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Leading for Equity: Elementary Principals in Pursuit of Excellence for All Students

By

Kyla Johnson

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

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Committee in charge:
Professor Tina Trujillo, Chair
Professor Janelle Perry
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Leading for Equity: Elementary Principals in Pursuit of Excellence for All Students
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By
Kyla Johnson

Abstract

Leading for Equity: Elementary Principals in Pursuit of Excellence for All Students

By

Kyla Johnson

Doctor of Education in Leadership for Educational Equity

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Tina Trujillo, Chair

The purpose of this study is to understand how three elementary principals in Sequoia Unified School District (SUSD) enact equity-centered instructional leadership in service of increased learning outcomes for its most vulnerable students. Specifically, this study examines how these principals employ leadership content knowledge, skills and dispositions to create learning conditions for all students to thrive. Investigation of how three SUSD principals *define* and *enact* equity-centered instructional leadership will shed light on what equity-centered instructional leadership looks like in practice and the types of challenges elementary principals may encounter.

The methodology used to conduct this three-month study was a cross case study analysis of three elementary principals in SUSD. Principal interviews, professional development observations, teacher focus group interviews and document analysis represented data collection methods employed to understand equity-centered instructional leadership.

Findings from in-depth principal and teacher focus group interviews elucidate the importance of SUSD elementary principals developing a critical consciousness lens, political leadership skills, and technical expertise, grounded in instructional and transformational leadership research, to enact equity-centered instructional leadership. Challenges encountered by the elementary principals suggest that the combination of leadership knowledge, skills and dispositions are required for SUSD elementary principals to transform their school environment into an inclusive space to promote quality teaching and learning for all student

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all the SUSD principals who demonstrate courageous leadership in their quest to deliver on the promise of providing a quality education for all students. Your dedication and relentless drive to transform schools for the students and families in greatest need have served as a great source of inspiration for my work as a researcher and practitioner. This work is also dedicated to my incredibly supportive family for their unconditional love, encouragement and patience throughout my research journey. To my mom and dad, Joslin Johnson and Bill Lloyd, for every delicious home-cooked meal; to my darling husband, Floyd Trammell, for being the best cheerleader on this earth; and, to my beautiful children, Noah and Naima Trammell, for surrounding mommy with oodles of hugs and kisses to sustain me. You all have been the source of my strength through this process.

Leading for Equity: Elementary Principals in Pursuit of Excellence for All

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Big Picture

Sequoia Unified School District (SUSD) serves a high-minority, high-poverty student population where close to 71 percent of students who live in poverty represent African-American and Latino descent (California Department of Education, 2012). Similar to urban districts across the nation, Sequoia faces a myriad of challenges in trying to address the disproportionate educational outcomes for students of color.

Despite numerous decades of reform efforts, persistent underachievement of African-American and Latino students has remained relatively unchanged. Per SUSD board policy, all SUSD high school graduates will be required to complete all A-G courses with a grade of "D" or better. Thus far, only 30 percent of English Language Learners, 46 percent of African-Americans, and 59 percent of Latino students meet this requirement, as compared to 73 percent of Asian and 76 percent of white students.

Glaring statistics for African-American and Latino students hold firm when examining chronic absences. African-American and Latino kindergarten students possess the highest chronic absent rate in the district—approximately 26 percent for African-Americans and 15 percent for Latino students compared to only 7.5 percent for Asian and White students. Concerns regarding the academic performance of African-American students are also exacerbated by the alarming rate African-American students are systematically excluded from classrooms. For example, 67 percent of African-Americans—which represents only 32 percent of the total district student population—were recommended for expulsion via the district's Disciplinary Hearing Panel process in 2012.

As SUSD once again called for drastic systemic change, the ushering in of new district leadership under Superintendent Hill answered this latest "call" by launching yet another district reform focused on the black and brown opportunity gap with hopes of galvanizing educators, students, families, community-based organizations, and city officials. With Superintendent Hill's leadership, SUSD laid out an ambitious seven-year strategic plan that outlined the needed infrastructure to build a full service community school district. The plan called for the conversion of every Sequoia school into a community hub—a place where Sequoia educators would work in authentic collaboration with a host of community-based organizations to meet the complex academic and social needs of urban youth—which would create the school conditions necessary to address not only academic challenges, but the socioeconomic and sociopolitical challenges that perpetuate black and brown underachievement as well.

Unanimous board approval for this ambitious vision launched the process of creating a seven-year strategic plan, consisting of four process phases:
1. Initiation
2. Design
3. Implementation
4. Tuning and Sustaining

Phases 1 and 2 involved the rallying of the community voice to form various task forces. The intent of these task forces was to allow the Sequoia community an

opportunity to be part of the strategic design process. Synthesis of each task force's best thinking and visioning about community schools was then reviewed and compiled into one strategic document that was later adopted by the Board (Dreyfuss, as cited in Hall, 2013).

SUSD's strategic plan differs significantly from other district reform approaches that focus purely on technical and structural solutions to improve the quality of teaching and learning, such as redesigning systems to recruit more effective teacher and leaders, or improving district-wide standards alignment of teaching and professional development (Voices in Urban Education, 2013). Beyond improving student achievement, Sequoia's strategic plan calls for the public school system to improve not just student learning, but student life outcomes, by servicing the whole child via elimination of health, social, and educational inequity, and providing a safe and caring school environment across the district.

The notion of schools serving as the center of the community is far from a novel concept; its roots can be traced to the early 20th century (Dryfoos, 1994; Roger, 1998). Educator philosophers such as, John Dewey, and more recently from organizations like the National Center for Community Education and the Coalition for Community Schools have advocated for and supported systemic reform initiatives rooted in this notion for decades. One example of this advocacy is the Coalition of Community Schools, which has partnered with over 11 communities, including: Chicago, Illinois; Evansville, Indiana; Portland, Oregon; and Tukwila, Washington (Blank & Berg, 2006) to develop community schools. [1]

Adding further complexity to SUSD's strategic plan, on August 6, 2013, the United States Department of Education approved the California Office to Reform Education (CORE) waiver, brought forth by eight unified districts. The CORE waiver granted these districts the opportunity to design an alternative accountability system to No Child Left Behind (NCLB). As CORE worked to design more holistic accountability metrics, SUSD paid close attention, hoping, in the future, to adopt metrics that measured academic and socio emotional student progress, racial disparities in academic achievement as well as school and district conditions for learning. The potential for tighter alignment among local and national accountability systems could create more favorable conditions for collective "take up" of the district policy enactment.

Framing The Problem

The construction of SUSD's strategic plan fostered numerous opportunities for collective dialogue among district and community constituents to develop an understanding for the rationale behind the soon-to-be-developed strategic plan. Engagements led by former Superintendent Hill along with district cabinet members generated palpable momentum and advocacy, both internally and externally, for structural changes outlined in the plan. Yet, while ideals and principles of the strategic plan were warmly welcomed by district and community members, the first calls to action, particularly for educators on the "front-lines"— teachers and leaders—were not always welcomed with open arms.

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[1] For a more extensive list and information about the Community School approach, please visit the Coalition of Community Schools website: www.communityschools.org.

As the theory of the district plan met the realities of implementation, many principals came to realize the enormity of the work involved in creating versus envisioning community schools. In particular, some principals began to realize that despite declining fiscal and human resources they would be expected to lead in significantly different ways than they had lead previously in order to create the necessary conditions for students most outside the sphere of success to graduate from high school and college as well as to be career and community ready. The *do different* in terms of district expectations for principal leadership can be captured by the term, *cross-boundary leadership*—forming, integrating, and sustaining effective partnerships with families and community agencies in service of robust academic, civic, and social-emotional student outcomes[2].

Implementation of the SUSD strategic plan illuminated the obstacles that principals had to endure and overcome in order to build community schools. Maintaining a focus on instructional improvements while forming and leading strategic community partnerships proved far more complex in reality. In spite of strong support from the community and board of education, endorsement among school sites varied widely across the system.

Transition in District Leadership

Superintendent Hill departed and was followed by one-year interim Superintendent Brown. Along with the onset of federal requirements from the Core Waiver, Superintendent Brown birthed yet another set of initiatives. A strong proponent of post-secondary readiness, Brown set the tone for deeper investment and focused attention on developing College and Career pathways—dual enrollment classes, internships, and career counseling—as a key lever to increase high school graduation rates.[3] During Superintendent Brown's tenure from 2013-2014, the High School Executive Officer as well as multiple central office departments spent time fundraising in order to acquire additional resources and align current initiatives to this reform effort. The cumulative effect of shouldering initiatives embedded in SUSD's original district plan along with the new emphasis on expanding College and Career pathways to all high schools resulted in a high degree of district mandates that led to the weakening of the district's central structure. During this time, schools expressed vehement overwhelm about the number of mandates and lack of guidance around implementation. Addressing the district's health and developing a coherent framework to show alignment among the various district initiatives would become first order of business for the incoming Superintendent.

When Superintendent Harris began his tenure, he assessed the district's current state by embarking on a listening campaign. In response to principal dissatisfaction with the lack of district focus and lack of site-based resources, Wilson partnered with approximately ten K-12 SUSD principals to develop a

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[2] Definition for cross-boundary leadership derived from Sequoia Unified School District's draft Principal Rubric for evaluation. This rubric was piloted among a set of SUSD principals.

[3] The Linked Learning approach to high school education organizes student learning in themed-based pathways to integrate academics, technical education, and real world experiences in order to strengthen postsecondary success for high schools.

Continuous Improvement Guide—a monthly structure and process to help site leaders identify the right district priorities for their site improvement plan. While still maintaining community schools as a key lever of school change, Harris introduced the *Continuous Improvement Guide* as a way to support school leaders with the implementation process of key district initiatives, which he articulated as: *college and career readiness, transforming school culture, and building community schools*.

Despite some principal participation in the development of the Continuous Improvement Guide, principal response to this new direction is still largely unknown. Some principals may welcome this new initiative, viewing it as a strong message from the district to select initiatives most relevant to site goals. However, other principals, many who have experienced the leadership goals of multiple superintendents, may remain skeptical, reticent to believe that they will be able to ignore initiatives irrelevant to their site needs while also receiving ongoing support to realize their site goals.

Purpose of The Research Study

Two superintendents and multiple district initiatives later, SUSD has continued to maintain an unwavering commitment to community schools and equity as a core value of district reform. Much of this commitment can be contributed to some level of value coherence among board approved district goals and the recently approved Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). Moreover, SUSD's board of education adopted a district accountability system which established student metrics for academics, chronic absences and racial disparities in student discipline, with all metrics requiring disaggregation by diverse subgroup.[4] The approval of SUSD's LCAP plan further crystallized the district's commitment to equity and endorsement of community schools as a key lever of change.

But what does it actually mean to lead and reform schools in service of equity? The question of how district value statements like: "We believe that families and teachers primarily influence student success and should be supported by the district, schools and community in creating learning opportunities for students…" or, "Establish a culture centered on teaching and learning and align resources to close achievement gaps and ensure all students are college and career ready" become realized still remains.[5] More importantly, it is important to explore how leaders at all levels of the district translate these values into practices that result in increased learning opportunities for all students.

The purpose of this study is to examine the rhetoric of equity in order to understand how to align daily action steps in pursuit of this often touted, but rarely implemented concept. In particular, this study intends to illuminate how school principals *operationalize* equity in the service of increased learning outcomes for the most vulnerable students. Therefore, this study will identify specific leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions that principals should employ in their quest to create the necessary learning conditions for all students to thrive. By investigating

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[4] *See SUSD Legislative Information Center, File Number 12-2920*

[5] See Sequoia Unified School District's website to access the original strategic plan and Superintendent Harris' Entry Plan.

how principals define and enact equity-centered leadership, specifically equity-centered instructional leadership, I plan to clarify what equity-centered leadership looks like in action and the challenges principals encounter.

Another purpose of this study is to contribute to the growing body of educational leadership literature on social justice, equity, and leadership (Bell, Jones, & Johnson, 2002; Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Fullan, 1993; Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000; Theoharis, 2007). Findings from this study will provide guidance and suggestions as to how districts can improve the capacity of school principals to more effectively navigate the social and political resistance that school leaders often face when they lead in service of all students.

In this study I use McKenzie and Scheurich's (2004) definition of *equity* to define *equity-centered instructional leadership* as leadership that explicitly calls for the disruption of status quo organizational structures, policies, and practices through *redistribution of resources*—people, time, and money—and development of local partnerships with families, local community and other governance structures, in order to transform academic, civic, and social-emotional student outcomes (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Shields, 2004).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I will examine how three elementary principals define equity-centered instructional leadership and how these definitions shape their actions. Additionally, this chapter will illuminate the struggles these principals encounter as they navigate their school communities in service of increasing learning opportunities for all students. Drawing from three bodies of literature—politics of education, reculturing for equity and educational leadership—I will develop the conceptual framework for my study, which will guide my methodological approach. Data collected from this study will include interviews with principals, my own observations, and document analysis. A culmination of the ata from this research study will provide the following insights:

- Illuminate the relationship between principal beliefs about equity and principal enactment of equity-centered instructional leadership
- Provide concrete examples of equity-centered instructional leadership by chronicling principal action steps
- Describe the resistance that principals encounter as they disrupt status quo policies, structures, and practices at their school sites

Consulting the Knowledge Base

The bodies of literature that I have selected for this study will focus on principal attitudes and beliefs about equity and how they shape principal enactment of district policy. I will use the existing research to better understand the political forces and reculturing challenges that emerge when principals enact equity-centered instructional leadership. In addition, the existing literature will guide my analysis of study findings to ascertain and then recommend a set of leadership practices—knowledge, skills, and disposition—that principals need to build their capacity as equity-centered instructional leaders.

In this paper, I will frame my analysis using concepts from the literature on the politics of education in order to highlight how political forces and processes shape the adoption and enactment of certain leadership practices. I will then draw on research, which investigates how schools reculture for equity as a means to investigate organizational structures that will increase student-learning opportunities as well as the most effective types of partnerships between students, families, and community. Lastly, I will use the social justice leadership literature to analyze specific ways that principals shape the school environment and larger school community to transform academic, civic, and social-emotional outcomes for all students.

Politics of Education

While design and enactment of policy undoubtedly require technical expertise—effective design, communication, and implementation of policy also requires a political expertise that entails understanding the negotiation of power among system stakeholders, ideological diversity, and competing interests. Political expertise is of equal importance to ensure that the intended purpose of the policy is understood, supported, and carried out by stakeholders (Ball, 1987). An absence of attention to political processes that reflect the power of stakeholders and groups

may undermine policy formation in its genesis stages (Noblit, Berry, & Demsey, 1991; Malen, 1994). That is because the examination of policy development cannot be divorced from the power and dominance that constituents or constituent groups exert over others for reasons, such as: obtaining a power position within policy enactment, lobbying for one's own personal agenda during policy design process, or strategizing to secure favorable policy implementation or dismantlement of the policy altogether (Hess, 1999; Datnow, 2000).

Political concepts like *micro-politics* (Datnow, 2000) and *value conflicts* (Trujillo, 2012) elucidate the inextricably linked nature of policy design and politics—that, "...policymaking can be explained not just in terms of concrete, readily seen processes, but in terms of less visible normative and ideological forces that act upon those who craft agendas and policies" (p.4). In a four-year case study of 22 elementary schools, Datnow (2000) used a micro-political lens to investigate the reform adoption process. Findings have suggested that power dynamics play a significant role in the shaping of the school reform adoption process. In most cases, either the district pre-selected a reform for principals, or principals pre-selected a reform model for their teachers. Though principals, technically speaking, had a choice as to whether to participate in the reform initiative, the same way teachers technically had a choice to agree to the pre-selected reform initiative brought forth by principals, *positional authority* played a significant role in shaping the school reform process at school sites. Evidence from Datnow's study suggested that many teachers and principals expressed feelings of not believing they truly had choice in the matter and agreed to participate due to perceived negative consequences from their superiors.

In a qualitative case study focused on an urban school district, Trujillo (2012) examined how, "…normative differences trigger political resistance to district policies targeting equity-oriented, ambitious change" (p.2). *Value conflicts* serve as an illuminating construct to investigate the degree of alignment or discord between ideological beliefs about instruction embedded in district instructional policies and those held by central office leaders, teachers and principals. Trujillo's (2012) findings suggest that *ideological diversity* among constituents regarding quality instruction is a significant shaper of district policy. Since the superintendent held highly technocratic, rational beliefs about quality instruction and valued conciliation over incitement in dealing with organizational conflict, final formation of instructional policies remained focused on basic skills standards and high-stakes testing, at the expense of ensuring equal access to high quality curriculum. Consequently, proposed equity-oriented policy recommendations that ran contrary to instructional values and beliefs held by many powerful school constituents were dismantled via political processes—board and union meetings—that contributed to the shaping of final policy design.

If we accept the notion that school sites are mediating institutions—"…an organized social setting that channels macro-political and economic forces…to mediate interactions between individuals within those sites…"—then the principal must understand political forces and their influence on school-site processes in order to contend with how political dynamics, among school constituents, shape formation of district policy at the site level (Oakes, Welner, Yonezawa, & Allen,

2005). Being that the driving force of an equity-centered instructional leadership approach is to disrupt normative instructional policy, practices and processes, such a leadership stance will inevitably ignite some form of political unrest among school community members that will fall into the lap of principals to negotiate. Hence, finessed political understanding of policy design becomes a crucial aspect of the principalship. Conceptual constructs within the politics of reform literature will illuminate the relationship of site political processes and shaping of district policy as well as unpack principal leadership moves that resolve, or attempt to resolve, such tensions.

Reculturing for Equity

An equity-centered district policy calls for the disruption of status quo organizational structures, policies, and practices through the redistribution of resources—people, time and money—as well as the development of local and national partnerships with family, local community and other governance structures to transform academic, civic, and social emotional student outcomes. Therefore, what principals pay attention to and how they organize schools should be centered on shifting attitudes and beliefs about the students of color and families by tending to the quality of relationships among school, families and the larger community (Oakes & Wells, 1997; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Shields, 2004). In this section, I will summarize two *reculturing* constructs within this body of literature that illustrate the role attitudes and beliefs play in shaping organizational decisions, and how *collective dialogue*, as a *reculturing* process, can create school conditions, "…for all children to learn in school communities that are socially just and deeply democratic" (Shields, 2004, p. 10).

McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) offered the construct, *equity traps*—derived from a participatory action research study—to help explain how teachers' deficit values and beliefs about students and families of color shape individual and collective teacher actions. McKenzie and Scheurich's in-depth discussions with eight experienced White teacher participants chronicled the ways in which deficit attitudes about students of color contribute to negative interactions between teachers and students and are used to rationalize *laissez faire* attitudes toward student academic failure. In essence, the equity traps construct posits that deficit attitudes and beliefs about students of color, "…ensnare, undermine and defeat the ability of educators to create equitable schools…[and] are both individual and collective, often reinforced among administrators and teachers through formal and informal communication, assumptions and beliefs" (McKenzie & Scheurich, p. 28). Hence, investigating the mindset of school principals and teachers in relation to leadership and teacher practices, sheds light on the dynamic relationship between principal values and leadership actions.

Another pragmatic leadership construct—anchored in school empirical research as well as her own K-12 educational experience—offered by Shields (2004) elucidated a leadership perspective in the service of creating school communities designed to improve life outcomes for marginalized students. The "seat" of this construct sits on three conceptual "legs"—*transformative leadership, developing positive relationships with students and facilitating moral dialogue*. In

particular, Shields stated that the fundamental role of a principal is the ability to facilitate conversation that allows disparate perspectives to be honored and considered in the organizational life of the school:

> …to be a catalyst for such conversation both in…school and in the surrounding community. Dialogue is…central to the task of educational leadership—not a weak concept of dialogue interpreted as strategies for communicating but a strong concept of dialogue as a way of being. Dialogue and relationships are not elements that can be selected and discarded at will; rather, they are ways of life—recognitions of the fundamental differences among human beings and of the need to enter into contact, into relationships dialogue and sense making…with one another…dialogue opens each individual educator to differing realities and worldviews… (p. 116).

Critical to the *reculturing* process is a leader's ability to facilitate *moral dialogue* in order to create necessary conditions for school and community stakeholders to ask honest questions and ultimately reach new levels of understanding. It is through the process of listening, reflecting, and learning—a process that principals play a significant role in constructing—that *collective dialogue* supports the school as an organization to interrupt the stronghold of deficit views and attitudes toward students and families of color.

Creating and holding an organizational space that honors differences will inevitably wax discord within an organization. Figuring out how to shape and ultimately shift individual and collective action, in the midst of dissension, requires reculturing and retooling of school communities so they are willing to rally around new sets of organizational purposes, structures, and processes in support of new learning goals. Conceptual constructs like *equity traps and moral dialogue* illuminate aspects of how individual attitudes and beliefs shape organizational beliefs about students and families of color as well as leadership moves that either interrupt or reinforce these deficit attitudes and beliefs.

Educational Leadership

Leithwood et al. (2004) stated:

Effective education leadership makes a difference in improving learning. There's nothing new or especially controversial about that idea. What's far less clear, even after several decades of school renewal efforts, is just how leadership matters, how important those effects are in promoting the learning of all children, and what the essential ingredients of successful leadership are (p.3).

Researchers examining school-related factors have found that in addition to the influence of the classroom teacher, the principal shapes organizational conditions that support high quality teaching and learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004). Numerous educational leadership studies have indicated that the principalship accounts for approximately 25 percent of school-related factors that affect high quality teaching and learning (Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis, Leithwood,

Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010). Underperforming schools, in particular, depend on strong leadership to become accomplished schools.

In fact, all documented accounts of transformative schools acknowledge the powerful role of the principalship in the transformation process. Regardless of the leadership "flavor"—moral, authentic, shared, distributed, transformational, instructional and social justice—principals, by virtue of their influence on work settings and school stakeholders—indirectly influence student life outcomes. In this section, I will highlight three leadership constructs to be used in this research study—*instructional, transformational, and social justice leadership*. I will use these leadership constructs to guide my examination of the leadership qualities of principals as their schools enact an equity-centered district policy.

Instructional Leadership

To not focus on *instructional leadership* would be to miss the entire point of the principalship—improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. *Instructional leadership* concentrates on *teacher quality*, which is the most important school-related factor that contributes to student learning (Blasé & Blasé, 1999). Darling-Hammond (1997) stated:

> Although things like standards, funding and management are essential supports, the sine qua non of education is whether teachers know how to make complex subjects accessible to diverse learners and whether they can work in partnership with parents and other educators to support children's development. If only a few teachers have this capacity, most schools will never be able to produce better education for the full range of students who attend them. Widespread success depends on the development of a profession wide base of knowledge (p. 294)

The construct of *instructional leadership* interrogates principal action steps that support teachers' ability to deliver high quality curriculum and instruction (Hallinger, 2003). This research aims to discover essential leadership qualities that enhance an organization's ability to support quality teaching and learning.

Transformational Leadership

In contrast to instructional leadership, where effective leadership is largely viewed as a *teacher quality* endeavor, transformational leadership focuses on broader organizational considerations (Leithwood et al., 1990). According to Leithwood et al. (as cited in Marks & Printy, 2003), transformational leadership,"…provides intellectual direction and aims at innovating within the organization, while empowering and supporting teachers as partners in decision making" (p. 54). In order to transform school organizations, principals must figure out how to ignite change within people to push them towards non-conventional actions. Leithwood (1994) referred to this form of leadership as *second-order change*—principals lead school organizations through change with the goal of increasing teacher capacity and ultimately student learning. Examples of *second-order changes* are: adoption of new programs, teaching techniques or school policies.

Findings from a mixed-method study conducted by Marks and Printy (2003) indicated that good leaders know how to: (a) generate ideas, (b) engender organizational innovation, (c) influence individuals, and effectively facilitate and lead individuals through the change process, and *(d)* develop systems, structures and processes that foster collaborative dialogue between teachers and principals. Modeling organizational values, developing a culture of intellectual stimulation, (Marks & Printy, 2003), and creating structures for participatory decision-making represent other technical skill sets that researchers have shown are necessary for principals to effectively lead (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Hallinger, 2003; Spillane et al., 2003). In essence, transformational leadership highlights and unveils the capacity and skill sets needed to lead a school through school wide change.

Social Justice Leadership

Social Justice Leadership recognizes forces beyond the school site that influence quality teaching and learning. In particular, scholars who study or employ this leadership construct pay careful attention to political, social, cultural, historical, and economic realities of larger society and their influence on school district and school systems (Larson & Murtadha, 2003). Therefore, inextricably linked to leadership is a focus on the myriad of internal and external forces that reinforce *structural inequities* (Marshall & Olivia, 2010):

> The quality of daily decisions that principals make does not simply have to do with the technical rationality of administration and management but also with whether they are willing to openly and explicitly advocate for underserved students and their communities. (p.22).

Social Justice leadership attends to *redistributive justice*—eliminating the opportunity gap and providing equal access to resources—in service of improving life outcomes for students of color (Fraser, 1997). Leadership actions under this construct include: promoting inclusive structures, inclusive pedagogies, and inclusive connections between schools, families, and larger school community (Riehl, 2000).

Kose (2009) examined social justice leadership within the realm of teacher professional development. Findings from this study of three principals offer five distinct social justice leadership roles that build teacher capacity in creating inclusive learning environments: a) transformative visionary, b) transformative learning leader, c) transformative structural leader, d) transformative cultural leader and e) transformative political leader. Examples of these leadership stances include: spending considerable time establishing parent empowerment groups for underserved populations, hiring diverse personnel, and accessing community resources (Kose, 2009).

Theoharis (2007) offered an empirical autoethnography to illuminate the leadership moves of seven social justice principals—how they both cope and develop proactive strategies, when faced with countervailing pressures. Theoharis' analysis of interviews through a three-pronged framework of *resistance* illustrated how principals:

- Enacted resistance against forms of historic marginalization of particular students;

- Faced resistance as a result of their leadership stance against oppression; and
- Developed resistance (or resiliency) to sustain themselves in the face of such challenging work.

Shields (2010), offered another social justice leadership framework in a qualitative study to make visible the leadership moves of two principals. Excerpts from observations and interviews demonstrate how principals facilitated discussions focused on: "…careful and consistent deconstruction of old knowledge frameworks that perpetuated deficit thinking and inequity and their replacement with new frameworks of inclusion…" (p. 576). In particular, the two principals' led to, "…more equitable approaches but also to an increased understanding on the part of all staff of issues related to power and privilege (Shields, 2010).

While technical responsibilities remain in the forefront of principal leadership—setting and managing towards a vision; building capacity of staff; and setting the overall organizational tone—social justice leadership recognizes the deleterious influential nature of normative beliefs about students of color and families on the crafting of policies, structures, and processes at the federal, state, local, and school level. This construct's recognition of the power of deficit attitudes and beliefs about certain children challenges principals to not just improve and refine policies, structures, and processes, but to *interrupt* such status quo structures in service of creating inclusive school communities.

Research Guiding Questions

In this research study, I examined how principals define equity-centered instructional leadership and how their definition shapes their leadership moves. I paid particular attention to political forces within the school community that shaped principal decision-making as well as reculturing challenges that emerged and how principals responded to such challenges. Given the significant change in district leadership, I will also take note of how principals connected Superintendent Anderson's vision with their understanding of a Full Service Community School District.

I drew from three bodies of literature—*politics of education, reculturing for equity, and educational leadership*—to guide my analysis of the data I collected, which included principal interviews, teacher focus group interviews, school site observations, and document analysis. The following three research questions guided my investigation:

1. How do principals define equity-centered instructional leadership?
2. To what extent do principal actions align to their definition of equity-centered instructional leadership?
3. To what extent do principal actions align to literature focused on equity-centered principal leadership?

Culmination of data from this study provided the following insights:
- Concrete examples of *equity-centered instructional leadership* by chronicling principal leadership moves

- Guidance to district leaders about capacity-building needs of elementary principals in service of creating schools that accelerate learning outcomes for all students

Conceptual Framework

Though a myriad of factors contributed to principal enactment equity-centered instructional leadership, I will use a conceptual framework to capture a "specific moment in time" of interactions at play when principals enacted this leadership approach. Three critical conceptual "ingredients" for framing this analysis were: *value coherence, equity traps, and the zone of mediation* (see figure 1). These constructs guided site interviews, observations, document analysis, and the development of the questions that I posed to principals and teachers during interviews. In this section, I will define each concept and explain its relevancy to the phenomenon under investigation.

Value Coherence

Literature regarding *values* and principalship has indicated that personal values are inextricably linked to leadership (Nanus, 1992; Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993; Day, Harris, & Hadfield, 2001). Individual core values—how individuals define respect, fairness, and equality, caring for the well being and whole development of students and staff, integrity, and honesty—are often part of strong religious or humanitarian ethics, rendering it virtually impossible for separation of personal from professional values. In other words, values play a significant role in the shaping of identity. More specifically, the concept of *work motivation* can help to explain how values show up in decisions that teachers and leaders make (Campbell-Evans, 1991; Begley, 2001). This concept suggests that people motivate themselves by seeking, finding, and carrying out work that satisfies their needs. Human beings are goal-oriented, intuitively sustained by feelings, aesthetic values, and self-concept. Put succinctly, people engage in certain actions based on who they are and what they stand for.

Values contribute to the mindset teachers and leaders take with them, consciously or unconsciously, whatever they go. If values shape how teachers and leaders orient themselves toward and ultimately respond to particular issues and dilemmas, then examining values will help to explain the extent to which principals enact equity-centered instructional leadership.

Equity Traps

The *equity traps construct* illuminates patterns of deficit-based thinking and behavior that block individual and collective movement towards greater equity in schools (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Principals and teachers often reinforce these traps via their own values about students of color. This typology for deficit-based thinking—*deficit view, racial erasure, employment, avoidance of the gaze, and paralogic beliefs and behaviors*—provides useful categories for examining teacher and principal values about students and families of color and the academic achievement levels of these students.

Zone of Mediation

The zone of mediation construct highlights the intersection among school, district, state, and federal policies with the larger political, economic, and social patterns within society. According to Oakes, Welner, Yonezawa, and Allen (2005): "Schools are situated in particular, local enactments of larger cultural norms, rules, values, and power relations, and these cultural forces promote either stability or change" (p. 288). Because schools are "nested" within larger organizational structures—district and larger society—the values that individual teachers and principals hold about teaching, leadership, purpose of schooling, and students and families of color are not independently held. Instead, these values are heavily influenced by interactions and messaging from school and local environment as well as larger state and national context.

For example, the notion that teachers should be held accountable for student academic results as a part of their evaluation process has been a source of great tension for many public school systems. Messages emanating from the national level (i.e. Broad Foundation versus teacher unions) the state and district level (i.e. enactment of Race to the Top policy) and the school level (i.e. school cultures that promote peer observations and feedback) intersect at the school level as the construction known as the *zone of mediation.* In the zone of mediation, these conflicting messages shape the ideological beliefs of individual educators and parents.

The degree of *value coherence* among teachers and principals about the purpose of schooling as well as students and families of color and their ability to learn within a particular school as well as at the district, surrounding community, and societal level all contribute to the setting of constraints on site latitude and maneuverability to interrupt inequitable practices (Oakes et al., 2005). Hence, the school site becomes the zone of mediation, the location of multiple views and perspectives about how best to support the teaching and learning of students of color, with value coherence contributing to the level of tolerance for enactment of equity-centered district policies. This construct illuminates the complex environment that principals must navigate as they enact equity-centered district policy as well as the site-specific nature of such an environment. In the methodology section, I will use the work of Miles and Huberman (2008) to explain how my conceptual framework will inform data collection as well as data analysis

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study will utilize a qualitative approach to a multiple case study design. I take a qualitative approach to understand and explain participant thinking and meaning. Creswell (2007 (Stake, 1995)) defines qualitative research as:

> …an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts in a natural setting (p. 15).

I selected a qualitative approach to examine how principals enact equity-centered instructional leadership so that I might observe principals in their natural setting to tell, in great detail, the participant's story from the viewpoint of a learner rather than expert. My employment of a qualitative approach then assumes a certain disposition to the acquisition of knowledge. Knowledge is a social process, constructed as people make sense of the world around them, grounded in the tradition of inquiry—asking well-thought out questions to better understand phenomena (Creswell, 2007).

The specific empirical method I choose to employ is case study. Stake (1995) defined case studies as:

> …a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity. And researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time.

A case study approach is an appropriate choice for this study because I focus on how a phenomenon plays out in three different complex school environments. Yin (1994) stated that "case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' and 'why' questions are being posed…and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context" (p. 1). In this study, the phenomenon I examine— how the collective stance of a principal's knowledge, skills, and disposition toward equity shape a principal's understanding and enactment of equity-centered instructional leadership—matches well with a cross case methodological approach for two reasons. One, multiple cases often yield stronger analytical conclusions; and two, as Stake (1995) and Yin (1994) have shown, comparing multiple cases allows a researcher to investigate how the phenomenon plays out in different contexts

Case Study Selection Criteria

Although school leadership research articulates a set of common practices all effective leaders should employ such as developing and maintaining a school vision, managing school staff, developing a positive school culture, and managing the instructional program, researchers have also argued that effective leadership is *context-dependent*—school conditions and factors shape how a principal leads to improve student learning outcomes (Copland, 2003; Hallinger, 2003; Marshall, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2010). To gain a deeper understanding of the different ways principals might enact equity-centered instructional leadership, I observed this

phenomenon in three elementary schools that exhibited a set of similar characteristics in some areas and contrasting in others:

- Similar school-level
- Similar school size
- Similar instructional focus
- Experienced principal leader
- Diverse geographical location in Sequoia
- Diverse composition of student demographics

I provide a brief rationale for each school criterion and conclude with a summary of criteria for the three schools selected, outlined in Table 1.

School Level

School size and structures can shape how principals take on the role of instructional leader (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2004). For example, secondary schools tend to have more complex instructional organizational structures than elementary schools. These structures tend to shape the role of principal as instructional leader. For example, high schools principals tend to guide and monitor the instructional program through the leadership of content department heads, whereas elementary principals tend to work directly with grade-level teachers (Louis et al., 2010). Given this reality, I will select schools at the same school level—elementary, middle, or high school. Observing principals at the same school level will allow for easier analysis of different leadership moves across the three sites.

School Size

The size of the school and classroom play a critical role in how principals lead (Leithwood et al., 2004). Finn (2002) and Lee (2000) argued that the smaller the school size—particularly for at-risk youth—the more likely schools can provide resources and programs, before, after and during school, that ensure student access to academic and socio-emotional interventions, broader enrichment supports, and ongoing relationships with at least one significant adult. By selecting schools with similar school and class size, I will be able to compare and contrast how principals establish structures and supports to improve student learning.

Instructional Focus

Selecting schools with a similar instructional focus will also provide another opportunity to examine instructional leadership similarities and differences based on how three different schools leverage their own leadership expertise and utilize common district supports to improve their instructional program.

Experienced Principal

As a practitioner conducting this study, I am most interested in observing and understanding the nuances of leading in service of equity. For this reason, I will exclude novice administrators, as they are more likely to be still grasping foundational practices of school leadership. Novice administrators may be unable to articulate, to the depth of an experienced principal, the knowledge, skills, and

dispositions needed to interrupt inequitable school practices. Moreover, novice leaders may not have had as many opportunities as experienced leaders to enact equity-centered instructional leadership. I define novice principals as school leaders with less than two years of administrative experience. Administrative experience is defined as both Assistant Principal and Principal experience.

Diverse Geographical Locations and Student Demographics

Within Sequoia Unified School District, the schools I selected represent diverse geographical locations as well as diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomics. I measured socioeconomic status by analyzing free and reduced lunch (FRL) rates and the percentage of neighborhood families who attend the school. By choosing diverse schools as based on the measures I have outlined above, I had opportunities to observe varying interpretations of equity-centered instructional leadership.

I also interviewed and observed teachers at each elementary school site to investigate how principals enacted equity-centered instructional leadership. Below I list criteria I used for teacher selection and then provide a brief rationale for each teacher selection criterion:

- Years in the profession and at the school site
- Teacher demographics
- "Culture Keepers" versus "Culture Resistors"

Years in the Profession and at the School Site

Including both new and veteran teachers will allow for a variety of perspectives about how the principal leads in service of equity. Moreover, including both new and experienced members of the school community will provide a range of perspectives on the impact of leadership on school culture and student learning.

Teacher Demographics

To the extent possible, I insured teacher selection represented demographic makeup of staff. Given the topic of this research study, hearing from a diverse range of teachers—race, ethnicity, and gender—provided a complex picture of how issues of equity were perceived by staff.

"Culture Keepers" versus "Culture Resistors"

Enlisting teachers who both supported the principal's vision and those who challenged site leadership provided balanced insight about the extent to which principals enacted equity-centered leadership.

Table 1: *Summary of Criteria for Three Selected Schools and Leaders[6]*

Elementary	Size	Leadership Experience	Instructional Focus	Demographic Percentages
School A Allison	310	1 year Assistant Principal	- Literacy - School Culture - Adult learning	86.4 Minority[7] 74.1 FRL 16.5 ELLs

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[6] Data retrieved from Sequoia Unified School District website

[7] Minorities represent: African-American, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander and Multiracial students.

		2 years Principal		37.5 Neighborhood
School B Beverly	376	1 year Assistant Principal 8 years Principal	- Literacy - Family Engagement -Science Integration	93.4 Minority 73.7 FRL 20.5 ELLs 32.6 Neighborhood
School C Catherine	318	2 years Assistant Principal 8 years Principal	- Literacy - Student Engagement - STEM[8]	98.8 Minority 87.1 FRL 29.8 ELLs 73.8 Neighborhood

To respect teacher confidentiality, teacher data are not listed.

Case Study Selection Process

I used the above-mentioned criteria to recruit elementary principals within Sequoia Unified School District to participate in this research study, excluding schools under my direct supervision. This research study focused on three cases, with each elementary school representing one case.

To reach the sample size of 12, I enlisted the technique of snowball sampling to recruit a total of 36 elementary principals, based on case study criteria. Additionally, I enlisted the assistance of district leadership support to initiate the recruitment process by sending recruitment emails to all principals who fulfilled research study criteria and also by conducting meetings with interested principals to explain purpose of research study and answer any clarifying questions (see Appendix A). All interested principal participants were referred to me via district leadership support.

Once principal participation was confirmed, I met with interested principal participants to review the consent letter, answer final questions, and schedule the first interview (see Appendix B). Next, I asked principals for permission to distribute teacher recruitment emails to recruit three teachers for teacher interviews and classroom observations. My intent was to directly interact with teachers to review the consent letter, answer any questions, and schedule individual teacher interviews and classroom observations. Table 2 lists final number of participants in the cross case study.

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[8] Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

Table 2: *Total Participants in Cross Case Studies*

Case Study	Principal	Teachers	Total Participants per Site
Allison	1	3	4 participants
Beverly	1	3	4 participants
Catherine	1	3	4 participants
Total Participants in Research Study			12 participants

Data Collection

Originally, the design of the two-month research study was to interview each elementary principal twice and then conduct teacher interviews as well as professional development and classroom observations in between the first and second principal interviews. Upon commencement of research investigation, I made two modifications to the design. The first was that in lieu of individual teacher interviews at each elementary site, I conducted teacher interviews in small groups. I made this change in the interview structure to account for time constraints among teacher participants. Despite this slight structural change, the teacher interview protocol remained unchanged (see Appendix C). The second change I made was to the principal interview protocol (see Appendix D). I greatly underestimated the volume of principal responses to interview questions; hence, I divided the first principal interview protocol into three phases of in-depth interviews for each elementary principal. Table 3 displays the revised data collection phases.

Table 3: *Revised Data Collection Phases*

Phase 1	Principal Interview	● Defined equity-centered instructional leadership ● Discussed life experiences prior to becoming school leader relation to equity
Phase 2	Principal Interview	● Discussed leadership actions aligned to equity-centered instructional leadership ● Discussed successes associated with equity-centered instructional leadership
*School Observations		● Teacher focus interviews ● Classroom observations ● Professional development observation
Phase 3	Principal Interview	• Discussed challenges associated with equity-centered instructional leadership

* School Observations were conducted between Phases 2 and 3.

Finally, I analyzed the documents collected from elementary principal participants in order to highlight potential trends in teacher practices and to provide some evidence about the relationship between leadership practices and the current reality of school. Documents used for this research study that were obtained from principal participants focused on school improvement plans, professional development, and school data available to the public.

Over a two-month period, I used three methods to collect data: *open-ended interviews, observations, and document analysis*. I will now provide an overview of each data collection method used in the research study.

Open-Ended Interviews

For each elementary site, I conducted three open-ended principal interviews and one teacher focus group interview. Though the conceptual framework guided development of interview questions, because the crux of my study centered on principal construction of meaning vis á vis equity-centered instructional leadership, I reserved room for new insights to emerge from the data. Patton (1990) stated:

> The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind. The purpose of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind…but to access the perspective of the person being interviewed. We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe...We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions…The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective (p. 278).

Open-ended questioning afforded the opportunity to employ a theoretical lens that outlined key issues to consider while allowing space for participants to share other critical insights about *politics of reform, reculturing for equity, and principal instructional leadership* that I may not have considered at the outset of the study (Creswell, 2007). The use of an open-ended interview protocol facilitated rich conversation anchored in research and participant voice and perspective.

Observations

In addition to open-ended interviews, I conducted observations of one staff professional development session and one classroom walkthrough of each of the three teachers interviewed per site. The process of observing participant behavior served to create multiple data points, corroborate or challenge principal self-reports and testimony with independent observations. By incorporating this method into my study, per Creswell's (2007) insights, I was able to examine participants' behavior. On the surface, this process seemed relatively straightforward; however, these observations required me to constantly disentangle my own bias and assumptions from the observed behavior and train myself to intently focus on understanding the perspective of the participant.

Document Analysis

Lastly, I collected and analyzed salient documents from each of the three sites in order to better understand school context in relation to principal equity-centered instructional leadership. In particular, I examined school improvement plans, which provided information about school vision and mission as well as resource allocation, school discipline policy*,* and school data reports that provided public data on academic and school culture performance as well as student demographic and enrollment patterns.

Data Collection Strategies

To prepare for this study, I conducted pre-fieldwork by conducting two principal interviews and site observations. Engaging in this pre-work provided an opportunity to test the conceptual framework and identify other possible elements that required consideration before launching the official research study. The process itself also offered opportunities to practice my dual role as participant and observer, which increased self-awareness of the types of challenges I would encounter as a researcher in my particular position within the district. Based on "rehearsal" site visits, I organized data into three-column descriptive notes (see Appendix C):

1. Column *one* to document evidence from the observation— participant talk and non-verbal behaviors
2. Column *two* to document self-bias thoughts and comments I make during conversations with participants as they emerge and I am aware of them; and
3. Column *three*—to document initial analysis by: problem identification, question development, and understanding patterns and themes in the study

During the initial stages of data collection, I used field notes to capture general information about participants—general descriptions, habits, body language, and who interacted with whom. After each visit, while the information was fresh, I reviewed my notes and jotted down all I could remember that I was unable to capture during note taking. Most importantly, I reviewed my notes to ensure that I captured low inference data—what I saw and heard versus my interpretation of what I saw and heard. Next, I will detail how I analyzed data collected from the three elementary cases.

Data Analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to transform raw data into findings in order to answer a research question. In my study, I produced a series of codes through deductive analysis in the early stages and inductive analysis in the middle-to-late stages to make sense of interview and observational data. Coding the data helped me synthesize large amounts of information into digestible chunks to bring meaning to the information (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). By combing through data multiple times and using my conceptual framework to guide the formation of a priori codes from interview notes, observational data, and document analysis, I made sense of how principals enacted equity-centered instructional leadership (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To honor the complexity of the phenomenon and do my best not to create permanent pattern codes that unintentionally excluded potentially critical data components, I engaged in an iterative coding process consisting of three steps. I will outline each of the three steps to make visible the multilayered coding process.

For the first step, after each of the three principal interviews, teacher focus group interviews, and observation visits—classroom walkthroughs and professional development sessions—I reread transcripts and notes to surface initial themes and wrote memos based on emerging themes and trends (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

To maintain a high-level of accuracy, I completed the first step within 24 hours of data collection. The process of re-readings principal and teacher focus interview notes and school observations illuminated aspects of the phenomenon that aligned to the conceptual framework as well as new trends that emerged during the course of the study.

In the second step, I uploaded transcripts and notes from three elementary cases into *Dedoose*, a data management program that facilitated coding and analysis of my qualitative data set. This platform enhanced efficiency of using a priori codes to make sense of principal equity-centered instructional leadership within each case. A priori codes represented the following three research questions, which were anchored in research literature focused on *Politics in Education, Reculturing for Equity, and Instructional Leadership*:

1. How do principals define equity-centered instructional leadership?
2. How do principals enact equity-centered instructional leadership and to what extent do principal actions align to their definition of equity-centered instructional leadership?
3. What struggles do principals encounter as they navigate their school communities in service of increased learning opportunities for all student?

Each of the three research questions served as the "major" a priori codes. For each "major "code, I then used findings from each body of literature to identify "minor" codes. Initial readings of interview, observation, and document data guided selection of research findings. Table 4 displays the three *Major Codes* and *Minor Codes* used for the second round of analysis.

Table 4: Major and Minor *A Priori Codes Created in Dedoose*

Major Code	
Research Question 1: Principal definition of Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership	
Minor Codes	• personal background • equity values • growth mindset about students, families and staff

Major Code	
Research Question 2: How do principals enact equity-centered instructional leadership and to what extent do principals' actions align to their definition?	
Politics in Education Minor Codes	• value conflicts among teachers about teaching and learning and student discipline • value conflicts between staff and leader about teaching and learning and student discipline • value conflicts between parent and staff about teaching and learning and student discipline • value conflicts between parent to leader about teaching and learning and student discipline
Reculturing for Equity Minor Codes	• structures and policies created to shape organizational norms, values, behaviors, rituals and traditions • dialogue used to shape organizational norms, values,

	behaviors, rituals and traditions • multiple perspective voiced and acknowledged • facilitation hard conversations
Educational Leadership Minor Codes	• use of school structures to accelerate learning for targeted populations • use of professional development to build teacher capacity use of resources to accelerate learning for targeted populations • supervision of staffing to accelerate learning for targeted populations

Major Code Research Question 3: Challenges principal encounter enacting equity-centered instructional leadership	
Politics in Education Minor Codes	• value conflicts among teachers about teaching and learning and student discipline • value conflicts between staff and leader • value conflicts between parent and staff • value conflicts between parent to leader
Reculturing for Equity Minor Codes	• creation of structures and policies to shape school organizational culture • facilitation of dialogue to shape organizational school culture • facilitation of hard conversations
Educational Leadership Minor Codes	• use of school structures to accelerate learning for targeted populations • use of professional development to build teacher capacity • supervision of staffing to accelerate learning for targeted populations • creation of data-driven instructional systems

Using Dedoose, I selected excerpts from culmination of data, representing principal and teacher focus group interviews, observations, and document analysis from each elementary case. Similar to step one, I also created memos as I used a priori codes in order to track and manage my own bias and assumptions about observed phenomenon.

As I entered step three of the coding process, excerpts "tagged" to a priori codes for each elementary case were exported to an Excel file for a final round of analysis. The focus of stage three was two-fold: to look for phrases repeatedly used by participants and to conduct cross-case analysis. Paying attention to key phrases uttered by participants allowed me to capture emerging trends or patterns apart from research literature, or simply surface participant language to describe phenomenon of equity-centered instructional leadership.

For instance, the phrase, "facilitating hard conversations", was used by all three principals to define equity-centered instructional leadership. Since this phrase

represented a common feature of all elementary principal participants, this language was selected as a "minor" code, used to analyze principal enactment of equity-centered instructional leadership and challenges encountered. Similar to steps one and two, I used memoing to record researcher bias and reflection during this stage of the coding process. Lastly, round three of data analysis allowed me to focus on emerging trends and patterns across case studies--potential similarities and differences related to principal definition, enactment and challenges encountered. Data from cross-case analysis served as key evidence to craft implications for the research study.

Reliability

It is paramount that procedures used within case study research be scrutinized to ensure consistency of data collection across each case (Yin, 2003). To ensure qualitative reliability, this study incorporates three major strategies:

1. **Case study protocol**—Three components represent the case study protocol: principal and teacher focus group interviews, professional development observation, and classroom observation. These protocols outline procedures and guidelines for each data collection method and increase the probability of consistent implementation (see Appendices xxx).
2. **Case study database**—The database includes academic and school culture performance in a formal and presentable format. As a result, data used to produce case study results and analysis will be easily accessible for investigators (see Chapter 4).
3. **Code definitions**—Per Creswell's (2007) recommendations, clearly defined codes ensure accurate coding of themes that emerge from data collection Data collected and examined were cross-referenced with the major and minor codes that were created.

Validation of Findings

Because it is impossible to collect and pay attention to every detail of the phenomenon examined, data collection in itself is a biased process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To protect the validity of findings, I employed specific analytic techniques, such as deliberately pursuing rival explanations, writing conceptual memos, and gathering feedback from principal participants.

Rival Explanations

To safeguard against being influenced by my desired findings, I used Yin's (1994) recommendation to identify rival explanations as I analyzed data. This safeguard is particularly important given the fact that I conducted research inside my own organization. I might have unconsciously read too many of my own assumptions into my collaborator's utterances and explanations, and as a result, failed to probe as deeply as I should have during interviews and informal interactions. Moreover, in trying to negotiate my dual roles as organizational leader and researcher, my relationships with some participants coupled with my influence as a participant observer may have influenced the data in a way where my perspective resonated instead of participants.

Conceptual Memos

Another concrete way I maintained reliability was through the use of conceptual memos. This sense-making tool supported reliability in three critical ways: one, it ensured that initial data analysis informed data collection in later stages; two, it assisted in identification of researcher biases during all phases of data collection and analysis; and three, it surfaced preliminary themes that informed the development of minor codes. Throughout the iterative process of data collection and data analysis, conceptual memos helped maintain a certain level of accuracy and captured and checked personal biases, throughout all three stages of data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Gather Participant Feedback

Lastly, to verify credibility of findings and data interpretations, I engaged in a process called, "members checking"—gathering participant input on credibility of findings and interpretations of data (Creswell, 2007). Asking principal participants to offer opinions on the research process helped maintain integrity to data collection. In addition to collaborative meaning making with principal participants, I debriefed findings with my LEEP cohort. The external "eye" of my research group helped to point out "blind spots" in my research design, as noted by Creswell (2007). I will now provide a brief overview of my expected findings from my research design.

Action Research and Rigor

Due to my internal role in the organization as principal supervisor and with my intention of using learning from this research study to improve how SUSD supports principal leadership capacity, I am both the research designer and a research participant. To gather useful learning, principal participants must experience the research process in an authentic manner. Walker (1995) defined authenticity as, "…data [that] represent the community's actual way of seeing and interpreting events…" (p. 9). In this case, principals would be able to speak as truthfully as possible about their experience leading schools, describing their leadership areas of growth and support needed to become better leaders on behalf of students.

For the research process to yield meaningful truths about principal leadership, I tried to maintain awareness of the intricate interplay of my roles as former colleague, current district leader, and research participant. Given my multiple roles within the SUSD community, I assumed there were moments where participants offered "public discourse" responses—answers to questions that protect one's "private beliefs" when someone is an "outsider" of the principal community. Furthermore, the controversial nature of the research topic in and of itself might have elicited other forms of biases. My identity as an African-American woman might have influenced topics raised and opinions shared by participants. Moreover, given my longstanding career within SUSD, participants might know of my personal background—educational preparation, district accomplishments or

aspects of my personal story—that might also influence the selection of information shared during discussions.

Yet, as a former SUSD educator with deep roots and relationships among many elementary principals, the study granted an opportunity to leverage these relationships and share knowledge of the role, as an educational researcher, to probe participant thinking and beliefs. Walker (2012) describes educational researchers as those who:

> ...have the capacity to hear teachers, to hear principals, to hear school participants…and hear the question they are not asking and then flip that into a research question and asks the question we need answers to…

While my identity and dual role as a researcher designer and participant presented certain biases to the research study, my background knowledge about district history, policies, and the role of school principal offered an informed perspective in the design and execution of methodological approaches.

To preserve the authenticity of the research process, I held regular informal conversations with participants and journaled responses. I used relationships I developed within the organization as former principal to hold informal conversations about preliminary findings in order to understand principals' interpretation of equity-centered instructional leadership. I used results from these conversations to adjust or completely alter, when necessary, methodological approaches that obstructed authentic principal self-reflection. The degree to which participants used research findings to reflect on their own leadership practices will be a testimony of the rigorous nature of this action research study.

Journaling during formal and informal conversations with principals helped to actively seek out how I "showed up" in the research process. Written self-reflection held me accountable in assessing the nature of what I was hearing and observing and allowed me to make necessary adjustments to my methodological approaches in an iterative manner.

Though I derived benefits from my multifaceted role as co-researcher, principal supervisor, and former principal, this research stance also posed additional threats to the integrity of the research study in the form of advocacy bias—unintentional guidance of participants towards a particular perspective aligned to expected findings of principal responses and participants responding based on the perceived "right answer", a concept known as the "Halo Effect" (Stake, 1995). To minimize such biases, I enlisted the support of a research assistant—an individual within the district who does not possess the same level of positional authority over principals to assist in data collection. I also conferred with principal participants and LEEP colleagues about my journal notes to discuss how my identity and background as a SUSD practitioner might influence my findings.

Limitations

The major limitation of this research study was sample size; a total of three elementary principals and school sites comprised the entire study. Moreover, the methodology I used to conduct the study was equally narrow in scope. Albeit the design of the study offered descriptive, in depth illustrations that elucidated the intricacies of equity-centered instructional leadership, lessons learned are not

generalizable to other principals or districts. Nevertheless, findings from this research study do substantiate claims drawn from the research literature, and also inform the design and delivery of principal professional development within the unique context of SUSD. In Chapter Four, I will provide a comprehensive report of findings from the three case studies.

Chapter 4: Cross Case Findings

The purpose of this study is to understand how three elementary principals enact equity-centered instructional leadership in service of increased learning outcomes for its most vulnerable students. Specifically, this study examines how these principals employ leadership content knowledge, skills and dispositions to create learning conditions for all students to thrive. Investigation of how principals *define* and *enact* equity-centered instructional leadership will shed light on what equity-centered instructional leadership looks like in practice and the types of challenges elementary principals may encounter.

The methodology used to conduct this three-month study was a cross case study analysis of three elementary principals in Sequoia Unified School District (SUSD). Principal interviews, professional development observations, teacher focus group interviews and document analysis represented data collection methods employed to understand equity-centered instructional leadership. Collection of multiple data points allowed for triangulation of data to increase validity of the study. This chapter will present findings from principal and teacher focus group interviews, supported by professional development and classroom observations. Findings presented are organized by case study where each case study is defined as one elementary school leader within his or her respective school community.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will describe each school site to provide readers context about each case. The second section will showcase emerging themes per case study derived from principal interviews, with supporting analysis from one teacher focus group interview, professional development and classroom observations, and document analysis. Section two is subdivided into three parts: how elementary principals define equity-centered instructional leadership, how they enact equity-centered instructional leadership and challenges they encounter as they navigate their school communities. The chapter will close with a summary of findings from each case.

Culmination of interviews, observations and document analysis will attempt to address three research questions:

1. **How do principals define equity-centered instructional leadership?**
2. **How do principals enact equity-centered instructional leadership and to what extent do principal actions align to their definition of equity-centered instructional leadership?**
3. **What struggles do principals encounter as they navigate their school communities in service of increased learning opportunities for all students?**

Section I

Allison, Beverly and Catherine were cases situated in three SUSD elementary schools—School A, School B and School C, respectively. Since school context shapes leadership decision-making, providing detailed school descriptions highlight some of the environmental factors leaders must consider in moving their schools forward (Leithwood, 2010). Table five presents student demographic data for all Schools A, B and C.

Table 5: Percent of Student Subgroups per School Site

School	AA	Latino	Asian	Other	ELLs	SwDs	LI
A	50.3	19.4	7.7	8.7	16.5	24.2	74.2
B	56.3	21.0	5.7	10.4	20.5	16.7	73.8
C	58	8.8	14.1	10.0	29.8	22.9	86.8

Tables six through eight present school performance data, followed by a brief narrative outlining the context for each of the three school sites.

Table 6: School A Performance Data[9]

School A Enrollment	Student Subgroup	SRI Proficiency	Common Core State Standards Proficiency	Suspension Rate	Chronic Absence Rate
	Overall	24.6	ELA: 7.4 Math: 4.9	1.7	17.8
310	AA	N/A	N/A	3.3	25.6
	Low Income	22.6	ELA: 4.4 Math: 4.4	1.9	19.3
	Latino	17.1	ELA: 0 Math: 0	3.1	0
	SwDs	0	ELA: 4.3 Math: 0	0	11.4
	ELLs	0	N/A	0	10.2

School A is an elementary school serving 350 students in grades Transitional Kindergarten through fifth. Approximately 70 percent of students qualify for free-and-reduced lunch, 50 percent are African-American and 15 percent English Language Learners. While 35 percent of families at School A live within the neighborhood, 65 percent of families commute across the city to attend the school. Like many schools within Sequoia Unified School District, School A is experiencing gentrification. Comparison of percentage of white families in Transitional Kindergarten through Kindergarten grade versus fourth through fifth grade exemplify changing demographics—25 percent in Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten grades compared to five percent in fourth and fifth grades combined. To promote academic and social emotional welfare of all students, including students with disabilities who attend Full Inclusion and Special Day Class Programs, School A enriches its core curriculum instruction with garden, visual arts, physical education and music classes. Nurturing students' mental health and

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[9] *School Performance Data was generated from Sequoia Unified School District's website.*

social skill development is also promoted through one-on-one and small group counseling facilitated by Restorative Justice Coordinator, social emotional support sponsored by an active parent-teacher organization. With only seven percent of students mastering Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts and less than five percent in mathematics, strategies to improve student outcomes at School A has centered on creating positive school culture, developing a culture of student readers, improving teacher practices in literacy, and creating an adult learning culture to support school transformation (see Table 6 for student indicators of academic and social emotional outcomes). Allison has served as school administrator for five years, serving at the helm of School A for the last two years.

Table 7: School B Performance Data

School B Enrollment	Sub-groups	SRI Proficiency	CCSS Proficiency	Suspension Rate	Chronic Absence Rate
	Overall	42.2	ELA: 32.1 Math: 18.7	0	17.6
376	AA	40.4	ELA: 25.5 Math: 11.5	0	N/A
	Low Income	40.5	ELA: 25.9 Math: 18.1	0	17.8
	Latino	N/A	N/A	0	23.6
	SwDs	20.8	N/A	0	24
	ELLs	19.4	N/A	0	7.4

School B is an elementary school serving 376 students in grades Transitional Kindergarten through fifth grade where approximately 75 percent of students qualify for free-and-reduced lunch, 50 percent are African-American and 20 percent English Language Learners. Similar to School A, School B community is wading in the waters of swaying neighborhood demographics, with only 33 percent of School B families living in the neighborhood. In grade level terms, white students comprise 18 percent of student population in Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten grades compared to less than two percent in grades four and five, combined. For the last two years, School B, like other elementary schools in the district, has focused on improving teacher literacy practices through implementation of Balanced Literacy model. To enrich the academic experiences of students, School B offers a science, African dance, visual arts, computer skills and reading tutors. Most notably, School B is the only elementary school in Sequoia Unified District that offers a specialized program geared towards the academic and social emotional growth of African-American male students. With 32 percent of students mastering Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and less than 19 percent in mathematics, School B has focused its improvement efforts on

building teacher capacity around implementing a Balanced Literacy model, improving family engagement strategies and ensuring weekly science instruction by classroom teachers. Beverly has served as school administrator for nine years, serving at the helm of School B for the last eight years.

Table 8: School C Performance Data

School C Enrollment	Sub-groups	SRI Proficiency	CCSS Proficiency	Suspension Rate	Chronic Absence Rate
318	Overall	24.7	ELA: 12.8 Math: 13.5	2	31
	AA	10	ELA: 12.6 Math: 12.8	0	35.7
	Low Income	27.2	ELA: 14.4 Math: 14.5	2.3	29.7
	Latino	N/A	N/A	5.9	23.6
	SwDs	0	ELA: 0 Math: 4.3	1.3	40
	ELLs	7.1	ELA: 8.3 Math: 4	0	20.5

School C is an elementary school serving 318 students in grades pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade where close to 100 percent of students qualify for free-and-reduced lunch, approximately 60 percent are African-American and 25 percent English Language Learners (ELLs). In past decades, African-Americans represented the predominant population. That trajectory has now shifted as more English Language Learner families settle into the neighborhood. Comparisons of primary versus upper grade ELL demographics exemplify this trend—24 percent ELLs in grades fourth and fifth, with 17 percent representing Arabic-speaking students versus 34 percent in Transitional Kindergarten through first grades, with close to 22 percent representing Arabic speaking families. Like many other schools within Sequoia Unified School District, School C struggles to attract and retain neighborhood families; currently, 55 percent of neighborhood families attend School C. School C, hosts three Special Education programs compared to district average of one Special Education program per school site. With 13 percent of students mastering Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and less than 13 percent in mathematics, School C has focused its improvement efforts on improving teacher literacy practices through Balanced Literacy implementation, increasing student engagement through investment in student leadership, and integrating Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) into core curriculum instruction. Additional student enrichments include STEM lab—coordinated by community partners and local high school students--and weekly band lessons for selected third through fifth grade students. School C nurtures the social emotional growth of students and families through the leadership of the Parent Liaison Manager who coordinates social services and parent education workshops. Catherine has served as school administrator for ten years, serving at the helm of School C for the last eight years.

Section Two

Data generated from principal interviews, teacher focus group interviews, professional development and classroom observations and school document analysis, surfaced emergent themes relative to equity-centered instructional leadership. Interview questions were informed by literature on social justice leadership, politics in education, and educational leadership, aimed to extract themes of equity, principal and teacher values around equity, political forces embedded in school community and principal navigation of these forces. Three interviews were conducted with each elementary principal. Each interview was designed to elicit detailed information about how principal participants enacted equity-centered instructional leadership in service of increased learning outcomes for its most vulnerable students. The purpose of each interview was as follows: interview #1, principals unpacked their definition of equity-centered instructional leadership; interview #2, principals discussed their enactment of equity-centered instructional leadership by highlighting leadership successes and challenges; and, interview #3, researcher asked follow-up questions related to professional development, observation, or topics surfaced during teacher focus groups (see Table 9 for a synopsis of principal interviews).

Table 9: Elementary Principal Interview Topics

Case Study	Principal Interview #1	Principal Interview #2	Principal Interview #3
Allison Beverly Catherine	● Defined equity-centered instructional leadership ● Discussed life experiences prior to becoming school leader in relation to equity	● Discussed leadership actions aligned to equity-centered instructional leadership ● Discussed challenges associated with equity-centered instructional leadership	● Debriefed professional development observation

Defining Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership

During principal interviews, Allison, Beverly and Catherine named facilitating hard conversations about school injustices as the focal point of equity-centered instructional leadership:

> *I want to push the equity conversation at this school and use data to do this...I want equity to be at the center of my vision so that all kids are truly served at this school. This is not the case right now...being an equity-centered instructional leader is about facilitating hard conversations about injustice practices at the school site.*
> - *Allison, School A*

Giving all students no matter where they come from what they need to succeed...closing the gaps...and forcing teachers at times to do so...is the way to give equity in education…

- *Beverly, School B*

How can parents have a safe place, have their voices heard, and be an intricate part of the school...so they can help their child...and sometimes having heart-to-heart conversations to get them [parents] involved...that is equity to me...

- *Catherine, School C*

All three principals viewed confronting school constituent resistance as a key feature of equity-centered instructional leadership (Theoharis, 2007). By leading and encouraging conversations that surfaced inequitable school practices, the three elementary principals attempted to mediate messages from the district's equity policy, values about equity from school constituents and their own personal equity values to create a school environment that served all students and families (Oakes, J., Welner, K., Yonezawa, S., & Allen, R.L. 1998). Table 10 outlines how Allison, Beverly and Catherine defined equity-centered instructional leadership.

Table 10: Defining Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership

Shared Perspective: Allison, Beverly and Catherine

What is Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership?	How do you enact it?	What skills are needed?
- Create an equity school agenda - Address school - injustices - Increase access to underserved students to become college and career ready	Facilitate hard conversations with school constituents: staff, parents and community	- Confront constituent resistance - Manage difficult relationships - Marketing skills

Principals also suggested that equity-centered instructional leadership entailed removing barriers for underserved student populations—African-American, English Language Learners or Students with Disabilities. Disrupting practices, such as school tracking, use of low academic-level curricula and lack of home-school communications were named by participants as systemic barriers that likely excluded students and families of color from learning experiences and information that promote college and career readiness. When asked to elaborate on the notion of "removing barriers", Allison, Beverly and Catherine offered several poignant personal stories from their own lives of students who fell through the cracks due to the lack of vigilance on the part of the school to provide students and families the resources and support needed to support student academic success. Extended learning opportunities, including: field trips, after school programs and summer programs, served as common examples from the elementary principals of how they

might increase educational access for underserved students and families. For example, Catherine discussed her leadership work with private foundations, central office and families to provide Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) summer programming to the school site:

> *…at the elementary level, it's all about exposure, exposure, exposure. Kids need to see early what they can be so they start to strive for it at some point. That is why I have worked…to get this STEM summer program in here. And I have also worked hard with my staff to do outreach to families for them to enroll their kids in the program. You would think this wouldn't be so much work, but it is! But, it is worth banging down doors, chasing parents and staying on staff to help recruit…because the exposure helps open their minds and I think also see why school is important. It is a lot of work, but part of helping our kids get on track for college.*

Sharing personal stories about their lack of access to quality learning experiences to substantiate the importance of educational exposure at the elementary level exemplifies the ways in which personal values about equity shaped the principals' definition and enactment of equity-centered instructional leadership.

Allison, Beverly and Catherine also believed that becoming an "equity vigilante" required business savvy. According to Beverly,

> *You somehow have to convince your school community to take on the hard and sometime controversial issues...and there is some strategic planning and deal-making you are doing, I mean all for good reasons, but you are plotting to keep the right work moving forward.*

In essence, how principals "bottle" and "sell" equity reform efforts matters so that the end results have a positive impact on student learning. All three elementary principals argued that facilitation of difficult conversations and crafting strategic messaging about equity reforms at the school site were key components of equity-centered instructional leadership.

While principal interviews surfaced a shared perspective about equity-centered instructional leadership, divergent opinions were equally present, which I will highlight next.

Table 11: Allison's Perspective: Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership

What is Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership?	How do you enact it?	What skills are needed?
● Take a stand on school injustices that marginalize students and families of color	● Create a moral imperative around school injustices to galvanize school community to address issues	● Facilitate hard conversations anchored in school and student data

Allison defined equity-centered instructional leadership as taking a stand against school injustices in order to rally school constituents towards eliminating the marginalization of students and families of color:

> There is just really this overwhelming unwillingness at my school to do anything to make life better for African-American students and their families... I am learning that these tensions are deep and many teachers just don't want to be bother with some of our African-American students. My work is to start these conversations and get my teachers and parents, especially white parents, to see that it is in the benefit of everyone to work on our culture--how we treat one another and make everyone feel safe, truly safe...that is really the first step for all students to learn.

Creating a moral imperative for the work of educating underserved students represented the bedrock of equity for Allison. During principal interviews, Allison substantiated her argument by referencing past experiences she had as a student and teacher when confronted with social injustice. As a high school student, Allison witnessed an African-American student being singled-out and expelled for smoking and selling weed, a common practice among many high school students at the time, according to Allison's retelling. She expressed feelings of immobilization and anger; she knew in her gut it was unfair that this student was being mistreated, but was uncertain what to do about it. Moreover, Allison expressed anger regarding the way the situation was handled by school administration. This incident was her first personal experience with racial injustice. As Allison chronicled her educational story to current role as elementary principal, she shared how working within the public school system granted her the opportunity to, "...influence a group of people to do right by kids." She shared how her high school teaching experience allowed her to leverage her positional power to give voice to the unjust treatment of students:

> *I remember as a high school teacher, there was a 9th grade skinny kid, who spoke to the current athletic director in a disrespectful way, but he [the athletic director] picked up [the] kid and threw kid on the ground. I saw that this teacher was [unfair] to all African-American students and this particular kid needed everyone on his side...this was a build up for me…*
>
> *I didn't really think about any negative consequences, [I] just knew it wasn't right so I had conversation with this guy and called him on it. It was hard, but [he] thanked me afterwards and said no one ever called him on this; this was how he was trained and was appreciative that I talked to him about how he was talking to kids.*

Allison's personal experiences with school injustices seemed to guide her personal equity values and equity-centered instructional leadership practices. Speaking out on behalf of a disempowered African-American high school student and witnessing the change in adult practice appeared to be a powerful moment in Allison's educational career that shaped her leadership footsteps. As principal of School A, Allison was now speaking out on behalf of numerous disempowered African-American students and families. By exposing injustices embedded within her

school community in public meeting spaces, Allison hoped to develop a compelling vision that would galvanize her school community to address the injustces.

Table 12: Beverly's Perspective: Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership

What is Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership?	How do you enact it?	What skills are needed?
• Prioritized needs of underserved students and families through differentiated distribution of school resources	• Strategic use of budget planning cycle to develop school plan	• Resource savvy

When asked to define educational equity, Beverly framed her definition by paraphrasing a quote from Thomas Jefferson, "There is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequal people."

> ...so there is a saying that the greatest unequal treatment is equal treatment of unequals...knowing [what] your community needs...what the gaps are and closing those gaps is the way to give equity in education. Different regions, schools, people need different things and finding out what it is that they need...being able to provide resources...even if everybody doesn't get the same is how you bring about equity...and make sure all students learn...

As Beverly unpacked equity-centered instructional leadership, she focused on the unequal distribution of resources—prioritizing the needs of underserved students and families over all students—as the purpose for facilitating difficult conversations. She used a metaphor about running a race to illustrate unequal access to the finish line of college and career readiness. Dependent upon their backgrounds, students entered the educational race at different distances from the finish line, some having shorter distances to run than others. Beverly further clarified how equity differs from equality:

> *...well, equality is something you do for all students, like all students must have instructional materials, while equity is something you do so that students furthest behind also reach grade level goals, like investing in reading intervention programs for a certain subgroup or paying for parent education classes for English Language Learners…*
>
> *...This is where you as the leader come in so that you get buy-in when you have to make those hard decisions about where you are spending money and where you are not. Everybody isn't going to like it, but you have to move ahead and stay focus on the need...*

In addition to facilitating difficult conversations with the school community, Beverly pinpointed the importance of maximizing the school budget planning cycle. She discussed the art and science of understanding school resources—staff, time as defined by district instructional calendar days and additional meeting time sanctioned by teacher union contract, and funding—to "bottle" and then "sell" a

school plan prioritizing resources for underserved students and families. Beverly's definition of equity-centered instructional leadership placed heavy emphasis on, "putting your money where your mouth is." From her perspective, strategic investment of school resources exemplified equity-centered instructional leadership.

As Beverly shared her own educational background, she identified herself as a college student who had a longer distance to travel compared to others in her quest to reach the finish line of college and career readiness:

> *...It was when I went to college that I found that my public school experience was mediocre compared to some of the other students that attended college. I could tell that they had been exposed to a lot more opportunities than I had in terms of being able to study computer science [and] travel abroad...I just felt that at the university level I had some catching up to do...*

When asked to be specific about educational skills or learning opportunities that she believed contributed to her "longer distance", Beverly responded:

> *I felt that I had good writing skills...math skills were ok too, but I don't really think I was taught to really think before I went to college...besides a few classes, like AP English, I was never really taught to pose my own questions and do my own research and I mean...this was really all I did in college so I ended up having a steep learning curve...*

In recounting her personal educational story, Beverly expressed keen awareness of the deleterious effects academic skill gaps and limited college and career exposure have on successful college completion and career acquisition. To shorten the distance for "long-distance runners", Beverly decided to exit the field of law and enter the field of education, intentionally at the elementary school level. During students' early educational years, Beverly argued, she had the greatest opportunity to maximize student access to academic and social-emotional success:

> *...I really wanted to make some changes in the way I see people living their lives. I started out as a political science major and wanted to go to law school and after the first year, I dropped out because some of the things I saw I didn't think I would be as effective in the type of change I wanted to make...I really came to realize that so much of the gap started at the very beginning of a child's school career and that is where I felt I wanted to make change...be on the preventive side so they would have better opportunities later on in life. I really think intervening once they are young adults is too late...*

In sharing her educational journey, Beverly identified herself as a student who was a "long distance" runner, a student in need of differential supports. Her own absence of educational access to rigorous learning in her formative years seemed to draw Beverly's attention towards the importance of early access and opportunity for students to ensure academic and social-emotional success in high school and beyond. One might argue that Beverly's personal values about early educational access and opportunity influenced her decision to enter the field of elementary education, and guided her beliefs and practices around equity-centered

instructional leadership. From Beverly's perspective, facilitating difficult conversations with school constituents about differential resource allocation pushed the school community to provide early educational access and opportunity to underserved students.

Table 13: Catherine's Perspective: Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership

What is Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership?	How do you enact it?	What skills are needed?
● Empower disenfranchised parents to be strong advocates for their child's academic and socioemotional growth	● Create meaningful three-way communication between home, school, and community partners to strengthen parental impact on student learning	● Know how to develop relational trust among various constituent groups ● Create and monitor structural conditions to support three-way communication

Unlike the other two principals, Catherine did not articulate a personal definition, but instead, referenced SUSD's vision around becoming a Full Service Community School District as her interpretation of equity-centered instructional leadership:

> *Building a Full Service Community model...I am just down with what our former superintendent helped to build…what we are still doing and really the key to helping all our babies learn...it's about wraparound supports provided by community partners so our families are more involved in schools...that's the only way to make sure all students learn. No one can learn until their basic needs are met so bringing the community together is how we get this done...*

Equity-centered instructional leadership from Catherine's vantage point, focused equity on parent empowerment, creating a nurturing school environment to welcome parents and families and empower disenfranchised parents to be strong advocates of their child's academic and social-emotional growth. As Catherine unpacked inequity, she spoke in great depth about mitigating circumstances impacting the lives of her students and families:

> *There is a lot going on in the lives of our families and while you can't let it become an excuse for kids not learning, our families are dealing with some real dilemmas that just aren't the norm across the district, like: homelessness, drug abuse, eviction, major mental health issues and there is just no way you can ignore all this stuff as a school and think parents are [going to] show up to family literacy nights. No, you have to connect with these families and you'd be surprised to learn that despite all this stuff, they want to be involved in their child's education...*

According to Catherine, equity-centered instructional leadership meant spending time as a leader establishing, building and sustaining an intricate web of

relationships among parents, community members and school staff to create meaningful three-way communication between home, community, and school to strengthen parental impact on student learning.

Similar to Allison and Beverly, Catherine surfaced the importance of not shying away from difficult conversations as a critical component of equity-centered instructional leadership. Catherine discussed the need to develop relational trust among parents, community partners, and staff to establish structural conditions so that tough issues affecting student learning were surfaced:

First, you have to get people to trust in what you are doing, I mean you can't go anywhere without that and that's part of leading, period. But once you have the trust, I mean where you feel like people are with you, you have to challenge folks so they know it's all about the kids...so that means with parents you have to keep it real when they aren't doing their part and tell them things they may not want to hear...Same with my staff, I mean I am on them and they get mad, but that's alright...they know I'm here for the kids, period....I have also gotten rid of certain community partners when I figure out they have another motive for being here and it's not the kids...I don't have time for the political games...you got to spend a lot of time having folks mad at you and get used to it ...it's part of getting stuff done…

Key components of equity-centered instructional leadership that Catherine highlighted were building relational trust with parents, students and community partners, and holding all constituents accountable for students' academic and social emotional growth. While Allison and Beverly defined the impact of equity-centered instructional leadership around staff, parents and students, Catherine expanded the definition to include community partners. Designing school structures to increase parent school participation and community partnerships to build parent capacity and advocacy on behalf of children represented a critical component of Catherine's perspective of equity-centered instructional leadership.

In recounting her own educational experience, Catherine underscored the importance of positive home-school connections as a key factor in her educational success.

I got my background in family and community partnership because that's what I remember from my childhood. Teachers always helped my parents and pushed them to better support me...there was [a] high sense of camaraderie…that helped me reach my full potential. I mean it was really a teacher who not only pushed me, but worked with my mom to get me into college...it was [a] community effort.

In sharing past educational experiences, as student and educator, Catherine unpacked the origins of her definition of equity and made connections between impact and the importance of strong parental involvement and advocacy in her own experience as a student and as a principal. Through reflecting on her own educational journey, Catherine articulated the important role schools played in building the capacity of her parents to advocate on her behalf. For example, Catherine believed her mother's decision to move her to a higher-performing elementary school was the direct result of her mother attending various parent

workshops which helped to sharpen her mother's lens around quality literacy instruction. The importance of building positive home-school connections was cemented for Catherine in her role as teacher and Assistant Principal in SUSD. Catherine discussed the critical role community-based organizations played in her former school, providing financial support for afterschool programs, and collaborating with principals to coordinate parent education nights. Catherine offered multiple examples of how community-based organizations assisted the school to strengthen its home-school connection and develop parents as strong advocates for their children. With great detail, Catherine offered reflections about partnership strategies utilized to provide parents access to medical services including, optometry and dental examinations. Catherine asserted that offering these services was an effective strategy for bringing families into the school building; thus, granting the principal an opportunity to establish structures to nurture an intricate web of relationships among staff, community partners and parents, which over time led to stronger parent participation. As a principal, Catherine shared how she utilized much of what she learned in her former school to develop her own network of relationships to connect parents to social services to support their growth and development as parent advocates.

Similar to Allison and Beverly, Catherine's personal story also shaped elements of her equity-centered instructional leadership definition. The strong home and school connections that Catherine experienced as a child left an indelible impression about the importance of nurturing parent involvement to promote parent advocacy. Principal interviews suggested that Catherine's personal values about parent involvement and advocacy shaped her definition of and practices around equity-centered instructional leadership.

Enacting Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership

Collective findings from principal interviews and teacher focus groups, in conjunction with professional development and classroom observations as well as document analysis, revealed a pattern of leadership successes and challenges encountered by three elementary principals as they enacted equity-centered instructional leadership. I will now present findings from each case, detailing each principal's leadership successes and challenges.

Table 14: Allison: Enactment of Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership

How does Allison enact equity-centered instructional leadership?	What leadership skills does Allison employ?	What challenges does Allison face?
- Use of district teacher evaluation system to dismiss ineffective teachers - Creation of school Positive Culture Policy - Formation of a	- Conducting teacher evaluations - Setting direction and creating a school vision - Facilitating hard conversations with constituents	- Teacher resistance - Ideological differences around student discipline - Neighborhood gentrification

school culture team ● Present equity agenda during School Site Council meetings	● Qualitative and quantitative data analysis

Allison recounted the steps she took to dismiss an ineffective teacher and form a positive school culture plan as concrete examples of her successes enacting equity-centered instructional leadership. Removing a teacher, who Allison believed detrimental to her school's learning environment, was the first step:

When you see the toxic nature of some individuals at your school site, you got to get them out first before you can really focus on building the kind of school culture you want to see. I mean the impact of even one toxic teacher is powerful...this person has drained the mental energy of so many teachers and they are looking at me like what are you going to do about it...I mean most [teachers] won't necessarily come out against this teacher, but they have let me know in many ways that the teaching and how kids are being treated is not ok….

In describing her equity leadership moves, Allison highlighted the role of data-driven decision-making and written documentation as essential leadership practices. She spoke about leveraging classroom observations and referral data to facilitate and ground difficult conversations with teachers. It was during these evidence-based conversations that Allison communicated her expectations about teacher practices and raised concerns about questionable practices she observed in the classroom. Allison also mentioned that she made it a habit to document conversations with teachers to create a "paper trail":

It was so tedious and sometimes didn't feel like I was doing anything to support my kids, but ultimately, it paid off. I mean, since teacher evaluation is a huge focus of the district, there was actual support in district staff to support me…[with] write ups and even how to hold some of the meetings, [and] understand the contract. It would have been totally impossible without this support. And now the individual is not in my school, which for me was a big win in helping my school move forward.

Other teachers within the school also agreed with the decision to remove the ineffective teacher. One teacher stated, *"I feel like the principal is doing everything in her power to remove this individual...it is the right thing to do."* Many examples and student stories were offered, illustrating the frenzied nature of the classroom environment and its detrimental impact on student learning. When asked about her decision to prioritize this teacher's behavior over other challenges, all teacher participants were able to describe how the instructional and classroom behavior practices in one classroom affected the learning environment across the school. Though impact on students was mentioned, teachers seemed more concerned with the impact on staff and parent morale; all teachers expressed concern about staff and parent flight from the school, if the teacher remained at the site.

In particular, Allison found the guidance from her supervisor and Human Resources department helpful in her quest to remove a classroom teacher. From

"dress rehearsing" hard conversations to providing just-in-time legal advice on how best to utilize teacher contractual language or state education code, Allison discussed specific ways central office staff supported her leadership efforts to improve teacher quality at her site. According to Allison, after more than twenty-plus classroom observations, thirty-plus written documents, noting ineffective behavior, including responding to formal parental complaints and facilitating numerous parent meetings, the classroom teacher was recommended for dismissal.

One can argue that Allison's strong belief in standing up against school injustices fueled her decision to undertake the dismissal of a tenured classroom teacher—a politically contentious administrative journey, often resulting in little to no change. Despite anticipated controversy from the teacher's union and staff frustration about the lack of classroom management from this teacher, Allison appeared driven to focus her leadership efforts on providing all students in School B a quality teaching and learning environment. Allison's full implementation of SUSD's teacher evaluation system and district disciplinary policies sent a message to the school community that ineffective teaching would not be tolerated. Testimonies from the teacher focus group indicated that maintaining a certain level of teacher professionalism surfaced as a common value between Allison and her staff, which ultimately engendered support from teaching staff, even when classrooms were inconvenienced by behavioral disruptions. In addition to Allison's personal values, the district had recently renewed its commitment to teacher evaluation through its recent adoption of a new teacher evaluation system and renewed principal expectations around conducting teacher evaluations. Establishment of the new evaluation system sent a message to the principals that SUSD valued teacher growth, development and accountability and therefore expected principals to prioritize teacher evaluations and professional development[10]. SUSD's Human Resource division was granted additional funding to support principals with teacher evaluation and coaching practices. Allison relied on such support during the evaluation process. Hence, the coupling of SUSD values about improving teacher quality in every SUSD school, and Allison's personal equity values rooted in standing up against school injustices created a school environment that supported and advocated for the dismissal of an ineffective classroom teacher.

Establishment of a Positive School Culture Policy was also identified as a critical step towards fostering an inclusive school community. Upon her arrival, Allison described the state of her school as tumultuous, "...no clear procedures for recess, lots of students getting hurt and no real approach to providing supports for kids." Allison described the creation of this plan as a sequential process. First, Allison invited her Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) to attend a school culture and climate retreat with the purpose of learning strategies to improve the site's pre-referral process for struggling students. When asked to articulate teacher selection, Allison responded: *"There were already teacher teams established so I'm trying as much as possible to build on what was already working, positive foundations to get*

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[10] SUSD Teacher Growth and Development System documents were reviewed to understand policy implications for elementary school sites.

traction. The teachers here generally like to collaborative with each other so trying to leverage spirit of collaboration…" According to Allison, *"...spending the time away, reflecting on what wasn't working at our school and thinking about the type of school we wanted to create for all our students really helped to reenergize us all to step up our game in this work."* Upon return from the retreat, Allison officially incorporated school culture into the work stream of the ILT, which led to her second step, development of a chronic absence student matrix. Allison stated that the school culture team used the matrix to collect and document data about chronically absent students:

> *The team and I used results from this matrix to revise the school's tardy policy since nothing was being followed. Now the team brought to staff that we needed to make sure all families check-in with office anytime a student is late and that attendance clerk would also be reminded and trained to reinforce to families the importance of being on time.*

Allison shared that although the focus around chronic absences had little-to-no impact on reducing the chronic absences rate, focused conversations among school culture team members and presentations to staff heightened awareness about the importance of connecting with families: *"Just having these conversations with the culture team and staff highlighted the need to better connect with these families...I mean that's a start…".* Lastly, Allison expressed school culture being an all-encompassing concept, too vague to digest and operationalize. As a third step, Allison identified one aspect of school culture, creating a safe school environment, to respond to school community concerns around physical and emotional student safety. From Allison's perspective, a focus on improving school safety provided the motivation for drafting the Positive Culture Policy. By investigating student referral data to identify patterns of student misbehavior, Allison determined a starting point for school culture work:

> *We are a PBIS [Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports] school so our focus is supposed to be on helping to make sure kids are safe, respectful and responsible...this is the work we were supposed to be doing but nothing was really happening and I knew and my supervisor also helped me narrow my focus too, that I had to start with one thing so I made the decision after a few select group of teachers and I looked at referral data that we would focus on making sure all students are safe at the school, at all times...*

One teacher participant mentioned a survey that staff took to determine areas of improvement around yard supervision:

> *It was nice to see our conversation and feedback reflected in a school document that everyone is supposed to use...I think that was motivating for the staff...it felt like we were finally moving forward to improve the school.*

 Like Allison, teacher participants also referenced physical safety of students and classroom management as primary school culture challenges, specifically, the need to build positive teacher-student relationships and clear expectations for how to handle student misbehavior, school wide. Teacher participant discussion also suggested consensus regarding approach to school culture dilemmas. All

participants spoke favorably about the use of the ILT to address school culture issues and PBIS as a strategy to build shared understanding among students, staff and parents. Teacher participants deemed formation of the Positive Culture Policy as, "a good start", for the school to address the myriad of root causes affecting school culture and climate. When asked to explain why, teachers felt it was important to have a process that outlined clear consequences for misbehavior and roles and responsibilities of principal, staff and parents to address behavioral infractions. Participants perceived the absence of such a policy contributing to the high frequency and intensity of student misbehavior.

Analysis of principal and teacher focus interviews indicated that collaborative decision-making appeared to be a value held by Allison and teaching staff. Final products, like the Positive Culture Policy and the decision to focus on PBI as a school culture strategy derived from collaborative discussions, facilitated by Allison and members of the ILT. Teachers interviewed spoke favorably about participating in collaborative processes where their feedback about the school's direction was taken into consideration by the principal. Principal and teacher focus group interviews suggested that aligned values about the importance of community dialogue to inform school decisions spurred initial ILT progress.

Leading a school community at the genesis of neighborhood gentrification seemed to be Allison's greatest challenge. According to Allison, changing demographics at School B gave rise to the surfacing of philosophical differences about School B's strategies to address the academic and socioemotional needs of students of color. Allison found herself juggling the demands of white middle-class families, the unmet needs of African-American families, and the emerging needs of Arabic-Speaking families. She noted the following:

> *I am leading a parent focus group with the help of my after school program coordinator who has really been my saving grace who is supporting me as I am listening to needs of some of my parents who are not represented fully by PTO [Parent Teacher Organization], which are mostly neighborhood families who meet Sunday afternoons, usually at each other's houses, which really, in my opinion, isn't really a way of being inclusive to the entire parent community. This really is a tension... families who aren't neighborhood families happen to primarily be African-American students and families and some growing Arabic families.*

From Allison's perspective, the mounting tensions among a predominantly white teaching staff, emergence of white middle-class families in the school community, and sense of disempowerment expressed by African-American families necessitated reculturing at School B.

Allison recounted a particular School Site Council (SSC) meeting to illustrate tensions between certain staff and parent, and how she used literacy achievement data to facilitate a difficult conversation about the school's responsibility to address the low reading levels of African-American students:

> *I had to find a way to convey the seriousness of the achievement gap with my SSC so hopefully they will see the need for us as a school community to really figure this thing out and better serve our African-American student.*

This really became clear to me when I saw our SRI [Scholastic Reading Inventory] and F&P [Fountas and Pinnell] data...What I didn't expect is that once I opened up Pandora's Box, then the black parents just started discussing all these different issues that were really unrelated to the literacy achievement data, but I guess they felt the space was there to open up about their concerns...a couple of Black parents started talking about incidents in the classroom, felt like their kids were treated unfairly based on [being] African-American and a couple of teachers named this as well...

Allison leveraged disaggregated literacy data—by race, ethnicity and language—to develop a clear narrative about the learning trajectory of African-American and English Language Learners in comparison to White students at School B by leading the School Site Council (SSC) through literacy data analysis. Allison hoped the presence of data would make conversations about race and student achievement more palatable for school constituents. To Allison's surprise:

...two teachers walked out of the SSC meetings; they just didn't want to deal with comments parents made about not doing enough to serve these kids. It had become clear to me at that moment that many teachers here didn't necessarily sign up to teach in an urban...community.

When asked to reflect the actions of some staff members at the SSC meeting, Allison conveyed a sense of shock and dismay:

...I am learning that these tensions are deep and many teachers just don't want to be bother with some of our African-American students. I was really stunned by what came out of this meeting...I know my responsibility is to figure out how we can better serve our African-American students...

While value coherence seemed present among Allison and teaching staff about teacher professionalism and collaborative decision-making, the conversation that took place during the SSC meeting indicated value conflicts about providing every student access to quality teaching and learning between Allison and some teaching staff.

When asked to share other examples of teacher resistance towards creating an equitable learning environment for African-American students, Allison mentioned a student incident where Allison chose to address the student misbehavior using alternative methods to suspension. In Allison's eyes, the student's behavior did not pose great danger to himself or other students; therefore, exclusion from the school day was unnecessary. In lieu of suspension, Allison's strategy involved personally providing the student with one-on-one counseling in hopes of addressing the root cause of the misbehavior. Allison viewed the informal counseling sessions as the consequence, a re-teaching intervention that would, hopefully, prevent the student from engaging in the same misbehavior in the future.

During the teacher focus group, this same incident surfaced in conversation; however, teachers expressed disagreement with Allison's disciplinary action. Deeming the student's misbehavior dangerous, the teachers supported their

colleague's refusal to provide the student counseling, a decision that took Allison by surprise:

> *The level of teacher resistance is really starting to get to me. Honestly, it was a shocker that people could be this against what is in the best interest of kids. I had a kids who was really in crisis the other day and I asked a staff member to help out [Researcher: in what ways did you asked staff member to help out?]. Well...I asked staff member to take the kid so that I would be freed up to get to the bottom of what was causing the issue, call parents if I needed to, do conflict resolution...you know, all the stuff to investigate and then resolve the situation, but she refused and just wanted the student suspended. I was stunned, really.*

This particular incident, along with other teacher comments mentioned during the teacher focus group, illuminated contributing factors to the *value conflicts* between Allison and her teaching staff. While some teachers advocated for a *Zero Tolerance* stance against student misbehavior, Allison championed for a *Restorative Justice* approach. With clashing philosophical perspectives about the handing of student misbehavior—teachers prioritizing the establishment of clear rules and disciplinary actions for students, and Allison prioritizing student counseling and relationship building—frustration surrounding School B culture and climate mounted, which seemed to thwart the implementation of the Positive Culture Policy.

Another leadership challenge articulated by Allison was having insufficient time to observe teacher classrooms. When asked to describe her vision of teaching and learning for all students, Allison cited an excerpt from the Positive Culture Policy:

> *Provide high-quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment that enable the participating students to meet the State of California's student academic achievement standards as follows:*
> *The school will provide developmentally appropriate teaching methods and materials that work best for your child.*
> *The school will use a positive discipline program to support the emotional and social growth of your child.*

Alison spoke about increasing student access to holistic curricula, hoping to integrate science and visual arts enrichment activities into classroom instruction. Allison also shared ideas for leveraging the expertise and influence of the ILT to provide African-American and English Language Learner students the academic and socioemotional learning supports needed. In spite of Allison's instructional aspirations, she struggled to regularly observe classrooms or provide teachers feedback on their instructional practice. Allison openly shared that the depth of her understanding of current teaching practices was shallow, given her limited time in the classroom. When asked to share obstacles that might be preventing her from observing classroom instruction, Allison alluded to student discipline—counseling students, calling parents and conducting follow-up conversations with teachers—which she believed consumed multiple hours each day, leaving minimal time to focus on instruction or collaborative with the ILT. Balancing the work of school

reculturing and maintaining daily focus on classroom instruction proved challenging in Allison's pursuit of equity-centered instructional leadership.

Findings from a staff professional development observation also indicated a need to increase principal time observing classroom instruction. At the professional development session, staff provided feedback on Allison's leadership. Many teachers suggested that Allison, "*stick to her schedule so she can be in the classroom more often*." To support her time in classrooms, teachers urged Allison to better utilize the Restorative Justice Coordinator and Community School Manager positions. During small and whole group discussions, teachers highlighted delegation of student behavior issues and management of support staff as critical improvement areas for Allison's leadership. From the staff's perspective, Allison needed to refine current systems of support so that she was not the exclusive problem solver for student discipline issues. Allison's decisions around her time versus staff recommendations about her time further highlighted the philosophical differences about approaches for handling student misbehavior.

Classroom observations indicated student disengagement as a possible root cause for school climate issues at School B. Data generated from three twenty-minute classroom observations indicated classroom management as a major focus area during instructional time. In all the classrooms visited, 50 percent of the 20-minute instructional observational window was spent acknowledging students for on-task behavior, while less than ten minutes focused on the learning objective. Allison described student disengagement as a school wide dilemma in her follow-up interview, *"I know I'm not in classrooms a lot…I know that if the quality of instruction was better, there would be less students sent to my office, especially, black boys."* Although Allison acknowledged and agreed with some of the professional development feedback, she remained steadfast that the development of the ILT to support the implementation of the Positive Culture Policy and relationship building with students and families would inevitably promote greater academic achievement and social-emotional growth among students.

Allison interrupted instructional inequity by removing an ineffective teacher from School B. Value coherence about the importance of a high quality teacher in every classroom helped to shape School A's environment to support the dismissal of an ineffective teacher. The district's focus on supporting and growing teacher practices coupled with School A's values about teacher professionalism, and Allison's personal value on standing up against school injustices worked harmoniously to support Allison's equity-centered instructional leadership.

In contrast, the lack of value coherence related to addressing student misbehavior thwarted the implementation of the Positive Culture Policy. Although Allison valued the district focus on reducing the disproportionality of African-American and Latino student suspensions, interviews from the teacher focus group and the professional development observation suggested that many teachers valued clear disciplinary consequences for all student misbehavior as the primary strategy to address culture and climate concerns at School A. Value conflicts among teaching staff and Allison posed many challenges for Allison's equity-centered instructional leadership, including lack of implementation for the School

Culture policy and limited time spent in the classroom, observing and providing teachers feedback.

Table 15: Beverly: Enactment of Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership

How does Beverly enact equity-centered instructional leadership?	What leadership skills does Beverly employ?	What challenges does Beverly encounter?
Development of family engagement plan	• Resource management: funding and staffing • Setting direction • Acting strategically • Qualitative data analysis	• Lack of clear goals for family engagement plan • Lack of shared understanding about grade-level expectations for core curriculum
Development of plan to teach social emotional skills across classrooms	• Resource management: funding and staffing • Setting direction • Acting strategically • Facilitating moral dialogue with staff (Shields, 2004)	

Beverly selected School B's recent family engagement efforts as an example of her success enacting equity-centered instructional leadership. In an effort to improve positive home-school connections among the most underserved families at School B, Beverly made the decision to focus on increasing English Language Learner and African-American parent participation at academic school events. She deemed home and school connections essential to accelerate academic and social emotional growth of struggling students, and viewed parent engagement as a key feature of equity-centered instructional leadership. Beverly shared concerns about families of color attending celebratory school events more than academically-focused events:

> *What I was finding is that it seemed like our parent events were well-attended, I mean when we have carnivals, African dance concerts or any type of student performance, our school is packed and it's beautiful! But then as I started taking a closer look at more of my academic events, like the one when we focused on math Common Core Standards, for the most part is just my white middle-class families attending...I just made this my goal for this year to try to do something about it.*

To respond to this dilemma, Beverly restructured the design of parent engagement sessions in three ways: included academic learning as a key component of the highest-attended parent events; assigned parent recruitment to grade level teachers, and made financial investments in parent literacy workshops. When asked to explain the rationale for shifts in her approach to family engagement, Beverly responded:

> *...if I get more parents of students who are struggling academically to be more connected to school, and get teachers...to start really communicating regularly [with parents]...I think more of my struggling students will start improving...we need the parents...in years past, I was the main person communicating and building relationships with my families, with the exception of a few teachers...now I realize I need a strategy and need to set expectations for all teachers to develop relationships with their parents so this is the next step right now...*

Beverly also shared that she found it too time consuming to be the point person to plan the parent workshops. Although some staff assisted, the brunt of workshop planning and event coordination fell on Beverly's shoulders. Investing in support from local agencies would allow Beverly to concentrate energy towards encouraging teachers to connect with three to five families of struggling students. To incentivize stronger teacher-parent connections, she paid teachers after-hour stipends to make phone calls and schedule parent conferences.

Beverly shared that her school culture leadership team assisted in the development of School B's parent engagement strategy through data analysis—tracking highly attended events and analyzing common features of these events—and leadership team conversations—engaging members of school culture team to identify high leverage strategies to improve parent outreach. For example, Beverly shared that the school culture leadership team identified student performances and student recognition as common features of all highly-attended school events. To attract a larger and more diverse pool of parents, the school leadership team recommended that student voice be incorporated into all academic events.

During the teacher focus group, members of the school leadership team discussed School B's collaborative culture as an essential ingredient towards making positive change: *"...everyone helps out where help is needed and gives feedback to make school better."* Teachers mentioned refinement of school discipline policy and student recognition assemblies as successes directly related to the collaborative work of the school culture leadership team and Beverly's leadership. Teachers surfaced two-way communication as a common value held by the school culture team and most teachers. Findings from the teacher focus group suggested that the common values of communication and collaboration allowed staff to provide continuous feedback about the development and implementation of school policies. Motivation by administration and teachers to work together thus fueled back-and-forth communication, which promoted school improvement efforts.

Findings from the teacher focus group interviews also suggested common values among some teachers and Beverly related to parent engagement and advocacy. The teachers interviewed were able to articulate Beverly's rationale for calling at least five parents of struggling students to attend the literacy-focused school events:

> *...if we succeed in getting the parents here and get into conversation with them, then maybe we can encourage them, convince them to try some simple things that don't take much time that will support what*

we are doing here...I think it's worth the effort and just focusing on a
few students seems realistic…

Additionally, teachers communicated their collective belief in partnering with local community-based organizations to strengthen home-school connections. In their opinion, having support with literacy content planning meant teachers could optimize time towards parent outreach and planning logistics. Both teachers and Beverly pointed to similar challenges in this recent school wide reform effort— inconsistent parent participation rates among grade levels, and an overall lack of a school-wide goal for increased English Language Learners and African-American parent engagement. The display of similar values around communication and collaboration indicated a high level of will among Beverly and her teaching staff to increase parent engagement and advocacy for parents of color; yet, lack of significant results for this reform effort might suggest that more work was needed in the articulation of the vision and goals for the parent engagement strategy.

In addition to challenges with the current parent engagement work, Beverly and teachers interviewed seemed aligned in articulating other dilemmas affecting teaching and learning at School B. According to Beverly, *"I have pockets of excellence in my school and I need to figure out how to spread these pockets throughout my building so all my students experience good teaching."* When asked to articulate her vision of quality teaching and learning for students, she stated:

It's about creating a college going culture, especially for my students
where exposure and access is the most limited... it's about exposing
kids to rigor in the classroom, developing a growth mindset about
their intelligence and ability to succeed and giving students lots of
opportunities to attend lots of enrichment activities and field trips so
they understand the importance of college.

Beverly spoke in detail about School B's recent dive into Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) as a focus area: *"I want to expose and build awareness around science and STEM-based education...where it is integrating into everyday teaching and learning...we are just starting, but this is a vision I have for my school."* Increased awareness about and preparation for STEM-based career, particularly for English Language Learners and African-American families, served as Beverly's rationale. When asked how she is working towards building STEM awareness, Beverly referenced school field trip investments, guest speakers, and the science preparation teacher.

In spite of her strong desire to improve academic rigor, Beverly admitted that the current state of instruction at School B lacked rigor. In her own words, Beverly described low academic rigor as: lack of positive classroom culture, lack of clear purpose for daily lessons and lack of checking for student understanding about the daily lessons taught. In describing her instructional vision, Beverly described the practices of one effective teacher in her school building: explicit teaching of grade-level standards-aligned content, structures for small group work with specific student expectations, purpose for learning articulated by students, and feedback provided to students throughout the lesson. In contrast, Beverly described a classroom that she believed fit the instructional trend at School B: teacher-

centered, content below grade-level, unclear purpose for daily lessons, and low student engagement:

> *Whenever I go into this teacher's classroom, there are usually at least five students off-task--head on desk or looking around the room, basically not doing any work. Also, there is usually lots of instructional time lost, like five minutes spent getting kids attention or transitioning from one activity to another...even if kids are completing activities, they are usually not clear what they are doing, objectives are not on the board, and if they are, the purpose of the lesson isn't always clear...I still see too many classrooms like this in my school...*

When asked to share her leadership attempts to change the current instructional trajectory, Beverly discussed her experiences observing classrooms, revealing her successes and challenges:

> *Over the years, I have really gotten better and landed on a system to be in classrooms on a regular basis. I have switched from paper and pen to my laptop, created a schedule for myself and usually debriefed with the classroom teachers, just a few days afterwards or emailed my comments...so I am in my classrooms and feel I have a sense of what is happening and not happening...I don't feel like I am always paying attention to the right things because I am not seeing as much improvement as I want to be seeing when it comes to student learning and I think this is the main reason for low student engagement, classroom management issues and not enough student learning....It's really hard to focus...*

When asked to articulate, "...the right things…", tackling implementation of the Common Core State Standards in tandem with newly adopted district literacy and mathematics curricula rose to the top of Beverly's list of challenges. In years past teachers relied heavily on scripted curricular programs to teach daily lessons, which dramatically reduced the quantity of time needed for teachers planning. With current changes in standards and curricula, teachers are now expected to be the instructional decision-makers of each lesson, a shift teachers were in the process of making. Beverly recounted an observation of one classroom as an illustration of her current dilemma:

> *Every time I go into this classroom, the tone is always positive and organized...teacher has established positive connections with students and developed systems and expectations where students know what to do at all times...but sometimes I find myself wondering what is the purpose for what they are doing during reader's' workshop time? It isn't always clear to me and it's not like especially now that there is more student-centered activities [I ask Beverly to give specific examples of student-centered activities.]...kids playing with blocks, making words or just reading to themselves. On the one hand, I see students more engaged...and most of the time when I ask them questions, they can tell me what they are doing and what they are learning...but is it grade-level appropriate? When should the teacher check-in with students and how often? I don't think the teacher is clear and I'm not always clear about how best to guide more of this open-ended learning...*

In her attempts to improve consistency of teacher practice, Beverly mentioned investing in weekly teacher collaboration and using staff newsletters to reiterate key teacher practices she expected to see in every classroom. Additionally, Beverly discussed her use of individual teacher data meetings as a way to keep a pulse on student learning progress. Approximately every six weeks, Beverly structured time to meet with grade level teams and discuss overall improvements in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, paying particular attention to struggling students, predominantly ELL and African-American students. Beverly stated that these meetings maintained a certain level of accountability for individual student progress monitoring and provided her information to share with intervention specialists who worked with ELL students and African-American boys in small groups.

During the interview, as Beverly reviewed her progress monitoring systems, she came to her own realization that her system of supports needed refinement. It became difficult for Beverly to pinpoint students who had benefitted from intervention support. Furthermore, Beverly admitted that teachers developed their own system for progress monitoring student growth and that she needed to "tighten up" grade-level expectations.

Findings from the teacher focus group also surfaced school challenges hindering common instructional understanding and effective use of teacher collaboration time. According to teachers interviewed, School B lacked regular and consistent whole staff professional development. Teachers expressed overwhelm with the quantity of new instructional materials, given changes in state standards and district curricula and communicated that most teachers worked independently to make sense of instructional requirements. Like Beverly, these teachers underscored the importance of teacher collaboration structures like professional learning communities (PLCs) and the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT); however, they felt that currently these structured lacked clear expectations and guidance. In their opinion, there existed a lack of instructional clarity around curriculum implementation, which teachers felt impeded the optimization of PLCs and small group tutoring supports.

Low relevancy of professional development topics was also cited as a contributing factor to inconsistent instruction. Teachers shared that typical professional development sessions focused on content that was frequently disconnected from staff instructional needs; for example, time spent discussing how to teach mastery of multiplication facts. Instead, teachers insisted that time be spent fostering instructional collaboration among school day and after school program staff to develop a common vision for student learning at each grade level. Teachers interviewed did not feel like allotted teacher collaboration time was used to develop instructional coherence. In fact, several teachers stated that PLCs needed an instructional coach to support grade-level teams in their instructional planning. Teachers also expressed interest in learning about effective teacher collaboration models from other schools.

Findings from the three classroom walkthroughs posited inconsistent teaching practices related to student engagement. In 2 of 3 classrooms observed, teachers redirected off-task students by using Restorative Justice practices, with

minimal disruption to instructional time. In contrast, classroom instructional time in 1 of 3 classrooms centered on reprimanding students for misbehavior, which took approximately 10 minutes, with the remaining 10 minutes focused on procedural directions. Although student *behavioral engagement* was evident in 2 of 3 classrooms, *cognitive engagement* was only present in 1 of 3 classrooms observed. While the three 20-minute classroom observations represented a small window into the classroom instruction at School B, data from the classroom observations correlated with perspectives shared during principal and teacher focus group interviews about School B's current instructional incoherence.

While presenting a clear vision for a clear and coherent instructional program appeared to be an area of leadership growth for Beverly, evidence from the professional development session observed demonstrated Beverly's strengths in communicating expectations and creating shared understanding about Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum implementation as a strategy to improve students' social skills.

To set the stage and build rationale for the professional development session, Beverly, accompanied by instructional coach, referenced prior one-on-one conversations with teachers and reviewed feedback from previous school culture leadership team meetings:

> *I wanted my staff to know that I have been listening to them and I wanted them to know that this work wasn't just coming from me but an ask from their colleagues...as a school I am having us refocus on work we have all said we are committed to because when we have focused on this work, we have collectively noticed the difference in how our kids show up...getting that buy-in is so important...*

Beverly shared the importance of building and reinforcing shared understanding about school B's approach SEL skill development. During this professional development session, teachers discussed curriculum implementation challenges, generated ideas, observed a SEL lesson modeled by the instructional coach, and received clarification about school-wide expectations to support consistent curriculum implementation.

In follow-up conversations, Beverly articulated her action plan to assess the application of learning from the professional development session and monitor adherence to SEL agreements, *"I've got to be in those classrooms to make sure teachers are teaching the lessons...they have to know we have to stay consistent with this work."* Beverly was also able to identify pieces of the positive school culture puzzle still missing: developing school SEL goals to measure the impact of SEL curriculum implementation.

Although a comprehensive school culture handbook existed, neither Beverly nor teachers interviewed made reference to this document guiding school culture and climate improvements. Teachers applauded efforts of school culture leadership team and Beverly's leadership around setting a tone for student, families and staff of respect and keeping kids first through her own daily actions and individual connections with school community. Similar to systems issues raised regarding consistent academic instruction, "systems needed to be "tightened", was one

comment made by teacher during the focus group that received head nods by others. When asked to be more specific, the group discussed a core group of students who are frequently sent out of class, remaining in buddy classrooms or even in the front office for unlimited amounts of time and variation in response to student misbehavior among school day teachers and after-school staff. It is important to note, however, that several teachers were swift to reiterate that despite lack of systems to support school wide student behavior expectations and consequences, School B staff, "...pitch in and help out whenever it is needed because that is the culture Beverly has developed." Hence, improving systems to support positive culture and climate was mentioned, but not perceived as grave a concern as system improvement to support instructional professional development.

Principal and teacher focus group interviews accompanied by classroom and professional development observations pointed to common values around collaboration, communication and providing all students and families access to quality teaching and learning. Whether discussing parent engagement and advocacy for African-American and English Language Learner parents or current challenges with the instructional program at School B, Beverly and her teaching staff not only identified similar strengths and challenges at School B, but also identified the various systems and processes that contributed to school improvement or hindered school improvement. One could argue that another common value at School B might be optimism—confidence in the school's ability to continuously improve. Through collaboration and communication, many School B staff seemed to believe that they could address some of the current system challenges impeding the learning environment and quality of instruction for all students.

Despite the collective will among School B constituents, Beverly's limited instructional leadership skill set prevented the maximization of key school structures to support school improvement efforts. The absence of clear goals to measure the impact of increased parent engagement and advocacy of African-American and Latino parents left many teachers unclear about the purpose of this school initiative. Moreover, the lack of clear instructional goals for each grade level and shared understanding of rigorous instruction seemed to impact the effectiveness of teacher collaboration and professional development, resulting in variance in teacher instructional planning and classroom instruction. Findings from School B suggested that values alignment is insufficient to operationalize equity-centered instructional leadership. The technical skill set of instructional leadership is also essential so that values live within the organizational practices at the school site.

Table 16: Catherine: Enactment of Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership

How does Catherine enact equity-centered instructional leadership?	What leadership skills does Catherine employ?	What challenges does Catherine encounter?
Development of school and community partnerships	● Managing school constituent relationships ● Managing three-	● Conflicting teacher views about school and district discipline

	way communication between community partners, parents and school (Epstein, et. al, 1997) ● Brokering district and community resources	policy ● Teacher demands to participate in leadership decision-making
Reconstitution of Instructional Leadership Team (ILT)	● Managing teacher relationships ● Modifying ILT structure and building collaborative processes (Leithwood, 2010) ● Facilitating moral dialogue (Shields, 2004)	

Catherine proudly attributed vibrant partnerships among community-based organizations, district-sponsored programs and families as a direct result of her unwavering commitment to students and families at School C and testament to her equity-centered instructional leadership. To make her point, Catherine spent time describing the school she inherited, eight years ago:

> *It was off the hook when I get here...I mean I kid you not, I spent time, just about every day breaking up kid fights, which is ridiculous because these are babies, but that's what it was like and on top of that, keeping parents from fighting, so no, I was not observing classrooms daily or even thinking about PLCs...it was about keeping a lid on stuff...parents didn't like staff and staff didn't like parents...there was no sense of community at the school and pretty much a soap opera with all the drama that happened everyday...it took time, I mean like two years, but I changed that...that was like step one, create a safe place...now looking back, that is what I was doing, creating a safe place so that kids can learn...now I'm rolling up my sleeves to focus on the learning part...couldn't do that at first...*

Probing into her reflective thinking, Catherine shared that her first step was modeling respect, love and care for student and families. Story after story exemplified Catherine's personal values around parent engagement. She shared in great detail her willingness to reach out and make personal connections with individual families, both to encourage them to be more involved in the school and talk through issues of concern, even in the midst of parental anger. From Catherine's perspective, her vigilance around the motto: treat other people like you want to be treated, gradually shifted the tone in school, *"Some teachers just left*

and others started following suit in how they started interacting with parents."
Teachers interviewed echoed similar sentiments about the impact of Catherine's leadership on school's climate and culture. One veteran teacher made the following comment during the focus group, while other teachers nodded their heads in unison:

> *Catherine is rare...she is willing to go the extra mile so we are willing to go the extra mile. I have worked with a lot of different administrators and this is unusual; she understands challenges and goes to bat for you. Parents now feel their voices are heard as a result of Catherine's leadership. She is responsive; families feel supported; outside people that use to stay away now come and help out. It feels different than how it felt before*

Bringing partnerships into the fold of School C, from Catherine's perspective was a step-by-step process, one that required extensive time, engaging in one-on-one dialog. She was not able to articulate why partnerships had not been in place or what helped them grow over time; she simply repeated that she invested time and energy into building relationships with partners and vetting the partners—which ones were about the kids and community versus their own organizational agenda. She communicated that she stopped partnering with community and district partners that were not a "good fit" for the school. To support her screening process, Catherine relied upon district central, *"I attended training and learned how to create criteria that I use and my Parent Liaison uses so we have some sort of quality control."* Furthermore, Catherine attributed equal success to her long-standing relationship with current Parent Liaison, who has also served the school community for the same length of time as Catherine. Catherine detailed their team approach to building infrastructure that now supports multiple monthly workshops, wraparound support meetings for families and regular check-ins with community partners, *"He is my right hand man and keeps me centered. I can now rely on him to do the heavy lifting with new partners that I use to do."* Catherine stated with pride the various partners that served her students directly at school and families within the community and celebrated the fact that she now has to turn partners away because the demand is so great.

Catherine channeled her personal values focused on strong home-school connections into her leadership work at School C. She spent much of her first two years leading by example, modeling the importance of showing students and family love and respect to attract them to the school community. Findings from the teacher focus group suggested that Catherine's initial actions had a positive impact on the mindset and actions of teachers as they witnessed the significant increase of parents and community partners who became active in the School C community. Catherine's personal values about parent and community partnerships also contributed to her public stance in support of the district's focus on building Full Service Community Schools. As Catherine's own actions helped to shape the school environment to be more welcoming and inclusive of parents and community members, Catherine also leveraged district resources—training, support staff and funding opportunities—to deepen community school partnerships at School C. Catherine's leadership continued to increase resources in the School C community,

many School C staff begin to embrace the notion of parent and community engagement.

Catherine pointed to the creation PLCs and the rebirth of her ILT as an example of academic achievements at School C. Catherine hoped these school structures would improve the quality of instruction so more students were reading at grade level. In full transparency, Catherine revealed that staff and district feedback helped her focused on these specific systems. Three years ago, Catherine mentioned SUSD's emphasis on PLCs at all school sites. Following suit with this district mandate, Catherine invested school funds to hire three Intervention Specialists to teach classrooms on Mondays to release grade-levels for collaborative instructional planning. Although initially met with teacher resistance, according to Catherine, teachers now valued this collaborative time, with recent additions being the inclusion of the current instructional coach to support selected grade-levels with instructional planning. In response to staff and district supervisor feedback, Catherine decided to revamp her Instructional Leadership Team:

> In the past, I think I just had the wrong people on the team. They did not want to commit after hours and focused more on what stipend they were going to receive them what we needed to improve on as a school. Also, it seemed like I was still doing everything even thought it was supposed to be a team...and it really was more of a complaining session than a place where we were figuring out how to take the school to the next level...

Learning from her past mistakes, Catherine reformed her ILT by selecting members who were self-starters and also held in high-esteem by their peers. In sharing her experience working with her current ILT, Catherine stated:

> ...what is so nice and refreshing is that I don't feel like it is just me owning the work...I mean we go back and forth and we argue toe-to-toe on what to focus on and what needs to go on the back burner. They also help plan and lead PD so all the messaging about what we need to do and why we need to do it isn't just coming from me, which I'm seeing now makes a big difference…

Illustrations of ILT contributions included refocusing School C staff on common agreements outlined in School C Handbook, co-facilitating grade-level assemblies focused on a particular social skill per month, and beginning to examine student performance on literacy assessments by grade level. Honest about being in the genesis stages of development, Catherine still counted establishments of teacher collaboration time and functioning team that focused on both school culture and instruction as significant steps to steer School C in the direction of improving instructional and social emotional outcomes for students.

School successes mentioned during teacher focus group interviews closely mirrored Catherine's perspective of School C; yet, current school dilemmas varied between leader and teachers. In addition to viewing Catherine's individual leadership as the catalyst for shifting school culture and climate, teacher remarks suggested that staff also perceive community partnerships as a value-add to the school. In vivid detail, teachers discussed how high-level trauma embedded in the surrounding neighborhood affected students and indirectly their daily lives as teachers. Woven throughout these stories, teachers knitted a tapestry of how

community-based supports and services—mental health providers, free eyeglass giveaways, reading tutors, and a multitude of parent workshops—served as an extension of the school, meeting family needs beyond capacity of school staff. As a newly reconstituted ILT body, teachers interviewed did not feel they had yet reaped the benefits from this team. With that said, teachers spoke optimistically about what they hoped this team would accomplish. One member of the ILT shared excitement about being a part of team that was helping to shape improvement strategies for the school, providing the specific example of establishing collective agreements about managing student behavior to decrease chaotic episodes throughout school campus.

The topic of student behavior raised by one teacher unleashed a diatribe against the current district discipline policy that discouraged African-American male student suspensions. Despite multiple services and support available at School C, teachers unanimously believed social emotional needs of students and families exceeded supports available; despite collective efforts of leadership and community partners, teachers believed episodes of student defiance, student violence or sheer outbursts remained a daily occurrence. For these types of behaviors, teachers expressed frustration at SUSD approach to student discipline that teachers interpreted as a moratorium on African-American suspensions. Because of this policy, teachers argued, the majority of students do not receive adequate instructional time.

However, one teacher shared a counterargument for possible root causes of school culture and climate issues at School C. Instead of focusing on trials and tribulations of students and families, this teacher shed light on the need to develop more consistent responses to student behavior. In particular, the teacher felt an urgent need for Catherine to invest in promoting open dialogue among teachers, similar to her investment with students and families. For this teacher, accompanied by nods of other teacher participants, absence of dialog among school staff about school-wide systems--where they are falling apart or simply absent--represented a current dilemma, deserving of immediate attention.

In Catherine's eyes, the intention of reconstituting the ILT was to respond to current staff culture issues by engaging in authentic collaboration with ILT, an approach, Catherine admitted foreign to her leadership style:

I must admit, I'm use to running the show...you know, what I say goes...I mean that's how I got the school where it is now, not saying it's perfect, but certainly better than it was. But, I hear my teachers and they are saying they want to be more involved in the planning and figuring out what we are going to do and not going to do. I mean, I here what they are saying...I need to slow down, include them more and stay focused…

Teachers interviewed shared Catherine's perspective about staying focused. They cited past and current professional development sessions as evidence of the school taking on too much at one time. One teacher even said that it often feels as though weekly professional development is dictated by topics discussed during district meetings Catherine attended. Resounding sentiment from these teachers

was that the newly formed ILT, along with input from the entire staff, should be guiding professional development planning, not the sole hand of the school leader.

Conflicting staff views surfaced during the teacher focus group interview became evident during an observed teacher professional development session about data walls. Catherine launched the staff discussion with a rationale for data walls, a visual representation of individual student progress—100 percent of School C students will read at grade-level, by the end of the school year. As this goal statement was made (in the middle of the school year), several teachers disengaged from the presentation by correcting papers or surfacing technological devices; yet, Catherine pressed on, using humor and charisma to redirect negative behavior, seeping through the meeting space. Other teachers demonstrated engagement by asking various clarifying questions, such as why staff had to implement data walls mid-school year, or what strategies should teachers use to accelerate reading achievement, if currently less than 15 percent of students read at grade-level? In response to questions, Catherine made reference to a district mandate regarding data wall implementation or replied that she would follow-up with teachers about data walls questions after she received more clarity from the district, as she was also learning about this practice. It should be also noted that Catherine facilitated the entire presentation; the instructional coach was only observed distributing folders with pertinent documents and recording teacher questions and concerns on the whiteboard. Evidence from this particular professional development session supported claims made by the teacher focus group that professional development planning lacked teacher staff input and a general sustained school focus.

Findings from 20-minute classroom observations of three teachers revealed slight variance in approaches to classroom management and student assessment of learning. In all three classrooms, positive narration to encourage on-task student behavior was observed; yet, subtle differences were observed between each classroom. In one classroom, the teacher used positive narration to gain 100 percent of student attention and waited to commence teacher-led instruction until all students demonstrated behavioral engagement, a strategy that consumed the first 10 minutes of the lesson observed. Employing an alternate approach, two other teachers used positive narration in the midst of teacher-led instruction by acknowledging specific expected behaviors and providing nonverbal cues—eye contact or hand on shoulder—to specific students, without pause. These two teachers attended to student metacognition by asking students to reflect on the difficulty of the task and learning strategies students used to complete the required task. In these two classroom, the full 20-minutes were devoted to building student understanding of the learning objective. Although only a snippet of classroom instruction, these three 20-minute observations revealed different philosophical approaches to student misbehavior and student engagement, differences teachers in the teacher focus group viewed as a contributing factor to inconsistent student behavior and learning across the school.

Catherine leveraged her charisma about parent engagement and advocacy and the current district focus around Full Service Community School to ignite reculturing efforts at School C. Findings from principal, teacher focus group

interviews and document analysis suggested that School C reaped numerous benefits in resources—staffing and funding—by embracing this approach to building a school community. More importantly, as resources poured into the School C community and teacher staff witnessed the positive impact on students and families, teachers begin to value the importance of home-school connections and utilizing community partners as a liaison between the school and family. Hence, Catherine's modeling of student, parent and community partner engagement served as an influential source that shaped the School C community to be open and receptive to the integration of parent and community leaders.

While leading by example proved to be effective during the initial stages of reculturing, Catherine now experienced teacher resistance as they clamored for stronger teacher input into School C decision-making—determining school priorities, discipline policies and professional development. Findings from teacher focus groups illuminated value conflicts among teachers and between a subset of teachers and Catherine related to district policies that valued a Restorative Justice approach when addressing student misbehavior. While Catherine towed the district party line as the rationale for major decisions, teachers surfaced their concerns, which revealed contradictory perspectives, specifically around managing student misbehavior and progress monitoring individual student achievement. Findings from the professional development observation indicated a lack of consensus around addressing student misbehavior as well as clarity about the instructional priorities for School C. Nebulous understanding about the general direction of School C from school constituents and Catherine seemed to gave rise to flourishing multiple perspectives about solutions to student misbehavior and data analysis that appeared to stymie Catherine's school improvement leadership efforts.

Allison, Beverly and Catherine collectively defined equity-centered instructional leadership as actions principals take to facilitate difficult conversations about school injustices to confront school constituent resistance in order to move one's school agenda forward. Allison, Beverly and Catherine were able to offer examples of when they stepped into controversial spaces in order to improve the learning environment and quality of instruction for underserved students and families.

Value coherence among district policy, groups of teachers, and the principal seemed to contribute to the implementation success of equity work shared by three elementary principals. On school issues where district policy, school staff and principal personal values were aligned, all three elementary principals demonstrated reculturing leadership skills. Allison organized school community dialogue to create a School Culture Policy; Beverly convinced the school culture leadership team to take greater ownership around English Language Learner and African-American parent outreach; and Catherine modeled from her teaching staff the way in which she expected teachers to involve parents in school events and classroom activities. In essence, all three elementary principals exhibited transformational leadership practices in order to reculture their respective learning environments to better serve African-American and English Language Learner students and families. Common beliefs embedded in district policies that resonated

with a critical mass of teachers, supported by unabashed principal leadership seemed to create school environments that were tolerant of organizational discomfort, which allowed for pockets of transformational change—dismissal of ineffective teacher, enrolling classroom teachers in differentiated parent engagement, and integrating community partners into school organizational practices—within each school site.

Challenges encountered by the three elementary principals as they enacted equity-centered instructional leadership varied based on each principal's areas of growth as well as the personal values held by teaching staff at the school site. For School A, SUSD policy that valued the reduction of disproportionality in the suspensions of African-American and Latino boys surfaced value conflicts between Allison and many of her teaching staff. Although Allison was able to lead the ILT through the creation of a vision document to transform the school culture, she struggled in developing organizational practices—routines, rituals, structures and process—to translate the vision statement into day-to-day action for School A constituents.

Beverly had similar technical leadership struggles, despite minimal value conflicts between Beverly and her teaching staff. While teachers communicated the vision for School B, there seemed to be a lack of understanding of the goals and outcomes for School B organizational practices, such as weekly teacher collaboration time, professional development and progress monitoring of student learning. Moreover, Beverly was unable to articulate how she needed to adjust her leadership practices to provide instructional clarity and direction to her largely onboard staff to improve the consistency of school culture and instructional practices.

Similar to Allison and Beverly, Catherine struggled to translate her personal vision into actionable leadership steps. Catherine was challenged by the burgeoning interest among teachers to participate in school-level decision-making. She was not certain how best to incorporate to use her Teacher on Special Assignment or ILT members to shape school priorities and professional development. Other than messaging received from district messaging, Catherine seemed unclear about her vision for the instructional program at School C, which unintentionally promoted teacher variance in terms of approaches to student misbehavior, teacher instructional practice and consistency of student progress monitoring.

Findings from the in-depth interviews and observations of Allison, Beverly and Catherine in their respective elementary school environments showcased the importance of elementary principals possessing a duel leadership skill set to interrupt inequitable learning outcomes. Attending to the organizational mindset of school constituents is critical to reculturing the school environment to take on the challenging work on creating an inclusive environment for all students and families; however, readying the organizational mindset of a school community must be balanced with technical leadership skills that allow elementary principals to translate an inclusive mindset into a clear vision, supported by organizational systems and processes that help to translate the organizational mindset into transformed actions by the school community.

In the final section, I will analyze findings as they relate to current literature focused on social justice, politics in education and educational leadership through use of a conceptual framework. I will conclude the final section with a synopsis of implications for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings and Research Implications

This chapter presents a summary of the findings and conclusions derived from data presented in Chapter 4, which outlined how three elementary principals defined and enacted equity-centered instructional leadership in service of increased student learning outcomes. Discussion of findings will elucidate equity-centered instructional leadership practices as well as the political challenges faced by elementary principals in SUSD. The organization of this chapter is divided in three sections: discussion of cross case analysis, discussion of findings to the literature, and discussion of the implications for future action and research.

Section One, Navigating the Politics of Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership

Allison, Beverly and Catherine encountered political challenges as they attempted to enact the equity agenda in their respective school communities. While political challenges varied in nature based on school context, findings illuminated the use of dialog, particularly facilitation of difficult conversations, by all elementary principals, as a strategic approach to mediate tension among school constituents. Political challenges faced by all three elementary principals seemed to fall within two main categories: *value conflicts and negotiating power dynamics*.

Allison encountered immense value conflicts, particularly from the teaching staff concerning approaches to student misbehavior. Allison assumed that the collaborative process that led to the development of the Positive Culture Policy would spur teacher motivation to adopt Restorative Justice practices in their classrooms, which would thus shift School A's school culture and climate, particularly for African-American students. To Allison's surprise, her equity-centered arguments seemed to fall on deaf ears as teacher advocacy for administrative support for student misbehavior waxed. By exclusively leading from her personal values about equity—stand up against any school injustices—Allison seemed to assume, without much interrogation, that her teaching staff held similar personal equity values. Perplexed by the dilemma of leading in the face of teacher resistance, Allison addressed the dilemma by resolving student misbehavior issues as an individual. As Allison delved deeper into the daily challenges of managing student misbehavior and teacher resistance against her administrative directives, Allison found herself unable to observe classrooms, provide teachers constructive feedback, or develop an implementation plan to operationalize the Positive Culture Policy. Allison's limited knowledge of her teachers' will and skill to create an inclusive classroom environment, and ability to lead collaborative decision-making in the midst of conflict seemed to stifle reculturing at School A.

Similar to Allison, Catherine experienced challenges with *power dynamics* among her teaching staff. Catherine's authoritative leadership style seemed to yield positive results at the beginning of her leadership tenure. As a result of her individual efforts, Catherine managed to bring order to School C and create a welcoming environment for parents. Prioritizing the reculturing of the physical school environment was also echoed by the teacher focus group. Unanimously, teachers credited the safe learning environment and strong parent participation to Catherine's leadership. As Catherine entered stage two of school improvement—

shifting the classroom culture and improving instruction—it appeared that the same leadership strategies Catherine relied on were now causing internal strife among some teachers. The teacher focus group pointed to the lack of teacher input in the decision-making process as a contributing factor to teacher disempowerment at School C. Catherine's unilateral decision to move forward with mid-year implementation of SUSD's Data Walls initiative served as a poignant example of the "top-down" leadership that seemed to spark teacher resistance. Catherine communicated the decision to implement Data Walls at the staff meeting without prior consultation with the Literacy Coach or Instructional Leadership Team. In Catherine's eyes, she was addressing instructional decisions in a similar fashion as school culture and climate decisions. Yet, teachers were beginning to express interest in the decision-making process that would impact daily classroom affairs.

The political tension surrounding decision-making at School C seemed to be rooted in Catherine's limited skill set in participatory decision-making. In success stories shared by Catherine, her individual efforts represented the agent of change for the transformation of the school environment. Catherine had learned how to shift school climate by rolling up her sleeves and doing the work herself. It appeared, she had not had much experience establishing, leading, managing and motivating a team of individuals to transform a school, and now at School C, she was working with teachers who were asking for a role in leadership to guide the continued transformation of the school, a request that Catherine struggled to respond to in her current "top-down" leadership approach.

Catherine's inability to lead teams also contributed to brewing value conflicts among teachers about student misbehavior. Teachers in the focus group expressed overwhelm with the quantity of student and families with high social emotional needs, but differed in their perspectives on how School C might address this critical issues. While one teacher explicitly blamed SUSD policy for banning suspensions, other teachers pointed to inconsistent classroom expectations about behavior and classroom instruction among teachers as the culprit for student misbehavior. The absence of structures and processes to promote collaborative dialogue, problem solving and decision-making, inclusive of teacher voice, seemed to result in each teacher interpreting the root cause of student misbehavior in different ways. While Catherine and the teacher focus group spoke optimistically about the recent reestablishment of the Instructional Leadership Team, neither Catherine nor the teachers articulated in precise terms how this newly formed leadership body would address teacher disempowerment.

Beverly, unlike her counterparts, seemed adept in navigating the political challenges within School B. One of the ways Beverly enacted equity-centered instructional leadership was through the strategic use of school funds to hire a staff member who worked exclusively with African-American boys to support their social emotional development. By engaging in collective dialogue with the school leadership team and school site council, Beverly garnered constituency support for this equity-centered staffing position. Understanding that some teachers had to witness firsthand, the positive impact of this equity-centered position, Beverly crafted strategic community dialogues, where the newly appointed staff member shared his early successes with the larger school community. Beverly also used

collaborative dialogue with her leadership teams to build understanding around the investment in boy mentor groups as a strategy to reduce African-American male suspension. By designing key structures and systems that promoted open-communication and collaboration among School B constituents, Beverly was able to garner school site approval for an equity-based school policy and staffing position.

While the establishment of collaborative structures seemed to be an area of strength for Beverly, designing accountability processes within the leadership teams—designing processes to establish clear goals and developing tools to monitor progress towards goals—appeared to be an area of growth for Beverly's leadership. For example, while teachers largely supported the targeted focus of increased parent participation among English Language Learners and African-Americans, no one seemed clear about the overall purpose for or goal of increased parent engagement. Similarly, the instructional vision for School B and grade-level instructional goals to guide teacher implementation of the instructional vision was equally unclear. Understanding the process to lead a team through the formation of a school-wide goal appeared to be an area where Beverly needed support as a principal. Moreover, designing a process for the leadership team to identify and analyze specific qualitative and quantitative data to monitor progress of equity-centered policy implementation also seemed to be a leadership growth area. Despite the presence of collaborative systems and structures that promoted school-wide consensus about equity-centered instructional school policies and equity-centered staffing, the lack of principal understanding about policy implementation contributed to the inconsistencies around school culture and instructional practices at School B.

The three elementary principals in this study enacted equity-centered instructional leadership in hopes of creating an inclusive learning environment that would prepare all students for college, career and community success. While all principals engaged in difficult conversations with school constituents to surface school-based inequities, each principal experienced pitfalls and setbacks in their quest to interrupt inequitable school-based policies and practices. Allison and Catherine struggled to navigate political challenges fueled by value conflicts and power dynamics between the principal and teaching staff. Their inability to anticipate and manage conflict among school constituents stymied their equity-centered leadership efforts towards greater school improvement for all students. In contrast, Beverly, who demonstrated leadership strength in navigating the political terrain at School B, struggled to implement school-based equity-centered policies supported by many within the School B community.

In section two, I will use the research literature, *Politics of Education, Reculturing for Equity and Educational Leadership*, to draw connections from the findings to the larger bodies of research.

Section 2

Engaging in equity-centered instructional leadership requires that principals embrace the enormous challenge of reculturing the mindset of individuals within the school setting to renorm the organizational mindset, while simultaneously

reimagining school systems and structures to improve the quality of teaching and learning for all students (Petty, 2015). While the enactment of equity-centered instructional leadership undoubtedly requires technical expertise—effective design, communication and implementation of school policy—political expertise is of equal importance to lead authentic implementation of equity-based school policies (Ball, 1987; Datnow, 2000; & Trujillo, 2013). Since the driving force of an equity-centered instructional leadership approach is to disrupt normative instructional policy, practices and processes, an equity-centered instructional leadership stance will inevitably ignite some form of political unrest among school constituents that will fall into the lap of principals to negotiate. The degree to which principals possess leadership skills and the disposition to mediate messages about equity from larger society, district policy and personal values from their school community, including their own, will shape the organizational space of the school to become tolerant or intolerant to the equity-centered policies elementary principals put forth (Oakes, Welner, Yonezawa & Allen, 2005). While Allison, Beverly and Catherine demonstrated a disposition to enact equity-centered instructional leadership, all three elementary principals varied in their leadership skill set, which seemed to contribute to the diversity of challenges experienced by the elementary principals as they worked to create inclusive school communities.

All three elementary principals possessed *critical consciousness* related to school justice (McCabe and McCarthy, 2005 & Theoharis, 2006). In other words, each principal valued the importance of interrupting school injustice. Critical consciousness came to life for these principals in their definitions of equity-centered instructional leadership. They underscored the importance of facilitating difficult conversations to surface injustices living within their respective school communities. The willingness of all three elementary principals to maintain justice, care, love, respect and equity in the forefront of their daily leadership practice echoes findings from the social justice educational leadership research, identifying *critical consciousness* as a critical feature of an equity-centered principal (Bogotch, 2002; Larson, 2003; Theoharis, 2007 & Kose, 2009). Recognizing the power of deficit attitudes and beliefs about certain children, these elementary principals committed themselves, not just to improve and refine school policies, structures and processes, but also to *interrupt* status quo schooling in service of creating *inclusive* school communities.

While the will to engage in the arduous work of equity-centered instructional leadership is essential, findings from this cross-case study of three elementary principals suggested that sheer willpower is far from sufficient. Knowing how to mediate messages from district policy, school constituents and negotiate political dynamics require a leadership skill set that only Beverly seemed to possess in this study. Beverly seemed to understand the power and political influence of aligning her personal values to those embedded in the district policy to leverage financial resources for her school site (Trujillo, 2012). In many respects, each SUSD elementary school was granted a certain level of political security by way of the district's equity-centered strategic plan. For instance, since SUSD expected all school sites to address the disproportionality of African-American and Latino male student suspension rates, Allison, Beverly and Catherine had an opportunity to

leverage the district policy as part of their school equity agenda. In contrast, Allison and Catherine attempted to move their equity agendas, relying exclusively on the power of their moral conviction to shift the mindset of others within their school community. Also unlike Beverly, Catherine and Allison failed to attend to the larger cultural and social norms and values surrounding the behavior of African-American and Latino male students. Hence, the introduction of equity-centered policies to address student misbehavior in School A and School C fell outside the "zone of tolerance" for these school communities as value conflicts between the principal and teaching staff surrounding discipline approaches for African-American male students proved too complicated for Allison and Catherine to manage (McGivney and Moynihan, 1972).

Findings from this research study also elucidated the importance of creating organizational space to facilitate and manage *collective dialogue*—conversations that promote disparate perspectives to produce greater inclusive organizational practices within a school (Shields, 2004). As each elementary principal attempted to disrupt structural inequities within their respective schools, their progress was shaped by their individual capacity to facilitate *collective dialogue*, particularly when divergent perspectives emerged. As an experienced "top-down" leader, Catherine's facilitative skills were in their nascent stage. As a result, School C policies reflected Catherine's voice without the balance of others, a reality that contributed to the delay in school policy implementation. Allison, on the other hand, possessed the skills to facilitate collective dialogue with divergent school constituents, often relying on quantitative data to promote healthy and purposeful community conversations. Though Allison facilitated a shared space for staff, families and community partners to share divergent ideas during the creation process the equity-centered policy, her inability to manage conflicting perspectives during the decision-making process stifled progress towards policy implementation. Beverly appeared the most skillful in her use of facilitation to garner support for School B equity-centered policies. Unlike her colleagues, Beverly planned for the presence of value conflicts. By carefully sequencing School B conversations, Beverly built buy-in toward the desired organizational mindset she knew would be required to support policy implementation. The variance of equity-centered policy acceptance among school constituents in the three elementary schools highlights "persuasive and skillful public relations techniques" as a critical component of equity-centered instructional leadership (Boyd, 1976, p. 552). The successes and challenges experienced by Allison, Beverly and Catherine in their attempts to implement equity-centered school policies elucidated components of the social justice literature—critical consciousness of the principal and willingness to shift the organizational mindset through collective dialogue.

Gaps in leadership knowledge and skills framed by the Instructional Leadership and Transformational Leadership literature appeared to hamper the enactment of equity-centered instructional leadership among the three elementary principals. Though every principal possessed an instructional vision for their school, and two of the three principals possessed facilitative leadership skills to shift the mindset of the school community, none could articulate an implementation plan that would enact a clear change process to transform the quality of teaching

within the school. Specifically, Allison, Beverly and Catherine struggled to develop systems, structures and processes to foster participatory decision-making within their Instructional Leadership and School Culture teams. In each elementary school, teachers expressed confusion about expectations around curriculum implementation or student discipline policies. The lack of clarity among teachers was largely due to the principals' inability to develop systems and processes that supported the coordination of curriculum and instructional coherence so that teachers could enact elements of each principal's equity-centered instructional vision (Hallinger, 2003). To not integrate leadership skills that are referenced in the *instructional leadership* literature misses a critical component of the principal role—improving the quality of teaching and learning for all students. In other words, the leadership knowledge, skills and dispositions to ready the school community for equity-centered school transformation are largely in service of reculturing the quality of teaching and learning for all students.

Section 3

Although the findings from this cross case research study are not generalizable to the broader context, they do hold significant insight for job-embedded leadership development for elementary principals in Sequoia Unified School District. This study sheds light on the complex nature of the leadership content knowledge, skills and dispositions needed for SUSD elementary principals to transform their organizational spaces into learning environments that promote inclusivity and high quality learning for all students. The successes and challenges faced by the three elementary principals suggest that SUSD elementary principals should possess leadership knowledge, skills and dispositions that intersect the personal, political, and technical boundaries (Oakes, Welner, Yonezawa & Allen, 2005).

As individuals leading in an urban school context, SUSD elementary principals must develop mental preparedness to take on the leadership challenges they will face when enacting equity-centered instructional leadership. They must possess critical consciousness to clearly see how inequity lives within the structural conditions and daily human interactions within the school environment. While personal experiences surrounding social injustice fueled the mental model around equity for elementary principals in this study, SUSD must take into consideration the capacity building of incoming elementary principals who may not have extensive prior knowledge regarding equity; thus, job-embedded professional learning should be created for principals to interrogate their level of consciousness about equity. Without a firm disposition and understanding of the manifestation of inequity within schools, principals lack the leadership compass necessary to navigate the complex school terrain.

SUSD elementary principals must also understand how to "bottle" and "sell" an equity agenda that calls school constituents to action. Knowing how to conduct a needs assessment of the school environment is a critical leadership skill. Deep analysis of perspectives and values related to equity, within the school community, district and society at large, allow elementary principals to negotiate the political

forces at play to more effectively facilitate collective dialogue in service of creating an inclusive school environment.

Beyond the personal and political, translating the vision of an equity-centered policy into action requires technical leadership skills to improve conditions for and the quality of teaching and learning. Whether facilitating community engagements, leveraging qualitative and quantitative data to identify root causes of structural inequity, designing professional development, or developing processes to guide the daily actions of school-based teams, elementary principals in SUSD require explicit training focused on the key components of instructional and transformational leadership.

Beyond intentional principal leadership development, the political challenges faced by the three SUSD elementary principals shed light on the critical role district and state equity-centered policies play in shaping the school environment. State policies like the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and SUSD policies that focused on reducing the disproportionality of African-American and Latino male suspensions grant individual principals the political ammunition to combat structural inequities within their school environments. The absence of equity-centered policies places the sole responsibility in the hands of the individual instead of the system. Because normative sociopolitical forces tend to dominate at the local level, centralized equity-centered policies tend to promote greater access to high quality learning by creating the organizational conditions for equity-centered leadership (Wise, 1972). Additional state and federal policies that favor differential resource allocation—highly qualified teachers in hard to staff schools, higher salaries for teacher and principals in high need areas, and additional instructional time for students and collaboration time for teachers—would lighten the political load for local districts and individual schools in their quest to interrupt structural inequities on behalf of underserved students and families.

In the case of SUSD, the combination of equity-centered state and county policies, accompanied by deeply rooted support from the community level for SUSD's equity-centered strategic plan, developed over the course of multiple superintendents, helped to sustain the focus on equity-based leadership, despite significant superintendent attrition. Though low morale and relational trust among SUSD elementary principals was apparent, negative sentiments about individual district leaders or the larger bureaucratic system did not appear to diminish principal connectedness to the equity vision and values embedded in SUSD's vision and call to action. The high level of value coherence among state, county and city policies around the disruption of structural inequities appeared to create an educational zone that provided individual principals, if mentally equipped and skilled, with the structural conditions to enact equity-centered instructional leadership.

Researcher's Final Thoughts

Like most academic research, this study surfaces far more questions than answers. There is much to learn about the influence of state and federal equity-centered policies on district and school-based equity-centered policies. For example, in what ways do centralized state and federal policies shape the priorities

of school districts to create more equitable outcomes for students? Conducting research to examine the impact of well-crafted equity-centered policies can offer solutions to potentially reduce the political load many districts and individual schools currently negotiate to provide all students quality educational experiences. At the school level, the educational research field could benefit from studies that investigate the enactment of principal equity-centered instructional leadership at the elementary, middle and high school to compare and contrast the leadership knowledge, skills and disposition required in the personal, political and technical realms. It is my hope that this research informs the future planning of professional development for SUSD principals and the recruitment of future principals for the schools in SUSD.

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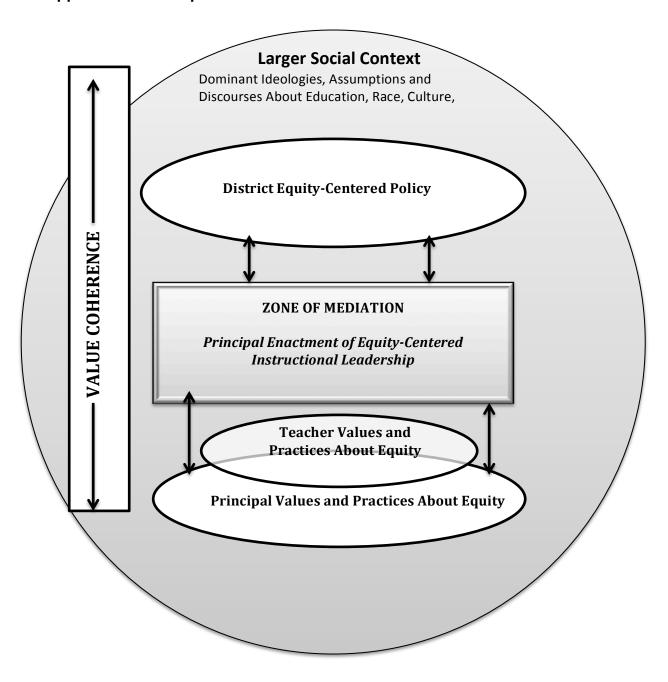
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Appendix 1: Conceptual Framework

Larger Social Context
Dominant Ideologies, Assumptions and
Discourses About Education, Race, Culture,

VALUE COHERENCE

District Equity-Centered Policy

ZONE OF MEDIATION

*Principal Enactment of Equity-Centered
Instructional Leadership*

**Teacher Values and
Practices About Equity**

Principal Values and Practices About Equity

Appendix 2: Interview Protocols

Principal Interview	Questions to ask participants
Introduction of Study	● *Clarify my role in this research study* ● *Provide overview of IRB protocols and policies* ● *Frame purpose of the study* ● *Explain why individuals selected as participants/clarify participants' questions* ● *Obtain signatures*
Embodiment of "critical consciousness" within belief systems or values of principals (Theoharis et. al, 2006)	1. *Where did you grow up?* 2. *Describe your own schooling experience. How would you rate your own schooling experience—positive, indifferent or negative? Describe the neighborhood where you went to school.* 3. *What stands out as particular highs and lows of your schooling experience?* 4. *Please tell me about specific experiences (if any) where you or others experienced injustices as a student? How did you respond to this situation? What did you learn from this experience?* 5. *How did you decide to pursue a career in public education?* 6. *Please share a time when you observed injustices at a site where you worked. Were you able to respond? *If principal mentions a school where they were/are a leader, ask how they responded to the injustice.* 7. *What does educational equity mean to you? How equitable is the system of schools in Sequoia Unified School?* 8. *What experiences best prepared you for your role to lead in service of equity?* 9. *How do you identify yourself—according to race/ethnicity, class, gender, disability, language, sexual orientation, and religion?*
Principal knowledge and skills about equity—principal understanding of what it means to be an equity-centered instructional leader and how to put knowledge into practice	1. *How would you define the core function of a principal?* 2. *Define college and career readiness. In what ways does your school provide all students opportunities to become college and career ready, during the school day and beyond—after school and school, community events?* 3. *How have your structured resources to ensure opportunities for students to be known and accelerate academically?* 4. *What accomplishments related to equity are you most proud of?* 5. *How have you worked to advance equity-awareness in relation to instruction with your staff? How effective have these practices been?* 6. *In what ways have you engaged parents and community*

partners in supporting the school's instructional goals? How effective have these practices been?

Teacher Focus Group Interview

Teacher *Focus Group Interview*	*Questions to ask participants*
Introduction of Study	● Clarify my role in this research study ● Provide overview of IRB protocols and policies ● Frame purpose of the study ● Explain why individuals selected as participants/clarify participants' questions ● Obtain signatures
Evidence of embodiment of "critical consciousness" within teachers' belief systems or values (Theoharis et. al, 2006)	1. Where did you grow up? 2. Describe your own schooling experience. How would you rate your own schooling experience—positive, indifferent or negative? Describe the neighborhood where you went to school. 3. What stands out as particular highs and lows of your schooling experience? 4. Please tell me about specific experiences (if any) where you or others experienced injustices as a student? How did you respond to this situation? What did you learn from this experience? 5. How did you decide to pursue a career in public education? 6. Please share a time when you observed injustices at a site where you worked. Were you able to respond? *If principal mentions a school where they were/are a leader, ask how they responded to the injustice. 7. What does educational equity mean to you? How equitable is the system of schools in Sequoia Unified School District? 8. What experiences best prepared you for your role to lead in service of equity? 9. How do you identify yourself—according to race/ethnicity, class, gender, disability, language, sexual orientation, and religion?
Evidence of principal knowledge and skills about equity—principal understanding of what it means to be an equity-centered instructional leader and how to put knowledge into practice	1. How would you define the core function of a principal? 2. Define college and career readiness. In what ways does your school provide all students opportunities to become college and career ready, during the school day and beyond—after school and school, community events? 3. How have the principal structured resources to ensure opportunities for students to be known and accelerate academically? 4. What accomplishments related to equity are you most proud of? 5. How has the school worked to advance equity-awareness in relation to instruction? How effective have these practices been? 6. In what ways has your school engaged parents and community partners in supporting the school's instructional goals? How effective have these practices been?

Appendix 3: Twenty-Minute Classroom Observation Protocol

School	
Date	
Time	
Grade Level	
Grouping Format	
Number in Student Groups	

Instructor models instructional tasks when appropriate (+, -, or NA).
o   Demonstrates the task (e.g., uses think alouds)
o   Proceeds in step-by-step fashion
o   Limits language to demonstration of skill
o   Makes eye contact with students, speaks clearly while modeling skill

Instructor provides explicit instruction
o   Sets the purpose for the instruction
o   Identifies the important details of the concept being taught
o   Provides instructions that have only one interpretation
o   Makes connection to previously-learned material

Instructor engages students in meaningful interactions with language during lesson.
o   Provides and elicits background information
o   Emphasizes distinctive features of new concepts
o   Uses visuals and manipulatives to teach content as necessary
o   Makes relationships among concepts overt
o   Engages students in discourse around new concepts
o   Elaborates on student responses

Instructor provides multiple opportunities for students to practice instructional tasks.
o   Provides more than one opportunity to practice each new skill
o   Provides opportunities for practice after each step in instruction
o   Elicits group responses when feasible
o   Provides extra practice based on accuracy of student responses

Instructor provides corrective feedback after initial student responses.
o   Provides affirmations for correct responses
o   Promptly corrects errors with provision of correct model
o   Limits corrective feedback language to the task at hand
o   Ensures mastery of all students before moving on

Instructor encourages student effort.
o   Provides feedback during and after task completion
o   Provides specific feedback about student's accuracy and/or effort

o   Majority of feedback is positive
o   Celebrates or displays examples of student success in reading

Students are engaged in the lesson during teacher-led instruction.
o   Gains student attention before initiating instruction
o   Paces lesson to maintain attention
o   Maintains close proximity to students
o   Transitions quickly between tasks
o   Intervenes with off-task students to maintain their focus

Students are engaged in the lesson during independent work.
o   Independent work routines and procedures previously taught
o   Models task before allowing students to work independently
o   Checks for student understanding of the task(s)
o   Students use previously-learned strategies or routines when they come to a task they don't understand
o   Independent work is completed with high level of accuracy

Students are successful completing activities at a high criterion level of performance.
o   Elicits a high percentage of accurate responses from group
o   Elicits a high percentage of accurate responses from individuals
o   Holds same standard of accuracy for high performers and low performers

Comments:

Appendix 4: Professional Development Observation Protocol

School Constituents present: _____

Purpose of Meeting: _____

Conceptual Lens "Look Fors"	Field Notes Participant Talk/Non-Verbal Behaviors	Observer Comments

Social Justice/Instructional Leadership
• Use of staffing
• Use of instructional minutes/master calendar
• Use of professional development time
• Use of discretionary funds
• Discussion/implementation of school policies for targeted populations
   • Universal Referral Form
   • Chronic Absence Monitoring
   • Reclassification
   • Parent Communication
Politics in Education
• teacher/teacher disagreement
• staff/leader disagreement
• parent/staff disagreement
• parent/leader disagreement
Reculturing for Equity
• low expectation of students
• low expectations of parents
• low expectation of staff
• multiple perspectives voiced and acknowledged
• equity of voice from stakeholders present
• respectful disagreement/challenging of ideas		

Appendix 5: School A Classroom Observation Protocol Data

School A
- + Present (85% or more of students in class)
- - Not present (less than 85% of students in class)
- ★ N/A No opportunity to observe

Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C
Teacher Actions	*Teacher Actions*	*Teacher Actions*
+ Instructor models instructional tasks when appropriate.	**+** Instructor models instructional tasks when appropriate.	- Instructor models instructional tasks when appropriate.
+ Instructor provides explicit instruction.	+ Instructor provides explicit instruction.	- Instructor provides explicit instruction.
+ Instructor engages students in meaningful interactions with language during lesson.	- Instructor engages students in meaningful interactions with language during lesson.	- Instructor engages students in meaningful interactions with language during lesson.
+ Instructor provides multiple opportunities for students to practice instructional tasks.	- Instructor provides multiple opportunities for students to practice instructional tasks.	- Instructor provides multiple opportunities for students to practice instructional tasks.
- Instructor provides corrective feedback after initial student responses.	- Instructor provides corrective feedback after initial student responses.	- Instructor provides corrective feedback after initial student responses.
+ Instructor encourages student effort.	- Instructor encourages student effort.	+ Instructor encourages student effort.

Student Actions	*Student Actions*	*Student Actions*
- Students are engaged in the lesson during teacher-led instruction. ★ Students are engaged in the lesson during independent work. - Students are successful completing activities at a high criterion level of performance.	- Students are engaged in the lesson during teacher-led instruction. ★ Students are engaged in the lesson during independent work. - Students are successful completing activities at a high criterion level of performance.	- Students are engaged in the lesson during teacher-led instruction. ★ Students are engaged in the lesson during independent work. - Students are successful completing activities at a high criterion level of performance.

School B: Classroom Observation Protocol Data

School B
- **+** Present (85% or more of students in class)
- **-** Not present (less than 85% of students in class)
- **★** N/A No opportunity to observe

Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C
Teacher Actions	*Teacher Actions*	*Teacher Actions*
+ Instructor models instructional tasks when appropriate.	**+** Instructor models instructional tasks when appropriate.	- Instructor models instructional tasks when appropriate.
+ Instructor provides explicit instruction.	- Instructor provides explicit instruction.	- Instructor provides explicit instruction.
- Instructor engages students in meaningful interactions with language during lesson.	**+** Instructor engages students in meaningful interactions with language during lesson.	- Instructor engages students in meaningful interactions with language during lesson.
- Instructor provides multiple opportunities for students to practice instructional tasks.	- Instructor provides multiple opportunities for students to practice instructional tasks.	- Instructor provides multiple opportunities for students to practice instructional tasks.
- Instructor provides corrective feedback after initial student responses.	- Instructor provides corrective feedback after initial student responses.	- Instructor provides corrective feedback after initial student responses.
+ Instructor encourages student effort.	**+** Instructor encourages student effort.	- Instructor encourages student effort.

Student Actions	*Student Actions*	*Student Actions*
- Students are engaged in the lesson during teacher-led instruction.	+ Students are engaged in the lesson during teacher-led instruction.	- Students are engaged in the lesson during teacher-led instruction.
★ Students are engaged in the lesson during independent work.	- Students are engaged in the lesson during independent work.	★ Students are engaged in the lesson during independent work.
★ Students are successful completing activities at a high criterion level of performance.	- Students are successful completing activities at a high criterion level of performance.	★ Students are successful completing activities at a high criterion level of performance.

School C Classroom Observation Protocol Data

School C
- + Present (85% or more of students in class)
- - Not present (less than 85% of students in class)
- ★ N/A No opportunity to observe

Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C
Teacher Actions	*Teacher Actions*	*Teacher Actions*
+ Instructor models instructional tasks when appropriate.	**+** Instructor models instructional tasks when appropriate.	+ Instructor models instructional tasks when appropriate.
+ Instructor provides explicit instruction.	+ Instructor provides explicit instruction.	+ Instructor provides explicit instruction.
- Instructor engages students in meaningful interactions with language during lesson.	+ Instructor engages students in meaningful interactions with language during lesson.	- Instructor engages students in meaningful interactions with language during lesson.
- Instructor provides multiple opportunities for students to practice instructional tasks.	- Instructor provides multiple opportunities for students to practice instructional tasks.	+ Instructor provides multiple opportunities for students to practice instructional tasks.
- Instructor provides corrective feedback after initial student responses.	+ Instructor provides corrective feedback after initial student responses.	+ Instructor provides corrective feedback after initial student responses.
- Instructor encourages student effort.	**+** Instructor encourages student effort.	+ Instructor encourages student effort.

Student Actions	*Student Actions*	*Student Actions*
- Students are engaged in the lesson during teacher-led instruction.	+ Students are engaged in the lesson during teacher-led instruction.	+ Students are engaged in the lesson during teacher-led instruction.
★ Students are engaged in the lesson during independent work.	+ Students are engaged in the lesson during independent work.	+ Students are engaged in the lesson during independent work.
★ Students are successful completing activities at a high criterion level of performance.	- Students are successful completing activities at a high criterion level of performance.	- Students are successful completing activities at a high criterion level of performance.