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Regrounding School Accountability in Shared Responsibility: A Case Study of Culturally
Responsive District Leadership

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Ericka Burns

June 2021

Advisor: Dr. Erin Anderson

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Title: Regrounding School Accountability in Shared Responsibility: A Case Study of Culturally Responsive District Leadership

Advisor: Dr. Erin Anderson

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ABSTRACT

School accountability has been a part of public education conversations since the development of No Child Left Beyond (NCLB) in 2001. These accountability policies were developed with a core mission of holding schools, districts, and states accountable to the academic growth and achievement of all students and all student groups, and for the last twenty years, schools and districts have adjusted their priorities to align to the mandates of the state and federal accountability policies. These policies have stirred a great deal of criticism in their limited scales of defining student and school success as well as the authoritative leadership approaches that have been used to implement these policies, and more importantly the notion that these policies have been implemented in a way that have moved public schools further away from the end goal of equitable opportunities for all students.

Much of the criticism has been around the lack of inclusivity around these policies. This study reviewed school accountability through a culturally responsive lens, and attempts to define the notions of accountability and shared responsibility. This study also used tenets of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) and developed a case for a Culturally Responsive District Leadership (CRDL) model.

This research used a case study design. Through semi-structured interviews, participant Q-sort survey, and a document review, the study revealed that the district

community values a district leadership that is committed to supporting schools around continuous improvement and building partnerships with the district community. The study also found the definitive difference in the conceptions of accountability and shared responsibility, and applied these conceptions to a mindset shift for a Culturally Responsive District Leadership model.

Key terms: Shared responsibility, accountability, Culturally Responsive District Leadership, mindset, community partnership, social capital.

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Chapter One: Overview of the Study

Today there are 54 million elementary, middle, and high school students filling the seats of American public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Schools are places where students socialize, get emotional support, receive food, and stay safe while families work in local and global economies, and with that public schools have played an important role in American history and its progress. America has come to rely on schools for young people's coming of age, both in their social and academic development. During the COVID-19 pandemic¹, Americans experienced a stark reminder of the vital role schools play in our contemporary world. As the pandemic unfolded, our nation felt the loss of many functions our schools perform in communities, making clear that schools serve purposes well beyond the development of math and literacy skills.

Since the organization of the original colonies, American leaders have turned to public education as a way of creating and promoting democracy (Tyack & Hansot, 1982), and throughout history, the United States has relied on public schools to further the norms and traditions of our states, cities, and communities. Although we have come to different ideas on how to best structure education, Americans have generally agreed that better public schooling generates a better society (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Dewey (1934)

¹ The COVID-19 pandemic was a global health pandemic caused by the infectious spread of the novel coronavirus that is believed to have originated in China and killed more than 3 million globally and 500 thousand in the U.S., and caused nations to shut down schools, businesses, and organizations to mitigate the spread (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021)

described the purpose of education as preparing youth to be productive members of their communities, which lends credit to the unique context of schools and their communities. Dewey (1934) also noted that because the purpose of education is rooted in individual communities and the needs of individual children, a uniform approach to education would not work. Horace Mann's 1848 vision for the purpose of public education as described in Schneider (2017), suggests that "schools would protect society" against negativity such as "intemperance, avarice, war, slavery, bigotry," while also building the character and "competence" of every child (p. 138). In these visions for public education, the purpose of education is more than academic: it is about the development of the youth into caring, compassionate, and thoughtful citizens of their communities. Through various historical periods and movements, America has turned to public education as a way to fix or mediate inequity and resolve social issues such as poverty and racial injustice (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Background - The Rise of School Accountability

Because public education is a core U.S. value, great emphasis has been placed on how to measure its success. In businesses, large and small, the definitive measure of success is financial solvency. In healthcare, better health for patients is the primary measure of success. However, defining success in education is less clear. What do we value from schools? What does success look like? Who decides? How do we measure success? How is success equitable? The U.S federal government has been a strong force in creating policies and regulations for public education, and likewise developed systems of evaluation. In a culture that values black-and-white outcomes, such as those in business and healthcare, it is uncomfortable for many to confront the grey areas

associated with educational outcomes. Thus, many school accountability policies and reform efforts have sought to delineate such measures in education, with the development of outcomes-based accountability structures.

Federal policies like No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which I further elaborate in the upcoming section, mandated common academic standards and state assessments, and created systems for data reporting and school ratings based on particular assessment data (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). Because of this and other federal policies, the American public also measures a school's success by its state assessments results.

However, 20 years into the outcomes-based accountability reform efforts, there is still disagreement with these identified goals, measures, and the implied purposes for public education. This dissertation reviews these accountability structures and interrogates the efficacy of these policies in creating a more equitable and socially just school system. The present introduction reviews how policymakers and education leaders have developed public-education accountability as it has been developed over the last century and describes the purpose and scope of this research to better understand the balance or tension of school accountability and community voice and involvement in vision setting and accountability for public schools.

Education Reform and Accountability, 1900–1930

Until the 1900s, American schools operated independently as part of small, rural communities, where the schoolhouse often stood as a focal point of the town. In this structure, families could be confident that their children's education aligned with community values and served as a vital part of their upbringing. Tyack (1974) describes a

strong coherence between families, school, and community values, where teachers and schools are accountable to the expectations of local families and the larger community.

In the 1900s, however, many school operations shifted from one-room schoolhouses to full school districts (Schneider, 2017). The industrial revolution and the growth of urban cities shifted the dynamic of the localized, rural school model (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). More students began attending public school from first grade through high school. A new movement of education reformers known as Progressives championed efforts to standardize schools, modeling the organizational and management structures of industry through superintendents and school boards (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Henig, 2013). Grade-level classes were divided by age, uniform expectations for core subjects were implemented, and standards for becoming public school teachers and leaders were generated in these standardized systems (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Tyack and Cuban (1995) assert that Progressives were trying to modernize public education, so students from rural and urban communities had the same access to high-quality education. As well, Progressives sought to ensure that an American public education meant something, and that businesses and colleges could have confidence in a high standard of an American education. In this movement, expertise and efficiency were prioritized over the local *laissez faire* models of prior years. This external management model, with the superintendent role similar to a CEO of a business, upended the dynamics of the locally operated school.

A new tension emerged between the standardized American education and the needs of local communities and individual students (Dewey, 1934; Schneider, 2017). Some saw it as a clash between the professional values of new executive school leaders

and the local values of the communities in which schools had existed (Tyack, 1974). In the 1930s, groups like the Education Policy Commission (EPC) pushed back against the movement toward standardized goals and measurable assessments, and advocated for other values such as character development, critical thinking, and career preparation, which were difficult to measure in a standardized way (Education Policies Commission, 1938). To this end, Progressives saw a need to ensure an American public education meant something, and that American businesses and colleges could have confidence in a high standard of an American education. Opponents of standardized assessments like college entrance exams, argued that they would stifle curricular innovation and instruction, and create artificial measures of an unmeasurable entity: student development and learning (Tyack, 1974). Dewey (1934) famously argued for a definition of education that extended beyond the skills represented on a college entrance exam and asserted that a uniform approach would stifle the youth learning process.

The standardization of education so prevalent in our current education system, started with the advocacy of the Progressives and policy makers of the early 1900s who were eager to create a system and tools that could decipher student success in a measurable, “unbiased” way (Geyer, 1922). Nearly 100 years later, this tension between professional and local values remains a critical pressure point in our public-education system. The educational policy debates persist: To what extent do we value standardized goals and measures of success in public education? To what extent do we value the unmeasurable and more human elements that education offers students? And, can schools be held accountable for both or either of these goals?

The shift to standardized schooling begs the question, to whom or to what communities and values were the schools standardized? And, for whom? When schools were situated within communities, many immigrant neighborhoods and communities used public schools to honor and carry on cultural norms, values, and histories (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). For example, immigrant communities often prioritized native language literacy and speaking skills in local schools. Of course, the standardization movement prioritized dominant White, English-only instruction, dismissing the cultural pride and values of these communities (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Progressive efforts were highly successful in their assertions that American schools should “progress or regress,” as described by Tyack and Cuban (1995), toward school systems focused on standardized expectations for instruction. However, this approach discounted non-White and non-native English speakers, who found these changes repressive and limiting to their vision for successful schooling in their communities. In this sense, what felt like *progress* to some, felt like *regress* to others. This example invites us to consider who was set up to succeed in these policies? Who was silenced or left behind? While these shifting structural and policy changes stirred conflict, public education remained an important component of America for communities and individuals alike (Tyack, 1974).

Integration and Education as Power, 1940–1960s

From the post-World War II period to the civil rights era, there were many changes to the American school system. Large school districts in urban areas forced the nation to review educational segregation policies that divided youth by racial background, and the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case forced school districts and states to desegregate their schools (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). However, the fight for truly

desegregated and equal schools continued through this era and remains a constant battle today.

During this time of civil rights and equitable education, policies were written and implemented with the intention that public education could or would fix issues of social justice (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). In 1965, for example, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was developed to combat the *War on Poverty*. ESEA was a federal mandate to provide financial aid to public schools serving students in poverty (Thomas & Brady, 2005). The focus was on providing additional funding or “inputs” to better support schools and communities in need. Policies and initiatives like this positioned educational opportunity as the panacea for America’s social problems, while failing to address other societal behaviors surrounding these inequities. Education was freighted as a singular solution for empowerment and social justice, which, in turn, made public education and educators easy targets for ridicule when these societal issues were not immediately remedied (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). This tension teed up the debates about public education that would unfold into coming decades.

Fear and Politics in Public Education, 1980s–2000

Coming out of the contentious Vietnam War, Watergate scandal, and continuing civil rights movements, the United States was in a place of civic distrust. The political climate of the 1980s saw a new narrative that prompted an increase in federal involvement in public education (Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). A provocatively titled report from the National Commission on Excellence in Education painted a grim picture of the state of American public schools. *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) engendered a tone of fear, divisiveness, and urgency,

claiming that American students were not globally competitive with other nations, with “13 percent of all 17-year-olds considered functionally illiterate,” and the performance discrepancy between White and affluent students compared to Black, Latine, and students in poverty was large (National Commission, 1983). *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission, 1983) sparked a convergence of politics and education that persists today. With inflammatory statements like, “while we can take pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished....the education foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our future” (National Commission, 1983), the report set a precedent for division between the federal government and public education.

A Nation at Risk (National Commission, 1983) fostered distrust in public schools and created the narrative that schools and educators were no longer competent to determine the vision or expectation for American students, leaving federal politicians to intervene and take control. This division gave power to the federal government, suggesting: “Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling,” and later noted the purpose of education was the “commitment to schools and colleges of high quality” (National Commission, 1983). *A Nation at Risk* marked an important moment in the history of school accountability and educational leadership, because it created the power structure of districts over local schools, state government over districts, or federal government over states, and that momentum led to the great changes we saw with reform efforts that followed.

A Nation at Risk (National Commission, 1983) was also situated in the very divisive context in American politics with the backdrop of the post-Vietnam war and

election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency. It was a political landscape that was generating more and more authoritative leadership and dividing the public into political parties (Feagin, 2012). *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission, 1983) created the narrative that schools and educators were failing American students and families, and the government was stepping in to rescue the nation. The power dynamic of heroes, victims, and villains was part of a larger Reagan administration narrative around other issues of the day, such as the Gulf War and the War on Drugs (Feagin, 2012; Jeffords and Rabinovitz, 1994). The problem with a hero, victim, villain narrative as it relates to public schooling is that it pitted parties against each other. Whereas families, schools, school districts, and government agencies should have been working together to solve problems, they were instead pitted against each other—as if they didn't have the same goals. This dynamic also positioned families as powerless victims, rather than empowered partners. In this model, political authorities were the ones empowered to solve our educational problems, and the policies and reform efforts that followed publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission, 1983) reflected this belief.

Following *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission, 1983), groups of federal politicians brainstormed ways to hold schools and educators accountable for maintaining the high bar of the American education system (Schneider, 2017). President George H. W. Bush started work with bipartisan groups to create America 2000—a federal plan for all American schools and students. Later, the Clinton administration carried on this vision, renaming it Goals 2000. The plan was ultimately put into law under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) during the George W. Bush administration (Schneider,

2017). Consequently, NCLB would become a powerful policy, impacting the behaviors, priorities, and practices of public schools.

The Era of No Child Left Behind, 2000–2015

Consequent to the fear-inducing messaging of a *A Nation at Risk*, outlining falling test scores and equity gaps in performance between student groups, NCLB was created with the goals of increasing academic expectations in all schools and closing the gap in student performance between White and affluent students, and marginalized groups of students (Darling-Hammond, 2006). NCLB was a bipartisan approved policy and many groups welcomed a policy that focused on equitable outcomes for all students (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005).

Along with the bipartisan support among politicians, many advocacy groups and civil rights activists were in favor of the policy and its attention on the inequitable academic outcomes between student groups. To these civil rights groups and others, a policy focused on the achievement of underserved students that held schools accountable to *all* students was long overdue (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The clear and rigid sanctions attached to NCLB drew excitement from many supporters who appreciated the urgency and accountability described therein (Hess & Rotherham, 2007). In many ways, the school accountability policies were welcomed as a much needed “structural change” to the American school system (Feagin, 2012). President Bush (2000) spoke with the same urgency in his speech to the NAACP about the proposed NCLB policy, when he explained that the sanctions would combat the “soft bigotry of low expectations” that had permeated integrated American public schools of America.

The NCLB accountability policies were written in response to student achievement reports on standardized tests and achievement deficits between student groups as measured by state assessments. Thus, accountability focused almost entirely on literacy and math achievement, and growth on state test scores. For schools that failed to meet standards, NCLB sanctions included school closure, restructuring, or charter takeover (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). Proponents of accountability structures saw clear guidelines and sanctions as a move toward improved schools, narrowed curricular focus, increased teacher motivation, and increased parent involvement with the ratings and reports (Jacob, 2005).

In contrast to ESEA (1965), which required the federal government to provide support or inputs for schools, NCLB measured the outcomes of schools and held schools accountable to measurable, definitive outcomes. Just as businesses were valued by measurable profit and production, schools now had clear, measurable outcomes for student performance on literacy and math assessments. Like the Progressives of the early 1900s, advocates of the new outcomes-based accountability system appreciated the standardization of academic goals across all American schools, as well as clear, measurable goals for each student and school (Elmore, 2004).

In the spirit of accountability and governance, NCLB exerted a great deal of power over schools, with strict sanctions for schools and districts that did not meet the expectations outlined in the policy (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). The rationale to shift to test-based accountability was that states and districts needed quantifiable ways to monitor which schools were meeting the goals and standardized assessments were the easiest method (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2013). Standardized assessments provided an easy way

to measure school and student success, and it also gave policymakers a way to enforce tighter governance over education systems (Schneider, 2017).

Another feature of NCLB that advocates highlighted was that it required schools to report student performance data publicly. With this public reporting, the thinking went, there would be urgency for schools to improve outcomes for all students if the data was clearly and publicly reported (Dorner & Layton, 2013). Until this mandate, student data and the data that outlined discrepancies in student academic achievement was shuttered and overlooked, and many welcomed this public reporting that would shine light on achievement data. With this data reporting, NCLB assumed that if schools had the right information about student achievement, they could improve student outcomes (O’Day, 2002). However, the public reporting strategy did not prove successful, and there has been continuing debate about the impact of strict accountability structures without support and resources for improvement.

In 2008, the Department of Education released a follow-up report to *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission, 1983), aptly named *A Nation at Risk, A Nation Accountable* (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Written six years after NCLB’s official implementation, states had since complied with standards and assessments, and had a platform for reporting the aggregated and disaggregated data. Even so, the report warned, the “nation is still at risk,” and provided grave data showing that students still were not graduating high school nor completing college at rates expected and continued to underperform on standardized assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). However, rather than meaningfully addressing student outcomes or achievement, the report focused on success in creating federal mandates, strict sanctions, and reporting

systems through the federal policy. The reported gain from NCLB was not in student achievement; it was how the nation now had the data to report the gaps in performance. The strong focus on data collection, while ignoring the student outcomes highlights the power dynamics of these policies.

The movement to an outcomes-based approach to school accountability has been both praised and disputed, but the shift has had an undeniable impact on public education and the behaviors of educators. Many reform efforts and initiatives came out of NCLB. For each of these reform efforts, the end goal was always improving literacy and math skills, as measured by standardized assessment. Over the years, many have argued that there is more to schooling than performing well on standardized assessments, while others have argued that these core skills are the primary purpose of schooling.

Tensions with NCLB

NCLB profoundly changed the focus and behaviors of American schools (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005). In chapter two, I further discuss some of the tensions occurring from NCLB implementation and the reform efforts that followed, including overreliance on testing; sanctions without support; school closures in marginalized neighborhoods; school choice and school ratings; teacher evaluation models; and a structure of external accountability that omits community voice (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

These tensions demonstrate that although the purpose of the accountability policy and the reform efforts were rooted in a push toward equity, the actual implementation of the policy and its reform efforts were anything but equitable (Hess & Rotherham, 2007). Although the policymakers expressed the goal as equitable schools for all students, using

standardized assessments as the main measure of success left many concerned with this limited and biased approach to defining success. Also, while reform efforts intended to ensure “quality schools” in every neighborhood, some neighborhoods vacated, while other schools were left underfunded because of their failing labels. Furthermore, the mandatory data disaggregation was implemented to ensure schools were transparent about how they serve all groups of students; however, many families felt that the comparisons created by disaggregation furthered a racist narrative, thus creating an even stronger divide between groups of students (Rabovsky, 2011). These examples outline some dangers of a test-focused accountability system.

These tensions caused a divide in the conversation about public education. Many policymakers, educators, and the public maintain that having standardized expectations for all students is the most equitable approach, while others point to ways in which these policies and pursuant sanctions, create *less equitable* environments and schools, even as their intention was the opposite (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

NCLB Reform Leadership

In addition to tensions rooted in an overreliance on test scores as the single measure of success, other concerns around approaches to school accountability leadership have come to the forefront in recent years. *A Nation at Risk* and the reform efforts that grew from NCLB share a common authoritative approach to education leadership, which stems from an authoritative or structural functionalist epistemology or belief system, which I discuss more in chapter two. The leadership model for school accountability efforts has been focused on data, with a forceful right/wrong approach (Capper, 2019), with the “right way” assumed to be right for everyone. Such an approach stands in stark

contrast to the community-driven approach to schooling and schools that Dewey (1934) described.

A century in the making, standardized education and accountability, and the current model in some ways is overly standardized and lacks unique community values. What would it look like if the pendulum swung back to center, where standards and local accountability exist, and where federal, state, and local values all matter?

ESSA and Onward, 2015 Back to Local Values

In 2015, almost 15 years after NCLB and aligned reforms were implemented, a new policy, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), replaced NCLB. The two greatest shifts in this policy were: 1) it gave power back to the states, rather than the federal government, in naming schools goals, and 2) it required states to add an additional measure to their accountability frameworks not tied to standardized assessments (Cook-Harvey, 2016). The shift to ESSA marks the lifting of federal control of schools and a nudge toward a more localized approach to school accountability.

Although ESSA offered an additional measure away from standardized assessments and gave states the authority to create their own accountability plans, the focus remains largely on standardized assessments (Hutt & Schneider, 2018). The focus on assessments has seen increasing debate, some still advocating for a continued focus on math and literacy skills with a clear, quantitative measure; and other groups advocating for a broader set of measures to capture school quality and student success—a debate I discuss in more detail in chapter two.

Fueling this debate, many colleges and universities have stopped requiring college entrance exam scores in their application process, noting the many studies show a lack of

correlation between entrance exams such as the SAT or ACT and student success (Strauss, 2019). This greatly influences the reform philosophy of monitoring “college readiness” by standardized assessments. For the past 20 years, American schools have been working toward the goal of 100% success on standardized assessment for literacy and math skills. Now, we can ask the question, is this the right goal? Is this everyone’s ultimate goal for students and schools? Who decides the goals of public education- policymakers, schools and districts, or communities?

Post Reform

The criticism and shift from the reform efforts of NCLB have gained a great deal of momentum, and in this movement, there are demands for a broader set of goals to measure school and student success. Alternatives to this approach to accountability include a focus on local accountability (Holms & Asp, 2018; Schneider, 2017), and an emphasis on Social Emotional Learning (SEL). All of these requests seem to be move us closer to Dewey’s (1934) vision that education is situated in a unique context of its community, holds a broader purpose beyond academics, and that when schools are tied to their communities, they are accountable to the families and the community, rather than external sanctions placed onto them (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

Problem Statement

As we are almost 20 years from the rollout of NCLB, we are at an important transitional time to evaluate the effectiveness of school accountability policies and structures. In terms of serving students and strengthening our school systems, the accountability structures of the last two decades have worked in some ways; in others, they have moved us away from our roots and purpose of education. High-stakes

accountability models have shed light on the very clear discrepancies between White and affluent students, and marginalized groups of students. On the other hand, while most agree that American schools do not equitably serve all students, many also argue that test-based or outcomes-based accountability models do not present an accurate image of student learning (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2013), nor represent the complexities and nuances of public schools (Schneider, 2017). Furthermore, these rigid outcomes-based accountability models represent a vision for school success that did not include the voices of the larger community (Khalifa, 2018). Modern school accountability structures were created with the assumption that everyone holds the same goal for all students, and dismissed the visions and values of local communities. Missing questions in the accountability efforts include: What do communities value in schools? How do we hold schools to that vision? What would it look like for school districts to work in partnership with their communities?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study is to use an urban district in the Western region of the U.S. as a platform to explore the extent to which the district's accountability structure aligned with the vision of the district and the community and better understand the community's conceptual understanding of a model for school responsibility. I will examine community member values and the current accountability structure to locate discrepancies and alignments between them and analyze accountability policies and leadership approaches to implementing the accountability models.

In the following research, I review the debate around school-accountability structures, the use of standardized assessments as the measure of success, and the

organizational-leadership research for school districts. Further, I analyze the organizational leadership of school accountability in one district to learn more about how school districts and district leadership can hold themselves accountable—or *responsible*—to students and the community.

Research Questions

With this topic focused on culturally responsive district leadership and the notions of school accountability or shared responsibility for schools, the key research questions are twofold: 1) What are the ways the community in a large, urban district in the American Western Region conceptualizes school accountability or shared responsibility? 2) How could the ways the community conceptualizes school accountability (shared responsibility) shape culturally responsive district leadership (CRDL) at the district?

The purpose of this research is to understand the community’s vision and values for schools and school accountability and responsibility. The hope is that this research is a part of a larger conversation about how we hold schools accountable and to whom, as well as to consider the best approaches to build a model shared responsibility for all schools and students.

The Case

The district under study has been in the national spotlight in the last decade for its reform efforts. It was one of the first districts to create and implement an accountability system that has been used to manage its portfolio of schools (A+ Colorado, 2019). This district used the accountability system for most of its initiatives in the last decade including to monitor and close “failing” schools using an aggressive approach, and to open smaller, innovation or charter schools, and to develop a robust teacher-incentive pay

programs based on value-add metrics of student assessment data (A+ Colorado, 2019). Externally, the district was celebrated for its reform efforts; internally, it has been another story. As research articles celebrated the district's success in better serving students (O'Keefe et al, 2019), local coverage highlighted the discontent community members felt with these initiatives (Asmar, 2019). In 2019, under the direction of a new superintendent, the district implemented a community-led process to redesign its accountability system. The result of this process was the recommendation to dismantle the district's contentious accountability framework and move to the state's framework, but it has also left a lingering question about aligning the community's vision for schools with an accountability system. The previous district accountability framework was the backbone of all of its aggressive reform efforts, and the dismantling of this framework and system was a loud message for change and discontent from the community. This change also quickly sparked other changes in the district. The community loudly advocated for reversing several of the reform efforts that were externally celebrated and internally debated, starting with its accountability framework and followed by reopening comprehensive high schools that had been closed and replaced with small schools 10 years ago (Asmar, 2020a, 2020b). The district is in a unique context of change, and therefore is a fitting case for this study. As the nation navigates the next wave of school accountability and the organizational leadership that guides these policies, this district offers an important case for close study.

Limitations

Limitations for this study are that the focus is on the unique setting of a large, urban district in the American Western Region, and the nuances and unique situatedness

of this district will influence the data and findings. However, I will consider these findings through the lens of broader theoretical research, and I will intentionally choose participants who represent the geographic and racial backgrounds of the city and district. These steps helped me apply the findings to the larger conversation about culturally responsive district leadership in America.

Significance of the Study

There is a great deal of research on culturally responsive teaching practices (Gay, 2018), as well as culturally responsive school leadership for school principals (Khalifa, 2018). There is also research on how policies and policymakers are critical in creating equity through inclusive and responsive policies (Kendi, 2019). However, there is a gap in research on how school district leaders, those who make policies for school districts, can lead through a culturally responsive practice.

Furthermore, there is a great deal of research on school accountability policies, such as NCLB (Elmore, 2004; Hess & Rotherham, 2007), and there is a great deal of criticism for these policies (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Dorner & Layton, 2013; Schneider, 2017). However, there is little research on thinking about school accountability through a culturally responsive leadership lens, or the shifts in leadership that would be needed to lead school accountability through a culturally responsive district leadership lens. This study attempts to connect these gaps and reviews approaches for school accountability, or shared responsibility, through the theoretical framework of culturally responsive school leadership.

Researcher Positionality

As a researcher in this study, I hold close connections to the topic. I have been a teacher, school leader, and district leader under the strict accountability framework. As a school leader, I felt its restraints. I felt its judgement and the single story I felt the rating placed on my students and our school. We were more than that rating, and there was pain and shame in sharing ratings with our students and families. As a district leader, I have also been a part of decision-making conversations about how to measure school success, and in these meetings full of other White, middle class district leaders, we made unilateral decisions on how to determine a schools' worth and success for a district full of students and families who identify as Black, Latine, and low socioeconomic status. In these experiences, I realize that I was complacent in the white supremacy tendency and systems that are designed to exclude community and stakeholder voices. These experiences drive my work as a researcher on this topic rooted in Culturally Responsive Leadership.

Organization

This study includes a review of literature on this topic, and the detailed overview of the methodology chosen for this study, the findings of the research, and a discussion on the findings and the implications and recommendations for future policy, practice, and research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

An argument I make in this dissertation is that context matters, and part of being culturally responsive is to consider context. In the case of my own writing and research for this dissertation, context also matters. I started writing this dissertation in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and state restrictions, closures, and mandates—a time when students and families were home navigating the uncertain world of a global health pandemic. During this time, another pandemic came to national attention: a pandemic of racial inequities. A powerful call for social justice, led by the Black Lives Matter (BLM)² movement renewed calls for racial justice, basic rights, and fair treatment. As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded throughout the world, Asian Americans also faced racist treatment and were victims of hate crimes as some placed racist-fueled blame on Asian persons because of the origin of the novel coronavirus. Black and Asian communities moved through the COVID-19 health pandemic and the racial pandemic concurrently, leaving many in fear for their safety and many living in an insurmountable amount of pain and emotional exhaustion. Both of these historic occurrences are important to note given the situatedness of this dissertation, and the focus on inclusive practices and culturally responsive leadership.

² Black Lives Matter (BLM) is an activist movement for social justice and equity for Black people. The movement regained momentum in 2020 after police officers killed George Floyd, an unarmed Black man in Minneapolis, MN. This event along with a stream of other media reported injustices on Black Americans sparked a flood of protests and conversations and a national spotlight on the BLM movement.

The current racial pandemics tied to the BLM movement and the Asian hate crimes forced the American public, and especially those of us in the public education sector, to consider the reality that race and culture matter in our country, and that our country, our policies, and our practices are interwoven with inequitable roots that must be untangled. Feagin (2012) outlined decades of policies and practices that have set-up White students to succeed and left black and brown students to fall further behind. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) assert that U.S. school inequities are a “logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized” (p. 47). Oakes and Rogers (2007) note that school reform efforts have ignored the concept that racism and racist policies have perpetuated inequities, and that these policies are at the core of our education system. Thus, the present discussion of school accountability policies must address the following questions: In what ways have these accountability policies, like so many others, perpetuated the inequity in our country? Or, in what ways have they made strides toward equity? In what ways have these policies and practices included the voices among our diverse communities? And, in what ways have they excluded or silenced voices?

In this literature review, I use the lens of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) (Khalifa et al., 2016) to frame school accountability practices and the tensions that have occurred with these policies and practices. I also analyze the purpose of the central office in school districts. I review the literature on community engagement in school accountability and begin to use the term *responsibility* rather than *accountability* (Elmore, 2004; Fullan & Quinn, 2016). The materials selected for this literature review include research on development of accountability structures, as well as

research on the impact of accountability on schools, students, and teachers. It highlights research outlining recent changes and shifts in mindset around school accountability and organizational leadership, critical race theory, and culturally responsive leadership. The scholarship herein was located via database and catalogue searches through DU University Libraries and Google Scholar. The criteria for the search connected to school accountability, school and organizational leadership, and culturally responsive leadership for the last 20 years.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership

Education leadership is key in ensuring equitable systems for all students. Johnson (2014) defined Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) as incorporating the beliefs, practices, and policies that create “inclusive schooling environments” (p. 145) for all students and families, especially those from marginalized and diverse backgrounds. CRSL is a crucial concept for school organizational leadership and districts, and it should be the lens through which we evaluate current policies and practices. Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016), released a framework for CSRL with four main tenets: (a) Critically self-reflects on leadership behaviors, (b) Develops culturally responsive teachers, (c) Promotes culturally responsive/inclusive school environment, and (d) Engages students, parents, and indigenous contexts. This framework and the research in Khalifa’s (2018) book, *Culturally Responsive School Leadership*, was developed for school-level leaders and principals. Khalifa (2018) and Johnson (2014) argue that school-level principals have an ability to work directly with the community where a school is situated, and create culturally responsive schools within that community context (Khalifa, 2018). Along with this work, there is a great deal of

research on the importance of cultural relevance in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and culturally responsive teaching (CRT) (Gay, 2018)—a term embedded in current pedagogy. There is also a great deal of research on culturally responsive leadership and reform within school buildings that, like Khalifa and colleagues' (2016) framework, focused on the inclusive strategies school leaders must take with teachers, students, and families to ensure schools are culturally responsive.

Although it is crucial for school principals to lead with a CRSL lens, I argue that there is a gap in leadership research on CRSL for district-level leaders. District-level leaders (i.e. superintendents, district leaders, board members) set policies and guidelines for school districts and play a critical role in shaping district practices (Leithwood, 1995; Rorrer et al., 2008;). Therefore, district leaders must be culturally responsive in order to create equitable schools and opportunities for all students and communities. However, there is limited research on the role of the central office in maintaining and fostering culturally responsive values and strategies. Researchers have demonstrated the importance of the central office as a place in which leaders create and implement policies and practices, and support the vision and mission of the organization (Fullan 2011; Honig, et al., 2017; Rorrer et al., 2008). I assert that the central office must ensure district-level policymaking is done with culturally responsive leadership in order to create equitable schools for all students.

In terms of central office leadership, the most important tenet of CRSL is to engage students, parents, and indigenous contexts and hold a commitment to partnership with the community (Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Johnson, 2014). This tenet of culturally responsive leadership is crucial to building trusting and inclusive school

districts, and although researchers have established this tenet in literature on principal leadership and teaching, it is underdeveloped in the district leadership literature. In the following sections, I discuss central-office leadership around school accountability through a CRSL lens and focus on the tenet of school-district partnership with communities.

School Accountability Purpose and Tensions

In the introduction, I detailed the evolution of current school-accountability policies. In this section, I more closely review the structures and tensions of accountability movements over the last 20 years. As outlined in the introduction, modern accountability structures are linked directly to the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002. NCLB is the most impactful policy to date in terms of school accountability and practices, and it charted the pathway for how schools are currently evaluated and viewed by families (Thorn & Harris, 2013). This policy not only changed the way we think about school accountability, it changed the way schools function, and how they prioritize work, staffing, and initiatives.

Purpose of School Accountability

The bipartisan support for school accountability policies was united in its mission to ensure rigorous and equitable instruction for all students as measured by standardized assessments. For the first time, a policy mandated federal guidelines and sanctions for schools, districts, and states, by requiring state academic standards, assessments aligned to these standards, and rigid goals for student proficiency (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005; Elmore, 2004). NCLB also required schools and districts to report assessment data,

disaggregate data to highlight performance discrepancies between student groups, and submit to a rating system based on these results (Wiley et al., 2005).

As noted in the introduction, ESSA replaced NCLB in 2015. There are some differences between NCLB and ESSA, especially an emphasis on state rather than federal control; however, accountability structures remain mostly the same.

Policymakers created and operated school accountability systems in America under the belief that schools, “like other private and public organizations,” should be held accountable to a set of expectations and should be able to demonstrate their progress toward those goals (Elmore, 2004, p. 90). Aligned with the mindset that schools should be held to clear expectations, the accountability systems of the last 20 years have operated under the assumption that if student achievement data are reported, schools can and will improve (O’Day, 2002). However, this assumption has been problematized by concerns about the support schools need to act on these data, the validity of standardized assessments as the only measure of success, and the legitimacy of the goals themselves (O’Day, 2002; Schneider, 2017; Anagnostopoulos et al 2013). In the following sections, I discuss these tensions.

Tensions with NCLB and School Accountability

Today’s school accountability approach is based on mandates that originated with NCLB, and these structures have generated great tensions in the education sector and the public. Some tensions include discussions of equity in how we rate students and schools (Dorner and Layton, 2013), the focus of outcomes versus the inputs that schools and students receive (O’Day, 2002), and debates about school standardization versus customization as Dewey (1934) outlined (Schneider, 2017). These tensions have deep

roots in American education, but they have become more highly debated with the implementation of school accountability policies. For the focus of this research, I highlight an overreliance on standardized assessments, equity with outcomes-based accountability, and the tensions around leadership tied to test-based accountability systems.

Equity and the Over Reliance on Testing

The debate over standardized testing and federal control over schools has continued over time, but it became the center of many educational policy debates with the rollout of NCLB. For the first time, a federal policy gave teeth to testing data and held schools, districts, and states accountable to student performance on standardized assessments (Darling-Hammond, 2006, Elmore, 2004). Perhaps the greatest tension with current school accountability systems is the overreliance on state assessment scores to determine school sanctions. Although testing has been a part of the education landscape for some time, accountability policies have granted and even encouraged states to flex their power in using test scores as a way to force schools to improve or face closure, restructuring, teacher terminations, or removal of leaders who did not meet expectations (Darling-Hammond, 2006). With accountability policies and sanctions in place, quantifiable data has become the focus of teaching, instruction, and district initiatives—as student performance on standardized tests stand as the core of public-education accountability (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Much of the criticism around these policies stems from this emphasis on test scores. Many argue that the overreliance on standardized assessments has limited the focus in schools and created inequitable structures (Anagnostopoulos & Baustista-Guerra, 2013).

Over Reliance on test scores and the rating system. In their book on school accountability structures in America, Anagnostopoulos et al. (2013) outlined the development of the focus on state assessment data, claiming that state assessments are not the best reflection of student learning; they are simply the easiest data to quantify and report. In this, the authors claimed that out of convenience, accountability policies are driven by measures that do not actually capture the information they seek. Whether it's a color code, a grading scale, or a numerical representation, schools rely on state assessments scores, and these ratings have become the way in which we (educators, families, and the public) understand schools (Schneider, 2017). The rating system has given language to how the public talks about schools, and phrases such as, *that's a red school*, or *an A+ school*, have become the way in which the public discusses schools (Schneider, 2017). Dorner and Layton (2013) posit that these ratings are so powerful that even the most innovative schools cannot escape them, and the drive for favorable ratings shapes the focus and initiatives of all American schools.

Rating systems can be fraught with tension. Rating systems hold schools to an expectation for student performance and give language to the public on how to talk about schools that meet these goals. However, some argue that the measures and basis for these ratings are flawed, because the assessments are a narrow reflection of student learning and achievement (Schneider, 2017). These data are used because these data are easy to collect and not because these data accurately reflect student learning (Anagnostopoulos et al 2013). Despite the multi-varied purposes of education that go beyond academics to include the development of civil-minded citizens who reflect the moral traits of the community (Henig, 2013), the overreliance on test scores in enforcing strict

accountability policies and rating systems has forced school leaders to prioritize math and literacy test scores over everything else.

Another critique of the overreliance on test scores is the rapid growth of technology that houses these data. Accountability policies accompanied a rise in technology that allowed for large-scale data collection and reporting. One contention is that technology innovated faster than education systems could keep up with, so schools were left with reams of data and a limited understanding of their usefulness, accuracy, or how they might improve school performance (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2013). In this way, data reporting was not helpful. In fact, the emphasis on data collection had the potential to do harm when not coupled with strategies to understand, analyze, and respond to the findings (O’Day, 2002).

Equity and Fixing the “Achievement Gap”

A stated goal of accountability systems has been to increase equity for all students by forcing schools and districts to report disaggregated state assessment data. The purpose was to reveal discrepancies in student performance between white and affluent students, and marginalized student groups and force schools to close the gaps in student performance. However, this structure relies on the underpinning assumption that state test performance will fix opportunity gaps in our country—arguing essentially: if Latine and Black students, students living in poverty, and other marginalized students can score proficient on standardized assessments, our public-school system will be equitable (Ladson-Billings, 2006). However, this assumption ignores deeply rooted issues of equity and equitable education in American public school by tying them simply to scores on standardized assessments. This not only dismisses larger issues about opportunities and

authentic outcomes for students, it buries much deeper issues about the core reasons for achievement gaps and the relationship between education equity and larger social and economic inequities. Anagnostopoulos et al. (2013) pointed out that the overreliance on reporting test scores, the very model that was created to encourage equity in our schools, was an inequitable practice due to its limiting definition of equity and how we can make socially just schools and opportunities for all students.

Furthermore, many have argued that the overemphasis of standardized assessments and a focus on closing the “achievement gap,” propagates a deficit-mindset of American children, particularly children of color or children from families and neighborhoods with low socioeconomic position (Kendi, 2016). Kendi (2016) claimed that when the assessment is the sole measure of success, and it is not aligned to community values, a deficit-mindset permeates the psyche of the marginalized people of the community. Students understand themselves as *less-than* and the term, “gap” locates students at a deficit (Ladson-Billings, 2007). So, in this argument, the overemphasis on test scores was created to force schools to better serve all students, but in many ways, it has set them further apart.

Equity of Accountability Sanctions

Based on goals tied to standardized assessments, accountability policies have mandated school closure if schools fail to meet expected student assessment scores. Policymakers determined these sanctions under the goal of ensuring all communities had access to “high quality” schools, as measured by the outcomes of state assessments; however, schools in neighborhoods that serve Black and Latine families and families living in low socioeconomic positions are more likely to be closed (Shiller, 2018). In a

participatory action-research study on the impact of school closings on local communities, Shiller (2018) found the school families and local neighborhood held a perception of dominant culture appropriating or trying to fix local communities with the implementation of school closure policies. Shiller (2018) found that some communities felt they lost their voice in setting the vision and expectations for their local schools.

Along with this critique of accountability policies that were intended to create more socially just schools, but paradoxically created less equity, Rabovsky (2011) found that school choice policies also created damaging segregation of students that pushed struggling neighborhood schools further into failure. In this study, Rabovsky (2011) claimed that school-choice models based on school ratings (which are tied to student test scores) painted a narrow view of schools and had a damaging impact. Once a school received a poor rating, families left the school, the “failing school” lost funding and staff, and was tainted with a scarlet letter it could not escape.

Other Tensions that Impact Equity in Schools

Teacher incentive pay, value-added teacher evaluations, the school choice system, and school closures and restructuring have all been tethered to a single measure of success: student test scores (Lee & Reeves, 2012). Some studies have reviewed these policies as they unfolded in schools that serve the most marginalized student populations. Stemming from NCLB, evaluation models that evaluate teachers based on student assessments have been highly criticized as an inequitable practice that leaves schools and students most in-need of stability and high-quality teachers with a revolving door of teaching staff, fearful of evaluations tied to student achievement (Ballau & Springer, 2015; Everson, 2017). The tension with this accountability for teachers ties to Elmore’s

(2004) explanation of the purpose of school accountability, and the belief that teachers should be held to strict and measurable outcomes similar to private employees. However, the issue with these policies is not only that there are strict expectations set on teachers to produce outcomes, but that the only measurable outcomes are based on student assessments data. Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have argued that using student results on standardized assessments as the only measure of success is an unreliable and inequitable approach to measuring quality schools. On the other hand, some argue that not having a quantifiable approach to measuring how schools serve students leaves unreliable and inequitable evaluations of schools (Elmore, 2004).

Limitations of Quantifying Learning

In addition to equity issues and the overreliance of standardized assessments, others have questioned the general efficacy of standardized assessments as a mode of reflecting student learning and school success. Schneider (2017) argued that standardized assessments are a limited measure of student learning. Further, overemphasis on assessments is problematic and inequitable to diverse student groups, including language learners, students with learning disabilities, or other marginalized groups. In this argument, Schneider (2017) claimed that multiple choice, standardized assessments are not designed to assess complex analytical thinking and problem-solving skills. Rather, he suggested, standardized assessments give information about student comprehension, but lack evaluative nuance around student development in critical thinking. A focus on student state assessments alone misses the greater goal of developing students into thoughtful, critical thinkers. Thus, Schneider (2017) alluded to a greater purpose of schooling as developing the academic and character of individual students.

Another tension with the emphasis on standardized assessments is that the focus on student outcomes on standardized assessments have ultimately limited student opportunities for robust curriculum and instruction, and students, especially marginalized students, have lost opportunities to take a broad swath of courses, and social studies, science, and elective courses have been deemphasized for all students (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2013; Schneider, 2017; Jennings & Sohn, 2014).

The rationale for focusing on literacy and math assessments has been that literacy and math skills are core competencies required for student success and an assumed indicator for long-term success. To review the impact of test-based accountability on transferable skills, Jacob (2005) conducted a quantitative study and reviewed the outcomes of a test-based accountability system in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) that was implemented prior to NCLB. It modeled similar approaches to NCLB, as in the test-based outcomes and incentives and sanctions tied to these outcomes. The quantitative study analyzed student performance of CPS students in third, sixth, and eighth grade on the state standardized (high-stakes) assessment affiliated with the CPS accountability policy with formative assessment data of a standardized assessment that was not reported or used for accountability (low-stakes). Jacob (2005) found some gains in student achievement on the high-stakes assessments, but the skills were not transferable to the formative, low-stakes assessment, of which he concluded that a focus on test questions and testing practice can in fact raise test scores. However, these surface level skills are not transferable to other assessments or other aspects of education and life.

Lee (2006) conducted a similar study that analyzed state assessment data compared to National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) from 2002–2005. Lee

(2006) concluded the same findings as Jacob (2005): state assessment data did generally rise when it became a focus attached to strict accountability policies. However, it had little impact on other skills-based, low-stakes assessments. These studies provide evidence in support of the arguments made about test-based accountability systems and that educators can “teach to the test,” limiting instruction to test-aligned standards and preparation, and students’ test scores improve. In some ways, these studies also validate a fear that has been rooted in test-based accountability systems: that while student test scores might improve, their opportunities for authentic learning might diminish (Anagnostopoulos et al, 2013).

Leadership Decisions and Allocations Tied to Test-Based Accountability

When rigid accountability policies rely almost entirely on math and literacy test scores, testing culture permeates the behaviors of teachers and leaders. These policies have not only limited the focus of curriculum and instruction for students, but have shaped the behaviors and decisions of district leaders. In an empirical study of the democratic practice and the local control in school districts under federal accountability policies, Trujillo (2013) conducted a qualitative case study, and found the diminishing representation of local values in district governance. In this study, Trujillo (2013) conducted semi-structured interviews with 46 participants, including school board members, district leaders, principals, and teachers; observed board meetings; and included a document review of board meeting minutes, agendas, presentation materials, emails, newsletters, and improvement between 2007 and 2008. Trujillo (2013) found that the federal sanctions attached to school accountability greatly impacted and even controlled the values, behaviors, and decisions of the school board in how it governed the

district. As test outcomes became the focus of a school district accountability, the school board made hiring, curriculum, and funding decisions in alignment with outcomes tied to accountability. Much like the limitations named above about the overreliance on tests, the test-based accountability structures impacted leader actions and thus limited the scope of schools' focus and students' education. In her study, Trujillo (2013) concluded the district policymakers dismissed the local and diverse values of the school district and replaced those values with drivers aligned to the federally sanctioned accountability mandates. This move signified a shift in the balance of power in local control of schools, and it demonstrated a shift in the mindset and power dynamic that determined to whom the local schools were accountable.

Written with a goal of equity for students, these policies failed to consider the context and values of underserved communities—the communities for which the policies strived to serve. In the upcoming section on community engagement with school accountability, I further discuss Khalifa's (2018) schoolcentric approaches. Essentially, the term schoolcentric is used to define the typical policymakers' beliefs that are often placed onto school communities (i.e. higher test scores as the main goal for schools). Khalifa (2018) suggested that school communities come to understand accountability measures differently than the schoolcentric view, and notes that different groups of people and different communities come to their values of schools and school accountability differently because of their beliefs and cultural backgrounds. In this case, school accountability policies, written with the main goal of putting pressure on schools to increase test scores of marginalized students, forced schools to prioritize this goal and limit any initiative or practice not directly related to increased literacy and math scores.

However, none of these efforts included community voice in naming what is important in schools.

In an evaluation of school accountability policies and their purposes, it is important to consider who was included and who was left out. Kendi (2019) stated that racist policies have led to racist outcomes that have further divided our students. In this sense, accountability policies focused on standardized assessments ignored community context, and thus ignored hundreds of years of racist policies and practices that led to the current state (Feagin, 2012). Such acontextual policies are racist and do not promote students equitably (Kendi, 2019). Further, I would argue that the organizational leadership decisions at the district level lacked sufficient cultural inclusion and anti-racist practices.

Summary. Accountability systems were designed to work exactly as they have been (Senge, 1990). Mintrop and Sunderman (2009) stated that accountability policies in general “worked and did not work” (p. 24), meaning that the goals of the accountability systems have been met in some ways as there have been some improvements on state tests, but these policies have not been successful in impacting other larger educational or societal inequities. Senge (1990) explored structures in professional organizations and asserted that organizations run exactly as they are designed to, and with a policy that has narrowly focused on state assessment data, the outcome is some upticks in this data, but little growth in the other more adaptive challenges around equity and building equitable schools. In that sense, are standardized assessments the best end goal for our students? Although standardized assessments provide information, is it the right information? Are these the goals to which schools should be limited? Are these assessments and these

accountability policies moving public schools to become more equitable for all students? These questions lead us to both the leadership approaches in school districts and the leaders who implement the policies.

The Role of the Central Office to Create Equitable Policies and Practices

In many ways, these policies rolled out with the same exclusionary practices that have perpetuated the inequitable outcomes of our history (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2013). Oakes and Rogers (2007) noted that education reform efforts that exclude the voices of the people involved will always fail. With that said, the focus of school accountability through a culturally responsive lens is not just about accountability frameworks, but rather the organizational leadership at the school district level. Oakes and Rogers (2007) explained that many educational equity policies have failed because they have focused on technical changes—like tracking data—rather than on equitable policies and practices that focus on collaboration and stakeholder engagement. The exclusionary practices of school accountability systems have omitted community voices, thus perpetuating inequitable practices. In short, it will require both change in leadership practices and policies to make schools equitable for all students. And, in my experience, the central office is the place where this type of leadership change can take place.

Role of the Central Office with Accountability, Responsibility, and Support

The central office is the school district's epicenter, where the school board, superintendent, and other district-level leaders align policies and procedures with the shared mission and vision of the school district. Tied to this alignment are the accountability structures that ensure that district stakeholders feel a sense of responsibility in meeting the vision and goals of the district. In the following sections, I

review the elements of culturally responsive central-office leadership in creating a model of responsibility throughout the organization.

Mission, Vision, and School Accountability

An undeniable core component of a successful organization is setting a clear vision and mission. Although central-office leaders need to ensure the mission and vision of the organization are supported through its initiatives, vision-setting is not the sole responsibility of the top leaders in an organization (Senge, 1990). Rather, it is vital that school district stakeholders co-create the district's vision and feel ownership and a sense of responsibility to it.

Senge (1990) discussed the importance of creating a shared vision and ensuring there is alignment to this vision throughout the entire organization, and that all stakeholders understand their unique role in meeting the vision and goals. Fullan and Quinn (2016) discussed this concept further as an introduction to their Coherence framework, which outlines approaches to developing internal capacity to move toward a shared responsibility for the organization's long-term goals. The researchers noted that reaching coherence in an organization is more than creating structures and aligning work to the vision, rather they explain that coherence in an organization requires that the “people individually and collectively” understand the “purpose and nature of the work” (p. 1). In this sense, the district central office not only directs initiatives aligned to the shared vision, but works tirelessly to uphold the vision by ensuring all stakeholders have a deep ownership of its purpose, the work surrounding it, and continuously monitors progress to ensure the path toward the vision is clear and at the core of the district's daily work.

For example, if a school district has a truly shared vision for ensuring all students succeed, Fullan and Quinn (2016) would argue that the central office needs to focus on helping all stakeholders—families, students, staff, teachers, school leaders, and community members—understand and take ownership of what this vision means; what success looks like; and how their daily, weekly, monthly and annual work fulfills that vision for students. The mission and vision then become more than a slogan; they drive the work, set the drivers for success, and make it clear when the organization cannot reach full success (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Central Office and Internal/External Accountability

In terms of school accountability and vision setting, the central office plays a unique role in both progress monitoring and providing feedback, as well as maintaining the balance of the internal and external accountability (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). The authors claim the balance of internal and external accountability is crucial for creating coherence and sustainable success. Fullan and Quinn (2016) define external accountability as mandates from outside the organization or team, such as federal- and state-mandated accountability frameworks and sanctions, and internal accountability as the conditions that people feel accountable to themselves, their team, and the vision. They argue that the most effective leadership strategy is to “maximize” the internal accountability and leverage the internal accountability to “reinforce” the external accountability (p. 109). In this sense, a balance of internal and external accountability maintains the stability of the organization and ensures the trajectory of the vision, goals, and accountability are aligned. However, it's internal accountability that propels the real change and success of the organization.

This concept of internal and external accountability has been widely discussed in organizational leadership research. Daniel Pink (2009) famously outlined the “carrots and sticks” metaphor to show how the hammer approach to accountability is ultimately ineffective, indicating that humans tend to be more motivated by internal or intrinsic drivers. Elmore (2004) noted that there must be a link between stakeholders’ internal accountability—what drives them to do the work—and external-accountability sanctions. Other researchers have used the “elephant and rider” analogy to describe the importance of internal accountability and external accountability, arguing that there needs to be a balance of emotional motivation (our connection to goals) and logical motivation (the external guidelines) (Heath & Heath, 2010). Pollack and Winton (2016) claimed that leaders must get to the elephant, or the emotional appeal of the stakeholders, not just the rider, or the rational side, in order to really propel people to change. In this discussion, the authors claimed that educators are driven by their emotional and ethical connection to the work, which drives their internal accountability.

O’Day (2002) argued that the outcomes-based model of school accountability that was developed under NCLB is overly reliant on external-accountability measures. As noted previously, external-accountability measures in an organization are the mandates placed onto the persons, teams, or groups, and in this sense have authority over the stakeholders without giving the stakeholders a say in the manner (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). In the case of school accountability policies, state assessments and the accountability frameworks are external-accountability measures placed onto schools and school communities to hold authority over them.

The overreliance on state assessments (O'Day, 2002) and the accountability system left little or no room for internal/local accountability measures that better represent the local values or goals of the community. This overreliance on external measures excluded community voices in setting the goals for schools, and thus assumed that everyone agreed with the end goal that was placed onto the schools. The structures for the reform efforts over the last twenty years have been mostly tied to a top-down structure, meaning the mandates are developed outside schools, districts, and even states. The drawback to top-down, external-accountability structures is that there is no internal buy-in or power among stakeholders. It defies wisdom, then, that the dominant model of school accountability over the last two decades has been designed solely with an external-accountability approach.

Accountability structures with a focus on external accountability have built a dynamic of blame in school districts, but Honig (2012) and Honig et al. (2017) claimed that districts will be stronger and serve students better if the central office positioned itself as a supportive partner, rather than the enforcer of external accountability. Shields (2011) created the Transformative Leadership framework and outlined a similar need for the central office and senior leaders to take active roles in the shared responsibility of school success and support for all students.

Shifting to a Mindset Shared Responsibility & CRSL

Although locating the central office in a position of support and shared responsibility seems reasonable and rational, most districts are not structured in this way. Instead, the central office often operates as an external, rigid presence, focused on accountability (Rorrer et al, 2008; Elmore, 2005). As noted in the introduction, *A Nation*

at Risk (1983) triggered new school accountability policies by painting a frightening picture of American schools and student achievement, but it also began the narrative of blame in public education: schools were not doing enough, teachers were not doing enough, districts and states were not doing enough, and the federal government created strict consequences and fix the problem (Feagin, 2012).

A mindset shift from accountability to shared responsibility would require school districts to use data in a different way. In some ways, accountability systems have been developed to weaponize assessment data in order to point out where schools and educators are failing (Ingersoll & Collins, 2017). Moving to a model of shared responsibility would require the school and the central office to use data with a focus on improvement and support (O'Day, 2002). This mindset shift would require the central office to see data not as punitive, but as information to learn more about what the school and students need.

This mindset shift from accountability to responsibility would require transformative leadership (Shields, 2018), and a commitment to continuous engagement with the entire community. It would require a departure from the current power dynamic of central office as *authoritative leader*, to central office as *partner* school success and improvement (Honig, 2012). This brand of transformative change would also require a strong commitment to culturally inclusive leadership or CRSL.

Trust and motivation are also tied to this model of shared accountability. Daly (2009) conducted research about the levels of trust in schools facing accountability sanctions, and the impact trust had on outcomes and school performance. In an exploratory, mixed methods study, Daly (2009) surveyed 252 teachers who were teaching

in schools deemed program improvement (PI) under NCLB, and 201 teachers not under PI sanctions, as well as 53 administrators in PI sanctioned schools. The research focused particularly on schools in PI as data had shown that schools were oftentimes unable to exit this status once they earned it under NCLB. The research also included a focus group of 73 teachers representing K-5 from a PI setting. The study did not include focus groups of administrators or surveys of administrators from non-PI schools. Daly used threat-rigidity to frame his study, defining threat-rigidity as the response employees have to threat. For example, when faced with “significant threat, organizations [and individuals] close down, reduce information flow, engage in poor decision making, and limit divergent views” (p. 173). Daly (2009) made the connection that the strict conditions under NCLB created a culture of threat-rigidity in individuals and impacted leadership in the organization. His research concluded that threat-rigidity was higher in schools under PI, and that these schools were then at a disadvantage of improving because individuals and leaders were paralyzed by the threat-rigidity response. Thus, they were less innovative, less collaborative, and less invested in problem-solving. His research implied the relationship of trust in building and creating shared accountability structures, rather than structures of blame in improving outcomes.

These empirical research findings can also be analyzed through the Coherence lens (Fullan & Quinn, 2016) and the concept of blame over support for school improvement. An example of this assumption under current school accountability policies is that if school data are reported publicly, and schools’ achievement and academic “gap” information is posted, the school will find ways to improve. If we apply this assumption to the Coherence model (Fullan & Quinn, 2016), we can see a large

misstep is assuming schools do not need support. The Coherence framework calls for senior leadership to provide progress monitoring and continuous support to ensure the work is consistently moving toward the vision. Fullan and Quinn (2016) described this partnership as a shared responsibility, and recommended school districts stop using the term accountability and start using the term *responsibility* because it implies a shared ownership and partnership rather than accusations and blame. This discussion reveals a need for trust, support, and shared responsibility from central office to schools, and from school leaders to teachers. In a later section, I will discuss trust between the central office and the larger community.

Community Voice in School Responsibility

Creating a model of shared visioning and shared responsibility requires a mindset of collaboration and mutual respect between leadership and the community. This literature review has outlined structures for school accountability and school leadership, and highlighted the absence of community voice and empowerment in accountability models and leadership around these policies. The following section reviews CRSL with school accountability structures.

Epistemologies and CRSL

Epistemologies are belief systems or the ways in which individuals consider and respond to the world (Khalifa, 2018; Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997). As it relates to school leadership, Capper (2019) explained that epistemologies are crucial to studying organizational leadership because they are the lens through which leaders operate. In this sense, epistemologies are at the core of how an organization is run because they stand as the foundation for how leaders structure the organization. Thus, epistemologies of leaders

and leadership teams shape the way organizations are structured, power dynamics within organizations, and decision-making models.

Belief systems of organizational leadership have been largely discussed with the values of what Capper and Jamison (1993) describe as structural functional epistemology. Structural functionalism aligns to the belief in social functions and order to the extent that everyone in an organization has a role and function in its success (Capper & Jamison, 1993). Capper (2019) outlined structural functionalism as it relates to educational leadership as the main epistemology that is studied in leadership programs (p. 28), and that this epistemology holds the social functions of defined roles with a top-down model and focuses on measurable data and outcomes (Capper, 2019). The focus in this leadership mindset is that organizations need to be goal oriented, efficient (Bolman & Deal, 2008), and driven by objective goals, data, and outcomes. The outcomes-based movements of NCLB and the accountability structures of our school systems are aligned to this paradigm, and so too are many models of organizational leadership in education. The mandate for tracking state assessment data and achievement-gap information are the result of a structural functionalist model of leadership in top education circles. These leaders supported the notion that outcomes and data were the most valuable driver in school improvement, and little else mattered. The danger in such a model is that it excludes many voices, assumes the context of the data is irrelevant, and presumes everyone agrees with the end goal.

Epistemologies of Order and Power

When studying CRSL and organizational leadership, understanding epistemologies helps leaders understand the practices and norms within an organization.

In considering the structures of school systems and educational leadership, the epistemology of district leaders can set the structure of power dynamics and collaboration in the school system. Popkewitz and Brennan (1997) used the concept of “social epistemology” to demonstrate the understanding of the dynamics of power relations in school districts. Social epistemology relates to a ranking of order and social systems (Gergen & Dixon-Roman, 2014). Popkewitz and Brennan (1997) explained these power-dynamic structures as the “rulers and the ruled” (p.17). The authors applied this epistemology to school system structures as in a top-down model with the highest leverage being decision-making power. The authors argued that when school systems are structured with a single person or group of leaders granted all the decision-making power over curriculum, assessments, evaluations, and accountability, the power dynamic is connected to social epistemology or sovereign power of the rulers and the ruled (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997).

As noted in the discussion on power dynamics above, in education systems, decision-making power is directly tied to the paradigm and epistemological beliefs of leaders. In a study of school district decision-making practices, Patterson et al (2006) explained the common practice of a “leader knows all” system of decision-making. In this model, the superintendent or district leader is often left with all of the decision-making power. Others are not included in this process, which marginalizes many voices in the district (Patterson et al, 2006, p. 147). The researchers used an archetype-systems concept to analyze the pattern of decision-making in this district, and their study outlined dangers of a dominant, powerful leader, and how that model can benefit some schools or groups and further marginalize others.

Power and Beliefs in Leadership

The discussion of these epistemologies encompasses concepts of power, and leaders' beliefs about power and leadership. School accountability policies were developed with a sense of power over schools, or guidelines placed over schools, and district leadership have oftentimes taken that same stance of power over schools and policy enforcement (O'Day, 2002). The terms that have repeated in the rollout of accountability policies have tended to place power over schools. The fear-inducing messages in *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission, 1983) implied that schools needed to be fixed, which created a structure where the federal government had enforcement power over schools. Terms like "power over" or "enforcement of" reveal the power structure of the policy, and can also reveal the leaders' belief about power.

In a study about power and leaders' perception of power in leadership, Brown (2020) described two different belief systems of power. Both were rooted in the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. quote that power is the "ability to achieve purpose and effect change." In this study, Brown (2020) provided competing definitions of power. On one hand, power can be defined as believing that power entails holding power over others to entice change; and on the other, it can be defined as the belief that true power elicits change by empowering others. She noted that both approaches to power are seeking the same end goal—affecting change—but one holds the mindset of "power over" and the other holds the belief of "power with." These beliefs about power can have a great deal of significance when it comes to organizational leadership and the way leaders structure the organization. It is easy to see that leadership approaches aligned to school accountability sit under the belief that leaders (district leaders, policy-makers, state and federal leaders)

need to have power over schools and teachers in order to create change or meet the goal. In applying these definitions to a CRSL approach, leaders with a more collaborative epistemology would rather “empower” schools to make changes to better serve schools, or “inspire” schools and teachers to make the best outcomes for students. Attention to this concept would require a huge shift in central office leadership approaches to meeting the desired outcome of creating socially just and equitable schools for all students.

CRSL and Schoolcentric Values

When we analyze leadership and the belief system of organizational leaders, language matters, and the language of leaders matters. In the discussion above, I point to the very important distinction in language between power over and “power with,” and the language of leaders’ beliefs is important in studying culturally responsive leadership in school districts. Turhan (2010) outlined language of education leadership that is aligned to the dominant culture beliefs and epistemologies as opposed to the language of marginalized groups. In this, dominant culture language in education leadership includes terms such as, “global competitiveness,” “measured competencies,” “accountability,” and “gaps”; whereas, terms from marginalized groups included ideas more associated with social cohesion and communality, such as “community,” “trust,” and “co-operation” (Turhan, 2010, p. 1359). This discrepancy in language mirrors variations in mindset between leadership in the dominant culture and the community-based visions of the marginalized groups.

These examples point to the epistemologies of the educational leaders and how these belief systems can shape the policies and practices of an organization. In a discussion about the different epistemologies between school communities and school

leaders, Khalifa (2018) advanced the claim that epistemologies are important to school leadership, because leaders need to learn that communities come to understandings and beliefs in different ways and leaders need to understand their own beliefs and epistemologies as well as that of the school communities in order to lead toward social justice. As noted in a previous section, Khalifa (2018) used the term “schoolcentric” to define the practice of placing acontextualized, policy-aligned beliefs about schools and what is best for students onto school communities (i.e., test scores are the main goal for schools) (p. 47). The practice of placing schoolcentric beliefs onto school communities ignores the epistemologies and values of the school community. Khalifa (2018) described how school communities often come to understandings and beliefs about accountability measures differently than the schoolcentric view, and that different groups of people and different communities come to their values of schools and school accountability differently because of their epistemologies. School leaders have been in a position to "normalize schoolcentric educator epistemologies" (White) beliefs onto communities rather than first understanding communities' values, epistemologies, and vision for their schools (p. 11).

Without understanding the epistemologies of the school community or without being inclusive of student and family voices, schools and districts tend to force the schoolcentric beliefs and values on to communities, rather than being culturally inclusive and affirming of their values, beliefs, and goals. To frame his work around culturally responsive leaders, Khalifa (2018) cited Freire (1970) and noted leaders who do not work impose their thoughts or decisions onto their communities rather than work dialogically with their communities, do not lead nor liberate, but rather manipulate and oppress (p

1). Freire's (1970) statement is key in grounding the importance of educational leaders using a culturally responsive lens to work with and understand community beliefs and values.

CRSL and Decision-making

When Khalifa (2018) discussed “normalizing” of “schoolcentric” beliefs, he was also implying the leadership style that many have referred to as the “hero” model (Bogotch, 2002). The district’s leader-on-top model places the central office leader(s) as the hero who makes all the decisions, and postures a position of fixer when it comes to district problems (Bogotch, 2002; Bogotch & Shields, 2014). However, the problem with this model is that it is based on assumptions of what schools and communities need, and these assumptions lend themselves to be exclusive rather than inclusive of community and cultural values. Rather than the savior of the central office and central office leaders, a CRSL district adopts an inclusive model for leadership that values and affirms the diverse cultures within the district community, and includes these voices and values in decision-making and planning (Khalifa, 2018).

When we review this top-down decision-making model through the lens of CRSL, it is clear that the major disconnect is in the omission of collaboration and inclusion of the broader district community. A move toward community engagement is a move away from the leader-as-hero approach. It acknowledges that schools are located in communities, and a partnership between community and schools is needed for success in the educational system. Leading with a culturally inclusive and affirming lens, means districts need to focus on not only engaging the community, but placing the district community (schools, families, and the community) at the center of the work (Furman,

2004; Oakes & Rogers, 2007; Turhan, 2010). A shift to this approach is not a single step, but again a large change in the mental model of the purpose of the central office and the leadership approaches of the district leaders.

A Focus on Relationships Between District and Community

Shifting the paradigm of educational leaders to an equitable lens would include a shift in the way schools and communities interact. Communication between schools and families is often “one-way,” meaning that schools deliver messages to parents about schedules and events but do not engage in deep dialogue about what families want out of the school (Shields, 2018, p. 82). The power dynamic of one-way communication locates power in the school or central office. Moving from one-way communication to a dynamic partnership between the central office and the school district community would be a shift in the communication paradigm. As stated in discussion above about epistemologies, organizational leadership has historically been structured as a top-down model with a single leader. In the United States, this leader has typically been a white male. To move away from this model, districts would need to leverage a new way of viewing leadership, a new epistemology, and a new understanding of the purpose of the central office.

Leading School Accountability with CRSL

Along with Khalifa’s (2018) framework and Johnson’s (2014) research, other researchers on organizational leadership have expressed the importance of community and stakeholder engagement in effective leadership models. Burns (2010) wrote that powerful leaders worked with their stakeholders within the organization to find ways to set shared goals and leverage the skills within the organization to thrive and meet the goals. Senge (1990) provided a similar approach in his research on learning

organizations, and stressed the importance of a leader setting a vision and designing the development of systems and people within the organization. When leaders situate themselves within the organization and posture a position of working with the stakeholders, leadership is transformative and constantly evolving with the stakeholders (Shields, 2018; Burns, 2003).

Working consistently and collaboratively with the community is a cornerstone of equitable, socially just educational leadership (Jean-Marie et al, 2009; Khalifa, 2018; Shields, 2018). Shields (2018) and Khalifa (2018) also noted that transformative and culturally relevant leadership requires constant reflection to learn and adjust and constantly seek to best include and serve the community.

These leadership approaches seek social justice for our students and schools. In an article on social justice and educational leadership, Turhan (2010) discussed social justice and how it plays out in education, claiming that social justice is often “only a token” or surface-level treatment in schools. Terms like *social justice* and *equity* are used in education and leadership preparation programs, but actual comprehension of what it means to develop socially just schools and districts cannot occur under the current structures (Turhan, 2010; Oakes & Rogers, 2007). Aligned with this, Shields (2018) noted that education organizations use the term “equity” in so many goals, visions, and plans that it too has become a token term that can mean nothing when the steps leaders take are not aligned to the vision for equity. In the case of a school district leadership, if the vision includes equity and collaboration, but district leaders do not engage the community stakeholders on important decisions and vision setting, then using equity in the vision is meaningless.

These researchers assert that social justice cannot be achieved when the diverse voices of the community and stakeholders are excluded from identifying the visions, goals, and decisions of a school district. When goals are placed onto people, it is not in an effort to find true social justice and equity; rather, it is as manipulating and controlling as Friere and Ramos (1970) described.

Social Capital, CRSL, and the New Public Service

None of this change and shift is possible without a focus on relationships within the district. The necessary district changes are large and transformative, and they rest in a simple concept: working collaboratively with stakeholders and the community to ensure the relationships within the district drive school support and improvement (Khalifa, 2018). The continuous work of a collaborative structure focused on a shared responsibility is challenging, but it is sustainable if relationships are a priority. Social capital theory (Coleman, 1988) posits that the more social capital in an organization, or the more trusting relationships built throughout the organization, the more successful the organization can be (Luoma-Aho, 2016). As it relates to CRSL, social capital theory suggests that building authentic, lasting, and ongoing relationships within school communities is a foundational element of building socially just schools.

Another community engagement theory important to this conversation is the New Public Service. Denhard and Vinzant-Denhardt (2000) describe the new approach to public engagement as a partnership with the community. The authors describe the shift from previous models of public engagement that focused guiding or steering the community to a shared belief aligned to the dominant culture of the leader or organization. This approach could be likened by the schoolcentric phenomenon Khalifa

(2018) described. In such models of community engagement, an organization has a set agenda and works to steer the public to get on board with this agenda. From a CRSL lens, we can see that this approach does not build a partnership; rather, it steamrolls community voice.

In the New Public Service model, Denhard and Denhardt (2000) suggest that organizations and the public should build partnerships to co-create solutions together. In this sense, it is not about steering or guiding, nor is it about removing professionals from the conversation. Rather, it locates public servants, like school districts, as partners with the community in co-creating policies. Again, language matters in this scenario, and the term partner is important, because it implies an equitable balance of power and importance. In many cases, the community is left out of important conversations; whereas, in this model, all parties show up with equal voice and importance. Much like social capital theory, New Public Services in a CRSL model relies on the relationships and ongoing partnership with the community to co-construct policies, solve problems together, and co-create the best schools for the community.

Summary

Central office leadership has the potential to drive pivotal changes in districts, and shape schools and districts into socially just, equitable schools (Honig et al, 2017). As outlined above, this type of leadership requires intentional constructions of trusting relationships and ongoing collaborative work with community stakeholders. Also, the role of the district office is to champion community needs and values, while also being a champion of national, state, and local policies and practices, which is why the partnership between the central office and the community is so crucial. In terms of accountability,

this balance might mean the central office upholds a focus on federally required assessments, while also making space for valuing other aspects of schooling that are important to the community stakeholders.

The larger issue around this research is that we do not have equitable and socially just schools that support all students. Creating outcomes-based accountability systems that force schools to better serve all students has missed the mark in creating socially just schools. The intention of this research is to find ways to listen to community stakeholders, adjust accountability systems and mindsets, and continue to move toward creating more socially just schools for all students and communities.

American school models have moved away from partnerships with their communities, and external guidelines and mandates have exerted significant power over local communities and school districts in locating the vision and goals for students and schools. Although there are different central office models between rural, suburban, and urban school districts, a significant gap in the research exists in understanding how district central offices can cultivate authentic partnerships and leverage the community knowledge to create socially just schools for the community. School districts may use this research to drive change in their leadership approaches and work collaboratively with communities to create a model of shared responsibility for all schools and students.

From the literature discussed in the introduction and literature review, it is clear that there has been both a shift in the identified goals and outcomes for schools and in the way school success is measured. Families and communities have historically set the vision and expectations for schools, but federal policies and processes implemented in the last 20 years have impacted the role of the local community in setting visions and

expectations for local schools and districts. Furthermore, strict federal and state policies have what research deems as “external accountability” structures over schools, and have diminished the models for local or internal accountability structures. Although the literature finds that internal accountability models foster greater motivation and productivity, little research has been conducted around the larger community’s role in setting a vision for how schools are held accountable. Aligned with this, there is a great deal of research around culturally responsive teaching, but little research around the role of the school district central office in engaging communities in co-constructing district policies. Therefore, it is important for this study to engage community stakeholders to learn more about their vision for schools and their values around information shared about schools. In this examination, I emphasize the school district community as a holistic group of family members, students, teachers, school leaders, district leaders, and community members. It is vital to understand these groups as interwoven and equally important, rather than separate or siloed from the district itself.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The methodology for this research is a qualitative case study, and the details for the research methods are outlined in the following sections. The first section of this chapter discusses the research questions and the rationale for the case study design and site. The second part of this chapter discusses details of the research design, including the interview process, data collection, and analysis, methods for ensuring trustworthiness, and researcher positionality. The final section offers a brief summary of the chapter.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of school accountability and shared responsibility that lie within this district community, and to learn how these perceptions could inform district leadership. In alignment with this purpose, the research questions were: 1) What are the ways the community in a large, urban district in the American West conceptualize school accountability or shared responsibility? 2) How could the ways in which the community conceptualizes school accountability or shared responsibility shape culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) at the district?

With the goal of engaging the community, this research was a qualitative study using a case study approach to codify and understand the vision and values for school accountability and district leadership from the school district community.

Why Qualitative Research?

School accountability and how we have measured school success has relied almost entirely on quantitative measures determined by standardized test scores. This approach has been limiting on many levels. It has limited our understanding of how schools are truly serving students, limited the goals of schools, and limited the voices included in decision-making. Furthermore, this quantitative approach to accountability has not ultimately helped schools better serve all students and communities. A broader lens is needed to understand what is valued in schools and how schools should be measured against these values. For these reasons, a qualitative approach is necessary.

Given the present study's goal to engage the school district community around the vision for schools, expectations, and reporting, it was important to use a qualitative method to deeply understand participant views through their own words and stories (Maxwell, 2005). The goal of the qualitative approach was to discover a comprehensive understanding of the values and visions for schools, as well as the value for information reporting and school accountability from a representative group of community members. This qualitative study worked to give meaning to the experiences and stories of the participants, and understand participant perspectives on this topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For the most part, school accountability has been a quantitative endeavor, linked to quantified measures of standardized test scores. Historically, this process has omitted the voices of community members. In order to understand a different view and to expand the understanding of community values, my qualitative approach centered, lifted, and empowered voices from community members who have been largely excluded from the conversation (Creswell, 2013).

Why a Case Study?

Case studies allow for in-depth description of a phenomenon (Yin, 2014), and for this study, the case study model allows for a deeper understanding of the district community's vision and values within the unique setting of this community and school district. Scholarly literature reveals that schools and districts are situated within their unique context, and for this study, to truly understand community values for schools and school accountability, it required consideration through the context of the school district. For these reasons, the case study helped better understand the "what," "why," and "how," of this district's current practices and the values and visions of the community stakeholders (Yin, 2014).

Sample

Case Study Site

Mountain West City School District (pseudonym used to protect the school district and participants) is located in the western region of the United States in a large, urban city. The district serves approximately 90,000 students in preschool through 12th grade. According to the US Census Bureau (2019), the estimated population of the city of Mountain West proper is about 730,000, with 53% White residents, 30% Latine, and 10% Black. On its webpage, the school district provides school demographics as follows: 53% Latine, 25% White, 13% Black, and 3% Asian (district web page, 2020). The district webpage also notes that the district employs about 15,000 full time employees, including 5,000 teachers.

The district is geographically divided into quadrants of Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, and Southwest, and a Central region is also designated. This city has seen

great changes to its regions and neighborhoods in the last decade due to an increase of gentrification and urban development (Rubino, 2020). Woven throughout the city and remaining in some gentrified areas are communities with deeply rooted cultural histories tied closely to their neighborhoods. The collision of historical roots and the spread of gentrification in these neighborhoods impacts the district and the community members, and it certainly impacts the collective community's values and vision for schools and schooling in the city.

In the last decade, this district was deemed one of the fastest growing urban districts in the nation (HuffPost, 2017). As noted on its website, the district has just over 200 schools, and is structured with a "portfolio" model, which includes a blend of district-run, charter, and innovation schools that all participate in the district's accountability system and school choice model (district web page, 2020). The school-choice program is a district-run process that aligns to the state's choice policy and allows families to choose schools regardless of their designated neighborhood school (A+ Colorado, 2019).

Some education reform and policy groups have credited the district's school accountability system, portfolio structure, and school-choice process for creating an enviable model of school reform, and for creating an attractive urban district with local families from varying socio-economic backgrounds (Osborne, 2016). Although these reform efforts have been celebrated in education reform circles, they have also been highly disputed in local conversations for their lack of community voice and values (Ultican, 2019). In this case, while some education policy groups celebrated the tough and rigid accountability policies and processes, local community members who faced

school closure and other changes spoke about the devastation these policies wreaked on local communities, noting the voicelessness they felt in the process (Asmar, 2019).

Beyond the tension between the groups who celebrated the accountability structure and reform models and those who felt oppressed by them, the district accountability policy also created tensions in terms of its alignment to the district's vision and values. The school accountability framework in this district was almost entirely based on student standardized assessment results, and the rating from this accountability framework has been interwoven into many of the district's policies. In many ways, the accountability system in this district became a single priority in this district, and it was used for most major initiatives and policies such as the school accountability policy (Denver Public Schools [DPS], no date), the policy to close schools (Denver Public Schools, 2017), school choice (Denver Public Schools, 2020a), school facility placement (Denver Public Schools, 2015), additional school funding and incentive pay for teachers and school leaders, as well as teacher, school leader, and central office evaluations (Denver Public Schools, 2018).

However, although the framework carried a great deal of weight in the district, it did not align with the district's values or core strategies. For example, the district outlined that its core values and vision included collaborating with the community, prioritizing the whole child, and offering college and career readiness, among other priorities not measured on the accountability framework (DPS, 2014). Current literature clearly outlines that successful organizations have clear coherence between their visions and values, their initiatives and daily work, and in their accountability models (Fullan &

Quinn, 2016). In this case, the district might lack alignment and coherence between its values, actions, and its measure of success.

The accountability system was an initiative led by a former superintendent who ran the district for 10 years—notably, a white male who came to the position from the business sector. After his resignation, the district named a female, Latine leader to take the superintendent seat. The new superintendent spent her entire 30+ year career serving in the district as a teacher and school and district leader. In the summer of 2019, under the direction of the new superintendent, district leadership launched a committee of community representatives to discuss approaches to re-envision the accountability system (Denver Public Schools , 2020c). The committee of community representatives charged with reimagining the district accountability framework was composed of teachers, school leaders, family and community members, and central-office representatives. In redesigning the framework, the committee set out to answer two main questions: What do we value in schools, and what do we want to know about our schools? The committee met regularly for ten months and generated a recommendation that would require the district to not only change the framework or tool itself, but change its behaviors, purposes, and structures around a system for accountability. In their recommendation, the committee claimed that the central office behaviors affiliated with the previous accountability framework used data for punitive measures in a way that left schools limited to a single story marred with a deficit mindset (Denver Public Schools, 2020b). The committee recommendation offered a strategy for intentionally moving away from these behaviors by restructuring the relationship the district has with data, to a relationship of collaboration between schools and the central office in a shared effort to

improve schools and locate the assets and strengths that they offer to students (Denver Public Schools, 2020b).

Interestingly, although this recommendation was written with the language of moving away from punitive ratings and evaluations, the committee recommendation was met with resistance from stakeholder groups who were fearful the district would continue to use data in a “weaponizing way,” or use school data to punish rather than support schools (Gottlieb, 2020). This information about the committee, its recommendation, and the resistance to the recommendation are important to note as part of my methodology because it adds important context to the discussion of this community.

The accountability system in this district has been contentious, with many reform supporters advocating for it and many local educators and community members voicing concern and outrage over the district’s overreliance on it. The district is in a time of transition, still leveling from the change to a new superintendent, continuing to negotiate the gentrification and urban growth, and currently living in a pandemic that is devastating residents and neighborhoods. For these reasons, this site lends itself as an interesting case study about school accountability, school vision-setting, and school district and community engagement.

Participants

The study included 12 participants who are principals, teachers, district leaders, community members, and families of students in the district. Participants were chosen to reflect the racial and cultural representation of the community. Participants also represented different geographic regions of the city, as well as the school governance types, including district-run, charters, and innovation schools. Selective sampling

(Creswell, 2013) was also used in choosing the participants, and the participants were chosen because of their connection and previous engagement with the topic of accountability in this district.

Recruitment

The nature of this topic has some nuance within this particular setting and case. As described above, the accountability system has been largely contentious in this community over the last 10 years, and the conversation can get somewhat technical or nuanced. To allow for in-depth conversation about this topic, selected participants were familiar with the topic. Because school accountability has been a highly discussed topic in this district, many community members have been active participants in the conversation. Also, as noted above, a group of 30 community members (family members, teachers, school leaders, and community members) met for 10 months to discuss the previous accountability system and their vision for a reimagined approach to school accountability. Some of the participants were from this committee. Other participants were from the school district community, and have been actively engaged in the larger discussion about school accountability, or have been engaged in conversations about school district initiatives and policies, as noted by Board of Education meeting public comment and other district initiative committees and meetings. In this sense, the participants were selected because of their previous knowledge about the topic, and could be considered an “expert group,” because they have committed more time to this topic than the general population. Throughout this research, I use the term *district community* to encompass all stakeholder groups—teachers, school leaders, district leaders, family members, and community members—and I also use the term “community members” to

designate the specific participants who identify as community activists within this district. The following paragraphs further define the participant groups.

Family members. Family voices were an important part of this study. A family member is defined as anyone who supports a child in the district. This includes parents, grandparents, guardians, and other adults who identify as a family member of a current student. The term “family member” is used intentionally (instead of “parent”) to be inclusive of the varied family models of this community (Morgan, 2020). Family member participants were representative of the community, racially, geographically, and by school type. It was also important to include family members of different school-aged children to encompass the variety of voices in a P–12 community.

Teachers and student-support staff. Student-support staff and teachers are crucial voices in the conversation about what is valued and important in schools. Teacher participants included classroom teachers and student support staff including other professionals who work with students in schools, such as social workers and counselors. Like the family groups, teachers and support staff were also racially and geographically representative of the community, and represent the various school governance types and grade levels.

School leaders. The school leader voice is important to include separately from teachers because their interaction with accountability reports is different from teachers and student support staff, and they have a different lens to accountability and reporting than teachers and other school staff. Like the other participant groups, it was important that the school leaders were representative of the racial and geographic representations of the district, as well as the school governance type and grade level.

District leaders. District leaders include employees who work at the district central office. These leaders hold a variety of roles within the district, and it was important that they represent the racial diversity of the district. Because their position in the district places them in a position to represent the entire district, geographic location is not applicable.

Community members. Finally, community members include members of local advocacy groups, community members of former or graduated students, retired district employees, or other active community members interested in the school district and district policies. These participants were representative of the diversity within the district and represent the geographical regions of the city when possible.

Participant information is outlined in Table 3.1. Participants self-identified racial and gender identity, and geographic location. Note that I used pseudonyms, and some participants fit multiple racial categories.

Table 3.1
Participant Demographic Information

Name	Connection to school district/ Community role	Racial identity/ Gender identity	Geographic representation (if applicable)
Karen	Family member	White, female	Central
Rob	Family member	Black, male	Central
Katie	Family member, teacher	White, female	NW
Janelle	Teacher	Black, female	NE

Kent	Teacher, family member	Latine, male	SE
Marcia	School leader	White, female	SW
Cesar	School leader, family member	Latine, male	SE
Elisha	School leader, family member	Black, female	NE
Catherine	District leader, family member	White, female	SE
Shirley	Community member, retired teacher, family member	Black, female	NE
Felipe	Community member, activist	Latine, male	Central
Nicholas	Community member, family member	Latine, male	SW

Research Design

This qualitative case study focused on interviews from community stakeholders to answer the research questions. In order to build on feedback already provided by the community on this topic, this study included an analysis of previous feedback that was used in the interview stage. The stages of this study are outlined in Table 3.2, and the description of the data collection is further explained following this table.

Table 3.2
Research Phases and Description

Research Phase	Description of Steps
Phase 1: Document review	Document review of previous community feedback that the district has received. This community feedback included

720 survey responses that were analyzed with the questions:

- What do community members value in schools?
- How do community members conceptualize school accountability or shared responsibility for schools?

The findings from this document review were categorized into themes or belief statements that were used in the participant interviews.

Phase 2: Participant data collection	<p>Interviews with participants were 60 minutes and conducted via Zoom online video call platform.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Prior to the interview, participants first responded to belief statements by completing a Qualtrics survey that asked them to categorize the statements in Agree, Disagree, Neutral categories.● Participants then responded to open-ended, semi-structured interview questions that asked the participants to reflect and explain their responses to the survey.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ You noted that you agree with statement XYZ, can you explain your thoughts behind this?○ You noted you agreed with statement XYZ, in what ways would this look different than the current model?
Phase 3: Data Analysis	<p>Data collection: trends, coding, analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Data were stored in a secure Google Drive folder● Researcher input all data into the matrix to compile responses and narratives● First phase of coding used an inductive, grounded theory approach of line-by-line analysis and identification of emergent codes and subcodes● Second phase used a deductive approach using themes from CRLS as coding.

Data Collection

The study was designed to collect data that could be used to help understand what community stakeholders value in school accountability and responsibility and how that can influence approaches for CRDL leadership and create a shared responsibility for all

schools. An exploratory case study provided a platform to understand community values for local schools and the conceptual beliefs about accountability and shared responsibility for schools. The main data were collected from participant interviews, and the secondary data included the data collected in a document review of responses the district collected on this topic. The document review and data collection are described below.

Phase 1: Document and survey review. Because this topic has been discussed in detail over the last several years, it was important to credit conversations about this topic that have already occurred within the community. Although this study was designed as a qualitative case study, interview questions used approaches from a Q method or Q-sort study. A Q model is a methodology that provides a scientific approach to study subjectivity or opinions and beliefs, and focuses on gathered opinions and perspectives to use in a sorting or ranking model with participants (Salkind, 2010). As this study was rooted in understanding the values of the community which includes a high level of subjectivity, approaches from this model helped me understand the participant responses in a scientific way. Some approaches from the Q method were useful for this study because they allowed me to draw from a wide variety of perspectives to identify connections and relationships between the participant perspectives and previous responses (Shinebourne, 2009).

With that said, the first step in this study was to analyze the survey and focus group responses the district gathered from the community in the last year. The district had two major initiatives that involved community engagement and these survey responses and focus group findings are posted publicly on the district page. A list of questions from these surveys and focus groups is outlined in Appendix A. The first

initiative was part of the initial community feedback to update the district's strategic plan. This engagement involved small focus groups and asked a major question related to this study: What are the most important characteristics of a quality school in this district? The responses in this engagement include family members, community members, and district employees from the different regions of the district. The second community engagement initiative that is included in this feedback analysis was part of the larger process to redesign the district's accountability framework. In this step, the community was asked to respond to the findings and recommendations that the 30 person community-representative committee developed along the redesign process. This feedback was received in the form of publicly posted surveys that were collected over the 10-month project, and includes 720 survey responses from family members, teachers, school leaders, community members from all regions of the city. Data from survey responses and the focus groups were analyzed, looking for trends in beliefs and values for schools in this district. A set of statements were generated from this data set to be used in the interviews. The core question considered for this analysis was what does the community value in schools, and what does the community value in an accountability or responsibility model.

The document review stage also included analysis of the district's mission, vision, and priority plans available on their web page. The guiding questions for this analysis was what do these documents imply about the district's value for schools, and school accountability, or a school responsibility model?

Phase 2: Interviews. Participants in this study were interviewed in a semi-structured interview model (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An interview protocol is outlined

Appendix B. Interviews were scheduled for one hour, and were facilitated via the University of Denver's Zoom online platform, and recorded with participant consent. The interview recordings were transcribed using the feature through the University of Denver's Zoom platform for further analysis.

Using the online survey program Qualtrics, participants were first asked to respond to the trend and belief statements collected in the phase I document review. Similar to a Q method approach, the Qualtrics survey asked participants to what extent they agree, disagree, or are neutral to statements generated from the documentation review (Shinebourne, 2009). The pre-interview survey questions are outlined in Appendix B. In the semi-structured interview approach, I asked follow-up questions to better understand participant responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), such as "what makes you disagree with this statement," or "in what ways do you agree with this statement?" Participants also responded to open-ended questions that allowed them to add information or rationale to their responses about what they valued in schools and the school district, or in what ways they believe schools and school districts should be held accountable or responsible. This included questions such as what do you value in schools, and what role do stakeholders play in a shared responsibility model? Both the participant responses to the belief statements and the open-ended questions were crucial in answering the research questions.

Organizing and Analyzing the Data

The data were analyzed with qualitative analysis steps of organizing the data, coding the data, generating categories and themes from the data, interpreting the themes and searching for alternative interpretations (Maxwell, 2005).

Organizing the data

To start, participant information, pseudonyms, and interview scheduling and notes were housed in a Google spreadsheet. Interviews were transcribed by the University of Denver Zoom transcription feature, and put into Google documents that were used for review for trends and coding.

Reading for Understanding. Transcripts of the interviews were reviewed along with the audio recordings, so I was able to be aware of the nuances and nonverbal communication of the participants responses, such as pauses, emphases, intonations, and emotional expressions of the responses. I read and listened to the interviews, and reread the entire interviews prior to starting the coding process so I could familiarize myself with the full interview to help identify any emergent themes as they are connected to the concept and context of the interview (Bradley et al, 2007)

Coding and generating themes. Once transcripts were reviewed and I had a general understanding of the scope of the responses, I conducted a coding process to catalogue key concepts within the context of each interview (Bradley et al, 2007). The coding plan is outlined in Appendix D. The coding was completed manually with an initial use of hardcopies, and then using Google document and Google spreadsheet tools to organize the data and track codes. I was the primary coder for this process.

In the first phase of the coding and analysis, I utilized a grounded theory coding process to understand the data as it connects to the theory. This stage included an inductive approach that allowed me to look for concepts that were not previously anticipated (Bradley et al., 2007). In this phase, I read the transcriptions line by line looking for connections, repeated ideas, and possible themes that came from the data. This detailed

approach to systematically reviewing the data helped ensure I was not imposing a personal bias or placing predetermined concepts of theory onto the findings. Because it was important to keep the focus of this first phase participant-centered, the analysis was open-ended and I did not use predetermined codes (Mertova & Webster, 2020), and coding in this stage was completed with attention to the participants perspectives and conceptual ideas and ideology (Bradley et al., 2007).

After the data were reviewed for new key themes, ideas, and code structures, the data was then reviewed with a deductive approach, and in the absence of a CRDL framework, important and applicable concepts were pulled from the CRSL framework (Khalifa et al., 2016) for the initial codes of this deductive approach. These initial themes include the concept of schoolcentric, the value for relationships between schools and community, the value of other aspects of schooling beyond academic success, and the value of equity for all students, as well as the concept of internal and external accountability.

Aligned with the Q-sort approach for the initial interview questions, I reviewed the ranking activity data to understand the responses individually, and then looked for trends in the data and connections between the participant responses. Some questions I posed in this analysis were to what extent are the responses similar between the participants role - teacher, school leader, family member, or to what extent were responses similar between participants' regional connect - NE, SE, SW, NW, and Central? Appendix E outlines a sample of the matrices that will be used to analyze the data as related to the participant identities.

In this phase, the data were also coded with a data count approach to learn how frequent participants gave similar and different responses to questions. These data were

also analyzed with the consideration of participant roles with the district, geographic location, and demographic information.

The two-step process outlined above allowed me to understand what community stakeholders value in schools and how these responses connect with theory.

Interpretation, credibility, and trustworthiness. Once the coding was complete, the data were interpreted to make sense of the information and any significance related to the research questions. Validation was completed with participants in a member check during the interview process as well as after the interviews. Participants were asked to clarify statements and remarks during the interview to clarify understanding, and participants were able to review the findings to check for accuracy of their responses (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2007). The literature review was also used as a point of validation to check the findings as they related to the literature. In this qualitative case study, the credibility was dependent on the way in which findings are aligned to the data presented in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I also kept a reflection journal during data collection as a bias-check process to maintain awareness of my own thoughts and feelings during the process so that these personal reactions did not impact data and findings. The plan for reflection and observations is outlined in Appendix C. My role as researcher and my approach to checking any biases from my positionality is further discussed in the next section.

Role of the Researcher

In part, the present study was rooted in locating the beliefs and values of the community about their school district. As a person who also lives in this community and works closely with district policy and accountability, I needed to reflect on my

positionality and any possible impact it could have on the study. School accountability in the district of study is a topic with which I have firsthand experience. Although I needed to constantly check my own thinking and reactions for any bias, my intimacy with the topic and district also allowed me to listen for the subtleties and nuances in participant responses. I have a deep knowledge of this topic and how it is situated within this district, which I can leverage throughout this process—in building rapport with participants, during data collection, and in the analysis and reporting stages. However, in order to maintain a neutral stance during the interview process and analysis, I was cognizant of my thoughts and beliefs during interviews in order to ensure my positionality was not impacting the research process. I used a reflection journal to document my initial thoughts and observations, and I used these reflections as I understood and contextualized the findings.

Furthermore, I interrogated my position as a white woman and remained cognizant of the power in my position as a central office leader. Khalifa (2018) offers the term *schoolcentric* to describe how white school leaders permeate dominant culture values onto school communities and stifle the community values, and beliefs (p. 47). As I work with community stakeholders, I was aware of this issue and positioned myself as a learner, as I observed the values and beliefs in this district and community.

Limitations

The full length of this study was conducted between Spring 2020 and Spring 2021. Interviews occurred in the first quarter of 2021, well into the COVID-19 pandemic and racial pandemics. This continuing crisis had a tremendous impact on our nation and local communities in ways that are not yet fully understood. We do know that educators,

schools, and communities of color are among the most impacted. The health pandemic disrupted the platform and operations of schools across the country, and will likely change how schools operate in the future. The community stakeholders who participated in this study—many who come from communities of color— were disproportionately impacted by the virus and the racial pandemics and their fallout. It was critical to identify this context and consider the limitations to the present study created by an ongoing global pandemic.

From a logistical standpoint, the pandemic required that interviews were conducted via an online platform to ensure the health and safety of the participants and researcher. Although an online platform provided some benefits, such as streamlined recording and transcripts, it also impacted the rapport between participants and me as the researcher. In-person interviews allow for nonverbal communication and cues that provide important context and understanding to participant responses; these were limited in an online platform. Furthermore, in navigating the pandemic and the online platform, the timeline for this research also impacted the participation. Three participants were unable to complete the survey and interview due to timing constraints. The planned sample included language diversity and further racial and ethnic diversity, and the timeline constraints caused a loss in representation of the sample. From a contextual stance, although we do not fully understand the impact of this pandemic, it has likely made lasting impacts on the beliefs and values of many participants. Considering and assessing these contextual shifts were addressed in the interviews and analysis.

Summary

This chapter described the research methodology that was used to answer the research questions. It outlined the process for participant selection, described the participants, as well as the process for engaging with participants in the interview process, and the steps for data collection and analysis. It also discussed the researcher's positionality, possible bias, and potential limitations. The next chapter outlines the findings from this research.

Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of school accountability and shared responsibility that lie within this district community and to learn how these perceptions could shape a culturally responsive district leadership model. With that focus, the research questions were: 1) What are ways the community in a large, urban district in the American West conceptualize school accountability or shared responsibility? and 2) How can community conceptualizations of shared responsibility shape culturally responsive district leadership (CRDL) at the district?

This chapter presents the findings of this qualitative case study. As noted in Chapter Three, study participants included teachers, family members, school leaders, district leaders, and community members affiliated with the American West school district, who have been involved in district conversations and committees tied to the district's accountability system. Each participant completed a pre-interview survey and sat for an individual interview. The survey asked them to sort 13 community-sourced value statements based on their agreement with the ideas. Then, interviews were conducted with each of the participants to discuss their responses to the belief statements. Interview questions served as a frame for conversations. However, participants responded from their own lived experiences and connections to the district, which contributed to a semi-structured approach, highlighting specific perceptions and experiences of individual

participants. The pre-interview survey and interview questions are outlined in Appendix B.

In this chapter, I explore research question one: ways the community in a large, urban district in the American West conceptualize school accountability or shared responsibility. Research question two is addressed in chapter five. The present chapter answers the research question first by presenting the quantitative results of the survey, and then describing the findings through results and themes from the data. Themes stemmed from both participant perceptions of a shared-responsibility model, and what they described as the antithesis of this possible model—the accountability model currently in place at the district.

All participants were a part of the same school district, and many of their examples were unique to it. For example, the color-coded rating system for the school performance framework has been in place for many years. Participants used the color-code model as a synonym for outcomes-based accountability systems. The district system they referenced uses the following color-codes for school ratings: a “red” rating suggests a school is not meeting expectations; a “green” rating indicates a school is meeting expectations; and a “blue”-coded school is exceeding expectations. This distinction is important to note, as participants used the color-coded terms in interviews, and such ratings are common knowledge within the district community. The next section describes the findings from the survey.

Survey Findings

Prior to interviews, participants completed an online questionnaire through Qualtrics that captured demographic information, and asked participants to sort the 13

belief statements into Agree and Disagree categories. Participants were required to respond to at least 8 statements in which they agreed or disagreed. The survey questions are outlined in Appendix B.

Derived from data collected from the community and district before the start of this study, belief statements addressed three different theoretical categories affiliated with this research: shared responsibility, traditional accountability, and culturally responsive school leadership. Data were analyzed to locate trends by role, geographic location, and demographics. I found no noticeable differences between participant groups. However, a larger set of data might have revealed more notable differences. Survey findings are broken down by the category and outlined below.

Shared Responsibility

Participant responses to the belief statements aligned with shared responsibility were overwhelmingly positive, showing clear agreement and support for all of these statements. The statement that triggered the strongest positive response was item number one, which aligned to beliefs in shared responsibility and an understanding that a broader set of actions leads to school success or failure. The statement, “We need to consider what actions led to a school’s failure as much as we need to consider what actions to take to improve that school” sparked positive agreement among 11 of 12 participants. The one participant who indicated neutral placement noted that he agreed with the statement, but did not feel compelled to respond to it in the survey. Considering the context of this district, the strong agreement for this statement is a movement away from its historical practices of accountability. For many years, this district closed schools based solely on school accountability framework performance measures. Strong agreement with item

number one suggests a shift in this community's value for better measures of school success, support, and improvement within the unique context of each school.

Another important finding was reflected in item number six: "I value a partnership in which schools, families, the community, and the district all share a moral obligation and shared ownership for the continued success of schools." Item six prompted 10 participants to agree, 1 to disagree, and elicited 1 neutral response. Shared partnership was a key topic of discussion in interviews as well, wherein participants talked at length about their conceptualization of partnership in this model. As I further explain in the upcoming section, the participant who disagreed noted that he still envisions the ownership of academic development to be the ownership of the school leaders and teachers. The participant who remained neutral on this statement noted her support for such a model as an ideal state; however, she could not currently fathom such a model in her district because she could not see all stakeholders, most notably district leaders, understanding the success of all students and schools as a "moral obligation." Her response connects to a lack of trust she feels within the district, which is further discussed in the interview analysis section, as other participants reported perceptions of trust or broken trust throughout the district.

The other notable distinction came from item number four: "Color-coded accountability systems have focused on shame and punishment of schools more than they have focused on school improvement," which prompted nine participants to agree and three to disagree. Similar to item six, participants explained their stance on this statement in semi-structured interviews. Participants who agreed with statement four had strong feelings toward the pain, shame, and division that the color-coding rating system caused

in the district. Of participants who disagreed with this statement, two were community members who work closely with families to help choose schools for their students; these participants noted the importance of rating systems for families to understand what schools offer students. However, these participants did not discuss the rating system from the school (teacher, leader, student) point of view. The participant who disagreed with this statement is a current district leader (Board member) and noted her own shift in perspective on the rating system when she moved from a teacher to a district leader. She noted that although she would have agreed with this statement as a teacher and remembers the feeling of pain and punishment she felt from the color-coding system, she now sees its value in overseeing all schools in the district. This remark was an interesting reflection, considering the possible disconnect between district leadership and community values; or, the disconnect between district leaders and district community’s conception of the purpose of accountability or shared responsibility in a district. Her remark begs the question: Is there a shared understanding of the purpose of the accountability or responsibility system, and is there shared trust in its use? The responses aligned to shared responsibility notions are outlined below in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Survey Responses to Shared-Responsibility Belief Statements.

Item #		Agree	Disagree	Neutral
1	We need to consider what actions led to a school’s failure as much as we need to consider what actions to take to improve that school.	11	0	1

4	Color-coded accountability systems have focused on shame and punishment of schools more than they have focused on school improvement.	9	3	0
6	I value a partnership in which schools, families, the community, and the district all share a moral obligation and shared ownership for the continued success of schools.	10	1	1
7	We need to consider the resources schools receive when holding schools accountable and not just the school rating.	9	1	2

Traditional Accountability

To understand participant conceptions of a shared-responsibility model, I asked them to respond to belief statements aligned to traditional accountability models. These responses are outlined in Table 4.2. Participants largely disagreed with the belief statements in this category and further elaborated in interviews. The most-discussed belief statement from this category was item two: “Test-based accountability is the best or only measure for holding schools accountable to students’ academic progress.” This statement triggered a great deal of mixed emotion and concern, especially among participants of color. In general, participants felt that the emphasis of standardized assessments has not moved the district toward more equitable opportunities for all students. However, many participants had strong feelings that having a system to report student achievement data was important to ensure equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students. These stakeholders—all of whom identified as Black or Latine—expressed strong feelings for a system that reports disaggregated information about

student performance. They also expressed fear around the pre-NCLB practices that did not report nor consider the inequitable opportunity and achievement between student groups, most notably the inequities between white and affluent students and black, brown, or students living in low socioeconomic status. I further discuss this statement in the thematic analysis in the upcoming section.

Table 3.2
Survey Responses to Traditional Accountability-Model Belief Statements

Item #		Agree	Disagree	Neutral
2	Test-based accountability is the best or only measure for holding schools accountable to students' academic progress.	1	11	0
9	High stakes accountability systems and color-coded ratings have moved us toward the goal of providing equitable opportunities for all students.	2	10	0
11	Color-coded school ratings based on student test scores are needed so parents can make informed decisions about where to send their students.	2	10	0
12	It is the role of the principals and teachers alone to ensure schools are successful, and if the school is not meeting expectations, it is the role of the district to close the school to open a better school.	2	9	1

Culturally Responsive

To better understand participant views on the ideologies affiliated with culturally responsive leadership as they related to shared responsibility, participants responded to

belief statements connected to culturally responsive belief statements. The findings from these responses are outlined in Table 4.3.

Participants responded in strong agreement to these statements. Item 13, “School districts must prioritize the values of its community members in making decisions about school goals, priorities, and expectations,” prompted mixed results, and participants had an opportunity to explain their response to this item. Two participants who disagreed with this statement noted the importance of partnerships with equal prioritization of values and opinions, rather than prioritizing one stakeholder group over another. One participant further explained that school staff—“the professionals”—as she called them, need a strong voice in the decisions of a school, and the goal is an equal partnership where all voices are included. Of the participants who did not respond to this statement, three noted that they agree with the statement, but did not feel compelled to respond.

Table 4.3
Survey Responses to Culturally Responsive Belief Statements

Item #		Agree	Disagree	Neutral
3	Schools need to have teachers and staff that understand the students’ and families’ cultural background. It is important that the cultural values of the community are reflected in the school and district.	10	0	2
5	Schools’ climate and culture (how staff and students feel and work together in schools) is a core component of a successful school.	10	0	2
8	Students need a range of skills to be successful in college and career and live happy and healthy lives, and only focusing on the progress on standardized assessments falls short of assessing these broader skills and development.	9	0	3

10	Schools are uniquely situated and serve in communities with unique values, so we need a broader set of measures to define school and student success.	10	0	2
13	School districts must prioritize the values of its community members in making decisions about school goals, priorities, and expectations.	5	3	4

Survey Summary

Survey responses provided a baseline of the participant conceptions about shared responsibility, traditional accountability, and culturally responsive school leadership. Generally speaking, their responses provided a clear narrative that they have strong connections to the concepts of shared responsibility, negative feelings toward traditional accountability conceptions, and a general agreement for the concepts affiliated with culturally responsive leadership.

Interview Findings

The semi-structured interviews allowed participants to further explain their thoughts about these belief statements and articulate their conceptions about a shared-responsibility model. The following section further outlines findings from participant interviews.

Perceptions of Accountability and Shared Responsibility

During their interviews, participants spoke about accountability and shared responsibility as two very different concepts. Table 4.4 displays some of the terms participants used when describing these different concepts.

Table 4.4
Participant Perceptions of Accountability and Shared Responsibility

Accountability	Shared Responsibility
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Shame	Improve
Stigma	Partner
Punish/Punitive	Supportive
Alone	Equity
Micromanage	Community
Power	Diversity
Label	Opportunity
Deficit-focused	Empathy
Insulting	Ground-up
Weaponizing	Internal/Within Community
Top-down	Asset-based
Authoritative	Trust
Demoralizing	
Winners/Losers	
Blame/Finger-pointing	
External	
Limited	
Speed/Fast	

Within these descriptions, common themes emerged. Participants had clear language for the accountability approach that they have known in their district; however, their language was less clear when describing an ideal state or a shared-responsibility model. At times, they defined shared responsibility by speaking *against* the current model—essentially as the antithesis of it. In this, comparisons of participant conceptions created their perceptions of a shared-responsibility model. Also, as described in culturally responsive leadership research, participants noted clearer visions for shared responsibility at the school level, between teachers, school leaders, and families, but were less articulate or direct with their perceptions of district leaders’ role in a shared-responsibility model. The following sections reflect themes that developed for both the accountability and shared-responsibility models.

Challenges with Traditional Accountability Model. A strict accountability model was the backbone to many policies and practices in this district, generating a lot of

emotions in participant reflections on the model. Although the focus of the present research was defining participant perceptions of a shared-responsibility model, participants spoke very passionately about their opposition to some aspects of the traditional model. Thus, it is important to highlight these responses to better understand their perceptions of what a different model could be. In general, the challenges the participants described in regards to the strict accountability model fall into the categories of being too limiting and taking an authoritative stance.

Participants clearly felt that traditional outcomes-based accountability models, using standardized assessments to monitor school success was insufficient. The conversations in which participants discussed their responses added context to why they felt the model fell short or even hindered student and school success.

The “Not Enough” Deficit-Mindset of the Limited Narrative. The accountability system participants discussed was based almost entirely on student assessment scores, with a color-coded rating used for school choice, school marketing, school funding, school contracts, etc. A very clear theme that emerged from the data was the notion that outcomes-based accountability models have generated a very limited narrative of schools, and an ideal system would include a contextualized and inclusive narrative of schools and what they offer students.

The concept of a test-based, color-coded accountability system as a limiting and limited narrative was clearly articulated by all participants. Each participant spoke to this limited narrative as a problem, though with different concerns. Their responses to this concept can be categorized into two areas: impact of a limited narrative on the school community and impact of a limited narrative on schools.

Janelle, an art teacher who identifies as Black noted, “the color-coding rating system was based on good intentions, but it missed the mark,” because it diminished the school and students down to a single color-code that created, “a narrative that a school is bad, when really it’s probably a really good school, made up of really good people that have a bunch of students who need something more than a test score to tell you who they really are.” In this sense, Janelle expressed concern around the limited scope of a color-coding rating system, and ways in which it ignored the many assets and strengths of both students and schools that do not show-up on standardized assessment scores. Janelle highlighted the limited measure of success provided by standardized tests and offers an alternative:

[S]uccess is not based on how well they can perform on a standardized test. Their success is based on their ideas and their expressions, and who they are, and so when we let that shine, that’s who a kid is, and we need those unique kids as much as traditional learners.

Here, Janelle pushed against limited goals for education and the undervaluing of diversity and unique skills that the test-based accountability engenders. She also noted the limitations with the test-based model, noting, “you’re only assessing those students who thrive in that environment and you’re missing out on an entire other side of the population, where students are thriving in a different capacity.”

Catherine, who is White and now in a district leadership position but spent 30 years as a teacher in the district, spoke passionately about the students she served who were English Language Learners (ELL). She noted that oftentimes these students were not set-up to succeed on standardized assessments. She spoke about the assets and

learning styles of her students and they were dismissed in the test-based accountability model because they were ELL. She also noted that in an ideal system, “[w]e could move away from the shame that comes from the single story, and we could focus on all of the pieces as assets of our schools and our students.” In this statement, she articulated the deficit mindset implicit in a narrative of what schools and students didn’t or couldn’t do, rather a focus on school and student assets. The deficit orientation of the accountability model was a repeated theme in participant responses.

School leader and parent in the district who identifies as Black, Elisha, explained the dangers of the limited narrative that comes from a color-coded rating system. She explained, “I don't know why anyone thought that that system was going to create better outcomes, because what it does is create a very limited narrative, that says that's a bad school and that's a good school.” She spoke further about the rating itself, and added, “instead looking at it as if this is a school that has a lot of strengths, but clearly needs more resources.” Her main concern with the single story the rating system painted was that it ignores the fact that schools serve students with different needs, and it assumes the playing field is level among all students and schools. She spoke passionately about the limitations of a rating system, and the notion that schools serving different populations of students need different resources, or “inputs,” in order to have better “outputs or outcomes.” Elisha argued that instead of considering the differing needs of schools, the rating system paints the narrative of a school without “considering the context of the school or the assets it holds.” She further articulated how these assumptions about students and schools engender sentiments of perpetual inadequacy, with the “feeling of never being good enough.”

Elisha's comment not only tugged at the issue of shame from these labels and ratings that is internalized by a community, but the finite declaration rating systems make about schools. She noted that the rating creates the story that "this is a bad school and there is nothing to be done about it." Another participant, Karen, a White parent and active community member, further explained this concept of the deficit approach to rating schools: "if I say, 'that's a red school,' people know exactly what I mean. They know, 'oh, it's at the bottom of the ladder, and people will just write that school off, and they won't give it a chance.'" She noted the way the rating system has become a lens through which her entire district understands schools, but she noted an critical finality to the distinction, suggesting, "this school *failed*, and not necessarily *failing*." She noted this distinction between failed and failing, in which "failed" is finished and past tense, but "failing" opens the door for improvement and opportunity. She emphasized the impact of the label: "It's demoralizing for the staff to feel like it's the scarlet letter," a rating by which teachers, families, and leaders feel forever defined. This concern engages the concept of what several participants named *the shame* the label provokes in school communities.

Rob, a Black father of two future district students, pointed out the impact the rating system has on communities of color. He noted that the color-coded rating system and the way it measures school and student success is set up to "rate the schools in communities of color as failing." When the assumption about that school is that it is a permanent failure, or "when there is no focus on how to make those schools better," he explained, "that just feels like they are reinforcing what America already tells you as a person of color." Rob further explained that these ratings leave the community and

students of color with the perception of “being less than, and not enough.” Rob elaborated the dangerous role these labels play in existing systems of oppression, and the impact that a deficit mindset can have on an entire community’s psyche.

Shirley, a Black woman who is a former teacher and parent and community activist, noted a similar toll on the students in her community—especially students of color. She stated, “When schools are rated by color codes, it is discussed at home, it is discussed in the community...and kids take that on their own shoulders, as though they feel they’ve done something wrong.” In this, Shirley located both shame and the system of social hierarchy that these rating systems have supported.

Participants spoke clearly about how school ratings, especially low ratings, are internalized by the school community, enticing pain, feelings of inequity, and division throughout the entire district. They also speak to broader issues of implicit racial divisions and systems of oppression engendered by the labeling system, and the deficit-focused limited narrative the rating system reified.

Limiting Opportunities for Students. Along with the deficit mindset that the color-coding rating system communicates about schools and school communities, participants also spoke to ways accountability ratings have limited opportunities for students by focusing on outcomes-based accountability frameworks.

Cesar, a Latine school leader, explained the differences in opportunities between schools ranked poorly on school rating systems and schools performing well. As a leader of a “red” school, he was entirely focused on “anything it took to get test scores up”; however, when he moved to a higher performing school, he had the liberty to design innovative programs and opportunities for his students, including “a STEM lab and other

great programs that would help kids.” He also talked about the equity issues tied to these investments in schools with different ratings. Cesar questioned, which “students are filling the high performing schools with all of those opportunities? And [which] students are filling the seats of the low performing schools and sitting with limited opportunities?” Here, Cesar highlighted the socioeconomic and racial disparities as well as and the limited opportunities provided to students of color and students with low socioeconomic status. He and other participants noted serious inequities among students attending what is deemed a red or failing school.

Marcia, a long-time educator and school leader in the district who identifies as White, echoed this idea by quoting one of her school leaders, “What you appreciate, and if you only prioritize scores on standardized tests, that is all that appreciates,” meaning that rating a school *only* on standardized assessments forces it to limit other opportunities for growth. She later added, “We value so much more out of our schools and for our students.” Marcia noted further the balance she and her team struggle to strike between focusing on increasing their rating and running programs they know are right for their students. In finding this balance, Marcia and other participants noted that academic growth is always important for schools; however, they hope the district can value the different ways students demonstrate academic skills, and better acknowledge the many developmental skills students need to grow as independent, confident, lifelong learners.

Impact on Schools. Along with the impact of the single-story narrative, participants were also concerned with the way the rating system has ultimately hurt rather than helped schools. In these concerns, participants noted the way the rating system

created a stigma that schools could not escape, and that instead of helping schools improve, the ratings often started an unraveling of schools.

Shirley noted the impact the rating system has on the way individual students feel about themselves, and she also discussed the impact school ratings have on the school, families, and the community. She noted that a failing school rating can make a school and a neighborhood start to crumble. She offered her neighborhood high school as an example of a school that closed ten years ago due to low ratings and performance: “Our school was our epicenter of all the community activities, and when that was taken away, it was, it just kind of defeated the community. We lost our pride and joy.” These statements connect to Rob’s statement above, that when the conversation isn’t focused on improvement, the communities, especially the communities of color start to internalize that failure.

Beyond the impact the ratings can have on communities, Janelle also explained the effect that this rating can have on a school: “What our students get out of that [rating] is the stigma of a red school and that their parents want to put their kids in a different school.” Janelle went on to explain the downward spiral that happens when parents start to choose other schools because of that rating, and the school then loses student enrollment, which leads to a loss in funding, and ultimately a loss in the quality of programs schools can offer students. Karen called this phenomenon a “self-fulfilling prophecy,” wherein the school receives the failing rating, which prompts families to choose other schools, which leads to fewer resources, and eventually the failure of the school. In this sense, Karen explained that the rating itself impacted the ultimate success of the school and made it impossible to improve and succeed.

Summary. Concerns about the limited narrative engendered by the accountability rating system was of high concern for participants. They emphasized ways ratings were internalized by students and communities; the toll it took on students, school staff, and communities; and the ways ratings limited opportunities for students. The next section extends discussion of limitations, with a focus on the authoritative nature of the accountability system.

Accountability as Authoritative

Another very clear theme that emerged from the participant interviews was the concept of the authoritative approach of the traditional accountability system. As participants spoke about their perceptions of the accountability models, they connected traditional accountability models with concepts like competition, shame and isolation, and external authority.

Competition and Shame. Along with the concept of the limited narrative that several participants expressed in connection to the rating system, many also spoke about the structure of “winners and losers” that comes from the rating system. Janelle explained, “it feels like we are running a race, and at the end only one person can stand on the podium, and everybody else are the losers.” Several participants noted this concept and the impact that has on school leaders and teachers, but also on students and families.

This structure of winners and losers carried through many of the participant responses, and some talked about the impact that the “winners and losers” model had on them and their schools. Cesar talked about the school-leader experience, and he painted a very bleak picture of isolation, shame, and despair. He explained that the isolation came from the lack of support, noting “leaders carry the entire weight on their shoulders.”

Carrying that weight without feeling supported leaves leaders feeling isolated and alone, and filled with the shame of not being able to improve the schools. Cesar explained that the school leaders and staff, like students, internalize the failing color-code and “feel unsupported, but worse they feel shame.” He spoke further about the toll that rating has on the school staff: “even though [the school staff] know there is more to the story, the only story anyone else knows is that color-code, and there is shame and anger attached to that.” Cesar and others talked at length about the shame felt by school leaders and the school community when there was a “red” rating, as well as the isolation that school leaders felt in having a failing school without support.

In this statement, Cesar implied a sense of blame that came from the authoritative approach of the accountability model. From his perception, the district blamed schools or school leaders, rather than offering support to improve the school. Catherine, a district leader and former teacher and parent, and Katie, a White teacher and parent, both used the term, “finger pointing” to describe how they perceived the district’s reaction to schools performing poorly. In their descriptions of this shame-and-blame model, participants depicted a power wherein the district held authoritative power over schools, but did not step in to help improve schools. This left schools feeling powerless against the school rating and helpless in trying to improve the school.

External, All-Knowing Authority. Another theme emerging from conversations about external authority was that participants felt the district’s accountability system was something done to them, their schools, and their community, and they didn’t have a voice or say in the matter. Karen explained that the district approach to a failing school was often to send in an external consulting group to do a school evaluation, or engage external

district staff to fix the problem. She noted, “any type of outside entity coming in and demanding that you do things this way is demoralizing. People don’t want to be shamed or forced into situations.” She expounded further on the squandered possibility of collaboration: “if the intervention was done in collaboration with the school community, then they could all take responsibility and ownership.” Karen noted a very clear value for the need for support and collaboration to improve schools, rather than a model of external authority and take-over.

Supporting this concept of external authority, Catherine reported that the district, “oftentimes quickly intervenes in schools, but they don’t always understand the full picture.” In this, she explained that the district feels compelled to know all the answers without crediting or understanding the unique context of each school. Katie, a teacher and parent, expanded this concept, as she explained the hoops she and her team needed to jump through when her school was given a low rating on the accountability framework: “It felt like we were being micromanaged from the ivory tower.” She spoke about external district leaders coming into her school, “and it seemed like they were charged with fixing our school, but knew very little about our actual school program, our students, our families, or what actually happened that our data dropped.” She noted the feeling of “inadequacy” that came from this experience, and that it didn’t serve her colleagues or students well.

Kent, a Latine teacher in the southeast region of the district noted that there is a difference in what the “district says and what the district actually does.” In this, he noted, “the district claims to be interested in being collaborative, culturally responsive, and valuing students first,” but then its authoritative or “top-down” actions do not align with

that vision. He furthered this by explaining that the district, “does what it thinks is best, not what the local community asks for or sees as best for its students.” In this, Kent touched on the sentiments of external and authoritative approaches that Shirley also noted.

As a long-time community member, Shirley, is actively involved in the community and school-district initiatives that impact her neighborhood. She expressed frustration at the exclusion and dismissal of community voices from decision-making, noting district leaders “think they know best,” and they have a tendency to “make decisions for communities, with no input from the community.” She reflected: “these occurrences are insulting” and explained the need for more authentic engagement and partnerships. In considering different approaches, Shirley proposed district leadership could “stop telling the community what they think we want to hear, and stop acting like we are gullible and that we don’t read and that we don’t do research. What this district does to the community is often insulting.” Shirley, who is active with her district and neighborhood, situated in a historically Black community, used the term “insulting” more than once to describe the approach the district has taken toward community engagement and decision-making for her neighborhood schools. This perception reveals a lack of authentic partnership between the district and the community—especially in her community which has seen perhaps the greatest impact of school closures due to the accountability policies.

Although most of the responses about the traditional accountability system in this district were weighted with negative emotions, some participants noted a distinction between the way the accountability system was used and the accountability model itself.

Rob noted that it was the “interpretation” of the ratings or “how they were used” that has caused issues, rather than the concept of sharing data about a school’s performance. This distinction is important in understanding the participants’ value for a system that ensures schools are meeting the needs of all students, and a value for a system of support rather than unilateral authority.

Summary. In summary, participants had a high emotional response to the accountability model in place in their district, and very pointed insights about their concerns with that model. Mostly, they worried that it didn't ultimately help improve schools or create better opportunities for students; and, in fact, caused harm and pain to the district community. As they reflected on their concerns with the existing model, they pondered a better model for their district and named some of their values and visions for a shared-responsibility model.

Perceptions of a Model for Shared Responsibility

As participants reflected on the accountability system and described what a better model might be, all seemed to grapple with what Rob called, “finding a happy medium.” Rob further defined it as a place “where we can honestly understand what is happening in a school, but in a way that does not undermine or demoralize or hide from the community all the good things that are happening.” In pondering a better system, Janelle asked, “With an accountability system, what are we wanting schools to gain? What are we wanting families to gain?” Indeed, it seemed many participants were pondering the same question. In some ways, a shift to a shared- responsibility model feels vastly different than what has been currently practiced in this district; yet, perceptions of what a shared-responsibility model means to participants seemed more about tweaks to mindset and

purpose. As the participants described a shared-responsibility model, the themes of support and a focus on improvement were most clearly evident. Within these larger buckets, participants noted that a shift to shared responsibility would mean a shared responsibility for students, improvement, and partnerships.

Responsible for Students. Participants all shared the vision that student success was the core priority for the district. When it came to perceptions of the importance of a shared-responsibility model, all members noted a reporting system is needed to ensure schools are meeting student needs and students are progressing both academically and personally. This means that participants value a system that reports data on student performance—an important distinction. In essence, participants' negative feelings toward the accountability system as it was used in the district was not rooted in collecting and reporting student performance data.

The value of continuing to collect and report student data stemmed from participants' value of equity for all students, as well as their memories of a time when student data and disaggregated data were not collected. When asked if outcomes-based accountability had moved us closer to equity, Rob, a Black father in the community, responded, "Well, just having an accountability system that looks at how Black and Brown students are performing is better than nothing," referencing a time before NCLB where student performance and growth data were not collected, and there was no standardized system for evaluating how schools were serving different student groups. He later added that the strict outcomes-based accountability models "took us a step further, but it isn't the final answer." Shirley also noted the importance of data collection and transparency of student performance. She stated, "We're afraid, literally afraid, in the

Black community that if data is not captured, our kids will be left behind.” Like Rob, Shirley expressed the fear of going back to a time when no data were collected and no one talked about the discrepancies in how different student groups performed and grew academically. Although Shirley spoke passionately about her concerns with the way the district used student data to blanket a school with a color-coded rating, she strongly advocated for the practice of collecting student data to understand how to improve schools and better serve students.

Teachers and school leaders in the sample expressed a stronger emotional reaction to the accountability model, since their roles were more closely impacted by the color-coded accountability systems. However, all participants were in relative alignment with Rob and Shirley in belief that the strict outcomes-based model did not meet the needs of the district. Even so, they valued a system that would ensure schools are serving all students and did not advocate for complete expulsion of all outcomes-based reporting systems.

When asked about standardized test data and how it is used for accountability systems, Shirley and Karen used the exact same idiom, noting that “you can’t throw out the baby with the bathwater”—meaning that we need to change the accountability model to better serve students and schools, but we can’t stop monitoring student performance. Shirley added, “If you don’t have any data on how different groups of children are doing, then how do you correct it?” In this, she expressed her commitment to the value of improving schools and using data reporting to focus on improvement rather than punishment or shaming. Another participant, Felipe, a Latine community activist and first-generation college graduate, told a story of his own educational experience as a first

generation Mexican-American student and how it connects to the shared responsibility for students:

In high school, my school didn't prioritize the Brown students. They let us fall back and we knew that. I worked hard at the start, but I knew they didn't pay attention to me, and I just stopped trying. My grades started to fall, and I was eventually failing classes.

He explained the shame he felt when his mother found out he was failing classes, and the pain he felt in letting her down. "She had risked so much to come to the U.S so we could have a better life," he noted, "and I wasn't working as hard as she had worked for us." He explained that his school let him down by setting low expectations and by not paying attention to his diminishing academic growth. Because of this, he believed it important that student data be reported regularly:

I don't look at it as a negative thing to make sure schools are responsible and accountable for their students' learning. We need to be able to see how all students are performing so that schools can't go back to forgetting about groups of kids like they did with me.

In this expression, Felipe identified an important distinction about school responsibility as a student-focused endeavor. He clarified the difference between the shame and blame affiliated with the accountability model, and a focus on being accountable to students in a shared-responsibility model.

Nicholas, a Latine former teacher and current community activist, noted his perceptions of the importance of sharing student academic performance data. He explained, "it does not tell the whole story of a child or a school. It tells a piece of the

puzzle,” and, he added that the information about all students’ and all student groups’ academic growth and performance is a “core component of the puzzle.” He also clarified: “Does it tell the entire story? Absolutely not. But it is a key piece of what we can learn from schools and their roles in providing high quality academics,” which shows his clear value for continuing to have a system that collects and reports student academic performance data.

These statements reveal participants’ value and commitment to continuing to collect student performance data as a way to monitor and ensure all students and all student groups are supported. Among participants, the value of data collection remains vital; however, it’s what districts *do* with school performance data that differentiates an accountability model from a shared-responsibility model.

Responsible for Improvement. Participants’ perceptions of a shared-responsibility model were rooted in a commitment to students, but also focused on improvement rather than punishment. As Shirley explained, “The color coding [of a rating system] should be a call to signify when the district or state should get involved in helping. The color coding should be the red light that something is going wrong, instead of [the district] being punitive, it is a time for improvement.” She reiterated her belief that the success or failure of a school is the responsibility of the entire community. It is a collaborative effort: “When a school fails, it’s the community, it’s the school, it’s the district, and the state all of them need to have a part in making it what it could be.” Shirley displayed her firm belief that the focus should be on improvement and this improvement is the responsibility of all parties—including the school, community, district, and state. In this statement, Shirley shifted the focus of a responsibility model to the student experience. In

her estimation, the purpose of a shared-responsibility model is not to signify blame or close a school, but rather to help the school better serve students.

In discussing the concerns participants had about the limited narrative engendered by the color-coded system, I return to Karen's description of how the limited narrative signified a finite storyline, that labels "schools as failed, not failing." This mindset shift aligns to the participants' vision for a focus on improvement in a shared-responsibility model. As previously mentioned, Karen noted that the mindset of "failed" is a final label, but a school that "is failing" could be supported. She explained that flipping the mindset to "failing" rather than "failed," provides an opportunity for the district and community to say, "you have strengths, but you are struggling and need support right now." The shift from labeling a school *failed*, to supporting a struggling school is perhaps the clearest distinction in participant perceptions of what would be different in a shared-responsibility model.

Responsible for Partnerships. Aligned to a commitment to improvement, participants also shared a perception of a shared-accountability model as one of supportive, trusting relationships and authentic partnerships throughout the district. Janelle captured the concept of a true partnership as when, "everybody wants the school to succeed. The teachers, principals, and that makes the kids want to succeed, and the community rallies around it to make it succeed, and that becomes a shared ownership." Karen added, "it is the ownership of the success and the ownership of the failures that the entire district community needs to own." Janelle clarified her vision for a shared responsibility with a question that revealed her value for unity and partnership throughout the district: "How can we lift everybody up, so that every school in our district is

successful?” In this sense, Janelle was implied that a shared-responsibility model has a communal focus on student success—not a competitive approach where individual schools compete to outperform each other.

Although most participants agreed that a partnership with a “shared moral obligation” to students is ideal, some participants had a difficult time envisioning it in reality. Elisha, a school leader and parent who attended school in this district asserted a need for change: “There should be some sort of unity around like not creating more division that already exists in our society, especially with schools,” recalling the winners and losers model of the accountability system. Even so, she hesitated to commit to a “partnership model with a shared moral obligation” , as she does not currently see the commitment of a shared moral obligation for students within her district. She explained “back to that moral obligation, we have to make sure every single child in the city has an equal shot at success. But we are so far from that right now.” She went on to explain that she still sees the ownership of a child’s success at the school level, because from her experience, the district is not yet set-up to make that mindset or operational shift. Her response speaks to her lack of trust in the district, and a lack of trust in an ideal state where schools could be vulnerable with the district to their areas for growth, while also celebrated for their strengths.

Partnership in Decision-making. Some participants noted their view of partnerships means that all stakeholders have a seat at the table in making decisions, and all stakeholders are united in the vision for the success of all schools in the community. In sharing this vision, participants spoke about how valuing community partnerships and support is different from simply having relationships in their district. “The community is

not the enemy,” Shirley explained, “We just want it to do better, and the partnership is critical.” For Shirley and many others, the district has a pattern of excluding community voices in making decisions and plans. Including the community in a partnership would provide the district with a breadth of new information and ideas that are absent when excluded. She stated, “When folks who don’t live in the community make decisions for that community, we lose.” When people have that local connection, they have a different lens and a different connection to solving the problem; or, as Shirley stated, “when you go home to that community, it means something; but when you go home somewhere else, it doesn’t matter.” In this, she explained the details and pride the community considers when they make decisions for their own neighborhood, and having an opportunity to be a part of that decision-making process is vital.

Partnerships for Social Capital and Trust. In expressing the need for local communities to be included in the partnership with the district and schools, Shirley also noted the need for the district to change its approach for how it engages the local community and families. She explained that her district tends to do community engagement in an inauthentic or surface-level way, and noted that to build a partnership, the district needs to consider and accommodate the lifestyles of the community in order to authentically engage. “They need to break down the education lingo. We can’t use all those acronyms when we are working with families,” she noted. Shirley highlighted the exclusive, “school-centric” language districts and schools use: “They need to meet the audience that they’re talking to where they are,” and that includes the language they use, the way they explain the topics, and the speed of conversations. She explained how it feels to sit in district-run community-engagement meetings:

It always feels like such a hurry. They never consider the thought that we have other jobs and responsibilities, and we can't just show up ready to talk about a topic we haven't even heard of yet. The community members need time to process, in order to engage.

Shirley stays actively engaged in her community, attending meetings and serving on a number of district committees and meetings. She noted that the district leads conversations with the community in a way that alienates and excludes community voices, rather than lifting community voices and fostering partnership.

Participants used the term "trust" often when talking about a shared-responsibility model and building partnerships. To build trusting relationships, participants suggested a web of support offered by a district focused on building trusting relationships. In this, participants discussed the dual benefit of more community resources and support, and more trust in the district.

In talking about the web of opportunities, Shirley noted the great amount of talent and skill within the communities and the web of connections that are in the communities. She offered an example of a father sitting in a school community meeting: "If he doesn't know anything about this topic, his sister-in-law might, or his neighbor might know." She argued that the district needs to allocate more time for the community to process and collaborate together to solve problems, if it wants "the chance to authentically engage and utilize those webs." The concept of community and the assets that a community collectively holds was important to Shirley and other participants.

Karen made a similar note, highlighting the family connections in schools or neighborhoods that could bring many skills, ideas, and assets to a school: "there are so

many connected families and neighbors within our communities, and tapping into that web of relationships that already exists could be so beneficial for the school and district.” She also explained that not only could leveraging these relationships help bring resources and support to the school, but the act of leveraging local talent builds community trust in the district.

Partnerships with a Balance of Power. Another component that came from the participants definitions of partnership was power-sharing, as it relates to district decision-making. Katie, a teacher and parent, expressed partnership as embodying both the community and parent voices as well as teachers, school leaders, and district leaders: “The partnership needs to also value the professionals in our buildings.” She used her school and parenting experiences to describe the vision for valuing all sides of a balanced partnership:

In my school, we often get requests from a group of parents advocating for their particular needs, and we need to hear those requests. But as the teacher and leader, we also need to be able help those parents understand the needs of all 27 students in the classroom, because our lens oversees the full class, and how to meet the needs of all students.

Katie also noted her experiences as an educator of elementary students and a parent of high school and middle school-aged students: “I don’t know anything about high school and middle school, so I need to rely on the professionals in those buildings, too, to help me understand how to best support my kids.” Katie’s response reveals a true partnership model in which there is a balance of power, with space for all voices in the

partnership to be valued and included. Katie expressed trust in her children’s schools and the professionals in those buildings.

Nicholas referenced the same type of two-way trust in building a partnership throughout the district. He highlighted the need for families to have full trust in their schools: “If I’m a parent, I’m trusting that you as a system, as an educator, are doing right by my child and I’m trusting you every single day when I send my kids to you for eight to 10 months.” He explained that trust also means that schools are open and vulnerable enough to invite parents and community members into their schools. In this discussion, he was building on the idea of a trusting partnership that could also be so focused on student success, such that all parties are open for feedback and ideas on how to better serve students.

Karen extended this idea of balancing the power dynamic to building trusting relationships. She discussed the need to elevate all stakeholders in decision-making, “That people within that school and the people around it, if they're the ones that they come together and they have not just an advisory capability, but a decision-making capability, then they can own the successes. They can own the failures.” Thus, this shared ownership creates partnership and shared responsibility for all schools. Through this statement, Karen engaged the concept of social capital, built through trust between the district and community—an important concept to participants.

External/Internal Partnership. While participants noted the mindset shift of a partnership grounded in trusting relationships, other participants noted the management styles of a shared-responsibility model. Karen eloquently explained the need to “deemphasize external influences to create a more balanced and trusting shared-

responsibility model.” She also noted that better leveraging the assets and ideas within the community can also help the district move away from the “ivory tower” model of decision-making:

I think you're going to get a ton more buy-in from the stakeholders in that school if decisions are being made by the local group than, you know 10 miles away up in an ivory tower. People are more likely to follow a local leader than to take directions from someone who doesn't even know my school.

Karen’s perception of shared responsibility means there is value in internal accountability and leadership, a value in local understanding of unique school contexts, and in deemphasizing external influences.

Aligned with this need to move away from top-down authority to a model of partnership, Katie expressed feeling “micromanaged and judged,” when her school was not doing well on the rating system. She noted that a supportive partnership between schools and the district would take a stance of, “I’m not here to judge; rather, let's work on finding a way to solve this and improve together.” In this statement, Katie highlighted a relationship shift from authority and subordinate to a collaborative partnership. Katie still sees schools acknowledging a need to improve, but the district taking the role of supportive partner instead of disciplinarian. The concept of collaboration and problem-solving recurred when participants talked about a partnership within a district.

Chapter Summary

Participants in the present research offered a breadth of knowledge and expertise in this research area. Each participant maintained a shared commitment to this district and its students. A key takeaway was the shared value for a system that continues to assess

and examine student progress and performance. In current conversations about school accountability, the common assumption is that moving away from outcomes-based accountability models likewise moves schools away from a commitment to ensuring they serve all students. Participant perceptions reflect quite the opposite. Instead, participants valued the student experience so much that they want to find new ways to ensure all students are served and given equitable opportunities. Ultimately, when moving from an accountability to shared-responsibility model, participants perceived the greatest shift in focus as one toward improvement *and* support. In the next chapter, I discuss implications of these findings and answer research question two.

Chapter Five: Discussion

In this case study, I sought to capture community perceptions toward school accountability and explore the possibility of a shared-responsibility model in a large school district community. The research questions for this project were: (1) What are ways the community in a large, urban district in the American West conceptualizes school accountability or shared responsibility? (2) How could the ways in which the community conceptualizes shared responsibility shape culturally responsive district leadership (CRDL) at the district? I discussed research question one in chapter four. I delve into research question two in this final chapter. I conclude the current chapter with a list of commitments school districts might adopt to shift from an accountability mindset to a shared-responsibility and CRDL mindset, and discuss possible implications and recommendations for future policy, practice, and research.

The findings from this study that were discussed in chapter four noted the values the district community has for a district leadership model that focuses on support for students as the main goal of schooling, a model of supportive leadership over authoritative, and a commitment to community partnerships for decision-making in the district.

These findings align to other research on culturally responsive teaching and leadership. The field of education has made great strides toward more equitable practices in classrooms and schools. Concepts of CRT and CRSL are commonly incorporated in

professional development and research for teachers and principals. However, culturally responsive leadership practices have not been widely incorporated into district leadership, nor has there been the breadth of research on CRDL and district communities. This discussion highlights alignment between CRT and CRSL, and the shifts districts require to embody CRDL.

Overview of Findings

The present research is grounded in a larger effort to provide equitable opportunities for all students, and explores ways school-district leaders can create district environments that support this mission. Participants in this study—teachers, family members, school and district leaders, and community members of this district—were rooted in this same mission, and spoke passionately about their vision for ways the district could be more supportive of all students, schools, and the district community.

Although the larger focus of this study was on the leadership in districts and the way district leaders could encompass culturally responsive district leadership practices, the study used the notion of leadership practices of accountability systems and how those practices could encompass a shared responsibility model. For the last 20 years, our school systems have been under the leadership of strict accountability models, and these models were formed under the general goal of using data to ensure schools serve all students and all student groups were growing academically (Darling-Hammond, 2006). During this time, the public has become accustomed to this structure of using quantitative data to evaluate schools and give an overall rating of a school, good or bad. While there has been criticism for this limiting structure, it has also become our only measure for school success. Because it has become the norm and only measure, some fear moving away from

this model would move districts *away* from the mission of serving all students and ensuring academic achievement and growth for all student groups (Schneider, 2017). However, data from the present study revealed the opposite. Participants reported deep investment in student success and equitable opportunities, but felt limited by the current accountability model. They suggested that a new approach would better support the larger mission of equitable opportunities for all students.

As outlined in the literature review, school-accountability models have been criticized for perpetuating limited narratives of marginalized groups and deepening racial inequities (Kendi, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2007, Rabovsky, 2011). Kendi (2016) posited that it is not just the accountability models that oppress communities of color, but the policies themselves are structured to limit and diminish minoritized students. Oakes and Rogers (2007) warn against ignoring systems of oppression and racism that have divided schools into “successes” and “failures.” Participants in this study maintained similar views and sentiments. Some participants pointed to negative assumptions about groups of students; others highlighted the limited narratives of students and communities propagated and sustained by these accountability models. Still others talked about the personal and communal toll deficit-narratives have on youth, which aligns well with Ladson-Billings (2007) and Shields (2018).

The weight of accountability ratings was clear in this study. Communities of color feel labeled by their ratings and limited to a “single story” narrative. Adichie (2009) elaborated the single-story concept in her TED Talk, *The Danger of the Single Story*. She explained that when a single description of a person, group, community, or place is used over and over “that is what it becomes” (Adichie, 2009). Likewise, when students,

community, staff, and leaders hear over and over that they have a bad school, that their scores are not high enough, that they have failed, they start to believe it, and that is what they become. Thus, when a group of students or a school is limited to a single story, the single story starts to define the identity of our students and their communities. It starts to imply that they themselves are “less-than.” What does that mean for our students? What lasting message does that leave with them? What lasting message does it have on the community? What communities typically get relegated to this single story? In what ways does the practice perpetuate implicit racism in this country?

We know that accountability models were designed to hold schools to account for student academic performance—measured mainly by standardized test scores.

Furthermore, we know that test scores represent a limited view of student skills. For this reason, they cannot tell the entire story of a student or a school (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2013, Jacob, 2005, Schneider, 2017).

While the spirit of accountability was rooted in the growth and achievement of all students (Jacob, 2005), the present research suggests it has, instead, cultivated negative perceptions and exacerbated inequities in many communities, especially historically marginalized communities. These sentiments reveal that rather than moving toward equity, these policies have increased division.

Khalifa (2018) noted that culturally responsive school leaders continuously reflect on their practice and consider to what extent their schools support all students or perpetuate patterns of racism, and racial and social inequities. In his research, Khalifa (2018) asserted that *we* all—the collective community—have participated in systems that helped some students succeed and held others back. District leaders require similar

reflection and interrogation into their roles in this system of oppression. Central offices and district leaders need to be open to a constant reflection on their policies and practices, and how they are serving or not serving students and the community. Not only is deep and continuous reflection imperative to culturally responsive district leadership, but an openness and commitment to improvement is also key.

District Leaders and the Central Office

The present study used the tenets of CRT and CRSL as grounding concepts for CRDL and shared responsibility. Although there are clear bridges from CRT, to CRSL, to CRDL, district leaders also serve unique roles within the district that are important to discuss. Honig and Hatch (2004) pointed out that the concept of the central office was created to manage finances and other operations of the districts 100 years ago, when school districts were developing. Over time, the central office role expanded into a reactionary “patchwork” of responses, rather a force of “coherence” (Honig & Heller, 2018, p. 43). Although central offices have oftentimes been used as a place of compliance management, they could be a catalyst for truly meeting the goals of creating equitable opportunities and supporting schools in serving all students.

In an interview (Honig & Heller, 2018), Honig explained that central offices need to change their purpose and mindset in order for districts to truly serve all students and create systems of equitable opportunities. Honig (Honig & Heller, 2018) articulated the changing the purpose and structure of central offices as a primary lever in school improvement:

If we’re finally serious, as a nation, about providing great instruction to every kid—especially students who’ve been marginalized and underserved until now—then how do we reinvent these outdated central offices, so they have the will and

capacity to help schools improve in all sorts of ways, from teaching to leadership, assessment, community engagement, and on and on? (Honig & Heller, 2018, p. 42)

Honig’s statement and the findings in this study elude to a need for changes in the approaches district leaders take in supporting schools and engaging with the full district community.

The findings in this study revealed a very clear distinction between the participants’ conception of traditional district leadership of accountability models and the shared responsibility leadership of CRDL. In thinking of how these perceptions could help district leaders move from traditional leadership models to those of CRDL, the chart below outlines the shifts in mindset leaders could make in their practice to become aligned to CRDL practices. Similar to the findings, Table 5.1 is broken down by coherence and focus, leadership approach, and community relationships, which are all elements aligned to the mindset of the district leadership.

Table 5.1
Shifts in Mindset from Traditional District Leadership to CRDL

Mindset	Traditional Leadership	Shared Responsibility of CRDL
Coherence & Focus on Student Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Values staying the course, and meeting goal by doing things as they have always been done ● Values quantitative measures of success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Values a focus on continuous improvement toward the goal ● Affirms different approaches to meeting end goal ● Values being reflective and holds an openness to change ● Open to a broad representation of measuring success

Leadership Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Values competition for success. ● Values individual success. ● Manages through compliance. ● Values external mandates for management. ● Uses data for evaluation. ● Holds power for decisions and vision-setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Values collective success. ● Focuses on constant improvement. ● Maintains focus on internal accountability, with balance for external. ● Uses data to improve. ● Shares decision-making power and poses a shared ownership stance.
Community Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Informs families/community about district initiatives. ● Communicates with the community to inform about decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partners with district and co-design district initiatives. ● Communicates with the community in an ongoing dialogue and collaborates on decisions.

Focus and Coherence. Research on organizational leadership outlines the need for leaders to focus efforts and initiatives toward the larger goals and mission of the organization (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). The behaviors of traditional leadership and a shared responsibility leadership model can encompass focus and coherence rooted in meeting the goals of the organization. The difference in moving from traditional leadership to shared responsibility is moving from a single vision of how to meet the end goal to being open and reflective about the constant adjustments that are needed to meet the fluid goal of best serving all students. Leaders who take a shared responsibility stance are inclusive of the many ideas and approaches to meet the end goal. This is a move from stagnant to fluid approaches.

Example. For example, a leader who subscribes to traditional leadership approaches might focus deeply on moving the school to end goals, however, this goal and

measure of success is likely limited – standardized test scores in literacy and math – and likely limited to single, “best” approaches. These leaders tend to value uniform approaches to teaching all students, uniform pacing across the district, and instructional structures that provide easy ways to track progress toward goals.

Participants spoke with an asset-based mindset for students. Janelle, for example, noted the diverse skills of her students that are deeper than the skills of multiple-choice tests, but noted the limited, deficit approach of only valuing student progress on standardized assessments as the measure of success and progress toward goals. With that in mind, a CRDL leader focused on shared responsibility, would give value to the diverse skills of students and give credit to the unique context of each schools and student. These leaders would be open to, rather than fixed on, a variety of methods to meet the end goals, and would work with the community on defining the goals for the district, schools, and students as well as the designing the approaches to monitoring progress.

Leadership Approach. The leadership of strict accountability models is modeled from authoritative, top-down leadership approaches that give power to the all-knowing leader to create mandates for others to follow (Rorrer et al, 2008; Elmore, 2005). Moving this leadership approach to one tied to CRDL with a shared responsibility model includes the shift away from these top-down behaviors, to behaviors that again are more reflective and focused on improvement rather than compliance and management. Aligned to the responses of the participants in this study, a clear distinction that moves from traditional leadership approaches to those tied to shared responsibility is the use and purpose of data that moves from using data to evaluate or manage, to using data to improve. This

constant focus on improvement is a key shift in the mindset of CRDL leadership approaches.

Example. A major difference in the traditional leadership approaches and the CRDL for shared responsibility is the use of data. A district leader with traditional leadership approaches tends to use data to punish or to hold power over schools with student outcome data. In this sense, the story ends with the rating, and the opportunities or focus on improvement stops. A leadership approach that is rooted in CRDL will use data to improve. For a district leader, this might mean that the conversation is not about what schools did well or poor on the rating, but what schools need support and what schools can be leveraged as learning partnerships for improvement. In this approach, the story begins with the rating rather than ends.

Community Relationships. The relationships between the district leaders and the community is important and pivotal in CRDL. The key difference between traditional leadership and behaviors aligned with shared responsibility and CRDL is a commitment to on-going dialogue and a mindset of partnership. Traditional leadership tends to make decisions separate from community voice and uses communication with the community to inform about decisions the leaders made (Honig, 2012). Shared responsibility and CRDL practices hold the mindset of partnerships between the district and community and commit to dialogue and shared ownership of decision-making.

Moving from traditional leadership behaviors to those of shared responsibility aligned to CRDL is a shift in mindset of the leadership approach and the role of the central district leaders, and the following section elaborates on this shift.

Example. A great example of a leader moving toward shared responsibility leadership approaches with community relationships is to include communities as partners in decision-making. For example, a district leader who noticed discrepancies in academic performance between Black students and other student groups might need to design a strategic plan on how to better support Black students. A traditional leadership approach would be to call a meeting with families and community members to notify them of the plan the district leaders created to address this challenge, and this leader might ask for feedback on the plan that was already created. A CRDL approach with an emphasis on shared responsibility would partner with the community to co-design this plan. As the participant in this present study, Shirley, noted that the community members that are most impacted by the topic, will care the most and will understand the challenges in ways that the district leaders might not see. In this case, the Black family members are positioned to share insight that the district leaders might not see or understand about the needs of Black students and how to better support this group of students. Including community as partners in problem-solving and co-creating plans provides the opportunity to create more authentic plans that can more tightly address the challenge and help the district meet its goals.

Shift to Culturally Responsive District Leadership

The second research question asked how the perceptions of the shared responsibility help inform a culturally responsive district leadership model of shared responsibility. Table 5.1 outlines the key shifts in leadership mindset that would help district leaders move to a model of CRDL and shared responsibility. These shifts further explained below and are broken down by the categories, Growth Mindset of Shared

Responsibility & Improvement, Mindset of Responsibility to Students, and the Mindset of Community Partnerships

The Growth Mindset of Shared Responsibility and Improvement

The previous chapter outlined differences in approaches from the inequitable practices of an accountability model to a CRDL approach. Moving from a traditional accountability model to one of shared responsibility and CRDL requires more than changes to practices alone: it requires a broader mindset shift. Mindset reflects a set of attitudes that guide how individuals respond to situations (Hammond, 2015). A growth mindset is an attitude grounded in acknowledging assets and skills that will build toward improvement, while a fixed mindset maintains an attitude of resistance to change (Dweck, 2016; Hammond, 2015). Capper (2019) and Khalifa (2018) pointed to mindset and leader epistemologies as core components of leadership, because epistemologies are “how we learn and understand what we believe is real” (Khalifa, 2018, p. 11). In the literature review, I discussed the epistemologies of leaders and how they impact the organizational mindset, and in this case, the mindset of district leaders and the central office. Mindset and epistemologies have important overlap; thus, in the present research, I use the term mindset. I separate these two terms with the frame that an epistemology can guide mindset, but a mindset guides the way we react.

Mindset is critical to district-leadership approaches because it involves both the attitude toward events and occurrences, as well as district response to such happenings. Moving from a mindset of strict, outcomes-based accountability to a model of CRDL focused on growth requires a shift in leader mindset. The following section discusses this shift.

Growth Mindset. Participants spoke about their conception of shared responsibility as a shift from a fixed mindset (failed) to a growth mindset (improve). Growth mindset is oftentimes referenced in CRT literature (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015) and instructional practices. Hammond (2015) described teacher-coaching and CRT as a practice rooted in continuous effort—an asset-based approach to helping students and teachers leverage their unique skills to improve in significant ways. Khalifa et al. (2016) also referenced this approach in step two of their CRSL framework. In this framework, Khalifa et al. (2016) highlight the importance of creating environments and systems of support for CRT practices to thrive. Thus, these approaches are rooted in a mindset of constant growth and improvement. Cultivating this growth mindset throughout a school district could move it to become a learning organization (Honig, 2008), focused on continuous improvement rather than repercussions.

Ironically, although district leaders have often set expectations for teachers and school leaders to utilize a growth mindset rooted in reflection, coaching, and strides toward improvement, the district leaders themselves often maintain a fixed and less-supportive mindset. In the literature review, I noted that many organizational leaders maintain epistemologies more aligned to the values of efficiency and structural-functional patterns of leadership (Capper, 2019). The leadership mindset of education-reform efforts linked to strict accountability models was also rooted in this type of authoritative leadership.

Moving to a shared-responsibility model would require district leaders to be aware of this epistemology and the mindsets (reactions) that manifest within this set of beliefs. Likewise, leaders would require an openness to reflect on how this approach may

exclude certain community voices and values, and create a deficit or fixed mindset for schools and students.

Application of the Growth Mindset for CRDL. In order to fully transition to a learning organization open to authentic growth, district leaders must consider the mindset of the organization by reflecting on its policies, processes, and practices. District leaders need to ponder: *How are these practices moving the district toward social justice and equitable opportunities? How are the practices inclusive of the entire community? How do practices promote support and shared responsibility?*

These questions for culturally responsive district leaders, and similar CRSL and CRT questions outlined in Khalifa et al. (2016) and Hammond (2015) highlight the necessity for school leaders to reflect on and engage pointed questions about how their school practices might benefit some students and marginalize others. A natural connection would be for district leaders to participate in the same kind of constant reflection and to continuously adjust their own practices and leadership to ensure they are moving the district to a place of anti-racism, culturally inclusive and affirming.

Along with this growth mindset focused on continuous improvement, another pertinent mindset shift is toward the coherence or focus of the full district being grounded in a responsibility to students.

Mindset of being Responsible to Students. In relation to growth mindset, participants displayed a strong value for locating accountability in the growth and support of students. They showed a continued commitment to collecting and reporting student data, and setting high academic expectations for all students and schools. It's important to note that moving from an accountability model to a shared-responsibility model is not

about stopping data collection or reporting; rather, it is about shifting how the data is used. It requires a change in mindset around the purpose of data, and it leans toward a mindset of a responsibility to students.

This shift in the purpose of data aligns with Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL framework that explicates the importance of using student data to ensure all students are growing academically. Participants have similarly strong feelings for continuing to collect student data and creating systems for improvement based on the student data. In fact, to be culturally responsive does not mean avoiding data—it means actually solving for problems illuminated by the data (Bryk et al., 2015).

In discussions about accountability and shared responsibility, the component of “responsible for students” is perhaps the greatest debate. Accountability models started with the premise that data will help schools serve marginalized students; indeed, shared responsibility declares the same goal. Similarly, shared responsibility is based on the argument that using data can make school communities more responsible for student success. Although there is a shared goal in these two stances, the approach for how to be “responsible” is different.

As described earlier, there are concerns and even fear that if school districts move away from strict accountability structures, they will lose the focus on student performance. Such fears suggest polarized thinking (Kise, 2014). In this case, polarized thinking suggests that if you value holding schools accountable, you can't be open to the idea of improvement; or, if you value community voice and a sense of shared ownership, you can't value holding schools to high expectations. Kise (2014) argued that there is middle ground for myriad beliefs and values in a district. In this case, can districts be

aligned to state and federal guidelines, and co-design shared responsibility models with their communities? Can districts have a balance of external accountability (state and federal mandates) and internal accountability (local values and internal goals)? I argue there is a way to ground the shared value of being responsible for student success, and there is a way for districts to hold systems of accountability through a shared responsibility model. This shift from polarities to middle ground is not impossible. Districts need to decide their role in the district ecosystem and determine their responsibility to help schools move toward the goal of serving all students. The other imperative mindset shift is around the relationship the district and district leaders hold with the full community.

Partnerships for Shared Responsibility of CRDL

Data from this study showed that participants value partnership between the community, schools, and the district. The data also showed that this authentic partnership is not yet in place, and the manner in which the community has been included or engaged is not aligned with CRDL practices. Honig (Honig & Heller, 2018) envisioned the school–district partnership as one rooted in shared responsibility for school improvement. In this sense, all district stakeholders would play an important role in that mission, and district leaders would be embedded in that shared responsibility.

Balance of Power/Decision-Making. Medina et al. (2019) explained the spectrum of community engagement and the practices that tend to be in place in school districts, along with the ideal state of a partnership. They outline the difference between information-sharing—which places the community in a passive role—and shared decision-making power—which places stakeholders as partners in decision-making and collaboratively design or redesign the school initiatives (Medina et al., 2019). This distinction is important, as moving from a model where district leaders own all decision-making rights to a model where decisions are collaboratively shared would take an intentional and constant shift in mindset toward shared responsibility.

When there are structures for a balance of power and a transparency of decision-making, there are opportunities for authentic partnerships and shared ownership of the district goals. Khalifa (2018) noted the danger of the school-centric beliefs forced onto families and school communities. The findings in this study also noted this sentiment. Participants felt their views for students and school success were overshadowed or dismissed by district leaders. In a shared responsibility model, with models of shared decision-making, the values of the community could be lifted and included in district goals and decisions.

Although the findings in this research showed support for a partnership model, the findings also pointed to a lack of trust between the community, and the central office and the district leaders. In order to move toward such a partnership model, district leaders would need to shift practices to ensure trust.

Social Capital and Trust. Trust and a sense of partnership were clear themes from the findings. Research on social capital describes the benefits of creating structures

of trusting relationships throughout organizations (Coleman, 1988). Coleman (1988) explained that social capital refers to the interconnected relationships that are created and expanded throughout a community. In terms of culturally responsive district leadership, social capital and trust are imperative in building the partnerships and systems of shared responsibility and support. Furthermore, Khalifa (2018) discussed the need for school leaders to connect with the community in trusting relationships. Hammond (2015) also noted the need for teachers to connect with students and families to build environments of trusting classrooms. Similarly, I argue that district leaders need to take the same initiatives to build authentic, trusting partnerships with their communities.

Literature on the history of community partnerships and schools suggested that the divide between schools and communities began with the creation of strict accountability models, instigated by *A Nation at Risk* (1983). The report sparked a divide between families, schools, and the state and federal government (Schneider, 2017). Schneider (2017) argued that the report created a narrative that teachers and principals were not doing enough to serve students, and the government needed step-in to fix it. As I discuss in the introduction, this narrative divided schools and districts from families, and school–community partnerships diminished, with the growing presence of an external accountability model that determined what was important in schools and what schools met or failed this expectation.

In the shift to strict accountability models, many district leaders embraced the role of authoritative enforcer (Honig et al., 2017). Trujillo (2013) described the district-leader role, and showed how district leaders dismissed community values and voices when making decisions about school accountability. Instead of aligning to schools or

community values, district leaders embraced federal and state guidelines. This distinction is important to note because it builds on the assumption that district policies either need to be aligned to external (federal and state) mandates or local community values. Oakes and Rogers (2007) posited that education efforts that exclude community voice will always fail. Participants in the present study noted similar sentiments. To create equitable opportunities for all students, districts need to connect with the local communities.

Both extant research and participants in the present study agree about the role of culturally responsive district leaders in building strategic and trusting relationships. In many ways, the ideal state of these relationships could be viewed as a partnership between district leaders, school leaders, teachers, families, and the full district community.

From Individual to Communal

On a recent podcast (Obama, 2020), Michelle Obama and President Barack Obama discussed the difference between a communal upbringing with a sense of community and shared ownership, and the movement to a focus on independent success. Although they were referencing the communities of their childhood, their insights connect to contrasting models of accountability and shared responsibility. The accountability model supports individual success and celebrates single school successes, while shunning schools that did not make the cut. A shared-responsibility model reflects the communal model the Obamas discussed, wherein there is a shared ownership for the success and safety of all students, all schools, and the entire community.

Putnam (1995) also remarked on the sense of individualism and less engagement in modern public-school districts. He claimed that while Americans have advanced with

individual wealth and success, their sense of community has diminished (Putnam, 1995). He also discussed the need for authentic partnerships and commitments to entire communities, and the need to value the assets within the community in what he called social capitalism.

Sentiments about the shift from celebrating the communal success of a community to focusing on the independent success is very aligned to the shift from the original purpose of schooling as an extension of the community (Dewey, 1934), to accountability models that moved the mindset of individual success. A shared responsibility approach moves back to the communal and community roots and is grounded in the notion of a community and sharing the successes, challenges, and growth of a school and the community.

Summary

This section used the findings and research to answer research question two. In general, a shift to CRDL is a shift in leadership mindset around how the district leaders lead in a way that is constantly committed to improvement toward the goal of best serving all students. The shift in mindset is a shift toward a focus on improvement and a commitment to building trusting relationships and partnerships with the community. This study calls for true transformative (Shields, 2011) change in district leadership models that will require constant reflection and change as well as a constant commitment to building trusting relationships throughout the community. The next section outlines this study's implications and recommendations for future policy, practice, and research.

Implications & Recommendations

In our current state situated within the COVID-19 and racial pandemics, there are several contextual occurrences that greatly impact this topic and the implications and

recommendations that can be made about accountability, shared responsibility models, and culturally responsive district leadership. The COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close, operate remotely, and on modified schedules, it also shed light on the many purposes schools serve in our society. Due to the inability to have large, in-person accountability testing, this pandemic also incited a cancelation or modification to state testing and accountability ratings for two years, and this two-year pause provides time to pause and reflect on the policies, practices, purposes associated with school accountability.

In addition to the impacts the COVID-19 pandemic has had on school accountability, the pandemic of racial inequities also impacts this topic. For the last few years, discussions around systemic racism have gained recognition in the general public, the media, education circles, and research. Among many groups, there is a general desire to evaluate our current practices, policies, and research frameworks through an equity lens, with a goal of inching toward anti-racist policies and practice. Both of these crucial contextual settings greatly impact the desire and immediacy for changes in policy, practice, and research. The next sections outline the impacts to policy, practice, and research in more detail.

Researcher Positionality and Growth. As discussed in the introduction, this topic has been personally and professionally important to me. As a practitioner, I have been deeply interested in the topic of school accountability, the goals we set for schools and students, and how these priorities have been set. In conducting this research and better understanding the participants' views, especially the participants of color, I see the colonization and white supremacy approaches that frame the accountability policies and

traditional district leadership. As I conducted the interviews and analyzed the data, I realized my own bias as a white, middle class woman. Several participants spoke of the need for transparency of school data, and the fear they shared for reverting back to a time when student achievement and discrepancies in achievement between student groups were not shared. I noted this finding as a surprise, but I also realize that this was a surprise to me as a white woman who has benefited from the privilege I hold in that schools have always been designed to benefit people like me. I feel that this “surprise” makes the call for moving to CRDL even more pertinent. This realization made me ponder what other assumptions we make every day or what other structures in our school districts have we internalized as a norm, but have been built from exclusive, colonizing practices and beliefs? I will take this learning with me as a researcher, a practitioner, and an ally, and I will continue to advocate for inclusive practices in our schools, school districts, and communities.

Implications for Future Policy, Practice, and Research

The present study has implications for local, state, and federal policy, as well as for practice and research. The following sections detail these important implications.

Implications for Policy

This study clearly outlined that traditional accountability models and their accompanying leadership approaches are limiting and oppressive to many students and community members. Ultimately, these approaches cause districts to stagnate rather than move toward continuous improvement. Though accountability policies were created with

a goal to best serve all students, this study showed that they do not always move toward that goal. From a policy standpoint, the findings of this study have implications for how policies define and measure student and school success. This study also has implications for defining the purposes of accountability policies, which could inform the adjustment of the policies themselves. Traditionally, accountability policies sought to ensure schools served all students and student groups with no real attachment to improvement. This study highlights that accountability must be rooted in a commitment to continuous improvement toward the end goal of serving all students.

Implications for Practice

Beyond the accountability policies themselves, this study highlighted the intersection of policy and the leadership. This study attempted to build a case for Culturally Responsive District Leadership (CRDL) as influenced by Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL). I argue that to build intentionally designed school districts that meet the needs all students and work in partnership with communities, we cannot employ culturally responsive practices in classrooms with CRT or school buildings with CRSL alone. We need to ensure that these practices are thoughtfully and transformatively (Shields, 2011) implemented in all district leader and central office efforts. This study outlined that district leadership can lead from a mindset of CRDL practice that is committed to continuous improvement and inclusive of community partnerships. Accountability models are rooted in a top-down leadership model that has failed school-district communities. District leaders can use this study to change leadership practices to better

meet the needs of the community, and ultimately move toward a shared responsibility for creating equitable opportunities for all students.

Implications for Research

This study outlined a clear gap in research on culturally responsive district leadership. The breadth of research and practice aligned to CRT and CRSL demonstrates a need to include culturally responsive practices in school district leadership. In addition, the timeliness of the present study is vital to the current context of accountability policies.

Many districts and states have paused or altered state testing requirements and school accountability ratings for two school years due to COVID-19. The pause in standardized testing and accountability ratings coincides with a growing number of colleges abandoning college-entrance exams (Strauss, 2019)—the root of standardized testing in America (Tyack, 1974). Since the present study found that accountability ratings are not moving schools closer to equitable outcomes, the findings herein could be used during this testing pause to consider how accountability might better align with the goal of creating equitable opportunities for all students. The testing pause also offers an opportunity for district leaders to step away from their obligatory compliance and accountability roles, and reimagine district models to support district vision and goals, and community partnerships.

Recommendations

This research offers a stepping stone for future policy, practice, and research. I used the important topic of school accountability and shared responsibility to highlight this shift toward CRDL. As this study outlined, there is limited research on CRDL, but

implementing CRDL in future policy, practice, and research could be a key move toward creating more equitable schools and school districts.

Recommendations for Policy

This study highlights that although accountability policies are important to ensuring schools and districts are serving students equitably, they miss the mark on community values for education. Accountability policies are grounded in collecting and reporting student achievement data. However, the present study and existing research suggest that current measures of accountability are limiting (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Dorner & Layton, 2013; Schneider, 2017). Future studies on accountability policy should engage notions of a broader, more inclusive set of measures, and shift from punitive uses of data to data for improvement and support.

This research highlighted that accountability policies have placed blame on schools for not serving students; yet, these policies have missed the mark on reviewing student and school success in the context or situatedness of the district, city, or state. Future policymakers should consider all factors for student and school success and understand school success as a shared responsibility between the district, city, and state. Shifting the focus away from blaming leaders and teachers—what principals and teachers *didn't* do to help students—to a focus on the context of the school can help move the conversation to one focused on improvement. This notion aligns to participant remarks that current accountability policies name schools as failed (fixed), not failing or struggling (growth), and that distinction moves the policy from stagnant or finite, to fluid and possible.

Furthermore, it is important to change the practices of how policies are created. Diem and Welton (2020) researched education policies and critiqued the ways in which policies have impacted different groups and individuals inequitably. To combat the practice of implementing policies that overlook the impacts these policies have on marginalized groups, Diem and Welton (2020) created a framework district leaders can use to ensure policies are inclusive of all voices and move toward antiracist policies and leadership. At the core of this framework is the need to engage the representative individuals who can review proposed policies through their unique and individual lens (Diem & Welton, 2020). This step provides the opportunity to consider how different groups would be affected by different policies and the practices that derive from the policies.

To move toward the practice of created equitable policies in education, leaders and policymakers need to implement inclusive practices to ensure policies and the practices that come from these policies represent the needs of all groups and understand how proposed and current policies impact groups differently.

Recommendations for Practice

Because this study is rooted in notions of Culturally Responsive District Leadership (CRDL), recommendations for district leadership practices are outlined in Table 5.1 and further encompassed in the discussion on the commitment to a growth mindset and community relationships. District leaders can continue to ask themselves questions about their own leadership models, and consider: *In what ways are community voices included in district decisions? In what ways are we committed to continuous growth and to supporting our schools to meet our end goals?*

Research highlights that authoritative leadership approaches that do not encourage a balance of power (Bolman & Deal, 2008) or create trusting relationships (Daly, 2009), can be stifling to organizations. Brown (2020) discussed the leader's mindset of power as being either "power over" or "power with," and that the leaders can incite long-lasting change using the shared approach of "power with." District leaders could employ a "power with" approach by empowering the district community as co-creators in decision-making processes. Another element of a "power with" leadership approach is the commitment to improve and problem solve together. District leaders who lead with a "power with" stance will not blame schools; rather, they will sit side-by-side with schools and communities to evaluate and make commitments to improvement. When the focus is on blaming the failure of a school on a single person or staff, opportunities for improvement stop. When the focus is on a shared framework—a "power with" approach—a commitment to improvement and equal ownership can better achieve the end goal. This shift in district leadership is crucial for school districts to set a new precedent to truly serve all students. The dynamic of a "power with" approach is one of partnership with equal power: the leader is not more powerful than the community, and the community does not dominate the leader. Rather, a "power with" leadership approach is centered on trust and partnership (Denhard & Vinzant-Denhardt, 2000).

Karlberg (2020) also discussed the notion of power over and power with in his framework about the constructs of social realities. In this, the idea of a zero-sum approach to leadership is outshined by the possibilities that come from collaborative and supportive leadership. Both Brown (2020) and Karlberg (2020) shed light on colonizing practices in our society, and both are arguing for moving away from these models to

more supportive and inclusive approaches. The ideas of anti-racist and de-colonizing approaches are important to this conversation about implications to practice. In many instances, racist and colonizing values and beliefs are imbedded in our system of structures and surround our every day practices (Kendi, 2019). In order to move away from these practices, district leaders need to be aware of the practices and how they might feed into systems of oppression, systems of racism, and systems that perpetuate colonization values and structures.

Recommendations for Research

Noting considerable gaps in extant research on CRDL, future research should delve into CRDL frameworks that could be used in the same way as CRT and CRSL. Future studies should also consider updating representative language, and the use of “culturally sustaining” rather than “culturally responsive” (Paris, 2012), to better align to the inclusive vision of CRDL. The present research also found that accountability systems have created a limited scope of school success. Thus, future studies should examine the colonial and white supremacist ideologies baked into school accountability policies, both to advance understanding of the roots of these policies and emphasize the need for more culturally affirming and sustaining leadership.

Aligned to this, the present research shed light on the lack of community engagement in accountability systems and policies, and a recommendation for future research would be to engage in participatory action research (PAR) with community members to better understand community values and visions on this topic and others. One such example of this type of PAR is the Carlton-Fairbault PAR Collaboration (2021). This collaborative and inclusive participatory action research worked with marginalized

student groups, Latine and Somali students in the districts, their parents, and their teachers, and it sought to shift the approaches and mindset on how to best support these student groups. The partnership that can be created through PAR approaches can help shift from the deficit mindset that is in place with the traditional district leadership approaches and help move to a partnership model that aligns to CRDL approaches.

Conclusion

In this study, I sought to better understand perceptions about the important topic of school accountability, shared responsibility, and CRDL. The findings show a commitment to the goal of creating equitable schools and socially just school districts, and a deep desire for a change in the leadership approaches for supporting school districts to meet the goal of creating equitable schools for all students. District leadership, especially in large school districts, can play a pivotal role in creating systems of support for schools and shifting from the narrative of blame on schools to a storyline of shared responsibility toward the united goal.

This study reviewed the purpose of public education in America and discussed the original purposes schools served when situated within the values of local communities. In this model of public schools, the local community worked in partnership with schools and through this partnership there was trust between the community and the schools. In many ways, federal accountability policies moved the purpose of schools away from these local values and has broken down some of the partnerships and trust between the school districts and the communities for which they serve.

This study builds the argument that there is space for both local and federal values, and district leaders could be the catalyst in creating school districts that have a

balance for both local community values and the federal vision for educating all students. Creating this balance would come from developing systems of partnerships with the community throughout the district, and through these partnerships, it could engender the trust the community has for the district and its leaders.

In many districts, the lack of trust and partnership that has come from the accountability policies and models has created unsustainable relationships throughout districts. In some districts the current state of relationships places district leaders against school leaders, or school leaders against teachers, or district against community, and these pitting relationships that place blame on one stakeholder or another is not productive for school districts meeting the ultimate goal. This study attempted to evaluate these leadership models and recommend the leadership approaches that would move the focus away from blame and punishment and toward a focus on improvement and support.

As the field of education continues to push for culturally responsive and inclusive practices and continues to recognize the dominant culture leadership practices that have created and perpetuated inequitable policies and practices, I believe a constant push for culturally responsive practices for district leaders is a necessary step in continuing to move toward equitable and socially just schools and districts.

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APPENDIX A: Survey and Focus Group Questions

Sample survey and focus group questions analyzed and used for participant interviews

The following sample questions were part of a larger outreach to the community. These questions and responses are posted public on the district webpages. The responses will be analyzed looking for trends and belief statements, and the participants will respond to these belief statements during the interview process.

- What are the most important characteristics of a quality school in this district?
- Equity is a value in this district. In what ways should equity be measured in our schools?
- Many have noted the importance of supporting the Whole Child. How could we measure schools' success in serving the Whole Child?
- What aspects of students' social emotional well-being are important in schools?
- What should social emotional support look like in schools?
- What aspects of school climate and culture are important?
- In what ways do you value school support?
- What would it look like to have a focus on continued improvement for all school

Group Questions

Research Question: 1) What are the ways the community in a large, urban district in the American West conceptualize school accountability (or shared responsibility)? 2) How could the ways the community conceptualizes school accountability (shared responsibility) shape culturally responsive district leadership (CRDL) at the district?

Informed Consent Follow-up:

Provide the Informed Consent Form to the participant and after the participant has read the form, ask the participant if he/she has any questions about his/her consent, the research, or the process.

Introductory Protocol:

I would like to record our discussion today via the Zoom record option so that I can ensure the best accuracy in note taking and analysis. I will be the only person who has access to this recording and the notes I take during this process. I will destroy the recording and notes after the research project is complete. As noted in the consent form, pseudonyms will also be used to ensure the anonymity of participants.

It is my plan that this interview should take no longer than one hour. During our time together, I have several questions to ask you and to honor the time we allotted for this interview, I may need to interrupt our conversation to ensure you have time to respond to all questions.

Introduction to the Research Project:

You have been selected to talk with me today because of your role as _____(Family member/parent, teacher, school leader, district leader, or community member) in DPS. My research looks at the perceptions of school accountability and culturally responsive school leadership in school districts. This study is conducted as a case study approach and seeks to understand the community perception of school accountability or school responsibility, and the connection these perceptions have to culturally responsive school leadership theory.

As a follow-up to this interview, I will ask for your comments and feedback to ensure that your opinions and ideas are accurately reflected in the writing. Do you have questions before we begin?

APPENDIX B: Survey and Focus Group Questions

Pre-Interview Survey: Demographic questions were collected in the Qualtrics Survey.

Demographic Questions:

1. What primary role or connection to DPS do you identify with?
 - a) Family member or Parent
 - b) Teacher/Student Support Provider/School Staff
 - c) School leader
 - d) District leader
 - e) Community member

2. Do you identify with other DPS roles? (Teacher and Parent)
 - a) Family member or Parent
 - b) Teacher/Student Support Provider/School Staff
 - c) School leader
 - d) District leader
 - e) Community member
 - f) Other/special notes:

3. How long have you been affiliated with this district in your role or otherwise?

4. Which age range best matches your age?
 - a) 18-24
 - b) 25-34
 - c) 35-44
 - d) 45-55
 - e) 55-64
 - f) 65+

Pre-Interview Survey Questions: Belief Statement Sort

Using Qualtrics, participants sorted the following belief statements in agree, disagree, or neutral buckets. Statements are listed in categories below, but they were listed in random order in the Qualtrics survey. The responses to this survey guided much of the semi-structured interviews.

Shared Responsibility:

- I value a partnership in which schools, families, the community, and the district all share a moral obligation and shared ownership for the continued success of schools.
- We need to consider what actions led to a school's failure as much as they need to consider what to do to improve that school.
- We need to consider the resources schools receive when holding schools accountable and not just the school rating.
- Color-coded accountability systems have focused on shame and punishment of schools more than they have focused on school improvement.

Traditional Accountability:

- Test-based accountability is of highest importance in holding schools accountable to students' academic progress.
- High stakes accountability systems and color-coded ratings have moved us toward the goal of providing equitable opportunities for all students.
- Color-coded school ratings based on student test scores are needed so parents can make informed decisions about where to send their students.
- It is the role of the principals and teachers alone to ensure schools are successful, and if the school is not meeting expectations, it is the role of the district to close the school to open a better school.

Community values for schools:

- Schools' climate and culture (how staff and students feel and work together in schools) is a core component of a successful school.
- Students need a range of skills to be successful in college and career and live happy and healthy lives, and only measuring standardized assessments on how well students read, write, and do math falls short of assessing the broader skills and development.
- Schools need to have teachers and staff that understand the students' and families' cultural background. It is important that the cultural values of the community are reflected in the school and district.
- School districts must prioritize the values of its community members in making decisions about school goals, priorities, and expectations.
- Schools are uniquely situated and serve in communities with unique values, so we need a broader set of measures to define school and student success.

Interview Questions:

Now I will ask some questions regarding the study. You may ask me questions at any time during this process. If you would like to follow along visually, here is a link to the questions I will ask.

- 1) *What do you value most in schools?*
- 2) *Follow-up questions aligned to the Qualtrics Survey*
 - a) *Ex. I noticed you agreed with the statement, "I value a partnership in which schools, families, the community, and the district all share a moral obligation and shared ownership for the continued success of schools." Can you tell me what made you agree with this statement.*
 - b) *Ex. I noticed you disagree with the statement, "Test-based accountability is of highest importance in holding schools accountable to students' academic progress." Can you tell me what about this statement makes you disagree.*
 - c) *Ex. I noticed you did not respond to the statement, "Color-coded accountability systems have focused on shame and punishment of schools more than they have focused on school improvement." What about that statement left you unconnected or neither agreeing or disagreeing?*
- 3) *In an ideal setting, what does it look for schools to be held accountable to this vision? What would change if schools were held to this vision?*

- 4) *Based on your beliefs about school accountability/shared responsibility,*
- a) *What role do you feel families play in this model?*
 - b) *What role do teachers and school leaders play?*
 - c) *What role should what should district leaders play?*
 - d) *What role do community members play?*

Closing Comments:

- 5) *Did you want to add anything about this topic or your experience before we close?*
- a) *Thank you for participating in this important study. I appreciate your time and your thoughtful responses.*
 - b) *My contact information is here; please feel free to reach out with any questions or any ideas or comments that you would like to add*

APPENDIX C: Coding Plan

Phase 1: Inductive coding

- 1) Review one interview transcript
 - a) Read transcript line-by-line with an inductive, open code approach.
 - i) Compile themes and codes that emerged from transcript
 - ii) Generate axial codes and categories that emerged from this analysis
 - b) Add data to the matrix to match codes with demographic data
 - c) Add themes and axial codes to coding table
- 2) Repeat process for all interviews

Phase 2: Deductive coding

- 1) Review one interview transcript
 - a) Read transcript line-by-line with using the concept of the theoretical framework
 - b) Read transcript coding for the theoretical codes: community/family voice, partnership, support, shared responsibility, inclusive practices, relationships, values for schools and students.

Coding Table

	Open themes & codes	Axial codes or categories
Phase 1: Inductive coding		
	Concepts of the theoretical framework to be applied	Suggested codes based on the theoretical framework
Phase 2: Deductive coding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creating partnerships with community ● Supportive and inclusive schools ● Acknowledges, values, and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community/Family voice ● Partnership ● Support ● Shared responsibility

	<p>uses cultural and social capital of community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Uses community voices to measure cultural responsiveness in schools ● Challenges hegemonic and schoolcentric epistemologies in school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inclusive practices ● Relationships ● Values for school, students
	●	●