

Abstract

**UNCOVERING THE BLACK BOX:
THE HIRING OF BLACK EDUCATORS FOR PRINCIPALSHIP POSITIONS IN
SUBURBAN CONTEXTS**

Kimberly Danielle Clarida, PhD

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Supervisor: David DeMatthews

Researchers have long recognized that common hiring practices are racially biased (Avery, 1979; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003). However, in education, few studies examine the hiring and placement policies and practices for school principals at the district level (Palmer & Mullooly, 2015). Equitable hiring practices are essential for ensuring equal opportunity for Black educators, who are underrepresented in the principalship despite the increasing number of Black students in K-12 (Williams & Loeb, 2012). The principal representation gap is especially alarming when Black students are consistently disenfranchised within U.S. public schools (Lomotey, 2019). Better educational opportunities for Black students are achievable and tied to hiring racially diverse and equity-focused principals (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019) - specifically Black principals (Kelley, 2012; Lomotey, 2019; Williams & Loeb, 2012).

This dissertation uses a mixed method multiple case study design to analyze hiring practices within two suburban school districts through the lens of racialized organizational theory (Ray, 2020). The study starts with investigating the “black box” of districts’ hiring policies and

practices using document analysis, hiring observations, and interviews with district officials and employees who participate in principal selection committees. Then, application data is analyzed to identify the rate at which Black candidates apply for principal positions compared to the rates at which they are hired and the demographics of schools where they are placed. Finally, interviews with Black educators in each district were used to understand how hiring policies and practices can improve for principals based on their experiences. This study allows researchers to conceptualize what is happening within the application pool process at the district level and provide school districts with insights on how equitable hiring structures and practices can further promote the hiring of Black principals.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Since the 1950s, researchers have recognized that common hiring practices (e.g., resumes, interviews) are inequitable, leading to hiring discrimination for people of color and racial disparities in the representation of people of color in leadership positions (Anderson, 1991; Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Kahl, 1980; Palmer & Mullooly, 2015). However, within the field of education policy, few researchers have examined the hiring practices and policies used to select and place school principals at the district level (Palmer & Mullooly, 2015). Moreover, few examine hiring policies and practices through a racial equity lens. Equitable hiring practices are important as our public school system is changing in the racial representation and socioeconomic status of students, and systemic changes are needed to meet the academic and social needs of our racially diverse student population.

The increasingly racially diverse student population (Orfield, 2011) is what many researchers have labeled as the "'browning' of public schools" (Bryant et al., 2017, p. 265). Still, the hiring of school personnel has not followed similar trends. For example, the percentage of Black students has grown at a higher rate than that of Black principals (Williams & Loeb, 2012). This lack of growth in the racial representation of school leaders has resulted in a gap in the racial representation of students and principals (Grissom et al., 2021). This gap is especially alarming when Black students are consistently disenfranchised within our public schools (i.e., academic tracking, discipline disparities, school funding, etc.), which limits their educational opportunities (Lomotey, 2019; Milner, 2012). Black students deserve better educational opportunities, which is achievable with effective school leadership that is diverse and equity-focused (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019; Davis et al., 2017; Grissom et al., 2021). Black students are not the only ones who would benefit from effective, racially diverse school leaders, as public schools are also increasing in the number of low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities (Grissom et al., 2021).

In the words of Grissom and his colleagues (2021), "principals *really* matter" (p. 43). Aside from teachers, effective principals are the second most important factor in students' achievement and social well-being and on teachers (Darling-Hammond & Post, 2000; Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004). Most notably, effective principals prioritize relationship building and collaboration (Leithwood et al., 2004), instructional learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007), high expectations for all students, student care (Silva et al., 2011), and the recruitment and retention of culturally responsive teachers (Bondy et al., 2007; Gay, 2013; Khalifa et al., 2016; National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], 2019). These effective leadership skills are often seen in Black principals who also positively influence teachers and students. For example, Black principals lead to a more diverse teaching pool (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019) and increase the number of Black and Brown students in gifted programs (Grissom et al., 2017).

Fortunately, more attention has been paid to the creation of equity-centered (e.g., Wallace Foundation) and racially diverse (e.g., The Leadership Academy or state education agency's "Grow Your Own" program) principal pipelines. Yet, this attention has not increased the representation of Black school principals across the nation and, in some ways, has led to a political backlash within the education sector (e.g., anti-CRT bills and colorblind equity policies). Almost twenty years ago, Tillman (2003) said the principal profession remains "undiversified" and overwhelmingly White, and not much has changed since. There are nearly 91,000 principals, most in elementary schools (68%) that serve 98,500 public schools (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022). Between 2000 and 2018, the number of principals who identified as female increased by ten percentage points, resulting in female principals constituting a greater proportion relative to male principals (NCES, 2022). While male gender dominance has decreased within principal leadership, the lack of racial diversity for principals (Tillman, 2003) continues to remain predominantly White (NCES, 2022). Over the

past 18 years, the percentage of White principals has only decreased by 4 percent to seventy-eight percent. Whereas Hispanic principals account for 9 percent of the distribution of public-school principals, and Black (non-Hispanic) principals account for 11 percent – a number that has not increased in over a decade for Black principals (NCES, 2022). Although there is rapid growth within the Hispanic student population, there is a slower growth of Hispanic principals, which has created a leadership representation gap between Hispanic students and Hispanic principals (Grissom et al., 2021). Black principals' representation gap has *only* shrunk from 5 to 4 percentage points between 1988 and 2016 (Grissom et al., 2021).

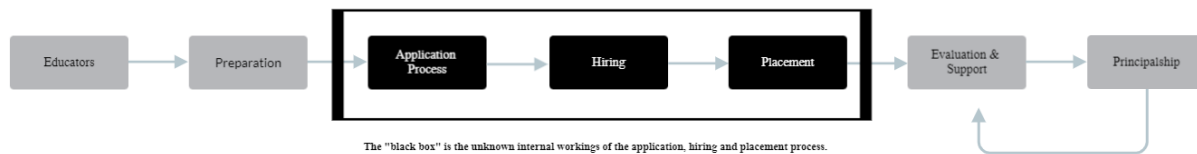
Racial, cultural, and political problems are created when "overwhelming White" school leadership and hiring practices are resistant to equity-centered school leaders, especially since race is a social construct shaped by cultural and political environments. Historically, the lack of (or decline in) Black principals has been tied to intentional racial discrimination by school districts to fire and demote Black principals due to the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and throughout the mid-to-late 1950s (Tillman, 2004). Today, hiring practices used to select school leaders have not been examined through a racial equity lens. However, there is a lack of representation from teachers to principals within school districts. More recently and commonly, researchers have centered the voices of Black principals who describe the principals' experiences in the hiring process (Mabokela & Madsen, 2003). In such studies, phrases like "vague" or "lacking transparency" have been used to describe hiring practices and policies (Weiner et al., 2022). Too often, these phrases have been accepted as "just the way things are." Researchers, school leaders, and policymakers create a "black box" when they choose not to investigate district-level hiring processes.

Despite non-discrimination policies prohibiting racial discrimination, applicants' race is a factor in the biased selection decisions within the education system (Young et al., 2010). Although other industries have studied the presence of racial bias in hiring practices, current

hiring practices for principals have not been examined through a racial equity lens. Inequitable hiring practices have the potential to perpetuate the underrepresentation of Black principals, waste resources designed to diversify the teacher-to-principal pipeline, and negatively impact students and teachers.

There is a need for researchers, policymakers, and educational leaders to examine the lack of diversity within the principal pipeline closely to understand the black box or internal workings of the principal pipeline. In the context of this dissertation, the principal pipeline refers to educational leaders' matriculation into a principalship position (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Principal Pipeline



This pipeline typically starts with an educator participating in a leadership preparation program. Next, they engage in the application, hiring, and placement process, also known as the “black box” within this paper. This process consists of completing an application, being screened, interviewed, hired, and placed at a school. The pipeline concludes with a loop of principals being evaluated and supported by district leaders.

This study examines the racialized hiring practices and policies for principal positions in two urban school districts through the collection and analysis of hiring practices, documents, hiring and application data, focus groups, and interviews. Using a mixed methods multiple case study, this study aims to (1) examine and analyze hiring practices and policies within urban school districts through a racialized organizational lens, (2) investigate if demand issues account for the paucity of Black principals through an examination of principal applicant data and hiring decisions and (3) identify structures and practices which better support the hiring of Black

principals in two suburban school districts. This chapter starts with a brief overview of the literature themes that inform this study. Then, I review the literature gap and my research questions. Lastly, I will describe the conceptual framework, the methodology, and the significance of the study.

BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE THEMES

During the Fall of 2017, Black principals accounted for 11 percent of principals (NCES, 2018), whereas Black students accounted for 15 percent (NCES, 2019). The underrepresentation and slow growth in the number of Black principals is a racial equity problem that impacts not only Black educators but also Black students. Nearly 70 years past the ruling of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* court case, educational injustices and inequities for Black educators and students are still prevalent throughout our society (Garces et al., 2017). Due to systemic and institutional racism, Black students “have less access than their White peers to highly qualified teachers, well-resourced schools, low student-to-teacher ratios, and school communities with high expectations” (Garces & Gordon da Cruz, 2017). These factors have often, but not always, resulted in lower measures of traditional “academic success” for Black students. While there are success stories of Black students exceeding academic expectations, the possibility of continuous and higher levels of academic achievement is possible through the pursuit of racial equity from the classroom level to the hiring policies and practices used in the school district office.

Within the confines of this manuscript, racial equity is an intentional effort to remedy and address racial inequities. The use of a racial equity lens is the act of reviewing actions in a way that acknowledges previous racial harm and attempts to remedy that harm produced by policies and organizations. For Black educators, racial equity in educational leadership includes attempts

to address racial discrimination experienced through the principal pipeline. This section will provide a brief review of how there is racial inequity in educational leadership and explain how Black principals are effective. Black educators deserve better access to principalship positions, not simply because they are Black but because they are often well qualified for the position.

Racial Inequity in Principal Hiring and Placement

Black principals are underrepresented nationally (NCES, 2022), and Black educators' promotion to principalship is often delayed and denied compared to their White counterparts (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). Also, racism is still evident in the hiring of Black educators, as seen within the larger leadership pipeline. For example, in Texas, less than three percent of the superintendents are Black (Fields et al., 2019). Just as racial representation matters between teachers and their students (Stewart et al., 1989), the same is true for educational leaders- like principals (Peters, 2019).

Palmer and Mullooly (2015) provided the most recent comprehensive and critical review of principal selection literature, with most of the literature produced between the late 1950s and early 2000s. They argued that "inequity in principal selection is a long-standing issue that can prevent the most-qualified candidate from obtaining a [principalship]" (p. 26). Two factors contribute to hiring inequity. First is the subjectivity of the selection procedures. Next is the fact that the policies are not measuring up to the importance of principalship (Palmer & Mullooly, 2015). The selection process is when the candidate and the organization come together to determine if their identities align (Palmer & Mullooly, 2015; Herriot, 2002). From the organization's standpoint, the selection process determines if the candidate is the right "fit" based

on their understanding of the candidates' characteristics and community values (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983). The principal selection process consists of two stages – selection criteria and procedures (Wendel & Breed, 1988) to determine the most qualified candidate.

Scholars have long discovered that selection criteria, which determine if a candidate has the qualifications necessary to be eligible for the position, relied on "vague, irrelevant and non-assessable criteria (Anderson, 1991; Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Kahl, 1980)" (Palmer & Mullooly, 2015). For example, there is a variance in the selection criteria within the district between the superintendent and the human resource manager (Roza, 2003). There is also evidence that hiring managers in the districts could not clarify the criteria they used to pick the most qualified candidate. If they could, that information would not be a part of their official policies or practices (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983). For example, in a 1950s study on the practices used for selecting principals and for the job preparation of elementary school principals in Ohio, Featherston (1955) discovered that selection programs had seven factors in their selection process: years of teaching experience, type of teaching experience, recommendations from principal or supervisor, examination of college credentials, an oral exam or interview, written examination, and final recommendation from the superintendent. Many of these factors are still in place (McIntyre, 1974; Palmer, 2014; Wendel & Breed, 1988), and data is not relied on throughout the selection processes (Clifford, 2010), which leaves room for subjectivity and ambiguity.

Herriot (2002) defined the selection procedures as the collection of data that an organization uses to make a hiring decision. Palmer and Mullooly (2015) found that although the data collection should be "formalistic and systematized," it has often been "based on intuition and described as unsuitable for selecting principals." According to Palmer and Mullooly (2015),

researchers have intensely criticized the procedures used in principal selection (e.g., resumes, interviews, and references) for being, among other things, subjective, lacking rigor, and flawed. Although widely criticized, outdated and vague principal selection processes are continuously used to determine if candidates are the right “fit” and capable of being effective leaders within their school districts.

Racial inequity is seen as a product of the black box when they continuously see the diminished agency of Black principals, and the legitimacy of the unequal distribution of resources was seen in the segregation of schools, which not only dictated where Black educators could work during the era of separate but equal but also evident in how organizations used race to unfairly judge the leadership skills of Black principals (Henderson, 2015). Despite the “gains” Black people have received through the Civil Rights movement, they are still “denied equitable access to senior school administrative positions” (Smith, 2016, p. 122). Black teachers are also less likely to be informally recruited into leadership positions when they are female and do not share the same race as their principal (Myung et al., 2011). Davis and colleagues (2017) also found that race and gender have negative implications within the principal pipeline, as White men have “the most opportunity when they decide to pursue the principalship” (Davis et al., 2017, p. 231). Again, the selection of school leaders is subject to systemic bias and creates inequities within the principal pipeline (Davis et al., 2017). A specific example of this is seen when all White search committees are liable to exclude Black candidates from recommendation or promotion to leadership positions (Ortiz, 2000). Recently, Weiner et al. (2022) added a racial and gendered lens to Black female principals' hiring and promotion progress. They found that connections with White men were key to these Black leaders entering the applicant pool and

obtaining positions when interviewing 20 Black female principals (Weiner et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the interview and hiring process was performative, reinforcing “problematic tropes about Black women” and lacked transparency (Weiner et al., 2022).

Black principals have expressed that during their principalship, they faced negative perceptions about their role as a principal and their capabilities as a Black leader (Black, 2012; D.B. Brown, 2012; Finley, 2013; Hill, 2013; Jackson, 2013; Jean-Marie, 2013; Nesmith, 2013; Richardson, 2013; Smith, 2013; Webb, 2013; Vinzant, 2009). Black principals not only faced negative perceptions but also had to deal with racial discrimination, lack of mentorship, and lack of Title IX mandates (Richardson, 2013). The biased treatment of Black principals has also created an unspoken assumption that leaders of color are only “fit” to lead schools and communities that share a similar racial makeup. For this reason, Black leaders are more often placed in schools that predominantly serve Black and Brown students. With the combination of systemic racism that impacts housing options and racial wealth, schools that predominantly serve students of color are under-resourced (McCray et al., 2007), which adds to the challenges that Black principals face and highlights the legitimacy of the unequal distribution of resources. Yet, White principals were more likely to lead predominantly Black schools versus Black principals leading predominantly White schools (McCray et al., 2007).

The placement of Black principals is not the only form of racial inequity. There are many other race-based challenges that disrupt Black principals’ agency and access to equal resources such as Black principals feeling as though they have limited authority but are expected to meet higher performance standards despite facing racism (Black, 2012; Finley, 2013; Hill, 2013; Jackson, 2013; Jean-Marie, 2013; Nesmith, 2013; Richardson, 2013; Smith, 2013; Tyson, 2016;

Webb, 2013; Vinzant, 2009) and lacking access to internal organizational supports like mentors and informational systems (Mabokela & Madsen, 2003). Overall, these scholars reinforce the need to investigate the policies and practices at the district level that continuously allow for these inequitable outcomes.

Black Principals are Effective Leaders

After the release of the Coleman Report in the late 1960s, educational leadership literature began to focus on identifying effective schools and the components that contribute to their success (DeMatthews, 2018). Research on effective schools in the educational leadership field was imperative because the Coleman Report described the achievement gap between Black and White students (Coleman, 1966). Effective schools were deemed as those that could modify curriculum and teaching strategies to correspond with the differing needs of students and their families (Edmonds & Frederickson, 1978). Effective schools also exemplified high student expectations, were well-managed, kept students safe, monitored student achievement (Edmonds, 1979), and focused on developing teachers' confidence and instructional skills (Blasé, 1987; DeMatthews, 2018). Overall, effective principals were vital to bringing together and maintaining the components that built effective schools (Edmonds, 1979), which increased student achievement for all students – especially students of color.

Over the years, the narrative that effective leaders produce effective schools for students, teachers, and communities was well supported by educational researchers (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019; Darling-Hannon et al., 2007; Fullan, 1997; Khalifa, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004; Walker, 2005; Tucker & Coddling, 2002; Wiley, 2016), and scholars continued to identify the characteristics and styles of strong leaders (DeMatthews, 2018). The list of strong leadership

characteristics expanded beyond setting high student expectations and developing teachers also to include principals being committed to a) the well-being of students, b) advocacy, c) equity, d) social justice, e) the development of culturally responsive schools, f) establishing shared goals and values, and g) community engagement among other things (DeMatthews, 2018). In addition, scholars have used these characteristics to describe different leadership styles like instructional, curricular, transformational, social justice, and culturally responsive leadership (Bredeson, 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Green, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; Theoharis, 2007).

An extensive review of the various leadership styles is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it is necessary to clarify that in the context of this dissertation, effective leadership prioritizes relationship building and collaboration (Leithwood et al., 2004), instructional learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007), high expectations for all students, student care (Silva et al., 2011), and the recruitment and retention of culturally responsive teachers (Bondy et al., 2007; Gay, 2013; Khalifa et al., 2016; NASSP, 2019). Unfortunately, effective principals are not distributed “equitably” across our school systems, as principals in “high-need schools” are typically ranked lower by their supervisors and teachers and have higher turnover rates (Grissom et al., 2021).

Researchers have often found that Black principals (although not always) display effective leadership styles and characteristics that contribute to the achievement of students, teachers, and community members. Scholars like Kelley (2012), Kochman (1981), MacLennan (1975), and Williams and Loeb (2012) have also reported the positive impact of Black principals on Black students’ success. More specifically, Black principals are known to serve as mentors

and role models to students of color (Henderson, 2008; Kelley, 2012; Sanchez et al., 2008; Tillman, 2004) to increase the number of Black and Brown students in gifted programs (Grissom et al., 2017), to diversify the teaching pool (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019), and to have strong connections with their school community (Khalifa, 2012). It is clear that Black principals are effective leaders. Yet, their effectiveness has not led to a significant increase in their presence across the nation. The underrepresentation of Black principals in school districts and in educational leadership literature is evidence of the need for racial equity in hiring policies and practices.

THE LITERATURE GAP & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There is a need to hire more Black principals. Research provides sufficient information on the benefits of effective Black principals (Darling-Hammond & Post, 2000; DeMatthews, 2018; Gay, 2013; Grissom et al., 2019; Khalifa et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2004; Lomotey, 2019; Tillman, 2003) and their experiences throughout the principal pipeline (Agosto et al., 2015; Brown, 2005; Black, 2012; Cruzeiro & Boone, 2009; Farinde et al., 2016; Nesmith, 2013; Ortiz, 2000). However, I have been unable to identify any study that investigated the demand aspect of Black principals within the labor market. The lack of Black principals in the education system is often attributed to a limited quantity of Black educators. While this may be part of the reason, no one has investigated if school districts have policies and practices in place that allow for the hiring of more Black principals (demand). Additionally, while there is literature on how Black educators and principals describe their experience applying to leadership positions (Crawford & Fuller, 2017; Fuller et al., 2007; Hall, 2015; Ringel et al., 2004), less is known about how school districts facilitate and make sense of the hiring and placement process. Finally,

little research has centered on Black educators' voices in the creation and development of district-level resources, support, and policy reconstruction that address racial inequity within the hiring and placement of Black principals. Thus, my study will examine:

1. What are suburban school districts' approaches to the hiring of principals?
2. How, if at all, are principal hiring processes racialized?
3. At which rate are Black candidates applying for principal positions compared to the rates at which they are hired and the demographics of schools where they are placed?
4. What hiring policies and practices do Black educators believe can improve Black principals' hiring and placement experiences in suburban school districts?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This dissertation is guided by the theory of racialized organizations. Racialized organizations theory focuses on the “centrality of organizations in producing racial inequity” (Ray, 2019, p. 94). Traditional organizational theory assumes that organizations are reliable and predictable, that their “hierarchical structures are normal, necessary, functional, and desirable,” and that their “communication channels are clearly delineated and consistently used” (Komives & Woodard, 2003, p. 270). Hiring standards within organizational theory attempt to control who enters an organization by enforcing criteria and practices that are believed to alleviate the amount of “training” and “socialization” required of new employees (Perrow, 2000). On the surface, hiring practices appear to be fair and beneficial to all stakeholders because it is believed that everyone has access to the same opportunities and information and is treated the same regardless of race or any other personal identifiers. This viewpoint is inadequate because organizations like

school systems are not neutral. As previously discussed, school systems create and reinforce racial inequities from the classroom level to leadership in the district office.

Victor Ray's (2019) racialized organizational theory provides a useful framework for making sense of and examining school districts' hiring and placement policies and practices. Racialized organizations theory recognizes that "race is constitutive of organizational foundations, hierarchies, and processes" (Ray, 2019) and allows me to examine how school districts use policies and practices that perpetuate racial inequities, especially as it relates to perceptions of fit and merit of school principals. Throughout the data analysis, the tenets of racialized organizational theory will be used to guide the overall questions I ask during the data analysis phase. For example, how and in what ways are these policies and practices operating in a way that treats Whiteness as a credential, diminishes the agency of Black educators, legitimizes the unequal distribution of resources, or decouples formal rules?

BRIEF OVERVIEW METHODS

I will use a mixed methods multiple case study with a transformative design to examine the hiring practices and policies for principal positions in two suburban school districts with a racial equity lens. A mixed methods design allows for qualitative and quantitative techniques to build upon and better explain each other (Creswell, 2016). It is appropriate for this dissertation because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of school districts' organizational processes and the impacts of those processes. Mixed methods-case studies "enable you to address broader or more complicated research questions than case studies alone" (Yin, 2014, p. 67). Since this study is guided by a theoretical framework, it is also characterized as a transformative design. A transformative design gives "primacy to the value-based and action-oriented dimensions of

different inquiry traditions” (Greene & Caracelli, 1997, p. 24) and analyzes district-level senior employees and school leaders (embedded unit of analysis). The study starts with an investigation of the “black box” of districts’ hiring policies and practices using document analysis, hiring observations, and interviews with district officials and employees who participate in principal selection committees. Then, application data is analyzed to identify the rate at which Black candidates apply for principal positions compared to the rates at which they are hired and the demographics of schools where they are placed. Quantitative data for this phase will come from the districts’ principal application data, hiring decision data, and school-level data from the two states’ education agencies. Finally, interviews with Black educators in each district were used to understand how hiring policies and practices can improve for principals based on their experiences. This study allows researchers to conceptualize what is happening within the application pool process at the district level and provide school districts with insights on how equitable hiring structures and practices can further promote the hiring of Black principals. For the qualitative questions, I employ thematic analysis and a racialized organizations theory framework for analysis.

SIGNIFICANCE

This study uncovers how school district leaders operationalize hiring and placement policies and practices when they examine Black candidates for principalship positions. For too long, researchers and school districts have allowed these inner workings to go unexamined. Therefore, this study will examine the “black box” of hiring policies and practices at the district level to understand if and how these actions are racialized and how hiring policies and practices can be improved to increase the hiring of Black principals. Specifically, this study's results

expand racialized organizational theory to school district offices and address racial equity in the hiring of Black principals.

Implications For Policy & Practice

Equitable hiring policies and practices may have a positive impact on Black educators, all students, and all staff members. The implications of this study can help address racial discrimination in the educational workforce at the district level. This work also helps researchers better understand and evaluate educational leaders for leadership responsibilities that include hiring, placing, and supporting Black educational leaders for principalship positions. There is also a disruption to power within school districts when Black educators are allowed to participate in the creation of equitable policies and practices that better serve their peers and, ultimately, the students and teachers they lead. Finally, equitable hiring policies and practices that increase the hiring of Black principals will increase student achievement, teachers' racial diversity, teacher retention and effectiveness, the presence of culturally responsive schools, and principal recruitment and retention.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I introduced my dissertation study on the need to investigate the hiring policies and practices that school districts use to hire Black principals. In chapter two, I provide a review of the literature to provide the historical context of Black principals' trajectory through the principal pipeline and how race has functioned as an institutional barrier to Black principals' advancement through the principal pipeline. This chapter also includes the theoretical framework that is used to inform how organizations are racialized and guide the analysis of the data. Chapter three describes the research design and methods of analysis. Chapters four and five provide the

findings for each of the suburban school districts. Chapter four focuses on the Westside School District. Chapter five focuses on the Southside School District and a cross-analysis of the two districts. Lastly, chapter six concludes with the implications of these findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

HISTORY OF BLACK PRINCIPALS

Racial pride, self-esteem, and self-respect were instilled as a form of passive resistance to theories of inferiority. At the same time, the introduction of academic and classical curricula and the recruitment of qualified teachers represented more overt forms of resistance to ideologies and individuals who would keep Blacks in subservient positions.

-Tillman, 2004, African American Principals and the Legacy of Brown

Before the era of accountability began in the early 2000s, many Black principals exemplified effective leadership by advancing student achievement and teacher development. Scholars like Tillman (2004) have long documented the extraordinary lineage of Black men and women who have led, cared for, and taught students within segregated and desegregated schools. Other scholars like Anderson (1988), Franklin (1984, 1990), Savage (2001), Walker (1993a, 1993b, 1996, 2003), and Ward Randolph (1997) used historical methodologies to document the history of Black principals. Much of this work is divided into two time periods, pre- and post-*Brown* and is used within this section to provide social and historical contexts to the beliefs, roles, and strengths of Black principals before and after the *Brown* case. These characteristics are the foundation of effective leadership that prioritizes culturally responsive education. I conclude the section by providing an account of the impact of *Brown* on the principal pipeline for Black principals.

Pre-Brown

1800s

In the 1800s, “principal teachers” were mainly male and considered the principals of schools (Pierce, 1935; Kafka, 2009). Their duties include administrative, supervision, and teaching tasks (Pierce, 1935). As the structure of schools developed, principals were freed of

their teaching responsibilities (Pierce, 1935). The selection of principals typically came from city officials or through town meetings (Pierce, 1935). Unfortunately, the earliest literature on the history of principals, like Pierce (1935), fails to mention the specific roles or entrance of Black people within principalship positions. Instead, Historians relied on archives and interviews to describe the values and responsibilities of Black principals, especially in the South (Tillman, 2004). Black principals served as physical builders of schools, managers who worked hard to obtain school resources, and activists for their schools and communities (Dillard, 1995; Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Savage, 2001; Walker & Byas, 2003; Tillman, 2004). Black principals took on these roles because they had to work against racism and limited school resources (DeMatthews, 2018).

Even in the 1800s, the leadership of education for Black people came from Black elites like ministers, journalists, and politicians (Franklin, 1984, 1990; Tillman, 2004), some of whom were once freed slaves. This was first seen within common schools where Black educators were “heads or principals” (Tillman, 2004). In alignment with the values of Black communities, Black principals believed that Black children deserved the same educational opportunities and resources as White children. (Tillman, 2004). This was partly linked to education being one of the few opportunities for Black middle-class people before the mid-1950s (M. Foster, 1997; Pollard, 1997; Walker, 2001). Rousmaniere (2013) provides accounts of Black educators’ dedication to educating themselves and turning to provide the best education possible to Black students despite poor treatment and limited resources from their White school system leaders. Jeremiah, a “principal-teacher” in California in the 1800s, is an example of leadership within the North. He was known for being an educator and advocate even while studying to be in spiritual

ministry (Tillman, 2004). Similar leadership was seen in the South when Bishop Daniel Payne started a school in South Carolina. However, less than ten years later, the school was closed when “Whites became fearful that free Blacks might have access to and be influenced by abolitionist literature” (Tillman, 2004, p.107). Segregated and racist school systems determined if and where Black people could get their education, but Black educators truly believed in the power of education and were dedicated to both maintaining and expanding Black people’s access to education.

1900s

Black principals’ dedication to education in the face of racist “separate, but equal” laws confirmed by the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* court case sometimes allowed them to obtain better schooling than White principals. In the early 1900s, it was common for Black principals to possess high-quality training and certifications (Fenwick, 2022; Tillman, 2004; Walker, 1996). In places with a “dual system,” two different schools for Black and White students, Black students were not allowed to attend certain graduate degree programs within their state (Fenwick, 2022). So, Southern Black people would travel to other states to receive their graduate degrees and return to the South to serve in leadership positions in segregated schools (Fenwick, 2002). Fenwick (2002) notes that these public and private graduate programs were often superior to White-only degree programs in the Black educators’ home state.

Advanced degrees were not the only advantage that rose during this period. Black male and female principals exhibited some agency by developing resources, performing services, and “transforming schools into the culture symbol of the Black community” (Rousmaniere, 2013; Savage, 2001; Tillman, 2004). Black principals ultimately were the decision makers within their

schools because their schools were unattended to by White school boards and superintendents (Rousmaniere, 2013; Tillman, 2004). This authority allowed Black principals to hire and dismiss teachers, implement programs, and raise money for resources and supplies (Rousmaniere, 2013; Tillman, 2004). When White school boards refused to provide their Black schools¹ with the items they needed, Black principals would reach out to their community to raise funds or find the items they needed (e.g., transportation for students). So, while Black schools were often inadequately funded and resourced, this constant struggle did not mean that Black schools and leaders were automatically inferior as Black principals, educators, and communities worked diligently to take care of their students (Walker, 1993a, 1993b, 1996, 2003). Black principals' cultural perspectives help explain how "segregated Black schools were able to fight the demon of racism by helping Black children believe in what they were capable of achieving" (Walker, 2003, p. 59).

There are several examples of Black principals' leadership styles that prioritized resistance to Anti-Blackness, care, and advocacy for Black students. In the North, there was a Black female principal in Harlem named Gertrude Ayer (DeMatthews, 2018). Ayer was described as a caring leader who built trusting relationships with parents, provided supportive services for unemployed families within her school, and created community partnerships that developed students' skill sets (Johnson, 2004). Not only did her students participate in experiential learning that allowed them to gain real-life experiences, but Ayer "also participated in activism that challenged racial inequality in public education" (DeMatthews, 2018, p. 123). A similar story is seen within the South with Ulysses Byas (Walker & Byas, 2003). Although Byas was born into poverty in Georgia, he obtained his graduate degree from Teachers College and

¹ The term Black schools refers to racially segregated schools that only Black children could attend.

became a principal of an underfunded Black school in Georgia (Walker & Byas, 2003). He, too, built strong relationships with his community and advocated against his school's dropout rates by centering and improving the school's curriculum (DeMatthews, 2018). Although Black principals had the authority to implement their vision for Black students; depending on the time and geographic region, Black principals had different leadership goals. Some of these focus more on vocational training and increasing economic development (Tillman, 2004) rather than on access to a variety of educational opportunities.

Post-*Brown*

The ruling in the 1954 *Brown* case did not immediately lead to fully integrated schools and never did. It took several years after the ruling for some school districts to begin integrating schools. During this time, Black principals still prioritized educating and caring for Black students and resisting anti-Blackness (Tillman, 2004). However, the roles of Black principals became broader (Tillman, 2004). Their roles extended to that of “superintendents, supervisors, family counselors, financial advisors, community leaders, employers, and politicians” (Tillman, 2009, p.181). In some cases, these additional responsibilities weighed on Black principals, causing them to take on authoritarian leadership styles, which “sparked diverging responses from both the students and teachers” (Jackson-Dunn, 2018, p. 19). Jackson-Dunn (2018) and Tillman (2004) argue that this post-*Brown* era focused on the “effective principal leadership” of Black principals to obtain student achievement, as seen through the work of Edmonds (1980), Hallinger and Heck (1996), Jackson-Dunn (2018) Murphy (1998), and Witziers et al. (2003). There was a “powerful urge” for Black principals to perform “well” and increase the academic performance of students (Jackson-Dunn, 2018). Black principals were responsible for being effective in fixing

barriers between schools and communities (Rousmanier, 2007) “due to the cultural mismatch between [B]lack parents and students and [W]hite educators (Jackson-Dunn, 2018, p. 20). Researchers like Lomotey (1989a) focused on the effectiveness of Black principals on Black students’ academic success. Using interviews and observations, his research found that successful Black schools were the ones that “possess the qualities suggested by the research on principal leadership and academic achievement,” such as establishing goals, utilizing staff energy, strong communication skills, and participating in instructional management (Lomotey, 1989, p. 6). Another study by Lomotey (1993) showed that successful Black principals in Black schools displayed a commitment to equitable education, compassion towards their students and families, confidence in their student’s ability to achieve academically, and concern about “education issues related to the development of the whole child” (Tillman, 2004, p. 185). Black principals who were considered “successful” were also committed to ensuring that their Black students were taught Black history and culture to develop “positive self-concepts” (Lomotey, 1993; Tillman, 2004). Moreover, principals with strong “cultural affiliation” will combine their personal and professional identities (Lomotey, 1989) to balance “‘schooling’ and ‘education’ to help [Black] children achieve academic excellence” (Tillman, 2004). This balance and commitment may not come easily or be as visible when there is a mismatch between Black students and White principals. A “racial and cultural mismatch” was known to lead “to barriers between the school and the community” (Lomotey, 1987, 1989a, 1993; Tillman, 2004).

Black principals were torn between displaying compassion for their students and community and meeting performance expectations (Jackson-Dunn, 2018; Karpinski, 2006). The care and compassion that Black principals displayed led to them advocating for students,

maintaining the schools, and helping students reach their potential (Dillard, 1995; Lyman, 2000). One Black principal's compassion, even in the face of discrimination in his school and community, contributed to how he was raised to be family-oriented and rely on his spiritual faith (Lyman, 2000). The research on Black principals' care found biased and different expectations for Black male and female principals. In some cases, Black males were expected to be disciplinaries, while female principals were expected to be nurturers (Trinidad & Normore, 2005). Unfortunately, there is limited research on Black women's school leadership styles and accomplishments during this period (Tillman, 2004). This can be partly attributed to the smaller number of Black women in leadership positions, the few Black educational researchers examining issues that impact Black leaders, and the lack of belief in or "suitability" of Black female principals' experience for publication (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). The research that focuses on Black women principals is crucial because it describes how Black women dealt with race and gender barriers (Doughty, 1980; Tillman, 2004). Compared to Black male principals, Doughty (1980) reports that after 1966, Black female principals decreased in numbers from a national urban school district administrative survey. The literature that does account for Black female principals (Banks, 1995; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1999; Young & McLeod, 2001) "rarely presents detailed portraits of the lives, work, vision, and impact of these principals on the school community and student achievement or discriminatory practices that affect their work" (Tillman, 2004, p. 126).

Black principals within the post- *Brown* literature are again characterized as individuals who care for their students and communities. Unlike pre-*Brown*, these principals are forced to take on additional duties within their role as principals and begin to face performance pressures.

This pressure created conflict for Black principals who felt forced to choose between performance and compassion. The previous literature showed that “strong” Black principals could balance compassion and hold high academic expectations for Black students.

Implications of *Brown*

It is impossible to critically examine the leadership pipeline for Black principals without accounting for the firing and demotion of Black educators as an implication of desegregation efforts. Scholars have reported that over 38,000 Black teachers and principals lost their jobs between 1954 and 1965 (Hudson & Holmes et al., 1994). Fenwick (2022) used primary sources to explain how nearly 100,000 Black principals and teachers’ positions were illegally taken and handed over to lesser-qualified White people. Through an analysis of transcripts from Senate hearings on the displacement of Black principals in 1971, Fenwick (2022) provides a detailed account of Black men and women who lost their jobs due to racism and political backlash. Black principals were either fired, demoted to co- or assisted principals under principals with fewer years of experience and/or academic training, or appointed limited federally funded positions within the central office with little authority or job security (Fenwick, 2022; Fultz, 2004; Milner et al., 2016; Tillman, 2004). In addition, black principals lost their reputation and authority within their communities when they were demoted to teaching and non-teaching positions or "downgraded" to administrative positions at lower-grade schools (Fultz, 2004).

It was not long after the passing of *Brown* that state and federal agencies were investigating the firing and demotion of Black principals. The Race Relations Information Center (RRIC) reported that Black principals were “desegregation’s primary prey” (Fultz, 2004). The Southern Education Reporting Services founded the RRIC with funding from the Ford

Foundation in 1954 “to collect unbiased data and information about Southern school desegregation” (Fenwick, 2022, p. 22). The RRIC report, other state reports, and Senate hearings highlighted the magnitude of the situation within the South:

- In 1967, Alabama lost 200 Black principals in only three years.
- Between 1968 and 1970, nearly 250 Black principals lost their jobs in Mississippi.
- Between 1954 and 1970, Kentucky lost 314 Black principals, which left the state with only 36 Black principals.
- Between 1963 to 1970, 227 Black high school principals in North Carolina dropped to 8.
- Between 1963 and 1971, Arkansas' 134 Black secondary school principals dropped to 14.
- Between 1965 and 1970, the Black high school principals in South Carolina moved from 144 to 33, and
- Between 1968 and 1970, Tennessee was left with only 17 Black high school principals instead of the original 73 (Fultz, 2004).

Fultz (2004) expands these findings by arguing against the narrative that Black principals left their positions to chase jobs that were newly available to them. Instead, their positions were illegally taken from them and often handed over to lesser-qualified White educators (Fenwick, 2022; Tillman, 2004). For example, in a Maryland State Department of Education study on principals by race for the 1968-1969 school year, the state found that in comparison to White principals, Black principals had more master's degrees and advanced certifications (Fenwick, 2022). Moreover, it was stated that “the one factor in determining the appointment of principals [was] the racial factor” (Hearings before Senate Select Committee on EE0, Part 10, 1971). Similar findings were present in other southern states and in reports from the National Education Association (NEA) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) (Fenwick, 2022).

The job loss imposed on Black principals also had a profound impact on Black students and their communities, leaving them “vulnerable and subject to mistreatment by White principals, teachers, and students” (Fenwick, 2022, p. 50) and “shaped the contemporary landscape of Black school leadership” (Templeton et al., 2021, p.3). Evidence of this mistreatment was present in an investigation conducted by NEA that shows White principals operating different bell systems for Black students, White teachers subjecting Black children to racial slurs and other forms of mistreatment, and “Black symbols of pride” being destroyed (Fenwick, 2022). There was also an economic impact of the loss of Black principals. While not many studies calculate the cost, in places like Georgia, the cost exceeds 80 million dollars (Fenwick, 2022).

Perhaps the most alarming part of this history is the lack of accountability on states to cease discriminatory hiring practices even though federal laws prohibit such actions. Thirteen years after the Brown ruling, the passing of *Singleton v. Jackson Municipal Separate School District I and II* provided “ammunition in Black educators’ fight against racial discrimination” (Fenwick, 2022). The *Singleton* case mandated that “during the desegregation process, teachers and school administrators had to be hired, assigned, promoted, paid, demoted and dismissed without regard to race, color, or national origin” (Fenwick, 2022, p. 88). *Singleton* provided instructions for staff reductions by stating that new hires for displaced individuals could not be of a different race from the displaced person unless other displaced staff members with the proper qualifications had the opportunity to fill the position (Fenwick, 2022; Fultz, 2004). *Singleton* also provided a guideline that declared that the ratio of Black and White teachers within a school must be the same as the Black and White teacher ratio within the school system (Fenwick, 2022;

Fultz, 2004). However, the decline in Black principals persisted as the Nixon administration failed to support the case adequately and the lack of safeguards within the Singleton to compact the persistent racial discrimination within the hiring practices of state and local authorities (Fenwick, 2022; Jefferson, 1973).

This section conceptualizes how White school boards illegally removed Black principals from their positions and appointed underqualified White peers to replace them (Fenwick, 2022; Fultz, 2004). Researchers tend to overlook that state and federal agencies were aware of what was happening, and federal laws were passed to “protect” Black educators. However, the onus of these crimes was placed on Black educators to file complaints and prove their dismissal or demotion was based solely on their race. By placing the burden on Black principals and not requiring states to recruit Black principals (Fenwick, 2022), states and local school systems escaped the responsibility of creating equitable and diverse leadership pipelines that could benefit all students. During this time, the lack of accountability for states and school districts is also seen in the lack of data collection that allows historians and researchers to see if Black educators and principals were applying to positions and who was selected within the applicant pool for new positions.

In recent decades, there has been an increase in intentional efforts to research and support programs that attempt to diversify the teacher-to-leadership pipeline. Such examples can be found within the U.S. Department of Education’s competitive Teacher Quality Partnership program, “Grow Your Own” programs sponsored by state agencies, teaching and principal fellowships hosted by colleges and universities, and grants from organizations like the Wallace Foundation. To some extent, the current data on principals show the effectiveness of such

programs. However, what is unclear is what is happening within the black box (the application, screening, and interview process) and to what extent these internal workings hinder the efforts of federal, state, and local agencies to diversify the principal pipeline.

BLACK PRINCIPALS' EXPERIENCES IN THE PRINCIPAL PIPELINE

The literature on Black principals in the twentieth century falls into two broad buckets of research. The first bucket explores the lived experiences of Black principals within their placements mainly through qualitative methods, whereas the second bucket explores the various aspects of the pipeline mainly through quantitative methods.

Experiences

Before this century, researchers argued that Black principals' experiences were excluded from the literature on educational leadership (Dantley, 1990; Gooden, 2012; Lomotey, 1989a; Matthews & Crow, 2010; Tillman, 2004). Since then, studies that described Black principals' perception of how their race is perceived throughout their principalship journey have emerged (Agosto et al., 2015; Brown, 2005; Black, 2012; Cruzeiro & Boone, 2009; Farinde et al., 2016; Nesmith, 2013; Ortiz, 2000). Much of this work has been explored within dissertations and grounded within critical theories that prioritize participants' experiences. In these qualitative pieces of work, Black educators describe their experiences of racial discrimination throughout various parts of the principal pipeline – including their experiences with (or without) preparation, hiring, promotion, and support. During a review of Black principals' experiences, two themes emerged: race as an asset and race as a challenge.

Race as an Asset

Literature on Black principals continues to describe their transformational leadership characteristics, such as their belief in learning for all students and their ability to serve as role models (Black, 2012). Race was often viewed as an asset for Black principals due to their ability to connect with students, staff, and Black parents (Tyson, 2016). Black principals have described how they felt connected to students of color, advocated for higher student expectations, and worked to increase diversity amongst staff (Vinzant, 2009). Black principals' ability to connect with students was not a one-sided perception. Marzett (2020) confirmed the mutual benefit of racial diversity by exploring how Black high school graduates perceive their Black principals. Through interviews, Black high school graduates described how their Black principals promoted positive school climates, created a sense of belonging, and prioritized education. (Marzett, 2020). These assets align with the shared qualities Lomotey (1989a) identified between Black principals in Black schools. When Black principals occupy these leadership roles, it also benefits students of color to see the representation (Wilson, 2020). These positive relationships and academic and community support were present not only within urban areas (Washington, 2019) but also in rural settings between Black principals and Black male students (Dawson, 2018). Yet not all the literature documents the positive impact that some Black principals provide. Khalifa (2012) reports that when Black principals reject "the cultural and social capital, and proclivities of Black students, and [blame] Black students for their lower achievement and unique behaviors," these principals then contribute to "abusive and exclusionary school environments that marginalized Black students" (p. 259). Khalifa's (2012) work further reinforces the need for racially diverse principals and ones dedicated to racial equity.

Race was also viewed as an asset by researchers that described Black principals' level of dedication and forms of self-care. Jackson-Dunn (2018) provides an account of the strengths of Black women found in urban school districts, such as resilience, nurturing spirits, ability to code-switch, and levels of confidence. Through a phenomenological study that explored the teacher-to-principal pipeline, Black male principals noted that confidence is a key factor needed to become a principal (Jackson-Dunn, 2018). Black male principals have also displayed "strength, paternalism, balance, consistency, and fairness" as practices that create effective educational environments (Henderson, 2015, p. 133). Lomotey (1989a) reported that Black principals' commitment is due in part to their "cultural affinity," which he describes as principals' "ethno-humanist role identity." This "ethno-humanist role" motivates them to take on a compassionate and culturally responsive approach to students, even in urban areas with high poverty levels (Brooks, 2020). These assets were often talked about in the face of some of the challenges Black principals faced within their schools, like lack of district support (Brooks, 2020). Despite challenges, researchers have investigated Black principals' forms of self-care (Brooks, 2020) which include a reliance on their spiritual faith (Brooks, 2020; D.B. Brown, 2012; Dantley, 1990; Hicks, 2020; Lewis, 2020), childhood experiences, and upbringing to guide their practices and sustain them (Brooks, 2020). Through a narrative inquiry, Chatman (2021) confirms that "resiliency, support, mentorship, and an unwavering dedication to students" were factors that helped Black principals "overcome the adversities they experienced throughout their career path to the principalship" (p. 1).

Race as a Challenge

The second emergent theme within the experiences of Black principals was race as a challenge. Again, mainly through qualitative studies, researchers found how race and racism made it difficult to develop trust and respect between the Black principals' staff and community leaders (Vinzant, 2009). Black principals expressed that during their principalship, they faced negative perceptions about their role as a principal and their capabilities as Black leaders (Black, 2012; D.B. Brown, 2012; Finley, 2013; Hill, 2013; Jackson, 2013; Jean-Marie, 2013; Nesmith, 2013; Richardson, 2013; Smith, 2013; Webb, 2013; Vinzant, 2009). The negative perceptions Black principals faced, along with workplace environmental factors like racial discrimination, lack of mentorship, and lack of Title IX mandates (Richardson, 2013), also decreased Black principals' self-esteem (Tyson, 2016). Unlike the positive trait of confidence that Jackson-Dunn (2018) spoke of within Black principals, scholars like Tyson (2016) bring to the forefront some Black principals' negative struggles with confidence.

Researchers who examined Black principals' experience within predominantly White schools found themes of negative perceptions of Black principals (Brown, 2005; D.B. Brown, 2012; McCray et al., 2007; Tooms et al., 2010; Lyman, 2000). In a qualitative study that examined 12 Black principals' experiences within predominantly White schools, Wiley (2016) found that these principals also faced difficulties developing trusting relationships with the White community due to racism and felt feelings of "alienation" and "rejection" (Wiley, 2016). While much of this work is found within suburban areas, Flowers (2020) examined the experiences of Black rural principals in White rural schools, and Grubbs (2021), within predominantly White urban schools, found similar themes. Despite the negative impact of race, like being "scrutinized by colleagues and superiors," the themes of spiritual faith and "professional training and

experience” reemerge as reasons why some Black principals stayed in predominantly White schools (D.B. Brown, 2012).

Other race-based challenges that Black principals experienced included feeling as though their authority to make decisions was limited and challenged by staff members, having to meet higher performance standards, and facing various forms of racism (Black, 2012; Finley, 2013; Hill, 2013; Jackson, 2013; Jean-Marie, 2013; Nesmith, 2013; Richardson, 2013; Smith, 2013; Tyson, 2016; Webb, 2013; Vinzant, 2009). Tyson (2016) supported and extended this body of research to look specifically at Black principals’ perceptions of the impacts of race on their leadership within Georgia through a qualitative study of seven principals. By using critical race theory (CRT) and constructivism theory, Tyson (2016) reported that race had an “adverse impact” as the principals reported staff’s viewing them as disciplinarians instead of “effective instructional leaders” (p. 110). As a result, Black principals had to prove their leadership capabilities and instructional knowledge (Tyson, 2016).

Researchers have also noticed that organizational challenges arose when examining the experiences of Black principals. Mabokela and Madsen (2003) explain the barriers to effective school administration for Black principals: their leadership roles were perceived as nontraditional, they lacked role models, mentors, or sponsors, they received little acceptance from their peers, they were excluded from informal networks and informational systems, subjected to racism and sexism, staff challenged their authority, subjected to higher performance expectations, their authority to make decisions were limited, and advancement opportunities were restricted (Richardson, 2013). Other studies also present these barriers (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Gosmire, 2010; Grubbs, 2021; Jackson-Dunn, 2018; Monts, 2012). When

Grubbs (2021) explored the lived experience of Black male principals in urban settings, lack of support systems, being labeled a disciplinarian, and mistrust in leading predominately White staff as a few of the challenges they faced. On the other hand, Black female principals, who faced racism and sexism, have expressed concern over lack of mentorship and support (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Monts, 2012), gender bias from staff, high work expectations, and apprehensions about their leadership and disciplinary abilities (Gosmire, 2010; Jackson-Dunn, 2018).

Leadership Pipeline

Aside from examining the experiences of Black principals within their placements through qualitative methods, other scholars have focused on their experiences moving through the leadership pipeline (Hall, 2015; McCray et al., 2007; Smith, 2016; Young et al., 2011). The underrepresentation of Black principals has been attributed to recruitment barriers like the need for more support and mentorship for Black educators, inadequate research on Black principals and their career aspirations, and Black principals experiencing resistance within the leadership pipeline (Sanchez et al., 2008). There is also some quantitative literature that either centers on race or includes race as a variable of analysis to quantify the impact of race on the certification, hiring, promotion, and turnover of principals. (Crawford & Fuller, 2017; Fuller, Young, & Orr, 2007; Ringel et al., 2004). These scholars have positioned this work as a way to address the underrepresentation of Black principals, the growing Black and Brown student population (Smith, 2016; Ward, 1998), the need for racially and culturally diverse schools, and a shortage of principals (Educational Research Service, 1998; McAdams, 1998; Olson, 2000; Steinberg, 2000). Building off these problem statements, this section first looks at the qualitative work that

explores whether race is a factor in the pursuit of principalship. Then, I critically review quantitative work that references race within the principal pipeline.

Race as an Employment Factor

A few studies have examined racial discrimination within the labor market (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003), and it is known that hiring practices like interviews are subjective and biased (Avery, 1979). However, there is not much literature that investigates “the racialized aspects of the educational leadership pipeline” (Smith, 2016, p. 123), especially within the twenty-first century. Before this era, few studies attempted to understand and recognize the correlation between the race of students and the placement of Black principals and what racial factors impact the hiring process (Ward, 1998). At the beginning of the 2000s, Hooker (2000) calls the literature on the “recruitment and selection of school administrators” “anecdotal, unpublished, and atheoretical.” Much of this work was qualitative and correlative (Ward, 1998). Since then, only a few scholars have begun to analyze the impact of race on the hiring of Black principals (Hall, 2015; McCray et al., 2007; Smith, 2016; Young et al., 2011). Recently, Weiner et al. (2022) added a racial and gendered lens to Black female principals' hiring and promotion progress. They found that connections with White men were key to these Black leaders entering the applicant pool and obtaining positions when interviewing 20 Black female principals (Weiner et al., 2022). Furthermore, the interview and hiring process was performative, reinforcing “problematic tropes about Black women” and lacked transparency (Weiner et al., 2022). These scholars reinforce the need for uncovering and revising the hiring and promotion process (Weiner et al., 2022).

Hall (2015) surveyed Black male principals to see if they experienced differential hiring practices. Although the work found that there is “a need and desire” to increase the number of

Black males within education, the study did not “provide much insight into what helped the men surveyed gain success” (Hall, 2015). While this work hoped to provide context to challenges within the hiring, promotion, and retention of Black male educators and leaders, not much new knowledge is gained that has not already been explored in other qualitative research on Black principals’ experiences. Smith (2016) dives slightly deeper into this work by using CRT and a historicizing of knowledge approach to focus on what intentional or consequential racism is in the hiring and promotion process that causes the underrepresentation of Black administrators. This work better conceptualizes and recognizes the roles of racism, White dominance, and racial stratification. For example, all White search committees are liable to exclude Black candidates from recommendation or promotion to leadership positions (Ortiz, 2000). So, despite the “gains” Black people have received through the Civil Rights movement, they are still “denied equitable access to senior school administrative positions” (Smith, 2016, p. 122). Black teachers are also less likely to be informally recruited into leadership positions when they are female and do not share the same race as their principal (Myung et al., 2011).

In another study that sought to understand how race influences principals’ placements, 127 principals in the southeast were surveyed (McCray et al., 2007). Unsurprisingly, McCray et al. (2007) discovered that Black principals were more likely to be placed in predominantly Black schools. Yet, White principals were more likely to lead predominantly Black schools versus Black principals leading predominantly White schools (McCray et al., 2007). A similar line of thinking was found by I. P. Young et al. (2011), who described how the “context” of the position depends on whether a candidate’s race is favored. Other scholars like Cruzeiro and Boone (2009) and Tallerico (2000) also describe how race plays a role in obtaining leadership positions –

especially as it relates to hiring, promotion, and the perception of fit (Templeton et al., 2021). These bodies of work help researchers begin to think deeply about whether the placement of Black principals is based on the negative presumptions of Black principals (McCray et al., 2007) but do not assist in conceptualizing what is happening within the application pool process.

Race Within the Principal Pipeline

Several scholars have researched principalship pathways (Gates et al., 2004; Fuller et al., 2007; Ringel et al., 2004; Turnbull et al., 2015). The passing of the No Child Left Behind Act in the early 2000s started the era of accountability (Sanchez et al., 2008) and increased quantitative analysis of principal pathways (Templeton, 2021). Yet, “few quantitative studies have contextualized race and racism in a way that recognizes how the education system itself often serves as a mechanism to further the inequality of Black teachers and administrators” (Templeton et al., 2021, p. 5). This includes the failure of many researchers to examine leadership certification, test-taker characteristics, and the relationship between test performance and leadership capabilities. The most notable study that takes up this challenge was based on data within Tennessee. Grissom and his colleagues (2017) found that individuals of color were less likely to attain the licensure score required when using ten years of data. However, they add to this work by highlighting that there is “little evidence” that assessment is a predictor of job performance. In other words, the assessment is another barrier to Black principals’ matriculation through the leadership pipeline.

In an earlier study, Gates et al. (2004) used North Carolina administrative data and logit models to examine the relationship between educators and schools in advancement to principalship. They declared that compared to White female teachers, Black female teachers

were likelier to become assistant principals (Gates et al., 2004). Two other studies that also used state administrative data and logit models found similar findings of Black educators being more likely than their White counterparts to advance in the leadership pipeline or obtain principal certification (Fuller et al., 2007; Ringel et al., 2004). However, these three studies did not properly contextualize that Black teachers were underrepresented in their populations and “minimized the problems of underrepresentation and discrimination of Black educators in the entirety of the public school system” (Templeton et al., 2021).

There is little quantitative research on teachers obtaining leadership credentials and advancement into principal positions (Gates et al., 2003; Davis et al., 2017). One study that examined teacher leadership certification and transition to principalship used event history analyses and discrete-time hazard modeling of nearly 11,000 Texan educators over 17 years (Davis et al., 2017). Davis and colleagues (2017) looked at the educators’ race, gender, and other characteristics to determine what influences their career paths to principalship. They found that race and gender have negative implications within the principal pipeline as White men have “the most opportunity when they decide to pursue the principalship” (Davis et al., 2017, p. 231). The authors also report that the "selection of school leaders" or the selection process is subject to systemic bias and creates inequities within the principal pipeline (Davis et al., 2017). Some similar findings were found in another study of Texas educators. Bailes and Guthery (2020) found that promotions for Black assistant principals were less likely to happen, and if they were promoted, it was delayed compared to their White counterparts when looking at the promotion of almost 4,700 assistant principals over a 16-year survival analysis.

Aside from Templeton et al. (2021), no other quantitative studies examine “the factors that might mitigate or promulgate discrimination and inequity experienced by Black teachers in the principal pipeline” (p.17). When other scholars analyze the principalship pipeline, some of them do not reference race at all (Bastian & Henry, 2015; Turnbull et al., 2015). Templeton and her colleagues (2021) provide the most recent and critical review of quantitative studies that examine the teacher-to-principal pipeline. The researchers argued that the best quantitative studies “report the likelihood of principalship among Black educators as compared to the White majority,” but the worst studies “minimize the racial disparities among Black and White educators by mischaracterizing and overgeneralizing specific findings without interpreting the inclusion of race variables” (Templeton et al., 2021, p.6).

Templeton et al. (2021) used Quantitative Critical Race Theory (QuantCrit) to provide “an accurate quantitative counternarrative” of the influence of race on Black teachers’ movement through the leadership pipeline. QuantCrit is a theory that acknowledges that racism influences data collection and analysis (Castillo & Gillborn, 2022). With QuantCrit, a dataset of 38,740 Black teachers within Texas, and survival analysis, Templeton et al. (2021) found that the chance of Black teachers becoming principals was small, with factors like the percentage of low-income students served during their first year of teaching decreasing their likelihood. They also found that the likelihood of a Black teacher becoming a principal increases the longer their teaching careers persist. Although many Black teachers have alternative certifications, the type of program did not influence their likelihood of becoming a principal. There is a need for more critical work like Templeton et al. (2021) that centers Black educators within their research instead of an unfair and inequitable comparison to other groups.

Through quantitative analysis, principal and school characteristics have been used to examine school turnover that impacts leadership stability (Gates et al., 2006). The work on mobility and turnover was more about understanding who is leaving the system and where they are placed with hopes of increasing leadership stability and student achievement versus looking specifically at the role of race. Instead, is race considered as one of the variables accounted for in their models? Very few quantitative bodies of work use a critical lens to center race and the experiences of Black educators within their studies (Templeton, 2021). While reviewing turnover data in Illinois and North Carolina through a multinomial logit modeling approach, there were “no significant main effects for the [B]lack indicator” (Gates et al., 2006) on principal mobility. However, overall, Black principals were less likely to quit in both states (Gates et al., 2006). In summary, the literature reports that Black educators are likelier to stay within their positions despite being less likely to be promoted to leadership positions.

Researchers tend to focus either on the lived experiences of Black principals through qualitative methods or explore the pipeline through quantitative methods. Qualitative researchers centered on race to report the racism within the leadership pipeline that influenced their placements and how others perceived them. Some quantitative researchers failed to center or properly interpret race in their study of the leadership pipeline. The few quantitative scholars who include or center race agree that race is a factor in Black educators’ slow progression through the leadership pipeline – even though Black principals are less likely to leave their positions once they obtain their leadership roles. The scholarship provides sufficient information on the benefits of effective Black principals and their experiences throughout the principal

pipeline. However, the internal workings of the application, screening, and interviewing process have been left untouched. This black box needs to be uncovered.

RACIALIZED ORGANIZATIONS THEORY

One might have expected a huge controversy over the dramatic social transformation necessary to eradicate the regime of American apartheid. By and large, however, the very same Whites who administered explicit policies of segregation and racial domination kept their jobs as decision-makers in employment offices of companies, admissions offices of schools, leading offices of banks, and so on.

-Crenshaw et al., 1996, Critical Race Theory: The Key Writing That Formed the Movement

This dissertation is guided by racialized organization theory. The purpose of racialized organizations theory is to focus on the “centrality of organizations in producing racial inequity” and “is an addition to critical race theory” (Ray, 2022, p. 94). According to Ray (2022), critical race theory (CRT) “is a body of scholarship that faces America’s brutal racial history, recognizes the parts of that history that remain unchanged, and works toward changing the rest” (p. xix). Hiring policies and practices are legal entities, and CRT was born out of the lack of acknowledgment that race influences legal procedures within critical legal studies (Crenshaw, 2011; Tate, 1997). Derrick Bell is cited for the emergence of CRT in the 1970s (Pedrioli, 2005) and the body of legal scholarship “that offers a radical lens to deconstruct and challenge racial inequality in society (Rollock and Gillborn, 2011).

The use of CRT in education arose in the mid-1990s. Scholars like Ladson – Billings & Tate (1995) used CRT to theorize educational inequity by drawing attention to the role of race in schooling (cited in Hambercer & Gin, 2020). Race is a dynamic factor in education. Race, which is often connected to wealth, influences the resources put into education and, ultimately, the opportunities that students can gain from education. Since the 1900s, CRT has been used to

analyze teaching practices, curriculum, school finance (Ladson – Billings, 1998), school discipline, tracking, school choice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), educational leadership (McCray et al., 2007), and more recently the hiring of principals (Alston, 2018; Randolph & Robinson, 2019).

Racialized organizational theory is possible because CRT first allowed researchers to understand that racism is a normal facet of our society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). More specifically, scholars like Derrick Bell, Charles Lawrence, Richard Delgado, Lani Guiner, and Kimberlè Crenshaw’s work challenges the role of law in maintaining and constructing social and economic oppression based on race (Lynn & Adams, 2002; Taylor, 2009) – including access to job opportunities, professional networks, and promotions to leadership positions. Racialized organization theory adds upon CRT to examine “how racial processes shape organizations in ways both obvious and obscure” (Ray, 2022, p.94). Victor Ray (2019) argues that “race theorists have also neglected key insights from organizational theory, lessening the explanatory power of their central theories” (p,29). Theories on race have traditionally focused on the state, individuals, or ideology and downplay “the role of organizations in the production of racial ideologies and the social construction of race itself” (Ray, 2019, p. 30). Ray’s (2019) racialized organizational theory provides a useful framework to make sense of and examine the factors that contribute to school districts’ use of hiring and placement policies and practices and how they make sense of candidates’ merit and fit. By highlighting that organizational processes are not race-neutral, I can begin to examine how organizations use practices that perpetuate racial inequities.

Traditional organizational theories have assumed that organizations are colorblind or race-neutral (Ray,2019). Institutionalists began to consider the “historical continuity of racial discrimination,” organizations' “reliance on cultural rules,” and “show that external factors such as legislation and professional organizations partially dictate organizational forms” (Ray, 2019, p.29). However, “institutionalists rarely see the racial homogeneity of mainstream organizations as a foundational abstract principle” (Ray, 2019, p.29). Therefore, racialized organizations theory recognizes that “race is constitutive of organizational foundations, hierarchies, and processes” (Ray, 2019). The four tenets: (1) racialized organizations enhance or diminish the agency of racial groups; (2) racialized organizations legitimate the unequal distribution of resources; (3) Whiteness is a credential; and (4) the decoupling of formal rules from organizational practice is often racialized. Individual prejudice and unconscious racial bias reinforce racial order through organizational mechanisms (Ray, 2019). Therefore, to address racial inequity in hiring policies that limit the hiring of Black principals must address organizational processes.

Traditional organizational theory assumes that organizations are reliable and predictable, that their “hierarchical structures are normal, necessary, functional, and desirable,” and that their “communication channels are clearly delineated and consistently used” (Komives & Woodard, 2003). Hiring standards within organizational theory attempt to control who enters an organization by enforcing criteria and practices that are believed to alleviate the amount of “training” and “socialization” required of new employees (Perrow, 2000). On the surface, hiring policies and practices may appear to be fair because if it is believed that everyone has access to the same opportunities and knowledge, all actors within the organization do not have a

(conscious or unconscious) racial basis, and thus, the formal practices do not perpetuate a racial order. These factors are rarely the case.

This dissertation seeks to examine how race and racism act within school systems to withhold economic and social power and opportunity from Black educators. Race is a lucid term that is influenced by political and cultural pressures (Calmore, 1992). Race, in the context of this study, refers to the social construct used often to classify and systematically oppress people of color through racism (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2020). Bell (1988) and Delgado (1989) argued that racism is “ingrained through historical consciousness and ideological choices about race” (Lynn, 2002). W.E.B. DuBois originally predicted that racism is one of this country’s main problems (Lynn et al., 2002), even though the education sector has been more reluctant to embrace race discourse. However, the inner workings of race and racism in our educational system cannot be negated. Ray (2022) argues that race is not only *in* organizations but “organizations shape racial meaning, provide a context for discrimination and shape social mobility” (p. 95).

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

The purpose of Chapter Two was to examine why Black principals are important, their trajectory through history, and how race functions as an institutional barrier to their advancement through the principal pipeline. By using historical, legal, and economic sources, this review centers the experiences of Black principals to provide a holistic review of the past and present factors shaping the leadership pipeline for Black principals. Before *Brown*, Black principals were described as central community figures who cared and advocated for their Black students and community. Post *Brown*, Black principals were fired and demoted at alarming rates, although

many possessed better qualifications and legal “protection” from federal court cases. In the late 1990s, Black principals continued to face racial discrimination within the leadership pipeline. Over the years, researchers either highlighted Black principals’ strength and dedication and the difficulties they faced within their placements because of their race or evaluated their effectiveness as leaders. Before the 2000s, few scholars focused on Black principals within educational leadership. Now, there is literature that describes their experience within the hiring process, and quantitative work attempts to conceptualize the impact of race on the teacher-to-principal pipeline.

This review discovered three central points: 1) the failure of federal agencies to hold state and local school districts to mandates that prohibited racial discrimination, 2) the effective characteristics of Black principals despite having to work against racial discrimination, and 3) the need for data that provides insights to the black box (the application, screening, and interviewing part of the principal pipeline). There is a growing need for collecting and reviewing demographic data on applicants for principal positions, access to principals’ exit interviews, and district-level information on principals’ complaints of racial discrimination. While state and district policies attempt to diversify the teacher and principal pipeline (e.g., Higher Education Act (HEA) Title III-B: Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities; Texas Grown Your Own programs), being prepared for the role does not guarantee that gatekeepers (hiring managers) will hire qualified Black principals. Without adequate data to understand what happens after applicants submit their application and while in the interview room, people will continue to argue that the lack of Black principals stems from them not applying to positions or

being underqualified. Yet, there is no sufficient evidence to support or reject this narrative without uncovering the black box.

The way school districts carry out hiring, and placement policies demands more attention. School districts are operating as racialized organizations that can hinder the advancement of Black educators, aid in the underrepresentation of Black principals, and ultimately have a negative impact on the academic and social achievement of Black students and their peers. Historically, the decline in Black principals has been tied to overt and covert racial discrimination by school districts to fire and demote Black principals due to the *Brown* ruling throughout the mid-to-late 1950s (Tillman, 2004). Today, hiring practices used to select school leaders have not been examined through a racial equity lens, although there is clearly a lack of racial representation from teachers to principals and superintendents within school districts and current and ongoing backlash on CRT and racial equity. Researchers, policymakers, and school leaders must take steps towards understanding how school districts hire and place principals within schools to truly move forward towards equitable and high-quality education for all students - especially Black and Brown students.

The effectiveness of Black leaders has not disappeared. Instead, school districts, like other organizations, may have created and implemented modern-day Jim Crow policies that restrict the growth of Black educators. Murthada and Watts (2005) argue that “if we are to develop schools to meet the needs of diverse student populations today, the use of cultural knowledge from the historical biographies of successful African American educational leaders may serve as valuable resources.” I agree but extend this argument by declaring that individuals must also 1) investigate the internal workings of school systems’ hiring policies and practices to

ensure that effective Black principals are given the opportunity to school systems to do the equity work and 2) rely on the voices of modern-day Black educators to aid in the development of equitable hiring policies and practices.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this study, I examine the racialized hiring practices and policies for principal positions in two suburban school districts through the collection and analysis of hiring practices, documents, hiring and application data, interviews, and focus groups. Using a mixed methods multiple case study, this dissertation poses the following questions:

1. What are suburban school districts' approaches to the hiring of principals?
2. How, if at all, are suburban school district hiring processes racialized?
3. At which rate are Black candidates applying for principal positions in comparison with the rates at which they are hired and the demographics of schools at which they are placed?
4. What hiring policies and practices do Black educators believe can improve the hiring and placement experiences of Black principals in suburban school districts?

These four research questions have three questions (1) examine and analyze hiring practices and policies within suburban school districts through a racialized organizational lens, (2) investigate if demand issues account for the paucity of Black principals through an examination of principal applicant data and hiring decisions in two suburban school districts, and (3) assist in identifying structures and practices which better support the hiring of Black principals. The methodology used to address these research questions and aims is described in this chapter. I will first explain the epistemological stance used to guide this study. Next, I will describe my site selection. Then I provide an overview of the study design for each research question and aim along with details about data sources, collection, and analysis. This chapter concludes with the strengths and limitations of my approach and positionality.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL STANCE

An epistemology stance explains how the researcher “comes to know or the nature of knowledge,” but also about Ladson–Billings (1998), this stance reflects society’s knowing, “*what* is considered as knowledge and *who* counts in creating that knowledge” [emphasis added] (Crotty, 2018, p. 7). With this in mind, “critically oriented” (Capper, 1998, p. 354) epistemology is the framework guiding how I understand and analyze the data collected in this study. Critically oriented epistemology focuses on empowering the traditionally oppressed and providing social justice (Crotty, 2018). Critical theories focus on power, inequalities, oppression, and marginalization, which allow researchers to ask specific questions that revolve around six key areas. First, conversations shift from who does and does not have power to acknowledging and attempting to relieve suffering and oppression. Secondly, a critical view of education takes into consideration all assumptions and historical, political, economic, and societal contexts. Third, facts and values are reunited with the goal of social justice. The fourth key area emphasizes analyzing the power between the oppressor and the oppressed. Next, power is disrupted by allowing equal participation from all participants. Lastly, leadership acts as a political actor (Capper, 1993).

A critical epistemological stance strategically centers the groups left in the margins (Crenshaw, 1991) and challenges power structures, inequity, and political devices to increase access and opportunities. In this dissertation study, I examine the reality of hiring policies and practices used within school districts to see how they impact the hiring and placement of Black principals with critical discourse and policy analysis. Then, I center Black educators in the policy creation process to identify structures and practices that better support aspiring Black principals.

Lastly, I analyze district-level hiring data to show the power of hiring policies and practices on the hiring rate of Black principals within each suburban district.

STUDY DESIGN

Case studies allow for an analysis of complex real-life organizational processes (Yin, 2009). Therefore, this dissertation study employs mixed methods and multiple case study design. According to Creswell and Plano Clarke (2018), “a mixed methods case study design is a type of mixed methods study in which the quantitative and qualitative data collection, results, and integration are used to develop cases for comparative analysis” (p.116). Two school districts – one in the Northwest and one in the South of the United States are the cases in this study. The cases are bounded by district-level senior employees (superintendents, talent managers, etc.) and Black educators within the school districts (embedded unit of analysis).

This mixed methods dissertation utilizes quantitative data to investigate if there is a potential under-hiring (or lack of demand) of Black principals within school districts. It also uses qualitative data (interviews, document analysis, and hiring observations) to understand how districts are making sense of and implementing hiring practices with a racialized lens. Lastly, it uses qualitative data collected through interviews with Black educators within the districts to strengthen their agency and credentials by providing the district with recommendations that create equitable hiring practices and affirming and welcoming environments for Black principals (See Table 1).

Recruiting school districts for this racial equity work was difficult. When I initially proposed the study, I had potential partnerships with two southern urban school districts due to prior university-district partnerships. Partnerships with these sites were unsuccessful due to

district turnover and research fatigue. Therefore, I had to rethink and reengage in district recruitment. Unfortunately, during district recruitment, states were also dealing with anti-Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies in higher education, anti-Critical Race Theory (CRT) policies in K12 and series of other educational gag orders. These policy movements were potential factors in the limited interest in engaging in this research study and districts' desire to avoid repercussions from engaging in race work in their hiring practices. As a result, I spent three months applying to 26 school districts across the United States that either had a district policy or resolution that stated they wanted to hire diverse staff, a research partnership with the Wallace Grant Foundation to build equitable leadership pipelines for principals or if the district expressed culturally responsive leadership as one of their core values or beliefs. Fourteen of the school districts were non-responsive. Six school districts declined my research application. One school district verbally agreed to participate in the qualitative portion of the research study but could not commit to providing the application data due to the extensive amount of time it would take for district approval and data cleaning (between 9 to 12 months). Five school districts approved the study, but only two provided me with their application data. These two districts were the official sites for the study. In the next section, I explain the site selections and then detail the data collection and analysis for each of the three phases.

Table 1. Research Questions and Design

Research Question(s)	Data Sources	Analysis
1. What are suburban school districts' approaches to the hiring of principals?	<i>Qualitative Data</i> • School Districts Policy Manuals, Application Documents, Job	Racialized Organizations Framework Analysis Thematic Analysis
2. How, if at all, are suburban school district		

hiring processes racialized?	Postings, Websites, etc.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiring Observations • Semi-Structured Interviews 	
3. At which rate are Black candidates applying for principal positions in comparison with the rates at which they are hired and the demographics of schools at which they are placed?	<u>Quantitative Data</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School District Websites and Hiring Data • State Education Agency 	Binary Logistic Regression
4. What hiring policies and practices do Black educators believe can improve the hiring and placement experiences of Black principals in suburban school districts?	<u>Qualitative Data</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-Structured Interviews 	Thematic Analysis

Site Selections

This study is conducted at the local district level to align with the ways hiring policies and practices are created and conducted in public education. The sites were purposefully selected. Both districts expressed interest in diversifying their pipeline and hiring more effective and equity-centered leaders either explicitly in a racial equity policy or indirectly through district values. The first district, Westside School District (WSD), has a race and equity policy and resolution that states a desire to recruit, hire, and train racially diverse staff. Southside School District (SSD), the second site, advocates for highly qualified educators who meet the needs of

their students. Although not stated directly, the desire for highly qualified educators who meet the needs of their students cannot be achieved without racially diverse educators.

WSD and SSD are both classified as suburban school districts. WSD is a smaller district with 24 schools and a little over 14,000 students. SSD has 57 schools and over 47,000 students. Both districts have a racially diverse student population that is mostly Black and Brown. In WSD, Black students account for 5% of the student population, 22% for Hispanic students, and 26% for other students of color. SSD has a slightly larger Black (8%) and Hispanic (30%) population (State Agency Data, 2023). Over 70% of the teachers in WSD and SSD are White. The trend of predominately White educators is also visible in the racial demographics of these districts' principals and assistant principals. WSD only has one Black assistant principal and no Black principals. In SSD, the assistant principals are 15% Black, and their principals are 14% Black.

Data Collection & Analysis

Research Questions One & Two

1. What are suburban school districts' approaches to the hiring of principals?
2. How, if at all, are suburban school district hiring processes racialized?

The first part of this dissertation addresses the gap in the literature on what is happening at the district level within the hiring and placement part of the principal pipeline. This section entails collecting physical documents such as district-level job postings for principalship positions, hiring protocols, district policy manuals, information available on districts' websites, and any other publicly available data that provides context to the beliefs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and expectations of the school districts regarding merit and fit of prospective applicants.

This pre-existing data will be used with the data in the second part as a triangulation strategy that will increase the trustworthiness of the study (Morgan, 2022). Additional data is also received from semi-structured interviews with senior district officials (i.e., superintendents, assistant superintendents, executive directors, talent managers, human resources, etc.) and/or other staff members who have recently participated in interviewing and selection committees for principals (n=11).

Due to the size of WSD, the sample size of the interviews with individuals within the district was limited. A total of 5 individuals were interviewed in Westside School District: three district office employees and two Black educators in the district. The positions of the educators are masked in this dissertation to preserve the anonymity and trust of the participants who shared their voices in this research study. Published protest content from the Black Students Union has indicated how, in the past, educators have faced negative consequences for standing up for students. To support the interviews, I also pulled a series of 20 policy documents and content from the district's website to support analysis for this section.

Although this study focuses on racial inequities in the hiring process for principals, it is possible that Black educators were less likely to participate in this research study due to previous interactions with the district. During the study recruitment phase, I reached out to all the Black educators at each level in the school district. Of the educators presented in this study, three individuals who lead the hiring process (two senior hiring directors and one district office leader), 100% of the participants represent the Black educators in school leadership positions, and 10% of the participants represent the Black educators in teaching positions.

Data collection in SSD consists of interviews with a district leader (n=1) and Black educators (n=5) and content from SSD's website and policy manuals. Although SSD is a larger district, the district's research protocols shaped the size of the educator pool, so the researcher was able to send interview invitations. In SSD, the researcher first had to obtain written permission from school principals to send interview invitations to Black educators at that school. So, out of the 60 schools, only eight school leaders approved the extension of interview invitations to educators on their campus. These eight schools had 25 Black educators on their campus. The educators who agreed to participate represent about 20% (n=5) of the Black educators in this school district (one educator no longer serves in the district but still is an active participant in the district). In total, there were six interviews (n=6), and 20 pieces of district content were used to answer the first two research questions.

Transcripts and documents were uploaded into Dedoose, a computer software for qualitative analysis, as a part of data analysis. Three forms of analysis are used to address the first two research questions: descriptive analysis, thematic analysis, and a racialized organization theory framework for analysis. I include the use of a racialized organization theory framework analysis because racialized organizational theory believes that race influences organizations' policies and practices. This framework is like critical policy analysis, which further enabled me to explore the distribution of resources and knowledge and the "difference between policy rhetoric and practiced reality" (Young & Diem, 2018). I followed similar methods used by Deim (2016): I recorded interviews and took notes during the interviews. Afterward, the interviews were transcribed, coded, analyzed, and then themes were pulled from what individuals were saying and its relationship to what research argues about racialized organizations.

To answer the first research question, I used descriptive analysis to understand the steps that educators go through during the hiring process for leadership positions in the district. All the qualitative data (interviews, policy documents, and district website content) was used to determine this process. Then, to understand how districts determine the merit and work of their candidates, I employ thematic analysis. For the second research question (understanding the racialized components of the hiring process), I first use deductive coding based on the four tenets of racialized organization theory as the primary codes. Child codes during this deductive coding stage follow the examples that are described in Ray's (2020) work (ex., identity agency, racialized tasks, limited resources for people of color, etc.). However, I quickly realized that a deeper level of analysis was needed to truly understand and explain the ways racial inequities are present for Black educators. Therefore, the second stage of analysis for the second research question used a racialized organizations theory framework for analysis of the data to dive deeper into how the district's hiring and placement processes that Black principals experience create and reinforce racial inequalities embedded within the school systems by asking a series of questions around the context of influence, text, and practice. The framework is influenced by racialized organizations theory and is used to produce the following set of questions that are used to analyze the emergent codes from the first stage of analysis (like the critical race theory framework for policy analysis that Bradbury (2020) used.):

Table 2. Racialized Organizations Theory Framework for Analysis

Context of Influence	How is this policy influenced by circulating discourses that enhance or diminish the agency of Black educators?	How does this policy present those in power as caring about Black educators' agency, power, access to resource equity, etc.?	Is the creation of the policy problem a distraction from matters of racial equity in hiring?	What/who is missing in this context? What is the effect of this absence?
Context of Text Production	How does policy constitute Black educators – as problems or part of solutions?	Is this policy used to either challenge racial inequity or those who seek to ignore it?	If a policy is presented as “colorblind” or race-neutral, how does this delegitimize those who challenge the policy on the grounds of hiring equity?	How does the policy and reaction to it maintain or establish new regimes of truth that reinforce the dominance of whiteness?
Context of Practice	What is the impact of this policy on the practice of hiring and placing Black principals?	How does the policy produce practices that result in hiring and placement disparities in job attainment through seemingly neutral practices?	How does the policy encourage the use of stereotypes, dividing practices, or labeling in ways that disadvantage Black educators?	How does the absence or presence of “race” perpetuate inequities?

After the codes and documents were analyzed with these questions, the answers were analyzed for common themes.

Research Question Three

3. At which rate are Black candidates applying for principal positions in comparison with the rates at which they are hired and the demographics of schools at which they are placed?

The second half of this dissertation study relies on quantitative data to investigate if demand issues account for the paucity of Black principals through an examination of principal applicant data and hiring decisions in two suburban school districts. Data collection used to address the third research question consists of principal candidate and school-level data.

Principal candidate data will come from the two school districts. The school districts I partner with will provide data on the population of completed applications for principalship positions in

the district for a specified time, including Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) data. I will also obtain information regarding position openings (school level), applicants' ZIP code, applicants' prior school experience (location and amount), and applications' education (level, subject, location, and school type). School-level data came from the districts' state education agency. I will request student population and principal data for schools in the district that hired principals from those agencies as well. This information will include priority school designation, demographic information regarding race and ethnicity, and free and reduced lunch participation. Lastly, I collected data on hiring decisions and the dates that the offers were extended.

After the data is collected and cleaned, I will create proxies to control the qualifications and local ties of the candidates in the regression analyses to isolate the role of race in hiring decisions. Proxies include whether candidates surpassed the suggested assessment score, the type of higher education institution attended, the highest degree earned, and whether the candidate lived in the district. In addition to the created variables, I will utilize publicly available school demographic information to examine the types of schools where Black principals were placed and create variables that characterize various school types in the district.

Through a logistic regression analysis, I will present evidence of under, typical, or over-hiring of specific principals within a school district. To estimate the likelihood of receiving a job offer in the district, I will use a binary logistic regression of the following form:

$$P(Y_i = 1) = \frac{e^{(bX_i)}}{1 + e^{(bX_i)}}$$

In the model, Y_i is a dichotomous variable that takes the value of 1 if the application *received a job offer* and 0 if otherwise. The independent variables of interest in my model are the applications with races identified as Black, Hispanic, another of the EEOC race categories, multiple races, or left blank. I will also include the number of applications submitted by each candidate, in addition to proxies for the applicants' qualifications and local ties, as control variables. All independent variables will be included in vector X , and β is the vector of parameters associated with X_i .

Research Question Four

4. What hiring policies and practices do Black educators believe can improve the hiring and placement experiences of Black principals in suburban school districts?

The last part of this study recruited Black educators within each district to participate in semi-structured interviews. These interviews reflect on problems of organizational practices that relate to the hiring of Black educators in the district to principalship positions. Data collected from this research question will be used to provide recommendations for the districts on policies and resources that are more affirming and welcoming to aspiring Black principals. I utilize thematic analysis to analyze the data collected.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY DESIGN

This study design has several strengths. First, the design itself allows for a comprehensive review of complex situations by drawing on the strengths of quantitative and qualitative techniques (Fetters et al., 2013). Specifically, the quantitative technique addresses the magnitude of the relationship between applicants' race, rate of application submissions, and

hiring decisions. The qualitative questions further investigate that relationship by exploring why and how race and discrimination occur in educational systems and how to alleviate the effects of racial inequity. These questions also offer a unique approach to principal hiring and leadership research by including both district and Black educator voices in the data collection phase. Although site selection does not allow for the results to be generalizable, researchers and practitioners can gain valuable information about hiring policies, practices, and support systems.

Despite the strengths of the study design, there are a few limitations of the study. The racial composition of the two site locations and the state do not align with the racial demographics of the United States. Therefore, the results and outcomes of this study are not generalizable. Although I gathered quantitative data from two districts, the short timeframe and small sample size of the data decreased generalizability to other districts and other years. Furthermore, the tests only display associations and correlations, not causations. I address this weakness by conducting interviews with hiring managers. I recommend additional behavior tests, surveys, and observations to strengthen the connection between the behaviors and outcomes of hiring decisions for future research.

POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

My lived experiences shape the way I approach my research. Outside of my family and church life, the other space that has closely influenced the way I perceived race is educational institutions. All my formal educational experiences have taken place within predominantly White schools and institutions. In elementary and middle school, I was one of a few Black people in my entire school. Due to academic tracking, I was one of the only Black students in my honors and AP courses in high school. These early school environments shaped the way I perceived people

who looked like me and often limited my interactions with other students of color inside classroom spaces. Furthermore, I never had a Black or Hispanic teacher or administrator until I went to college. In these spaces, I experienced many microaggressions. However, I also recognize that there have been times when I benefited from being a token for White educators and school systems. Although I benefited from such systems, many of the Black students I sat with at lunch in high school did not reap the same academic or social benefits.

It was not until I worked as a College Adviser within a Title I high school in North Carolina that I was finally able to see the work of Black educators and principals. By the time my Black students were seniors in high school, their post-secondary options were restricted by their GPA, SAT/ACT scores, academic performance, course offerings, etc. Moreover, most of these factors depended on other things that were sometimes out of their control and an element of race acting as a social construct. I saw firsthand how race influenced my students' access to educational resources and opportunities. However, the Black principals and educators showed up every day advocating for each student. Therefore, I am motivated to examine the educator leadership pipeline and experiences of Black educators in the education policy field with a critical – often racial lens, because of the barriers and lack of opportunities I saw throughout my educational journey.

Chapter 4: A Westside Story

Few studies have examined the hiring policies and practices that are used to select school principals at the district level (Palmer & Mullooly, 2015). The failure to do so has resulted in a gap in the literature regarding the lived experiences of Black educators navigating their career pathways into the principalship. Therefore, equitable hiring practices are essential for ensuring equal opportunity and justice for Black educators, who are underrepresented in the principalship despite the increasing number of Black and Brown students in K-12 (Grissom et al., 2021; Williams & Loeb, 2012) and who have experienced a long history of racial discrimination that has gone unaddressed.

The purpose of this study is to analyze hiring practices within two suburban school districts through the lens of racialized organizational theory (Ray, 2020). This study uses a mixed methods case study that asks four research questions. The research questions are as follows: 1) What are suburban school districts' approaches to the hiring of principals? 2) How, if at all, are principal hiring processes racialized? 3) At which rate are Black candidates applying for principal positions compared to the rates at which they are hired and the demographics of schools where they are placed? 4) What hiring policies and practices do Black educators believe can improve Black principals' hiring and placement experiences in suburban school districts? Chapter four will focus on the first case, which is the story of the Westside School District (WSD). This chapter starts with providing background information on WSD. The background information will include profiles of the district and educators who participated in the study. Next, this chapter presents the findings to the four research questions and then closes with a review of

all the findings before transitioning to chapter five. Chapter five presents the findings for the second school district in this case study.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The first section of this chapter provides the background information needed to understand the context of the first case in this dissertation – Westside School District (WSD). The background information for WSD is divided into three parts. Part one will provide an overview of the district’s data (ex., district size, revenue report, and community demographics). Part two provides an educator profile to explain how many years of experience the district’s educators have, their approach to leadership, and how they define equity. Finally, part three of the first section of chapter four will conclude with an equity profile of WSD that explains how WSD met the selection criteria, what WSD values, and how WSD defines diversity before transitioning into the findings to the research questions.

District Data

WSD, a small city school district in the northwest U.S., is a wealthy and well-formally educated community that resides in a majority White population community. The district serves a little over 15,000 students in 24 schools, with a total expenditure of a little over \$200 million and a total per-pupil expenditure of almost \$16,000 (NCES, 2023). The state provides almost three-quarters of the district’s revenue, while the federal government only provides 5% (NCES, 2023). The district spends over half of its revenue on instructional expenses and only 12% on administrative expenses (NCES, 2023). WSD is situated within a community that is predominately White (67%). The Hispanic population represents 11% of the total population, Asians represent 9%, Multiracial 7%, and Black individuals represent 4% of a population of

nearly 111,000 people. The median household income in WSD is around \$80,000 (NCES, 2023), which is close to the state's median income level. Families in the school district have a median income of about \$98,000, and 81% of families are in the labor force. Over 60% of WSD's families have at least some college or associate degree. Less than 20% of WSD families receive SNAP benefits, and 13% of the families in WSD have incomes below the poverty level.

Educator Profile

WSD's student population is far more racially diverse than its teacher and principal workforce and its community members. Approximately 43% of the student population in the district is White (State Agency Report, 2022). Black students comprise approximately 5% of the student population; Hispanic students account for 24%, and Asian students represent 8% of the district's student population (State Agency Report, 2022). About 7% of students are English Language Learners, 49% are considered low-income, 18% of students have disabilities, and 6% of students have a 504 (State Agency Report, 2022). In a stark comparison, 87% of teachers are White, 1.2% Black, 4% Hispanic, and 3% Asian (State Agency Report, 2022). Additionally, less than 5 of the assistant principals and principals in the district identify as a person of color. None of the 24 school principals identify as Black, and only one assistant principal is Black. On average, principals in the school district have about eight years of experience. Other school leaders have about 14 years of experience (State Agency Report, 2022).

Equity Profile

Equity is referred to in several key documents and websites in WSD. The term is often used inconsistently. For example, the district has a race and equity policy and resolution that specifically mentions that it is the superintendent's responsibility to:

Recruit, employ, support, train, and retain a workforce that is reflective of their diverse student population and continuously develop a workforce of culturally responsive staff; [and] Provide professional development, training, and engagement opportunities to inform and practice cultural competence and increase awareness of implicit bias and inequities in leading, teaching, counseling, advising, and coaching practices.

On the district's website content, equity is included in a heading that is followed by the phrase, "removing the barriers to student success." In the district's race and equity resolution, they define racial equity as "when two or more racial groups are not standing on approximately equal footing." This resolution also defines systemic racism as "racial biases, intentional or unintentional, that lead to policies and practices that result in racial inequities and injustices." The district states that the "inequities in our academic data and discipline data for non-White students are the result of systemic racism" and that there are other racial inequities that exist in WSD that are not measured. In policy documents and content on its website, the district has expressed its desire to ensure that the students are prepared for future careers and life after college. Overall, the district prides itself on its commitment to student success as a form of equity.

In the sample of educators I interviewed from the classroom (teacher=1), school level (assistant principal=1) to district office level (directors=3), and these individuals held roles in the district anywhere between one and nine years. Overall, all the educators who participated in the interviews have between seven and over 30 years of experience. All interview participants have experience hiring or participating in the hiring committee in school systems in this district or others.

These educators in leadership positions define their approach to school leadership in three different, but similar ways. One educator defines their approach to leadership as being “well-rounded” and listening and learning “to know people and really have an understanding of what they can offer” to build the next set of school leaders. Another educator defined their approach to school leadership as being a “servant leader” who takes an “analytical approach to leadership.” This educator also talks about the need to be able to listen to people but in the context of understanding organizational challenges. The last educator defined their approach to school leadership as relational. They believe in “relationships, putting in systems that serve all in place and building the capacity of others.” All three leaders’ approach to leadership is based on relational skills and the desire to grow leaders.

When asked what the phrases equity, social justice, and anti-racist school leadership mean to them, the educators noted that these phrases indicate that 1) the tasks of principals are to “identify and dismantle barriers, like systemic barriers to opportunities for historically marginalized students to achieve their true potential” with the use of adaptive work; 2) these phrases allow for the district to “dig in having those honest conversations about what equity looks like, what White privilege looks like, what sexism looks like; and finally 3) as an organization these phrases allow for them to intentionally focus on how to break down barriers and restructure their system in a way that does not produce the same outcomes they have been procuring for years (paraphrased). These educators are excited about new personnel in the district office who have a passion and commitment to learning about equitable hiring practices and ways to implement new strategies that will aid in the equitable hiring of racially diverse school leaders.

HIRING PROCESS IN WSD

WSD's principal hiring process is shorter than what is later seen in the next case study (chapter five). WSD's officials post the openings for leadership positions on their district website, Indeed.com, and the state's Association of Principals. This district also relies on informal communication with individuals they know who they think may be a good fit, such as word-of-mouth advertising. For example, a hiring manager stated, "More informally, if we know of people in the region, the community who may be interested in moving to our district, we're, of course, reaching out and informing them of opportunities that we have come open." After the applications are submitted for leadership positions, WSD's human resources department screens the applications to ensure that their paperwork is completed and that there is no criminal history that would warrant the applicant as unfit to work in the district as a school leader. Then, the district takes a race-neutral approach by redacting all identifiable personal information.

Once the human resource department finishes the initial steps, the applications are sent to the directors of the school level (e.g., elementary, middle, and high school) position that is hiring. An executive director oversees principals at elementary schools in the district, and the assistant superintendent of school leadership oversees principals at all the other schools. Therefore, two district-level individuals lead most of the hiring process. Once one of these district leaders receives their applications, they assemble two committees with educators (e.g., principals, assistant principals, and teachers) of their choosing from the district. The first committee simply reads through the applicants and scores them based on criteria the reading committee and district leader (executive director or assistant superintendent) deem important for the open position. Based on the scores, a few applicants are selected for interviews. Then,

another committee is selected to participate in the interviewing of applicants. Some members of the interview committee may have also served on the review committee. After the interviews, the committee and the executive director decide who moves on to the next step in the hiring process, which is the school-level interviews. During the school-level interviews, the applicants are brought in front of the school staff to interview. The school-level interview involves the candidates completing a verbal resume and an equity presentation, as well as explaining how they would handle a scenario assigned to them. A verbal resume is when candidates describe themselves, their passions, and their achievements to an interview panel. An equity presentation is a presentation where they explain how they would make equitable decisions based on the provided data. Finally, the scenarios that candidates complete at the school level interview are like behavioral questions where they have to describe how they would handle or manage a unique situation at that particular school.

The school staff that served on the interview panel and the executive director then narrowed down the candidate pool to the top one or two applicants who interviewed with the superintendent and their cabinet members. The superintendent and cabinet members (school board members) have the final say in who receives the position. The next section will provide the findings on how WSD determines the merit and fit of candidates for principal and assistant principal positions. Figure 2 provides a diagram of WSD's hiring process.

Figure 2: A diagram of WSD's Hiring Process

Westside School District



The school district has district leaders (2) who oversee their principals based on the school level (elementary vs. middle & high school).



PERCEPTION OF MERIT & FIT IN WSD

In general, WSD’s hiring managers talked more about the need for specific administrative skills that resemble support and coordination when it came to finding effective school leaders. This is also seen in the policy and procedures for administrators within the district. For example, the district policy focuses solely on the managerial task of a school principal. Yet, three themes emerged when reviewing how WSD accesses the merit and fit of candidates in the application pool: a) education and background, b) visionary leadership with a focus on equity, and c) relational skills.

Education & Background as a Form of Merit & Fit

“Five years teaching experience. Typically. Really, I think the state is three, but practice is five. I can think [the] minimum at the state is three years of teaching experience.” (Hiring Manager #1)

An important quote from the hiring manager illustrates how the district typically looks for candidates who have more teaching experience than what is normally required at the state

level for principalship positions. This is an indication that the most common criteria that organizations use to evaluate the merit and fit of a candidate are the education level, years of experience, and type of experience. In WSD, it is expected that candidates either start with a master's degree or, if enrolled in a principal preparation program, they must earn their master's by the end of it. Successful candidates in this district have more than five years of teaching experience. Although the state only requires three years of teaching experience. Another hiring manager also expressed the same sentiments, "...honestly, because depending on the school, when we're looking at applications, we might not choose someone that's only taught three years or five years" (Hiring Manager #3)

In the realm of evaluating candidate suitability within WSD, the benchmarks of educational attainment and professional experience are pillars of consideration. The district's standard of a master's degree or active enrollment in a principal preparation program aligns with the expectation of a comprehensive educational background. Furthermore, the emphasis on five years of teaching experience, exceeding the state's minimum requirement of three, speaks volumes about the district's pursuit of candidates with a higher level of pedagogical expertise. These criteria stand as a testament to WSD's commitment to fostering leadership grounded in a robust foundation of academic proficiency and seasoned practical knowledge.

Visionary Leadership as a Form of Merit & Fit

The next indicator of merit and fit that WSD relies on to determine if a candidate for a leadership position should be hired is if candidates present themselves as visionary leaders. Visionary leadership in WSD appears to resemble leaders who have a clear vision and passion

for education and are aligned with WSD’s strategic plan, especially the district’s call for equity. Specifically, one hiring manager indicated that the person they are “looking for” is one that is

...able to share [their] vision, share [their] beliefs, and influence other people. Some work in leadership may be making directives. Most of it is influencing people [laughter]. (Hiring Manager #2)

This manager spoke directly about the need for a school leader in their district who has a “vision” and can motivate their staff and colleagues to follow it. The need for visional leaders is also seen through Educator #2, who has participated in hiring committees as well. For example, Educator #2 describes a successful candidate as a person who

needs to have an alignment with the vision of that district or with the school because it really wouldn't benefit the school to bring someone in, even if they had all the qualifications, who just does not share the mission and a vision of the school, so I think it is very important to make sure that you are aligned with the mission and the vision of the school. (Educator #2)

This quote shows that qualifications, like degrees and experience, are not enough to determine the merit and fit of the school. Instead, according to this educator, a candidate is only beneficial to the school if it aligns with the school and, ultimately, the district’s vision. Moreover, this same educator talks about how this alignment helped them understand their fit within the district and how to be prepared for the hiring process:

Yeah, and I think, too, when you're in the programs here, so I went through a program at [redacted university] here, and so as a part of that, you're somewhat, well, I think you're

somewhat giving, sort of, I wouldn't say a guideline, but just a perspective of what secondary education and perspective of that district, and I will say for this district here, I had an opportunity to go look at their strategic plan to see what their focus was, so that sort of gave me some idea of where they were going as I would answer my questions so that I can gear it to see if that would be a perfect fit for me. So, I think I have an opportunity to research that in any district that you apply to, to see what their strategic plan is and see if that matches where you want to be. [WSD's] strategic plan at this point was around equity, a lot of things of equity. (Educator #2)

Lastly, within visionary leadership as a form of merit and fit, the district is beginning to look for applications that have a clear understanding of equity. This is also seen in the previous educator's quote, in which they mention that WSD's strategic plan was "around equity." Hiring managers in the district noted that equity is extremely important to meet the needs of their diverse student populations:

Yeah. So, and then again, with the equity focus, we wanna make sure that our leaders, no matter which building they're in, can honestly look at kids and what they need based upon equity. Not equality, but equity. What does this kid need? He might need something different than the other student. [The] leader has to be able to understand the curriculum. When you're putting that curriculum in front of a student, look at it with an equity lens. (Hiring Manager #3)

As previously noted about the different perspectives of equity, one hiring manager talks about the need for a clear understanding of equity by posing the following questions:

Do they have an inclusive mindset? Are they... And do they really understand what equity is? What equity isn't? Do they conflate equity with equality? So, when we're asking questions about equity, are they able to help us understand that they truly do lead with it? So, we're definitely looking for that. Are they a person who values relationships? Not just in saying it in a buzzword. (Hiring Manager #1)

Within the hiring processes and practices that WSD is trying to develop, ineffective applicants lack an understanding of equity, including racial equity. More specifically, a manager indicates that

the biggest red flag right now for me would be to not be aware that racism there's different types of racism, but your job as a leader is to dismantle systemic racism to the greatest degree that's in your power, right? That would start in your building, but also be an advocate for others. That's, so it would be, yes, it would be a red flag if someone said racism isn't real. And people do say [chuckle] people do say that.

This need for visionary leadership rooted in equity forms is also apparent in district policies and web content. The district's employment website mentions the need for employees to work with "culturally diverse families and communities" and, in bold letters, implies that they are looking for folks who are "PASSIONATE about diversity, equity, and inclusion" in their schools. More explicitly, as mentioned earlier, WSD has an equity resolution that declares the need for institutions that "uphold equity and justice among all racial and identity groups" and their desire to "attract, develop, and retain highly qualified, motivated, anti-racist, and diverse workforce in [their] schools and district office who reflects [their] student population." This district also has

an equity website that speaks to its commitment to equity. Yet, WSD’s most recent version of its five-year strategic plan does not mention the word “race.” Additionally, neither of the data points nor outcome goals are disaggregated by the race of students. The plan does include the words “culturally diverse” and “culturally responsive teaching.” Most notably, there is a section in the strategic plan on the need for “cultural competency,” which, again, highlights the desire to attract, develop, and retain a “diverse workforce” and create a “culture of inclusion, equity, and accountability.”

In essence, the critical cornerstone for hiring within WSD moves beyond the traditional metrics of qualifications and experience. The resonance between a candidate's vision and the district's strategic direction stands as the pivotal factor. The emphasis on visionary leadership converges on a profound alignment with the educational vision, particularly the imperative focus on equity. Prospective leaders are sought not merely for their credentials but for their ability to passionately articulate and embody this shared vision, driving transformative change rooted in an unwavering commitment to equity. The evolving hiring landscape at WSD underscores the imperative understanding of equity, signaling a shift towards leaders who not only comprehend its nuances but actively engage in dismantling systemic barriers, making it not just a qualification but an ethical imperative for those aspiring to lead within the district.

Relational Skills as a Form of Merit & Fit

The last indicator of merit and fit that WSD relies on is relational skills. Relational skills within leadership positions are defined as a person who emphasizes teamwork, listening skills, and the ability to build relationships. As mentioned earlier, WSD is not looking for someone who

is solely good at giving out directions. Instead, they are looking for leaders who can understand people and bring those people together. For example, one hiring manager specifically states

So, relational skills may or may not all be in the job description, but those are personal qualities. We can teach content, but I've always believed in hiring for those more intangible qualities that make a person... That you can't teach as easily, and you can't obtain as easily, but they're... They have to be part of your DNA, I think, to really help move the dial on things. So, we want them to have both the skill and the commitment and then maybe those intangible qualities. That's what I'm looking for. (Hiring Manager #1)

This manager also goes on to later say,

Someone who is collaborative and a team player because what we do is teamwork. A good listener is someone who recognizes the importance of hearing others, and that leadership is more about listening and understanding and bringing people together than telling people what to do. (Hiring Manager #1)

The need for relational skills to determine merit and fit is also seen in conversation with the second hiring manager, who explains what they are looking for in an applicant.

Well, I look for an applicant who is like humble and knows that they don't know everything and that there's no expectation that they'll ever know everything... So, I look for opportunities for like distributed leadership, which tells me that they are able to identify skill sets in people and strengths and weaknesses and able to put teams together that complement each other... Kind of listening for collaboration and, again, my building

relationships and systems that serve. And then how do we build the capacity of others to be successful? Those are my core values. I usually listen for those. (Hiring Manager #2)

In the “black box” of hiring principals within WSD, the significance of relational skills emerges as a defining attribute sought in aspiring leaders. Beyond the education level, years of experience, and visionary leadership, the district also places value on the intangible qualities of relational skills—qualities ingrained within individuals, not easily taught or acquired. However, their description of these characteristics is very subjective and not clearly outlined in any of their hiring materials. The emphasis on collaboration, humility, and the ability to curate teams that complement each other resonates deeply within WSD. These relational skills, encompassing teamwork, active listening, and the art of nurturing relationships, stand as pivotal markers for identifying leaders who not only excel in their roles but also catalyze cohesive, inclusive, and impactful environments within the educational landscape. In seeking candidates with these profound relational qualities, WSD underscores the essentiality of leaders who not only possess skill but embody a commitment to fostering a collective, supportive, and transformative educational community.

RACIALIZED PRINCIPAL HIRING PROCESS

This section discusses the findings from the examination of WSD’s hiring practices and policies through a racialized organizational lens. This section investigates the “black box” of district hiring policies and practices using interviews, policies, and documents from the district and employees who participate in principal selection committees. Specifically, this section relies on five interviews and 20 documents to see how the hiring process is racialized for Black educators. This data is analyzed in two stages. First, the researcher uses the tenets of racialized

organization theory (ROT) as primary codes to determine how race is showing up for Black educators in the described hiring practices. Next, the researcher dives deeper into the data and asks a larger subset of questions inspired by ROT, explaining the context of the influence, text production, and influence of the hiring and placement processes that Black educators experience. The findings are then organized by the emerging themes that arose during both stages of analysis and then a summary of the overall findings.

First Stage of Analysis: ROT Tenets

The emerging themes from the interviews with hiring managers and educators and hiring policies and documents show that district leaders are accessing candidates' merit and perception of fit within the district and schools with equity and leadership profile discourse. While Westside School District has a racial equity policy that speaks to their desire and need to diversify their school leadership, the district's focus on equity is centered on addressing achievement gaps for students. Less of this work is focused on interpersonal relationships between staff outside of their civility policies, which are race-neutral.

The four tenets of racialized organization theory provide additional insight into WSD hiring and placement policies. See Table 3 for a summary of these findings. The first tenet of ROT is that racialized organizations enhance or diminish the agency of racial groups. Specifically for this dissertation, the district's hiring policies are analyzed to determine their potential impact on the agency of Black principals. WSD's hiring policies and practices diminish the agency of Black educators in the district by the interviewing process lacking specificity, not accounting for interviewers' implicit bias, and not intentionally addressing systemic racism. Second, the district's hiring policies legitimize the unequal distribution of resources by again

lacking specifics and not addressing implicit bias or structural issues. Next, the district’s policies and practices allow for Whiteness to be a credential by not expanding its network to increase the access of Black educators to the applicants, its avoidance of addressing structural issues in the hiring process, and vague notions of merit and leadership styles. Lastly, the district’s hiring policies allow for the decoupling of formal rules from organizational practice in a racialized way through its use of informal networks during recruitment. This is not uncommon. However, the individuals must analyze who they are sharing the information with and why and whether they have tried other forms of networks that they may be less familiar with but still yield successful results. Some of these examples of ROT arise in the second stage of analysis and are further explained.

Table 3: Analysis of Codes by the Main Tenets of ROT

Tenets of racialized organization theory	Examples
Diminish The Agency of Black Educators	<i>Diminish Agency</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewing process lacking specificity • Not accounting for interviewers’ implicit bias • Not intentionally addressing systemic racism
Legitimize The Unequal Distribution of Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacking specifics • Not addressing implicit bias or structural issues
Whiteness To Be a Credential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No recruitment of Black educators • Vague “notions of merit” or leadership styles • Avoidance of addressing structural issues in the hiring process
Decoupling of Formal Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of informal networks during recruitment

Second Stage of Analysis: Racialized Organizations Theory Framework Findings

During the final stage of analysis to understand how the hiring processes that Black educators experience are racialized, the indicators of racial inequities found through the tenets of ROT are further explored through a framework. This stage of analysis asks twelve questions

across three categories of each piece of data point. Then, the text was analyzed to pull out the two points that emerged: a) subjectivity in evaluation criteria and b) failure to address systemic issues and provide accountability. These themes ultimately lead to the maintenance of the status quo in their hiring practices. The next paragraphs will discuss each of the two central themes.

Subjectivity in Evaluation Criteria

The first emerging theme that arose during the final stage of analysis is the fact that the evaluation criteria for principalship positions in WSD are subjective. The criteria are vague and subjective, which can pose a disadvantage for Black educators in the district. Relational skills and visionary leadership can be interpreted and evaluated through a biased lens, which leads to the favoring of candidates who fit conventional, often White, leadership models. Moreover, the district's policy documents that describe the desired behaviors and qualities of principals and prospective school leaders vaguely describe that they are seeking leaders who can maintain their "managerial" responsibilities and display "leadership qualities, communication skills, human relations skills and dedication to past and present assignments." These terms are present in the qualifications for principal internships and a policy for principals. At the same time, these expectations are important but are not accompanied by specific indicators or examples of these behaviors. Again, depending on the lens that those in power are evaluating potential candidates, this vague and subjective language can inadvertently disadvantage Black candidates and reinforce existing racial inequalities – especially in a district and community where those in power have not exposed themselves to what excellence looks like from Black educators.

The Failure to Address Systemic Issues and Provide Accountability

The second way that the hiring processes that Black educators experience are racialized is the policies do not explicitly address the challenges faced by Black educators within the educational system. The conversations around the need for racial equity in WSD and the policy documents are typically student-centered. None of the policies in the district acknowledge the history of racism in the district as it relates to Black educators. District content around addressing systemic inequities continuously points to the district's desire for "culturally appropriate and multicultural perspective[s]" when teaching students and engaging families and communities. However, there is one policy that states that the *superintendent* must provide "professional development, training, and engagement opportunities to increase awareness and cultural competence in the area of implicit bias and inequities." This policy lists what evidence of this work looks like district-wide equity lessons and implementation monitoring for schools and district programs, professional development sessions with equity consultants, equity-based book studies, dialogues, toolkits, and support sessions.

While well-intended, the expectations and desired learning outcomes around equity (especially racial equity) do not show up explicitly or directly on the district's website content for employment or evaluation of leaders, in the district's five-year strategic plan, or in employee conduct policies. The race and equity resolution is the only other supporting document. This document has the following statements:

WHEREAS, we want to attract, develop, and retain a highly qualified, motivated, anti-racist, and diverse workforce both in our schools and at the District office who reflects our student population.

WHEREAS, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) Educators prepare all students to live in a multicultural society by breaking down negative stereotypes and help all students understand and confront racism.

WHEREAS, while we will work to recruit, hire, and train BIPOC and anti-racist educators, we commit to develop among our staff the knowledge, understanding, mindset, and skills needed to examine personal hidden biases, including how White dominant culture, privilege, and fragility impacts historically marginalized and oppressed subgroup...

WHEREAS, all [WSD] employees, future employees, and the School Board must display a strong commitment to Anti-Racism. Anti-Racism recognizes, affirms and defends the truth that all racial groups are equal; and directs the Superintendent to enact policies and practices that lead to sustained racial equity and justice and ensure full participation and compliance...

WHEREAS, at [WSD], we must display an unwavering commitment to racial justice and equity while dismantling White dominant culture and the racial disparities it has established within our schools and the greater community. In this work, we will continue the cycle of centering Voices of Color, owning our impact, learning from mistakes, and revising policies as we learn.

Unlike some of the other policy documents, there is no form of accountability for district employees in this policy document. The language of the equity policy argues that it is the superintendent's responsibility to provide and enforce these equity-based strategies, but there is no language for how the staff should adhere, attend, or actively participate in the equity-based

strategies. Therefore, individuals are easily allowed to choose to opt out and not negatively impact their job security or performance. Thus leaving an avenue for the maintenance of the status quo in pockets of the district. As a result, WSD content and conversations show that people skip equity-focused PDs, keep the same mindsets, and have varying forms of equity.

There are several data points that support the previous points:

Skipping PDs, maintaining racist mindsets, and different definitions of equity. When asked if the schools in the district different definitions of equity have, one hiring manager stated, I would absolutely. I would say I could ask [laughter] I can, yes, absolutely. Some would have no idea how they, [but] most people I think would say it means equal...I would say about 50% would probably respond that way...what we see again in this district is people who are absent on days when there is professional development around equity, ...social justice. (Hiring Manager #2)

An educator in the district notes that,

And I think probably one of the biggest struggles I would say is like, how do you change people because you can't make people not be racist in their views and not be superior in their thinking if you come from the superior race, that's how you were raised. How do [you] make people treat you differently? It's just not possible. You can make them aware, you can do training, all of that's happening in our district, and that's one thing I did appreciate when I did come aboard, we had a lot of stuff going on around equity training. And even to this day, right? But in every district, I think every district [redacted] have to have a culturally competent workshop at the beginning of every year, but do people really go to those workshops seeking information to change? Not at all.

So, while WSD's race and equity policy has elements that can have an impact on racial equity in WSD, it is a stand-alone document that is not embedded into the other district documents and procedures. This leaves room for the perpetuation of racial inequalities for Black educators. The lack of specific strategies targeting systemic issues such as implicit bias, unequal resource distribution, or institutionalized racism with accountability measures for everyone in the district, the hiring and placement processes will continue to inadvertently favor non-White candidates. Even if school districts do see new Black educators, it is unlikely they will stay.

Failure to Address Challenges Black Educators Face. Although a few of the documents and website content in WSD emphasized their desire to recruit, support, and retain a diverse workforce, the district has not adopted strategies that fully address the challenges Black principals face in these suburban school systems. Aside from including equity-based questions in the interview questions for school leaders, there are no new measures or practices to recruit or sustain Black educators. Therefore, the lack of explicit measures to support Black educators perpetuates inequalities even if diversity is encouraged. This is seen in Black students and teachers' feedback during district-hosted community dialogues. The themes from the dialogues (one for adults and another for youth) are listed on WSD's website. Two years after the passing of the equity policy and resolutions, the dialogues contained the following statements about things that have occurred in the WSD: "Teachers making racist comments and opinions," "Being gaslighted when speaking my truth," and "When I was hired but nobody engaged with me. I didn't feel welcome." Furthermore, an educator also states the following:

But given that opportunity, they want diversity, and so I don't think that has been a limitation as for the opportunity to get a job, but to sustain me in a job and the things that happen to me while I'm on the job, those are the things that make me leave the job.

Here, the educator confirms that the district desires diversity but implies that the district has room to grow and ensures that the district is a place that is conducive to the well-being of Black educators.

WSD's subjectivity in evaluation criteria and failure to address systemic issues and provide accountability have ultimately led to the maintenance of the status quo in their hiring practices. The previous themes show that the status quo is being maintained throughout the hiring and placement processes for educators. Since the criteria and desired qualities for school leaders do not actively challenge existing power dynamics, biases, or systemic issues within the educational system, they inadvertently contribute to the perpetuation of racial inequalities by maintaining the dominance of White leadership and reinforcing existing structures that hinder the progression of Black educators.

WSD'S HIRING APPROACH, MERIT & FIT, AND RACIALIZATION CONCLUSION

The purpose of this section was to examine the hiring practices and policies in WSD and examine the racialized components of this process. Through interviews with hiring managers and Black educators and district content (policies and website content), several insights are gathered. First, within WSD, tangible qualifications like years of experience, visionary leadership with a focus on equity, and relational skills are desired and used to determine candidates' merit and fit. Next, with the ROT framework, the latter part of this section dives deeper into the ways racial inequities appear in the hiring and placement policies and practices that Black educators

experience. Throughout these analyses, emergent themes expose critical issues. The subjectivity in evaluation criteria surfaces as a barrier. The lack of addressing systemic issues and accountability mechanisms within policies perpetuates racial inequalities, especially regarding racial equity strategies' implementation and enforcement. This leaves the challenges that Black educators face unaddressed despite the district's stated commitment to diversity. Ultimately, these findings converge to underscore the maintenance of the status quo within hiring and placement processes. The criteria and desired qualities for leadership positions inadvertently reinforce existing power dynamics, biases, and systemic issues, inhibiting the advancement of Black educators.

This research showcases how hiring and placement practices unintentionally perpetuate racial inequalities. Addressing these disparities demands a comprehensive reevaluation of policies, the integration of explicit measures targeting systemic issues, and a commitment to creating an inclusive environment conducive to the success and retention of Black educators. Only through a concerted effort to dismantle entrenched biases and structural barriers can meaningful progress toward equity within WSD be achieved and sustained. The last section of chapter four will provide a review of the structures and practices that Black educators in the district believe will better support the hiring of Black principals in WSD.

ARE BLACK EDUCATORS IN WSD APPLYING & BEING HIRED?

The purpose of this section is to analyze the rate at which Black educators are hired in WSD to determine if demand issues account for the paucity of Black principals through an examination of principal applicant data and subsequent hiring decisions. Specifically, this section presents the findings for this research question: At which rate are Black candidates applying for

principal positions in comparison with the rates at which they are hired and the demographics of schools at which they are placed? Throughout this section, tables and graphics are used to assist with contextualizing the data. This section will provide the results of this section of the study before concluding with the conclusion of this section.

Racial Composition of Applications and Offers

During the three years, there were 140 applications from 115 applicants for 13 hired positions. There were six positions opened for assistant principals and seven positions opened for principals. Out of the 115 applicants, 16 of the applicants submitted more than one application (2-4 apps). In total, there were 79 submitted applications for assistant principals and 61 applications for principals. Throughout the three years, WSD hired four assistant principals for elementary schools, one assistant principal for a high school, and one assistant principal for the open pool (a generic application for an assistant principal position that is not for a specific school). WSD also hired five principals at the elementary level and two at the middle school level.

As mentioned earlier, 43% of the district's students are White, but 87% of the teachers are White. Ninety percent (90%) of submitted applications for principal and assistant principal principalship positions were from White candidates. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of the job offers were provided to White candidates. The district's application pool is oversaturated with White candidates; Nine out of every ten applicants were White candidates, and these candidates receive over three-fourths of the job offers. Black students consisted of 5% of the student population (1% for Black teachers), but about 3% of applicants were submitted by Black candidates. Despite the low number of Black applicants in the application pool, about 8% of job offers were extended to Black

applicants. In this case with Black educators, the percentage of job offers to Black applications was higher than the district's racial composition of Black students. However, the district currently only has one Black school leader outside of the district office. In summary, in comparison to the student population, there is an underrepresentation of Black candidates in the applicant pool and in leadership positions. However, there is a positive indication that when Black applicants do apply, their chances of being hired are not significantly hindered by inequities in the system.

Since the district has a higher percentage of Hispanic students, the trends for Hispanic educators are different. Hispanic students comprise 24% of the student population, and 4% of the teachers are Hispanic. However, 5% of the applications were received from Hispanic educators, and they received about 15%. Black educators apply and are hired at about half the rate of Hispanic school leaders. Asian applicants closely represent the Asian student population, but unfortunately, during the period of this dataset, none of the hired applicants were Asian. Table 4, Panel A provides detailed data on the racial composition of applicants and offers.

Table 4, Panel B provides detailed data on the racial composition of applicants and offers by school type. This panel of data reveals that 100% of the offers extended to middle, high school, and open-level principal and assistant principal positions were only to White applicants. Unfortunately, there were no Black or Asian educators who applied to positions outside of the elementary school level. Black and Asian educators only applied to elementary-level school positions. Only White and Hispanic educators applied to all available position levels. While there are not any glaring differences between the racial composition of students by school level, positions at the high school level have a higher percentage of students in the Free and Reduced

Lunch program (see Panel C).

Table 4. Panel A. Racial Composition of Applications & Offers

Race	Applications	Applicants	Offers
White	90%	90%	77%
Black	3%	3%	8%
Hispanic	5%	3%	15%
Asian	2%	3%	0%
Number	140	115	13

Table 4. Panel B. Racial Composition of Applications & Offers, by School Type

School Level	Race	Applications	Offers
Elementary	White	88%	67%
	Black	5%	11%
	Hispanic	4%	22%
	Asian	4%	0%
	Number	80	9
Middle	White	95%	100%
	Black	0	0%
	Hispanic	5%	0%
	Asian	0	0%
	Number	19	2
High School	White	86%	100%
	Black	0%	0%
	Hispanic	14%	0%
	Asian	0%	0%
	Number	14	1
Open	White	96%	100%
	Black	0%	0%
	Hispanic	3%	0%
	Asian	0%	0%

Table 4. Panel C. Racial Composition of Schools by School Type

School Level	White Students	Black Students	Hispanic Students	Asian Students	American Indian Students	Native American Students	Multiracial Students	FRLP
Elementary	43%	4%	26%	7%	1%	3%	16%	45%
Middle	49%	7%	21%	7%	0%	3%	13%	37%
High School	43%	5%	25%	8%	1%	3%	16%	49%

Results

Impact of Race

Before considering other factors, Table 5 provides statistical evidence of the lack of any significant association between race and the likelihood of being offered a principal or assistant principal job in the district. However, candidates who have experience working within the district are 2.06 units more likely to be hired (p -value < 0.01). When taking into consideration the race of applicants and whether they have district experience, candidates of color are more likely to be hired by 2.18 (p value < 0.05). More specifically, the increase in likelihood is seen with candidates who identify as Hispanic (2.38 units with a p value < 0.05).

For assistant principal positions, the rate at which people of color applied and were hired was one out of five. One was hired for every five candidates of color. For Black educators, the apply-to-hire rate within assistant principal positions is slightly lower. For every four Black candidates, one was hired for an assistant principal position (25%). For White candidates, the apply-to-hire ratio is 59 to four (7%). For principalship positions, the rate at which people of color applied and were hired was one out of two (50%). Black candidates did not apply to any principal positions, whereas 53 White candidates applied, and six were hired (11%).

Table 5. Panel A. Correlation of Receiving an Offer with Race

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian	POC
Hired	-1.14 or -1.34	1.52	1.34	0	1.14

Panel B. Correlation of Receiving an Offer with District Experience

	No Experience	Experience
Hired	-2.06	2.06**

Panel C. Correlation of Receiving an Offer with Race, Controlling for District Experience

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian	POC
Hired	-2.18 or -2.26	2.38*	2.26	omitted	2.18*

Panel D. Correlation of Receiving an AP Offer with Race, Controlling for District Experience

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian	POC
Hired	-2.18 or -2.53	2.24*	3.25	omitted	2.53*

Impact of Local Ties

Applicants' zip codes were used to determine if local ties or proximity to the school district correlated with predicting the likelihood of being hired. Applicants received different labels if the zip code used on their application fell within the boundaries of the school district (in district), within the state (in-state), and/or less than an hour from the school district (close to the district). When applicants' proximity to the school district or local ties to the school district are taken into consideration, all three of the variables (in the district, in the state, and close to the district) predict if applicants would be hired perfectly (12 hired educators, one applicant's location was unknown). Most of the applications (94%) came from within the state. No applicants were hired from outside the state. About 93% of the applicants came from outside of the school district boundaries. None of the hired applicants lived within the school district boundaries. However, 83% of applicants lived close to the school district boundaries. 12 out of the 13 hired school leaders lived close to the school district.

Impact of College and University Type

Applicants were also analyzed to determine if the type of college or university an applicant attended correlated with predicting the likelihood of being hired. Applications were categorized by whether an applicant attended a college or university near the school district (local), in the state (state), in the closest metropolitan area (metro), and/or if the applicant earned a degree from a four-year college or university ranked 50th or higher in U.S. News and World Report Top Colleges and Universities for 2023 (*Top50*). The following insights can be derived from the data:

Attended a Local Institution. All six applicants who attended a local college or university were denied a position. The 13 hired applicants did not attend a local university. Most of the applicants (133 out of 139) did not attend local colleges and universities (96%). Only one person of color applied from a local school/college, and this person was not hired.

Attended an In-State Institution. Nine (out of 13) of the hired applicants attended a college/university in the state (69%). Four (out of 13) of the hired applicants did not attend a college/university in the state (31%). 105 applicants out of 139 attended a state college/university (76%). Only 34 applicants did not attend a college/university out of the state (24%). Six applicants of color attended a state school.

Attended a Metropolitan Institution. 12 (out of 13) of the hired applicants did not attend a metro college/university (92%). Only one (out of 13) of the hired applicants did attend a metro college/university (8%). 128 applicants out of 139 did not attend a metro college/university (92%). One person of color attended a metro college/university (none were hired).

Attended an Institution on the Top 50 College or University List (Top50). 13 out of 139 applicants attended an institution on the Top 50 list (9.4%). Only one applicant who attended a

Top50 school was hired (7.7%). None of people of color attended college or university on the top 50 list.

Table 6. University Composition of Applications by Offers

<i>Local College</i>		<i>State College</i>		<i>Metro College</i>		<i>Top 50 College</i>	
Hired	Not Hired	Hired	Not Hired	Hired	Not Hired	Hired	Not Hired
0%	100%	69%	31%	0%	100%	69%	31%

Are Applicants of Color as Qualified as White Applicants?

D’amico and colleagues (2017) have noted that it can be assumed that hiring managers (like principals) make “economically rational decisions and hire the most qualified applicants.” Thus, the paucity of Black and Brown educators could be due to these candidates being less qualified. To investigate those assumptions, D’amico and her colleagues (2017) compared the characteristics of White applicants and applicants of color. Following the same method, Table 7 provides an overview of applicants. Many of the applicant characteristics did not produce statistically significant results.

The only significant difference between White applicants and applicants of color is the fact that White applicants were less likely to attend an institution within the state (about seven percentage points less). Table 7, Panel B compares the application characteristics of candidates of Color and White candidates who received job offers. A significant number of the variables were not applicable for t-static analysis, and *none of the variables were statistically significant.*

Table 7. Panel A. Differences in Characteristics of Candidates

Variable	White	POC	Diff	T-Stat	Sig
<i>Offered</i>	.08	.21	-.134	-1.6405	
<i>Local_Ind</i>	.04	.07	-.032	-0.5530	

<i>State_Ind</i>	.79	.429	.365	3.1034	*
<i>Metro_Ind</i>	.079	.071	.008	0.1040	
<i>Top50</i>	.103	0	0.103	1.26	
<i>InState</i>	.935	1	-.065	-0.976	

Table 7. Panel B. Differences in Offer Characteristics

Variable	White	POC	Diff	T-Stat	Sig
<i>HighestDegree</i>	-	-	-	-	
<i>Local_Ind</i>	0	0	0	.	.
<i>State_Ind</i>	.7	.667	.033	.10	
<i>Metro_Ind</i>	.1	0	.1	0.5311	
<i>Top50</i>	.1	0	.1	0.5311	
<i>InState</i>	1	1	0	.	.
<i>ClosetoSD</i>	1	1	0	.	.
<i>InsideSDBoundaries</i>	0	0	0	.	.
<i>DistrictExperience</i>	.8	1	-.2	-0.79	
<i>StateExperience</i>	.9	1	-.1	-0.5311	

Characteristics of Receiving Schools and Hired Applicants

The final assessment of application data is a brief overview of which schools the hired applicants were placed in to serve. Table V shows that the candidates of color were hired at schools with 4 percent fewer White students and 4 percent more students in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program. Due to the size of the data sample and the smaller number of hired applicants of color, statistical analysis of the interaction between the race of applicants and their school placement is not applicable.

Table 8. Characteristics of Receiving Schools and Hired Applicants

	Average Composition of Schools							
	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	American Indian	Native Hawaiian	Multiracial	FRLP
Hired White Applicants	44%	5%	24%	8%	1%	3%	16%	46%
Hired Candidates of Color	40%	4%	29%	7%	1%	3%	16%	50%

HIRING RATES CONCLUSION

There are several reasons for this dataset's lack of statistically significant results. Non-statistically significant results imply that there is no strong or clear relationship between the variables being examined and/or the sample size is too small. Although the dataset produced few statistically significant results, it does provide important insights into hiring trends.

Although this school district has a racially diverse student population, the applicant pool for leadership positions is oversaturated with White applicants who receive most of the job offers. Race alone has no statistically significant relationship with whether an applicant is hired. However, whether an applicant has prior experience working within the district increases the likelihood of the applicant being hired (p-values < .001). When controlling for district experience, Hispanic educators are more likely to be hired (p-value < .05). The dataset shows that POC only applied for open positions within elementary schools, and no applicants of color without district experience were hired (the only applicant hired without district experience was White). The district did not hire anyone outside the state or within the school district's boundaries. While none of the hired applicants attended a local college, most applicants attended a college in the state. Lastly, there were no significant differences between hire applicants; the only significant difference between applicants was that White applicants were more likely to attend an in-state college and have experience working in the district.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WSD FROM BLACK EDUCATORS

This chapter's first and second parts analyzed the hiring and placement trends in WSD, described WSD's approach to hiring school leaders, and analyzed how WSD's hiring and placement policies reinforce racial inequities embedded within their education system. This last

section will identify structures and practices to better support the hiring of Black principals in WSD. Specifically, this section asks: What hiring policies and practices do Black educators believe can improve Black principals' hiring and placement experiences in their school district? To address this question, this section relies solely on the interviews with Black educators in WSD. The interviews in this section were coded inductively. Then, thematic analysis was used to identify the key policies and practices that the Black educators in the district believed could improve the experiences of Black candidates in the district. Two themes emerged: a need for recruitment strategies and mentorships and support.

Recruitment

The first recommendation that emerged from conversations with Black educators in the district is the need for better recruitment strategies for Black educators. This suggestion should come as no surprise following the previous sections, where the quantitative and qualitative showed that the applicant pool is oversaturated with White candidates, and none of the policies and practices in WSD outline ways the district plans to diversify the applicant pool. In the interviews with Black educators, this emerged,

I just think that they need to look at what they were doing in the past because it did work. And then, as I said before, they need to invest in some money, some time and money and really seriously recruit 'cause they said they go to the job fairs. They have job fairs at HBCU universities. They told me they go there in March and April on the East Coast. And I just think that they really need to look into what's not working and how to make it better because we really need more [Black educators].

In the past, the district engaged in recruitment activities that directly targeted Historically Black Colleges and Universities. However, this is no longer a current practice in the district. The removal of this practice has eliminated any formal strategies to recruit educators of color.

Mentorship and support

The second recommendation that emerged was the need for mentorship and support for Black educators. For example, one educator states,

I think support, I think support, and that support needs to be support from people who have the same experiences, because you can have mentors, and I wouldn't necessarily have to have the same experiences, but are open... Who are open to learning because I think that's part of that is getting to know each person of color for who they are and that person being comfortable enough to be their authentic self, and so I think that support is needed.

Although there are not many educators of color in the district, there is a need for mentorship and support for Black educators. Participants in the interviews expressed a willingness to serve as mentors, and one educator notes that the mentorship does not have to come from a person of color, but people are open to learning. The need for mentorship is described in a way as support with transitions into the district and forming the connections needed to stay within the district.

In alignment with the previous sections, there is a need and desire for better recruitment strategies and mentorship and support for Black educators. This concluding section of the study highlighted the main recommendations provided by Black educators in WSD. The call for better recruitment strategies is present because of the absence of formal practices to diversify the application pool for leadership positions. The second call for mentorship and support programs

for Black educators is to create nurturing environments that foster connections, aid in transition, and support the unique experiences of Black educators. These findings show that there is a need for reforms in recruitment strategies and comprehensive support systems to facilitate the entry, growth, and retention of Black educators within WSD.

SUMMARY

Chapter four addresses a series of gaps in the literature around the policies and practices used to hire school leaders in WSD and the effect of these actions on WSD's application data. This chapter started with a review of the hiring policies and practices and the effect of these policies. Then, the chapter provided the findings from WSD's application data. Chapter four concludes with a review of the recommendations from Black educators in the district. Three interviews with hiring managers, two interviews with Black educators, and 20 policy documents were used to better understand WSD's approach to the hiring and placement of principals (i.e., interviewing, accessing merit, and perception of fit) and how these processes are racialized for Black educators. Then, application data was used to analyze hiring trends in WSD. Lastly, interviews with Black educators were used to identify structures and practices that better support the hiring of Black principals in WSD.

In the first section, interview data and district content (policy documents and website content) aid in describing WSD's approach to hiring principals and understanding how these practices are racialized. In the first part of the second two, it is discovered that tangible qualifications like years of experience, visionary leadership with a focus on equity, and relational skills are desired and used to determine candidates' merit and fit. Next, using a ROT framework, emergent themes expose critical issues: a) subjectivity in evaluation criteria and b) failure to

address systemic issues and provide accountability. These themes show the maintenance of the status quo in their hiring processes. Finally, interview data from Black educators shows a need for better recruitment strategies and mentorship and support for Black educators. Chapter V provides a similar review of the second case in this dissertation.

Chapter 5: The Southside’s Story

Chapter four provided the findings of the Westside School District. Chapter five presents the research findings for the second case in this dissertation study. Like Chapter Four, Chapter Five will analyze hiring practices within a suburban school district through the lens of racialized organizational theory but will focus on another school district—the Southside School District (SSD).

Qualitative and quantitative data for SSD is used in a mixed methods case study with four questions: 1) What are suburban school districts' approaches to the hiring of principals? 2) How, if at all, are principal hiring processes racialized? 3) At which rate are Black candidates applying for principal positions compared to the rates at which they are hired and the demographics of schools where they are placed? 4) What hiring policies and practices do Black educators believe can improve Black principals' hiring and placement experiences in suburban school districts? Chapter five focuses on the second case, which is the story of the Southside School District (SSD). This chapter starts with providing background information on SSD. The background information will include profiles of the district and educators who participated in the study. Next, this chapter will present the findings to the four research questions and then close with a review of all the findings before transiting to the next chapter.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This background section will start by offering information on SSD to provide the context needed to understand this dissertation study. First, there will be an overview of the district’s data (e.g., district size, revenue report, and community demographics). Afterward, the researcher will provide an educator profile that describes the experience the district’s educators have, their

approach to leadership, and their definition of equity. Next, this section describes SSD's equity profile to explain how SSD met the selection criteria for the study, SSD's values, and SSD's diversity definition. The background information concludes with a description of the hiring process in this district.

District Data

Southside School District (SSD) is a midsize city school district located in the South. SSD has a student population of over 47,000 students in 60 schools. During the 2019-2020 school year, SSD's district's total expenditure was nearly \$600 million, and the total per pupil expenditure was almost \$12,000 (NCES, 2023). The district's local government provides 84% of the district's revenue (NCES, 2023). SSD spends over half of its revenue on instructional expenses (NCES, 2023). The district resides in a community that is predominately White (51%). The Hispanic population represents 22% of the total population, Asians represent 14%, Multiracial 4%, and Black individuals represent 8% of nearly 300,000 people. The median household income of parents in SSD is around \$127,000 (NCES, 2023), almost double the state's median income level. Eighty-seven percent of the parents in the school district are in the labor force. Over 85% of SSD's parents have at least some college or associate degree. Less than 6.2% of the SSD population receive SNAP benefits, and less than 6% of the SSD families have incomes below the poverty level.

Educator Profile

In SSD, about 36% of the student population is White (State Agency Report, 2022). The Hispanic student population accounts for about 30% of the student population. Similar to the community demographics, Black students represent 8% of the student population, and Asian

students account for 20% of the student population in SSD. Thirteen percent of SSD's student population are English Learners, 22% are considered economically disadvantaged, and 13% of the students are in special education (State Agency Report, 2022).

The teachers in SSD are 73% White, 4% Black, 18% Hispanic, and 3% Asian (State Agency Report, 2022). About 32% of these teachers are novice (5 or fewer years of experience). Overall, all the teachers have an average of 11 years of experience. For assistant principals, 15% are Black, 1% Asian, 21% Hispanic, and 61% are White. Principals in SSD are 14% Black, 63% White, 12% Hispanic, and none of the principals are Asian. On average, Black principals in the district have about six years of experience working and a total of 12 years of overall experience. Hispanic principals have about 14 years of district experience and 20 years of educational experience. Lastly, White educators have 12 years of experience in the district and 21 years of education experience (State Agency Report, 2022).

In the sample of educators from SSD, five participants worked at the school level, and one worked at the district office. The educators in this district all have leadership experience and have between four and 21 years of experience. All participants have experience hiring or participating in this district's hiring committee in school systems. The district leader in SSD describes their approach to school leadership as relational but student-centered. When asked what equity center leadership looks like to them, the educators in SSD noted the following: equity leaders are individuals who are 1) servant leaders, 2) working to remove access barriers, 3) differential leaders who understand the needs of different people, 4) humble and compassionate, 5) relational, 6) flexible, 7) willing to have critical conversations, 8) understand

what learning, inequity, and systemic inequity, and 9) willing to change policies and practices and make tough decisions.

Equity Profile

SSD was recruited because one of the district's strategic goals is to “identify, develop, support, and retain a talented team of teachers, administrators, and staff who are equipped to meet the needs of every student.” This goal is impossible without hiring and placement policies for equity-centered principals, leading to the recruitment and retention of effective racially diverse leaders. Equity-centered and racially diverse principals directly lead to recruiting and retaining effective, diverse, and culturally responsive teachers and schools. The district agreed that students benefit from equitable learning environments that provide holistic care and support. The district states that it is committed to equity and relationships and focuses on student and community needs. Equity is defined as a reflective practice that understands marginalization and uses data to drive practices that improve student outcomes.

HIRING PROCESS IN SSD

SSD’s hiring and placement process for principals is more detailed than what was seen in the previous district (chapter four). Before describing SSD’s hiring process, it is important to note that the district conducts an internal equity audit for all its positions. This audit has two parts. First, the audit examines SSD’s hiring processes to ensure that they are posting the job listings in places that can attract (racially, cognitively, perspective, culturally, and life) diverse applicants, vetting the right candidates. The second part or function of the audit is to examine the data from the last audit to ensure that similar mistakes are not made during this hiring cycle, and it is tied to the hiring campus improvement plan. Throughout each phase in SSD’s hiring

process, the interviewers and evaluators go through a calibration process to make sure that everyone has the same understanding of what characteristics are being looked for and how to score those desired traits. Interviewers are also trained to alleviate biases throughout the process.

In SSD, the hiring process starts with principalship positions being posted on the district website and other platforms like “LinkedIn,” Indeed, and state principal agency groups. In this district, the area superintendents have most of the power throughout this process until the final interview with the district superintendent. After applicants submit their applications for the open positions, the applicants are redacted for personally identifiable information, and then a group of individuals in the district use a rubric to evaluate the applicants. This initial process simply looks at candidates’ applications and resumes to determine if they receive an invitation to SSD’s online hiring platform. The rubric that this initial group of reviewers uses is based on the district’s leadership values. Successful candidates then receive an invitation to the online hiring platform, where they must answer a set of questions (three to five questions with an allotted two to three minutes per question). This platform does not have an audience but is a timed and recorded session that does not allow individuals to start over. These recorded interviews are also evaluated by a group of individuals based on a rubric. The candidates with the highest scores move forward to a community panel interview at the school level.

These school-community interview panels typically consist of the area superintendent, teachers, parents, a human resource member, and another district leader who is aligned with the needs of that particular school (ex., director of SPED or advanced academics). These individuals undergo a calibration process as well to determine the type of questions they will ask, and these questions are based on the profile of the campus. The parents who participate in this interview

panel go through a screening and application process to participate. The parents who apply are evaluated by the district's leadership values and parent profile. Specifically, the district is looking for individuals who have a "universal" view of campus that is student-centered and aligns with the needs of the school. Parent voice is also retrieved in the hiring process by the submission of a survey to parents at the school with the opening. Surveys are sent out to understand what type of principal the parents are looking for, what challenges are present on their campus, and what positive things are happening on the campus.

During the school-community interview panel for the principalship position, the candidates undergo two activities: a data-driven equity presentation (about 10 mins) and an interview. These activities are also evaluated with an assigned rubric. The top one to two candidates are then invited to an interview with the superintendent and possibly one or two other district employees. Once the final candidate is selected, the HR department will check their credentials and certifications and provide the finalist with a formal notice and salary offer. The next section will provide the findings from how the district determines the merit and fit of applicants.

Figure 3: A diagram of SSD's Hiring Process

Southside School District



The school district has district leaders (6) who oversee their principals based on the smaller communities in the district.



PERCEPTION OF MERIT & FIT IN WSD

Southside School District relies heavily on its district's leadership values as a way to determine the merit and fit of candidates for principalship positions. Although there are some flexibility and customizations that can occur during the school-community interview based on the individual needs of the school, the district has an extensive set of values and skill sets that they are looking for throughout the hiring process. These values are listed on the district's website and were presented in interviews with a hiring manager and school leaders in SSD – especially when discussing the rubric used to evaluate candidates. Three central themes emerged during an examination of how SSD determines merit and fit: 1) inclusivity, 2) growth, and 3) action-based leadership.

Inclusivity as a Form of Merit & Fit

The first theme that arises in how SSD determines the merit and fit of candidates for principalship positions is based on the inclusivity of the candidates. District employees are

looking to see if the candidates have an inclusive mindset that understands and advocates for the needs of the schools and knows how to engage all stakeholders to meet those needs. Prospective leaders are able to maintain relationships and have a commitment to equity. A district leader describes it as this,

Do they have an inclusive mindset? Are they ... And do they really understand what equity is? What equity isn't? Do they conflate equity with equality? So, when we're asking questions about equity, are they able to help us understand that they truly do lead with it? So, we're definitely looking for that. Are they a person who values relationships? Not just in saying it in a buzzword kind of way, but how do you show it? So, you're giving us concrete evidence on what you've done in your past or and what you would do in this new job to foster a sense of belonging, to foster a sense of connectivity to show that you value relationships. (District Leader #1)

Ultimately, SSD emphasizes inclusivity by seeking leaders with a genuine commitment to understanding and advocating for the diverse needs of their schools. The district prioritizes candidates who not only display inclusivity and forms of equity but also demonstrate a deep understanding of these concepts in practice, fostering genuine connections and a sense of belonging among stakeholders. This theme shows that the district claims to be dedicated to cultivating leaders who actively champion an inclusive environment and prioritize authentic relationships to drive meaningful change within their educational communities.

Growth as a Form of Merit & Fit

The second theme that is prevalent in the way SSD determines principals' merit and fit is whether candidates have a growth mindset and are able to grow others. The district is looking for someone who has the capacity to learn and grow in their role. This growth is characterized by the following statement from desired behaviors from principals: "Demonstrates responsibility for continuous learning and self-reflection, and actively seeks and applies feedback from others at all levels of the organization." A district leader describes this by asking, "Do [they] have a growth mindset [themselves] so that [they] can invest in the growth of others?" Another educator builds upon this by providing the following insights,

I definitely think that they're looking for people who are going to be flexible. That you are still going to be in that learner mode, that you're not coming in assuming that you know everything, because, of course, you don't know the principalship until you're in it... really going to take that person who, again, that flexibility, that learner, that you're willing to work with others, you're willing to change some of your mindset if you need to. (Educator #2)

This district emphasizes the importance of a growth mindset and a leader's ability to foster that growth in others. Within this call for growth, there is a desire for continuous learning and self-reflection to show a commitment to personal and professional development.

Action-Based Leadership as a Form of Merit & Fit

The last theme for merit and fit in the district is the characteristics of action-based leadership. Here, SSD is looking for individuals who can cast a vision, drive continuous improvement, and foster connectivity. Action-based leadership that can cast a vision must do so

in alignment with the district's vision, be able to communicate that vision clearly and build collaboration around that vision as well. With continuous improvement, candidates are evaluated for their ability to analyze data and develop an improvement plan with goals. An indicator of this not only shows up in the school-community interview when candidates must do a presentation but also in candidates' track record – specifically in their ability to talk about their experience doing this and in the amount of time they have spent in the district or a particular district. For fostering connectivity, SSD is looking for an action-based leader who can hold individuals accountable while also building cultures of accountability. The best example of a desire for leadership that is actionable and produces change is seen in this interview with a district leader,

We do kind of tease out like people who just sort of bebop around year after year after year after year after year. Because if we say driving continuous improvement is important and, in an effort, to do that, there's some element of longevity that has to be there. Then, a person who continues to show a year here, a year here, a year here on their resume, we have to consider that. If we say that the marriage, that the principalship and the leader that that's a marriage, the campus, the principal, we have to also vet for a screen for some sense of longevity too. And so really if you're not able to speak to situations, experiences in very concrete ways, it might be because you've kind of be bopped around. You've not given yourself enough time to bloom where you are planted. (District Leader #1)

Action-based leadership is the final determinant of merit and fit for principals in the school district. This leadership style necessitates the ability to drive and communicate a cohesive vision aligned with the district's goals and a demonstrated track record of driving continuous improvement through data-driven strategies.

RACIALIZED PRINCIPAL HIRING PROCESS

This section is designed to understand how the hiring and placement processes that Black educators experience create and reinforce racial inequalities embedded within SSD by analyzing interview and district policy and content data. There are two stages of analysis. The first stage uses the tenets of racialized organizational theory (ROT) to complete the deductive coding of the data. Then, the ROT framework is used to further explain the context of the influence, text production, and influence of the hiring and placement processes that Black educators experience. The findings are then organized by the emerging themes that arose during both stages of analysis.

First Stage of Analysis: ROT Tenets

Although SSD has a standardized set of measurements for leadership values that are used throughout the process, utilizes an equity audit of their hiring process, and trains the central participants who lead the hiring process, there are ways that racial inequities are created and reinforced. These inequities are better seen through the tenets of racialized organizational theory: the enhancing and diminishing of agency for Black educators, the legitimizing of the unequal distribution of resources, Whiteness as a credential, and the decoupling of formal rules. See Table 7 for a summary of these findings and their examples.

In SSD, the enhancing and diminishing of the agency of Black educators are seen in several ways. First, there is the enhancement of Black educators' agency using inclusive language, reliance on community engagement in the hiring process, and the use of data and metrics to drive equitable hiring practices and to determine candidates' ability to use data with an equity lens. The diminishing of Black educators is seen indirectly when educators speak about

their experiences throughout the process. Black educators speak to the need for more transparency with hiring decisions, a limited ability to show up in their Blackness, and how the hiring process is top-heavy (ex., area superintends have a lot of power, which can be a good or bad depending on their understanding of equity). The legitimization of unequal resources for Black educators is seen when there is an unequal provision of knowledge and district insight. Some educators speak to how their insights are developed in the district through the participation in assistant principal and principal preparation programs or the sharing of knowledge from mentors. These experiences and types of connections are not always as equally available to Black educators. Whiteness as a credential is displayed in the ways some educators feel as though they can or cannot show up during the interview – particularly with Black males. Finally, the decoupling of formal rules is partially seen in the way hiring decisions are made. Educators describe this process as a process that resembles what is seen in politics. For example, candidates are expected to “wait their turn,” “buy their time,” and ensure that they are presenting a favorable leadership persona for the area superintendents. These examples are explored deeper through a ROT framework for analysis.

Table 9: Stage One Analysis of Codes by Main Tenets of ROT

Tenets of racialized organization theory	Examples
Diminish The Agency of Black Educators	<p><i>Enhance Agency</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive language • Community engagement • Use of data & metrics <p><i>Diminish Agency</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not intentionally addressing systemic racism • Lack of transparency • Limited ability to express oneself • Top-heavy bureaucracy
Legitimize The Unequal Distribution of Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge production • Reliance on networks

Whiteness To Be a Credential

- Implicit bias

Decoupling of Formal Rules

- Informal networks

Second Stage of Analysis: Racialized Organizations Theory Framework Findings

The indicators of racial inequities found through the tenets of ROT are further explored using a racialized organization theory framework for analysis during the final stage of analysis to understand how the hiring and placement processes that Black educators experience create and reinforce racial inequalities embedded within SSD. This stage of analysis asked twelve questions across three categories of each piece of data point. Then, the text was analyzed to pull out the three points that emerged: a) networking as a barrier, b) subjectivity in leadership values, and c) inclusivity and equity without racial equity. The next paragraphs will discuss each of the central themes.

Networking (aka Nepotism) as a Barrier

Although the hiring process is designed with a deep level of intentionality and rigor to ensure that the right educators are being hired as principals, the intensity and insider knowledge needed to truly be successful throughout this process can pose as a barrier or disadvantage for Black educators who, may possess the skills and passion to be effective principals, but might not have equal access to learning opportunities in the district or with key district networks. If not correctly cared for or nurtured, these systems could discourage Black candidates from pursuing leadership positions.

Networking is also viewed as a variation of nepotism that favors close connections.

Networking is not completely a negative skill set, but when hiring decisions feel or are viewed as

being dependent mostly (or even solely) on relationships within the district, it can begin to reinforce racial inequities for Black educators in suburban contexts. Throughout the data, there is a revolving theme of the necessity of forming the right relationships and connections to develop the knowledge and favor needed to be successful in the hiring process. Educators and district context explain the “rigor” of the process, but participants acknowledge that the process can be “tiring” and “look very frustrating.” However, the right connections and insights from other educators and preparation programs can make the process easier. One educator puts it this way,

A lot of the non-black applicants, if you look at them, it's nepotism where they have people in their past who taught them or groomed them and told them the things to do. And if you had that, and don't get me wrong, there's some... I ran into a black principal who had nepotism because he had people that were in the system, and they were able to help him navigate. So, he rolls really quickly, but if you don't have that experience or the exposure, then it's not gonna happen. (Educator #4)

Here, we see that this educator defines the connections explicitly as “nepotism” and highlights how important the right networks and knowledge are in helping make advancements through the leadership pipeline quicker and easier. In the conversation, it is acknowledged that these connections are not something that only White educators are taking advantage of, but they are more prevalent for them. When asked how this educator was able to figure out the hiring system and make their own advancement into a leadership position, they responded with, “Experience. And then I eventually got in front of some fellow Black educators who saw my potential.” When Black educators are not privy to formal networks and connections, they must find ways to develop the knowledge they need in informal ways. Other Black school leaders supported those

educators by providing them with access to the resources and knowledge needed to be successful. This helpful information was not a cheat sheet but the provision of training to aid in their leadership development and their knowledge of district insights.

With the right formal connections, advancements to leadership positions become more predictable. An educator provides this context:

So, you already know who's gonna get the job before they get it. It's that type of thing. So, and there's this whole thing of like, do your time. You gotta do your time; you'll move up. (Educator #1)

However, they also follow up this statement by expressing their belief that the district's new superintendent is working to change things. Another educator explains it as this:

It's very much one of those situations where, growing up, my mom was always like, you never know who's watching you. So, you need to make sure that whatever you're doing speaks to you as a person, your character, and what you're about. Because I feel like that's how people are chosen for different placements. (Educator #2)

They provided a further explanation by adding,

So definitely take advantage of being in those [assistant principal and principal preparation] programs if you can. Develop that relationship with your principals so that you're asking all of the questions so that you're getting into those spaces to at least just kind of have a glimpse of, here's some things that could be popping up. (Educator #2)

While formal connections often dictate predictability in advancements, there's an emerging sense of change underway (well, see this hope more in the other themes). In the meantime, successful

Black educators are seen undergoing proactive engagement in preparatory programs and relationships with Black educators and other leaders to help achieve their leadership aspirations.

In conclusion, the process of hiring principals is designed to be a thorough and precise process – understandably so. Yet, the process and hiring nature can inadvertently pose challenges for Black educators due to disparities in access to insider knowledge and networking opportunities. This reliance on connections and relationships within the district can sometimes perpetuate racial inequities that create hurdles for aspiring Black principals. Yet, the educators do speak to hope and acknowledge hiring improvements. Overall, the data showed that there is an emphasis on networks and experiences to be successful in the hiring process. To reduce the potential for creating and reinforcing racial inequities for Black educators, SSD must work to ensure that their networks are inclusive and that there is a provision of equitable access to knowledge and resources for Black educators to have fair opportunities that ascend to leadership roles in the education system.

Subjectivity in Leadership Values

The second theme that emerges during analysis that shows how the hiring and placement processes that Black principals experience create and reinforce racial inequalities is subjectivity in the interpretation of leadership values. In SSD, there is an emphasis on hiring principals (and all educators) that align with the district's leadership values. However, the interpretation of these values from evaluators might also inadvertently favor candidates whose leadership styles align with pre-existing norms. This can disadvantage Black educators who might bring diverse leadership perspectives or innovative approaches but are scored lower because they do not align

with established norms. This is particularly seen in the school-community interviews. An educator (#4) explains it like this:

there's normally some kind of matrix, scoring matrix that identifies, but it's still, it's subjective...It's a matrix that says, one to whatever, one to 10, or whatever. But it's subjective to what you feel and how well the person answered the question. Did they answer the question, and so forth... The person who left we were replacing somebody who left. So when we were going through the hiring process, there were biases that were coming out of the selection process that my principal and others didn't realize they were using in a selection because, remember, even though you're using a matrix, it is subjective because you are scoring one to whatever based on how that person responds.

There is no definitive; this is a five. (Educator #4)

This educator provides context to how, although the district has a set list of values they are looking for and even trains their key evaluators, there is a level of subjectivity involved in the process that comes from educators in the district. This educator was speaking about their experience with a hiring committee in the district for an assistant principal position. If the district's hiring policies and practices were able to speak for themselves, another educator (#5) states that these policies and practices will stay, "That it's just for show." This educator describes how this is possible by stating,

They ask a question or two to see if you have examples of equitable leadership, but you could still get past the questions and not be an equitable leader...I mean, you could just use buzzwords and share an example of something, an initiative that you did, but it doesn't actually mean that hearts and minds were changed. And even if the data did move

again, it still doesn't mean that the person that was working with the students was compassionate and saw them as who they were. (Educator #5)

These educators help contextualize the subjectivity in how the leadership values are interpreted by evaluators and how the subjectivity of the values can lead to the passing through of individuals who rely on popular phrases and experiences that do not speak directly to their ability to impact students and serve their school well. This same educator makes this clear with the following statements,

and then also because competency isn't always the first thing that is looked for. I can see that we have a system of people that have moved up that don't have the capacity to do what they're doing, but they can't be removed from where they are...But then also your practices have to go behind that. And we have some of the buzzwords, but we don't have the practices... And because there's not a central committee for all campuses, one principal supervisor might have this equity lens, and then somebody else might do something different. It's not streamlined. (Educator #5)

Despite the emphasis on alignment with district values, there is room for subjectivity in the hiring process – especially if the leadership styles conform to established norms. Educators highlight how, despite formal training and established criteria, subjective judgment persists, potentially allowing individuals to advance based on superficial adherence to buzzwords rather than substantive, impactful leadership. Subjectivity is also in how various campuses choose to interpret equity at their campus. This subjectivity in interpreting values displays the risk of prioritizing appearances over genuine transformative leadership. Additionally, there's a concern raised about competency taking a backseat to superficial traits, allowing individuals lacking in

essential skills to ascend and sustain their positions. This highlights a disconnect between the values and actual practices within the hiring processes and aids in creating and reinforcing racial inequities for Black educators.

Movement Towards Equity Without Racial Equity

The final theme that emerges is the presence of inclusivity, diversity, and equity without racial equity. The district's leadership values, which outline how SSD determines the merit and fit of applicants, emphasize the need for inclusivity, diversity, and equity. These same phrases are used on district websites and policies regarding exemplifying kindness and respect (mentioned 17 times). Equity is a developing culture in the district that all the participants amplified a passion for, but there is room for growth in equity that transcends hiring practices. An educator defines it as this,

If I was able to stand back and look at our leadership, our teaching and learning, and our HR practices, and I could easily discern equity throughout from explicit actions, then we'd get a gold star. And I think as our district, honestly, we're moving in that direction.

(Educator #3)

For Black educators, equitable hiring practices transcend the practices used in the hiring process and include how students are treated, leadership and teaching practices, curriculum, consistency in the tenure of the district's equity officer, and equity in the staffing of educators across the district. Other educators talk about this by advocating for equity in a variety of ways, including equity in pay that aligns with the rigor of individuals' placements and rezoning of school boundaries to promote student equity in resource allocation. Again, there is this hope and belief that the district is moving in directions that will further equity.

In the pursuit of equity in SSD, there is also an intentional diversion from racial equity in the district. The district has two pieces of content that speak to its stance on racial equity. This includes the district’s core belief of “achieving racial and educational equity” and their desired learner profile, which includes valuing and engaging people of different races and cultures as an example of the leader’s ability to interact effectively. Outside of these two sentences, the district has no policy, resolution, or district content that advocates specifically for racial equity. The list of behaviors and values that are projected on educators in the district generally promotes principles of inclusivity and equity. However, this content lacks an explicit mention of racial dynamics or targeted strategies that might impact the hiring and placement of Black principals by perpetuating systemic barriers, implicit biases, and a lack of tailored support needed to address the unique challenges they face in educational leadership roles.

The language of racial equity (or even an emphasis on racial diversity) as an asset is avoided in district content. For example, the desired values for teachers, assistant principals, and principals all mention the need for inclusivity that uses equity and diversity as assets in their behaviors. Equity alone is the only asset that is listed as a desired behavior of principals when they are performing hiring duties. In this document, the word diversity is intentionally excluded, which is a deviation in the word patterns of all the other profiles of educator values that group equity and diversity as an asset. In fact, in the 83 pages of district content, diversity, and equity are mentioned 44 times. Equity appears 75 times, variations of inclusion 38 times, but race is mentioned the least – 21 times. Aside from the two statements above, all other mentions of race mainly reside in basic non-discrimination and equal employment opportunity policies and documents (11 times).

The effects of the absence of specific racial equity policies and practices transcend into the hiring experiences of educators. In the interviews, some educators explain how they have either experienced racism or heard racist remarks in the school-community interviews. These comments and incidents were seen coming from other educators in this district (specifically teachers). One educator tells this story about an instance during the school-community hiring committee when a Black educator was the top candidate based on the scores,

they were saying, okay, we're going to send this one to the superintendent, and that was her comment like they're going to be 3 of them [Three Black assistant principals]? But that's not even the crazy part; the crazy part was when I had gone through the process a year or two prior for me to get hired through that same process, this same woman...when they were going through the selection process with me, took my arm... Took my hand, rubbed my arm, and said, we need your skin, and was emboldened; it didn't feel any kind of way like this was so wrong and racist, but it was okay; she wanted my skin, because they wanted a [redacted] Black [redacted] to come in and beat a hammer on the nails of the kids, that's what they saw me as, so they were all, we want [you], we want [you], but now we got [you], we don't need another one, we don't need another one, so it was that process, I was like, wow, but I had to play the game and let her rub my skin, and I didn't react, and this looked better, I said okay, not a problem, there is something I want out of this, so I just have to smile and keep it going, keep it moving, yeah, you're not bothering me, even though you're being very insulting. (Educator #4)

Another educator follows up with this comment,

But I don't think they were very intentional about finding people like that [who are close to and understand the problems in the district]. And some of the teachers that were serving said blatantly racist things. So, like making sure that the teachers that we are inviting onto panels are those that, I guess, again, they're on the margins, on the margins.

(Educator #1)

These two educators provide insight into the racism that can occur in SSD's hiring committees at the school-community level from educators in the district. One of the educators then advocated for the district to be more intentional in including individuals who truly understand the needs of the school and are anti-racist.

This final theme displays the district's pursuit of inclusivity, diversity, and equity that lacks explicit strategies and policies targeting racial equity. This does not ameliorate systemic barriers affecting the hiring experiences of Black educators. The lack of emphasis on racial equity is reflected in the distressing accounts from educators who have experienced or observed racism during the school-community interviews. These incidents highlight a need for racial equity in the district.

SSD'S HIRING APPROACH, MERIT & FIT, AND RACIALIZATION CONCLUSION

Three points emerge during a deeper analysis of the racial inequities found through the tenets of ROT to understand how the hiring and placement processes that Black educators experience create and reinforce racial inequalities embedded within SSD. The first theme was networking as a barrier due to potential disparities in access to insider knowledge and networking opportunities. The second theme was the subjectivity of how leadership values are evaluated. The final theme was the district's movement toward equity without racial equity. The

district has a strong emphasis on inclusivity, diversity, and equity but is distant from matters of racial equity. This distance leaves room for racial instances within the school-community interviews. The next section of this dissertation will review the findings from SSD's application data.

ARE BLACK EDUCATORS IN SSD APPLYING & BEING HIRED?

The purpose of this section is to analyze the rate at which Black educators are hired in SSD to determine if demand issues account for the paucity of Black principals through an examination of principal applicant data and subsequent hiring decisions. Specifically, this section presents the findings for this research question: At which rate are Black candidates applying for principal positions in comparison with the rates at which they are hired and the demographics of schools at which they are placed? Throughout this section, tables and graphics are used to assist with contextualizing the data. This section will review the results of this section of the study before concluding with the conclusion of this section.

Racial Composition of Applications and Offers

In SSD's dataset, there were 187 applications and applicants for 17 hired principal positions. SSD hired ten elementary school principals, five middle school principals, and two high school principals. The student population in SSD is 35% White, and the racial demographics of White applicants for principalship positions represent 40% of the applicant pool. White candidates receive 29% of the offers for principalship positions. Black students represent 8% of the student population, and Black applicants account for 21% of the applicant pool. Black candidates received 24% of the offers.

The Hispanic student population accounts for about 30% of the student population, and Hispanic educators account for 32% of the applicant pool. These educators received 41% of the offers for principalship positions. While Asian students account for 20% of the student population in SSD, Asian candidates only accounted for 2% of the applicant pool, and none of the applicants received a position. Table 10 Panel A provides detailed data on the racial composition of applicants and offers.

The next panel (Table 10, Panel B) provides data on the racial composition of applicants and offers by school type. At the elementary school level, Hispanic candidates received half of the offers. White applicants received 40% of the offers and Black applicants received 1% of the offers. At the middle school level, White and Black applicants both received 20% of the offers, while Hispanic applicants received 40% of the offers; finally, at the high school level, Black applicants received both open positions. The composition of the open positions in SSD was not significantly different. The high schools in this district served slightly more students of color (see Table 10 Panel C).

Table 10. Panel A. Racial Composition of Applicants & Offers

Race	Applicants	Offers
White	40%	29%
Black	21%	24%
Hispanic	32%	41%
Asian	2%	0%
Number	187	17

Table 10. Panel B. Racial Composition of Applications & Offers, by School Type

School Level	Race	Offers
Elementary	White	40%
	Black	1%
	Hispanic	50%
	Asian	0%
	Number	10
Middle	White	20%
	Black	20%
	Hispanic	40%
	Asian	0%
	Number	5
High School	White	0%
	Black	100%
	Hispanic	0%
	Asian	0%
	Number	2

Table 10. Panel C. Racial Composition of Schools by School Type

School Level	White Students	Black Students	Hispanic Students	Asian Students	American Indian Students	Native American Students	Multiracial Students	FRLP
Elementary	35%	9%	37%	13%	.3%	.1%	5%	30%
Middle	36%	12%	32%	16%	.4%	.1%	5%	23%
High School	33%	10%	38%	14%	.3%	.2%	5%	30%

Results

Impact of Race

There is no statistical evidence that there is an association between race and the likelihood of being offered a principalship position in SSD. Candidates with district experience

are more likely to receive an offer by a little over two units (p value <0.001). People of Color were hired at a 56 to 6 (11%) rate. At the same time, White educators' apply-hire rate was 15 to 1 (7%). For Black educators, this rate was 39 to 4 (10%).

Table 11. Panel A. Correlation of Receiving an Offer with Race

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian	POC
Hired	-0.52 or -0.47	.61	.47	omitted	.52

Table 11. Panel B. Correlation of Receiving an Offer with District Experience

	No Experience	Experience
Hired	-2.15	2.15***

Table 11. Panel C. Correlation of Receiving an Offer with Race, Controlling for District Experience

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian	POC
Hired	-0.65 or -0.90	.60	.90	omitted	.65

Impact of Local Ties

The zip codes of the applicants were used to determine if local ties or proximity to the school district had a correlation with predicting the likelihood of being hired. All of the hired applicants are educators who live within the state. In the state, applicants comprise 96% of the applicant pool. Only 18% (3 out of 17) of the hired applicants lived inside the school district boundaries. These applicants comprised 14% of the total application pool. Although only three hired applicants lived within the school district boundaries, 15 (out of 17) or 88% of hired candidates lived close to the school district boundaries.

Impact of College & University Type

Proxies were created to determine the impact of college and university hiring decisions in SSD. Categorizing the applications by whether an applicant attended a college or university near the school district (local), in the state (state), in the closest metropolitan area (metro), and/or if the applicant earned a degree from a four-year college or university ranked 50th or higher in U.S. News and World Report Top Colleges and Universities for 2023 (*Top50*), the following insights were derived from data:

Attended a Local Institution. Thirty-five percent of the applicants attended a local college or university. Eight of the hired applicants attend a local university. These data points are the same for a metropolitan institution.

Attended an In-State Institution. Eighty-eight percent of the hired applicants attended an institution within the state, although only 23% of the applicant pool attended a state institution.

Attended an Institution on the Top 50 College or University List (Top50). Only four of the hired applicants attended an institution on the top 50 list, despite 23% of the applicants in the pool attending a top 50 college.

Table 12. University Composition of Applications by Offers

<i>Local College</i>		<i>State College</i>		<i>Metro College</i>		<i>Top 50 College</i>	
Hired	Not Hired	Hired	Not Hired	Hired	Not Hired	Hired	Not Hired
47%	53%	88%	12%	47%	53%	24%	76%

Are Applicants of Color as Qualified as White Applicants?

Following the same method, Table IV provides an overview of applicants. Many of the

applicant characteristics did not produce statistically significant results. The only significant difference between White applicants and applicants of Color is the fact that White applicants were about 20 percentage points more likely to have a higher degree.

Table 13. Differences in Characteristics of Candidates

Panel A. Differences in Applications Characteristics					
Variable	White	POC	Diff	T-Stat	Sig
<i>Offered</i>	.067	.107	-.040	-0.9408	
<i>Highest Degree</i>	2.21	2.02	.195	2.4930	**
<i>Local_Ind</i>	.347	.360	-.014	-0.1905	
<i>State_Ind</i>	.88	.864	.015	0.3005	
<i>Metro_Ind</i>	.347	.360	-.014	-0.1905	
<i>Top50</i>	.227	.234	-.008	-0.1194	
<i>InState</i>	.133	.151	-.018	-0.3501	

Panel B. Differences in Offer Characteristics					
Variable	White	POC	Diff	T-Stat	Sig
<i>HighestDegree</i>	2	2.167	-.1667	-.9393	
<i>Local_Ind</i>	.2	.5833	-.3833	-1.4468	
<i>State_Ind</i>	.8	.9167	-.1167	-0.6479	
<i>Metro_Ind</i>	.2	.5833	-.3833	-1.4468	
<i>Top50</i>	.2	.25	-.05	-0.2083	
<i>InState</i>	.4	.0833	.3166	1.5837	
<i>ClosetoSD</i>	.8	.9167	1.1167	-.6479	
<i>InsideSDBoundaries</i>	.4	.0833	.3167	1.5837	
<i>DistrictExperience</i>	.6	.8333	-.233	-1.0027	
<i>StateExperience</i>	1	.9167	.0833	0.6333	.

Characteristics of Receiving Schools & Hired Applicants

The final assessment of application data is a brief overview of which schools the hired applicants were placed in to serve. Table 14 shows that the candidates of Color and Black candidates were hired at schools with a slightly higher percentage of Hispanic students and a lower percentage of students participating in the free and reduced lunch program.

Table 14. Characteristics of Receiving Schools and Hired Applicants

	Average Composition of Schools							
	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	American Indian	Native Hawaiian	Multiracial	FRLP
Hired White Candidates	27%	11%	31%	17%	3%	3%	7%	28%
Hired Candidates of Color	37%	8%	36%	13%	.3%	.1%	5%	26%
Hired Black Candidates	39%	10%	34%	12%	.3%	0%	5%	27%

HIRING RATES CONCLUSION

In SSD’s dataset, there are not any statistically significant results that show that race is a hiring factor. Instead, applicants’ district experience does have a positive impact on hiring decisions. This section sought to understand at what rate Black applicants apply and are hired in this school district. The analysis of district data showed that Black educators' apply-to-hire rate is 39 to 4 (10%). This rate is 3% higher than for White candidates and 1 percent lower than the rate for all hired educators of color in the school district during this year of the dataset. The next section will provide details on how the individuals in this district describe and determine the merit and perception of fit of the candidates throughout this process.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SSD FROM BLACK EDUCATORS

In this last section, the interviews of the Black educators in the SSD were used to understand what hiring policies and practices these educators believe can improve the hiring and placement experiences of Black principals in their school district. this section relies solely on the interviews with Black educators in SSD. The interviews in this section were coded inductively, and then thematic analysis was used to identify the key policies and practices that the Black

educators in the district believed could improve the experiences of Black candidates in the district. Three themes emerged: a) transparency in the hiring process, b) improvements in the school-community interview panels, and c) racial equity in the provision of resources and support for Black educators.

A Need for Transparency in the Hiring Process

The first policy and practical change that Black educators believe can improve the hiring and placement of Black principals in the school district is more transparency in how and why hiring decisions are being made. Some educators wanted to know how final hiring decisions were being made in the later rounds of the interviews so that they would not be deterred from applying again and so that they know exactly how to improve for future application cycles; when describing the instructions, they would give mentors, an educator (#5) stated that they would tell them “to be persistent in that. Not to think that just because you're qualified, you'll actually get the job... Because it'll probably be more rejection than you anticipate.” Although this educator later notes that they have a better understanding of why some decisions were made in hindsight, they are also aware of how some of those hiring decisions were not the best decisions due to turnover that resulted from those hires. Hiring decisions in SSD are not always initially clear (or even fair). However, the district can develop more trust with educators and enhance Black educators’ ability to engage in personal and professional development to become the candidates the district desires. For example, this same educator recommends that the district,

Find[s] a way to triangulate [their] data[.] 'Cause of the perception of being a person of color and interviewing and automatically since I'm defaulting to, oh, it's because of my color or my gender that I wasn't selected. That there's also other reasons too. And taking

both into account. And then also not assuming that because we don't get jobs, that it's also a bad thing. (Educator #5)

This educator speaks to the need for using all the data to provide educators of color (and even educators of different genders) with insights into hiring decisions so that they do not automatically think that their denial is due to their race. In fact, for SSD hiring and placement policies,

To get a gold star. I would think, honestly, more transparency in how feedback is given because the first year that I began applying for the principalship, and I applied to one school, I went through the entire process. I was a superintendent finalist, and my feedback was, well, you were just great, but we just feel like maybe just one more year. But I was like, outside of that though, gimme more... What are some things... I'm sure there are things that I need to be working on to get there, so don't just tell me, "You did great." Because then it's like, well, what was the problem? And really the person that got it, it was just because [they] had been an AP one year longer than I had been. Okay. But still, gimme more feedback to grow on because clearly, you know that I want to get in this position. (Educator #2)

The second educator explains how the lack of transparency through quality feedback hindered their ability to really understand what they could do to become a better candidate for principalship positions. Later in this conversation, this same educator explains how a colleague was also recently denied a position and was left wondering how they can improve after going through the process.

In describing ways that the district could receive a gold star in its hiring policies and practices, an educator clarifies the need and desire for quality feedback throughout the hiring process. Transparency in the hiring process serves as a motivator for persistence in applying for leadership positions, an eliminator of concerns for racial and gender bias, and an improvement strategy for Black educators.

A Need for Improvements in the School-Community Interview Panels

The second policy and practical change that Black educators believe can improve the hiring and placement of Black principals in the school district is through improvements in the school-community interview panels. There were two sets of panel recommendations. The first recommendation was for the committee to have a clearer equity vision that is streamlined across the district. An educator puts it this way,

Have a clear equity vision, I've already done the systematic work of front loading with the community, with the staff, with the people that are on the committee about what that looks like. And making it so that there was, in the interview process, you couldn't just lie your way through it. There were more in the community interview; usually, you'll have to present some type of task, but the tasks are determined by the culture of the campus. And because there's not a central committee for all campuses, one principal supervisor might have this equity lens, and then somebody else might do something different. It's not streamlined. (Educator #5)

Although equity is one of the leadership values and desired behaviors for principals in the district, the decentralization of the school-community interviews allows for varying understanding and implementation of equity.

The second set of recommendations for the school-community panel interviews revolves around ensuring that there is a representation of races and students during the interviews. For example, an educator makes this suggestion,

I would make sure that true representation was... Remember I mentioned the committee process, though it is a very dynamic process, and I don't have a problem with the process because it [has] such an important role on the campus. However, it is a flawed process...I've experienced where I have a colleague who...interview as a principal and his entire selection committee had no ethnic diversity, well, I'm sorry, I take it back, it had one committee member who had an ethnic background because they were the principal of the high school... Everybody else that was on that part of the committee w[as] White [teachers and parents]. But it didn't represent... And that's not a problem if it represented the diversity of the school that the applicant was applying to, [yet] the diversity of the school that the applicant was applying to was 60% Hispanic, like 30 something percent Black, and it was like less than 10% White. (Educator #4)

This educator suggests a need to ensure that all school-committee panels represent the racial diversity of the schools. They further explain in the next excerpt why this representation is important for Black educators:

So, things like that put you at a disadvantage because you can't tell by this video, but with my size; you probably wouldn't be intimidated because you're probably used to seeing us. You wouldn't be scared if I walked up to you and started talking; you wouldn't first think in your head, "Oh, [they are] a big big black [person]. [They are] this, this, and the other," because I'm assuming your [family member] or somebody looks similar to me. So, you

got just used to it. Whereas other cultures see me, and it's a stereotype, but it's the truth. They have a different perception. So, I have to carry myself with intentionality to make myself small so I don't intimidate. (Educator #4)

When hiring committees lack racial diversity, Black applicants are left having to figure out ways to ensure that their agency is not overpowering or triggering racial biases within the hiring committees. The shared experiences of some of the educators in previous sections of this study provide knowledge that racist comments and incidents are likely to occur during the school-community interviews. Finally, the need for student representation is seen in an interview with this educator,

I think we need a student advisory council. And I think those students need to be a part of the hiring committee, which I believe there was one student on... Yeah, I think there was. There was one student on the principal committee, the first one, the one in 2017 and 2018, around there. But I need to see more of that. And it's not, and this student was one of the straight-A students that's like this. I need to see the students that are in trouble. I need to see them pick a principal. (Educator #1)

In this last quote, an educator implies that SSD is used to include the voices of students in hiring committees and explains how there is a need for students to have more of a direct say-so in the hiring of principals in the district in the current process. However, this educator is not advocating for the presence of students who are high achievers. Instead, they believe that the students who have more to gain through effective leadership have a voice in determining their school leader. In this section, educators explain and express the need for racial diversity and student representation of students on the hiring committees.

A Need for Racial Equity in the Provision of Resources and Support

The final but most prevalent recommendation that emerged from the interviews with Black educators is the need for more racial equity practices. In this final theme, a few concerns are raised. The Black educators argue for a need for racial equity in the recruitment, working conditions, and resource allocation of other Black principals. In terms of recruitment, one educator poses the following question:

How can we ensure that we're making the positions not necessarily look lucrative, but what's the drawing point for our district for others to come in? We do have people of color in some of our central office positions, but outside of that, how are we drawing persons of color into those positions? (Educator #2)

This educator desired to know more about who is applying and what is hindering other Black educators from applying to positions in the district. They desired that the district investigate the numbers to further understand what initiatives could draw more educators of color into lower-level positions. An educator describes the need for more racial equity in a more systemic way that extends beyond recruitment:

“And even beyond that, and I don't know how much... How far you want me to go. I think they really need to look at switching up school boundaries to where they don't have schools that are primarily students with... all of the refugee students would come [to one school] from all countries, mostly Central America, but they could have easily spread that out to other campuses. But they didn't because it's a high-poverty school, and they knew the parents weren't gonna complain. So, I mean, just looking... They need a complete rehaul of their systems. 'Cause to me, you cannot talk about hiring without talking about conditions. (Educator #1)

The conversation around the hiring of Black educators quickly turns to include the working conditions that school leaders are expected to face. Typically, high-poverty schools are overcrowded with limited resources and support. Thus, the workload and stress of the principals placed there are increased. Moreover, this educator later highlights that school leaders with placements that require more duties should be compensated for their labor because it is not possible to attract the right educators to high-need positions in the district if they are not being compensated adequately.

Lastly, the educators in the district also articulate a need for racial equity in the provision of resources and support. So far, Black educators have been successful in job obtainment and development through informal networks and connections that they developed or paid for themselves. Here is a perfect example of these needs from an educator:

Supports would be like, it would be great. So, we're encouraged to join professional groups....I was encouraged to join because they'll pay for it if I join it, but I have no desire to be a part of this group. And it's these principal organizations...out there, or there's several out there that are geared towards us, and they don't pay for those. So, if I want to be a part of that, I have to come out of pocket. Well, educators don't make the most money, so it's like, if you can, you can, and a lot of us do, but so I bring that up because if it, with intentionality, allow me to select what would help me and benefit me, because being around like-minded people, having those honest discussions would help me develop... Because it wasn't until I found three people who authentically mentored me. And what I mean by authentically mentoring me. They went beyond the surface rhetoric of jargon that just says the right thing. And they peeled back the layers and said,

this is what you really need to know. And they told me, and they taught me in a way that I could process it, understand it, and bring it through my filter and give back what was needed in that interview process, in that hiring process, because that's what took me so long, took me over two years to get my first AP position...So...allow us to a safe space to discover the truths that affect us of how we need to be able to communicate. (Educator #4)

Although this is an extensive quote, it provides a complete example of the racial disparities found in resource allocation and mentorship for Black educators. Throughout the interviews, Black educators spoke about the informal connections they had to make on their own to gain insider knowledge and develop and sustain themselves in leadership positions. It is also apparent in this last quote that Black educators not only have to take on additional labor to connect to the resources they need, but they sometimes also must take on additional financial expenses as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS' CONCLUSION

In conclusion to the final section of this dissertation study, there is a need and desire for a) transparency in the hiring process, b) improvements in the school-community interview panels, and c) racial equity in the provision of resources and supports for Black educators. Transparency in the hiring process will better maintain Black educators' motivation as they persist through the hiring process, eliminate concerns for racial and gender bias, and aid in their desire to grow personally and professionally. The need for improvements in the school-community interview panels displayed educators' desire for these panels to have a clearer equity vision that is streamlined across the district. It also showed how there is a need for these committees to have a diverse racial representation of interviewers and a representation of students. Finally, the

educators advocated for the need for racial equity in the provision of resources and support for Black educators that allow them to have safe spaces to develop.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION OF FINDINGS

Chapter Five continues to address a series of gaps in the literature around the policies and practices used to hire school leaders by analyzing the data, policies, and practices of the Southside School District. This chapter began with a review of interview data and district content (policy documents and website content) to aid in describing SSD's approach to hiring and placement of principals and understanding how these practices create and reinforce racial inequalities embedded within the district. In the first part of this chapter, it is discovered that the district relies heavily on a set of leadership values and behaviors to determine candidates' merit and fit throughout the hiring process. Next, using a ROT framework for analysis, emergent themes expose critical issues: a) networking as a barrier, b) subjectivity in leadership values, and c) inclusivity and equity without racial equity.

The latter half of this chapter provided the findings from SSD's application data. The analysis of district data showed that Black educators' apply-to-hire rate is 39 to 4 (10%). This rate is 3% higher than for White candidates and 1 percent lower than the rate for all hired educators of color in the school district during this year of the dataset. In the dataset, race does not have a statistically significant relationship with whether an applicant is hired. However, whether an applicant has prior experience working within the district does increase the likelihood that the applicant is hired (p values < .001).

At the end of the latter half of chapter five, there was a presentation of recommendations from Black educators in the district. The interview data from Black educators showed a desire

for a) transparency in the hiring process, b) improvements in the school-community interview panels, and c) racial equity in the provision of resources and support for Black educators. This chapter concludes with a cross-comparison of the findings for WSD and SSD.

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS OF DISTRICTS

Finally, a cross-case analysis was conducted to examine the differences and similarities related to the research findings (Yin, 2009). Summaries of the findings can be found in Appendix D and are discussed in detail throughout this section by research questions.

Hiring Process

WSD and SSD share a similar hiring process. Both districts have a four-step process that is led by one director of the school with an open position. When educators submit their applications to the school district, the district's human resources office is the first set of individuals who receive the applications. These individuals typically screen the applications to ensure they have the right certifications and then redact personally identifiable information. Afterward, there is a director or district leader who facilitates most of the hiring process before sending the top candidate(s) to a final interview with the superintendent and cabinet members. These individuals control who reads and scores the initial interviews and help the individuals on the school panel decide who is the top candidate. Lastly, both school districts have some measures of equity built into their process (ex., having a standard set of interview questions during the initial round of interviews or performing an equity "audit" before and after each hiring process) and attempt to structure their school-level interviews in a way that is responsive to the needs of that particular school (ex. gearing questions or interviewers around math specialist).

Although similar in overall structure, there are a few differences between WSD and SSD's hiring process. First, SSD posts their job openings for leadership positions in a wider range of places than WSD. SSD not only posts their positions on their district website and the state's principals association, but they also specifically reach out to other principal agencies that are geared towards Black and Brown school leaders and to specific organizations that are focused on the needs of the school (math organizations if the school needs to improve in its math area). Next, the schools are grouped differently. The directors in SSD either oversee their elementary schools or all the other grade levels. In WSD, the schools are grouped together by communities or five smaller subsets of communities within the district. In SSD, a leadership profile is primarily used to score candidates. Meanwhile, WSD does not have a standard leadership profile. Another difference between WSD and SSD is the format of the initial interview, which determines who is invited to the school-level interview. At WSD, these interviews are conducted directly by a committee assembled by the director who leads the hiring. In SSD, these interviews take place through an online platform where the candidates have 2-3 mins each to answer 4-5 questions. This system does not allow candidates to restart or redo once they start recording. The last difference between WSD and SSD is that there is more community and parent engagement in the school-level interviews in SSD. SSD solicits parent feedback before the hiring committee with a survey and allows for a parent(s) to serve on the interview panel.

Racialized Process

The following research question this dissertation sought to address was how the hiring process was racialized. WSD and SSD's hiring process shows racialized elements through the

subjectivity found throughout the process. Although SSD has a leadership profile that they rely on throughout the hiring process, there is still room for subjectivity through their hiring process based on how various individuals interpret individuals' characteristics. The same is true for WSD. Both districts have a level of subjectivity involved in their hiring process that leaves room for biases if they are not correctly addressed or accounted for before the interviews. However, SSD does have some race-neutral strategies attempting to aid in equitable hiring practices (e.g., audit of the hiring process and standard leadership profile).

Outside of subjectivity and lack of accountability for racial equity, racialization appears differently for WSD and SSD. In SSD, a high level of knowledge and connections are needed to be successful throughout the district's hiring process. Educators mentioned that, without prior knowledge, the process can be very intimidating and that networking and making the right connections are key to success. Lastly, through an analysis of district policies and content, it is seen that WSD has policies that directly speak to racism and anti-racism. However, SSD is more race-neutral in its approach to leadership and in its policies.

The subjectivity of evaluation criteria, the subjectivity of the scoring of selection criteria, and networking/nepotism as a barrier align directly with three tenets of ROT: the diminishing of agency of Black educators, the unequal distribution of resources, and whiteness as credentials. Ray (2019) argued that "Whiteness is a credential providing access to organizational resources, legitimizing work hierarchies, and expanding White agency" (p.41). At the basic level, credentials, and vague or subjective criteria allow organizations to appear objective or neutral (Ray, 2019). In WSD, the district's selection criteria can change based on who is leading the hiring process, who is on the committees that read or evaluate the applicants, and which school

has an open position. When there is this level of subjectivity in the evaluation criteria of educators for leadership positions, it can restrict the ability of organizations to operate in a way that is truly fair and inclusive for all individuals – regardless of their race. The subjectivity does not allow applicants to understand what is expected of them, limits how hiring officials are able to remain transparent and objective in their selection criteria, and negatively impacts the district’s ability to hire educators that align with the district’s goals for racial equity and culturally responsive leadership within the district. The same is true for WSD, where the subjectivity of the scoring of selection criteria was sometimes present. The presence of standard expectations also fails when there is subjectivity in the way those expectations are evaluated by others involved in the hiring process. These situations probably occur within school districts across the US. Gratefully, WSD is determining ways to strengthen racial equity in its hiring processes, and SSD engages in continuous evaluations of its methods. This level of intentionality around equity has aided in buffering the adverse effects of subjectivity.

On the one hand, the importance of this research on racial diversity in school leadership is meeting the needs of students, staff, and school communities. On the other hand, racial diversity in school leadership is also about showing how, and if at all, school districts are “hiding or legitimizing racial inequality” for Black educators seeking advancements in their careers (Ray, 2022, p. 95). Ray (2022) argues that schools are “highly segregated,” with more people of color working at entry-level jobs and facing slower advancements to leadership positions. Previous literature on Black educators' advancement to leadership positions supports these claims (Hall, 2015; McCray et al., 2007; Smith, 2016; Young et al., 2011). Throughout the findings of this dissertation, racialized organizations show how school districts can shape the

agency of Black educators. In doing so, their “social mobility,” full- “social incorporation within the membership of the district,” and plans for their future are negatively impacted (Ray, 2022). The subjectivity limits Black educators' ability to shape their agency when uncertain of the criteria or how they will be evaluated. Their agency is continuously limited when their subjectivity leads to a lack of transparency in the hiring process (a theme in WSD), hinders Black educators’ ability to map out their future because of uncertainty in the hiring process and lack of feedback on ways to improve for the next hiring cycle.

Application Data

There are two main similarities between the hiring rates in SSD and WSD. The first noticeable similarity is in the context of the student populations. Both districts have similar student racial composition. Then, an analysis of the hiring data showed that district experience increases the likelihood of applicants being hired. In WSD, when controlling for district experience, the likelihood of a Black applicant being hired increases for assistant principals. For principalship positions, the likelihood of a Hispanic applicant being hired increases. However, in SSD, the applicant pool is more racially diverse.

Recommendations

There is only one main similarity between the recommendations that Black educators provided within both districts. In each of the districts, educators mention the need for mentorship and support that is intentional and specific to the racialized needs of Black educators. The other recommendations were specific to the different needs and procedures in each district.

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Hiring policies and practices determine if candidates have the skills and expertise needed to fit within an organization and effectively perform the job. However, it is known that hiring policies and practices have historically been racist, sexist, and classist in ways that favor White candidates and those who align with the dominant European culture (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Henderson, 2015; Palmer & Mullooly, 2015; Smith, 2016). Hiring policies and practices are one of the last gates that professionals must pass to begin their career in their desired field at an ideal organization. The same is true in our education system. Yet, this topic is under-researched within educational leadership and policy literature. Many questions are unanswered, specifically: How are school districts selecting school leaders? Do these policies and practices align with their said values and goals? Are these policies and practices racialized? Moreover, what do Black educators deem as recommended improvements? This research begins to address these questions and opens windows of opportunities for additional research.

My research examines how two suburban school districts conduct their hiring practices and policies and analyzes these activities through racialized organizational theory. Interviews and district policies and content were used to understand the hiring process and the racialized elements of that hiring process. Application data was used to understand Black educators' hiring rate and determine if race was a statistically significant factor in hiring decisions. Interviews with Black educators were also used to determine what Black educators believed would be helpful for their district.

The study revealed that the Westside School District (WSD) relied on tangible qualifications like years of experience, visionary leadership with an emerging focus on equity,

and relational skills to determine candidates' merit and fit. With a racialized lens, the following issues emerged: a) subjectivity in evaluation criteria and a failure to address systemic issues and provide accountability. Finally, interview data from Black educators in WSD highlighted a need for better recruitment strategies and mentorship and support for Black educators. It was unexpected to observe that although WSD had race and equity policies and resolutions, they did not have any specific policies and practices to be more strategic in recruiting Black and Brown educators. This may explain why this district only has one Black assistant principal with a significant amount of educational experience (28 years) and no Black principals.

It was discovered that the Southside School District (SSD) relies heavily on a set of leadership values and behaviors to determine candidates' merit and fit throughout the hiring process. Next, using a racialized organizations theory framework for analysis, emergent themes expose critical issues: a) networking as a barrier, b) subjectivity in leadership values, and c) inclusivity and equity without racial equity. The theme of networking as a barrier is due to potential disparities in educators' access to insider knowledge and networking opportunities. The subjectivity in leadership values was apparent in how leadership values are evaluated. The final theme was the district's emphasis on inclusivity, diversity, and equity, but is distant from the matters of racial equity in hiring practices. The interview data from Black educators showed a desire for a) transparency in the hiring process, b) improvements in the school-community interview panels, and c) racial equity in providing resources and support for Black educators. In this district, seeing a more racially diverse application and leadership pool was significant despite having a similar small Black student population as WSD.

In sum, this study investigates “the Black Box,” which is the complexity and inner workings of hiring policies and practices at the district level. As districts become more aware of hiring practices, serve a larger population of students of color and students with individualized needs, and develop race and equity policies and resolutions, school leaders, researchers, and policymakers must begin to understand these changes and hiring procedures.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO RESEARCH

After the passing of *Brown* and the forced implementation of *Brown II*, school districts and states failed to create racially diverse and equitable leadership pipelines that could benefit all students. There was a pressing need for more rigorous accountability measures and comprehensive data collection regarding hiring decisions and the nonrenewal of Black educators’ contracts by states and school districts after the integration of schools (Fenwick, 2022). Pre-*Brown* scholars like Fenwick (2022), Rousmaniere (2013), Savage (2021), Tillman (2014), and Walker (1996) found that Black principals possessed high-quality training and certifications, successful school managers and were culturally responsive leaders who were resistant to anti-Blackness and fought against racism “by helping Black children believe in what they were capable of achieving” (Walker, 2003, p. 59). Post-*Brown*, researchers like Lomotey (1989a) focused on the effectiveness of Black principals on Black students’ academic success. However, over 38,000 Black teachers and principals lost their jobs between 1954 and 1965 (Hudson & Holmes et al., 1994).

As some school districts attempt to become more accountable in how they hire and train school leaders, this research makes a few contributions to the education leadership research. Specifically, as it relates to the leadership characteristics that schools value, the continuous need

for support and mentorship, and subjectivity and bias within the hiring process. The findings also expand our knowledge of ROT and recent hiring practices in school districts. Finally, this study makes several methodological contributions to the study of the hiring process and principal pipeline.

The most significant contribution to the research is the expansion of the literature on the "recruitment and selection of school administrators" that Hooker (2000) called "anecdotal, unpublished, and atheoretical." This body of work was primarily qualitative and correlative (Ward, 1998), and only a few scholars have begun to analyze the impact of race on the hiring of Black principals (Hall, 2015; McCray et al., 2007; Smith, 2016; Young et al., 2011). This dissertation study dives deep into the hiring of principals in two suburban communities to provide a detailed, in-depth description and analysis of the decentralized hiring policies and practices with a racialized lens, especially as Smith (2016) stated that "the predominance of a [racially] homogenous school leadership workforce is further compounded by a decentralized, localized model of education that results in variable routes to the hiring and promotion of school administrators dependent on the type of school, urbanicity, school district and state" (p. 123).

Next, previous literature provides numerous insights into Black school leaders and the principal pipeline (Agosto et al., 2015; Brown, 2005; Black, 2012; Cruzeiro & Boone, 2009; Farinde et al., 2016; Nesmith, 2013; Ortiz, 2000; Tillman, 2004; Walker, 2001). The literature on Black principals shows their lineage of excellent leadership that scholars have directly and indirectly characterized as "effective leadership" or "culturally responsive leadership" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Henderson, 2008; Kelley, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004; Sanchez et al., 2008; Tillman, 2004). These leadership styles often focus on student and staff care, being

responsive to the needs of students, staff, and community members, being able to produce change equitably, and serving in the "ethno-humanist" role (Brook, 2020). It was evident that both WSD and SSD value these leadership styles even if they were race-evasive in their language or could not clearly articulate how to adequately measure that in a way that was not subjective or performative. To some degree, the school districts agreed to participate in this study because they state in their values or racial equity policies that they want culturally responsive educators or they want to recruit racially diverse leaders who have the skillset and ability to display characteristics aligned with effective and culturally responsive leadership.

The study's third contribution to previous research is the alignment with the need for continuous support and mentorship for Black educators. Several studies included evidence that the race of school leaders can act as a challenge in the way others perceive them, lack of role models, and access to informal networks and systems (Mabakela & Madson, 2003; Smith, 2016). These challenges are in both school districts – especially SSD. In WSD, there was a desire for more mentorship and support to help incoming educators of color adapt to their new school and community environment. In SSD, there is a more visible presentation of the need for mentorship and informal networks when the educators describe how they successfully obtained a position because of the connections they were able to make.

Theoretically, using racialized organizations theory allows a better understanding of "how racial processes shape organizations in ways both obvious and obscure" (Ray, 2022, p. 94). Additionally, Smith (2016) argues that to "fully explore the presence of racism in hiring and promotion practices, it is important first to understand the different levels within which racism manifests: individual, institutional, and cultural." Although not described or explicitly discussed

in this study, the different levels within which racism manifests itself (individual, institutional, and cultural) are apparent and should be explored further. Scholars can also begin using ROT to understand hiring practices in various contexts – mainly suburban and rural areas often excluded from mainstream research. Understanding these dimensions helps to develop strategies to counterbalance racism and other racial implications built into our organizations and society to serve students and their families better.

As for methodological implications, this dissertation combined methodological tools to explore this racialized hiring process. The mixed methods used in this study to examine hiring processes deepen our conceptual understanding of how school districts make sense of racial equity and apply that to hiring decisions and impact. No studies to date that I was able to locate have comprehensively described and analyzed districts' hiring processes with district interviews, policy, and content analysis combined with the collected and analyzed districts' application data. Other studies have relied only on qualitative data like interviews with Black educators to gain insights into the hiring practices (Agosto et al., 2015; Brown, 2005; Black, 2012; Cruzeiro & Boone, 2009; Farinde et al., 2016; Nesmith 2013; Ortiz, 2000). These studies are beneficial for understanding Black principals' experiences after participating in the district's hiring process. However, this mixed methods analysis extends these insights to other educators familiar with the process. Interviews with hiring managers aid in better understanding the structure, internal processes, and reasoning behind hiring processes. Interviews are also used to understand the implications of the hiring process on Black educators and gain their understanding of how to improve hiring policies to add depth to the description of the hiring process. I include an analysis

of the district's policies, documents, and website content to aid in the understanding of whether the districts' expressed values and goals align with what takes place in practice.

This study combines qualitative measures with a quantitative analysis of districts' application data. This quantitative analysis brought the interviews and analysis to life by allowing for a preview of the implications of the hiring process. Instead of listening to *descriptions* of activities and how people *felt*, the application data gave insight into who was applying for leadership roles, the characteristics of applicants, and the hiring decisions that emerged. While the collection and analysis of application data is novice and novel to the body of literature, the data in this dissertation has a few limitations. The data shows likelihood, not causations, and is a small sample of one to three years of data.

Nevertheless, the finding that district experience is a crucial determinant of hiring decisions in both school districts suggests that, although not explicitly stated, school districts prefer individuals who have worked within the district before. In districts where Black candidates are less likely to have district experience due to the limited number of Black educators, this preference could negatively impact immediate attempts to diversify school leadership. Moreover, how can district experience perpetuate a stagnated culture or improve the relations within the districts – both can be true. Overall, this research emphasizes the complexity and nuance of hiring policies and practices in school districts. Therefore, additional quantitative work that analyzes the factors that influence hiring decisions is needed, as well as deeper analysis and the use of more quantitative tools to better understand causal relationships.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR WSD & SSD

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, POLICYMAKERS, AND POLICY ADVOCATES

This multi-site case study of school districts' hiring practices with a racialized lens allows for a broader understanding of how organizational practices and the implications of racialized lenses can impact school leadership and, ultimately, students and schools. While this study occurred in two suburban school districts, this work transcends geographic location and has policy implications. These school districts are trying to implement racial and equity-conscious hiring practices and researchers.

Policymakers at the federal, state and local levels are facing tension in promoting racial equity amidst heightened racial and political discord, exacerbated by bans on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies in hiring practices. While policymakers must navigate various barriers, there are several avenues that they can take to advance and advocate for racial equity in K12 schools and hiring practices for school leaders. At the federal level, the US Department of Education can provide financial incentives (grants and fellowships) to encourage investments in racially diverse leadership, provide states with recruitment strategies to attract racially diverse educators, and create a national report that collects and tracks districts' application data and hiring metrics.

At the state level, state agencies can follow similar mechanisms. First, state officials can establish goals for leadership diversity that align with the needs of their student population and are accountable for past harm conducted by the state during the implementation of *Brown II*. These diversity goals should be accompanied by guidance to school districts and financial incentives for recruiting and retaining diverse educators. Although some Republican-led states have issued book bans, states could consider ways to implement state standards that ensure that districts focus on ways to include diversity, cultural competence, and inclusive leadership

practices for school leaders and curriculum standards. These Republican-led states with educational gag orders (ex., book bans and anti-CRT laws in K12 schools) can publicly report the racial demographics of their school leadership along with the teacher and student data they typically display on their websites. These states and others can begin to report application data or invest in residences that might remove barriers to leadership careers for all candidates, including those who are Black. Next, state agencies can audit hiring processes, standards, and job requirements to ensure these mechanisms do not have unnecessary barriers for racially diverse candidates. The agencies can periodically reevaluate credentialing requirements and provide sample job descriptions and hiring practices to mitigate bias for school districts.

State universities and professional associations can design courses and curricula around the history of inequitable hiring decisions and equitable hiring practices. These organizations can also partner with school districts and state organizations to develop mentorship programs for school leaders of color and pair them with other individuals in the state who can provide guidance, advice, and networking opportunities. Admissions, recruiting, and district-university partnerships can also aid in addressing racial inequities in hiring practices. State universities' preparation programs for school leaders can annually evaluate their admissions policies to prioritize holistic review processes considering students' backgrounds, experiences, and potential to contribute to a racially diverse academic community. Universities and professional associations can develop strategies to attract diverse candidates for faculty and administrative positions, like reaching out to historically underrepresented groups, attending job fairs and conferences focused on racial diversity, and establishing partnerships with organizations that support diversity in education and employment and Black Greek-letter organizations. District-

university partnerships can work together to create educator-to-school leader pipelines that support Black educators' recruitment, development, and retention. By sharing resources, school districts and universities can create pathways for career advancement, create professional development sessions, and develop recruitment strategies for attracting Black educators. Finally, at the school district level, districts must also navigate and balance several factors in pursuing racial equity in hiring practices. Despite an increased understanding of the need for a diverse educator workforce, districts also must grapple with tension with school boards and staff with ideologies and behaviors that need to align with the mission of racial equity and compliance with legal policies and procedures. This case study shows that districts have the power to implement policies and strategies that can directly affect the hiring of diverse school leaders. What would it look like for one district to have racial equity policies and resolutions, recruitment strategies targeting diverse populations, continuous evaluation of hiring policies and data, and built-in recruitment and retention support geared toward Black school leaders? Each district has components of this work, but imagine the impact of a district comprising all the components.

Superintendents and district office personnel can create racial equity policies and resolutions that acknowledge past and present racial harm and clearly articulate their hopes for future racial equity. These resolutions and policy documents cannot be standalone items. Instead, all policy documents should include practical policy solutions that can create change. For example, districtwide mentorship and support programs for Black school leaders, district-sponsored membership to principal associations for Black leaders, and other forms of support that Black leaders in their district deem as necessary. The racial equity policies and resolutions must also engage in race equity work throughout their entire education system (hiring, student

curriculum, discipline policies, etc.). In other words, the equitable hiring of racially diverse school leaders also considers culturally responsive school culture and equity-centered practices throughout every function of the school. The last implication of the research for school districts includes human resource offices, with the backing of their leadership, consistently practicing inclusive hiring, analyzing hiring data transparently, and taking targeted interventions.

The work of racial equity in the hiring of school leaders is only possible with buy-in from district leadership, clear policies with accountability measures, racial equity training, and the ability to navigate resistance at every level in the district. In practice, Superintendents must lead and advocate for diversity efforts and assign additional funding to support the development of human resource departments and hiring managers. District leaders should annually analyze and train all individuals involved in the hiring committees, refine HR policies to promote racial diversity, reduce "hidden" biases, foster cultural competence, and create a more inclusive educational environment.

Overall, the equitable hiring of diverse school leaders requires collecting comprehensive data on recruitment and hiring along with clear goals, benchmarks, and accountability measures to track progress and ensure that racial equity initiatives have positive implications.

Policymakers must also have a long-term commitment to racial equity, evident through the (re)allocation of funding towards recruitment and retention programs for Black principals and the ongoing analysis of hiring policies and practices that includes engagement with Black educators, students, and community members.

For researchers, a wide variety of research can benefit from using the theory of racialized organizations theory. So far, scholars have used Ray's theory of racialized organizations to

explore medical schools (Tiako et al., 2021), practices and policies at colleges and universities (Foster, 2022; McCambly et al., 2023), banks (Friedline et al., 2022), and administrative practices (Ray et al., 2022). The research with the theory and K-12 schools typically focuses on students' and teachers' biases, school interactions, and school policies (ex., discipline) (Owens, 2022; Stewart et al., 2021). With racialized organization theory, researchers can aid in a deeper understanding of how policies and practices and individual bias perpetuate racial inequity (Tiako et al., 2021) and provide macro-, meso-, and micro-level analysis on the preparation programs and mentorship that Black educators typically attend and receive to understand these impactions on advanced job opportunities.

FUTURE WORK

The findings show a need for future research on how school districts hire Black principals. This work shows a need to understand better how school districts implement hiring policies and practices. My work shows that in mid-size school districts, the process is decentralized and typically led by a small group of school leaders. There is a need to explore this more in other contexts (different school sizes and how the race of those leaders impacts those processes). WSD and SSD school districts have a diverse student population and are more progressive schools in which they openly advocate for equity and, in the case of WSD- racial equity. These case sites clarify how equity is being embedded into hiring practices in districts that have some level of buy-in to the need for equity. However, additional research is needed to understand how school districts with no equity policies, resolutions, values, or goals are operating their hiring processes for school leaders. Are all districts engaging in similar hiring processes? Does only district experience, and not race, impact hiring decisions in school

systems? Furthermore, a study of how school districts that operate with an equity lens handle resistance from other stakeholders would be an excellent avenue for new research. A national or state-wide analysis of hiring policies and practices will provide more significant insights.

Second, researchers have interviewed Black educators to gain insights into potential hiring inequities after the process. Although this study provides further insight into what hiring managers say takes place throughout that process, little is known about all the other stakeholders who participate in hiring committees. Veteran teachers, community members, parents, superintendents, and board members all have some say-so in the hiring decision. How do other stakeholders impact or influence hiring decisions within school districts? What role do school board relations and ideologies play in equitable hiring decisions? Additional qualitative tools (ex., surveys and observations) with a broader range of stakeholders would aid in better understanding all the factors that drive hiring decisions.

Next, there is a need for the ongoing collection and analysis of application and hiring data. What would a state-wide or national database look like as it relates to the hiring of school leaders? What would a centralized process look like? The collection, analysis, and reporting of the hiring process and outcomes can serve as a level of accountability and transparency. However, future research will need to determine if such databases would aid in the amelioration and perpetuation of racial inequity in hiring practices. This data would aid in a more comprehensive understanding of the implications of inputs (preparation programs, job experiences, etc.) into the school leadership pipeline and the outcomes (retention and student outcomes).

Future work should also include additional research on ensuring the diversity of Black educators. This work includes studying the experiences of Black principals in White contexts and communities. How do these various environments impact the experience and effectiveness of Black educators? This work also includes examining the implementation of the practices involved in diversifying the educator workforce. What toolkits, trainings, reports, or audits could lead to more diverse school leadership and student achievement? Such work is practical with partnerships with districts, state leaders, Black educators, and community members and organizations.

Lastly, future research is necessary for other groups of school principals who are under-hired but reside in the margins of educational research - especially as it relates to intersectionality. Crenshaw's (1991) work argues that intersectionality is needed because identity-based politics, which is a source of strength, community, and intellectual development, frequently conflicts with or ignores intergroup differences. An example of intersectionality within this work is the need for research to understand how gender and sexuality play a part in the hiring decisions for Black women and other women of color. Researchers are increasingly completing qualitative research on Black women's experience after they are hired into principalship positions (Jackson-Dunn, 2018; Palmer & Mullooly, 2015; Weiner et al., 2022). However, the field can benefit from more in-depth mixed methods approaches to uncovering the black box that Black women encounter.

Scholars have long advocated for a more diverse educator workforce by highlighting the benefits of diverse school educators and advocating against inequitable practices. There is a need

for more research that will lead to practical changes in policies and practices. If done correctly, such work will increase accountability, transparency, equitable hiring outcomes, and eventually better academic and social well-being for all students – especially Black and Brown students.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this comprehensive study investigates the hidden internal workings of hiring policies and practices within two suburban school districts. This work uncovers the black box to allow for a better understanding of districts' racialized practices and provides implications for research, policies, and future work. The research highlights the role of hiring school leaders in shaping organizational culture and equity within educational institutions. By examining the hiring processes of two suburban school districts through a racialized lens, the study reveals nuanced issues such as subjectivity, networking barriers, and the disconnect between inclusivity and racial equity.

Moreover, the research contributes significantly to the educational leadership literature by highlighting the well-documented challenges that Black educators face during districts' recruitment and selection process for school leaders. Even when districts try to promote racial equity in hiring, some districts face difficulties in addressing all the challenges due to a system of racial inequities. It emphasizes the need for rigorous accountability measures, comprehensive data collection, and proactive strategies to address racial inequities in hiring practices. The implications of this study extend beyond research by offering actionable recommendations for policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels. Moving forward, future research should focus on expanding our understanding of hiring practices in diverse contexts, amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, and developing evidence-based interventions to advance equity in

educational leadership. By embracing the principles of transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement, stakeholders can work collaboratively to build a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape for all students and future educators.

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