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Breaking the Cycle: Examining the Effectiveness of Administrative Strategies for Empowering
High School Students with Diverse Ethnic Backgrounds

By

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Dartavion, Ae'Riel, Giovanni, Mateo, and Leonardo. You are my greatest inspiration and the reason behind my entire journey. I want to see the world around you realize your worth throughout all your years learning, and through my experiences as your mom and an educator, I found my passion for this research and a desire to advocate for students who look like you. You guys are my true motivation for finishing this work. I am so thankful that I am your mom.

To Darius, I am so grateful that you have walked alongside me throughout this entire journey. You are not only the greatest father, but also the greatest partner that I could have ever had throughout this entire process. I have cried many tears, had many stressful moments, but you were always by my side saying "just get it done!", and now here I am. I can finally say I did it.

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Abstract

This dissertation, *Examining the Effectiveness of Administrative Strategies for Empowering High School Students with Diverse Ethnic Backgrounds*, investigates how school leaders may spearhead transformative and inclusive strategies for empowering students by cultivating equity and long-term success. Informed by Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, the researcher examines the ways in which administrative practices can create opportunities for critical reflection, personal growth, and active participation for high school students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This study will identify and explore the effectiveness of administrative strategies that lead to the creation of school environments where students from all walks of life are valued, supported, and able to reach their full potential. It adopts a qualitative research design and investigates, through interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, how school administrators interpret, design, and apply the practices promoting transformative learning experiences among ethnically diverse students. By giving voice to both students and educators, the research seeks to uncover challenges and opportunities within the implementation of inclusive leadership strategies at the high school level. This dissertation contributes to the literature on educational leadership by applying and extending Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory to a secondary education context, which is less regularly examined in the literature. The findings have implications for refining theoretical conceptions of transformative learning and generating actionable insights for administrators working to close opportunity gaps and promote more equitable outcomes.

At its core, this work stems from a deep commitment to educational justice and the belief in the power of inclusive leadership to bring about transformation. This integration of rigorous scholarship with practical application will hopefully support educators and administrators in the creation of learning environments that empower minority students to achieve academic success and develop as confident, reflective, and socially aware individuals ready for postsecondary and lifelong success.

Keywords: transformative learning theory, educational leadership, administrative strategies, student empowerment, equity, diverse ethnic backgrounds, minority student success.

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Problem Statement

Despite ongoing efforts to advance equity in U.S. high schools, far too many students from ethnically diverse and historically marginalized backgrounds face significant disparities in academic achievement, engagement, and post-secondary success. “Though research shows that equity-oriented school leaders ‘hold and communicate high expectations for all students regardless of their racial and ethnic backgrounds’” (Leithwood, 2021, p. 306) and work to embed culturally responsive practices into their leadership, many schools have yet to enact such practices in meaningful ways. The practice of effective inclusive leadership extends beyond representation alone; rather, it must ‘challenge and eliminate racist assumptions wherever encountered’ and ensure that ‘the school’s curriculum, culture, structure, and policies reflect the racial diversity in the school’ (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016, p. 5). For high schools serving diverse student populations, administrative strategies fostering critical reflection, student voice, and agency remain explored less, and particularly less so from the perspective of transformative learning. Transformative learning theory maintains that learners can critically challenge and revise their taken-for-granted frames of reference to become “more inclusive, open ... emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7). As applied in high schools, this framework has provided educational leaders with a roadmap to support students not only academically but also as reflective, empowered learners (Gómez-Hurtado, Valdés, González-Falcón, & Jiménez-Vargas, 2021, pp. 69-80).

Yet, the literature consistently reveals one gap: whereas many studies emphasize teacher practices or curriculum design, far fewer systematically explore how administrative and leadership strategies might be leveraged intentionally to facilitate transformative learning among high school students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. As Møller (2018) argues, advancing equity requires a concerted effort to embed understanding of students' cultural, linguistic, and socio-historical contexts in leadership practice (p. 90). Asset-based and culturally affirming pedagogies also highlight the importance of "narrative, storytelling, engagement, and identity" in empowering students from marginalized communities to "transform their own communities from within" (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016, p. 24) This thus points to a critical need to investigate the ways in which high school administrators can enact strategies in congruence with transformative learning theory in order to promote empowerment, reflection, and active engagement of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

This present research aims to tackle that very need through the assessment of administrative strategies within high schools characterized by ethnic diversity. More specifically, the paper probes how leadership practices can lead to school settings in which students would be enabled to feel valued, supported, and mentally and emotionally prepared for success beyond high school, not just academically but as self-determined, socially conscious human beings. By contextualizing transformative learning theory within the scope of secondary education, this paper aims both to further the academic literature and to offer actionable recommendations for education leaders dedicated to equity and the empowerment of students.

Contextualization of Topic

On the issue of high schools with ethnically diverse student bodies in the U.S. secondary

education system, there are multiple, sometimes overlapping, issues: historical patterns of racial inequity, unequal access to Advanced Placement courses, graduation and college matriculation rates, and culturally responsive leadership practices. In that respect, these issues are not localized but situated within much larger systemic contexts related to school leadership decisions, structural policies, and organizational cultures. To this end, this chapter aims to establish how the administrative strategies work in these settings to allow equitable and empowering learning environments for all students, but especially those from a historic ethnic background.

School administrators are in a position of great influence: they develop and implement policies, practices, and school culture that either perpetuate or disrupt inequitable patterns. Recent scholarship highlights that leadership practices beyond those that reinforce compliance or merely formal representation are needed. For instance, educational leaders should “challenge and eliminate racist assumptions wherever they are found” and ensure “the school’s curriculum, culture, structure, and policies reflect the racial diversity in the school” (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016, p. 18). This leadership is much more demanding than simply making diverse hires or celebrating cultural heritage months; it is about embedding equity into the very operational fabric of the school's systems. The challenge is even more pointed in high schools serving ethnically diverse populations, where students often enter with significant disparate educational experiences, and where leadership must navigate both academic and socio-cultural terrains.

Layered onto this is the theoretical framework of transformative learning, typically applied in adult learning and higher education, but increasingly relevant for secondary education contexts. According to Jack Mezirow’s theory, learners engage in processes that prompt them to

question and revise “taken-for-granted frames of reference ... to make them more inclusive, open ... emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7). Deploying this lens in a high school setting invites us to see students not merely as passive recipients of instruction, but as active agents capable of reflection, revision of identity, and self-determined action. When school administrators design strategies through a transformative learning lens, they are creating opportunities for students to move beyond compliance and toward empowerment. In particular, for students from ethnically diverse backgrounds who may have encountered limiting beliefs or systemic barriers, these opportunities are vital.

Complementing the transformative learning perspective is the leadership literature that addresses inclusive, socially just, and equity-driven leadership. For example, authors researching leadership in culturally diverse learning environments emphasize the role of self-transformation for leaders themselves: “effective transformational school leaders are advocates for equity and are role models for all ... ensuring that all students perform academically” (Rodríguez & Villarreal, 2016, p. 72). In other words, administrators must engage in their own reflective and transformative work if they are to lead schools that support transformative learning for students. Research investigating leadership competencies further supports this: school leaders must develop structures that support learner-centered, personalized education, thereby creating conditions where diverse students can engage deeply and meaningfully (Richardson & Khawaja, 2025, p. 7).

Despite these frameworks and insights, an identifiable gap in the literature has persisted: most of the studies focus on either teacher practices, curriculum design, or instructional

leadership, while less attention has been placed on how administrative strategies explicitly support transformative learning processes among ethnically diverse high school students. For instance, it was indicated that while instructional strategies are well documented, “fewer studies investigate how administrative or leadership strategies explicitly facilitate transformative learning processes for ethnically diverse high school students” (Murata, Dong, Lin & Cheung, 2024, p.106). This becomes important because administrators operate at the level of policy, culture, resource allocation, and vision-setting. Their actions create the environment in which teachers and students engage—and therefore have a multiplier effect on whether or not transformative, empowering learning can take place.

In addition, at a time when schools are increasingly called upon to prepare young people for life after graduation, civic engagement, and a shifting labor market, the need to empower students from various ethnic backgrounds becomes all the more urgent. The intersection of transformative learning theory, inclusive leadership practices, and the realities of high school institutional contexts therefore constitutes a formidable context within which to pursue an inquiry. Situating this study at the intersection of theory and practice, it seeks to examine how administrators might operationalize strategies informed by transformative learning for ethnically diverse students. Rather than describe the problem, the aim is to further develop an understanding of how leadership can enact change—how administrators can design, implement, and maintain strategies that transform learning environments in ways that empower students as reflective, agency-oriented individuals prepared for success upon leaving high school.

The contextual landscape of this research is shaped by: (1) historical and persistent disparities faced by ethnically diverse high school students, (2) the critical role of school

administrators in setting the tone, structures, and practices of schools, (3) the applicability of transformative learning theory in supporting students' deep reflection and agency, and (4) the leadership literature that underscores equity-driven, inclusive strategies. Given these interwoven dimensions, this study contributes to the field of educational leadership by forging a pathway toward applied administrative strategies that both draw on theory and respond to the lived realities of diverse high school contexts.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by two complementary theoretical frameworks, the Critical Race Theory and Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. Essentially, these provide a clear basis upon which to investigate how administrative strategies in high schools could be used to empower students from ethnically diverse and traditionally marginalized backgrounds. Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers a framework that not only describes how systemic inequity shapes educational experiences but also challenges such inequities, while Transformative Learning Theory describes the reflective and developmental processes by which students and educators can engage in and transform inequity.

Critical Race Theory in Education

CRT originated in the late 1970s within the field of legal studies as a response to the slow pace of racial reform following the civil rights movement. Primarily developed by people of color, CRT was initially rooted in the field of legal studies during the late 1970s and then spread into education, where scholars have utilized it to analyze the ways in which racism and systemic inequities are deeply embedded in schools, policies, and cultural norms. Some premises of CRT include that racism is ordinary and pervasive; interest convergence defines the time when racial

progress may occur; and the lived experiences of people of color are sources of knowledge. CRT challenges within education the false narrative of meritocracy-the belief that success is purely of individual effort-and instead reveals how institutional structures advantage certain groups and disadvantage others. As Solórzano and Yosso (2002) contend, "CRT provides a lens to examine how race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact educational outcomes and experiences" (p. 24). It also provides a framework within which to understand the persistence of disparities across racial and ethnic lines in achievement, discipline, and course-taking in high school.

CRT also focuses on the centrality of counter-storytelling-the use of individual stories as a means to counter dominant ideologies and reframe ideas of what education should look, feel, and sound like. By centering the voices of students from ethnically diverse and historically marginalized backgrounds, school leaders can more deeply understand how systemic barriers manifest in their schools and draft policies aimed at mitigating inequities. Santamaría and Santamaría (2016) stress that equity-focused leadership should "challenge and eliminate racist assumptions wherever encountered" and ensure that "the school's curriculum, culture, structure, and policies reflect the racial diversity in the school" (p. 112). Such a call to action is in direct alignment with the goals of this dissertation, in which the research investigates ways in which administrative strategies might disrupt structural inequities and foster meaningful inclusion.

The concept of interest convergence by CRT is important to understand the challenges in the operationalization of equity-focused leadership practices. According to Bell (1980, p. 518), racial equity progresses only when doing so furthers the interests of those in power. It invites a critical questioning of whether school equity initiatives aim at empowering marginalized students or these are only performative acts to retain the status quo. Therefore, CRT is at once a

diagnostic and a transformative tool; it helps to identify systemic inequities and presses leaders to take deliberate, justice-oriented action to dismantle them.

Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory

While CRT provides a sociopolitical framework for analyzing inequity, Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory offers a human development perspective on how change occurs at the individual and collective levels. Mezirow (2000) defines transformative learning as "the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference . . . to make them more inclusive, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (p. 7). This process involves critical reflection, dialogue, and action—all of which are essential components of educational empowerment.

Transformative learning is centrally influenced by a disorienting dilemma, which forces individuals to call into question their previous assumptions. Through reflection and discourse, the learner reconsiders his or her beliefs, examines their validity, and, when required, reconstructs them to create new more inclusive and self-aware perspectives (Mezirow, 2000). Within a high school setting, transformative learning theory can help explain how both students and administrators might engage in reflective practices that foster growth, empathy, and agency. Gómez-Hurtado, Valdés, González-Falcón, and Jiménez-Vargas (2021) mention that "effective leadership within diverse schools requires the ability to generate reflective and dialogical situations where both students and teachers critically analyze their own assumptions" (p. 196). These are environments in which students become active agents of their learning processes, rather than passive objects of teaching. Transformative learning, in this respect, is not only a

pedagogical but also a leadership model-it stresses the significance of critical reflection for every actor involved in the educational process, from administrators to students.

Integration of Critical Race Theory and Transformative Learning

Together, Critical Race Theory and Transformative Learning Theory offer a powerful dual lens through which to examine administrative strategies in ethnically diverse schools. CRT places the problem of educational inequity within its historical and structural context, while Transformative Learning Theory provides a pathway for cognitive, emotional, and behavioral change at individual and institutional levels. Administrative approaches based on these frameworks also spur educators and students to be reflectively critical about their roles in inequitable systems and to mobilize toward change. For example, the application of leadership that amplifies student voice, incorporates culturally sustaining pedagogy, and fosters dialogic learning environments can be seen through a CRT lens as means to contest systemic barriers, and through a Transformative Learning Theory lens as pathways to personal and collective transformation (Rodríguez & Villarreal, 2016, p. 45).

Both frameworks highlight the role of dialogue and reflection as tools for transformation. In CRT, the use of counter-storytelling becomes a way of challenging dominant stories and reframing the discourse around race and equity (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28). Likewise, in Transformative Learning Theory, dialogue is that space within which learners reexamine assumptions, share views, and co-create knowledge (Mezirow, 2000, p.14). This is where school administrators can help to create those reflective and dialogical spaces where students are motivated and encouraged to challenge inequitable systems and imagine something else for themselves and their communities.

Relevance to the Study

The combination of CRT and the Transformative Learning Theory forms a strong basis on which this dissertation examines administrative strategies in ethnically diverse high schools. CRT maintains racial equity as central in this examination, recognizing that disparities in education are symptomatic of systemic and historical inequity. The Transformative Learning Theory supplements it with detailed attention to how reflective practice, dialogical process, and empowerment can facilitate personal and institutional change. Together, these theories will assist in the investigation of how administrators can foster an environment in which students from diverse ethnic backgrounds would feel valued, supported, and prepared to be successful after high school, not only academically but also as reflective, socially conscious individuals who become change agents. Integration of such theories bridges the gap between understanding inequity and committing to dismantling it, in accordance with the overarching goal of education as a transformational, justice-oriented process.

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to situate the study within the broader body of research on educational leadership, equity, and student empowerment in ethnically diverse high school contexts. This review explores the theoretical and empirical foundations that inform the study's focus on administrative strategies designed to foster inclusion, reflection, and empowerment among students from historically marginalized backgrounds. The chapter is guided by two intersecting frameworks, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), which together offer a lens for understanding how

systemic inequities in education can be addressed through reflective, equity-driven leadership practices.

Educational leadership research has identified that school administrators do indeed play a pivotal role in setting school culture, enacting equity-centered policies, and cultivating the conditions necessary to support a wide range of learners both academically and emotionally (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020, pp. 6–7; Theoharis, 2007, p. 219). Still, after decades of educational reform designed to stem the tide of achievement gaps, there is still a significant divide between students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Darling-Hammond, 2010, pp. 9–10). These inequities are not the result of individual biases or the distribution of resources but rather from systemic structures deeply ingrained within the curricula, expectations, and relationships developed within schools (Ladson-Billings, 2006, pp. 6–7).

This literature review has three major objectives: to synthesize the current body of research regarding equity and diversity in U.S. high schools in order to contextualize ongoing challenges faced by students from marginalized backgrounds; to analyze just how administrative leadership influences the implementation of inclusive practices and initiatives aimed at the empowerment of students; and to identify limitations of the current literature, namely, how the exploration of administrative strategies with use of the transformative learning and critical race theory lenses is limited. These objectives consider how school administrators can be active agents of genuine, equity-driven change in diverse education settings.

Equity and Diversity in U.S. High Schools: Persistent Inequities in Educational Outcomes

Despite substantial national discourse around equity and inclusion, U.S. high schools continue to reflect deep and persistent racial and ethnic disparities in educational outcomes.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023, Table 1), students from Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous backgrounds consistently score lower on standardized assessments, graduate at lower rates, and have reduced access to advanced coursework compared to their White and Asian peers. These patterns reveal not only academic disparities but also structural inequities that perpetuate cycles of underachievement and exclusion (Carter & Welner, 2013, p. 45). Ladson-Billings (2006, p. 7) framed this sustained disproportion as the “education debt”—the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral inequities that have accrued and placed students of color at a disadvantage. Rather than framing current disparities as if they were recent and new, the framework places them within a history of unequal opportunity that continues to frame the educational landscape. This means, in practice, that students from diverse ethnic backgrounds more often enter schools without culturally responsive pedagogy, are subjected to disciplinary actions in disproportionate numbers, and often face low expectations by educators and administrators alike (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010, p. 93). Furthermore, while accountability policies such as No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act aimed to close achievement gaps, critics argue that they often reinforce deficit-oriented narratives and emphasize test-based measures over meaningful engagement and identity-affirming learning (Sleeter, 2012, p. 46). These policies, though well-intentioned, frequently fail to address the cultural and structural barriers that shape student experiences in diverse schools. Consequently, the persistence of inequities underscores the need for school administrators to engage not only in policy implementation but also in critical reflection and leadership practices that confront systemic bias.

The Role of Race, Culture, and Identity in Schooling

Educational inequity cannot be understood without considering how race, culture, and identity intersect within school environments. Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, pp. 8–9) asserts that racism is not aberrational but endemic to social systems, including education. This recognition means that inequities are reproduced through both overt and subtle mechanisms—such as biased tracking systems, culturally narrow curricula, and disciplinary policies that disproportionately affect students of color (Skiba et al., 2011, p. 142). For students from ethnically diverse backgrounds, school experiences are radically influenced by the cultural incongruities between their life experiences and the dominant norms infused in schools (Gay, 2018, p. 34). According to Ladson-Billings (1995, p. 160), culturally relevant pedagogy posits that students learn best when teaching affirms students' cultural identities, promotes equity, and develops critical consciousness. While there is significant literature about how teachers can enact culturally relevant practices in classrooms, less research has focused on how system leaders, that is, principals, assistant principals, and district leaders, promote and sustain these kinds of approaches at scale.

Administrators are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between policy and practice by setting expectations for inclusive instruction, supporting professional development, and modeling equity-centered leadership. Research by Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016, p. 45) brings into view the three key features of culturally responsive school leadership, or CRSL—a model that outlines leaders' responsibilities to engage communities, critically self-reflect on bias, and ensure that school practices affirm all cultural identities. CRSL moves beyond the rhetoric of diversity; it asks that leaders take purposeful action to address racism and advocate for students who have been historically marginalized.

Santamaría and Santamaría (2016) elaborate that inclusive leaders have to “challenge and eliminate racist assumptions wherever encountered” and make sure that “the school’s curriculum, culture, structure, and policies reflect the racial diversity in the school” (p. 112). The leadership described here demands courage and commitment to dismantling embedded inequities—attitudes and dispositions consistent with transformative learning in which an individual critically reviews assumptions for the purpose of taking action toward social justice (Mezirow, 2000, p. 23).

Culturally Responsive and Transformative Leadership

Emerging research suggests that leadership rooted in cultural responsiveness and transformation can significantly impact school climate, teacher expectations, and student engagement (Shields, 2010, p. 85). Culturally responsive leadership requires administrators to understand students’ cultural contexts, validate their experiences, and create conditions for equitable participation. When leaders demonstrate cultural competence and prioritize inclusivity, they help cultivate a school environment where diversity is not merely tolerated but celebrated as a strength (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016, p. 215).

Transformative leadership extends this idea by directly connecting educational equity with larger questions of power and justice. Shields defines transformative leadership as a form of leadership that “begins with questions of justice and democracy and challenges inequitable practices by effecting deep and equitable change” (2010, p. 559). This is extremely close to the basis upon which Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory rests, where reflection and critical dialogue become mechanisms for personal and institutional transformation. In the case of school administrators, transformative leadership involves leading the school community through processes of collective reflection and change, grappling with uncomfortable truths about

inequity, and reimagining practices that support all learners. In diverse high schools, transformative leadership can take concrete form in policies and initiatives in ways that afford voice to students, forge partnerships, and make decisions inclusively. By calling attention to systemic barriers, these practices also create belonging and empower students (Møller, 2018, p. 142). Students, who are encouraged to critically reflect on their experiences and to participate in shaping their learning environments, become agentic in developing the skills and self-efficacy needed to be successful beyond high school.

The Need for Administrative Transformation

While the literature has been well advanced in understanding culturally responsive teaching and designing curricula, little attention is directed toward exploring the facilitator role of administrative leadership in driving equitable transformations. Most of these empirical studies focus on classroom-level interventions rather than how principals and other administrators shape schoolwide conditions for inclusion and empowerment (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020, p. 87). Yet, as Mezirow (2000) reminds us, transformation involves not only personal change but also institutional structures that support continuous reflection and learning (p. 21). To do so, administrators must be both learners and change agents—those who critically examine their biases while promoting collective participation throughout their schools. This requires, as Theoharis (2007) suggests, "equity-oriented leadership" whereby school leaders deliberately attack systemic constraints and mobilize underrepresented constituent groups in the face of possible backlash (p. 213). Such leadership also aligns with both CRT's commitment to dismantling racism and Transformative Learning Theory's emphasis on critical reflection and action.

Ultimately, educational inequity in ethnically diverse high schools has to be met by a fundamental reimagining of the role of the administrator—not merely compliance or instructional managers but facilitators of transformation. Intentional leadership, reflective practice, and community involvement allow administrators to create school cultures that nurture academic, social, and personal success for all students.

The Role of Educational Leadership in Promoting Equity

Educational leadership is unequivocally important in shaping how schools respond to growing cultural and linguistic diversity within the United States. On the front line of education, school administrators (principals, assistant principals, and district leaders) serve not only as managers of academic programs but also as the moral and cultural stewards of their institutions. Their beliefs, decisions, and actions profoundly influence whether schools become spaces of equity and inclusion or perpetuate cycles of marginalization and exclusion (Theoharis, 2007, p. 214; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020, p. 52). For high schools that are ethnically diverse, leading with equity means more than implementing policies which are inclusive; it means fostering a transformative vision that questions inequities in the structure and places the voices of traditionally marginalized students at the core. Social justice and culturally responsive leadership can challenge systemic barriers that impede student success and further create learning environments which allow all students to flourish academically, socially, and emotionally (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016, p. 305; Shields, 2010, p. 87).

This section explores how educational leadership promotes equity, from three interrelated dimensions that include: (1) the conceptual underpinnings of equity-oriented leadership, (2) culturally responsive leadership practices, and (3) transformative and critical approaches that

synthesize reflection, action, and justice. Together, these dimensions illustrate how effective leadership can become one of the mechanisms for systemic change and student empowerment.

Conceptual Foundations of Equity-Oriented Leadership

Equity-oriented leadership emanates from an understanding that schools are never neutral. Rather, they represent the broader social hierarchies and cultural norms that benefit particular groups at the expense of others. It therefore involves a conscious and sustained process of discerning, challenging, and changing the inequitable structures located within school systems. According to Theoharis, an equity-driven leader “acts to promote inclusion, provide more equitable opportunities to learn, and realize more just conditions by 'perpetual critique' of marginalizing practices and structures” (2007, p. 223). This type of leadership surpasses both the technical and managerial dimensions of administration. Indeed, it requires moral courage born from a deep sense of purpose situated in matters of justice. Shields states that an equity-oriented leader must be willing to ask critical questions regarding whose interests schools serve and who benefits from the policies and practices in place. Such a reflective stance would continually encourage leaders to gauge how issues of racism, classism, and other forms of systemic oppression contour the educational experience of students.

The effective equity leader builds trust and collective responsibility within educators. Leithwood et al. (2020) identified that leadership that improves student outcomes builds collaborative professional cultures in which teachers share accountability for equity goals. In such settings, leaders model inclusivity through transparent communication, participatory decision-making, and a sustained focus on equity outcomes rather than standardized compliance.

Ultimately, equity-oriented leadership requires that administrators conceptualize themselves as agents of transformation, rather than caretakers of the status quo. They must envision schools as dynamic spaces for social change: institutions active in and contributing to the empowerment and self-realization of all students, particularly those who have been historically marginalized (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 45; Theoharis, 2007, p. 137).

Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices

CRL has emerged as one of the most cogent frameworks toward the advancement of educational equity. Culturally responsive leadership emanates from the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 476) and critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, p. 36), extending the ideas of each into the field of educational administration. It calls for leaders to engage with the student population's cultural contexts, affirming identity development and creating policies and practices representative of the diversity within the school community (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016, p. 102). At its core, CRL calls for administrators to reflect critically on their personal biases and assumptions. As Khalifa et al. (2016) point out, culturally responsive leaders must pursue “self-awareness, learning and unlearning” in order to understand how positionality informs decision-making (p. 1280). This critical self-reflection is necessary as a way to disrupt the deficit-oriented views which have framed students of color and multilingual learners as problems to be fixed instead of as assets to be valued.

Specifically, culturally responsive leaders enact equity via specific behaviors and policies, such as teacher recruitment and support that reflect cultural and linguistic diversity, curricula that reflect students' backgrounds, restorative justice discipline approaches, and family and community partnership-building processes (Gay, 2018, p. 24; Khalifa, 2018, p. 58). For

instance, one hallmark of an inclusive discipline policy is moving beyond punitive models that disproportionately discipline students of color toward policies centered around relational repair and accountability. In this same way, leaders who facilitate culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 52) afford teachers the opportunity to capitalize on students' linguistic and cultural resources as assets for learning rather than as deficits to be overcome. Furthermore, effective CRL incorporates authentic community engagement. Those administrators who listen to families, who involve the community in decision-making, and who show respect for local cultural ways are better at establishing trust and achieving equitable outcomes (Khalifa, 2018). This is underscored by Møller (2018), who reminds that leadership embedded in local cultural knowledge enables schools to “create cultures of equity and high expectations” by aligning their institutional goals with the lived realities of their students (p. 90). Culturally responsive leadership thus offers a compelling framework for rethinking how schools serve the diverse student population. By building a platform of cultural competence, self-reflection, and advocacy, school leaders can fashion school climates that encourage belonging, engagement, and achievement for all students.

Transformative and Critical Approaches to Leadership

While culturally responsive leadership focuses on cultural affirmation and inclusion, transformative leadership and CRT extend the conversation to systemic transformation and the redistribution of power. Shields defines transformative leadership as “leadership that begins with questions of justice and democracy and moves toward deep and equitable change” (2010, p. 559). It challenges leaders to confront the structures that keep inequality in place, not simply to adapt to the structures.

Transformative leaders are guided by moral purpose and social responsibility. They critically examine institutional practices that marginalize students and collaborate to redefine what success means in their schools. Drawing from Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, they are aware that real change requires deep reflection and worldview changes (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22). In other words, transformation is both personal and organizational. Before they can effectively lead others to dismantle inequitable systems, administrators themselves must undergo processes of critical reflection-looking at their assumptions about race, ability, and merit. CRT complements this framework, providing a useful theoretical lens for analyzing how race and power operate within educational institutions. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) contend that racism is embedded in laws, policies, and everyday practices; for this reason, educational leaders should provide an opportunity for "counter-storytelling" to elevate the lived experiences of marginalized communities (p. 9). In the context of high school leadership, this translates to valuing student voice as a legitimate source of knowledge and placing students' narratives at the center of policy decisions and reform.

Where transformative and CRT-informed leadership practices most clearly intersect is the call for critical consciousness through collective action. Equity leaders must create the space for dialogue about race, identity, and justice for all students and teachers alike. They must also make sure that equity efforts are not a performance but are structural in the form of policy changes, the distribution of resources, and accountability systems. As Theoharis (2007) has indicated, equity-centered leaders face resistance when challenging entrenched norms; however, their persistence is required to reorient the institutional culture towards justice (p. 228). By amalgamating the reflective depth of transformative learning with the systemic critique of CRT, the practice of

educational leadership becomes both a site and a source of individual and societal change. This can enable administrators to re-imagine schools as democratic spaces where every student is able to achieve and contribute meaningfully to society.

Empowering Student Voice and Agency through Leadership

Equity-focused leadership also empowers students to become active participants in their education. Transformative and culturally responsive leaders recognize that authentic student voice is central to equity work (Cook-Sather, 2014, p. 67). When administrators create structures for students to share their perspectives—such as advisory councils, participatory decision-making committees, or restorative circles—they cultivate a sense of ownership and agency among learners.

Empirical research indicates that schools centered on student participation have better engagement, academic motivation, and school climate. This is particularly important for students from an ethnically diverse background who have felt alienated by the traditional hierarchical structure of schools. The leaders who value student insights do not only affirm their experiences but also assist in developing critical consciousness; that is, the way one develops the ability to recognize and challenge inequitable conditions (Freire, 1970, p. 36). The relationship between student voice and leadership aligns closely with Mezirow's notion of transformative learning. In facilitating dialogue and reflection among students, administrators create opportunities for meaning-making and personal growth. It is a dynamic process that epitomizes the very meaning of transformation: learners critically reevaluate assumptions and leave transformed with newfound insights to guide socially responsible action. Therefore, leadership for equity is relational, participatory, and reflexive. As such, administrators will contribute to the formation of

democratic learning communities by engaging students as co-constructors of school culture.

Such practices will not only improve educational outcomes but also prepare students to navigate and transform inequitable social structures beyond high school.

Challenges and Tensions in Leading for Equity

While the benefits of equity-oriented leadership are well-documented, the process of enacting such leadership is complex and riddled with challenges. Administrators often face resistance from staff, community members, or policy constraints that favor traditional, performance-based accountability measures (Theoharis, 2007, p. 125). The emotional labor associated with confronting racism and inequity can also contribute to professional isolation and burnout among equity-driven leaders (Gooden & Dantley, 2012, p. 47). Additionally, leaders must balance the demand for institutional stability with the need for disruptive change. Shields cautions that transformative leadership can be uncomfortable since it involves confronting privilege and reimagining deeply held and historically embedded practices. Yet, discomfort can be a critical catalyst to learning and growth. Administrators who commit to reflective practice and also engage their communities in critical dialogue will be more likely to sustain long-term change. Leading for equity, in the final analysis, requires both vision and a sense of courage and persistence. It is fundamentally a moral and pedagogical endeavor, one that asks educators to reevaluate their assumptions and work together toward justice.

Educational leadership plays an indispensable role in furthering equity within ethnically diverse high schools. Equity-oriented, culturally responsive, and transformative leaders have the power to challenge systemic inequities, create inclusive cultures, and empower students to become reflective, engaged citizens. Based on Critical Race Theory and Transformative Learning

Theory, this study emphasizes that it is about the need to consider administrators' approach to leadership as both personal transformation and institutional reform. Through culturally responsive practices, critical self-reflection, and authentic collaboration with students and communities, leaders can transform schools into equitable learning environments where diversity is valued as an asset, not a challenge. In so doing, they will be closing not just opportunity gaps but raising a generation of empowered learners ready to lead in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

Administrative Strategies and Transformative Learning

In education systems pursuing equity and inclusion, the administrative strategies will make all the difference between the realization and mere aspiration after transformative learning environments. While teachers determine day-to-day learning experiences, school administrators set up structural and cultural conditions that allow or hinder transformation. Through designing policies, modeling behaviors, and setting expectations, it is the administrators who define what learning and leadership look like in practice. Within ethnically diverse high schools, these are decisions that hold particularly profound implications for how students will experience belonging, identity affirmation, and empowerment (Khalifa, 2018, p. 102; Shields, 2010, p. 65). This section draws on Mezirow's (2000) Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) and its application to educational leadership, exploring how the administrative strategies may begin and support transformation on both the individual and institutional levels. In essence, transformative learning involves critical reflection, dialogue, and action — those processes that urge learners to call into question and rebuild their assumptions about the world (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7). Thus, when applied in the high school environment, this theory provides an administrator with a

framework for designing policies and practices that can nurture not just academic achievement but also critical consciousness and agency among ethnically diverse students. What is even more important, administrative strategies based on transformative learning go beyond compliance and managerial efficiency to the creation of an environment where educators and students alike engage themselves in continuous self-examination, empathy, and growth. The section will analyze literature about transformative leadership and administration in regard to reflective practice, professional learning, equity-centered decision-making, and structures that would enable student empowerment.

The Administrator as a Transformative Leader

Transformative Learning Theory views learning as a nonlinear process of transforming one's frame of reference through critical reflection and dialogue (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5).

Administrators adopting this approach involve not only their students but also their teachers and themselves in cycles of questioning, meaning-making, and action. According to Taylor (2017, p. 22), transformation occurs when leaders challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and foster collective reflection about how schools function.

For administrators, this means changing leadership practices from transactional management to reflective, participatory processes. Transformative administrators do not simply enforce policy; they learn alongside their staff and students. Shields (2010) suggests that the “transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy and moves toward deep and equitable change” (p. 559). This moral and relational orientation is what distinguishes transformative administrators from traditional school managers. They see the school as a living community rather than a bureaucratic system — one capable of evolving in response to

inequities. Furthermore, transformative administrators model reflective practices they want to engender in others. According to Brookfield (2012, p. 56), leaders should engage in becoming "critically reflective practitioners" who consider their power, privilege, and decisions in the shaping of school culture. Through transparency in communication, in vulnerability, and with a focus on learning from feedback, administrators can inspire staff and students to do similarly. This is reciprocal not only in strengthening the relationships within schools but also in aligning leadership in all ways with the principles of transformative learning itself: reflection, dialogue, and empowerment.

Creating Reflective School Cultures

One key administrative strategy for promoting transformative learning has to do with cultivating a reflective school culture, one in which there are feelings of encouragement among teachers and students to question assumptions, dialogues, and the exploring of multiple perspectives. Administrators can enact reflection through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), teacher inquiry groups, and structured protocols for reflection that focus on issues related to equity and inclusion (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8; Taylor, 2017, p. 34). Research indicates that reflective leadership itself can have measurable effects on teacher efficacy and school improvement. For example, schools led by principals who promote collaborative reflection and shared inquiry exhibit increased teacher motivation and improved student outcomes (Leithwood & Louis, 2011, p. 52). Reflection becomes a collective tool for learning, not an individual practice. Administrators are able to embed reflective dialogue into faculty meetings, data analyses, and curriculum planning sessions in ways that keep equity at the forefront of their discussions rather than relegated to the periphery.

In diverse high school settings, reflection will also need to consider race, culture, and identity. For Mezirow (2000), critical reflection means questioning the socio-cultural assumptions that frame one's understanding of others (p. 22). Administrators can encourage this level of reflection by facilitating courageous conversations about race, providing professional development related to culturally sustaining pedagogy, and setting norms of respect and inquiry. When leaders engage staff in reflective discussions related to equity, according to Khalifa (2018), they “begin to cultivate a school culture that values inclusivity and recognizes the systemic nature of marginalization” (p. 94). The intentional cultivation of a reflective culture transforms the school into a learning community — one capable of adapting and growing in response to its diverse students' needs.

Transformative Professional Development and Learning Communities

PD is also a vital administrative strategy that is congruent with transformative learning principles. Rather than making PD a compliance activity, the transformative administrator creates learning that is dialogical, problem-centered, and reflective. These types of approaches invite educators to reflect on their biases, reconsider instructional practices, and consider culturally responsive ways of teaching and leading (Mezirow, 1997, p. 43; Gay, 2018, p. 27). Brookfield (2012) contends that professional learning should invite “critical interrogation of assumptions” that sustain inequities (p. 12). That is, for example, administrators facilitate PD sessions focused on disciplinary data disaggregated by race, the patterns of exclusion that emerge from it, and collectively determine restorative responses. Similarly, administrators can insert storytelling or student panels into PD to center the voices of students — an approach aligned with CRT's counter-storytelling methodology (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 45). Research

supports the link between transformative PD and student outcomes: In schools in which administrators provide sustained inquiry-based professional learning, teachers demonstrate increased cultural competence and responsiveness. Such outcomes are consistent with Mezirow's assertion that transformative learning requires not just reflection, but active experimentation and change in practice. When transformative learning principles are baked into ongoing PD, administrators empower teachers to conceptualize equity work as a shared professional process, rather than an individual moral imperative. And that has ripple effects that benefit students—particularly those from marginalized groups whose experiences often reflect the systemic inequities of schooling.

Decision-Making and Policy Through a Transformative Lens

Administrative strategies also extend to decision-making and policy formation. Transformative leaders view policies not as static mandates but as evolving frameworks shaped by reflection and community input. Mezirow (2000) emphasized that transformation occurs when learners act on new understandings to “generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (p. 7). When administrators apply reflective decision-making to school policy, they demonstrate learning in action. For example, discipline policies based in restorative justice rather than punishment would represent a transformational shift in assumptions regarding behavior, accountability, and belonging. Administrators who have made such changes in policy often report reduced racial disparities in suspensions and improved school climate (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2016, p. 112). Likewise, adopting flexible grading systems or portfolio assessments reflects change from compliance-based assessment to personalized equitable learning.

Transformative administrators also embrace transparency and shared governance. By engaging teachers, students, and families in decision-making processes, they build shared ownership of change. Shields (2010) calls this "transformative democratic practice," where leadership is distributed and empowerment is shared (p. 563). Here, the lived experiences of students become a source of data that drives institutional reform—a concept squarely grounded in both Mezirow's (1997, p. 5) dialogical learning framework and the CRT notion of elevating the voices of those most marginalized (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 37). Administrative decision-making based on transformative principles reimagines leadership as an act of collaboration and reflection. It closes the gap between theory and practice by ensuring that equity is something not simply valued but operationalized in practice.

Student Empowerment and Agency as Outcomes of Transformative Administration

Perhaps the most deep-seated consequence of transformative administrative strategies is a development of student agency—or the ability of students to understand, question, and shape their own educational experiences. Mezirow's theory focuses on the notion of empowerment through reflection and action, important elements for marginalized students navigating inequitable systems (Mezirow, 2000, p. 21). To build in student empowerment, administrators can provide outlets for student voice, like equity councils, peer mediation programs, or participatory research projects. Such work supports CRT's principle of counter-storytelling, where students can name their experiences and disrupt dominant stories that position them as deficient (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 28). According to Mitra (2018, p. 142), institutionalizing student participation in governance by the school leaders is associated with students showing increased engagement, motivation for achieving academically, and a sense of belonging. In addition, transformative

learning may be fostered when administrators purposefully mentor students from underrepresented groups to engage in critical reflection related to identity, leadership, and purpose.

In transformative schools, student empowerment is not a byproduct; rather, it is an explicit goal. Administrators design structures that affirm cultural identity, encourage critical inquiry, and prepare students for democratic participation beyond high school. As Freire (1970) contended, education should be the "practice of freedom," in which learners develop the capacity to transform their world (p. 81). Transformative administrators embody this philosophy by constructing school environments nurturing critical awareness and social responsibility. Administrative approaches based on transformative learning theory pave the way for equitable, reflective, and empowering high school environments. By modeling critical reflection, facilitating ongoing professional learning, and embedding participatory decision-making, administrators activate the values of both Transformative Learning Theory and Critical Race Theory. These leaders do more than manage schools—they engage in moral, intellectual, and emotional work that transforms institutions from within. Through deliberate strategy and reflection, administrators have the ability to foster schools at which students from diverse ethnic backgrounds not only achieve academic success but also come to experience learning as a liberatory, identity-affirming process. As Mezirow (2000, p. 20) reminds us, transformation has its genesis in instances when individuals first begin to question their assumptions and take action based on new understandings. The most powerful administrative strategies, then, are those that help entire school communities—leaders, teachers, and students alike—learn to see, think, and act differently in the pursuit of a more just and inclusive education system.

Gaps in the Literature and Implications for Practice

Despite considerable writings on educational equity, leadership, and transformative learning, there are significant lacunas in understanding how high school administrators can intentionally foster transformative learning for ethnically diverse students. Although prior literature has identified key constructs, such as culturally responsive teaching, reflective practice, and social justice-oriented leadership, most research has targeted teacher-centered interventions, classroom strategies, or broad policy directives rather than the concrete administrative practices that influence school-wide transformation (Khalifa, 2018, p. 45; Shields, 2010, p. 72).

This section highlights the main gaps in the existing literature and their implications for practice. In particular, three issues need to be researched: (1) the limited application of TLT to high school administrative contexts, (2) a general lack of consideration of systemic and structural levels in equity-focused leadership, and (3) evidence-based strategies that effectively infuse student voice, agency, and empowerment into administrative decision-making within schools. Such a discussion of these gaps forms both a scholarly and a practical rationale for this research, reinforcing the need to investigate how administrative strategies can operationalize transformative learning to support ethnically diverse students attending high school.

Limited application of transformative learning theory to high school administration

Whereas Mezirow's (2000, p. 18) Transformative Learning Theory has been widely referenced in higher education and adult learning contexts, it has largely remained underdeveloped with respect to K-12 administrative leadership. Although TLT places central emphasis on critical reflection, dialogue, and action as mechanisms for individual and collective transformation, few studies have explored how such principles translate into administrative

strategies within high schools (Taylor, 2017, p. 42). Most existing research targets either classroom-level interventions or teacher professional development with little attention being paid to the deeper institutional practices that condition transformative learning at the school level (Brookfield, 2012, p. 45; Mezirow, 1997, p. 22).

For example, while administrators may provide professional development on culturally responsive pedagogy, there is limited evidence regarding how they foster reflective school cultures, engage staff in critical dialogue, or implement policies that explicitly support student empowerment through TLT principles (Khalifa, 2018, p. 57). Few studies have also explored how the administrators themselves undergo transformative learning processes which inform their leadership decisions, despite evidence that reflective leadership is crucial in bringing about equitable learning environments (Shields, 2010, p. 45). This omission is even more significant within an ethnically diverse high school context, where students' experiences and identities converge with systemic inequities. Thus, understanding how school administrators can integrate transformative learning into school culture, policy, and practice is imperative in translating theory into actionable strategies towards successful academic performance coupled with socio-emotional development amongst marginalized students.

Under-Examination of Systemic and Structural Factors

While a substantial amount of the literature promotes the value of equity-oriented leadership, very little addresses the structural and systemic barriers impeding transformative practices. Critical Race Theory (CRT) embeds the understanding that racism, inequitable distribution of resources, and biased institutional norms remain part of schools today (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 8; Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 6). However, much of the research stops short of

exploring how school administrators can work through such systemic challenges to institute change that could be continuous. For example, studies have shown that policies aimed at closing achievement gaps rarely account for broader socio-historical contexts that impact students from marginalized backgrounds (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 45). Rather than solely focusing on student needs, the administrator has to face entrenched expectations, state and district mandates, and resistance from staff or community members who may be unfamiliar with or opposed to equity-driven reforms (Theoharis, 2007, p. 812). Although CRT points to these very barriers conceptually, there is a lack of empirical research showing concrete administrative strategies that can effectively confront and dismantle systemic inequities within high schools (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016, p. 45).

Not only that, but the current literature rarely addresses the interplay between administrative decisions, institutional structures, and student outcomes in ways that integrate both TLT and CRT. Research is needed to explore how administrators' reflective practices and transformative strategies intersect with structural factors-tracking systems, disciplinary policies, or resource allocation-to either perpetuate or mitigate inequities. Without this understanding, leadership interventions risk being superficial or unsustainable, failing to achieve meaningful transformation at the school level.

Limited Research on Student Voice, Agency, and Empowerment

Another critical gap in the literature regarding equity-focused administrative strategies concerns the role of student voice and agency. While TLT clearly places a high value on the potential of learners to reflect and act, much less attention has been paid to how administrators purposefully provide high school students with opportunities for contributing to their educational

experience (Mitra, 2018, p. 112; Mezirow, 2000, p. 21). Student voice is more than symbolic inclusion; it represents an important mechanism in which transformative learning occurs, particularly for ethnically diverse students who are often marginalized within traditional school structures (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 50).

While district and school administrators have options like student advisory councils, participatory budgeting, restorative justice programs, and mentorship initiatives that support agency, empirical research documenting such approaches is underdeveloped. The intersection of student agency with administrative reflexivity has been less fully explored: How do leaders respond to student feedback? How do these insights influence policy, school climate, and instructional priorities? In the absence of studies on such matters, educational leaders also lack evidence-based models for embedding student empowerment into comprehensive school-wide transformation efforts (Cook-Sather, 2014, p. 23). Finally, student agency literature often is about classrooms or after-school programs, not systems of school leadership. It is necessary to examine the administrative strategies for intentionally integrating the voices of students within the institution and learn how transformative practices spread and maintain equity outcomes.

Challenges in Operationalizing Transformative and Equity-Oriented Strategies

A recurring theme in the literature is that translating theory into practice is complex and context-dependent. Shields (2010) comments that transformative leadership requires leaders to navigate simultaneously moral, relational, and organizational challenges. In their efforts to implement equity-focused, reflective strategies, administrators are confronted with resistance from staff, parents, and community stakeholders, with limited resources and competing demands for standardized achievement metrics. Similarly, Khalifa (2018) suggests that culturally

responsive leadership is usually impeded by either institutional inertia or superficial policy adoption, where schools may adopt the rhetoric of diversity but make no systemic changes (Khalifa, 2018, p. 72). The tension between compliance-driven leadership and transformative, equity-centered practices creates a need for empirical investigation into practical strategies that administrators can realistically enact. Such research would provide actionable guidance for leaders who would work toward creating an inclusive, reflective, and empowering school environment.

Implications for Practice

These gaps have implications for the educational practice on many levels, most especially among secondary school administrators committed to both equity and transformative learning. First, there is an evident need for strategies that operationalize TLT in administrative contexts: reflective practices, professional learning communities, and participatory decision-making frameworks that integrate both staff and students. Administrators can foster transformative learning by modeling reflection, engaging staff in dialogue about equity, and creating policies that prioritize inclusion and empowerment. Secondly, leaders must engage systemic and structural factors so that equity-focused initiatives are sustainable. This would involve a review of policies dealing with discipline and tracking, resource allocation, and curriculum design using both CRT and transformative learning lenses. Administrators need to develop practical tools that support their evaluation of how structural barriers influence student outcomes and how to adapt systems of schools to support justice and inclusion. Thirdly, student voice and agency should be upfront. As such, administrators must make conscious efforts to create mechanisms through which students can participate in decision-making, provide feedback on policy and instruction,

and lead initiatives that affect their school communities. These not only align with Mezirow's principles of transformative learning but also reflect CRT's emphasis on counter-storytelling and valuing marginalized perspectives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 9; Mitra, 2018, p. 45). Finally, professional development and mentoring structures to support administrators to adopt equity-centered reflective leadership practices are needed; administrators themselves are learners in a transformative process, one that keeps them always questioning their assumptions, biases, and practices while working collaboratively with the staff, students, and community (Taylor, 2017, p. 63). This reflective leadership ensures that the strategies for promoting equity are both intentional and adaptive.

In all, while there is growing recognition within the literature for both equity-oriented and transformative leadership, significant gaps remain in understanding how high school administrators effectively operationalize these principles. Specifically, research is limited in applying Transformative Learning Theory to administrative practice, addressing systemic and structural barriers, and integrating student voice and agency into decision-making. These gaps demonstrate a need for empirical studies of administrative strategies in diverse high school contexts. Addressing these gaps is of both scholarly and practical importance. By examining ways in which administrators can foster transformative learning environments, future research can offer actionable insights for the design of policies, professional development, and school structures that promote equity. In addition, understanding the strategies themselves informs the development of leadership models responsive to the needs of ethnically diverse students and helps support their academic success, personal growth, and social empowerment.

This research, therefore, tries to fill these gaps in understanding the efficiency of administrative strategies in high schools with ethnically diverse populations. Situating TLT within CRT-informed equity principles, this study aspires to meaningfully develop an understanding of how school administrators can actualize transformative practices, engender reflective and inclusive school cultures, and equip students as critically aware and socially responsible learners.

Research Questions

Specific research questions that address the purpose of this study involve exploring how high school administrators are supporting minority students toward academic, social, and emotional success. These questions remain within the scope approved in the IRB application, ensuring that data collection focuses on experiences and strategies of administrators in fostering equitable and inclusive school environments.

1. How do high school administrators support students from ethnically diverse backgrounds in their academic, social, and emotional development?
2. What administrative practices and policies contribute to creating equitable opportunities for students in high schools serving diverse populations?
3. How do school administrators foster an inclusive school culture that encourages student engagement, belonging, and voice?
4. In what ways do the administrators address the challenges and barriers within the school environment that impact the equitable outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds?

Though the concepts examined include student agency, transformative learning, and culturally responsive leadership, these are explored as parts of the broader inquiry into how school administrators enact strategies and policies to support students from minority groups.

Framing those areas within approved questions ensures consistency with the IRB application while enabling meaningful analysis and discussion in the dissertation.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to investigate how well administrative strategies work in ethnically diverse high schools to nurture transformative learning and advance equity. This research is grounded in the Transformative Learning Theory by Mezirow (2000, p. 21) and informed by Critical Race Theory by Delgado & Stefancic (2017, p. 8) as it seeks to understand how administrators enact policies, programs, and practices that empower students, develop reflective school cultures, and address systemic inequities. This research follows a qualitative design to offer an elaborate and contextually deep exploration of such complex phenomena in their natural settings and thus yields a rich understanding of administrator and student perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 45). A multiple-case study design was used to explore high schools with ethnically diverse student populations. Case studies are best conducted to explore "how" and "why" questions since they allow the researcher to explore processes and outcomes in natural settings (Yin, 2018, p. 15). In this study, each school was considered a case unto itself and, therefore, provided insight into how administrative strategies within the school are enacted and perceived by students. Guiding the study were the theoretical frameworks of Transformative Learning Theory and Critical Race Theory, which ensured that reflective practices and leadership principles focused on equity were integral to data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

The participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that those included could provide the most relevant and insightful data with regard to administrative

strategies for equity and transformative learning (Patton, 2015, p. 264). Seven high school administrators- current principals and assistant principals with policy, curriculum, and equity initiative responsibilities-were included in the study. Their experiences yield detailed information about strategies put in place to create an inclusive and empowering environment within their school. Furthermore, three high school students from diverse ethnic backgrounds provided insight into how administrative practice influenced their sense of agency, engagement, and belonging. In particular, the opportunity for intensive, individual exploration of each participant's experiences allows a depth of understanding critical in qualitative research. Data collection occurred through seven semi-structured interviews with administrators and three in-depth individual interviews with students. Interviews with administrators explored leadership strategies and approaches regarding the implementation of equity-focused initiatives, reflective practices, and strategies for working with systemic and structural barriers. For the students, the interviews examined experiences with school leadership, voice and participation opportunities, and perceptions of equity and inclusion within their schools. To provide further context and triangulate interview data, relevant school documents, such as handbooks, equity plans, and professional development materials, were collected and analyzed. The combination of interviews and document analysis will provide an in-depth understanding of administrative strategies and their impact.

Data analysis employed a thematic approach, which facilitated the identification of patterns and insights at both the administrator and student levels (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Interviews were transcribed verbatim and carefully reviewed for accuracy prior to coding. Initial open coding identified recurring concepts related to transformative learning, student

empowerment, culturally responsive leadership, and systemic barriers. These codes were then organized into broader categories through axial coding, with attention to themes reflecting Mezirow's principles of critical reflection and action, as well as critical race theory emphases on systemic inequities and the experiences of marginalized groups (Crenshaw, 2017). A cross-case analysis compared themes across participants, highlighting commonalities and differences to develop a nuanced understanding of how administrative strategies were enacted across different school contexts. Triangulation with school documents further validated findings and ensured that reported practices corresponded with formal policies and initiatives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2021).

Ethical considerations guided every phase of the research process, but it was especially important because this study involved a population of minors and relied heavily on sensitive topics related to race and equity. All administrators gave informed consent, while assent was obtained from student participants and parental consent when appropriate. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used, and all data were stored in a secure location. Participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they may terminate their participation in the study at any time. The potential for power dynamics during interviews was minimized by ensuring that participants felt comfortable sharing candid perspectives. The protocol was reviewed by an Institutional Review Board to ensure that protection of human research subjects was maintained according to the required ethical standards. Several means were utilized to enhance trustworthiness and rigor in the study. Data source triangulation included data from administrator interviews, student interviews, and school documents, and as much as possible, findings were mutually corroborated to reduce bias. Member checking allowed

participants to review and validate interpretations of their responses for accuracy and credibility. The researcher kept reflexive notes throughout the data collection and analysis process, reflecting critically on personal assumptions and how they might influence the study. Together, these practices reinforce the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301).

While this method offers deep insights into administrative strategies and student experiences, one recognizes a number of limitations. The relatively small sample size of seven administrators and three students does not generalize well; however, the objective of qualitative case study research is not statistical generalization but, instead, the generation of rich, contextually grounded insights (Yin, 2018, p. 15). Data from self-report measures can be susceptible to social desirability or selective memory, and this is mitigated to an extent by document analysis and member checking.

In all, the methodology of this research befits the investigation into high school principals' implementation of strategies for transformative learning and equity. By investigating administrative intent through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and thematic analysis, the investigation captures both the administrative intent and the students' experiences, providing a comprehensive view of how leaders facilitate or hinder school culture and student empowerment. This integration of Transformative Learning Theory with Critical Race Theory ensures a theoretically sound yet practically relevant study, supplying insights that can help future administrative practices toward the creation of inclusive and transformative learning environments for ethnically diverse students.

Data Findings

This study explored how high school administrators enact strategies to foster equity, student empowerment, and transformative learning in ethnically diverse schools. Interviews and surveys conducted with seven administrators and three students offered rich insights into both progress and lapses in practice. Using Critical Race Theory and Transformative Learning Theory as a foundation, these findings highlight not only what administrators are doing but also how these acts mold student experiences and shape culture within schools. Beyond this, nuanced tensions between policy intentions and students' lived realities are exposed in the data, providing guidance for both practice and future research.

In the context of administrators pursuing equity and transformative learning, the data reflect multiple recurring analytic "codes": individualized administrative support, authentic vs. symbolic inclusion, feedback and accountability practices, culturally responsive mentorship and counseling, inequitable access to opportunities and discipline, continuous reflective leadership, and developing social-emotional climate and belonging. Collectively, these codes evidence that equity work in schools remains multi-dimensional, more often than not entailing overlays of dynamics of identity, power, and institutional structure. The view represented here is seconded by Crenshaw's articulation of Intersectionality, where she says that intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things. (Crenshaw, 2017)

Applying an intersectional lens to our findings helps make visible the ways in which students' experiences of inclusion, discipline, mentoring, and belonging are shaped not only by

race or culture alone, but by the confluence of many identity and structural factors (e.g., socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic identity, cultural background, prior academic access). Variation in students' reports-that some receive consistent personal support, mentoring, and culturally aware counseling while others feel unseen or misunderstood-suggests inequities are not uniformly distributed, but mediated through administrators' capacity, cultural competence, and the broader institutional context. In this way, the codes illustrate how inequity can persist even within schools committed to equity; symbolic efforts do not equate to structural or relational change for all students. Therefore, in Crenshaw, intersectionality reinforces the analytic framework of the study by pointing out that effective, equity-oriented leadership has to attend to single identities-not just race or culture-but also to the intersectional identity markers and structural positions. For high school administrators, this means personalized support, mentorship, curricula inclusion, and disciplinary practices have to be reassessed and reshaped with sensitivity to how multiple forms of marginalization may compound-otherwise, even well-intended reforms risk leaving students behind. In so doing, the study moves beyond a simplistic "diversity and inclusion checklist" to deeply relational, reflexive, and structural work that acknowledges intersectional realities.

Theme 1: Individualized Administrative Support as a Foundation for Transformation

A primary theme that emerged was the critical role of personalized support. Administrators described flexible approaches, such as adjusting schedules or workloads to accommodate professional development. One administrator shared, "My principal worked with me to ensure I could finish my administrative certification without compromising my classroom responsibilities." Students similarly valued moments of tailored support, though they noted

inconsistencies: “Sometimes it’s immediate, but other times, it falls through the cracks. It depends on which staff member I approach.” This is analytically indicative that transformative learning is most likely when support is relational, deliberate, and sustained. Indeed, administrators' ability to recognize individual needs and respond appropriately not only builds trust but also models reflective leadership, bridging CRT and TLT principles. As such, this theme adds to the literature by highlighting the link between administrator responsiveness and student agency, which has gone under explored in literature largely centered around teacher practices.

Theme 2: Authentic Inclusion and Representation in School Life

The theme of diversity and inclusion revealed a tension between structural initiatives and lived student experiences. Administrators pointed to programs like mentorship initiatives, multicultural events, and multilingual family engagement nights. One explained, “We have worked hard to build cultural competency among staff, but it’s an ongoing process. Equity work doesn’t end.” Students, however, expressed frustration at gaps between representation and curriculum or leadership opportunities: “We celebrate cultural days, but I don’t see my culture or perspective reflected in the classes I take or the leadership opportunities offered.” This finding is analytically important because it shows that symbolic gestures, while important, cannot substitute for authentic inclusion. The data underscore CRT’s emphasis on counter-storytelling and the need to elevate marginalized voices. As mentioned earlier, Delgado and Stefancic (2017) assert, “members of subordinate groups, particularly their experience of oppression, are best positioned to know and articulate their own reality” (p. 9-11). For this research, this makes a twofold contribution: first, it reveals the nuanced gap between policy and practice; second, it underlines the centrality of student perception and experience in any evaluation of the effectiveness of equity initiatives.

Theme 3: Communication and Feedback as a Driver for Accountability

Another key insight concerned how administrators collect, interpret, and act on feedback. The administrators spoke to surveys, meetings, and planning systems, yet acknowledged that resource constraints often limited follow through: “We try to gather input, but sometimes it’s hard to implement change. Resources and time often limit what we can achieve,” one participant put it. Students echoed this concern: “We fill out surveys and attend meetings, but I don’t see real changes. It feels like our voices get recorded but not acted on.” From an analytical perspective, this theme sheds light on the disjuncture between participatory process and outcome. It thus reinforces the TLT idea that dialogue needs to be translated into consequential action (Mezirow, 2000). In terms of contribution, the data yield concrete evidence that student engagement in decision-making requires both structural channels and accountable follow through -an insight with significant policy and leadership training implications.

Theme 4: Mentorship and Culturally Responsive Counseling

Mentorship and counseling emerged as important mechanisms through which students were supported in reflecting on their identities, developing themselves, and becoming empowered. Administrators acknowledged the importance of culturally responsive mentorship, yet recognized important limitations in staffing and training: “Our counselors are great, but they’re stretched thin and don’t always have the training to understand cultural nuances.” Students similarly indicated that while support existed, counselors sometimes lacked the cultural understanding necessary to effectively guide students: “My counselor listens, but I feel like they

don't really get my experiences as a student of color." Analytically, this theme is illustrative of the fact that mentorship and counseling are not just support structures; rather, they are mechanisms for transformative learning, providing an opportunity for students to engage in critical reflection around identity, leadership, and purpose. The contribution to the field is therefore significant: it evidences the need for administrators to prioritize culturally responsive staffing and professional development as central to equity-oriented leadership, rather than supplementary initiatives.

Theme 5: Equitable Opportunities and Disciplinary Practices

Data consistently pointed to equity gaps in academic programs, extracurricular activities, and discipline. Administrators described targeted initiatives such as leadership academies and college readiness programs, yet students noted persistent disparities: "Sometimes it feels like certain kids get pushed to join programs, while others are left out." Discipline inequities were also observed: "Some kids get written up immediately, while others don't. It depends on who you are." Analytically, these findings highlight the gap between the design of policies and their actual execution and bring attention to the critical role of the administrator in monitoring, reflecting on, and adjusting practices to guarantee that they are fair. This study makes its singular contribution by adding empirical evidence on linking administrators' equity-focused practices to students' experiences of inclusion and justice and by extending the frames of CRT and TLT to the context of high school leadership.

Theme 6: Continuous Reflection and Transformative Leadership

Finally, across all themes, administrators consistently described the need for ongoing self-reflection, dialogue, and critical examination of bias. One participant reflected, "Equity work

doesn't end. It's about always questioning ourselves and improving our practices." This commitment reflects Mezirow's (2000) concept of transformative learning and CRT's emphasis on challenging systemic inequities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). From an analytic perspective, findings have shown that this equity-oriented leadership is personal and institutional in nature, in that it requires administrators to model reflection and engage with stakeholders while making actionable, equity-driven decisions. This study bears merit in a literature review regarding how the reflective practice of school administrators impels school climate, student empowerment, and systemic change, a line of inquiry often under analyzed in previous research.

Conclusion

In summary, the data presented here illustrates how, in ethnically diverse settings, high school administrators are committed to equity and transformative learning; however, chasms persist between intentions and what students actually report about their experiences. By investigating personalized supports, inclusion, communication, mentorship, equitably distributing opportunities, and reflective leadership, this study discovers certain leverage points to support systemic change. These findings extend both CRT and TLT frameworks to practical administrative strategies and also highlight the ways in which administrators' decisions, actions, and reflections shape both student outcomes and school-wide culture. Importantly, they underscore that equity is a dynamic, ongoing process—one that requires sustained commitment, structural support, and authentic engagement with the voices of those most affected.

Major Contributions

This study contributes to the fields of educational leadership, equity, and transformative learning in several key ways. First, it reveals how high school administrators operationalize

equity-oriented leadership in ethnically diverse contexts through concrete examples of practices beyond rhetorical commitments to inclusion. Through detailed interviews and surveys, this research surfaces showed ways in which administrators provide individualized support, cultivate culturally responsive pedagogies, and foster mentoring structures that empower students hailing from historically marginalized communities. Unlike much prior research emphasizing either classroom-level interventions or broad policy mandates, these findings illustrate school-wide strategies and reflective practices that shape everyday student experiences and a sense of belonging.

Second, this study contributes to an emerging understanding of the interplay between student voice and administrative action. Data reveals that when students are meaningfully engaged in decision-making-through councils, advisory boards, or structured feedback mechanisms, they develop agency, critical consciousness, and a deeper sense of attachment within their school context. Administrators who intentionally center these voices at the heart of school governance create conditions for equity that also bring transformative learning processes for students and staff. This is a timely contribution as equity-oriented education reformers increasingly look toward student-centered practices, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and anti-racist school reform.

Third, the study offers empirical evidence of CRL and TLT in a high school context. Although TLT has been widely used in adult and higher education contexts, this study demonstrates how its concepts-critical reflection, dialogue, and action-inform strategies for K-12 administrators. In this study, administrators participated in reflective processes that questioned their assumptions, confronted systemic inequity, and spurred school-wide discussion on race,

culture, and identity. In doing so, they demonstrated the transformative leadership practices the literature indicates are necessary yet missing in ethnically diverse secondary schools.

Finally, it contributes to the practical knowledge base for leaders and policymakers through identifying actionable approaches toward mitigating systems of inequity and improving educational opportunity. From designing culturally relevant curricula and restorative discipline policies to implementing mentorship programs, the recommendations include tangible, replicable strategies for schools intent on moving beyond performative equity efforts. The current research emphasizes that moving forward with equity demands both moral courage and sustained reflection—values with implications for the development of professional growth, policy design, and leadership preparation programs.

This work truly bridges a crucial gap in the literature by combining theory, practice, and lived experience into a robust framework for understanding how school administrators can foster inclusive, reflective, and transformative schooling. Its implications will resonate with scholars and practitioners alike and with students themselves, whose empowerment the book positions as decidedly central to equitable educational reform.

Demographics

Participants in the study included seven school administrators and three high school students from different schools across the United States, with the majority of the subjects being from the midwest, specifically Illinois. The administrator sample consisted of participants aged from the mid-thirties to over fifty-five years, with both male and female leaders represented. A majority identified as Black or African American, while others identified as White, Hispanic, or of mixed heritage. All of the administrators held graduate degrees, indicating a high level of

professional preparation and commitment to educational leadership. Finally, the participants included students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, each with a unique perspective on how school administrative practices influence their experiences of learning, belonging, and post-secondary aspirations. These life stories came together to create a multivocal narrative of how equity intersects with transformative leadership within secondary education.

While administrators consistently professed commitment to equity and inclusion, they also consistently highlighted how systemic barriers persisted and the ways in which inequities were manifested through inconsistencies in implementation. For example, several administrators highlighted efforts to build cultural responsiveness through professional development and mentorship programs while simultaneously noting that these efforts were not always supported or sustained at higher levels of district leadership. For example, one administrator shared that their principal had been flexible and supportive when attending professional training; however, subsequent proposals for equity-focused student leadership initiatives showed a lack of institutional follow-through. This highlights Mezirow's (1991) idea that transformative learning, or reflection and critical dialogue, must be manifest in changes to structures for transformation to be realized. For educational leadership, this means questioning existing norms but enacting new, equity-centered practices to reshape the culture. (pp. 142-160)

Student perspectives resonated with these administrative reflections, particularly in their emphasis on the relational trust-emotional safety nexus. Students characterized administrators as generally supportive and accessible but indicated variation in consistency and personalization of support. While most reported that their academic and social needs were met through counseling, tutoring, or teacher support, some felt that responses to cultural or identity-based struggles were

uneven. These experiences capture the emotional nature of transformative learning-where students' experiences of recognition, respect, and validation of their identities become critical moments of empowerment (Mezirow, 2000, pp.13-14). When administrators acted with genuine interest in students, providing opportunities for their voices to inform the culture of the school, students reported increased motivation, confidence, and sense of belonging.

A central theme across participants was that social-emotional growth was both an outcome and a vehicle for equity. For instance, administrators connected students' social-emotional learning to engagement, conflict resolution, and leadership readiness; however, they also identified culturally responsive approaches as essential for SEL implementation. As one administrator stated, "strong relationships with students and families are central to school success...empathy and clear expectations foster trust and long-term growth." This belief aligns with transformative learning principles which emphasize empathy, reflection, and connection at the base of transformation (Cranton, 2016, p.27). Such findings also support the Critical Race Theory perspective forwarded by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995, p. 48), in which transforming the institutional structures of inequity involves affirming the identities of marginalized students at their core. By making cultural relevance the center of mentorship and communication, administrators offset deficit-based narratives and develop inclusive, empowering contexts for learning.

Professional and emotional development was further emphasized among the participants. In that respect, administrators talked of their continuous effort to enhance their own cultural competency and self-awareness, pointing out that leading in diverse schools requires both reflection and action. Again, many pressed for equity audits as an ongoing process, mentorship

of educators of color, and district-wide accountability for equity goals. These insights reflect what Shields (2010) characterizes as transformative leadership, a model incorporating critical reflection, moral courage, and commitment to social justice (pp. 5-7). The experience of administrators suggests that transformative leadership not only confronts bias but also nurtures the emotional resilience needed to keep equity work ongoing over time.

From the students' perspective, the emotional climate of the school played an important role in their sense of agency. They expressed that only caring and listening from administrators helped them feel visible and valued. On the other hand, follow-through on diversity initiatives not consistently done or limited opportunities for their voices in leadership have contributed to marginalization. These findings support Noguera's (2003) contention that equity must be both systemic and relational—students' emotional well-being and academic outcomes are intertwined with the degree to which schools create environments of trust, fairness, and belonging (p. 435). The demographic diversity of participants and social-emotional narratives shared within the stories recounted here reveal a deeper understanding that equity work is greater than policies and programs; it is deeply human and rooted in relationships, self-awareness, and reflection. Transformative learning theory helps explain how both administrators and students change through these experiences—questioning assumptions, entering into dialogue, and moving toward more inclusive and empathetic practices. Simultaneously, Critical Race Theory provides the needed structural lens to recognize that these transformations must also engage systemic inequities and historical patterns of exclusion. These theoretical underpinnings have framed the experiences described by participants not just as a matter of personal growth but, importantly, as part of educational transformation that seeks to create schools where every student—regardless of

background-is cared for, respected, and supported to succeed.

Limitations

While this study contributes significantly to our understanding of administrative strategies for supporting ethnically diverse high school students, a number of its limitations should be addressed. First, sample size was small: seven administrators and three students across multiple schools. Although the qualitative approach allowed for depth regarding participants' perspectives, the small participant number makes it difficult for generalizability on broader populations of schools or districts. In accordance with Creswell and Creswell (2018), small qualitative samples can provide rich contextual understanding; however, their nature inherently reduces the representativeness of the findings (pp. 185-187).

Second, the nature of the sampling was purposive, and while this is intentional to capture administrators with experience in equity-focused practice, it naturally may have generated some bias. Participants who were more knowledgeable about or who preferred diversity initiatives may have been more willing to participate, thus placing limitations on the representation of dissenting or critical voices (Patton, 2015). Only three student voices were included in this study; again, these may not represent the full range of experiences of underrepresented students across grade levels, socioeconomic status, and school climates.

Third, the whole study relies heavily on self-reported perceptions by both administrators and students. These stories provide rich insight into individual-level experiences; however, they can be subject to social desirability bias, recall bias, and individual interpretation. For instance, administrators might emphasize positive practices, and students' reports may vary based on their

recent interactions or relationships with staff, raising concerns about the dependability and confirmability of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 290–292). Fourth, there are contextual limitations: the participating schools vary in their sizes, demographics, and resource availability. The findings from schools that boast sound administrative support, mentorship programs, and initiatives that introduce cultural competency may not fully capture the essence of challenges faced by schools that fall within less-resourced or highly segregated districts. According to Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016, p. 48), culturally responsive leadership is greatly dependent upon institutional context, staffing, and community engagement; thus, the transferability of findings might be constrained.

The final limitation is that this study focuses on administrator and student voices without including additional stakeholder voices, such as teachers, parents, or community members, which may be complementary or contrasting in examining equity efforts. The future examination of these perspectives may offer a fuller picture of how the effectiveness and impacts of administrative strategies come into being (Theoharis, 2007, p. 252). Although this work has certain limitations, it makes significant contributions to the discussion with an in-depth investigation of strategies employed by administrators, students' experiences, and dynamic interaction among school leadership and equity-related school outcomes. Its results can be used to link policy and practice through recommendations on mentoring, culturally responsive leadership, and targeted strategies to create equitable settings in schools.

Research Biases

This study may have been susceptible to several biases that affected the data collection and analysis. First is researcher bias. As the researcher, my background, perspectives, and

experiences in education and equity work inform the ways in which I design survey questions, interpret responses, and identify themes. Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 259) underscore that qualitative research inherently reflects the researcher's perspective, and that reflexivity should be a continuous aspect of the investigation. I used reflective field notes, iterative coding processes, and discussions with peers to cross-check interpretations to ensure that emerging themes were based on participant responses and not on personal assumptions. Participant bias, mainly social desirability bias, could affect the responses of administrators and students. Administrators may have emphasized practices that speak well of them as leaders or downplayed challenges related to equity, and students may minimize or exaggerate their experiences as affected by their perception of what the researcher expected or based on their comfort level in sharing negative feedback. For instance, administrators might have emphasized positive practices, whereas students' self-reports could be influenced by social-desirability bias, especially on sensitive topics like diversity and inclusion (Patton, 2015, pp. 658–660).

Third, confirmation bias may have occurred at the stage of data analysis. Given the focus of this study on administrative strategies and transformative learning theory, there is a risk in interpreting evidence in a way that may be supportive of pre-existing theoretical expectations. Systematic coding included attention to divergent or contradictory perspectives to ensure that coverage across all themes was obtained, including those related to gaps, inconsistencies, or negative experiences. Fourth, selection bias may be present due to the purposive sampling method adopted for identifying participants who had experience with diversity-oriented leadership and student support. This approach was done on purpose because of the chances of capturing rich and relevant insights. It may have led to overrepresentation of administrators

being proactive or supportive regarding the equity initiatives. Similarly, the participation of only three students has a limiting effect on their representativeness of the larger population of students.

Finally, cultural and contextual biases may have influenced interpretation. The schools in this study vary in their demographics, resources, and institutional priorities; researcher assumptions about equity practices could inadvertently affect how responses are evaluated across these contexts. For instance, administrators might have emphasized positive practices, whereas students' self-reports could be influenced by social-desirability bias, especially on sensitive topics like diversity and inclusion (Patton, 2015, pp. 658–660). Noting such potential biases enhances the study's credibility and reinforces the importance of transparency in qualitative research. This reflexive process of ongoing engagement, documentation of decision-making processes, and presenting multiple perspectives reflects this study's effort to offer an authentic and believable inquiry into administrative strategies that support ethnically diverse high school students.

Challenges

This study involved a number of logistical and methodological challenges that shaped the research process from design to interpretation. The most significant challenge was the small sample size, in which only seven administrators and three students participated. This kind of purposive sampling was chosen for an in-depth inquiry into the participants' perspectives about equity-enhancing initiatives. However, this made generalizing the findings hardly possible. Moreover, a small student sample restricted the diversity of their experiences represented in the data and may not fully reflect the range of issues faced by diverse students enrolled in other high

schools. Other complications arose in relation to participant accessibility and scheduling. Most administrators were busy individuals, making it difficult to coordinate interviews and manage homogenous participation from the beginning. Some were also more forthcoming in their responses than others, which then led to differences in data richness. Similarly, students had tight schedules due to class or extracurricular activities, and therefore the potential depth of follow-up questions and probing during the interviews was limited.

The sensitive nature of the topics dealing with equity, bias, and discrimination added another layer of complexity to the process of data collection. For example, participants may have shown discomfort in revealing negative experiences or criticisms regarding their schools for fear of retribution or judgment on leadership. This called for a concern for confidentiality: framing questions properly, ensuring anonymity for participants, and paying active attention to the safety of the space so participants would feel free to respond openly. With this consideration, some experiences might still have been underreported; this might affect the comprehensiveness of the findings. Secondly, there was the issue of coding across multiple participants and themes. It required iterations of analysis, cross-checking, and constant reflection to make sure that findings reflected participant perspectives, not the researcher's assumptions, while trying to keep the influence of the researcher's bias to a minimum.

Finally, contextual differences in demographics, available resources, administrative policies, and engagement within communities made consistent data analysis a challenge. What works in one setting may not work in another, which complicates broad generalizations without careful attention to context. As Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016, pp. 12–14) remind us, culturally responsive and equity-focused leadership is deeply contextual, which required nuanced

interpretation of the data. Despite these challenges, the study was able to generate meaningful insights into administrative strategies, mentorship, and support systems for ethnically diverse students. The challenges encountered also bring to light the importance of transparency, reflexivity, and careful methodological design when conducting research into equity and inclusion in high school contexts.

Discussions and Impact in the Field

Findings from the current study offer important insights into ways in which administrators are implementing strategies designed to advance equity, diversity, and transformative learning among high school ethnically diverse students. Overall, administrators reported a great commitment to inclusive environments via mentorship programs, professional development, and equity-focused initiatives. Students generally recognized these efforts but noted inconsistencies in the way they were implemented and their access to services. This gap points out the important difference between policy intent and what happens in practice—a proposition that agrees with the current literature on educational leadership for equity (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016, pp. 45–47; Møller, 2018, p. 90). This article reiterates a need for responsive and inclusive leadership within a culturally responsive framework. Those administrators who had been more actively engaged in cultural competency training, mentorship programs, and policy development that included student and family voice demonstrated greater alignment to transformative learning principles (Mezirow, 2000, p. 21). These efforts not only improve academic success but also foster socio-emotional growth, critical reflection, and a sense of agency among students—typical transformative learning outcomes applied to the context of secondary education settings (Gómez-Hurtado, Valdés, González-Falcón, & Jiménez-Vargas,

2021, p. 112). Students have noticed that when administrators proactively acknowledged cultural diversity, celebrated successes across different backgrounds, and promoted equal opportunities for participation in extracurricular activities and leadership opportunities, the school climate was much more supportive and empowering.

Mentorship and counseling services emerged as important mechanisms in promoting equity. Both administrators and students made it clear that structured mentorship programs, culturally responsive counseling, and proactive engagement with underrepresented students create positive academic and socio-emotional outcomes. This is well supported by prior research indicating that targeted mentorship and guidance raise student engagement, self-efficacy, and post-secondary readiness among historically marginalized populations (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016, p. 45). The data also indicate that increased staff training and further resourcing of mentorship and counseling would act to further bolster these outcomes. This research also contributes significantly to the call for authentic student voice and participatory leadership. Students continued to express that even in schools where administrators implemented equity-focused programs, their perspectives were often overlooked. As Møller (2018) noted, equity concerns not only access but also participation in decision-making (p. 92). It is through the incorporation of student voice into policy, curricula, and school culture initiatives that administrators can better align practice with equity-oriented goals and transformative learning principles. From a broader field impact perspective, the study offers practical implications for educational leadership and policy. First, professional development for administrators should place high importance on ongoing cultural competency, anti-bias practices, and strategies to foster transformative learning experiences. Second, schools must establish structured

mechanisms for mentorship, student voice, and inclusive participation in academics, athletics, and leadership roles. Third, school systems have an active responsibility to monitor the implementation and impact of equity initiatives to ensure responsiveness and consistency across diverse student populations. Through the operationalization of such strategies, educational leaders can contribute to a systemic culture of equity that not only supports academic achievement but fosters social-emotional growth, critical reflection, and empowerment for all students.

This study joins a body of work that explores the intersection of critical race theory and transformative learning theory as applied to educational leadership. As the findings in this research show, leaders have important roles to play in dismantling systemic inequity, embedding culturally sustaining practices, and creating a learning environment where all students can flourish. Equity-oriented leadership is a matter not only of morality but also of practice: It requires ongoing self-reflection, adaptive strategies, and inclusive engagement throughout all levels of the school community (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016, p. 72).

Challenges

Several challenges arose with respect to carrying out this study, each influencing the timeline of the research and the process of data collection, organization, and analyses. Although many of these are common to qualitative research design, others were unique to the technological and procedural demands of this project. The challenges collectively influenced the pace at which the study progressed and demanded constant modification if methodological integrity was to be maintained. One of the biggest challenges came right in the beginning of the research, when the IRB took a great deal longer than had been expected to grant approval.

Although IRB oversight is an important safeguard for ethical research, the administrative steps involved—revisions to the application, clarifications about participant protections, and updates to the consent process—required multiple rounds of communication before official approval was granted. This extended delay served to compress the timeline for scheduling interviews, securing participants, and managing subsequent data analysis. The delay likewise required continuous recalibration of the project milestones that contributed to a longer overall completion period. This challenge highlighted the importance of early preparation and multiple layers of review, even when research poses minimal risk.

Apart from data collection, another key challenge arose after the commencement of data collection with the use of the NVivo qualitative data analysis software selected to code and undertake a thematic analysis. Although NVivo is a widely used software package in qualitative research and has powerful tools for organizing and identifying patterns within data, technical difficulties disrupted the workflow. The software frequently failed to save projects correctly, crashed during the importation of data, and occasionally corrupted files during coding stages. At times, NVivo did not synchronize codes or nodes properly across project files, which required re-coding certain transcripts or rebuilding sections of the coding structure. These issues slowed analytic progress considerably and increased the amount of manual backup work that needed to be completed to ensure integrity in the data. Rather than relying on NVivo's automation exclusively, it became necessary to make extensive external notes and cross-check coded segments manually to avoid data loss or misclassification. Such complications represent a larger challenge that has been quite well-documented in qualitative research: while digital tools may enhance rigor and efficiency, they also introduce new technical vulnerabilities that researchers

need to be prepared to navigate.

Aside from IRB and software issues, classic qualitative research problems also arose. Recruitment presented a challenge at first, partly because the sample was intentionally limited to administrators and students meeting particular demographic and role-related criteria. Coordinating schedules with school administrators—who often juggle competing demands—required flexibility and repeated follow-up. Several students also required a little more reassurance than others regarding the promise of confidentiality, as they were asked to reflect on their experiences in school and perceptions of administrative support. While all participants ultimately consented to participate, the time it took to establish sufficient trust and confirm participation extended the recruitment phase beyond initial estimates. Time management also presented a challenge, especially when balancing the need for data collection with ongoing professional and academic responsibilities. Because the nature of this research depended on narrative-rich qualitative responses, transcription and verification required significantly more time than anticipated. The process of reviewing transcripts for accuracy, ensuring that no data was missing, and preparing each file for import into NVivo added several weeks beyond initial estimates. Although such steps enhanced the reliability of the findings, they indeed increased the length of the study. Other challenges included trying to maintain objectivity during data interpretation. Since the research issue of educational equity can be closely associated with the researcher's professional commitments and personal passion, this required an intentional effort to make sure that themes emerge from participant voices rather than from preconceived expectations. In addressing this, reflexive journaling and peer debriefing were added to the

analytic process. These strategies help in maintaining awareness of possible biases and allow interpretations to be drawn from the participants' responses.

Finally, there was added complexity because of the nature of the qualitative data analysis. With each round of coding, new layers of meaning emerged that required continued refinement of themes. Such review, though valued, did call for a degree of flexibility and patience that extended the analytic timeline. Unexpected patterns emerged which necessitated revisiting preliminary assumptions and earlier transcripts, further illustrating the non-linear structure of qualitative inquiry. These issues that have been faced in this study—the delay in IRB approval, NVivo technical problems, complex dynamics in the recruitment of informants, possible limits on time, and continuous need for reflexive analysis—are decidedly not unique to this qualitative inquiry, but they are crucial in determining the course of this undertaking. Overcoming these challenges through perseverance and methodological awareness kept the research focused on ethical concerns and analytic integrity, further enhancing the credibility of the results of this study.

Discussions and Impact in the Field

The findings of this study contribute important insight into the ways school administrators support, engage, and influence the educational experiences of ethnically diverse high school students. The perspectives from administrators and students bring to light both alignment and the reality of how equity-focused strategies are interpreted and actualized within practice. These findings have significant ramifications not only for the field of educational leadership but also for ongoing national conversations about equity, culturally responsive schooling, and transformative learning in secondary education. Across participants, one of the

most consistent themes emerged: the importance of administrative support as a foundation for meaningful student engagement and success. Administrators frequently described their roles as supportive and intentional, particularly when initiatives aligned with school goals or district expectations. Students, however, tended to judge administrative support through their day-to-day interactions-whether administrators were approachable, whether help was timely, and whether their needs were seen as important. This contrast reinforces existing research showing that equity is experienced differently by those who design policy and those who live it (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 45). The implications for the field are clear: leaders must recognize that procedural support does not always translate to personal support, and schools must evaluate how policies are enacted at the student level, not only how they are written.

Diversity and inclusion efforts are another major finding. While cultural competency training, inclusive practices, and community engagement were discussed by administrators, this reflects a theoretical understanding of equity-focused leadership. However, students observed gaps between intention and practice in representation, recognition of students' backgrounds, and consistent application of equity practices. This gap echoes broader critiques in the equity and leadership literature, where good intentions are not good enough without structural follow-through (Khalifa, 2018, p. 12). The consequences for the field are monumental in that this study reinforces the need for leadership preparation programs, district-level initiatives, and professional development models beyond raising awareness and into practical implementation strategies that directly affect student experiences.

Communication emerged as a third major theme with clear implications for leadership practice. Both administrators and students recognized communication concerns, though from

different perspectives. Whereas administrators believed communication was getting better while still being spotty, students reported not always having their input recognized. This is in line with prior research indicating the importance of relational trust in effective school leadership (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 25). Schools wanting to achieve equitable climates need to ensure that communication channels are transparent, bidirectional, and responsive to students' cultural and linguistic needs. The consequence for the field is that preparation programs should highlight communication across diverse stakeholder groups as a core equity practice in leadership, not simply as an administrative task.

Mentorship and counseling also emerged as central to both administrative strategy and student experience. Administrators stressed structured mentorship programs and culturally responsive counseling as key support structures. Students generally concurred, but did report that sometimes counselors were stretched thin, or not well-attuned to cultural differences. This finding points to a larger national issue about school counseling ratios and the need for culturally responsive student support services (American School Counselor Association, 2023). The implication for the field is that schools should be prioritizing staffing, training, and program design in ways that take seriously the intersecting academic, emotional, and cultural needs of diverse learners.

A second key area of concern was equitable access to opportunities, such as extracurricular activities, advanced coursework, and leadership programs. Students identified financial barriers, selective encouragement, and a general lack of awareness about the opportunities available to them. Administrators reported ongoing efforts to increase participation among underrepresented groups, yet acknowledged ongoing inequities. This finding aligns with

long-standing research documenting inequitable access to rigorous coursework and enrichment programs for students of color and low-income students (Oakes, 2005, p. 123). The implication for the field is straightforward: administrative strategies must include pro-active outreach, targeted supports, and systematic monitoring of participation data in pursuit of truly equitable opportunity structures.

Challenges to systemic inequities in schools are further highlighted by issues with bias and disciplinary practices. In their interviews, administrators and students alike described how implicit and explicit bias influenced disciplinary outcomes and interpersonal interactions. This echoes research evidence of the disproportionate discipline experienced nationwide by Black, Latino, and Indigenous students (Skiba et al., 2011, p. 45). Implications for the field are that administrators should consider equity-centered disciplinary practices, targeting restorative approaches, staff bias training, and data monitoring as a means to disrupt entrenched inequities. Taken together, these findings speak to the importance of administrative strategies consonant with Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. Specifically, this theory positions critical reflection, perspective transformation, and the development of agency-features students in this study consistently identified as integral to being valued and empowered. When administrators model reflective practice, challenge oppressive norms, and organize opportunities for student voice, they construct contexts within which transformative learning is possible. The consequence for the field is important: this study suggests that transformative learning is not only applicable to adult education, as traditionally understood, but can function powerfully in secondary school contexts when embedded in leadership practices.

Finally, this research points to the continued need for studies that center the voices of ethnically diverse students in high school. Although considerable equity research explores curriculum and teacher practice, or achievement, fewer examine how leadership shapes the lived experience of students from the students' perspective. The findings of this research underscore that administrators play a pivotal role in shaping conditions of equity, and that students' perspectives provide critical counsel on ways to enhance school contexts.

Digital Media

Digital media played a significant role in both the process and presentation of this study. To the degree that educational settings increasingly utilize digital systems for communication, support, and engaging students, these platforms will inevitably shape how students experience school and how administrators fulfill their duties. This research demonstrated that from email communication and learning management systems to virtual counseling platforms, digital tools were integral to participants' descriptions of the ways support, access, and equity were manifest across their schools. Digital media proved to be a key vehicle for administrators in reaching students and families. Many described relying on email updates, automated messaging systems, online academic monitoring tools, and school-sponsored apps that allowed them to efficiently disseminate information. The tools have given administrators the ability to reach large and diverse student populations in ways that cannot be matched by traditional, paper-based communications. At the same time, administrators acknowledged that digital communication requires intentional planning in order to ensure the messages are accessible, timely, and culturally responsive. Some concerns were raised about uneven engagement from families facing language barriers, inconsistent Wi-Fi access, or limited familiarity with digital platforms. Even

as these challenges existed, administrators showed uniform agreement on how digital tools enhanced their ability to deliver support and respond to student needs more quickly.

Students' experiences with digital media were more varied but equally revealing. Many students appreciated having immediate access to information—such as grade updates, tutoring schedules, and counseling appointment links—that helped them stay organized and academically supported. Several students noted that digital communication gave them a sense of independence, allowing them to seek help privately or review information at their own pace. Yet, students also described feeling overwhelmed by constant notifications or discouraged when administrators took long periods to respond. Some students from lower-income households expressed frustration with limited internet access or shared devices at home, which made digital participation difficult. These disparities demonstrate that while digital tools can increase access and support, they can also reinforce inequities when not paired with adequate resources or multilingual outreach.

Digital media directly shaped the research process. The use of NVivo for qualitative coding and analysis reflects the broader reliance on digital tools in contemporary research. While NVivo ultimately increased the organization and depth of the analysis, the learning curve associated with the software created challenges akin to those students and administrators face when adopting an unfamiliar digital platform. Indeed, time spent troubleshooting issues and learning advanced functions mirrored the broader realities of digital literacy in schools: that tools can be powerful, but only when users have the support and training needed to navigate them effectively.

In constructing the final stage of this dissertation, the DDP is being formatted as a public-facing website to enhance the access, transparency, and usefulness of the findings of the study. The website format supports the guiding principles of this research-equity, student voice, and community engagement-through the presentation of work in a medium that is highly accessible and easy to navigate. The DDP website is organized into clear sections that mirror the structure of the written dissertation: an introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, and implications. Each major chapter is translated into web-friendly content that emphasizes readability and user experience. The site uses a combination of text, embedded visuals, and interactive elements to make research approachable to a broad audience, from teachers and administrators to policy decision-makers and students. Charts, tables, and other visuals created while analyzing in NVivo are included to help readers visualize the key themes that have arisen from the data. Participant voices are also featured on the website, with anonymous quotes, showcased using clean visual design to highlight qualitative insights. This format enables the findings to be more engaging; it is more dynamic than a two-dimensional representation of the narratives that underpinned this study.

The DDP website has been designed with accessibility in mind. The large text options, mobile-responsive layouts, alternative text for images, and translation support within both English and Spanish ensure varied access to the content. Such attention to accessibility reflects the very core values of the present study, especially cultural and linguistic inclusion.

The final project also includes multimedia components, like short video summaries of infographics of the conceptual framework. These enhance the digital experience and provide a different point of entry for visitors who learn best through visual or audio formats.

Ultimately, the digital presentation of the dissertation allows for wider dissemination and provides examples of how research can adapt to evolving academic and technological landscapes. The website will be used not only as a repository of findings but also as a resource for schools seeking practical strategies for supporting ethnically diverse students. The translation of traditional dissertation content into digital form bridges the divide between academic research and real-world usability, ensuring alignment with this study's emphasis on issues related to accessibility, equity, and transformational leadership.

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Appendix

Interview Protocol

Semi-structured oral interview- The oral interview is completed in one session via zoom or in person, and each was documented through use of audio recordings. Once completed the recordings were transcribed into words for use in my research. The interview process consists of three parts which includes the opening scripts, interview questions, and the closure of the interview. Each participant interview took an average thirty minutes to one hour.

Interview Transcript

The interviewer is the researcher Trish Iaiennaro. There was a total of 10 research participants. The participants information remains confidential to protect the identity of the participants. All participants are either current 9th-12th grade public school administrators, or students who are currently in high school, who were interviewed for equitable education research.

Initial Interview Script

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Before we begin, I want to briefly explain the purpose of this research and what your participation will involve. The goal of this study is to explore how high school administrators implement strategies, policies, and practices that support minority students' academic, social, and emotional success. I am also

interested in understanding how students experience these strategies in their schools. Your insights, whether as an administrator or a student, are invaluable in highlighting how leadership and school practices can foster equitable learning environments, empower students, and address systemic barriers that affect ethnically diverse students.

Confidentiality and Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have full control over what you choose to share during this interview. You may skip any question or pause or stop the interview at any time without penalty. All information you provide will remain confidential. Your responses will be anonymized, and any identifying details will be removed from the data analysis and final reporting. The data collected will only be used for the purposes of this study, including academic reporting, publications, and presentations.

Emotional Considerations: Some questions may involve reflecting on challenges you face as an administrator or experiences you have had as a student related to equity and inclusion. These topics may bring up strong emotions. Please know it is okay to pause, reflect, or refrain from answering any question you do not wish to address.

Purpose of the Interview:

During this interview, you will be asked to share your experiences regarding:

- How administrators' practices and policies support minority students' academic success
- Challenges encountered in implementing or experiencing equity-focused initiatives
- Ways staff, administrators, and students engage to foster inclusive and culturally responsive environments

- Mentorship, counseling, and support systems for students from diverse backgrounds
- Recommendations for improving school-wide strategies for equity, student empowerment, and inclusion

There are no right or wrong answers. Your honest reflections and experiences are critical for understanding how administrators and students perceive and shape equitable and transformative learning environments.

Questions Before We Begin: Do you have any questions about the study, your participation, or the confidentiality of your responses? Once you are ready, we can begin the interview. Thank you for sharing your time, experiences, and insights for this research.

Closing Script

Final Question: Is there anything else you would like to share that you feel is relevant or important to this research topic? Your additional insights can help provide a fuller understanding of how school leadership and practices impact minority student success.

Closing Statement: Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. Your experiences and perspectives are invaluable to this study, and I greatly appreciate your willingness to share them. Your input will contribute meaningfully to understanding how administrators can foster equitable and transformative learning environments for students from diverse backgrounds.

Generative AI Acknowledgement:

In preparing this research document, I utilized generative AI (ChatGPT, Grammarly) as a tool to assist with drafting, editing, and organizing sections of the paper. All ideas, research questions, and study design elements were originally conceptualized by me, and AI was used strictly to refine

language, enhance clarity, and ensure professional academic formatting. Prompts provided to the AI were carefully crafted to maintain the integrity and originality of the work, and all content generated by AI was critically reviewed, verified against sources, and adapted to reflect my authentic voice and scholarly intentions. This use of AI aligns with the School of Education's policy advocating responsible and transparent integration of AI into academic work.

Interview Questions

Student Survey

Demographic Information

1. What is your age?

12-14

15-17

18+

2. What is your gender?

Male

Female

Non-binary

Prefer not to say

3. What is your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply)

Asian

Black or African American

Hispanic or Latino

White

Native American or Alaska Native

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Other (please specify): _____

Prefer not to say

4. What is your current grade level?

9th grade

10th grade

11th grade

12th grade

Administration

Administrative Support

5. How would you rate the support you receive from school administrators in your academic pursuits?

Very supportive

Somewhat supportive

Neutral

Somewhat unsupportive

Very unsupportive

6. To what extent do you feel that school administrative policies address the needs of students from diverse backgrounds?

Very effectively

Effectively

Moderately

Ineffectively

Not at all

7. How often do you feel that your feedback on school policies is considered by administrators?

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

8. Do you believe that the current administrative strategies help in creating equal opportunities for all students?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

9. Can you describe a specific instance when you felt supported or unsupported by school administrators in relation to your personal or academic needs?

10. In what ways do you think the school administration could better address the needs of students from diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds?

11. How can school administrators improve their support for students with disabilities or special educational needs?

12. What changes would you suggest to make school policies more equitable for students from different socioeconomic backgrounds?
13. Can you provide examples of how the school's efforts to create an inclusive environment could be enhanced?
14. What additional resources or support services do you think would be beneficial for students from diverse backgrounds?
15. Describe any challenges you have faced related to bias or discrimination within the school and how you believe administrators should address these issues.
16. How do you feel about the current opportunities for students from underrepresented groups to participate in extracurricular activities and leadership roles? What improvements could be made?
17. What are your thoughts on the effectiveness of the school's mentorship or counseling services for students from diverse backgrounds? How could these services be improved?
18. What are some specific actions you think the school administration could take to ensure that students from all backgrounds feel valued and included?
19. In your opinion, how well does the school administration communicate with students about available support and resources? What improvements could be made?
20. How can the school administration better respect and incorporate students' cultural or personal identities into school practices and policies?

21. What specific initiatives or programs do you think would help improve the support provided by school administrators to students from diverse backgrounds?

22. Please share any additional feedback or suggestions you have regarding how the school administration can better support students from diverse backgrounds.

General Feedback

23. What changes, if any, would you suggest improving the support provided by school administrators?

24. Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding the impact of administrative strategies on your educational experience?

Administrative Survey

Demographic Information

1. What is your age?

18-24

25-34

35-44

45+

2. What is your gender?

Male

Female

Non-binary

Prefer not to say

3. What is your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply)

Asian

Black or African American

Hispanic or Latino

White

Native American or Alaska Native

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Other (please specify): _____

Prefer not to say

4. What is your current educational level?

Associate's Degree

Bachelor's Degree

Graduate Degree

Other (please specify): _____

Administrative Support

5. How would you rate the support you receive from school administrators in your educational pursuits?

Very supportive

Somewhat supportive

Neutral

Somewhat unsupportive

Very unsupportive

6. To what extent do you feel that school administrative policies address the needs of individuals from diverse backgrounds?

Very effectively

Effectively

Moderately

Ineffectively

Not at all

7. How often do you feel that your feedback on school policies is considered by administrators?

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

8. Do you believe that the current administrative strategies help create equal opportunities for all students?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly disagree

9. Can you describe a specific instance when you felt supported or unsupported by school administrators regarding your personal or academic needs?

10. In what ways do you think the school administration could better address the needs of individuals from diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds?

11. How can school administrators improve their support for individuals with disabilities or special educational needs?

12. What changes would you suggest making school policies more equitable for individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds?
13. Can you provide examples of how the school's efforts to create an inclusive environment could be enhanced?
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General Feedback

23. What changes, if any, would you suggest improving the support provided by school administrators?

24. Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding the impact of administrative strategies on your educational experience?



Office of Academic Affairs

April 30, 2025

TO: Trish Iaiennaro
FROM: Webster University Institutional Review Board
RE: Breaking the Cycle: Effects of Administrative Support and Creating Sustainable Opportunities for Minorities
STATUS: Exempt - Approved

NOTES:

- The IRB Proposal Number for this research project is FA24-14.
- The proposal has been declared exempt under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4).
- If any changes are made to the study, the IRB must be notified.
- You are also required to promptly notify the IRB Chair of any problems that arise during the course of the research.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vicki Callan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "V".

Vicki Callan, Associate Professor, Nurse Anesthesia
Chair, Webster University Institutional Review Board, FWA00024297

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