Leadership Practices that Support Marginalized Students: District and School Leaders' Support for LGBTQ Youth

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LEADERSHIP PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT MARGINALIZED STUDENTS:

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEADERS' SUPPORT FOR LGBTQ YOUTH

Dissertation

by

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with Margarita E. Amy, Mark J. Pellegrino, and Jaime D. Slaney

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by
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Dr. Lauri Johnson (Chair)
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Abstract

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth are a marginalized student population in school settings. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine whether and how district and school leaders' knowledge, attitudes/beliefs, and practices regarding LGBTQ students affected school policies for advocacy, anti-discrimination, and proactive care for this marginalized population. It was part of a larger group case study of how leaders support marginalized students in a Massachusetts urban school district. Data was gathered and analyzed from eight semi-structured interviews, document reviews, and observation of a student organization meeting. Results showed that leaders created and sustained safe environments in schools for LGBTQ youth, made efforts to urge the normalization of LGBTQ advocacy and discourse, and afforded opportunities for LGBTQ student-led activism. The study also found that district and school leaders need to further their systemic efforts toward establishing and implementing inclusive LGBTQ curriculum and instruction. Implications of this study reveal that district and school leadership practices must be explicitly designed, implemented, and sustained in order to effectively support LGBTQ youth.

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Dedication

To my loving husband and best friend, Mark.

Your hugs and encouragement have fortified me through this entire process.

To Corina and Pablo for always believing in my potential.

This dissertation is also dedicated to those LGBTQ youth who have felt marginalized.

Please know that it does indeed get better. Stay strong.

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CHAPTER ONE[1]

Introduction

School populations have become more diverse racially, ethnically, socially, as well as by sexual orientation, socio-economic status, disability, language spoken, and cultural identity (Lopez, 2016). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) predicts that enrollment in U.S. K-12 schools will increase by almost 5 million students from 2000 to 2027 (NCES, 2019). Although NCES statistics show the number of Black and White students are expected to drop by 1 million and 6 million respectively, the number of students identifying as two or more races will increase by almost 2 million and Hispanic/Latinx students by 8 million.

Of concern is the fact that emergent bilingual, Hispanic, Latinx, and African American students have significant gaps in achievement in the classroom and on standardized tests (Allen & Steed, 2016; Matsumura et al., 2008). These students are overrepresented in special education (Artiles et al., 2010; Counts et al., 2018) and suspended more frequently and receive harsher punishments for misbehavior than their White peers (Allen & Steed, 2016; Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Gregory et al., 2017; Skiba et al., 2014). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students also have higher rates of discipline and absenteeism and lower grades than other students (Kosciw et al., 2018). It is clear that districts and schools are struggling to meet the needs of all learners as our population changes and their needs diversify (Matsumura et al., 2008).

While students' race and ethnicity data have a more meticulous recording history, the statistics for LGBTQ students may be less accurate for three reasons: 1) researchers have

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[1] This chapter was collaboratively written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project. Authors include: Margarita Amy, Mark Pellegrino, Jaime Slaney, and Luis R. Soria

traditionally had difficulty operationalizing definitions of LGBTQ individuals; 2) some LGBTQ individuals are reluctant to self-identify; and 3) educational institutions and census information gathered at the state and federal levels did not collect demographic information related to the LGBTQ community until recently (Heck et al., 2016). The Massachusetts Center for Disease Control conducts an annual Youth Health Survey that asks students to identify their sexual orientation. Data reported from their bi-annual Youth Risk Behavior Survey reveals that Massachusetts students who identify as LGBT rose from 7.7% in 2015 to 9.6% in 2017 (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). When compared with heterosexual students, LGBTQ students have disproportionate percentages of being bullied, harassed, and threatened, as well as suffering from depression and suicidal ideation which indirectly contribute to circumstances that increase disciplinary outcomes and negatively affect grades (Kosciw et al., 2018). When student groups have higher victimization rates, they often have higher disciplinary rates as they receive punitive consequences for physically or verbally defending themselves. Additionally, students with mental health challenges struggle socially and battle chronic stress. These characteristics make it difficult for students to emotionally respond to stressful events. Inappropriate, emotional outbursts are often addressed through the disciplinary process.

We have illuminated the change in student populations in schools and surfaced crucial student needs that must be addressed. Next, we explore two essential elements for the study – how we define Marginalized Student Populations (MSP) and the importance of school leadership in supporting these student populations.

Marginalized Student Populations

Individuals and groups can be marginalized based on multiple aspects of their identity that may include race, gender, gender identity, intellectual or physical ability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, sexuality, age, and/or religion (Veenstra, 2011). Marginalized student populations are often positioned at the fringes of a community and not allowed to have voice, choice, identity, or full engagement within the community (Crenshaw, 1989). Marginalized groups feel less important when community members of higher position or dominance target them with negative beliefs, behaviors, or judgments (Sue, 2010). As previously stated, marginalized student populations are at higher risk for low academic achievement (Kosciw et al., 2018), pessimistic social-emotional well-being (Dewall et al, 2011), and disproportionate discipline and suspensions (Poteat et al., 2014; Gregory et al., 2010). Given the urgency to build, sustain, and measure school connectedness for marginalized student populations (Riele, 2006), and the need to address the impact of social exclusion (Woodson & Harris, 2018), this study focused on how specific categories of marginalized students are supported in school settings.

Leadership Matters

Schools are the primary social context where marginalized students spend a large portion of their day. The school setting can be a hostile environment where marginalized students are at risk to experience adversity such as verbal and physical harassment, institutional bias, and an exclusive school culture (Kosciw, 2014). Therefore, it is imperative that district and school leaders impact and guide how marginalized students are supported and included in the school setting. Indeed, school leaders can play an integral role in "creating schools that value individual differences" (Gardiner et al., 2008, p. 142). School building leaders can have direct influence regarding how schools design, improve, and sustain rigorous instruction and ensure the school

community is a safe space for all learners (Theoharis & Brooks, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2009). District and school building leaders influence policy, pedagogy, and professional learning that can inform and sustain equity, instructional practices, and safe spaces that affect students' sense of inclusion (Sleeter & Grant, 2009). There is increasing literature regarding how leaders advance equity (Theoharis, 2009), build student/teacher relationships (Pearson et al, 2007), influence students' sense of safety (Biag, 2014), and model agency (Johnson, 2007). Additionally, Khalifa et al. (2016) note the influence of school leaders' self-awareness, teacher preparation, school environment, and community advocacy as a critical means to support learners in school.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose

Given the increased diversity of student populations and their varied academic, social-emotional, and school-environment needs, it is imperative to examine how district and school leaders support traditionally marginalized students in school settings. Among school-related factors that impact student success, leadership is second only to teaching (Leithwood et al., 2004). Specifically, leaders and leadership are crucial to the success of marginalized student populations.

The purpose of our group research project was to examine how district and school leaders support and advocate for marginalized student populations. We sought to understand the ways in which districts might concentrate and sustain efforts to support these students through district and school leadership practices. Specifically, our research aimed to answer the question: In what ways, if any, do district and school leaders support marginalized student populations in schools? For the purposes of this study, the term *marginalized student populations* is defined broadly to

include students who identify as LGBTQ, emergent bilinguals, Hispanic/Latinx, and African Americans.

Accordingly, the overarching research question for this study was: In what ways, if any, do district and school leaders support marginalized student populations in schools? As such, our research team members each applied a different lens to examine the role of leadership in the participating district as outlined in Table 1.

Researchers' Focus Areas

Table 1

Individual Research Topics

Investigator	Research Questions
Margarita Amy	How do leaders perceive they are fostering teacher leadership which supports emergent bilingual and Latinx students? When working to develop teacher leadership, how, if at all, do leaders perceive they are setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization?
Mark Pellegrino	Do teachers with low discipline disparities necessarily embrace culturally responsive discipline practices? How, if at all, does the school leader promote culturally responsive practices of teachers in order to reduce disciplinary outcomes for African American and Hispanic/Latinx students?
Jaime Slaney	How, if at all, does the leader develop and maintain cultural awareness and self-reflection to support marginalized populations? What leadership practices does the leader enact, if at all, to engage teachers in cultural awareness and self-reflection?
Luis R. Soria	How, if at all, do district and school leaders' knowledge, attitudes/beliefs, and practices support LGBTQ youth?

Conceptual Framework

In this qualitative case study, we ground our conceptual framework in the work of Khalifa et al.'s (2016) Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework and the complementary ideas of Leithwood and Jantzi's (1990) Transformational Leadership

Framework. These frameworks guided our review of the literature and informed our study. Khalifa et al. assert that culturally responsive leaders simultaneously resist systems of oppression that exist and affirm cultural practices and identities of students. We merged these two frameworks, as we believe the underlying work of a culturally responsive leader (Khalifa et al., 2016) encompasses Leithwood & Jantzi's (1990) three leadership practices: setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization. For the purposes of this study, we characterize *culture* through a "bottom-up approach" (Birukou et al., 2013) that begins with a set of traits of an individual person, recognizes transmission of ideas and communication as a relevant means of spreading the culture, and then expands to the group culture within a context. For this research, the individual characteristics of marginalized students and their interactions with non-marginalized students are examined within school contexts.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

For this study, culturally responsive pedagogy and its origins in multicultural education informed how we applied Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL). Originally, Ladson-Billings devised the phrase "culturally relevant pedagogy" in *The Dreamkeepers* (1994), a study of eight exemplary teachers of African American students. Ladson-Billings (1995) further developed her theory stemming from the work of anthropologists, sociolinguists, and ecologists. She examined teaching practices that align to the home and community cultures of students of color who had previously not experienced academic success in school. She established the need for a culturally relevant theoretical perspective. In her view, "culturally relevant pedagogy" would produce students who could obtain high achievement, understand and develop cultural competence, and obtain critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Gay (2002) built on Ladson-Billings' (1994, 1995) theory and made a case for improving the academic outcomes of underachieving African, Asian, Latinx, and Native American students through culturally responsive teaching. In order to do this, she further posits that teacher education programs must encompass the appropriate knowledge, beliefs, and skills toward cultural responsiveness. Gay (2002) defined culturally responsive teaching as pedagogy that uses "cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students to build bridges for teaching" (p.106). Villegas and Lucas (2002) assert that a culturally responsive teacher:

> a) is socioculturally conscious; b) has affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds; c) is responsible and capable of bringing about educational change which will make schools more responsive to students; d) understands and embraces constructivist views of both teaching and learning; e) knows about students' experiences outside of school; f) builds on students' personal and cultural strengths while stretching them beyond the familiar" (p. 21).

Culturally relevant teaching and pedagogy provide a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership

Following the groundbreaking work of Gay and Ladson-Billings to create culturally responsive education, education reformers introduced the notion of the culturally responsive school leader (Johnson, 2006; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). While culturally responsive teaching is critical, it is imperative to ensure the entire school environment, not just the classroom, is responsive to the needs of marginalized students (Khalifa et al., 2016). Riehl (2000) contends, "a genuine commitment to diversity would require administrators to attend to

the fundamental inequities in schooling, to disavow the institutions which they purportedly lead, and to work toward larger projects of social and institutional transformation" (p. 58). In their synthesis of the literature on the topic, Khalifa et. al. assert culturally responsive school leadership is "the ability of school leaders to create school contexts and curriculum that responds effectively to the educational, social, political, and cultural needs of students" (p. 1278).

A culturally responsive leader intentionally engages in leadership behaviors to stop systems of oppression that continue to widen the gap for marginalized student populations (Khalifa, 2018; Riehl, 2000). Khalifa et. al (2016) define these behaviors as "practices and actions, mannerisms, policies, and discourses that influence school climate, school structure, teacher efficacy, or student outcomes" (p. 1274). The culturally responsive school leadership framework is based upon three assumptions and is characterized by four key leadership behaviors:

> 1) cultural responsiveness is a necessary component of effective school leadership; 2) if cultural responsiveness is to be present and sustainable in school, it must be foremost and consistently be promoted by school leaders; and 3) culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) is characterized by a core set of unique leadership behaviors, namely: a) being critically self-reflective; b) developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers and curricula; c) promoting inclusive, anti-oppressive school contexts; and d) engaging students' Indigenous (or local neighborhood) community contexts (Khalifa, 2018, p. 13).

For this case study, we utilized two of the four identified behaviors from Khalifa et al.'s framework to guide our work. We focused on the leadership behaviors of being critically reflective and promoting culturally responsive inclusive school contexts as they relate best to our

study. These behaviors, paired with Leithwood and Jantzi's (1990) three transformational

leadership behaviors of setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization

enabled us to further examine how leaders at the district and school level support marginalized

student populations. A visual of the applied frameworks is provided below (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Culturally Responsive School Leadership and Transformational Leadership Frameworks
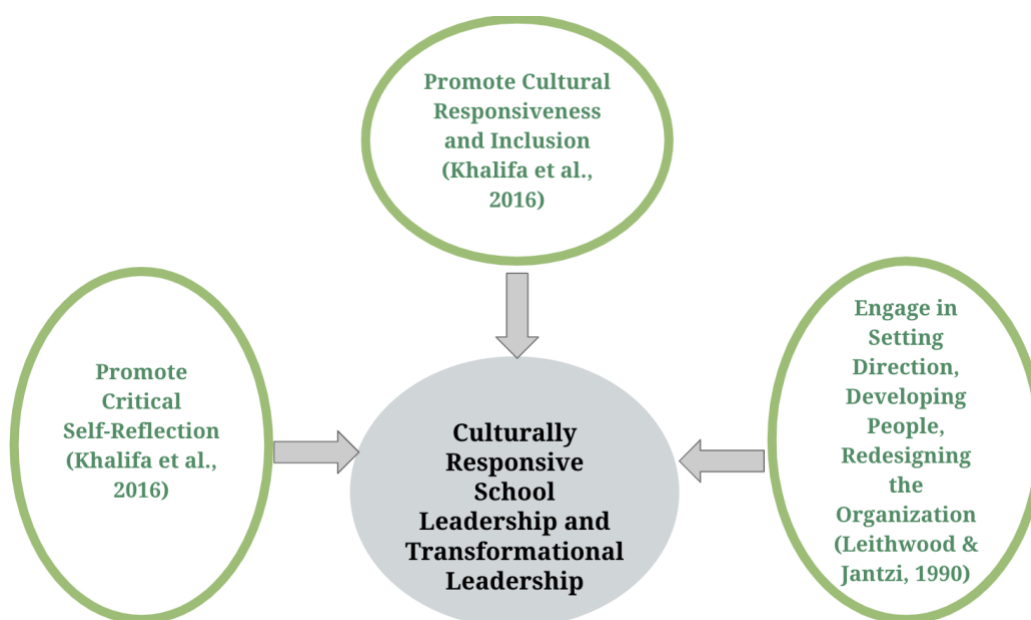
Critical Self-Reflection

Khalifa et al. (2016) posit critical self-reflection is a crucial first step to a leader's journey

of becoming a culturally responsive leader. Critical self-reflection includes the "deep

examination of personal assumptions, values, and beliefs" (Brown, 2004, p. 89). Once a leader

develops critical self-awareness and reflection they can become conscious of their own personal

biases, values, and assumptions that contribute to systematic patterns of oppression and

marginalized student populations' experiences in schools (Khalifa, 2018). Young and Laible

(2000) argue that "understanding our participation and then unlearning our patterns of thought

and action that support racism are necessary steps for dismantling the system of White racism

that exists in our society and in our schools" (p. 389). Without the leader developing critical self-awareness, any attempts at reform will only result in surface level change as opposed to systemic long-lasting reform (Cooper, 2009).

Cultural Responsiveness and Inclusiveness

A culturally responsive leader must actively protect and seek inclusion for marginalized student populations (Khalifa, 2018). In order to repeal systems of privilege and oppression that are embedded within the systemic structures of our educational system, leaders must express intentionality in their behavior to create culturally responsive and inclusive school environments (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Khalifa, 2011). These environments must provide cultural mirrors for students in order to create a culturally affirming school environment (Riehl, 2000). Leaders must be willing to have courageous conversations to combat inequities and to promote systemic change (Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Khalifa, 2011; Khalifa et al., 2016; Santamaria, 2014; Singleton, 2015).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders promote leaders and followers to engage in a relationship of mutual respect and power-sharing interactions (Burns, 1978). Leaders who enact transformational leadership influence their followers by behaving in ways that motivate and inspire. They communicate their expectations, demonstrate a commitment to a shared vision and goals, seek new ideas from others, and promote the individual development of others (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders influence their followers. Additionally, these leaders actively solicit new ideas and promote supportive climates. More importantly, they promote the individual development of others (Danielson, 2007; Poekert et al., 2016; Wilson, 2016).

For this research study, transformational leadership theory was informed by Leithwood and Jantzi's research in schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Leithwood et al., 2004; Yu et al., 2002) which expands upon the work of Burns (1978) and Bass (1985). Using this theory as part of our conceptual framework enabled us to further examine how leaders at the district and school level support marginalized student populations. This model describes three broad clusters of leadership practices: setting direction, developing people and redesigning the organization.

Setting Direction, Developing People, and Redesigning the Organization

Transformational leaders set the organization's direction with the intent to create and promote a shared vision, develop consensus, and establish high-performance expectations (Garza et al., 2014; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Transformational leaders develop people within the organization as they strive to provide individualized support, recommend high-quality professional development, and model important values and practices (Day et al., 2016; Poekert et al., 2016; Wilson, 2016). Lastly, a transformational leader redesigns the organization by developing a collaborative culture that promotes shared decision-making and structures to support this type of collaboration (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990).

In summary, transformational leadership theory is an appropriate part of the conceptual framework of this study because leaders who employ transformational leadership practices can directly impact teaching and learning to support marginalized student populations. For this research study, we weave two theories into our conceptual framework, Khalifa et al.'s (2016) culturally responsive school leadership and transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). This conceptual framework guided our review of the literature and informed our study to examine how leaders at the district and school level support marginalized student populations in schools.

Literature Review

There are well-documented research findings related to changing demographics in student populations (NCES, 2019), marginalized students' academic and social-emotional well-being (Dewall et al., 2011), and leadership practices that affect students' success (Theoharis & Brooks, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2009). Additionally, there is a significant body of research related to the specific marginalized student populations that we examined for this qualitative case study. In our review of literature, we first illustrate relevant research on the disproportionality of marginalized students and next illuminate research findings regarding four marginalized student groups: LGBTQ, emergent bilinguals, Hispanic/Latinx, and African American students. We culminate our review of literature with research findings regarding leadership practices that support marginalized student populations that informed our qualitative case study of an urban district in Massachusetts.

Concerns Regarding Marginalized Student Populations

Disproportionality of Marginalized Students

Disproportionality is evident in educational outcomes when there is a significant difference found between marginalized and non-marginalized populations. Disproportionality can be defined as the under-representation of a particular subgroup of the population when measuring positive outcomes such as high academic achievement, feeling connected to school and feeling safe, or an over-representation when measuring negative outcomes including suspensions, special education identification, being bullied, and absenteeism (Bradley Williams et al., 2017). Historically, disproportionality exists in the U.S. educational system with regards to drop-out rates, academic achievement, and disciplinary consequences for several marginalized groups (Gastic, 2017; Mizel et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2014). The disproportionality of

marginalized students' representation and subsequent academic and disciplinary outcomes brings to light a need for targeted advocacy in the school environment. The role of district and school leaders is critical in creating equitable opportunities to learn and ensuring a high-quality education for all student populations (Capper & Young, 2015). To discern the leadership practices that support marginalized students, it is necessary to examine the relevant research regarding the student populations that are featured in this study.

LGBTQ Students. There is expanded scholarship concerning LGBTQ youth experiences in the school setting (Heck et al., 2016). Studies reveal systemic and systematic disparities faced by LGBTQ youth regarding a hostile climate (Greytak et al., 2016) and harsh disciplinary actions (Poteat et al., 2014). Himmelstein and Bruckner's (2011) national longitudinal study of 15,170 students found significant differences between LGBTQ and heterosexual students' disciplinary consequences. Indeed, they found that nonheterosexual adolescents had greater odds than their heterosexual peers of experiencing sanctions. LGBTQ students were more likely to be suspended, arrested, or convicted of a crime. Subsequent research found that LGBTQ students are disciplined for conduct and actions that heterosexual students are not (Snapp et al., 2015). LGBTQ students reported being suspended for non-violent offenses such as public displays of affection, self-expression, and defending themselves from bullies.

Emergent Bilinguals. For this study, English Learners are referenced as emergent bilingual students. This terminology aligns to research that asserts "through acquiring English, these children become bilingual, able to continue to function in their home language as well as in English, their new language and that of school" (Garcia et al., 2008, p. 6). Emergent bilingual students are a fast-growing subgroup among student populations in the United States (Rhodes et al., 2005). The emergent bilingual student population is diverse due to differences in students'

experience with English, individual competence in their first language, and explicit literacy needs (August et al., 2014). These differences, along with other social and environmental factors such as socioeconomic status, influence students' ability to learn to read, write, speak, and listen in English. To best support emergent bilinguals, educators must have a clear understanding of their students' backgrounds, and must focus on providing personalized reading instruction, with varying levels of support. When educators fail to become familiar with and recognize the knowledge, experiences, and values of culturally diverse student populations, they engender a culture of power that further marginalizes ethnic and linguistic minorities (Delpit, 2006). This power imbalance further casts linguistic minorities and emergent bilinguals as deficient in character, behavior, and academic ability (Nieto, 2007; Valenzuela, 2001).

Discipline of Hispanic/Latinx and African American Students. As far back as 1975, racial disparities in suspension rates for African American students have been well documented (Edelman et al., 1975). Edelman and associates found that African Americans were suspended at three times the rate of White students in elementary school and two times the rate in secondary schools. Unfortunately, since that time, this gap has persisted and has been well documented by researchers (DeMatthews et al., 2017; Gastic, 2017; Gibson et al., 2014; Huang & Cornell, 2017; Mizel et al., 2016; Morgan et al., 2014). Though the amount of literature is not as expansive, disparate suspension rates for students of Hispanic and Latin American ethnicity (Latinx) students have also been a consistent finding in current research (Anyon et al., 2014; Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015; Morgan & Wright, 2018). This same research has established a strong positive correlation between school suspensions of students of color and incarceration. Dubbed the "School to Prison Pipeline," this is reason enough to improve school support of Hispanic, Latinx, and African American students. However, beyond prison, there are negative effects of school

suspensions that are broader reaching and are far less visible. Research has established links between school discipline and drug use (Hemphill et al., 2014), loss of institutional trust, and lower college enrollment (Yeager et al., 2017).

A crucial outcome of suspensions is the reduction in students' opportunities to learn as they miss valuable class time. Consequently, research has connected student suspensions to course failures, grade retention, and dropping out of school (Barnes & Motz, 2018; Ford et al., 2013; González, 2012; Pesta, 2018; Rocque & Snellings, 2018). One 3-year study of a large urban school district of almost 374,000 students found, in the first year of the study, that suspended students were three years behind non-suspended students on average in their reading ability (Arcia, 2006). Two years later, they were five years behind. This is particularly concerning as reading skills are foundational to all learning. Arcia (2006) made the connection of lagging reading skills with low student achievement and other negative academic outcomes. Ultimately, interrupting the "School to Prison Pipeline" by reducing the discipline of African American and Hispanic/Latinx students will support their immediate educational needs as well as change their lifelong outcomes.

Schools have attempted to address disproportionality in discipline over the years. Many have proclaimed that the disciplinary program School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) will eliminate the discipline gap. While there is an abundance of empirical evidence that demonstrates SWPBIS effectively reduces discipline rates for all subgroups in schools (McIntosh et al., 2018), McIntosh and associates (2018) also found that African American and Hispanic/Latinx students are still suspended at higher rates than White students.

We have illuminated research regarding marginalized student populations. Next, we explore school climate effects on marginalized students and then elucidate leadership practices that are paramount for their academic and social/emotional needs.

School Climate Effects on Marginalized Student Populations

As noted, there is increased literature regarding marginalized students' school experiences. Consequently, it is critical to explore intermediary factors that affect school climate and can impact marginalized students' academic success, emotional well-being, and safety.

Student Connectedness

Marginalized students are better able to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally in school environments when they feel connected and safe in their school (Kosciw et al., 2014). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) defines school connectedness as students' belief that school staff and school peers care about their academic learning and about their personal wellness. Students' sense of belonging while at school impacts how they engage in school and is associated with a number of positive academic outcomes (Johnson, 2009). Studies encompass various terms to characterize student belonging such as connectedness (Joyce, 2015), relatedness (Connell & Wellborn, 1991), or belongingness (Finn, 1989). These terms can be analogous and have been researched in various ways including girls' reduced sense of victimization (Loukas & Pasch, 2012); safeguard against substance abuse, school absence, and suicide ideation (Resnick et al, 1997); and the development of sustained positive teacher-student relationships (Sulkowski & Simmons, 2018).

Belongingness

Students are able to perceive signs and cues from their school environment, educators, and peers that inform whether or not they have a sense of belonging (Okonofua et al., 2016).

These perceptions can affect marginalized students' success both inside and outside the classroom (Blad, 2019). Students who possess a sense of belongingness perceive that they are more competent with higher levels of intrinsic motivation than peers who lack a strong sense of belonging (Osterman, 2000). Conversely, students who perceive inconsistent treatment from their teachers due to their race or ethnic group may respond with defiance and misbehavior (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Social Exclusion

The World Health Organization (2015) defines social exclusion within a relational lens that is informed by disparate power relationships among peers resulting in the marginalization and exclusion of groups of people from social connections and experiences. When children experience social exclusion such as being denied rights, opportunities, and resources that are normally available to all children, their physical, emotional, and mental health wellness can be negatively impacted. Research suggests that aggression, anxiety, and depression have been observed when children have been excluded from their peer groups (Dewall et al., 2011).

Leadership Practices that Support Marginalized Populations

Leadership matters to the success of marginalized students (Khalifa et al., 2016; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018). In the following section we explore specific leadership practices and behaviors that directly and indirectly support marginalized students in schools.

Building Relationships

Disproportionality in disciplinary outcomes for Hispanic/Latinx and African American students is a significant concern for the US educational system (DeMatthews et al., 2017; Mizel et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2014). Although there are promising systemic programs--such as the

three-tiered behavioral program, "Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports" (PBIS)--that reduce disciplinary outcomes for all student subgroups, disproportionality persists (Allen & Steed, 2016). As Hershfeldt et al. (2009) note, "Problem behaviors among students are often a function of a lack of correspondence between the mainstream expectations for student behavior and the diverse cultural orientations students bring to their school environment" (pp. 13-14). Essentially, educators often do not understand how students' diverse cultural and situational backgrounds inform their behavior (Gay, 2002). Teachers often lack an in-depth understanding of their students' cultures and values as well as how to develop their culturally responsive skills (Hershfeldt et al., 2009). Hershfeldt and associates (2009) found that these discipline disparities were the result of negative student/teacher interactions. Likewise, most discipline referrals from classroom teachers (where most discipline begins), stem from poor student/teacher relationships (Fox & Hemmeter, 2009). In response to this relational disconnect, Hershfeldt and colleagues (2009) designed the Double-Check framework. At its core, this framework of culturally responsive practices is relational. The framework identified five separate but interrelated components: (a) reflective thinking about the children and their 'group membership,' (b) authentic relationships with students, (c) effective communication, (d) connections for students to the curriculum, and (e) sensitivity to students' cultural and situational messages. Simply put, educators need to better understand their own beliefs and biases as well as students' perspectives in order to communicate in a way that fosters positive interactions and relationships with their students. Yet supporting marginalized student populations in schools goes beyond relationships.

Instilling High Expectations

Culturally responsive leaders have high expectations for every member of the learning community (Johnson, 2007; Khalifa, 2011; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018). A number of studies

have suggested that without an intentional focus on having high expectations, the organization will continue with systems of oppression for marginalized student populations that surrender to the acquiescence of low expectations and low outcomes (Brown et al., 2011; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Khalifa, 2011).

For example, in a qualitative two-phase study, Brown et al. (2011) examined 24 state recognized "Honors Schools of Excellence." The schools were ranked, based solely on minority achievement, and then separated into two types of schools, small gap (SG) schools who kept achievement gaps between minority and White students to less than 15% and large gap schools (LG) who recorded achievement gaps of 15% or more between their White students and their minority students. Researchers found school principals of the small gap schools expected excellence from each and every student. Principals held the mindset that excellence was achieved by having high expectations for every student, regardless of their starting point or background. Small gap schools defined excellence with measurement of growth as compared to grade-level proficiency. In comparison, the large gap schools defined excellence in more vague terms, mostly by meeting grade-level proficiencies. Principals of large gap schools did not hold the expectation that every child could learn, no matter the circumstance. When asked about the concept that all children can be successful, one principal stated "I don't think we can guarantee that every child is going to be successful. But we need to provide them the opportunity to be successful" (p. 81). Researchers found that the difference in expectations contributed to the difference in achievement for minority students.

Khalifa (2011) further supports the importance of the culturally responsive leader having high expectations to support marginalized student populations. In his case study examining a principal's response to teacher acquiescence, the leader's belief in having high expectations was

crucial to combating low teacher expectations. The principal in the case study enacted an approach to challenge teachers' behaviors through conversations, both individually and as a collective staff. In additional to challenging teachers' deficiency perspective, the principal developed teachers' understanding about race, discrimination and specifically, the impact of the teacher's behavior and low expectations on the student. Due to the leadership practices of upholding high expectations, engaging in critical conversations, and imparting professional learning, teachers improved their practices and supports for students.

In contrast to the above studies, in Gardiner and Enomoto's (2006) qualitative analysis of the practices of six urban principals, researchers found only two of the six principals engaged in the practice of holding high expectations for all students. The other principals demonstrated more of a deficit perspective and focused on what the students lacked (i.e., language, shelter, immigration challenges). The principals in all of the above studies who held high expectations for all were able to challenge stereotypes and systems of oppression for marginalized student populations in order to support students.

Developing Teacher Leadership

Developing teacher leadership has increasingly become a strategy for educational improvement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). York-Barr and Duke suggest "teacher leadership is the process by which teachers individually influence their colleagues, principals and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices" (p. 288). Their study revealed that successful teacher leadership relies heavily on the evidence of specific school conditions to be in place. These conditions include: collaborative and encouraging school culture, roles and relationships (i.e., the establishment of trust), and structures (i.e., access to each other, professional development).

Building on research that underscores the importance of teacher leadership, Anderson (2008) explored the rural school context and argued that teacher leaders influenced these schools, and in some cases, transformed the entire organization. Anderson's research presents a valuable new focus on teachers as leaders beyond their traditional roles. Danielson's (2007) extensive writing regarding teacher leadership divides teacher leader roles into two different categories: informal and formal. Formal teacher leader roles are positions designed and appointed by building or school leaders and recognized by the school community (i.e. department chair, master teacher, instructional coach). Informal teacher leaders are not selected. Instead, "they take the initiative to address a problem or institute a new program. They have no positional authority; their influence stems from the respect they command from their colleagues through their expertise and practice" (Danielson, 2007, p. 16). Her research posits several conditions that can promote teachers to become leaders: (a) a safe environment for risk-taking, (b) administrators who encourage teacher leaders and (c) opportunities to learn leadership skills. Danielson also asserts that administrators must be proactive in their commitment to cultivate teacher leaders.

Promoting Inclusivity

Culturally responsive leaders can create and sustain school cultures that are inclusive (Khalifa et al., 2016; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018). Indeed, school leaders can explicitly maintain safe and inclusive school environments via their actions and practices. Khalifa et al. (2016) posit that leaders can model cultural responsiveness when they interact with and among school staff (Tillman, 2005), recognize and name inequities toward marginalized students (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012), and challenge the status-quo of exclusionary practices (Khalifa, 2011). Theoharis (2007) asserts that leaders enact inclusivity when they eliminate exclusionary practices that discriminate and segregate students such as tracked levels of class placement.

Engaging in Critical Self Reflection

Culturally responsive leaders must be aware of and be able to reflect upon their own cultural identity and the identity of the context in which they lead (Cooper, 2009; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Khalifa et al., 2016; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Capper et al., 2006; Young & Laible, 2000). It is only after the leader engages in the iterative process of personal cultural awareness and self- reflection that they are able to recognize and combat inequities within the schools they lead (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). The leader's personal cultural awareness and self-reflection assists in the probing and challenging of assumptions and practices within the school that promotes inequitable practices (Cooper, 2009; Khalifa, 2011; Khalifa, et al., 2016; Santamaría, 2014). This leads to transformative action that will result in equitable practices and contexts to support marginalized students (Shields, 2010).

Conclusion

The research we have reviewed indicates that there is an existing opportunity and academic gap for marginalized student populations in schools. We have reviewed literature on the specific populations for this study: LGBTQ, emergent bilingual, Hispanic/Latinx, and African American students to discern the impact of leadership practices to support marginalized student populations. We then explored the impact of leadership on marginalized student populations, with a focus on culturally responsive school leadership and transformational leadership practices. While there is an abundance of research on the disparities and systems of oppression that marginalized student populations face, there is still a relatively smaller body of research on how district and school building leaders can positively impact and change the outcomes for these students. As a result, we constructed a study to answer the research question: In what ways, if any, do district and school leaders support marginalized student populations in

schools? We collected and analyzed data from our study to inform further research studies and

provide guidance to district and school leaders to create equitable school systems for all students.

CHAPTER TWO[2]

Methods

This qualitative descriptive case study examined whether and how district and school leaders model, encourage, and sustain culturally responsive practices that support marginalized students. The sections below describe the overall study design and procedures for data collection and analysis.

Study Design

A qualitative, descriptive, single-case study design was applied to answer the group and individual research questions. The descriptive case study design was chosen to uncover and describe the phenomena of leadership within specific, unalienable contexts (Yin, 2018). We identified, examined, and described the relationship between school leaders' beliefs and practices, and the culturally responsive systems, structures, and practices that support marginalized student populations. Through semi-structured interviews, document reviews, observations, and field notes, the team gathered evidence to describe this relationship in the context of a mid-sized urban Massachusetts school district.

Site Selection

The study site selection criteria included: 1) a mid-to-large-sized K-12 urban district in Massachusetts; 2) inclusion of a diverse student body, with at least fifty percent representing marginalized students populations-specifically, LGBTQ, emergent bilinguals, Hispanic/Latinx, and African American; 3) inclusion of school leaders who self-identified (and/or who were recognized by their district leaders) as being culturally responsive; 4) recognition by GLSEN of

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[2] This chapter was collaboratively written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project. Authors include: Margarita Amy, Mark Pellegrino, Jaime Slaney, and Luis Soria

Massachusetts as a district committed to culturally responsive ideology through policy, practice, and professional development regarding LGBTQ students; and 5) access to at least two of the district schools. Site selection also required a district that had demonstrated efforts and leadership practices in support of marginalized students.

After engaging in demographic data analysis, several Massachusetts districts aligned to our site selection criteria. To make the final selection of the research site, we examined six GLSEN recommended districts. We reviewed each of the recommended district and school websites for evidence of practices, policies, and/or initiatives in support of marginalized students, with a focused lens on LGBTQ students. We also communicated with local- and state-level professionals who were familiar with the districts and the district superintendents to determine if the leaders demonstrated culturally responsive practices and beliefs. Bayside Hill School District (pseudonym) was ultimately chosen as the focus of the study.

Contextual Background of Bayside Hill School District

At the time of this study, Bayside Hill School District, located in Massachusetts, had a racially and linguistically diverse population (see Figure 2). Of the approximately 950,000 students in Massachusetts public schools, 21.6% are Hispanic/Latinx, 9.2% are African American, and 10.8% are English Learners, and 57.9% White. In comparison, Bayside Hill Public Schools has a more diverse student makeup. The Hispanic/Latinx population at Bayside Hill is eleven percentile points higher than the state's percentage, and the emergent bilingual (defined by the state of Massachusetts as English Learners) population is fifteen percentile points higher. Figure 2 highlights how the student demographics have shifted at Bayside Hill School District over the last ten years. The Hispanic/Latinx and emergent bilingual student populations have continuously increased during the last five years. Additionally, the White student

population decreased nineteen percent over the past ten years. This shift in population simultaneously occurred with an increase of 1000+ district students. Contrasting this shift in students' racial makeup, the staff demographic has relatively remained White. Research has demonstrated that it is beneficial for schools to have a staff population that mirrors the racial makeup of the student population (Wilder, 2000). However, only 1% of the teachers in the district are African American, while 7% of the students are African American. Likewise, 10% of teachers in the district are Hispanic/Latinx, while 32% of the students are Hispanic/Latinx. This difference in the makeup of the two populations can contribute to disproportionate outcomes for students (Wilder, 2000).

Figure 2

Student Demographic 10-Year History of Bayside Hill School District
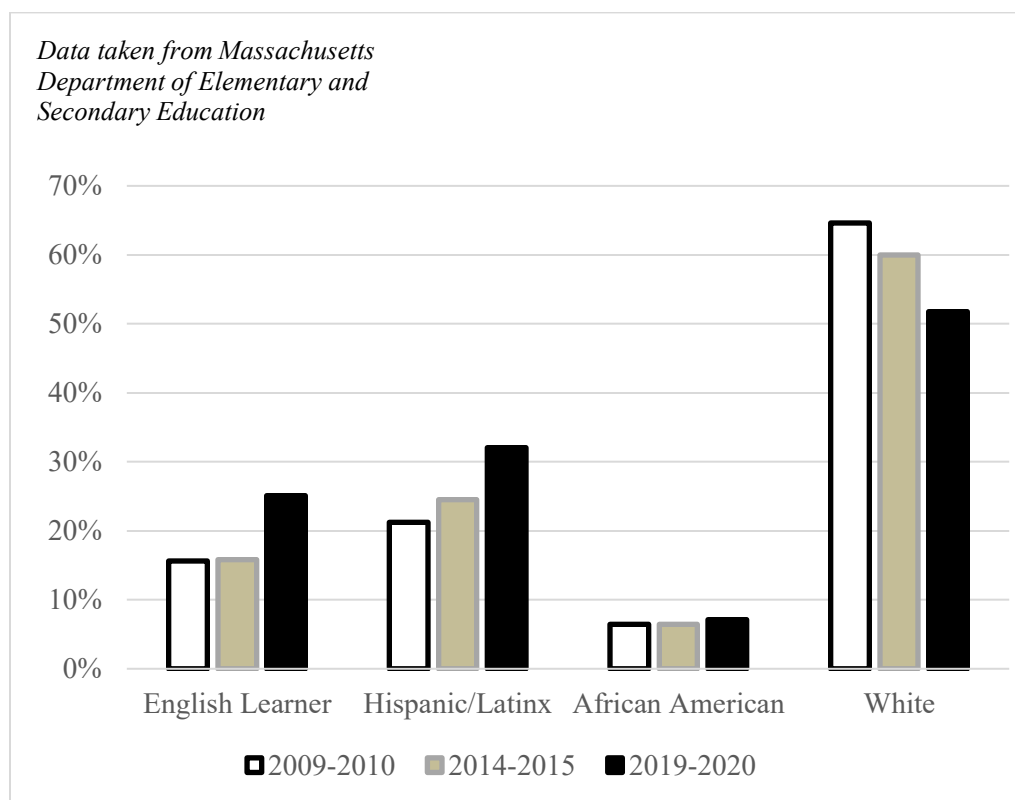
The superintendent has been in his position for three consecutive years. The district has fourteen schools, with only one currently identified by the state as "requiring assistance" under the state's accountability measures. During the time of our research, three schools were following a state mandated Turnaround Plan as a form of dramatic and comprehensive intervention, since they were identified as schools also "requiring assistance." According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, schools classified as "requiring assistance" have low graduation rates, low overall performance on statewide assessments, or have low participation on the state mandated assessments.

When interviewed, the superintendent identified equity as a driving force for Bayside Hill Schools. He described the context of the school system, the city itself, and inequities that exist. The superintendent explained student educational outcomes is highly correlated with a student's address. He shared:

> This city is kind of divided with the North/South... Predominantly our students live on the south side. [The south side] has more concentration of housing. There is state and federal low income housing in the South Side. And the north side is very affluent, much more than the south side... So you see it in the performance of students who live on the north side or attend north side schools. We've been really trying to adjust for that marginalization, whether it's by skin color, or income, or by making sure we had an equity model in our schools, and our funding formula.

The superintendent expressed that until recently, inequities evidenced in specific geographic areas in the school district have been largely ignored.

At the time of the research, the district was engaged in implementing a lesson plan mandate, which required teachers to come together and co-plan lessons using a prescribed

template. Co-planning occurred twice a week for math and English language arts. The expectations for co-planning were for all elementary schools, where the teaching teams submit weekly lessons which include both content and language goals. This new mandate harmed the relationship between the teachers and the district leaders. Consequently, teachers felt that this was a top-down mandate and an example of the lack of trust that exists within the district and has resulted in less sharing of practices. Although the district's intent was to increase collaboration among teachers, teachers' perceptions were that they had no time to collaborate or share ideas. As will become apparent in Chapter 4, this initiative was a frequent theme in many interviews.

Data Collection

Research data was collected via semi-structured interviews, document analysis, observations, and field notes to understand whether and how district and school building leaders support marginalized student populations. Case study data was collected from August 2019 through February 2020. The research team collaboratively gathered data to support the overarching question for the larger case study, as well as for the four individual studies that contributed to the larger research.

Interviews

In order to understand how leaders modeled, encouraged, and sustained practices that supported marginalized students, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from the district. Participants included district leaders, school building leaders, teachers, and teacher leaders. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) assert, "Interviews are necessary when we cannot observe behaviors, feelings or how people interpret the work around them" (p.108). The relationship between the interviewer and the respondent is a partnership (Weiss, 1994). Each

participant was interviewed individually for 30-60 minutes. Interviews were conducted in person, recorded, and finally, transcribed using the web-based program, Rev.

Study Participants

Purposive, nonprobability sampling was used to select study participants in order to discover and gain insight into a specific phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this collective study, each researcher sought participants for their respective study informed by their specific criteria and research questions. Participant selection is further discussed in each individual Chapter Three. The following paragraphs describe the criteria we utilized to seek participants for the overarching group study.

Four senior district-level administrators, seven school building leaders, and eighteen teachers were interviewed to explore their individual and collective beliefs toward supporting marginalized students (See Table 2). The Bayside Hill superintendent and assistant superintendent identified a number of building leaders who, in their opinion, demonstrated efforts to meet the needs of the marginalized students.

Each school building leader identified between 1 and 6 teachers who met the criteria for each individual study. In total, eighteen teachers participated in the study. The identified teachers were interviewed to examine their beliefs and practices to support marginalized students. Additionally, teachers were asked whether and how their respective school building leaders support marginalized student populations. Table 2 details the gender and race of each of the participants in the group study.

Interview Protocols

Interview protocols were designed to discover and probe for leadership practices, decision-making, and beliefs in support of marginalized student populations in Bayside Hill

Table 2

Participant Self-Identified Demographics

Organizational Level	Gender		Race/Ethnicity	
District Level Leaders	Female	2	African American	1
	Male	2	White	3
Building Level Leaders	Female	5	White	7
	Male	2		
Teachers	Female	13	White	16
	Male	5	Hispanic/Latinx	2

Public Schools. Questions were created based on relevant literature on the topic. Interview

protocols were designed for district and school leaders, teachers, and teacher leaders (See

Appendix A which details questions for each participant group). Protocols were piloted with

conveniently available educators who were not candidates for the study to ensure the questions

were understandable and produced useful data.

Document Review

Purposive sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was used to select documents related to

leadership practices to analyze whether and how district and school building leaders support

marginalized student populations. The documents included district- and school-level policies,

websites, professional learning agendas/presentations, problem solving protocols, school

schedules for co-planning, and communications to families and teachers. One researcher

reviewed a student organization mission, vision, and value statements, and agendas/minutes of

the student organization meetings. We also analyzed the Bayside Hill district's strategic plan

(2017), equity plan (2018), and budget (2019).

Observations

Observations were conducted in three schools to provide our team with firsthand examinations of leadership knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and practices (See Appendix C for protocol). We observed interactions between leaders and students, teacher leaders and students, and among students. We also observed planning meetings and dual language classroom instruction. For two of the individual studies, observations were conducted to provide "knowledge of the context and specific incidents, behaviors, which can be used as reference points" (Merriam & Tisdell 2016, p.139). These reference points allowed us to triangulate the information gained from interviews and other sources.

Field Notes

Field notes were an additional data source for this study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe field notes as "the written account of the observation, which are also analogous to the interview transcript" (p. 149). Field notes provided knowledge of the context and specific behaviors observed during the time of the interviews and informal observations. The field notes were "reflective," as noted by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), and included "feelings, reactions, hunches, initial interpretations, speculations and working hypothesis" (p. 151). The field notes included but were not limited to interactions with school, district and teacher leaders, teachers and students. The content of the field notes included verbal descriptions, direct quotations and other running narratives based on the observers' comments. A sample of our field note protocol is included in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

Data was collected and uploaded to Dedoose, an online qualitative software, to facilitate coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As transcripts and other sources of data were added to

Dedoose, each individual researcher determined and applied a priori codes (Miles et al., 2014) aligned to categorical themes and that related to individual conceptual frameworks. Data was analyzed through these themes to identify specific words and phrases (Creswell, 2012). This process was iterative and allowed the researchers to modify, clarify, or enhance these themes as the study progressed and data was gathered. In other words, the team, as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2015), had "a conversation with the data" (p. 204). Additional emergent coding cycles were completed by all researchers. These cycles were designed to create a more narrowed thematic organization of the initial coding (Saldana, 2013). The team completed pair checks to review each other's coding cycles to further build trustworthiness of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Positionality

Our research writing reflects our individual interpretations informed by cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics also referred to as "positions" (Creswell, 2012). This research team acknowledges that our research writing can be positioned. For this reason, to minimize potential biases, as a team, we developed interview protocols, coded interview samples in pairs, and maintained a process memo. The research team for this study is composed of four Massachusetts public school administrators. The group has a range of educational experiences in both public and private schools. These experiences include teaching at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Collectively, research members have also served in various roles such as teacher leader, director of instruction, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent in various schools and districts. The team is evenly divided between two women and two men. Of the four researchers, two identify as Latinx and two identify as White. In addition, one researcher identifies in the LGBTQ community. The members of the team

identified their roles and school district affiliation to the participants in the study. The team also

shared with each other their unique perspectives and positionality throughout the research

process.

CHAPTER THREE[3]

Individual Study

Introduction

The school setting is a significant factor in marginalized students' daily lives. It is critical that district and school leaders support minoritized scholars who are more susceptible to dropping out (Kosciw et al., 2018), suicide ideation (Proctor & Groze, 1994; Wexler et al., 2009), systemic discrimination (Garnett et al., 2013), bullying and harassment (Mitchell et al., 2014), substance abuse (Lee et al., 2016) and hostile climates (Kosciw et al., 2009). The lack of explicit and sustained support for marginalized youth can have long lasting negative impact on their social emotional well-being, academic performance, and future achievements. Indeed, research reveals that "during childhood and adolescence, marginalized populations experience a lack of support and resources for pursuing higher education" (Tate et al., 2014, p. 286).

District and school leadership actions and sustained practices can affect policies, pedagogy, and professional learning that support marginalized youth in schools. While there is increased scholarship regarding culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa, 2011; Khalifa et al., 2016) and its potential for positive impact on students' educational experiences (Theoharis, 2007), alternative research reveals ongoing systemic disparities and inadequate supports for various minoritized student groups (Meyer, 2003). With increased awareness regarding the connection between leadership and its impact on students, there is a need to further research the advocacy and advancement for anti-bullying and inclusive educational policies toward marginalized youth resilience (Wexler et al., 2009).

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[3] This chapter was authored by Luis R. Soria

Research Question

This individual qualitative case study was driven by the following research question: How, if at all, do district and school leaders' knowledge, attitudes/beliefs, and practices support LGBTQ youth? This study fills an existing gap in research regarding district and school-based leadership practices, policies, pedagogy, and professional learning, and their implications for LGBTQ youth in an urban Massachusetts school district. With the continuous changes in school populations and the increased number of self-identified LGBTQ youth in Massachusetts, now is a critical time to study whether and how leadership practices can affect the advocacy efforts and practices in schools for this marginalized population.

There is substantial literature regarding school experiences for LGBTQ youth and the higher frequency of challenges in schools that are "generally unsupportive and unsafe" (Kosciw et al., 2009, p. 976). Youth who identify as LGBTQ reveal that they experience discrimination, isolation, harassment, and victimization, resulting in negative academic and social–emotional outcomes (Watson et al., 2010). Consequences yielded by sustained victimization toward LGBTQ youth include depression (Garofalo et al., 1998), suicide ideation (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006), and substance abuse (Rosario et al., 1997). In national research conducted by GLSEN of 23,001 LGBTQ students surveyed from all 50 states, the District of Columbia and five U.S. territories, 59.5% of students between the ages of 13 and 21 indicated that they "felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, 44.6% because of their gender expression, and 35.0% because of their gender" (Kosciw et al., 2018, p. xviii).

However, there is expanded scholarship regarding improvements in school environment supports for LGBTQ youth (Kosciw et al., 2018). For example, there is growing research on Gay-Straight Alliances that strive to provide belonging, connectedness, and social justice for

LGBTQ youth (Poteat et al., 2017; Heck et al., 2016; Seelman et al., 2015). Research also exists

regarding LGBTQ youth and resiliency (Kosciw et al., 2014; Heck et al., 2016). Yet there is

minimal research regarding whether and how, district and/or school leadership practices are

designed, implemented, and sustained to support LGBTQ youth in urban districts in

Massachusetts. Additional research is needed regarding whether and how the leaders'

knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes regarding LGBTQ students can affect the espoused and enacted

school policies for advocacy, anti-discrimination, and proactive trauma-informed care for this

marginalized population.

LGBTQ Youth

Sexual minority youth are a marginalized population given the predominantly perceived

adolescent heterosexual archetype in the school environment. Wexler et al. (2009) argue that:

> Sexual minority youth live in a world where heterosexuality is the dominant sexual
> orientation. When heterosexual identities are defined as 'normal,' and recognized as
> the only acceptable sexual orientation, those that identify as 'other' are made invisible,
> and may be viewed as deviant or unnatural, with the prospect of being targeted for
> outright violence (p. 568).

LGBTQ youth, as a sexual minority group, are made invisible as "others" and can become

vulnerable to exclusionary practices and violence. Indeed, sustained diminishment of self-worth

combined with a lack of explicit and intentional support can have a long-term impact on LGBTQ

youth including lifelong distress and victimization (Birkett et al., 2015). Conversely, Heck et al.

(2016) contend that increased scholarship regarding LGBTQ youth has expanded to include

promising improvements such as district policies to advocate for transgender youth (Dickey &

Singh, 2016); anti-bullying policies to improve LGBTQ youths' school climate (Kull et al.,

2016); and affirmative influences of Gay/Straight Alliances (Marx & Kettrey, 2016). While the research has increased regarding LGBTQ advocacy, policy, and anti-harassment, Heck et al. (2016) hold that "we must be allies for LGBTQ youth in all of the settings they inhabit, and schools represent one such preeminent setting" (p. 384). Thus, it is essential to examine the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and leadership practices, norms, and policies that enable LGBTQ youth to feel safe and successful in school.

District and School Leadership

District and school leadership practices are critical for LGBTQ youth. Principals can directly influence how a school is designed to enact daily practices that create and sustain a safe space for all learners (Kosciw et al., 2009). District and school leaders shape policy, pedagogy, and professional learning that advance equity (Theoharis, 2007) and promote and influence curriculum, instruction, and extracurricular activities (Leithwood, 2004; Toomey & Russell, 2012). Principals can lead and motivate teachers to understand and enact the school's purpose, mission, and vision, which then impacts the collaborative discourse among teacher team members in support of student learning (Scribner et al., 2007).

Kouzes & Posner (2007) argue that leaders can have a profound influence on the people and organizations they lead when they exhibit five practices: 1) inspire a vision; 2) model the way; 3) challenge the process; 4) enable others to act; and 5) encourage the heart. Accordingly, district and school leaders who are critically self-aware can reflect on their intentional behaviors that may impact whether LGBTQ youth thrive or are diminished in the school environment. Moreover, Khalifa et al. (2016) posit that culturally responsive leaders "develop and support the school staff and promote a climate that makes the whole school welcoming, inclusive, and accepting of minoritized students" (p. 1275). District and school leaders can create conditions for

LGBTQ youth to feel safe in the school environment (Kull et al., 2016). Indeed, youth populations who identify as LGBTQ require sustained and targeted advocacy in order to achieve equitable opportunities and to flourish in safe, affirming school environments (Kosciw et al., 2012).

Conceptual Framework

The overarching conceptual framework is positioned by Khalifa et al.'s (2016) culturally responsive school leadership framework (CRSL). Khalifa et al. posit four tenets of CRSL that are anchored by the leaders' ability to be critically self-aware and knowledgeable of how they intentionally abate behaviors and policies that can lead to marginalizing students in the school environment. The four tenets of CRSL include: 1) critically self-reflect on leadership behaviors, 2) develop culturally responsive teachers, 3) promote culturally responsive/inclusive school environments, and 4) engage students, parents and families. For this study, I grounded the conceptual framework based on the third tenet: promote culturally responsive/inclusive school environments. Building on literature regarding culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995), Khalifa et al. (2016) argue that school leaders can create and maintain safe, inclusive school environments by recognizing inequities and then challenging the perceived and actual status-quo to decrease disparities such as exclusionary practices. Newcomer and Cowin (2018) further assert that critical self-reflection and mindfulness regarding "personal biases, assumptions, and values" inform school leaders' practices (p. 490). Consequently, the culturally responsive leader "*resists* the oppression and marginalization of diverse students and *affirms* student identity and cultural practices" (p. 492, emphasis in original).

For this case study, I focused on Khalifa et al.'s third tenet of CRSL with attention to whether and how leaders promote inclusivity (Riehl, 2000); build relationships among and between students and teachers (Khalifa et al., 2016); challenge exclusionary policies and behaviors (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012); use student voice (Antrop-González, 2011); and model culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa, 2011). For the purposes of this research, *culture* as defined by Birukou et al. (2013) begins with traits of individuals, recognizes transmission of ideas and communication to spread the culture, and then expands to the group culture within a specific context. For this study, the characteristics of LGBTQ students, their interactions with each other and with non-LGBTQ students are examined within school contexts.

Literature Review

The review of literature for this qualitative case study includes four overarching schemas regarding LGBTQ youth in schools: 1) Visibility Management, 2) Bullying, Harassment, and Violence, 3) Massachusetts Laws and Regulations, and 4) Leadership Practices Regarding LGBTQ Students. I first review research regarding LGBTQ youth managing their visibility in school and the environmental factors that enable them to self-reveal their identities, such as the existence of student Gay/Straight Alliance organizations. Second, I explore research regarding the impact of negative school climates on LGBTQ youth's academic performance and social-emotional well-being. Next, I review current Massachusetts laws and regulations in support of LGBTQ youth such as equal rights expectations regarding involvement in sports participation and bathroom access for transgender students. I conclude with a review of leadership practices regarding LGBTQ students.

Visibility Management

LGBTQ youth engage in a delicate and nuanced balance to reveal and/or conceal their identity that is informed by the school environment, teacher attitudes, and level of perceived support (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003). The process to reveal a sexual minority identity, commonly referred to as "coming out" for LGBTQ individuals, can lead to peer harassment resulting in suicide attempts (Rosario et al., 1996; D'Augelli, 2006). The meaning making development for LGBTQ youth identity can be difficult even in the most supportive environments. In their groundbreaking exploratory, qualitative study of 20 gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) youth aged 18 and under, Lasser and Tharinger (2003) utilized grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to facilitate and code semi-structured interviews. Absent a specific theory to test regarding the GLB youth experience in the school environment, their research methodology evolved from a list of "starting point" questions that led to additional questions, analysis, and innovative terminology. Lasser and Tharinger found that the GLB adolescent school experience is impacted by the students' "visibility management" (p. 237), a process that enables GLB youth to carefully plan when, how, and to whom they reveal their sexual orientation and identity in school. The researchers further distinguished "coming out" as an explicit action or *event* that LGBTQ youth engage in to disclose their sexual identity and/or orientation. Conversely, visibility management is a *process* that LGBTQ youth utilize along a continuum of time.

In subsequent research, Lasser et al. (2010) indicated that visibility management can have a profound impact on GLB life experiences including the ability to regulate stress, build self-esteem, and foster individual relationships. Visibility management enables GLB adolescents to regulate their disclosure of sexual orientation and maintain their privacy to minimize perceived and actual stigma, abuse, or marginalization. Visibility management therefore serves as a coping

strategy for GLB youth to command anticipated discrimination and prejudice (Dewaele et al., 2013).

Bullying, Harassment, and Violence

For the majority of their day, LGBTQ youth may be immersed in hostile school environments (Watson et al., 2010). LGBTQ youth report experiences of aggressive abuse and harassment during the school day (Kosciw et al., 2009). In the comprehensive 2017 National School Climate Survey conducted online from April through August 2017, researchers surveyed 23,001 LGBTQ students aged 13-21 (Kosciw et al., 2018). The survey topics included LGBTQ youth experiences regarding victimization, hostile school environment, and harassment and assault. Kosciw et al. revealed that 59.5% of LGBTQ students felt unsafe at school due to their sexual orientation (p. 14), 82.0% reported verbal harassment (p. 24), and 36.7% experienced physical harassment such as being shoved or pushed (p. 24). Further research has indicated that being harassed and assaulted at school can have a negative impact on LGBTQ students' mental health, self-esteem, and resiliency efforts (Greytak et al., 2016; Murdock & Bolch, 2005). The frequent bullying and harassment may have long-term effects for sexual minority youth.

In their expansive study on the school to prison pipeline for LGBTQ youth, researchers Snapp et al. (2015) interviewed 19 adult advocates (educators, school administrators and counselors), surveyed 322 self-identified LGBTQ youth, and conducted focus groups with 31 LGBTQ youth of color. Snapp et al. posit that the over-representation of LGBTQ youth in juvenile detention facilities is informed by factors that include LGBTQ youth being punished for non-violent misconduct such as public displays of affection and violating gender norms via their clothing choices and physical appearance/expression. Snapp et al. further report that sexual

minority youth who experienced hostile school environments engaged in fighting to protect themselves and were often blamed for their own victimization.

Research also reveals that rejection experiences from home such as verbal and physical abuse has led to students who runaway and other survival tactics. Garnette et al. (2011) argue that LGBTQ youth are twice as likely as their heterosexual peers to be detained for non-violent offenses such as running away, prostitution, and truancy. Snapp et al. (2015) recommend additional research to better understand the school environmental factors that impact how LGBTQ are disciplined for offenses such as public displays of affection, defending themselves, and truancy.

Laws and Policies

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) provides guidance for public schools to create a safe and supportive school environment for students, with amended language in 2012 that explicitly outlines additional protections on the basis of gender identity. This expanded language for anti-discrimination regarding gender identity was informed by the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In Part I: Administration of the Government, Title XII: Education, Chapter 76: School Attendance, Section 5 states:

> No person shall be excluded from or discriminated against in admission to a public school of any town, or in obtaining the advantages, privileges and courses of study of such public school on account of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin or sexual orientation.
>
> https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter76/Section5

Massachusetts DESE Laws and Regulations

In eight of the nine sections of the 603 Code of Massachusetts Regulations (CMR) 26.00: Access to Equal Educational Opportunity (Massachusetts DESE, 2019) there is explicit language regarding anti-discrimination protections for students "on the basis of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation." In section 26.01: Purpose and Construction: Definition, gender identity is defined as:

> ... a person's gender-related identity, appearance or behavior, whether or not that gender-related identity, appearance or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with the person's physiology or assigned sex at birth. Gender-related identity may be shown by providing evidence including, but not limited to, medical history, care or treatment of the gender-related identity, consistent and uniform assertion of the gender-related identity, or any other evidence that the gender-related identity is sincerely held as part of a person's core identity; provided, however, that gender-related identity shall not be asserted for any improper purpose. http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr26.html

In short, DESE strives to explicitly communicate a comprehensive definition regarding gender identity in support of student rights. Additional detailed protections under CMR 26:00 include equal access to school admissions (26.02); equal admission to courses of study (26.03); anti-discrimination regarding career and educational guidance (26.04); curricula that thwarts demeaning generalizations, and equal access to physical education (26.05). Protections also include equal access to extracurricular activities (26:06); school committee establishment of policies and procedures to remove obstacles regarding equal access to school programs (26:07); and the inclusion of these above required obligations for anti-discrimination policies in school

handbooks (26:08). While all of these protections are critical for LGBTQ youth, section 26.07 makes explicit reference that school districts:

> ... shall provide in-service training for all school personnel at least annually regarding the prevention of discrimination and harassment based upon race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin and sexual orientation, and the appropriate methods for responding to such discrimination and harassment in a school setting.
>
> http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr26.html?section=07

Specifically, Massachusetts school superintendents must ensure that annual professional learning regarding the prevention of discrimination and harassment for LGBTQ youth is provided for all school personnel. Guidance for the professional learning can be found via the DESE Office of Student and Family Support (SFS) that includes information and school district expectations for LGBTQ youth under the Safe School Program for LGBTQ Students. The Safe School Program was founded in 1993 in response to growing concerns for LGBTQ youth suicides and other risk factors (Massachusetts DESE, 2016). The Safe School Program offers services and professional learning designed to enable school districts to implement state laws regarding anti-bullying, gender identity, and student anti-discrimination. Indeed, the Safe School Program guidance includes relevant LGBTQ topics such as gender identity (p. 4), gender transition (p. 6), names and pronouns (p. 7), and restrooms, locker rooms, and changing facilities (p. 10).

Another critical component of this LGBTQ youth literature review is the DESE Safe School Program's (2019) list of nine principles. Adopted in March 2015, the principles include:

1. Schools must have policies, and update them as needed, protecting LGBTQ students from harassment, violence, and discrimination based on LGBTQ status, to ensure compliance with the law

2. Schools must include content about violence and suicide prevention related to LGBTQ students in their required training for school personnel

3. Schools are encouraged to offer school-based groups for LGBTQ and heterosexual students

4. Schools are encouraged to provide support for family members of LGBTQ students

5. School districts are encouraged to designate a staff member who is proficient in issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity

6. Schools, through their curricula, shall encourage respect for the human and civil rights of all individuals, including LGBTQ individuals

7. Schools are encouraged to provide age-appropriate information about LGBTQ issues in school libraries and in student and faculty resource centers

8. Schools are encouraged to have a diverse workforce

9. Schools are encouraged to review academic and non-academic policies and procedures, and available data, to identify issues or patterns that may create barriers to a safe and successful learning experience for LGBTQ students

   http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/lgbtq/Principles-SafeEnvironment.html

Leadership Practices Regarding LGBTQ Students

There is growing research regarding LGBTQ youth in schools (Heck et al., 2016) that includes the positive effects to diminish bullying and harassment via Gay/Straight Alliances (Seelman et al., 2015), advocacy from school counselors (Watson et al., 2010), and the role of the school psychologist (Cook & Eby, 2014). In their review of research, Heck at al. (2016) detail copious findings regarding the existence and/or championing of advocacy efforts for LGBTQ students. However, there is less research regarding the explicit roles and practices that

are enacted by district and school leaders in support of LGBTQ students which is the focus of this current study.

The research related to advocacy and support of LGBTQ students seldom identifies the conditions within a district or school that enable support efforts to occur such as the leaders' definitive leadership moves to enact policies or practices. However, whether it is the distinct attitudes, beliefs, and/or practices enacted by district and school leaders or the public demands of LGBTQ advocacy, the leaders are responsible for the daily school environment (Khalifa et al., 2016). For example, the existence of Gay/Straight Alliances in a school may suggest that the district and school leaders are supportive of inclusivity and advocacy efforts.

Methodology

This individual study within the group research applied qualitative methodology via a case study approach. Yin (1984) defines case study research methodology "as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). I collected data via semi-structured interviews, document reviews, and an observation of a student organization meeting to better understand behaviors and conditions that impact the LGBTQ experience in an urban district.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data from this case study was collected from August 2019 to February 2020. For each of the data sources listed above, I analyzed and coded the data to identify patterns that supported or contradicted culturally responsive leadership in support of LGBTQ youth. To strengthen and refine my data gathering processes and practices, I utilized multiple cycles of coding, starting with initial codes that surfaced regarding leaders' knowledge, attitude/beliefs, and practices.

Next, during the analysis phase related to the conceptual framework, I recoded the data for patterns and themes through a lens which examined whether and how leaders: 1) promoted inclusivity; 2) built relationships among and between students and teachers; 3) challenged exclusionary practices and behaviors; 4) used student voice; and 5) modeled culturally responsive school leadership.

Semi-structured Interviews

For this individual case study, I utilized purposive sampling, also known as selective, or subjective sampling, as a form of non-probability sampling to determine the district and school leaders who participated in the interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This sampling method required a selection of eligible participants who self-identified or were recommended as culturally responsive leaders. The semi-structured interviews included questions regarding district and school LGBTQ student policies and procedures, inclusive school events and celebrations, extracurricular activities such as student organizations and sports, and the enacted curriculum. Interview questions were adapted from the GLSEN Safe Space Kit (2019) and Personal and School Assessment (2012) and included:

- What are the observable behaviors and practices that make this district/school a visible ally to LGBTQ students?

- If a student were to come out to you as LGBTQ, what would be your first thought?

- How, if at all, does your curriculum include information about LGBTQ people, including LGBTQ people of color, history and events?

- How, if at all, do non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies explicitly protect LGBTQ students?

- When you consider the supports that currently exist for LGBTQ students, what is
  working well? How do you know? What supports can be strengthened for LGBTQ
  students?

Interview participants included four district-level administrators, a high school principal, a
middle school principal, and two teacher leaders (one middle school, and one high school). The
two teacher leaders were identified by their respective principal as being responsive toward
LGBTQ students. Each participant was interviewed individually for 45-60 minutes.

Document Review

This case study included an analysis of documents such as district policies and
procedures in support of LGBTQ youth, professional learning presentations, student organization
Mission, Vision, and Value statements, and agendas and minutes of student organization
meetings. The document review included an analysis of whether and how the district met the
laws, regulations, and policies as outlined in Massachusetts DESE expectations in support of
students who self-identify as LGBTQ.

Observation

I observed a middle school Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) meeting and utilized an
observation protocol (See Appendix C) to record behaviors, comments, and practices that
revealed or contradicted culturally responsive practices in support of LGBTQ youth (Creswell,
2012). I coded and recoded elements such as LGBTQ student participation and representation,
inclusive language for LGBTQ issues such as anti-bullying, and celebratory affirmations of
LGBTQ visibility.

Limitations

Findings from this case study may not be generalizable to other district or school contexts. Additionally, participant bias toward LGBTQ youth may have influenced participants' reporting of whether and how the district supported LGBTQ students. Lastly, I did not explore the academic achievement of LGBTQ students. While prior research indicates that being safe in school can impact student achievement, I did not examine whether or how district and school leaders strive to enact policies or practices that are explicit to support or improve academic improvement.

Findings

This study examined district and school leaders' practices in support of LGBTQ students. Accordingly, the question that guided this research was: How, if at all, do district and school leaders' knowledge, attitudes/beliefs, and practices support LGBTQ youth? For this study, the term "leaders" refers to four district administrators, two school administrators, and two school teacher leaders. Findings for this case study are organized into three major themes. First, leaders engaged in intentional actions that created conditions for LGBTQ student voice and visibility. Second, leaders facilitated normalization of LGBTQ advocacy and discourse. Third, leaders created and implemented sustained actions and structures for LGBTQ student inclusion that yielded student-led activism.

Leaders Created Conditions for LGBTQ Voice and Visibility

Two senior-level district leaders, both school administrators, and both teacher leaders reported a conviction for listening to LGBTQ student voice as a means to develop the students' sense of belonging in the school environment. All six leaders described specific instances when they reached out to LGBTQ youth to hear directly from them as a means to establish or sustain

open communication. These efforts, in turn, generated district and school leadership actions that confirmed the leaders were moving from listening to students' concerns and recommendations to engaging in observable leadership practices in support of LGBTQ youth.

All eight leaders reported a need to create conditions to provide a safe space within school environments. The conditions included opportunities for district and school leaders to learn how to support LGBTQ youth by engaging in listening tours at students' homes and providing opportunities to hear directly from the students in school. Both school administrators created conditions that led to LGBTQ student voice and visibility via the Gender Sexuality Alliance student organizations in their respective secondary level schools. Additionally, both school leaders and both teacher leaders revealed their efforts to navigate the delicate balance of LGBTQ student identity between home and school.

Leaders' Willingness to Learn about LGBTQ Issues

Two senior level district leaders, both school administrators, and both teacher leaders reported a need to better understand how to support LGBTQ youth. In fact, the district assistant superintendent acknowledged his eagerness to learn about LGBTQ youth issues informed by his limited knowledge.

> I bring in consultants to work with the students and support them, because I have
>
> information, but I'm no expert, especially in LGBTQ. I know a lot, but I'm not an expert.
>
> I'd rather have experts to guide us and make sure that we're doing everything
>
> appropriately and learn during the process.

Listening to learn from LGBTQ youth was reported by the district superintendent and assistant superintendent. They described their efforts to engage in listening tours to learn directly from students, families, and community members in order to first understand, and then respond to, the

LGBTQ advocacy needs in the school district. The superintendent recounted the learning action, "We went out to about 12 homes and maybe another three or four different institutions. We sat there each time for an hour and a half, two hours, having intimate conversations about families who want to talk about LGBTQ issues." Similarly, the district assistant superintendent recounted his efforts to ensure that the entire district level leadership heard directly from the students:

> I heard some pretty disturbing things from the students. Immediately when I heard it, I said, "Okay, I can't be the only one that hears this. I need there to be a response from the district." I went to the superintendent and said, "I need you to bring the leadership team here." I asked, "Can you bring the entire meeting to the high school? I want the kids to present on their experience."

This leadership action resulted in a meeting between the high school GSA and the senior level district leaders. In reference to that first meeting with LGBTQ youth at the high school, the assistant superintendent shared, "It was good in the sense of understanding past practices within the school that have been disruptive." He reported that one of the past practices included limited access to condoms at the school, a practice that has since changed. The assistant superintendent shared that the change was informed by the students' voice for increased accessibility to condoms, "We listened to their concerns about the condoms and then acted on it." In other words, the two most senior district leaders demonstrated an explicit leadership action to build relationships and reach out to the students, families, and community members to learn precisely from them. The listening tours served as opportunities to increase their knowledge and understanding regarding LGBTQ youth concerns and needs.

Leaders' Willingness to Listen to Student Voice for Organizing

Both school administrators and both teacher leaders reported their response to student voice to formally organize and recognize LGBTQ youth Gender Sexuality Alliances (GSA). The teacher leaders from each school reported there was one GSA at the middle school and another at the high school. They also reported that both student organizations, informed by student voice, transitioned their group name from Gay/Straight Alliance to Gender Sexuality Alliance to promote an inclusive belongingness among LGBTQ students and allies. The middle school teacher leader shared:

> Students came to us and asked for this club. We had kids that were identifying as LGBTQ and then kids that were allies. They really wanted a place where they could come and talk about different topics and get support. And it was really exciting. We started seven years ago and we made a presentation for the Parent Teacher Organization and asked if they had any questions. They didn't.

As a result of the student presentation, the LGBTQ youth club was formed. At the time of this research, the middle school GSA included fifteen middle school students. The principal from the middle school explained why she believed the GSA provided a safe space for LGBTQ visibility management, particularly for youth who are not yet ready to identify as LGBTQ.

> I believe the GSA is important for our kids. She (GSA sponsor) encourages allies to come to the meetings, which I think then allows kids that may actually identify as lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, but haven't come out yet, to be in that safe environment. They may call themselves an ally, not having to out themselves to their friends.

Additionally, the teacher leader at the same middle school reported that students' engagement in the GSA provided a safe environment where LGBTQ youth could experiment with self-identity

options among peers. "A lot of kids may come out here, they may use different names to identify

themselves. They do some gender code switching in the GSA, but they choose to not be

identified outside because it's GSA."

Leaders' Willingness to Respond to LGBTQ Youth Voice

After learning that a high school teacher was reluctant to post signage in their classroom in

support of LGBTQ youth, the assistant superintendent shared his intentional actions to reach out

and listen to the students' concerns.

> One of the first things that I did was to actually meet with LGBTQ students to hear about
>
> their experiences within the district. They shared with me stories of a teacher who not so
>
> recently refused to put up a sign that reads, 'This is a welcoming place for students.' And
>
> so, we asked them, 'Can you give me the commandments? Give me four or five things
>
> we need to work on.' And what they said was, 'We want to raise the flag.'

In direct response to the students' petition to raise the Pride Flag, a universal symbol of visibility

and inclusion among LGBTQ youth, the assistant superintendent reported his actions to enable

the students to lead the efforts to plan and actualize the flag raising. Ultimately, in response to

the students' experience with this particular teacher, the assistant superintendent reported his

leadership action for LGBTQ youth advocacy informed by student voice. He did not require or

mandate that the teacher post the sign. Instead, he reported the specific arrangements to raise the

Pride Flag per the students' request. Moreover, he emphasized the need to continue to engage

beyond the school environment and integrate the LGBTQ youth advocacy into the local

community and district office. "So, we went to the VA's office and veterans and got the whole

thing sorted. We're going to raise the Pride Flag again this year for the students. But we're also

going to establish an actual working council with them so they can have more direct access to the central office leadership."

The district superintendent reported his belief that LGBTQ student voice was critical to inform actions in support of transgender athletes. He shared that listening to student's concerns led to district actions for school facility design.

I've popped into a number of the GSA meetings and members of the school committee have joined as well, just to talk with the kids and give them voice. And now we are looking at changing our bathroom structures to make sure that we're moving away and eliminating the gender specificity of bathrooms. So that's been a big lift for us, because of the facility cost to do that. Spacing, locker room showers, and things that you're trying to give privacy.

The superintendent also reported that in March 2018, the school district became the first in Massachusetts to develop and implement an inclusive sports participation policy. The policy was informed, in part, by student voice, and includes explicit definitions for changing areas, hotel room overnight stays, and team uniforms. He reported:

The impetus for the transgender athlete policy was when we were trying to support a student athlete who had transitioned. We felt that we were unprepared and that in order to shift the culture in our programs we needed to commit our beliefs to formalized language. As a result, our policy has become a model for many communities.

Document review of the Inclusive Sports Policy revealed a comprehensive definition of terms regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. The policy concludes with a specific reference for professional training.

The District shall provide culturally-competent training regarding this policy to all staff, including but not limited to athletic department staff and coaches, and to all student-athletes, including captains, on an annual basis as well as at the start of each athletic season for the student-athletes.

Furthermore, both school principals and teacher leaders referenced their need to listen, and respond to, transgender student voice. These leaders shared instances of engaging with transgender youth to ensure that the students felt safe in school. The middle school principal described a professional learning opportunity for school staff to hear directly from a transgender student. "We had a transgender boy come and speak to the staff and really just say, "It's about the head, not what's between the legs." When asked how this message was received by staff members, the principal continued:

I think there's a lot of people that still have a long way to go to accepting gender identity. We could do a lot more professional development. I believe on the outside all teachers are accepting, but I think there are many teachers still struggling with the information. As adults we don't struggle, my generation doesn't struggle really with gay or lesbian, because we kind of grew up with that. But I think it's the transgender piece and helping people understand what we need to do to be welcoming and accepting.

While the district's Inclusive Sports Policy has enabled explicit advocacy and support for LGBTQ youth, particularly students identifying as transgender, this principal's commentary highlighted the need for additional professional learning across the district. Regarding the need for further professional learning, the superintendent shared:

While we have spent considerable time engaging our staff and coaches in these conversations, the voices of our high school GSA and our own observations and

understanding of held beliefs among staff and families have made it clear that this work

will be ongoing. To the extent that we are able, ensuring that our schools across the

district celebrate diversity and inclusivity will be a huge step forward, but shifting culture

takes time. Personal student narratives - students courageously telling their teachers and

those adults in their lives of how they feel day-to-day in their school and extracurricular

lives - may be a powerful impetus to continue the professional learning conversation. As

a leadership team, we will continue to prioritize this cultural shift throughout our district.

Specifically, this district leader made explicit reference to "student narratives" to inform future

professional learning opportunities for district staff members.

Normalization of LGBTQ Advocacy and Discourse

Leadership actions to learn directly from LGBTQ youth regarding students' perspective,

needs, and desires for belongingness served as a normalizing factor for LGBTQ advocacy in the

middle school and high school. All eight leaders reported district and school level efforts to

conduct open discourse with LGBTQ youth as a means to universalize the students' experiences

in school. The reported conversations included opportunities to engage LGBTQ youth across

schools, managing LGBTQ self-identity management, and LGBTQ student confidentiality.

Leaders' Actions to Normalize Discourse

In reference to discourse with LGBTQ students, the middle school principal shared, "I've

gone to different meetings that they have, to learn. I've gone to their diversity nights. There's a

lot of activism around all marginalized groups in our school community and I'm there with

them." This principal reported her explicit efforts to engage with LGBTQ youth to learn from

them. In fact, the leader reported a collaborative endeavor between the high school and middle

school youth to create a shared learning experience among the LGBTQ students. She disclosed

that this collaboration effort enabled the school and teacher leaders to better understand common experiences among the LGBTQ student age groups.

> We have had, in the past, kids from the LGBTQ community from the high school come over and meet with our club as a bridge so that the kids can understand each other and we can understand what they need. And it was interesting. The first time they came, I sat in their meeting. That was probably three or four years ago. And it was a little...I needed some time to process after. I've come a long way since then. My worry isn't the same. It's a great thing that they share their message, and I think it's okay that we do this in a safe setting.

This principal expressed her evolving knowledge, perspective, and comfort level in support of LGBTQ youth informed by her willingness to learn directly from the students. Her personal and professional evolution was informed by the LGBTQ students' discourse. Similarly, the high school principal revealed that she too has learned to intentionally strive to build relationships to broaden her personal and professional perspective by interacting with, and learning from, LGBTQ students and teachers.

> I learn. I try to get better and better and better by surrounding myself with people who have had different experiences than me. Because that makes me a better principal to understand the experiences of students and teachers from all walks of life and from all backgrounds, including the LGBTQ community.

That same principal reflected on the impact of public perception regarding the leaders' willingness to normalize LGBTQ issues as informed by senior-level district leaders' modeling.

> I think it's an outward way to the public to say we support all kids. We support our LGBTQ community, whether it is children or adults. And we have worked since he

(assistant superintendent) met with us and I have also worked with the superintendent. I feel like it's brought our community together, having such support all the way up to central office.

This school principal explicitly referenced how the district superintendent and assistant superintendent have modeled leadership actions for LGBTQ youth, thus demonstrating alignment from the central office to the schools for advocacy efforts across the district. These district and school level conversations to build and sustain LGTBQ youth belongingness are becoming commonplace and universalized within the district. The superintendent shared, 'I think the conversations with LGBTQ are much more open conversations than we've had in the past."

Leaders' Actions to Normalize Support for LGBTQ Identity Process

The collective and sustained leadership practices to support students as they managed their self-identity in the LGBTQ community were reported across the various levels of leadership: district, school, and teacher. The superintendent and assistant superintendent, both school administrators, and both teacher leaders communicated the importance of acknowledging and protecting students' self-identity management as LGBTQ youth. All six leaders reported the need to ensure that LGBTQ students felt safe and accepted at school while navigating a fragile balance of less support, regarding their LGBTQ identity, from the home environment. The superintendent reported:

I need to figure out this way for us to do it that ensures that, for kids who are not out at home, we are not giving out information. Because I don't want to have a situation where in the school, we're communicating appropriately with the student pronouns, maybe using a different name. And then the parent either accesses that information online, or comes

into the school community and that information is communicated. It puts the student in a

difficult and challenging circumstance.

This senior level district leader revealed his understanding that in order to safeguard LGBTQ

students' identity there may be potential disharmony between school and home.

Similarly, regarding possible school and home disruption for LGBTQ identity, both

school principals concurred that cautious measures were essential for students who were

managing their unique self-identity process. The high school principal referenced the process of

students managing their LGBTQ identity along with the intersections of the school and the

home.

I would also be really careful in wanting to do what the student wants me to do. So how

do you want me to approach this? What are you comfortable with me saying? Because I

would never want to presume that a student would want me to say this or do that without

their permission and consent. It's the same with their parents, too. Right? How do they

feel about my role in supporting them if their parents are not aware?

This school leader revealed how she has responded to and supported students who self-identify

as LGBTQ at school.

First, I consider how I can support them. What can I do to support them as they're coming

out? Transitioning? What do they need from me to make them comfortable, happy,

confident, able to focus on studying, feeling connected to the school community?

Support. That is my number one thought.

The high school principal also emphasized her leadership actions to provide support for the

LGBTQ youth to promote inclusivity. She continued, "Kids really need to know that, all students

need to know that, school is really their home, it's a second home. I want them to come into

school feeling loved and supported and honored for who they are. They deserve that. We owe that to all of our kids."

Likewise, regarding students who are maneuvering their LGBTQ identity, the high school teacher leader revealed:

> We find them the supports that they need and try to help them through every step of the way. We've had some kids who come out and have suffered through a nightmare at home. I mean things that the mind can't wrap itself around that happen at home. We always try to keep them connected with their family first because sometimes that's all they have. But if it gets to the point where it becomes dangerous, we also help them find another plan.

This high school teacher leader revealed her leadership practice to determine whether and how to collaborate with students and other school staff members as the students maneuver their decision-making processes for LGBTQ self-identity. She also shared her deliberate actions to thoughtfully support students who are navigating their self-identity process.

> Well, they do come out to me. A lot of times they come out in our GSA meeting. We talk about what's the best way to go about this. We talk about whether they should or should not come out to their parents yet. Or if they decide, what is a good decision. We have professionals here, especially one of our professionals who works with kids making decisions on when, if at all, it's a good idea to come out to your parents depending on who the parents are. If there's supports needed, we find them the supports, whether it's in school or in the community. We get them supports if they need it. In the past, we've gotten them LGBTQ supports outside of the school.

Similarly, the middle school teacher leader emphasized her cautious approach and sustained actions to support LGBTQ youth as they "come out" and self-identify to her.

Students have come out and that's part of my role here and it's interesting how students choose to talk about it. Some kids are so just so relieved. Some kids, it's really hard for them to put it in words, so they'll write it on paper and share it with me. What I talk about with students in here is confidential and that's what I tell all the children. I would never ever out a child, ever, to a parent, to guardian or staff.

This teacher leader divulged her nuanced method which served to normalize and promote inclusivity for LGBTQ youth while maintaining confidentiality for those youth who are not yet ready to communicate their LGBTQ identity with parents.

Leaders' Actions to Normalize LGBTQ Student Visibility

All eight leaders referenced the significance of structured and sustained LGBTQ visibility in the school environment, specifically via efforts that stemmed from the GSA. The middle school principal reported that the GSA had a significant and positive impact for LGBTQ students and their peers as allies to create a safe space within school.

We have a Day of Silence here, where kids will sign a contract, wear a sticker, where they're not going to talk so they're supporting the LGBTQ community. Our club does different events throughout the year to kind of highlight what their work is. We also try to encourage allies to join in, which many of them do.

The middle school teacher leader affirmed the importance of utilizing the Day of Silence, a student-led anti-bullying protest in support of LGBTQ youth in schools, as a means to bring awareness to LGBTQ discrimination experiences. The teacher leader reported that the Day of Silence created an opportunity for peer allies to pledge an anti-bullying stance. She offered this perspective, "We always talk about kids, LGBTQ kids who have been bullied when we do Day of Silence, those whose voices have been silenced. We're standing in solidarity with them and

that's why we're taking the pledge." Both the middle school principal and teacher leader demonstrated a shared understanding about the intent and impact of student-led empowerment efforts to create bonding relationships between the LGBTQ youth and peer allies. Their reflections regarding the Day of Silence experience illuminated their willingness to listen, and respond to, LGBTQ student voice for advocacy.

Both school principals reported making diligent efforts to orchestrate opportunities for the GSA to serve as a safe haven for LGBTQ youth. By intentionally structuring a sense of belonging, partnered with a discernment toward safeguard measures such as strongly enacted anti-bullying policies, both principals shared how they buoyed GSA student members to engage in social awareness and activism. In fact, the high school principal emphasized that LGBTQ empowerment was a hallmark of her leadership:

> I have given the students a lot of opportunities to be front and center. I support them every time they have an idea, 'Can we come to the faculty meeting? Can you invite the teachers to this activity we're having?' So, you'd find that the students would tell you, because they've told me, that through my allegiance to them, they feel empowered to not only be themselves but to promote the message of love and unity in the school community.

This school principal revealed that she has tapped into the students' leadership expertise thus providing LGBTQ youth visibility and acknowledgment in the school environment.

Leaders' Actions to Normalize an Anti-bullying Stance Toward LGBTQ Identity

The superintendent, assistant superintendent, and both school principals reported zero tolerance for peer-to-peer bullying regarding LGBTQ identity. The leaders reported their sustained actions to challenge bullying exclusionary behaviors. The high school principal shared:

The students in the GSA are making us better. They're bringing unity and allegiance to one another and the removal of any kind of hate in our school. That's essential. You cannot have hate in the school community. There can be no place for hate of any kind towards anyone because that makes our school unsafe. We do not tolerate it and we immediately meet with the aggressor and victim to ensure that it stops.

Similarly, the high school teacher leader affirmed this anti-bullying stance for LGBTQ youth in school. She shared:

We are mindful of the bullying. How do we best support this child? I always say whether or not someone's gay, if they're being called gay or they're being made fun of for their sex, it's crossing the line and we talk about that. There's teasing and then there's crossing the line. And bullying regarding LGBTQ is illegal. So, we do a lot of educating with kids that bullying is against the law.

The middle school teacher leader also confirmed the anti-bullying position at their school. When asked about leaders' actions to bullying aggressors, she replied:

If it's just a one-time thing, and there needs to be an educational process, then that's what it is. If it's a bullying issue, that it's been ongoing, that's a different thing and that's handled case by case with full discipline measures. It would be just like any other type of hate crime. In this school, if you are going to be hateful and hurt other kids, that's it. It's going to be taken care of. There are consequences.

Leaders Created and Implemented Structures Toward Student-led Activism

For the third theme of findings in this case study, I found that recursive and sustained leadership actions and structures toward LGBTQ youth acceptance ushered student-led activism into the school environment. The reported practices included providing options for LGBTQ

students to lead learning experiences for peers and educators, enacting opportunities for students to address anti-bullying, and promoting student agency to identify next step actions for LGBTQ curriculum and instruction.

Leadership Practice to Enable Student-led Learning

Both principals explained how the GSA organizations provided opportunities for LGBTQ youth to design and facilitate learning experiences for peers and educators. The leaders reported that the learning experiences included information regarding how to support and advocate for LGBTQ youth in the school environment. The middle school principal shared:

> The GSA students designed the sessions. They got up and presented at community meetings. In our school, we have community meetings once a month. Sixth grade would go into the auditorium one morning, then seventh grade, then eighth. Our students said, "This is what's going on." They put together a PowerPoint presentation with a little video of being kind, seeking support, and what that looks like for LGBTQ kids.

During my observation of a middle school GSA meeting, the student members recounted the impact of the student-led presentations. As they debriefed their efforts to present to their peers, one sixth grade student reviewed the motivation for the learning sessions:

> I'm glad we decided to focus on the mental health crisis for LGBTQ kids. We noticed that kids were experiencing stress. We were concerned about self-harm. It can be hard for us. What started as a conversation in GSA turned into our presentations. We did an awesome job to research the mental health support. Then we created the flyers and then we did the presentations.

When asked by the teacher leader whether all the GSA student members had conducted their presentation, ten of the fifteen members confirmed. She then asked, "What could you do if you

haven't yet done the presentation?" The students offered suggestions, including supporting each other to speak to the homeroom teachers as a reminder that the presentation needed to occur. The teacher leader offered her support, "If you want me to send an email to remind teachers, I can do it. But as advocates for yourselves, you can ask to do it first. Let me know how you want me to proceed." In short, the GSA student members determined the learning topic and then researched, designed, and facilitated the learning. Additionally, the middle school teacher leader encouraged student agency to own presentations that had not yet occurred.

At the high school, the teacher leader reported the importance of student access to the staff in order to provide professional learning. She shared:

> I send the GSA members to the principal and that gives them a sense of leadership. The fact that the principal has wanted the students to present at faculty meetings is so important. The kids were empowered to say, 'I'm a lesbian, I'm asexual, I'm pansexual,' explain what it means, feel good about it, go over terms, and tell the faculty what they would like to see in our school.

Leadership Practice to Enable Student-led Anti-bullying Efforts

The middle school teacher leader described the student-led efforts to combat bullying toward LGBTQ youth. She explained that the GSA student members created and made daily school announcements for one week that culminated with a school-wide Ally Day:

> What we really try to do is educate the school community and make it a safe and inclusive environment for everyone. This is the poster I wanted to show you. Tomorrow we're celebrating Ally Day. It is students stand up against bullying and be an ally. The kids are going to sign a link. I'll show you the ally pledge that we have.

Upon review, the daily announcements included information regarding the definition of an ally, why students should choose to be an ally, and actions that allies can take. The informational poster included, "An ally believes all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, deserve to feel safe and supported." When reviewing the poster, the teacher leader shared, "So we're just kind of defining it for them. It's educating."

Leadership Practice to Enable Student-led Suggestions for LGBTQ Curriculum

During my observation of the middle school GSA meeting, the teacher leader asked the student members to consider their next level efforts for LGBTQ advocacy in the school. A seventh grade student shared:

> We need to start teaching about LGBTQ struggles and history. Like Black History Month, we need to learn about the heroes and the progress we have made. Like, how to learn and accept the contributions from the LGBTQ community. But there needs to be sensitivity for the language that we use.

I observed that this comment generated animated interest among the GSA student members, and eight of the fifteen members raised their hand to contribute to the conversation. The student chairperson of the GSA called on an eighth grade student who had self-identified in the LGBTQ community at the start of the meeting. She explained, "I'm researching for an opinion piece that I'm writing about Stonewall. It's such an important part of the LGBTQ history and we need to share it." When another GSA member asked for more information about Stonewall, the student continued to explain to her peers, "It happened on June 28, 1969. Police kept raiding this gay bar. They locked up drag queens and kings. They were fed up and so they created a riot. It's an important part of the LGBTQ community fighting back for their rights. We can teach about it in our curriculum." The teacher leader wrote the ideas as the students spoke with each other. Noting

that it was almost time for the meeting to end, she suggested that the students arrive to the next meeting prepared to offer more suggestions for the middle school curriculum. "Where do we get more information? We can launch a research effort. We would also need to give teachers time to build a curriculum in the future. Where would we start?" The students then named teachers who they thought could support the curriculum and be proactive.

At the high school, the principal reported efforts to include LGBTQ topics in the curriculum. She explained:

> We are working with the local State University right now on our history curriculum. We're doing a lot of work on ensuring that we are including the LGTBQ community. History is kind of piloting it, but we're talking about it in English and math and science. How do we showcase the achievements, the excellence, and the contributions of LGBTQ educators, musicians, and people in history?

When asked whether students have contributed to the curriculum effort, the principal replied, "Oh absolutely. It started with their request for more LGBTQ representation."

Discussion

Data analysis from this study revealed four themes. First, leaders created and sustained safe environments in schools for LGBTQ youth. Second, leaders made efforts to urge the normalization of LGBTQ advocacy and discourse. Third, leaders afforded opportunities for LGBTQ student-led activism. Lastly, district and school leaders need to further their systemic efforts toward establishing and implementing inclusive LGBTQ curriculum and instruction.

Safe School Environment for LGBTQ Youth

Data analysis revealed leaders' intentional actions and practices that were specific and sustained to create school environments toward LGBTQ youth feeling safe. This finding aligns

to previous research, regarding LGBTQ students feeling safe in school (Greytak et al., 2016). Given the potential to be bullied or harassed due to their LGBTQ identity, both school leaders set the tone for advocacy in school for sexual minority youth. In fact, one school leader remarked, "What do the LGBTQ students need from me to make them comfortable, happy, confident, able to focus on studying, feeling connected to the school community? Support and safety. That is my number one thought." Similarly, the teacher leader at the same school reported, "In the absence of relationships with adults, caring supportive, adults, students become extremely vulnerable, especially if they have no support outside of school. School has to be the safe haven."

School leaders directly shape how schools enact systemic actions to create and sustain a safe space for all learners (Kosciw et al., 2009). Findings in the present study are consistent with this research. In fact, the middle school teacher leader shared, "Having an adult in the school community such as their principal be a person they know they can trust, who will honor and respect their wishes, will empower them to feel safe."

Normalization of LGBTQ Advocacy and Discourse

Data analysis for this study found that the superintendent, assistant superintendent, both school leaders, and both teacher leaders made definitive efforts to normalize conversations in schools for LGBTQ advocacy, including the GSA structure. These efforts included engaging in direct conversation between leaders and LGBTQ students to learn directly from the youth regarding advocacy needs. Previous research indicates that district and school leaders' efforts to create a sense of belonging is a critical baseline for LGBTQ youth in the school environment (Poteat et al., 2017). However, aiming toward a sense of belonging in isolated safe havens within a school is not enough (Sadowski, 2016). There is an existing body of research regarding events to support LGBTQ youth in schools such as the Day of Silence and structures such as GSAs

(Kosciw et al., 2014**).** However, there is less research regarding district and school leaders'

explicit actions and practices that enable LGBTQ advocacy to begin in the first place. Findings

from this present study, albeit preliminary, suggest that district and school leaders can enact and

name systemic leadership practices that support LGBTQ students. In other words, advocacy

actions for LGBTQ youth can be intentional, not happenstance, and be informed by leaders'

knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs.

When describing the straightforward initial actions toward accessibility by the then new

school principal, one teacher leader reported, "She visited me a few times, especially in the

beginning, to say welcome and anything you need. That was never done before, never done

before her. She introduces herself and tells the kids where she can be found and that has made a

big difference." In fact, school leaders' accessibility transitioned from LGBTQ students feeling

safe to leading activism efforts.

Student-led Activism

The data revealed that LGBTQ student voice was a contributing factor for leadership

advocacy actions. Findings in this study included student voice to inform the district Inclusive

Sports Policy, anti-bullying efforts, and professional learning for staff. Consulting experiences

between students and teachers can contribute to elevating the impact of student voice in the

school community (Quinn & Owen, 2014). The high school principal explained, "We have a lot

of activism among the kids and I'm so proud of them for that. I want the teachers to know what

they're doing. I want to celebrate the work that they're doing. They're making us better." There

are similarities between the present study and those described by Heck et al. (2016) regarding

LGBTQ students benefiting from positive relationships with a nurturing adult that can lead to

student-led activism.

LGBTQ Curriculum and Instruction are Limited

Analysis of data from this study surfaced a district need to research, develop, and implement a systemic curriculum regarding LGBTQ history. While initial efforts to include LGBTQ content are being made at the high school level, the superintendent, assistant superintendent, both school principals, both teacher leaders, and middle school students agree that LGBTQ curriculum must be addressed to further promote inclusivity. However, it is essential to ensure that student voice be included when determining the LGBTQ content. The middle school GSA student members revealed that they are willing to contribute to this effort. Additionally, it is critical that the LGBTQ curriculum content be made available to all students at the middle and high school levels to avoid limiting access to only those students who identify in the LGBTQ community. The curriculum can be universally integrated and made relevant to all students to avoid minoritizing the content to LGTBQ student populations (Douglas, 2014).

In summary, this individual slice of a group study regarding support for marginalized student populations in a school district unearthed findings regarding district- and school- level leadership actions toward LGBTQ student advocacy. This study also uncovered a need to increase efforts for systemic LGBTQ curriculum implementation. Chapter 4 of the overarching study will include discussion of the collective findings across the four individual case studies and recommendations to be considered by the district.

CHAPTER FOUR[4]

Discussion

This overarching study explored how district and school leaders supported and advocated for marginalized student populations. As such, our research team examined the ways in which the district initiated and sustained efforts to support these students through district and school leadership practices. Soria (2020) examined district and school leaders' practices in support of LGBTQ students. Pellegrino (2020) examined culturally responsive practices in relation to discipline. Amy (2020) examined perceptions of school and district leaders about fostering teacher leadership, specifically to support emergent bilingual and Latinx students. Finally, Slaney (2020) examined the leadership practices engaged in to develop both the leaders' and the teachers' cultural awareness and self-reflection. Collectively, these individual studies contributed to answering our overarching research question: In what ways, if any, do district and school leaders support marginalized student populations in schools? The collective data was analyzed through the lens of leadership practices. Specifically, we utilized both the culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016) and the transformational leadership frameworks (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990) to ground our research.

Four central findings emerged from our collective data analysis and synthesis of the individual case studies. First, the majority of the leader participants were critically aware and self-reflective about their own race, gender, social identity, positionality, culture, worldviews, and potential biases. Second, this self-awareness propelled leaders to take transformative actions in efforts for equitable access, programming, and policies for marginalized student populations.

[4] This chapter was collaboratively written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project. Authors include: Margarita Amy, Mark Pellegrino, Jaime Slaney, and Luis Soria

Third, leaders engaged in varied actions to develop people to better support marginalized students. Finally, we found divergent levels of trust between leaders and teachers in the Bayside Hill School District.

The following sections will discuss these findings and their implications for both practice and research. First, we discuss the findings. Next, we provide recommendations for practice that can be used to guide the future efforts of leaders seeking to support marginalized students. Lastly, we discuss the limitations of this study and provide recommendations for future research.

Awareness of Self and of Inequitable School Factors

According to Khalifa et al. (2016), awareness and critical self-reflection are crucial first steps to a leader's journey of becoming a culturally responsive leader. Eight out of the 11 leader participants demonstrated awareness and critical self-reflection about their cultural identity evidenced by comments about one's own race, gender, social identity, positionality, culture, worldviews, and potential biases. One White leader recalled her journey to awareness when she started to question her own beliefs and positionality, "it's a place where you start to question things that you were raised to believe and you start to question and re-examine and say, is that really what I think?" In addition, all eight of these participants were aware of inequities that existed for marginalized students within the school system.

While awareness is essential to a culturally responsive leader, in order to stop systems of privilege and oppression that exist within schools, leaders must purposefully and intentionally engage in actions and leadership practices to create and sustain culturally responsive and inclusive school environments (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Khalifa, 2011). The following two

sections will describe both actions and leadership practices participants engaged in to create more equitable schools.

Transformative Practices

Most of the district and school leader participants enacted transformative practices to create conditions to support marginalized students. These transformative actions are essential for sustained change (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). The next section discusses transformative practices that district and school building leaders demonstrated to promote equity within the district.

Responding to Stakeholder Voice

Data analysis revealed that the voices of students and community members matter in the Bayside Hill district. Leaders reported formal and informal structures and systems that provided opportunities to learn stakeholders' concerns, ideas, and solutions that in turn influenced the leaders' actions. As a result of their intentional interactions with various district and community stakeholders, district- and school-level leaders shared their explicit and sustained efforts to create responsive actions to support marginalized youth. Aligned to previous research, Bayside Hill leaders described their collective and individual leadership practices to enable their students to thrive socially and emotionally, and to feel connected and safe in their school (Kosciw et al., 2014). Additionally, district and school leaders reported how they established affinity groups with a culturally responsive lens (Khalifa et al. 2016). Participation in the affinity groups enabled students to discover their voices, awaken their critical thinking, and have a hand in decision-making to challenge exclusionary practices (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

Student Voice and Community Voice to Inform Leadership Actions. District and school leaders explained their efforts to use student and community member voice to propel transformative actions. At the district level, both senior leaders reported their sustained efforts to

seek and respond to student and community member contributions when making critical decisions to address LGBTQ policy issues, develop programming for emergent bilingual learners, and denounce exclusionary speech. The superintendent and assistant superintendent engaged in sustained listening tours to hear directly from students, families, and community members. They reported that their primary goal was to understand the stakeholders' perspectives and concerns in order to respond to them with the intent to make improvements in Bayside Hill Public Schools. For example, in reference to students who identify as transgender, the superintendent shared,

> The impetus for the transgender athlete policy was when we were trying to support a student-athlete who had transitioned. We felt that we were unprepared and that in order to shift the culture in our programs we needed to commit our beliefs to formalized language. As a result, our policy has become a model for many communities.

This statement led to the groundbreaking Inclusive Sports Participation Policy in Massachusetts that outlines explicit definitions for sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression for the district. The policy also makes clear the endorsement to ensure full inclusion of students participating in Bayside Hill athletics in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity.

Regarding programming for emergent bilingual learners informed by stakeholder voice, the assistant superintendent reported:

> We had a meeting with families that are in the two-way programs who advocated for the need to build more of a culture of inclusiveness within those programs, to focus more on building holistic needs of language learners. It led to the development of a parent advisory committee for a dual language program, a student advisory committee for those programs and increased effort to build curriculum around Latin American culture and

heritage.

Engaging parents in the decision-making process regarding contributions for district and school improvement ties well with previous studies (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Bayside Hill district leaders are utilizing parent and student voice to develop positive understandings of students' and families' perspective to inform next-level strategies for the emergent bilingual programming and cultural curriculum design.

Additionally, after listening to students and community members, the assistant superintendent referenced future goals to establish a contingent of Equity Ambassadors and a district Equity Committee consisting of Bayside Hill administrators, teachers, parents and students. He noted, "Essentially I'm trying to create a cohort, or an army of individuals, who have some knowledge or expertise that we're constantly working to enhance and support that can also be resources to each other." In fact, these individuals would include "an expert in LGBTQ, an expert in terms of race, an expert in terms of people who are able-bodied or people with a disability, because all of those different lenses or perspectives can be resources for other people." In short, this senior level district leader described future efforts to transform how in-district talent will lead equity actions for Bayside Hill.

Practices for responding to student voice were also enacted by the high school and middle school principal participants in this study. The high school principal revealed her efforts to meet with high school student affinity groups such as the Black Student Union (BSU), Student Immigration Movement (SIM), and Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA). This practice, to listen, enabled students to design and implement student-led activism that influenced the beliefs, attitudes, and awareness of others. The high school principal shared:

Talking to the students and hearing their views and their opinions and seeing the school

through their eyes helps me be a better principal. It helps me continually refine our

school improvement plan and my vision based on what the students are saying we need.

But you have to put yourself with the students.

Likewise, the middle school principal reported her continuous, intentional efforts to meet with students, particularly LGBTQ members of the middle school GSA, to implement their input for anti-bullying efforts, visibility, and self-identity disclosure. Both teacher leaders in the high school and middle school concurred with their respective principal. The teacher leaders reported students' consistent access to the school leaders. Regarding the high school principal, the teacher leader divulged, "My (GSA) officers say, 'We want to see if she will be okay with this.' I send them to her. No matter what she's doing, she finds time to sit down with them. She talks it out."

Building Leader Voice and Teacher Voice to Inform Leadership Actions. Our data analysis confirmed findings that Bayside Hill district and secondary level building leaders enacted structures and systems to listen and respond to *student* and *community* voice to support marginalized students. However, there is less evidence that *school building leader* and *teacher* voices are informing district leadership practices. Indeed, during initial and subsequent interviews, the district leaders disclosed very few efforts to learn directly from building leaders and teachers regarding their espoused equity efforts for Bayside Hill Public Schools.

Several participants shared that there was less buy-in for Bayside Hill improvement strategies such as the district effort regarding required lesson plans. District leaders and some building leaders have not fully built consensus regarding district and school improvement goals and priorities across different levels of the Bayside Hill district. One school building leader shared her perspective regarding district decision-making:

I feel like the people who are closest to the work need to have a voice in the decision

making process. They need to have the power to be part of the process of leading and

directing where the school is going and I think that's how you get long systemic change. I

mean, you can mandate change from the top down but it's not sustainable, and

I don't think that's how you get real buy-in.

Similarly, when asked about teacher contributions to district improvement strategies, one teacher

leader responded, "The district doesn't listen to us." Another teacher reported her frustration that

"things are just thrown at us, instead of taking the time to really develop whole school

philosophies or whole district philosophies and train us on the things that we all agree that we

want to do." Likewise, regarding professional development, several teachers reported frustration

that the district improvement strategies are constantly shifting with little instructional support for

teachers in the classroom. At this stage of understanding, we believe that these building leader

and teacher frustrations are informed by their perceived lack of voice and contributions to

decision making.

Equity Oriented Policy

Bayside Hill has developed and implemented an inclusive sports participation policy in

an effort to provide equitable access to athletes who self-identify in the LGBTQ community,

particularly transgender students. The Bayside Hill policy is aligned to the Code of

Massachusetts Regulations: Access to Equal Educational Opportunity (Massachusetts DESE,

2018) that includes explicit language regarding anti-discrimination protections for students on

the basis of gender identity. Bayside Hill has also created and implemented innovative LGBTQ

advocacy guidelines and expectations that serve as a model for other school districts. In addition

to protective measures that include comprehensive terminology regarding sexual orientation,

gender identity, and gender expression, the district is making definitive decisions and taking action regarding the establishment of gender-neutral bathrooms for all students.

Equity Driven Budget and Staff Positions

Senior district leaders described the previous budget structure and the dispersion of resources as "disparate" between schools resulting in inequities for students in need. For fiscal year 2019, the Bayside Hill superintendent advocated for and implemented a budget structure with "equity" and "access" as the primary budget levers. One district leader described, "We've created a model where schools…our poorest school who had been one of our most underperforming schools, it is kind of lifting up now. But we put four times the investment in that school than we did in the more affluent school." The new budget structure redirected resources to marginalized students who had previously had inequitable access to resources.

The change in budget structure and mission precipitated the creation of new positions within the district. These positions included an Assistant Superintendent of Equity and Diversity, a bilingual curriculum coordinator, some English Language Development (ELD) coaches, native speaking tutors, and an equity consultant. These positions were reported as an invaluable support to both teachers and to students. Indeed, one teacher described the impact of the support, "We have an English language learning coach who is also present (at PLCs). She's really helping us look through the lens of language objectives and helping meet those needs." Further, a district leader shared how instructional coaches change practice to support learners, "Coaches lead professional development, they model lessons and also help guide the co-planning sessions." In short, the newly funded positions supported equity and access for marginalized students.

While leaders have made concerted efforts to allocate funds to address inequities, the district is still faced with concerns. The number of emergent bilingual students has risen

dramatically in recent years and the district is facing challenges to meet their needs. The superintendent described the dramatic shift in demographics in the district, "Our percentage of English Language Learners over the last 10 years has increased. We are at about 3,500 out of 10,000 students that their first language is not English." Another district leader illustrated the inequities with staffing for emergent bilinguals, "Anytime you have a caseload of six students per ESL teacher, that's not being an effective teacher at all... I have a school where there are 360 English learners in a school of 550 kids, and only 7.5 ESL teachers. So that's very inequitable." The increase in numbers of emergent bilingual students across the district has drawn attention to district, building, and teacher leaders to advocate to add more ESL teachers to schools.

Equity Audit

Engaging in equity audits is a way to engage the learning organization in conversations regarding inequities to promote cultural awareness and reflection (Skrla et al., 2004). In the fall of 2019, Bayside Hill School District invested $50,000 in a year-long equity audit through a consultant. The Assistant Superintendent of Equity and Diversity described the equity audit goal to "get a focused area about where we can start to target some of our resources towards." He asked, "Where are we seeing larger inequities and how can we develop strategies around those areas?" He further explained that the audit findings will inform the district strategic plan for the next three years.

Dual Language Programs

According to Sanchez et al. (2018), "Dual language education has been accepted as the only way to continue to have bilingual education programs that are not remedial or transitional in nature." Over the past two years, the district increased the dual language programs from one to four. One district leader spoke of the value of supporting students' native language development

and viewing emergent bilingualism as an asset rather than a deficit. She explained, "I think when you're looking at some of that decision-making around English learners, we're looking at opportunity and access." The district phased out the Transitional Bilingual Education programs, a reductive model of language acquisition, and replaced them with the dual language programs in Spanish-English and Portuguese-English. One building leader said, "I feel pretty strongly that they are better supported than when they're in English-only programs, and there's of course a lot of research to back that up." The increased access to the district dual language programs sent a strong message to students, their families, and the community that Bayside Hill values their home languages.

Developing People by Promoting a Shared Vision

Transformational leadership in schools is invaluable as it fosters the collective development of a shared vision (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). Leithwood & Jantzi (1990) define a transformational leader as, "One who helps build shared meaning among members of the school staff regarding their purposes and creates high levels of commitment to the accomplishment of these purposes" (p. 254). District and school leaders who are invested in establishing transformative change for marginalized student populations develop people toward a shared vision regarding culturally responsive practices (Khalifa et al., 2016). Therefore, the leaders must provide opportunities to engage all educators in professional development to further establish, understand, and enact the shared vision.

Bayside Hill district and school leaders implemented professional development opportunities regarding culturally responsive practices. However, the opportunities were reported by school building leaders and teachers as top-down directed, sporadic, and lacking a shared vision. Additionally, several of the PD opportunities were described as "elective" to district

personnel. As a result, culturally responsive practices were not fully embedded in schools. Data analysis revealed less evidence regarding leadership practices to build a collective vision to promote culturally responsive practices between and among levels of the organization.

Professional learning regarding race and culture that is embedded within existing collaborative structures has a lasting impact (Brown et al., 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Bayside Hill has implemented some structures, such as Professional Learning Communities (PLC) for ESL teachers, to develop educators and enable them to share instructional practices. Additionally, the district provides after-school elective PD opportunities for teachers to learn and implement culturally responsive practices. However, these courses were underutilized by teachers. Indeed, one teacher leader disclosed that PD topics were often scattered and insufficient. She reported the need to engage in deep conversations regarding cultural responsiveness, rather than receiving cursory level information. "One day devoted to whatever topic is not deep enough or useful enough to immediately bring back into practice or to skillfully present it to everybody."

Developing Leaders

Transformational leaders create and foster opportunities to develop people by engaging them in professional learning experiences to support a shared vision and promote organizational change (Danielson, 2007; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Quin et. al., 2015; Wilson, 2016). Professional learning regarding race and culture must be ongoing, frequent, meaningful, and embedded within the school practices (Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Further, professional learning must engage educators in an ongoing examination of the intersectionality of their own race and culture and that of their students (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Bayside Hill district and

school building leaders created opportunities to develop people via professional development (PD). For example, senior district leaders reported that they engaged in PD provided by external consultants to develop their collective understanding regarding culturally responsive and inclusive practices. Additionally, they partnered with community organizations to support their ongoing learning. One district leader stated, "We work with a parent organization called Free Bayside Hill Families for Racial Equity." He further explained that this organization has met with the leadership team to discuss the "prison pipeline, looking at institutional racism and structural racism, and having deeper conversations about that."

District leaders also reported providing professional learning opportunities for school building leaders regarding equity and inclusion. For example, building leaders were required to participate in monthly equity meetings with a district leader. During this professional learning, district and school leaders engaged in conversations related to the presentations. They were asked to reflect on the professional learning content and consider parents' perspectives. This led to authentic discourse regarding initial efforts toward a collective vision for cultural responsiveness. However, when interviewed, building and teacher leaders were unable to articulate the district's vision for professional learning to promote cultural responsiveness.

Developing Teachers

Data analysis revealed that building leaders developed teachers through professional learning, staff meetings, district-wide PD, and after school elective options. However, most of these opportunities were not driven by a shared decision-making process. They were mostly directed by building leaders or offered as the aforementioned electives. One elementary building leader designed a book group for her staff to discuss the book *Disrupting Poverty*. She shared, "This is really important thinking we need to be doing as a school." Another building leader

implemented PD regarding culturally responsive teaching. Her staff participated in a book group

to read and discuss *Culturally Responsive Design for English Learners*. These leaders were

interested in supporting teachers to improve their instructional practices, specifically regarding

how they discipline students and how they interact with marginalized student populations.

Isolated workshops and disconnected training do not lead to the development of

comprehensive knowledge (Fullan, 1993). Fullan further asserts that sustained and measurable

instructional change must be precipitated by in-depth knowledge. In the Bayside Hill district,

participation in culturally responsive PD was not universal and did not lead toward extensive

knowledge. The district-led PDs were typically offered as electives or mandatory only for a

small group of people. One senior district leader described the PD as "pockets of electives"

where teachers opted into the professional learning with no mechanisms to ensure their

participation in the PD sessions resulted in changing instructional practice. For example, when

teachers participated in PD regarding the new ESL scope and sequence, only a small portion of

teachers were mandated to attend yet the entire staff was required to implement language

objectives into the mandated lesson plans.

Trust

Leaders who expect to manage adaptive change in their organizations must cultivate a

sense of trust with those who will make the change happen (Brown et al., 2011**;** Madhlangobe &

Gordon, 2014; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Handford & Leithwood, 2013). Organizational

members traditionally resist change, usually out of fear (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Whether

rational or not, fear can impede the implementation of even the most positive organizational

changes. District and school leaders must proactively and intentionally build a sense of trust with

and among their charges in order to support them as the organization navigates the intended

changes (Bryk & Schneider; Cosner, 2009; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018).

High Levels of Trust Exist Within, but Not Between, the District and Schools

District leaders reported their intent to make instructional practice changes in order to create and enact more equitable outcomes for students. To facilitate change, district and school leaders must design professional learning experiences that enable staff to learn individually, and then collectively share and align their instructional practices. The professional learning tenets of collaboration, reflective dialogue, and shared social resources require trust (Bryk et al., 1999). Additionally, Bryk et. al. (2009) found that these professional learning tenets combined with trust create an efficient cycle for instructional change. For example, when educators work collaboratively, trust grows. This, in turn, increases collaboration, therefore trust subsequently grows again, and so on. This cyclical process reinforces the notion that leaders must structure and support a culture that imbues collaboration, reflection, and shared social resources in order to drive and foster the changes they intend to make. We next examine where trust exists in the district, and where trust needs to be further developed.

High Levels of Trust Exist Among District Leadership Team Members. District level leaders reported that they have strong, trusting, working relationships with each other. They work in an environment that fosters a sense of safety, encouraging vulnerability and critical reflection. Several comments were made by district leaders that evidenced this trust. For example, one district leader reported, "We are fine to push each other; to make sure that we're not bringing bias into the room… And if a comment is made that maybe isn't inclusive, challenging each other. Like (saying) 'Okay, but …'" These critical conversations encouraged

team members to challenge each other's beliefs and reflect more deeply about their own beliefs and practices.

  High Levels of Trust Exist Between Building-Level Leaders and Teachers. Data analysis also revealed a high level of trust between teachers and their school building administrators. Relational trust is essential for teachers to feel safe and be vulnerable with their supervisor (Liou & Daily, 2014). Trust enables teachers to respectfully hear feedback and change their instructional practices. In the Bayside Hill district, teachers across various school buildings confirmed the existing trust between school leaders and teachers. "(My principal) has been supportive. I feel like we're living a dream. We do have all the support we need here…" Another teacher reported, "She's unbelievably, personally connected with everyone, and you can feel that. That's just kind of the administrative presence she brings... a sense of caring."

  Relational trust allowed building leaders to conduct difficult conversations with teachers and challenge the status quo. For example, one teacher described trusting her building leader's competence and understanding of marginalized students' needs:

> My administration here in this building is very supportive and conscious of everything that's going on... But they've all been in the district for a really long time, and understand the population, and understand the families, and the parents, and the community, and what needs to go into helping students be successful.

  At one school, relational trust enabled teachers to engage in problem-solving meetings designed to solve behavior issues in the classroom. Essentially, if a teacher experienced concerns with a student, they requested a meeting with the student and principal. The principal then facilitated a discussion to enable the teacher and student to share their feelings regarding the situation, brainstorm mutually beneficial solutions, and ultimately repair the relationship. Trust is

essential for this process to work well (Liou & Daily, 2014). As a case in point, one teacher who asked for a restorative meeting, consistently struggled to hear 'student voice' in situations that often led to disciplinary action. The leader shared,

> She's very much a black and white person. She's very much either right or wrong. She's having trouble seeing the gray, and I don't know if it's just more her personality. She's kind of that way in all of her interactions with students. So it's just interesting to me. And so when she requests these problem solving conferences, now we have to really sit down and prep her (so) she can then hear what the kids are saying.

This leader had built relational trust with the teacher which allowed these conversations to occur. Another building leader described how he provided individualized support to help teachers acquire the confidence they needed to support marginalized students. He explained, "I think for some of them, it happens organically, but others need a little bit more of a push."

Less Evidence of Trust Between District-level and Building-level Leaders. In Bayside Hill there is a sense of trust within the district leadership team. There is also evidence of trust between and among principals and teachers at the school building level. However, data analysis suggests that there is not yet a trusting relationship between all school building leaders and the district leadership team. One district leader disclosed:

> I think there needs to be a level of trust between (district & school) levels of the organization before you can truly engage in these conversations. I think there needs to be a huge unpacking of the why… Why is this important for all kids? Why is this important for all individuals?

Less Evidence of Trust Between District-level Leaders and Teachers. Trust between building leaders and teachers is paramount. However, trust between teachers and district level

leadership is also essential. Adams and Miskell (2016) found that trust between teachers and the district can be enhanced or diminished based on teachers' perceptions of the district leadership with regards to benevolence, competence, openness, honesty, and reliability. Though less impactful than trust between building leaders and teachers, trust between teachers and the district leadership should not be ignored.

In the Bayside Hill District, there was evidence of some discord between the district and teachers. One example centered on a lesson planning expectation that was set by the district. The district leadership designed this initiative to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum; in turn, this data would inform the design of the professional learning experiences provided for teachers and increase collaborative efforts among teachers. Alternatively, teachers felt that this was a top-down mandate and an example of the lack of trust that exists within the district. Teachers felt that they had more time to share practices before the mandate, and the lesson planning initiative actually reduced collaborative efforts. The superintendent described the intended purpose for the initiative:

> We're looking for what standards (the teachers) are teaching. We're asking to know how
> that curriculum lives in that standard, and lives through the content and language
> objective. … (And without this) I can't provide feedback as an instructional leader.

However, as previously stated, that is not how teachers perceived the district-led requirement to write and submit lesson plans. Teachers reported their belief that the lesson planning initiative emerged from a bureaucratic decision that ultimately reinforced a perceived lack of trust from the district level leaders. Public comments from a Bayside Hill Teachers Union leader summarize teachers' responses regarding the lesson planning initiative:

Top down regulations and initiatives tie (teachers') hands rather than empower them with

the freedom to run their own classrooms. She said that micromanaging staff carries the

effect of disengaging the staff, and makes the staff feel unappreciated and not trusted to

do the work, and is considered one of the top three reasons why employees resign.

(School Committee Meeting Minutes, September 18, 2019)

Recommendations for Practice

Data analysis and findings from the four individual research studies informed the

following collective recommendations for future Bayside Hill Public Schools leadership

practices. The recommendations are informed by the theoretical frameworks of transformative

and culturally responsive leadership practices. At the core of our recommended leadership

practices, we contend that district and school leaders must design, implement, and assess systems

and structures to communicate the "why" of their leadership practices. These systems should be

iterative and include stakeholder voice, a practice that leaders currently do well with Bayside

Hill students. For example, district leaders can build on their efforts to embed school leader

voice regarding *how* improvement strategies can be implemented across the district. Likewise,

school leaders can expand their efforts to include teacher voice. Next, we recommend that

district leaders intentionally deepen their systems to develop people. When school leaders and

teachers better understand the why and how of the improvement strategies, we assert that they

will more willingly engage and thrive in professional learning that aligns to the district vision

and impacts instructional pedagogy. Lastly, we recommend that district and school leaders

further develop trust between and among leaders and teachers. Absent strategic efforts to

accelerate resolute trust regarding Bayside Hill improvement strategies, stakeholders may resist

and dissuade endeavors toward the implementation of the strategies. These interconnected

recommendations are illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Interconnected Recommendations

COMMUNICATE THE WHY

DEVELOP PEOPLE

BUILD TRUST
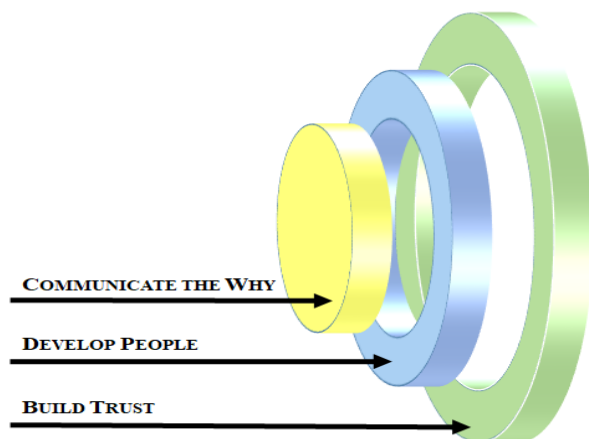
Communicate the Why

Data analysis revealed that Bayside Hill district leaders have designed and implemented

systems for district and school improvements. The systems included leadership practices in

support of marginalized student populations such as responding to district and community voice,

conducting an equity audit to inform district improvement initiatives, increasing access to Dual

Language programming, and revamping the district budget process. We assert that these efforts

can be more impactful when they are fully communicated for short- and long-term visioning to

all district stakeholders. Data analysis of participant interviews and document review revealed

that district leaders have communicated the "what" of their actions. However, there is less

evidence regarding explicit communication regarding the "why" of their decisions. Additionally,

stakeholders revealed their perception that improvement strategies were happening to them, not

in partnership with them. Before moving forward with the design and communication of the next

multi-year strategic plan, district constituents would benefit from hearing the superintendent tell the story of his "why" regarding his leadership practices.

Therefore, we recommend that Bayside Hill district leaders intentionally communicate the *intent* of what has been designed and implemented thus far regarding district vision, strategies, and actions for equity and cultural responsiveness. We also propose that district leaders seek and implement contributions from stakeholders regarding *how* improvement strategies are implemented. The "why" factor for *future* district decision-making can be facilitated via explicit efforts to design and implement systems to learn the *collective* "how" for overarching district improvement strategies. We recommend that district leaders build on their current practice to learn from each other and replicate their intentional conversations regarding district inequities across the district with building leaders, teachers, students, and community members. During several interviews, district leaders shared compelling narratives and revelatory intentions regarding what inspires them toward leadership practices of equity and cultural responsiveness. However, these conversations occurred less frequently across other district levels. Systems to engage in these discussions must occur between district and school leaders. They must also occur between district leaders and teachers in order to garner more buy-in for the district initiatives. Bayside Hill stakeholders would benefit from creating and communicating their collective beliefs regarding district and school supports for marginalized student populations and improvement strategies.

Develop People

Data analysis revealed that professional learning was less systemic across the district and in some cases sporadic. Interview participants disclosed their perceptions that professional learning lacked teacher voice. Therefore, we recommend that district leaders ensure that relevant

stakeholders, including building leaders and teachers have voice regarding the what, how, and why of professional learning. Additionally, to ensure this professional learning is meaningful, we recommend that district leaders embed stakeholders' voice in planning the professional learning. Bayside Hill district leaders can build on their current professional learning systems to enhance school leaders' and teachers' capacity to buy into the district vision. This must include their PD efforts for students who may have been marginalized due to race, ethnicity, or language. During interviews, district leaders revealed their efforts to reflect on and respond to the needs of students who have been marginalized. They reported a vision to promote culturally responsive practices. However, Bayside Hill can benefit from including building leaders and teachers for this vision. To make this happen, rather than offer optional electives, all teachers must provide voice and then engage in professional learning regarding support for marginalized students.

The first step is to develop people through professional learning regarding culturally responsive teaching practices. This professional learning must be ongoing, frequent, embedded in current structures, and meaningful to the educators. It is important for all teachers and building leaders to participate in professional learning where they build joint understandings regarding marginalized student populations and how to support them. They would benefit from engaging in sustained and comprehensive professional learning toward cultural responsiveness that includes increasing awareness, teaching, collaborating, and sharing practices to build each other's collective instructional practices. A focus to develop educators to move across the Cultural Responsiveness Continuum (from color-blindness to relational to responsive) in efforts to build strong relationships can be impactful. Additionally, professional learning can be embedded within the structures of the school day and implemented via the district PD days, staff meetings,

and PLCs that currently exist. Engaging building leaders and teacher leaders as thought partners in this work is critical for the district to consider.

Ultimately, the goal for professional learning at the Bayside Hill School District can enable all educators to engage in practices that support marginalized students. A commitment to develop people should be reflected within all schools, instead of pockets across the district. For this reason, we also recommend that school leaders and teachers establish a shared commitment to incorporate this acquired knowledge regarding culturally responsiveness into their schools and classrooms. District leaders, school leaders, and teachers can name the measurable and observable instructional practices that support marginalized student populations and then determine how to build on them.

Build Trust

Trusting environments are an imperative precursor to building collaborative professional learning communities and to facilitate change. Study participants revealed varying degrees of trust in the Bayside Hill School District across different organization levels. We recommend that district and school leaders intentionally build a sense of trust across the district to bolster the improvement change efforts and to embrace the initiatives regarding support for marginalized students.

We posit that a crucial leadership action toward building trust is to recognize and verbalize that varying levels of trust exist within Bayside Hill. Across interviews, participants openly shared their beliefs regarding where trust was established and where trust was lacking in the district. It is recommended that district leaders bring these conversations to the forefront and communicate this trust phenomenon directly with staff. First, district leaders are urged to directly recognize the perceived lack of trust to acknowledge their awareness of this concern and its

potential impact regarding stakeholder buy-in. Next, district and school leaders can specifically ask teachers where they believe varying levels of trust exist. Finally, the leaders can explicitly communicate their desire to repair and set trust-building as a priority.

Trust is built when educators work collaboratively and engage in a culture that imbues collaboration, reflection, and shared resources. This level of trust was evident among the senior leadership team where members actively engaged in continuous conversations and collaborations that pushed each other's thinking and resulted in shared learning. Trusting relationships were established by meaningful professional dialogue. Therefore, the district is encouraged to replicate this trust-building mechanism across the district. We encourage senior level district leaders to provide opportunities for educators across Bayside Hill such as district leaders, building leaders, and teachers to learn and implement professional discussion protocols. District stakeholders can benefit from utilizing collaborative protocols to collectively build trust among and between district levels. These efforts can occur during the established collaborative structures that already exist such as the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

Lastly, data analysis revealed that Bayside Hill district and school leaders listened and responded to student and community voice regarding support for marginalized students. Their voice was valued and heard which resulted in transformative actions to support LGBTQ students and emergent bilingual students. This leadership practice further established high levels of trust. The district is encouraged to build upon the structures that have already been implemented for voice and expand it to include building leaders and teachers to further establish trust.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

We acknowledge four limitations for this research. First, this qualitative case study is not longitudinal. Given the six-month timeframe, we examined a bounded system for a short period

of time that may not be representative of the attention, support, and advocacy of marginalized students in the district.

Second, qualitative case studies are not widely generalizable. The probability that the collected data is representative of larger populations is low. This study explored one school district in Massachusetts making the sample size small and idiosyncratic. Additionally, for this study, we were dependent on volunteer participants which resulted in researching seven of the fourteen district schools. This small sample size may have impacted our findings as leader perceptions, practices, and beliefs were obtained from only half of the district schools.

Third, study participants may have had a bias toward marginalized students. The possible bias could have influenced the findings regarding whether and how the district supports marginalized students. Additionally, participant perspectives may have impacted awareness and sensitivity toward culturally responsive support for marginalized youth. More than one participant from each stakeholder group, such as teacher, teacher leader, building leader, district leader, was included in the study when triangulating the collected data to mitigate potential bias.

Lastly, we acknowledge that this study did not examine or measure marginalized students' academic achievement. Although prior research indicates that being safe in school can impact student achievement, we did not explore whether or how district/school leaders strived to enact policies or practices that were explicit to support academic improvement.

Regarding future qualitative case studies informed by this research, we recommend an examination of all district leaders and teachers in the district rather than a small sample size. This would allow researchers to have a larger sample size to inform their findings. Additionally, a longer time span for the research would facilitate longitudinal findings. Furthermore, including more than one district would allow for more generalizability of the findings. Lastly, future research should seek to better understand how students' academic achievement and social

emotional development are impacted by culturally responsive leadership practices, which can be both transformational and transformative.

Conclusion

District and school populations continue to become more diverse racially, ethnically, socially, as well as by sexual orientation, socio-economic status, disability, language spoken, and cultural identity. For this research, we sought to answer the research question: In what ways, if any, do district and school leaders support marginalized student populations in schools? Findings from this case study identified leadership practices that support marginalized student populations. These findings emerged from the collective data and analysis of the individual case studies. First, leaders who were critically aware and self-reflective about their own race, gender, social identity, and potential biases attempted to create equity through actions. These transformative actions included efforts for equitable access, programming, and policies for marginalized student populations.

Next, we found leaders engaged in actions to develop people to better support marginalized students. These actions were more developed at the senior leadership level and less developed among other levels of the organization. While professional learning existed, it was not universally ongoing, frequent, embedded in current structures, or meaningful to the educators.

Finally, we found varying levels of trust between the different levels of Bayside Hill School District. A possible catalyst for this lack of trust was that district leaders often communicated the "what" of their leadership actions and rarely communicated the "why" for the district vision, strategies, and actions for equity and cultural responsiveness. This study illustrated the importance of culturally responsive school leadership and its impact on creating equitable schools for marginalized students.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Intro to the interview:

- Thank you for taking the time to speak with me/us. This will be a 45-60-minute interview. At the end of these minutes, we are hoping to learn more about *your* perspective regarding how leaders support marginalized students in your school district.

- We will be recording this interview.

- At any time during this interview, you can request that I turn off the recording device.

- After collecting our data, we will ensure that schools and/or leaders are not being identified individually.

- The data we collect from this research project will eventually be shared with your central office. However, at no time will your individual responses be shared with anyone in the central office or your district's school committee.

- All interview questions are optional.

- At any time during the interview, you can request to end the interview.

Introduction Questions

- Tell me/us about your role.

- How many years have you been in this role?

- This research focuses on marginalized students and includes race, gender, culture, language spoken, and sexuality. If comfortable, what are the ways in which you identify?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol- Superintendent

- When you think about the student populations in the district, which would you consider to be student populations who are marginalized?

- Tell us about a situation or incident in the District regarding students that involved an inequity based on race, culture, gender or sexuality? What were the district's responses?

- How do you use data to guide your practices and your decision making to support diverse learning populations? Can you give me an example? Have you made any changes in the schools based on this data?

- What professional learning activities has the District engaged in to support diverse learning populations? Has there been any professional learning for principals about cultural responsiveness?

- What opportunities for teacher leadership have surfaced in your school district? Are there particular principals who have been able to successfully foster teacher leadership in their schools?

- What types of professional development have district personnel, including school staff, received regarding LGBTQ students? What would be examples of further professional development that you think district personnel need?

- What are the ways that LGBTQ students are supported in the district?

- What are the non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies that explicitly protect LGBTQ students and how are they manifested in schools?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol- Leadership Perceptions when Fostering Teacher Leadership

District Leaders:

- What motivated you to become a leader?

- What experiences shaped your leadership? Who or what supported you in your leadership journey?

- Can you talk to me about experiences with teacher leadership that you may have had?

- What opportunities for teacher leadership have surfaced in your school district? Are there particular principals who have been able to successfully foster teacher leadership in their schools? Can you give me an example?

- How seriously are teachers' opinions considered? How do they participate in the decision-making process?

- How does the district encourage teachers to experiment with sharing best practices with colleagues?

- How often do you teachers have structured times to meet or engage in professional development? Who sets up this calendar?

- (Probing questions: Ask for examples throughout this entire section.)

- How are teachers being developed in the district? What structures and systems have you put in place to develop the capacity of teachers?

- This research focuses on marginalized students and includes LGBTQ, Emergent bilinguals, Hispanic/Latinx, and African Americans. How, if at all, do you relate to this topic?

- When you think about the student populations in the district, which would you consider to be student populations who are marginalized?

- What are the ways that emergent bilingual students are supported in the district?

- How do you use data to guide your practices and your decision making to support emergent bilingual students? Can you give me an example? Have you made any changes in the schools based on this data?

Principal and Teacher Leaders:

Purpose: To understand, when working to develop teacher leaders, how leaders perceive themselves as setting directions.

- How do teacher leaders contribute to school goals and the decision-making process?

- In relation to everyday practices, how do teacher leaders promote the school vision?

Purpose: To understand when working to develop teacher leaders, how leaders perceive themselves as developing people.

- How are you identifying and developing teachers as leaders?

- How do you support teachers in identifying their strengths?

- How do you plan professional development for teachers?

Purpose: To understand when working to develop teacher leaders, how leaders perceive themselves as redesigning the organization.

- How do you motivate teachers to seek new ideas and new information that are relevant to the school's development?

- How do you stimulate teachers to constantly think about how to improve the school?

- How do you help teachers talk about research-based practices through inquiry?

Additional Questions for Teacher Leaders:

- What motivated you to become a teacher?

- What experiences have shaped your leadership as a teacher?

- What opportunities for teacher leadership have surfaced in your school district?

- How seriously are teachers' opinions considered?

- How do you encourage teachers to experiment with sharing best practices with colleagues?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol- Culturally Responsive Discipline

Building Leaders:

- If an African American, Hispanic, or Latinx student began demonstrating atypical behavior that required disciplinary action, how might you handle the situation differently?

- How have you supported teachers' learning to improve culturally responsive practices?

- How do you support teachers in embracing culturally responsive practices specific to discipline? How do you hold them accountable for these practices?

Teacher Questions:

- How do teacher behaviors de-escalate or escalate student behaviors? Can you give an example of each from yours or another teacher's experience?

- How do you learn about other cultures and student groups? How does that information inform your lesson planning?

- How do you communicate high expectations to your students? Can you give me an example?

- What are your priorities in establishing a classroom environment for students?

- Tell me about a time you developed a positive relationship with a hard-to-reach student. What were your behaviors that allowed you to do that and what was the outcome? What interests did the student have outside of school? What were his/her talents and strengths?

- If an LGBTQ student begins to demonstrate atypical behavior that requires disciplinary action, how would you proceed? What might be different for them? Thinking about the student's intersectionality, how might race further impact disciplinary actions?

- What role does culture play in your relationship with students? Describe a time you learned about a student's culture and used that understanding to foster a positive relationship.

- How do life situations impact learning? What do you do to proactively and reactively respond to students facing these situations?

- Have you adapted a lesson or activity to better fit the culture or life situation of a student? If so, how? What was the outcome?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol- Cultural Self-Reflection and Awareness

Principal Questions:

- How would you describe the racial and cultural makeup of your student body? Of your staff?

- Tell me about a situation or incident at your school that involved an inequity based on race or culture? What did you do?

- Do you consider your own race to inform decision making? If yes, how?

- Has there been an instance when you have demonstrated leadership or commitment to equity in your work?

- How do you use data to guide your practices and your decision making to support diverse learning populations? Can you give me an example? Have you made any changes in the school-based off this data?

- How do you support teachers and staff with training or professional development to meet the instructional needs of diverse learners?

- How do you encourage and/or provide opportunities for teachers to engage in self-reflection and self-examination elation to race and culture?

- What do you do to help expand your teachers' knowledge of diverse learning populations?

- Have you ever had to handle a situation in which someone made a sexist, racist, homophobic or otherwise prejudiced remark? What did you feel? What did you do?

Teacher Questions:

- Tell me about a situation or incident at your school or in your classroom that involved an inequity based on race or culture? What did you do? What did your principal do to help and support you?

- What professional learning activities has your school engaged in to support diverse learning populations?

- How and what data do you use to guide your practices to support diverse learning populations?

- Has the school leadership encouraged and provided opportunities for self-reflection and self-examination among staff in relation to race and culture? If yes, how?

- Has there been a person or event that has increased your personal awareness of race and culture?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol- District and School Leaders' Support for LGBTQ Youth

Principal and Teacher Questions:
- What are the observable behaviors and practices that make this district/school a visible ally to LGBTQ students?

- If a student were to come out to you as LGBTQ, what would be your first thought?

- How, if at all, does your curriculum include information about LGBTQ people, including LGBTQ people of color, history, and events?

- How, if at all, do non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies explicitly protect LGBTQ students?
- When you consider the supports that currently exist for LGBTQ students, what is working well? How do you know? What supports can be strengthened for LGBTQ students?

Appendix B: Field Note Protocol

Setting: _____

Observer: _____

Date of Observation: _____

Start time of Observation: _____ End Time of Observation _____

	Observations	Observer Reflections/Comments
Physical Setting		
Participants		
Activities Observed		
Interactions Observed		
Conversations Observed		
Other		

Adapted from (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

Appendix C: Meeting Observation Protocol

Meeting Observation Protocol	
Date: Start Time: End Time:	
Location: # Members Present:	
Meeting Leader and Role/Title:	
Description of who attended the meeting:	
Meeting Format: (one person leads, group facilitation, group conversation)	
Meeting Objectives	**Was this objective accomplished?**
Discussion Topics	

Participation & Representation	Comments	
Do all members actively participate?		

Are multiple viewpoints represented	
Does the meeting setting encourage participation and interactions?	
Is conflict productive?	
Are members willing to take risks?	
Organization & Structure	Comments
Are objectives clear and understood?	
Does the meeting have clear objectives?	
Do participants contribute to the objective and outcomes?	
Communication	Comments
Are members open and communicate what they think?	
Do members encourage and support each other?	
Results & Actions	Comments
Is an agreed upon decision-making or problem-solving method used?	
Are the next steps and action items clear?	

Adapted from: Faribault, Martin and Watonwan Counties Statewide Health Improvement Program

Appendix D: Structured Abstract for Margarita Amy's Individual Study

Leadership Practices that Support Marginalized Students:
How Leaders Support Teacher Leadership for Emergent Bilingual and Latinx Students

Background:

Demographic shifts in public schools in the United States are continuing to increase the diversity within our student populations in schools. These changes have required leadership at every level in schools in order to create positive learning experiences for students who have been sidelined because of their ethnicity and language diversity. For this reason, leaders have to inspire change in key stakeholders throughout the *entire* organization. Teachers are critical stakeholders in schools and can support powerful changes in school improvement efforts.

Purpose and Research Questions:

The purpose of this individual case study was to identify the perceptions of school and district leaders about fostering teacher leadership, specifically to support emergent bilingual and Latinx students at a public school district in the state of Massachusetts. There are still many unknowns as to how principals encourage teachers to become leaders. My work extended the literature in an effort to understand the transformative aspects of leadership and how it functions across schools within a district. Conversely, there are a lack of studies that explore the perceptions of leaders at the district and school level about fostering teacher leadership, and its incorporation into practice, particularly, in supporting emergent bilingual and Latinx students. This study answered the following research questions: How do leaders perceive they are fostering teacher leadership which supports emergent bilingual and Latinx students? When working to develop teacher leadership, how, if at all, do leaders perceive they are setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization?

Methods:

This study utilized a qualitative case study methodology in order to explore leaders' perceptions about teacher leadership within a bounded system; namely a Massachusetts school district. The most recent model of transformational leadership developed from Leithwood's research in schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000) served as the conceptual framework. This framework enabled me to refine the research questions, review the literature, develop interview protocols; and served as the foundation for sorting, coding, classifying, and analyzing data to understand the role of the leader in setting direction, developing people and redesigning the organization as an invaluable agent of change in schools. Data collection included 13 individual semi-structured interviews with district, building and teacher leaders as well as field notes and document reviews.

Findings:

Findings indicated that school and district leaders perceived they support emergent bilingual and Latinx students through formal and informal leadership practices. The results of this study also found a discrepancy between district leaders, building leaders and teacher leaders' perceptions about opportunities for teacher leaders to engage in sharing best practices, collaborate in a shared decision-making process and participate in quality professional development. Top-down approaches impacted the development of teachers as leaders, creating barriers and challenges in each of three components of transformational leadership (setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization). Recommendations include establishing a collective vision for promoting teacher leadership and for developing teachers as leaders.

Implications:

Future research could be designed to better understand how teacher leadership is enacted to support issues around equity and social justice, and how we might encourage more teacher leadership among underrepresented groups. Additionally, building on the research of Anderson (2008), studies aimed at identifying teacher leaders and their capacity to be transformational over time are worth pursuing.

Appendix E: Structured Abstract for Mark Pellegrino's Individual Study

Leadership Practices that Support Marginalized Students:
Culturally Responsive Discipline Practices to Reduce Disparities for
African American, Hispanic, and Latinx Students

Abstract

Background: Over the past forty years, schools have suspended African American, Hispanic, and Latinx students at significantly higher rates than white students. Culturally responsive interventions that foster positive relationships between marginalized students and educators have been found to be effective. School leaders are called to foster these practices.

Purpose: This individual study examined whether or not teachers with low discipline referrals for African American and Hispanic/Latinx students from a midsized urban Massachusetts district report using culturally responsive discipline practices described in the Double-Check Framework (Hershfeldt etl al., 2009); and how, if at all, they perceive their principal fosters these practices. It was part of a group study that examined how school and district leaders support marginalized students.

Participants: Two schools in the participating district and their principals were identified because they agreed to be in the study and were able to identify teachers with low incidence of Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs). Two white, female principals; four white, male teachers; and five white, female teachers participated in the study.

Research design: The research team used an explanatory case study design.

Data collection/analysis: Data was collected over a four-month period using semi-structured interviews with principals and teachers in two schools as part of the group qualitative case study. Interview questions for teachers were based on a framework designed to identify culturally responsive discipline practices called Double-Check (Hershfeldt etl al., 2009). Questions for the principals were open-ended and asked them to describe how they support teachers in developing

and embracing culturally responsive practices. Interview data were coded and analyzed through

the Double-Check framework and Khalifa et al.'s (2016 culturally responsive school leadership.

Findings: This research, though limited by its size, scope, and duration, supported the notion

that teachers with low office discipline referrals might embrace culturally responsive practices, at

least to a limited degree. Additionally, while principals reported that they had provided culturally

responsive professional learning activities for teachers, teachers interviewed did not attribute

their discipline practices to these efforts. Recommendations for practice and future research are

included.

Appendix F: Structured Abstract for Jaime Slaney's Individual Study

Leadership Practices that Support Marginalized Students:
Cultural Awareness and Self-Reflection

Background: The student population in our schools is becoming increasingly more diverse and marginalized. The increasing diversity in our schools demands our attention and requires a change in our approach to educating all students. Culturally responsive school leadership is essential to meet the needs of marginalized students and to close both the achievement and opportunity gaps that persist in today's schools. Critical self-reflection is an essential culturally responsive school leadership behavior to disrupt inequities in schools and transform schools to become culturally responsive.

Purpose and Research Questions: The purpose of this qualitative research study was to address the research gap that exists related to leadership practices that establish culturally responsive schools related to the development of cultural awareness and self-reflection among leaders and teachers. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions: How, if at all, does the leader develop and maintain cultural awareness and self-reflection to support marginalized populations? What leadership practices does the leader enact, if at all, to engage teachers in cultural awareness and self-reflection?

Methods: To address these questions, I utilized a descriptive, qualitative, case study of a mid to large sized urban district which had a diverse student body population where at least fifty percent represent marginalized populations of LGBTQ, emergent bilinguals, Hispanic/Latinx, and African American students. Khalifa et al's (2016) culturally responsive school leadership behavior of critical self-reflection was used as a conceptual framework to guide the study. It's four tenets for leaders include: having an awareness of self and the context in which they lead;

be willing to probe personal assumptions, their own and others, about race and culture and impact on the school; having an awareness of the inequitable facets that negatively affect marginalized students' potential; and finally, to use awareness to transform and create a new equitable environment for marginalized students. Methods included semi-structured interviews, a review of documents, and field notes as data to determine leadership practices that engage the learning organization in critical self-reflection and awareness.

Findings: First, the study found that almost all of the leader participants exhibited cultural awareness and reflectiveness. This awareness was enacted through either feeling marginalization themselves, childhood experiences, and through professional experiences. Second, leaders utilized a variety of leadership practices to maintain their awareness and to engage in self-reflection. Third, leaders utilized their awareness to create more equitable environments for marginalized students. Lastly, although leaders utilized leadership practices to increase teacher awareness, practices were not consistent, embedded, or persistent.

Appendix G: Structured Abstract for Luis Ramirez Soria's Individual Study

Leadership Practices that Support Marginalized Students:
District and School Leaders' Support for LGBTQ Youth

Background: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth are a marginalized student population in school settings. LGBTQ students are susceptible to suicide ideation, substance abuse, discrimination, bullying, and harassment. District and school leaders can affect practices, policies, pedagogy, and professional learning that advance equity and support for LGBTQ students in schools. Agency for LGBTQ students can be affected by how leaders promote inclusivity, build relationships among and between students and teachers, challenge exclusionary policies and behaviors, use student voice, and model culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Purpose and Research Questions: The purpose of this study was to examine whether and how district and school leaders' knowledge, attitudes/beliefs, and practices regarding LGBTQ students affected the espoused and enacted school policies for advocacy, anti-discrimination, and proactive care for this marginalized population. Accordingly, this study explored the research question: How, if at all, do district and school leaders' knowledge, attitudes/beliefs, and practices support LGBTQ youth?

Methods: I conducted a qualitative case study of a Massachusetts urban school district. Data for the research was collected from semi-structured interviews, document review, and observation of a student organization meeting. For each data source, I analyzed and coded the data to identify patterns that supported or contradicted culturally responsive leadership in support of LGBTQ youth. I utilized multiple cycles of coding, starting with initial codes that surfaced regarding leaders' knowledge, attitude/beliefs, and practices.

Findings: Data analysis from this study revealed four themes. First, leaders created and sustained safe environments in schools for LGBTQ youth. Second, leaders' made efforts to urge the normalization of LGBTQ advocacy and discourse. Third, leaders afforded opportunities for LGBTQ student-led activism. Lastly, district and school leaders need to further their systemic efforts toward establishing and implementing inclusive LGBTQ curriculum and instruction.