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# The Principal's Role in Creating a Culturally Responsive Learning Environment

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THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN CREATING A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE  
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

By  
Freda J. Allen

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Gardner-Webb University College of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University  
2024

## Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Freda J. Allen under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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## **Acknowledgements**

**GOD IS GRACIOUS!**

This has been an amazing journey, and God has been gracious through it all!

The support and encouragement from my front row are second to none. I am here because of the never-ending support and unconditional love of the Allen Girls. My mother, Doris Allen, has always allowed me to pursue every opportunity imaginable. I am thankful for the solid foundation she created for me. My sister and best friend, Renita Allen Dawson, is the epitome of excellence. She keeps me sharp and lifts me up each and every day.

The late Patrick McKinley Best was the BEST Godfather and principal around. My desire to be a leader in education began through conversations with him. My Godmother, Vernal H. Best, exemplifies poise and grace and has always supported my dreams.

If it weren't for Aletta B. and Carol A., I may have never started this journey. Thank you for the nudge. If it weren't for the prayers of Cynthia, Shanita, Wandra, and Sharlene, I may not have made it through. Thank you!

Thanks to my committee members for helping me cross the finish line. Dr. West, Dr. Artis, and Dr. Stone—you each hold a special place in my heart.

There are so many friends and family members who supported me throughout this journey. For every conversation, question, and word of encouragement, I am grateful!

## **Abstract**

THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN CREATING A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT. Allen, Freda J., 2024: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

Many educators believe the implementation of culturally responsive strategies may help to increase the engagement and academic success of students of color. The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not culturally responsive leadership (CRL) strategies were consistently being implemented in schools with large percentages of minority students. The research for this study was based on the CRL Framework developed by The Leadership Academy in 2022. This mixed methods study explored the practices of current school administrators and compared them to the perceptions of staff members. Staff members from three high schools completed a 23-question survey with a 4-point Likert scale to rate their perceptions of the leadership practices in the school for the quantitative portion of the research. To collect quantitative data, three administrators from two of the high schools participated in a focus group discussion. The questions for the survey and the focus group were created by me and were based on the eight actions outlined in the CRL Framework. The qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed separately and then compared to determine overall themes. Finally, the results were compared to the literature. There was not enough evidence to prove there is consistent implementation of CRL strategies. Based on the research findings, I was unable to conclude that there is a significant presence of CRL strategies being consistently used in these high schools in Alpha County in every area of the framework.

*Keywords:* achievement gap, culturally competent schools, culturally responsive

school leader, culturally responsive teaching

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The institution of education is undergoing a major shift. One of the most notable changes in recent years has been in the types of instructional tools used to present information to students. There are technological tools being used in our schools today that did not exist 10 years ago. Remote instruction, virtual reality, and gaming tools have become common instructional resources. Additionally, educators are challenged to provide students with valuable learning experiences to guide them toward their future professional destinations, many of which do not exist today. Students in America's schools today must graduate prepared to live and work in the world of tomorrow. Technological advances in society will allow for a greater degree of professional collaboration between individuals across the United States and abroad. According to educational researchers,

The world in which schools operate today is very different from the one of just a few years ago—and all signs point to more change ahead. The global economy is transforming jobs and the 21st century workplace for which schools prepare students. Technologies are advancing faster than ever. The conditions and characteristics of children, in terms of demographics, family structures and more, are changing. (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 1)

Education must be proactive and use this evolution of technology and careers as an impetus for change. There has also been a significant shift in the country's demographics over the past several decades. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, America is becoming a more diverse country (Jensen et al., 2021). The percentage of minorities increased six percentage points to 42% in 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). It

is estimated that minorities will make up the majority of the population by the year 2050; therefore, students in our schools must be productive citizens of a diverse society.

According to Burns et al. (2005), today's students will enter a workforce that will be both ethnically and culturally diverse. It will be imperative for individuals to respect and have positive interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds in the workplace.

Students will need experiences that will increase their awareness of diverse cultures and traditions in order to be successful (William Peace University, 2023).

The shift in demographics in our nation is reflected in the majority of our public schools around the country. The most diverse group of the country's population are children under the age of 5. According to Duncan (2017), over 45% of preschool-age children are minorities. During the 2022-2023 school year, 55% of the students in public schools were minorities (Public School Review, n.d.). Schools will play an integral role in helping students develop an appreciation of various cultures. The classroom is a reflection of the larger society and can be used to teach values that represent a democratic and diverse culture (Glickman et al., 2018).

While the change in demographics across the nation is noticeable in the students attending public schools, the demographics of the educators in our public schools do not follow this same pattern. Approximately 80% of teachers and 70% of administrators in our public schools are White (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.-b).

Consequently, minoritized students have a reduced chance of connecting with a teacher or administrator who shares the same cultural identity.

### **Background of the Problem**

Cultural diversity is more than race and ethnicity. Across the nation, there has

been an increasing shift among businesses and organizations to increase the cultural awareness of employees and individuals. Institutions are devoting a significant amount of time to training employees on cultural diversity and inclusion. In 2018, Starbucks closed 8,000 of its stores for anti-bias training (Starbucks Stories & News, 2020). The company has created a specific mission that emphasizes inclusion and diversity for its employees and patrons (Starbucks Stories & News, 2021). Other companies like Coca-Cola, L'Oréal, Marriott, and Johnson and Johnson have specific programs in place focused on embracing diversity in the workplace (Social Talent, 2020).

Colleges and universities are also embracing strategies to create culturally inviting campuses for students and staff. Universities are hiring diversity officers, creating departments for multicultural training, and sponsoring events to increase awareness around issues of equity and inclusion. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of South Carolina, and the University of Michigan are examples of campuses with diversity officers (Stewart, 2022). An increased focus on cultural awareness on college campuses translates to student understanding of different perspectives which will enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills (William Peace University, 2023).

While efforts to embrace diversity are becoming more widespread, this pattern is inconsistent in K-12 public schools. Since the fall of 2021, there has been an increase in the requests to have books that deal with race or racism, gender identity, and sexism banned from school and community libraries (Haupt, 2022). Additionally, legislators in over 30 states across the country have introduced bills to limit educating students about diversity and inclusion (Kite & Clark, 2022). These actions from parents, community

members, and especially legislators in many instances have hindered the work of administrators to create more inclusive learning environments for students.

In 2022, some school districts in North Carolina were introduced to the revised pilot standards for school leaders. A very noticeable change in this document from the current rubric is the addition of a new standard for equity-driven leadership (Joyce, 2022). In order for educators to be competent in this standard, they must ensure students receive unbiased and equitable treatment in the areas of academics, school policies, and discipline. They must also respect diversity and recognize its strength in the educational process. Processes must be created so that all students have access to resources and instruction that will lead to success. In addition to the new standard on equity, language has been added to the remaining standards that reflect the importance of understanding diverse cultures in our schools.

According to research, school leaders who are culturally responsive recognize the role they play in the communities they serve (Khalifa, 2020). In order to address the academic and cultural needs of minoritized students, they must understand the needs and priorities of the families in their communities. Parents of minorities are often less concerned about their child's performance on a standardized test because they are more focused on community and world issues. Employment rates, food security, police brutality, and immigration policies are issues that have consistently plagued historically marginalized populations. Culturally responsive school leaders keep the needs and perspectives of the community in mind as they lead their schools. This practice helps create successful learning environments for minority students (Khalifa, 2020).

In order to increase opportunities for success for students of color, schools must

be intentional about the strategies they use to motivate minority students, create relevant learning experiences, and engage minority families in the educational process.

Professional development must include strategies to increase diversity-related pedagogical skills. Student learning preferences must be considered, and appropriate resources must be selected (Hawley & Wolf, 2011).

### ***Statement of the Problem***

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, an achievement gap between subgroups occurs when one group consistently performs better than another group such that there is a substantial difference between the groups' average scores (The Nation's Report Card, n.d.). For over 30 years, the achievement gap between White students and students of color has been studied. When reviewing standardized test scores, dropout rates, and the rate at which students enroll in college after high school, there is a substantial gap between White students and students of color (Mesrobian, 2022).

Research states that African American and Latino students' performance during their senior year in high school is comparable to White students in the eighth grade (Public Impact, 2018). While the achievement gap has been on the radar for educators for several decades, there has been little progress made in closing the achievement gap.

Several contributing factors to the achievement gap have been cited over the years. Some educators find culturally diverse students unmotivated, and their parents often seem less engaged and not supportive of the educational process; however, research suggests instructional resources and activities are often not designed with minority students in mind. Parents of minority students have lower attendance at school events because of work schedules, language barriers, or past experiences with school staff

(Leddy, 2018).

In an attempt to address the achievement gap, several states have had conferences and initiatives focused on increasing the academic performance of students of color. For several years in the 1990s and early 2000s, North Carolina held an annual conference, called Closing the Gap. During this same time, educators at Georgia Southern University hosted the National Youth at Risk Conference. In 2021, the name of the conference became the National Youth Advocacy and Resilience Conference. The goal of this conference was to help educators and community members learn the best strategies to target poverty, achievement gaps, dropout, and racism in an effort to meet the needs of a diverse group of learners (Georgia Southern University, 2023). While states and educational organizations continue to track student achievement, graduation rates, and college success rates in schools across the county, the achievement gap continues to plague our educational system.

The achievement gap between student subgroups has the potential to impact the socioeconomic status of the students when they become adults. According to Banks and Dohy (2019), minority students who attend schools with high percentages of minorities often attend schools with fewer resources and more inexperienced teachers and are less likely to be exposed to advanced learning opportunities. Minority students who perform lower than their peers academically often feel unprepared for college and are less likely to pursue postsecondary education. Ultimately, the achievement gap negatively impacts the high school dropout rate and the college success rate and affects the employment potential of adults. As our country continues to diversify, it is imperative that school staff become equipped to meet the needs of diverse school populations so that more of our

students will have successful futures.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In order to truly address the academic achievement of diverse individuals, educators must understand cultural diversity and use it as a means to improve educational achievement. Gay (2018) stated,

Learning experiences and achievement outcomes for ethnically and culturally diverse students should include more than cognitive performances in academic subjects and standardized test scores. Moral, social, cultural, personal, and political developments are also important. All of these are essential to the healthy and complete functioning of human beings and societies. If education is, as it should be, devoted to teaching the whole child, then this comprehensive focus should be evident throughout curriculum, instruction, and assessment. (p. 15)

The majority of the research on cultural responsiveness in schools has focused on the work of the teacher and the curriculum; however, Khalifa (2020) stated,

This is an oversight, given that leaders are often considered to be the drivers of reform and the connection between policy and practice. They are also held accountable for the growth and efficacy of their teachers; they are best positioned to improve the practice of teachers who are persistently exclusionary and resistant to cultural responsiveness; they are best poised to develop the willing teachers who can actually become culturally unresponsive to new, unfamiliar children; and they are uniquely positioned to impact nonclassroom spaces in the school. (p. 29)

Culturally responsive leadership (CRL) involves the actions of the school leaders to create learning environments that increase engagement for minority students which

will result in academic success for all students. Khalifa (2020) stated that culturally responsive school leaders must be self-reflective, be able to train culturally responsive instructional staff, be able to address discriminatory policies while creating an inclusive learning environment, and be able to engage the communities of minority students. The purpose of the study was to examine the processes by which school leaders can increase the achievement of minority students through CRL.

### ***Research Questions***

1. What CRL strategies are currently being used by school leaders in schools with high populations of minority students?
2. How do staff members perceive the implementation of CRL strategies?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Leadership Academy (2022) developed the CRL Framework: A Framework for Schools and School System Leaders. This framework was developed to guide school staff as they work to create learning environments that respond to cultural differences that will lead to academic success for all students. In order to address the inequities found in educational systems, school leaders must have the ability to connect with stakeholders in every educational setting. CRL requires leaders to be cognizant of the varied situations minority students have experienced. They must consider how policies, selection of curriculum and materials, and standardized assessments and data analysis have impacted the educational opportunities for minority students.

According to the CRL Framework, there are specific actions leaders of culturally responsive learning environments must practice (The Leadership Academy, 2022). Culturally responsive school leaders must provide equitable experiences and achievable



learning goals for every student. They must understand how culture influences society and how their own personal beliefs shape their professional practice. The success of all students must be a priority. Rigorous practices must be evident in every school, classroom, and learning environment. They must build the capacity of instructional staff to be able to properly assess each student's capabilities and progress and provide adequate scaffoldings. School leaders should affirm the cultures of students by providing authentic, relevant learning experiences through the selection of appropriate resources. Finally, school leaders who are culturally responsive should give stakeholders the tools to analyze social structures, beliefs, and practices that continue to support systemic inequities and encourage productive change.

The CRL Framework is divided into eight actions and addresses the work of future school leaders, current principals, supervisors of principals, and district superintendents. For the benefit of this study, I focused on the actions of current principals. The image for the CRL Framework is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1***CRL Framework***Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to determine what strategies are currently being implemented in schools with large populations of minority students that align with CRL. A convergent mixed methods design was used in the research. A quantitative survey was used to measure the perceptions of staff on the implementation of CRL strategies. For the qualitative research, a focus group discussion was facilitated to determine the level of implementation of CRL strategies. The data collected from both research methods were analyzed separately, and the findings were compared.

**Significance of the Study**

School administrators in North Carolina have the responsibility of creating an effective school culture that celebrates the people in the school community. Students are more motivated to learn when they are connected to the school. When schools create a

welcoming environment for parents, they are more supportive of their child's learning experience. There have been several studies done in recent years on how teachers can increase cultural competence in their lessons; however, there is less research on the leadership actions of the principal on this topic. This study may help districts and school leaders become more aware of the level of cultural competence in their schools. The results of this study may assist districts and schools in determining steps needed to create more culturally competent learning environments that will ultimately impact academic achievement for all students. This may include reviewing hiring practices and providing intentional professional development.

### ***Setting of the Study***

Alpha County School District is located in Alpha County in Eastern North Carolina. There are 33 schools and over 2,200 employees in the district serving over 17,000 students. According to the district improvement plan, 35% of the students in the district are African American, 33% are White, and 27% are Hispanic.

Alpha County has been designated as a low-wealth county by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). Low-wealth counties are identified when the amount of local revenue generated is less than the state average and therefore affects the amount of local dollars the district is able to spend on each student. In order to determine the low-wealth districts, the state considers the amount of revenue generated in the county from property taxes, income per capita, and the size of the county. Low-wealth counties receive additional funds from the state to spend on tutors, professional development, additional staff, and other resources (NCDPI, 2023b).

There are six traditional public high schools in the district. This study examined

the staff perceptions and leadership practices of principals of three of the high schools. The high schools were selected based on their demographics and school performance on standardized assessments. The majority of each school's population are minority students. Additionally, according to the state's accountability model, the schools have received the designation of low-performing for the 2022-2023 school year. As the populations in these schools continue to become more diverse, it is important to consider the implementation of CRL strategies and whether or not they have an impact on student achievement.

### ***Limitations***

I am employed by Alpha County School District. My professional associations with administrators in the district may have influenced the findings of the focus group discussion. This study specifically examined the leadership practices at three specific schools in Alpha County School District. The research findings may not be applicable to other high schools in other districts.

### **Definitions of Terms**

#### ***Achievement Gap***

The significance of the difference in performance between different groups of individuals (Mesrobian, 2022).

#### ***Culturally Competent Schools***

Schools with processes and programs in place to support the learning of all ethnic and socioeconomic groups (Burns et al., 2005).

#### ***Cultural Diversity***

Differences between individuals or groups of people based on race, ethnicity,

gender, religion, socioeconomic status, language, and other identifying factors (The Leadership Academy, 2022).

### ***Culturally Responsive***

To exhibit behaviors that respect cultural differences and value the various contributions of all individuals (Price & Roberts, 2022).

### ***Culturally Responsive School Leader***

A leader who is aware of their own cultural beliefs and acknowledges the cultural beliefs of students and staff in the organization to create effective learning environments (The Leadership Academy, 2022).

### ***Culturally Responsive Teaching***

The process of using the knowledge, experiences, and beliefs of ethnically diverse students to improve the learning experiences of all students (Gay, 2018).

### ***Low-Performing Schools***

A designation assigned to schools in North Carolina based on attendance, graduation rate, and how well the students in the school perform on standardized assessments (NCDPI, n.d.-d).

### ***Minoritized Students***

Students who are treated differently based on conditions beyond their control (Smith, 2016).

## **Organization of the Study**

There are five chapters in this study. The first chapter included an introduction to the study and the theoretical framework. The problem and research questions were stated and the significance of the study was given.

Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature related to the topic. Demographic trends in education are reviewed as well as data surrounding the academic achievement gap for students of color. Characteristics of culturally responsive schools and culturally responsive school leaders are discussed as well as the benefits of culturally responsive schools.

The methodology and research process are described in Chapter 3. A convergent mixed methods design was used for data collection. The framework, research questions, and procedures for data collection and data analysis are included in this chapter.

Chapter 4 includes a summary of the research findings. Chapter 5 explains how the findings relate to the literature. This chapter also includes recommendations for further studies on this topic.

### **Summary**

Schools and school leaders have the responsibility to prepare students to graduate prepared to be productive members of society. Students in today's schools will live in a very diverse world; therefore, schools must be intentional about ensuring our students have the knowledge and skills to understand, appreciate, and communicate with individuals from different cultures. In order to ensure practices and policies are in place to meet the needs of minority students, the school leader must be equipped with the tools to create culturally responsive learning environments. Barriers to opportunities and resources will need to be removed to allow every student access to a successful educational experience that will prepare them for the world of the future.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Research suggests that when schools embrace the cultural differences of their students and include their varied experiences in the learning environment, all students benefit (Hawley & Wolf, 2011). Gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religion are a few factors that impact a person's cultural identity (Will & Najarro, 2022).

Relationships and relevance are important concepts in education. When students cannot see a reflection of themselves or their cultural beliefs in their schools, relationships will be harder to build and relevance will be difficult to find (Gay, 2018). In order to create a learning environment where the contributions of all students in every classroom are valued, we must consider the culture of the school and the school leader who is responsible for creating it (Wells et al., 2016).

I conducted a literature review to better understand the impact CRL has had on public schools. The impact, if any, would be determined by trajectories of performance and growth of students. The literature review begins with a review of the demographic trends of students and staff in K-12 public schools in America and North Carolina. I then review the academic achievement gap that has persisted between White students and students of color. The review continues with a review of the characteristics of effective school leaders and leaders of culturally responsive schools. Finally, the benefits of culturally competent schools are explored.

### **Trends in Public Education**

#### ***Demographics***

Data from the U.S. Census show a shift in the diversity in the country over the past 20 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The population of minority groups is

increasing at a faster rate than the total population. According to U.S. Census data, the population of minority groups increased from 36.3% in 2010 to 42.2% in 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). In North Carolina, the growth for minority groups increased from 34.7% to 39.5% during the same time span. The diversity index is the probability that if two people are randomly selected, they will be from different races and ethnic groups. The country's diversity index increased from 54.9% in 2010 to 61.1% in 2020. The diversity index for North Carolina increased from 52.1% in 2010 to 57.9% in 2020. Table 1 shows the data compiled from the Race and Ethnicity Prevalence Tables from the 2010 and 2020 U.S. Census Data.

**Table 1**

*Prevalence of Race and Ethnicity Groups for the United States and North Carolina*

	United States		North Carolina	
	2010	2020	2010	2020
White, Non-Hispanic	63.7	57.8	65.3	60.5
Hispanic	16.3	18.7	21.2	20.2
African American	12.2	12.1	8.4	10.7
Diffusion	7.7	11.1	5.2	8.6

It is estimated that the majority of the population will be minorities by the year 2050 (Burns et al., 2005). According to Nevarez et al. (2019), by the year 2060, it is projected that 25% of the country's population will be comprised of Hispanics. This trend suggests that America is becoming a more diverse country.

In 2010, White, non-Hispanic individuals made up over 60% of the population in the United States and North Carolina. Table 1 shows a significant decline for this ethnic group by 2020. There was also a slight decline in the percentage of African Americans during this decade; however, the percentage of Hispanic individuals grew during this



time period in the United States and North Carolina.

The demographics in our public schools are following a similar trend. The population of White students in public schools across the country decreased from 62% in 2000 to 51% in 2010 (Chen, 2014). By the fall of 2021, the percentage of White students in public schools decreased to 45%. During this same time period, there was an increase in Hispanic students from 24% to 28% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). According to Chen (2014), 53% of the students in public schools in America are minority students. According to Irwin et al. (2022), of the 49.4 million students in public schools, 46% are White, 15% are Black, 28% are Hispanic, and 5% are Asian.

According to NCDPI (n.d.-f), the shift in the demographics for students in public schools in North Carolina resembles the shift across the county. Between 2010 and 2019, the number of students enrolled in public schools in the state increased from 1.4 million to 1.5 million. The enrollment percentage of American Indian and Asian students increased slightly, and there was a slight decline in the number of Black students in schools across the state; however, there was a significant difference in the percentages of White and Hispanic students. According to NCDPI (n.d.-f), during this time span, there was a 5% increase in the percentage of Hispanic students, while the percentage of White students in public schools across the state decreased by over 5%. Table 2 shows the demographic trends of students in public schools across the state between 2010 and 2019.

**Table 2***Demographic Trends of Students in North Carolina Public Schools*

School year	Indian %	Asian %	Hispanic %	Black %	White %	Two or more %	Pacific Island %	Total
2010-2011	1.5	2.5	12.7	26.4	53.1	3.8	0.1	1,424,555
2011-2012	1.4	2.5	13.5	26.3	52.5	3.7	0.1	1,429,616
2012-2013	1.4	2.6	14.3	26.1	51.8	3.6	0.1	1,438,793
2013-2014	1.4	2.8	14.9	26	51	3.8	0.1	1,442,742
2014-2015	1.4	2.9	15.8	25.9	50.3	3.6	0.1	1,446,936
2015-2016	1.3	3	16.5	25.7	49.5	3.8	0.1	1,443,471
2016-2017	1.3	3.2	16.8	25.5	49.1	4	0.1	1,531,099
2017-2018	1.2	3.3	17.4	25.3	48.4	4.23	0.1	1,534,856
2018-2019	1.2	3.5	17.9	25.1	47.7	4.5	0.1	1,533,022

While diversity in the country and our schools continues to increase, this is not the case for the teachers in our public schools. According to Nevarez et al. (2019), there has been a decrease in teacher diversity in our public schools. Twenty-six percent of the teachers in public schools were minorities 20 years ago. Research states that during the 2020-2021 school year, minorities made up 20% of the teaching force (Taie & Lewis, 2022). According to Taie and Lewis (2022), 80% of public school teachers were White, 9% were Hispanic, 6% were Black, and 2% were Asian. In North Carolina for the 2020-2021 school year, 76% of the teachers in the state were White, 4.2% were Hispanic, 15.6% were Black, and 1% were Asian (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.-c). The gap between the percentage of minority students and teachers is said to contribute to the achievement gap (Ingersoll et al., 2021).

Similarly, the diversity of school principals in the United States has changed very little over the past decade. As a result, there are increasing gaps between principals and their students. Less than 30% of all public school principals are minorities (National

Center for Education Statistics, 2020). There has been a slight decrease in the percentage of White principals, with 69.5% in 2010 compared to 64.8% in 2021. In 2010, 11.6% of principals were Hispanic, while the percentage in 2021 was 14.4% (Zippia, n.d.). While there has been a slight increase in the percentage of Hispanic principals, Hispanic and African American students have the largest gap in principal representation over any subgroup. There is a great chance that students of color will never encounter a principal of the same ethnicity. Table 3 shows the demographics of principals in the U.S. for select years from 2010–2021.

**Table 3**

*Demographic Trend of Principals in the United States*

	2010	2013	2016	2018	2021
White	69.50%	68.72%	68.03%	67.73%	64.86%
African American	12.77%	12.33%	11.45%	11.56%	11.61%
Asian	3.89%	3.79%	4.35%	4.47%	4.39%
Hispanic	11.61%	12.55%	13.41%	13.79%	14.43%

In North Carolina, minorities comprise less than 25% of the population of public school principals. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.-b), 77.1% of the principals in North Carolina in 2020-2021 were White, 10.4% were African American, and 9.3% were Hispanic. In 2017-2018, these numbers were 77.7%, 10.5%, and 8.9% respectively. The school leader is ultimately responsible for providing all students with the resources and opportunities to be successful. The principal will impact the school culture, staff demographics, and the professional learning focus of the school.

***Achievement Gap***

An achievement gap is defined as a significant difference in performance scores between subgroups (Mesrobian, 2022). Standardized test scores, graduation rates, and

college enrollment rates are examples of data sets that have been used to determine achievement gaps. The groups can be defined by their gender, income, or even their parental status. For the purpose of this study, the groups are ethnic groups. Studies have shown that wide achievement gaps separate minority students from their peers. Over the past 3 decades, researchers have reviewed and tracked the achievement gap between ethnic groups. Little progress has been made in closing the gap. Unless changes are made to the traditional Eurocentric approaches to education, the rates of academic failure will continue to increase for children of color and those who live in poverty (Burns et al., 2005).

### *Academic Gaps*

According to research, students of color experience a variety of inequalities in schools across the nation. There are often disparities when it comes to access to resources and opportunities. Students of color often appear unmotivated because they feel disconnected from instructional strategies. As a result, teachers perceive their lack of motivation as a lack of potential. This leads to a higher percentage of minority students being diagnosed with learning disabilities (Public Schools First NC, 2022). Schools with large populations of minority students do not offer higher-level courses such as chemistry and advanced math courses. Additionally, schools with higher populations of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students are often taught by new and inexperienced teachers. These students often attend schools where teachers are not successful in completing certification requirements (Chen, 2014). These factors will have an impact on the academic trajectory of many students.

African American, Hispanic, and Native American students are often

underrepresented in advanced learning opportunities. According to the Thomas B. Fordham Institute (2023), students in the highest socioeconomic status are identified as gifted at a rate of 12% compared to 2% for their peers in the lowest quintile; however, minority students who attend more diverse schools seem to perform better than their peers. In order to increase the probability that learning opportunities are available for all students, efforts should be made to evaluate students in ways that limit implicit bias and measure student potential and not just achievement (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2023; Public Schools First NC, 2022).

The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) is administered each year by the National Center of Education Statistics to public and private schools in every state in the nation. The goal of these assessments is to compare achievement data for students and schools across the country in a variety of subjects. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.-a), African American and Hispanic students consistently score lower than their White peers. Table 4 shows the reading and math results from the 2022 NAEP assessment for fourth- and eighth-grade students in North Carolina.

**Table 4***NAEP – Reading and Math Performance by Racial and Ethnic Groups in North Carolina*

	Reading average		Math average	
	Fourth grade	Eighth grade	Fourth grade	Eighth grade
National average	216	259	235	273
North Carolina average	216	256	236	274
Race/ethnicity				
White	229	265	246	286
Black/African American	198	242	219	255
Hispanic/Latino	206	252	225	266
Asian	242	276	270	309
Two or More Races	209	255	240	276

As illustrated in Table 4, White students scored above the state and national average in all four assessments. In reading, the average score for African American students was 31 points lower than White students in the fourth grade. The gap on the eighth-grade reading assessment was 23 points. For Hispanic students, the average score on the fourth-grade reading assessment was 23 points lower than White students. The average score on the eighth-reading grade assessment was 13 points lower. In math, the average score for Black students was 27 points lower and 31 points lower than White students in fourth and eighth grades respectively. The average score for Hispanic students was 21 points lower and 20 points lower than White students in fourth and eighth grades respectively. The gap was lower in reading in eighth grade than in fourth grade for both Black and Hispanic students; however, there was not a significant difference between the gaps between the grade groups for math.

The ACT is a standardized test administered to high school students to determine their career and college readiness. The ACT is one of the criteria used to determine college eligibility. According to ACT (2023), the results help high schools and students

create their postsecondary plans. The ACT is divided into four sections and measures student proficiency in English, mathematics, reading, and science. The scores for each subject range from 1 to 36. The subject scores are averaged to create a composite score.

Table 5 shows the average ACT composite scores by ethnic group from 2016–2020 (ACT, n.d.-a).

**Table 5**

*Average ACT Composite Scores by Ethnic Group*

	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	%	Ave	%	Ave	%	Ave	%	Ave	%	Ave
All students	100	20.8	100	21	100	20.8	100	20.7	100	20.6
Black/African American	13	17	13	17.1	13	16.9	12	16.8	12	16.7
White	54	22.2	52	22.4	52	22.2	52	22.1	52	22
Hispanic/Latino	16	18.7	17	18.9	16	18.8	16	18.7	17	18.5
Asian	4	24	5	24.3	5	24.5	5	24.6	5	24.9
Two or More	4	21	4	21.2	4	21.1	5	21	5	20.9
No response	8	20.1	8	20.3	9	19.8	9	19.7	9	19.7

The average score for all students over the 5-year period was between 20 and 21. Each year, White students account for over 50% of the scores, and the average score for White students was higher than the national average. Black students accounted for 12% to 13% of the scores each year and each year scored 3 to 4 points lower than the national average and 5 to 6 points behind their White peers. Sixteen percent to 17% of the students tested each year were Hispanic. Hispanic students scored lower than the national average each year and 4 points below White students. Asian students scored above the national average and higher than White students, but they represent only 5% of the students tested.

North Carolina administers the ACT to all high school students during their 11<sup>th</sup>-grade year. According to MyFutureNC (2022), the University of North Carolina system

of colleges has set 19 as the minimum composite score required to be considered for college admission. Students who receive a composite score of 19 or above are said to be prepared for college-level work. Table 6 shows the percentage of students in North Carolina who received a score of 19 or above during the 11<sup>th</sup>-grade test administration (NCDPI, 2023a).

**Table 6**

*Minimum ACT Composite Score for Juniors in North Carolina by Subgroup*

	2021-2022	2022-2023
All students	41.7	41.7
African American	18.6	18.7
White	55.9	55.5
Hispanic	26	25.7
Asian	70.4	72.5
American Indian	22.8	14
Two or More	41.2	40.2

Over 50% of White students and over 70% of Asian students received the minimum composite score of 19 or better during the last 2 years of the state administration. Both groups exceeded the passing rate for all students. Each year, the percentage of Hispanic, American Indian, and African American students receiving the minimum composite score was substantially lower with 25%, 22%, and 18% respectively.

North Carolina administers the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) each year to seniors who have taken a minimum of four courses in a single Career and Technical Education cluster. The NCRC measures student proficiency in applied math, graphic literacy, and workplace documents (MyFutureNC, 2022). Students will receive one of four scores: bronze, silver, gold, or platinum. A score of silver, gold,



or platinum is the equivalent of a passing score on the NCRC. According to ACT (n.d.-b), businesses and industries use the NCRC score to help place individuals in appropriate jobs that align with their achievement level on the assessment. Table 7 shows the percentage of students in North Carolina who received a silver or better on the NCRC.

**Table 7**

*ACT NCRC Performance*

	2021-2022	2022-2023
All students	61.1	61.9
African American	40.8	42.6
White	69.7	70.7
Hispanic	55.3	56
Asian	81.4	81.2
American Indian	49.9	55.2
Two or More	60.8	60.2

Over 60% of all students tested received a silver certificate or better on the NCRC during the past 2 school years. Asian students, followed by White and Multiracial students, had the highest percentages of students receiving a passing score. Over half of the Hispanic students received a score of silver or better. The greatest improvement in performance was seen by American Indian students over the 2 years. Each year, African American students had the lowest percentage of students receiving a passing score on the assessment.

North Carolina assesses student achievement through the administration of end-of-grade and end-of-course assessments. The assessments are scored on four levels: not proficient, Level 3, Level 4, and Level 5. Students scoring Level 3 or above are said to be proficient and prepared to move to the next grade (NCDPI, 2023a). Students in Grades 3–8 complete end-of-grade assessments in reading and mathematics. Students in the fifth

and eighth grades also complete end-of-grade assessments in science. Table 8 shows the percentages of students who were proficient on end-of-grade assessments for reading, math, and science in Grades 3–8 for the 2022-2023 school year by subgroup.

**Table 8**

*Percentage of Proficiency on North Carolina End-of-Grade Assessments for 2022-2023*

Subgroup	Reading Grades 3-8	Math Grades 3-8	Science Grades 5 & 8
All students	50.2	53	67.7
American Indian	36.2	38.9	59.3
Asian	76.1	84.1	88
Black	34.7	33.4	51
Hispanic	37.1	42.9	56.9
Two or More Races	51	51.6	68.8
White	63.1	66.7	80.8

The data show American Indian, Black, and Hispanic students consistently score lower than their White and Asian peers in reading and math. The same is true for science; however, the gap is not as significant as in reading and math.

End-of-course assessments are administered in high schools in Math 1, Math 3, biology, and English 2. Table 9 shows the percentage of students who were proficient on end-of-course assessments for the 2022-2023 school year.

**Table 9**

*Percentage of Proficiency on North Carolina End-of-Course Assessments for 2022-2023*

Subgroup	NC Math 1 (9-12)	NC Math 3 (9-12)	Biology	English 2
All students	36	58.3	54.1	58.3
American Indian	27.7	49.2	47.1	42.7
Asian	60.2	86.4	82.1	83.1
Black	23	39.3	33.8	42.2
Hispanic	29.5	49.6	41.3	46.7
Two or More Races	37.7	56.2	56	59.9
White	48.6	69.7	68.1	70.8

For each subject, Asian students performed better when compared to other ethnic groups, while Black students had the lowest performance in all subjects. American Indian and Hispanic students were the next lowest-scoring ethnic groups. White students received the second-highest scores in each subject after Asian students.

The data show that the achievement gap between White and minority students is consistent across grade levels for a variety of subjects and assessments. As minority students are slated to become the majority in the public school population in the years to come, schools must begin to work on ways to specifically increase the academic achievement of these students. When schools begin to improve the learning environment for students from ethnically diverse backgrounds, the achievement of all students will be positively impacted (Hawley & Wolf, 2011). Students respond to instruction when the content connects to their lives. Educators should acknowledge the lived experiences of all students in an effort to increase motivation and overall student success (Ladson-Billings & Paris, 2021).

### ***Discipline Data***

There are also significant disparities in disciplinary practices in schools. Students

of color are removed from school as a disciplinary consequence at a higher rate than White students. Hassan and Carter (2021) compared the suspension and arrest rates of Black female students to White female students in Grades 6–12 in 10 states and found that Black female students were more likely to be suspended for subjective offenses such as disrespect, talking loudly, and chewing gum than White female students. Additionally, Hassan and Carter found that increased disciplinary infractions led to increased behavior issues, a decline in student motivation, and poor performance on standardized assessments. Research shows that White teachers punish Black students more often than when teachers and students are of the same race (Public Schools First NC, 2022). Bireda (2010) suggested that a lack of cultural understanding can lead to increased disciplinary infractions for low-wealth students of color. According to Hawley and Wolf (2011), teachers of color may be less apt to react to disciplinary issues.

Data compiled from the National Center for Education Statistics (2021) that show percentages of students suspended and expelled by ethnic group in Grades 6–12 for select years over the past 25 years can be found in Table 10.

**Table 10**

*Suspension Rate for Grades 6-12 in the United States*

	1993	1996	1999	2003	2007	2012	2016	2019
Total	15.2	17.1	19.2	17.1	21.3	19.6	16.1	14.4
White	10.9	14	15.3	14.3	15.4	15.6	12.9	12.3
Black	32.5	32.3	34.5	27.5	41.9	38.9	32.6	29.6
Hispanic	16.2	14.5	19.6	17.7	22	17.4	15.1	11.4
Asian/Pacific Islander	9.1	3	13	11.9	10.8	9.3	3.9	6.7
American Indian/Alaska Native	15.6	33.5	35.4	‡	14.2	22.6	30.4	21.2
Two or more races	31.4	24.2	15.5	24.4	24.9	26.8	17.4	18.2

While White students made up the majority of the public school population, each

year the majority of the students in Grades 6–12 who had ever been suspended were Black. In 2007, over 40% of the total suspensions were Black students, and 22% were Hispanic students. North Carolina data for the 2021-2022 school year indicate that Black students had the highest rate of short-term suspensions over any other ethnic group (NCDPI, n.d.-c). Over 300 Black students were suspended for every 1,000 students. The next highest rate of short-term suspensions was for American-Indian and Multiracial students, whose rates were 242.84 and 178.96 respectively. When compared with White students, Black and Hispanic students are more likely to receive in-school or out-of-school suspension, which leads to an increased loss of instruction time and a decrease in positive feelings about the school and affects overall academic success.

### ***Graduation Rates***

Students of color are more likely to be retained. Studies suggest that there is a correlation between retention and dropout rates (Hawley & Wolf, 2011). According to Irwin et al. (2022), the adjusted cohort graduation rate is the percentage of students who graduate from high school within 4 years. According to Taie and Lewis (2022), the graduation rate increased from 79% in 2010-2011 to 86% in 2018-2019. The graduation rates for Black students (80%), Hispanic students (82%), and American Indian/Pacific Islander students (74%) increased as well but were all below the national average. In North Carolina, over the last 10 years, 87% of all students graduated from high school within 4 years (NCDPI, n.d.-a). Asian students had the highest graduation rate of 95%, followed by White students with 90%. The graduation rates for Black students (84%), Hispanic students (81%), and American Indian students (80%) were below the state average.

### *College Enrollment*

Academic gaps, suspension rates, and graduation rates ultimately affect the percentage of students of color who will pursue postsecondary education. Minority students are less likely to attend college after high school. Many students of color believe they are unprepared for college-level work because they were not exposed to college preparation programs and advanced learning opportunities in their high schools (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Irwin et al. (2022) also gave us information about the rate at which high school graduates immediately enroll in postsecondary institutions. This percentage fell from 68% in 2010 to 63% in 2020. The greatest decline in college enrollment was for Black students to 54% in 2020 from 66% in 2010. The immediate college enrollment rate in 2021 was highest for Asian (84%) and White students (68%) than for Black (58%) and Hispanic (57%) students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). When considering the percentage of the population represented by Black and Hispanic students, the immediate college enrollment rate is concerning. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), people of color are less likely to receive a college degree, which affects the future income and socioeconomic status of families of ethnically diverse families.

Recently, university admission processes were under review as the Supreme Court reviewed a case involving affirmative action (Ax, 2023). Universities have considered race as one of several factors in their admission processes in an effort to create more diverse communities on campus. Historically, racial inequities have affected the educational experiences of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students and the opportunity to attend some of the most elite colleges in the country. The practice of

affirmative action helped increase the number of minority students and those from low-income neighborhoods attending prestigious universities. Strauss (2022) suggested that the use of affirmative action provides more equitable opportunities for students of color, benefits all students on the college campus, and creates a more diverse leadership in society.

The Supreme Court case on affirmative action reviewed processes for admission at Harvard University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Leiva, 2023). The claim was that admissions policies negatively affect White and Asian students' chances of being admitted to select universities (Ax, 2023). In June 2023, the Supreme Court decided the use of race as a factor in college admissions programs was unconstitutional; however, race may still be used as a factor in military academies. Without the use of affirmative action to combat the racial inequities and opportunity gaps in public schools, universities expect to see a decline in the number of minority students on college campuses (Leiva, 2023). As a result of this ruling, universities will have to find new ways to diversify their campuses.

### **Current Educational Practices**

Current educational practices have not placed an emphasis on spotlighting the differences of students of other cultures. Historically, practices and policies have sustained limitations in academic achievement for students of minority ethnic groups. In order to change the trajectory of minority students in our public schools, the attitudes of educators about the cultures of these students must change (Gay, 2018). Cultural differences should be seen as assets and not limitations (Price & Roberts, 2022). Natural linguistic patterns should be respected and not avoided (Hilaski, 2020). If an appreciation

for cultural traditions is interwoven into the educational practices and policies, students of color will achieve higher levels of success.

### *Multilingual Learners*

Minority students who are not fluent in English are placed in English language learner programs. While these programs focus on helping students become proficient in the English language, there is seldom any effort made to maintain or use their native language in schools. Parents of these students want them to be proficient in English. Consequently, there is little effort at home to help students maintain their native language. As a result, students begin to lose their native language because of a lack of use, and subtractive bilingualism occurs (Triebold, 2020). Over time, parents begin to have a hard time communicating with their own children. The loss of the native language affects relationships with parents and older relatives and jeopardizes the preservation of that culture. The result is often a student who is no longer fluent in their native language and not yet fluent in English. Failure to nurture a child's native language while learning English may affect the student's intellectual development and the ability to achieve at the same academic level as their peers (Carley Rizzuto, 2017). This type of inequity is grounded in the Pobrecito syndrome, or the circumstance when teachers have great empathy for their students' life circumstances and consequently water down instruction (Berzins & Lopez, 2011).

Teachers often view language barriers for students as academic deficiencies. As a result, these students are often exposed to less rigorous academic content; however, there are several strategies teachers can use in order to help English language learners thrive as multilingual learners. First, the native language of these students must be viewed as an



asset instead of a liability (Hilaski, 2020). These students have foundational knowledge that should be embraced as a foundation to build upon. Teachers should make an effort to help students connect their cultural background and native language to their work at school (National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 2018).

Problem-based learning is another method for successfully teaching content to multilingual learners. Problem-based learning focuses on completing learning tasks through a series of phases. By giving clear instruction through modeling and small group instruction, teachers will help students learn language through application (Huynh & Skelton, 2023).

As multilingual students increase their English skills, they will not need continued instruction from English language learner programs; however, they still may need support from their content teachers to improve their academic language. Their English fluency may be better than their writing skills. Content area teachers will need to guide students with specific language expectations such as completing a math project, writing a poem in English, or completing a lab report for science. Setting high expectations for these content-specific assignments will help students increase their academic language skills for other subjects (Huynh & Skelton, 2023).

### ***Resources for Culturally Responsive Instruction***

The North Carolina General Assembly created an advisory council for American Indian Education in 1987. The council works with the Indian tribes and organizations in North Carolina to ensure that all American Indian students have the opportunity to receive an education that prepares them to be globally competitive citizens. North Carolina has eight recognized American Indian tribal communities (North Carolina

Department of Administration, n.d.). NCDPI has several resources on its website to help teachers increase their cultural competence for teaching American Indian students (NCDPI, n.d.-b). For example, there are resources to assist with teaching about Thanksgiving. Data have also been collected about the use of American Indian terms and images as school mascots.

According to NCDPI (n.d.-b), culturally responsive instruction includes embracing the cultural experiences of students and incorporating them into classroom instruction, while ensuring all students have equitable opportunities in the learning environment. There are several general resources and frameworks included on NCDPI's website to increase the cultural competence of teachers that can be utilized with all ethnicities; however, most of the resources focus on the American Indian student.

### ***Issues of Cultural Insensitivity***

A lack of understanding of student cultures can lead to disrespectful practices by school staff. There have been several instances documented around the country where minority students have been mistreated by school staff. In California, a math teacher was recorded mocking the Native American culture during a math lesson (Chavez, 2021). While presenting terms for trigonometric functions, the White female teacher showed drawings of stick figures and made inappropriate comments, referring to a rock god and water goddess. The teacher's actions were found to be insulting to the Native American culture, and she was placed on administrative leave for further investigation. In 2017, a physical education teacher in Virginia was investigated for violating the rights of a Muslim student during Ramadan (McConnell, 2017). During Ramadan, Muslim individuals are required to fast from dusk to dawn, which could be as much as 16 hours a

day. The student was required to run in class even after asking to be excused. When the teacher was not pleased with the student's performance, the entire class was required to run for an additional amount of time as punishment. These actions would violate state, federal, and local board policies regarding religion.

One of the most common issues of cultural insensitivity has centered around the hairstyles of African American students. In New Jersey, in 2018, an African American male wrestler was told by a White male referee that he would have to cut his dreadlocks in order to participate in a wrestling match (ABC News, 2018). Even though the student had a head covering, he was told if his dreadlocks were not cut, he would have to forfeit the match. His dreadlocks were cut by an athletic trainer in the middle of the gym.

According to research (Aduayom & Locke, 2022), a 9-year-old female in Delaware was sent home because a teacher deemed her natural curls as a distraction. In Texas, an African American male student was told he would not be able to participate in his graduation ceremony unless he cut his dreadlocks (Cox, 2020). The school handbook's policy limits how long male students can let their hair extend. The student styled his hair up so it would not pass his collar, eyebrows, or ear lobes. Then the school board amended the policy and included language that forbade male students from wearing adornments in their hair. The student was placed in in-school suspension for refusing to cut the dreadlocks he had been growing for 5 years to connect with his Trinidadian heritage. In August 2023, another African American male student in the same school district in Texas was suspended for several weeks for refusing to cut his dreadlocks (Duster, 2023). The family is considering legal action against the district, stating that this treatment is a violation of the recently passed Crown Act.

Several school districts have policies that prevent students from wearing dreadlocks, twists, or braids. These policies overwhelmingly affect African American students. Several parents and students have begun to fight against these discriminatory policies. Legislators in California introduced and passed the CROWN Act in 2019 (Payne-Patterson, 2023). CROWN stands for “Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair” (Payne-Patterson, 2023, p. 1). Since then, 24 states have passed some form of legislation that protects individuals from discriminatory actions in schools or the workplace because of cultural or religious expressions through their hair. Through this bill, protective hairstyles, head and face coverings, and jewelry worn in the hair are protected. At the time of this writing, Texas, Delaware, New Jersey, and Virginia have all passed some form of the CROWN Act. This legislation was introduced in the United States legislature in 2022. The U.S. House voted for the CROWN Act in March 2022; however, the legislation was not passed by the Senate. Many feel that the passing of the CROWN Act will reduce the discriminatory practices faced by people of color in schools and businesses across the nation (Payne-Patterson, 2023).

### **Effective Schools**

Educational researchers have studied the qualities of effective schools for several years. Often, student performance is used as a factor to determine a school’s effectiveness. Some researchers argue the setting of the study matters. The criteria of an effective elementary school may differ from the criteria of an effective high school. Whether the school is in an urban or rural area and the size of the school may also impact the findings of the study. According to Lynch (2015), school effectiveness is also determined by the quality and frequency of professional development offerings and

whether or not they are relevant. Interactions between the school, parents, and community are also indicators that should be considered when measuring school effectiveness.

### ***Effective School Leaders***

The leaders of an organization or business are often tasked with the responsibility of establishing processes and procedures to move the organization forward. An effective leader is able to establish a vision and be able to communicate the vision to those around them (Sinek, 2009). This idea of moving forward will look different depending on the goals of the organization. An effective business leader may develop strategies to increase the annual revenue. A leader of a community organization may create a successful plan to impact more lives through community service. Increasing the membership of the church may be the sign of an effective church leader. Leaders do not work in isolation but are able to motivate and inspire others in the organization.

According to the Wallace Foundation (2013), the leader of the school is a key component of the school's effectiveness. While the teacher has the greatest impact on individual student achievement, having an effective principal is almost as significant as having an effective teacher (Grissom et al., 2021). An effective principal is instrumental in ensuring that teachers and other instructional support staff are supported and provided adequate training to create a productive learning environment.

The ability of the principal to effectively serve as an instructional coach is a significant quality for school leaders. High-quality instructional coaching by the school leader can result in improved instructional practices and increases in student learning. (Childress, 2014). The Principal Fellow Program at Texas Tech University focuses on

developing school leaders who have effective coaching skills (Palmer et al., 2022).

Another key component of its program is for each principal intern to complete an equity audit on the campus where they are placed for their internship. The purpose of the equity audit is to identify any inequities that are present and to develop a plan to address them.

The Leadership for Learning Program at the University of Washington focused on educational equity (Palmer et al., 2022). Each cohort develops an equity standard to address the needs of marginalized students.

A variety of data are used to measure the effectiveness of school leaders, including student performance on standardized assessments, graduation rates, discipline data, and teacher retention rates. The principal is responsible for hiring and retaining quality teachers. An effective principal will positively impact the attendance of students and staff, have decreased suspension rates, and create a culture that encourages and motivates students to be engaged in the learning process (The Wallace Foundation, 2013).

There are several sets of standards that have been created to determine the effectiveness of school leaders. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) were developed by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015). The PSEL standards highlight the role effective relationships play in teaching and learning as well as in the work of school leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). State boards of education often use the PSEL standards when developing their professional development and licensure programs. Each state has a set of standards used to evaluate school leader effectiveness. Several states have adopted the PSEL standards, including Washington, New York, Maryland, and Georgia (National

Policy Board for Educational Administration, n.d.). Additionally, there are states whose standards are aligned with the PSEL standards, such as Kentucky, West Virginia, and Indiana.

According to the PSEL standards (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015), school leaders must be intentional about supporting the academic achievement, development, and wellness of every student. According to the Wallace Foundation (2013), an effective principal must be able to develop a team capable of delivering effective instruction. The five key responsibilities of an effective principal include shaping a vision of academic success for all students, creating a climate hospitable to education, cultivating leadership in others, improving instruction, and fostering school improvement by managing people and through the analysis of data and processes.

### **Culturally Competent Schools**

Schools must be intentional in their practices in order to enhance the learning experiences of ethnically diverse students. A culturally competent school is one that does more than recognize isolated holidays and observances. Burns et al. (2005) stated,

Culturally responsive schools encourage students to learn by building in substantive ways on the interests, experiences, knowledge, and skills that majority and minority, middle-class and low-income students bring to schools and classrooms. Culturally responsive schools contextualize instruction and schooling practices while maintaining academic rigor. They resist the false dichotomy of relevance or rigor; rather, they embody relevance and rigor. (p. 9)

All students can be more successful when schools make the academic success of

culturally diverse students a priority. According to Hawley and Wolf (2011), there are nine categories that can be used to identify a diversity-responsive school.

1. Student achievement is analyzed using a variety of data. This includes reviewing grouping for instruction and attendance and discipline data as they all impact a student's opportunity to learn.
2. Professional development that focuses on cultural pedagogy and improving interpersonal skills with various subgroups.
3. Practices are in place to ensure that all students have access to rigorous instruction. This includes reviewing selection criteria for honors courses and continuous assessment for ability grouping.
4. Reviewing discipline practices and using strategies to prevent classroom disruption. Additionally, schools use suspension as a last resort.
5. Strategies are in place that strive specifically to engage culturally and linguistically diverse families in educational activities.
6. The school's curriculum encourages students to interact with different ethnicities and learn about different cultures by building relationships. Student learning preferences are considered, and efforts are made to avoid stereotyping.
7. School policies and practices are inclusive and respect the diversity of the racial and ethnic groups in the school community.
8. The school seeks to retain a staff that is racially and ethnically diverse.
9. The school staff has productive discussions about race and discrimination. They take time to reflect on how their personal attitudes and beliefs may



affect the performance of students.

### ***Culturally Responsive School Leaders***

Culturally responsive schools have leaders who understand the value of supporting the contributions of the various cultures in the school. Effective leaders are aware of their own cultural lens and are intentional about acknowledging the cultural experiences of others (Price & Roberts, 2022). Standard 3 of the PSEL focuses on equity and cultural responsiveness. It is important for school leaders to create equitable opportunities and incorporate culturally responsive practices so every student has the chance to be successful (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Leaders who are proficient in this standard value each student's diversity and culture as strengths in the learning environment. They have processes in place to mitigate biases, treat all students fairly, and help prepare students to live in a diverse society. Cultural leadership is the focus of Standard 3 of the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System (NCDPI, n.d.-e). According to this standard, the school leader must understand the cultures of the stakeholders in the school and be able to connect with them in order to develop a positive school culture.

It is important for students from other cultures to be able to identify with staff members. Studies show that when students have a cultural connection with teachers, there are fewer disciplinary issues and a lower dropout rate, and college enrollment may increase (Leddy, 2018). For principals leading in cultural competence, this often means hiring staff to match the demographics of the student population (Hollowell, 2019). Hawley and Wolf (2011) stated that teachers of color serve as positive role models for minority students. Having a diverse staff allows students to see positive interracial

interactions on a daily basis. Culturally responsive leaders must be willing to learn from and relate to others and consider the impact on everyone involved when making decisions (Price & Roberts, 2022).

Leaders of culturally responsive schools must review school policies to ensure they are inclusive and do not target specific racial and ethnic groups. Some examples of policies that may overwhelmingly affect certain groups are dress code policies and policies about hairstyles and self-expression (Grant, 2021). Schools and districts should have a translation policy in place so all families will be able to receive pertinent communication.

In a study conducted by Hollowell (2019), she noted several themes that emerged from principals of culturally competent schools. These themes were:

- Use data about staff and student populations and cultures to determine professional needs.
- Address disparities in suspension rates with alternative discipline methods.
- Become more aware of the needs of special education students.
- Include parents when making key school decisions.
- Use strategies to address the traditional marginalization of certain populations.
- Encourage and engage students to create inclusive environments.
- Enhance relationships with the community that will promote student success.
- Foster positive school and community relationships toward student success.

### ***Professional Development***

In order to increase cultural competence in schools, schools must be intentional in providing training or methods for teaching and engaging diverse groups of students (Gay,

2018). Teachers must be able to help students understand other cultures through regular integration of multicultural resources and experiences throughout the curriculum. This will require a professional development plan that integrates the importance of increasing culturally relevant pedagogical skills.

### ***Adult Learning Theory***

When considering the implementation of training for school staff, it is important that school leaders consider the ways adults learn best. Andragogy is the practice of teaching adults (TEAL Center Staff, 2011). Malcolm Knowles studied the ways adults learn best and developed the five principles of Adult Learning Theory in 1968 (Boulter, 2021). If the principles guide the planning of professional development, staff members are more likely to have a positive experience.

First, learning should be self-directed (Peterson, 2018). As adults grow older, they desire to make their own decisions about learning because they know how they learn best. They know whether or not they learn best by listening or by physically completing a task. They are aware of their strengths and challenges when learning new information and are able to set their own learning goals. Many adults prefer to set the parameters of their learning journey. Professional development delivered through self-paced modules may appeal to school staff.

Adults also have experiences that may add value to the learning process. These experiences can serve as a foundation for what is to be learned (Peterson, 2018). Because experiences vary, adults should have the opportunity to discuss their experiences with others. This could help participants feel valued and a part of the learning process (Boulter, 2021).

As individuals become mature adults, they want the information they learn to be relevant and useful in their current roles (Peterson, 2018). Adults become selective about learning new information and will learn best when they understand why the information will be needed (Boulter, 2021). When planning activities for adult learners, it is helpful if real-world tasks are included to illustrate how what they are learning can be applied. Additionally, concepts that are taught should be focused on solving a problem.

Finally, motivation for adults to learn new information is internal and personal (Boulter, 2021). People will have different reasons for embracing the opportunity to gain knowledge about a topic or concept. Organizations and leaders will need to understand what motivates their staff members and use the information to develop a successful training plan.

In order for schools to become culturally competent, there must be consistent practices school-wide that focus on creating engaging learning opportunities to benefit all students. This means the entire staff must be adequately trained so these practices become the normal routine in a school and not just isolated events. Principals of culturally responsive schools are intentional about finding professional development to increase the cultural responsiveness of the staff. These principals use a variety of data to determine appropriate types of professional development that will address the needs of a diverse student population (Hollowell, 2019). Consistent culturally responsive training can impact academic achievement as well as improve student behavior. Najarro (2022) stated,

District-wide diversity, equity and inclusion training has gained significant popularity in recent years as policymakers and administrators became more convinced by research that academic disparities between white students and

students of color were partly caused by some educators' false beliefs of the intelligence levels and behaviors of students of color. (para. 4)

The most experienced and qualified teachers may not be able to meet the needs of students from underrepresented groups. According to the Thomas B. Fordham Institute (2023), school districts should

- provide professional development that focuses on culturally responsive lesson planning
- share with teacher preparation programs the desired skills aspiring educators need to have
- utilize data to support the needs of learners

A review of principal preparation programs reveals that university programs have begun to include equity and culturally responsive practices in their curriculums. Virginia Commonwealth University offers a graduate certificate in CRL and a Master's in Educational Leadership with a concentration in CRL (Brogan, 2023). Bowie State in Maryland offers a Master's in Culturally Responsive Teacher Leadership (Bowie State University, n.d.). These programs have been designed to help students prepare to enhance the classroom experiences of marginalized students, as well as their experiences in the workplace and society.

### **Benefits of Culturally Competent Schools**

The research suggests that a culturally competent school will have a positive impact on achievement for all students (Burns et al., 2005). Additionally, students who attend culturally responsive schools will be more prepared to live and work in a globally competitive society (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2023).

### ***Transformational Leadership***

Transformational leaders leave a positive, lasting impact on the communities they serve (Fontein, 2022). They are able to establish a collaborative culture and execute a vision that is shared by all in the organization. Their influence impacts the work of others and helps to grow other transformational leaders. The transformational leader inspires those in the organization while building effective relationships. According to Kouzes and Posner (2017), there are five key practices of a transformational leader.

First, transformational leaders are innovative and have a vision for what the future of the organization will look like (Wiley, 2021b) They model the behaviors they want to see and their actions will align with the shared set of values of the organization (Wiley, 2021a). Their vision was created by taking into account the ideas and input of others in the organization. Because of their leadership and ability to connect and build effective relationships, members of the organization feel valued, and therefore will help to see that the goals of the organization are accomplished. Opportunities to collaborate are vital and result in elevating others into positions of leadership. Transformational leaders are willing to step outside the box and take risks if they think their actions will benefit the organization.

In a school, the actions and visions of transformational leaders create an environment that is supportive of all students. Teachers are encouraged to be creative and innovative, which will result in a highly engaged learning environment. The views of all stakeholders are considered when making decisions, and everyone is aware of the values of the school. The transformational school leader strengthens partnerships with the community and creates a respectful and inclusive school culture (Wiley, 2022).

### ***Student Achievement***

According to Burns et al. (2005), schools are effective when all children can learn. If socioeconomic status, race, or ethnicity are reasons why students do not receive adequate instruction, schools are not effective. When culturally responsive strategies are consistently being utilized, the learning experiences of all students will be positively impacted. Students will be more engaged, attendance will increase, and grades will improve (Grant, 2021). When school employees embrace culturally responsive strategies instead of focusing on an achievement gap, they will begin to address the opportunity gap. Efforts will be made to ensure that all students have the resources they need to be successful. Practices for exposing students to special learning opportunities will be reviewed to ensure that student potential is taken into account.

Increasing cultural competence in schools will improve student confidence as they become more motivated learners and begin to feel more connected to the school (Hoytt et al., n.d.). Relationships between students and teachers will improve and there will be increased trust between minority students and their teachers. Students will begin to see the school as a safe place to take risks; then they will begin to seek advanced learning opportunities and rigorous instruction (Banks & Dohy, 2019).

### ***Parent Engagement***

According to research, parent engagement has a great impact on a student's academic success (Chen, 2022). There are a variety of ways parents can be engaged with the school. Parent engagement includes the communication between parents and the school about the student's academic progress, the amount of support a parent provides at home to reinforce what the student has learned, volunteering at school activities, and

parent participation in parent groups (Foulidi & Papakitsos, 2022).

According to Leddy (2018), parents of minority students often have lower amounts of engagement with the school. Parents may have negative feelings about education because of their own personal educational experiences. Sometimes, parents are not as involved in school activities because of their own work schedules, which limit their ability to participate. There is often a language barrier for minority parents that hinders the ability to understand communication from the school. Cultural differences may result in a parent not fully understanding different aspects of the educational process. When parents are not as involved in school activities, school staff may incorrectly assume parents are not concerned about their child's academic success (Leddy, 2018).

In order to increase parent engagement for families of minority students, schools must ensure that all parents feel welcome. When planning activities, efforts should be made to schedule activities outside of school hours to accommodate parents who work during school hours. School staff should also be trained to better understand the cultural and linguistic differences of stakeholders in an effort to find ways to bridge the cultural gap between school and home. Duncan (2017) stated, "Teachers need additional support with communication with parents whose primary language is not English, how to develop a partnership with parents from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and how to establish two-way communication with non-English speaking parents" (p. 84). Schools must be intentional about finding ways to communicate effectively with parents (Leddy, 2018). Documents that are sent home should be written in a common language that can be clearly understood by parents. Additionally, when there are multiple languages represented in the school, efforts should be made for translation into more than one



language, especially when requesting parent signatures. Schools can make the effort to work with parents to celebrate different cultures throughout the school year and invite parents to participate in the planning and presentations. When minority parents feel their cultures and experiences are valued by the school, parents will become more involved, and student performance will increase (Foulidi & Papakitsos, 2022).

### ***Social Impact***

Ladson-Billings and Paris (2021) stated, “Sociopolitical/critical consciousness is the essence of education in a democratic society. If our students cannot apply, analyze, synthesize, and critique their environment and the problems they encounter, they will not be prepared to be effective members of society” (pp. 6-7).

Ultimately, increasing the cultural capacity of the students in our schools will have a positive impact on society in the years to come. Employers of today will depend on tomorrow’s adults who are able to work and collaborate with a diverse group of individuals. Adults will need to be able to understand other cultures and consider a variety of viewpoints when making decisions. Creating diverse learning environments will help us to produce citizens who are prepared to live and work in the diverse world of our future (Public Schools First NC, 2022).

### **Summary**

The literature review showed that there has been a significant gap in student achievement for students of color for decades. The gap spans a variety of subjects and grades. The changing demographics of the student population and the lack of change of demographics in the teaching staff may contribute to the achievement gap. Students of color are more likely to be removed from school for disciplinary infractions and perform

lower than their White peers on standardized assessments and are less likely to enroll in postsecondary institutions. Schools and school leaders who embrace culturally responsive strategies can create learning environments that increase student motivation and academic achievement for all students. School leaders must work to provide every teacher with adequate training and resources to help meet the academic and social needs of every student.

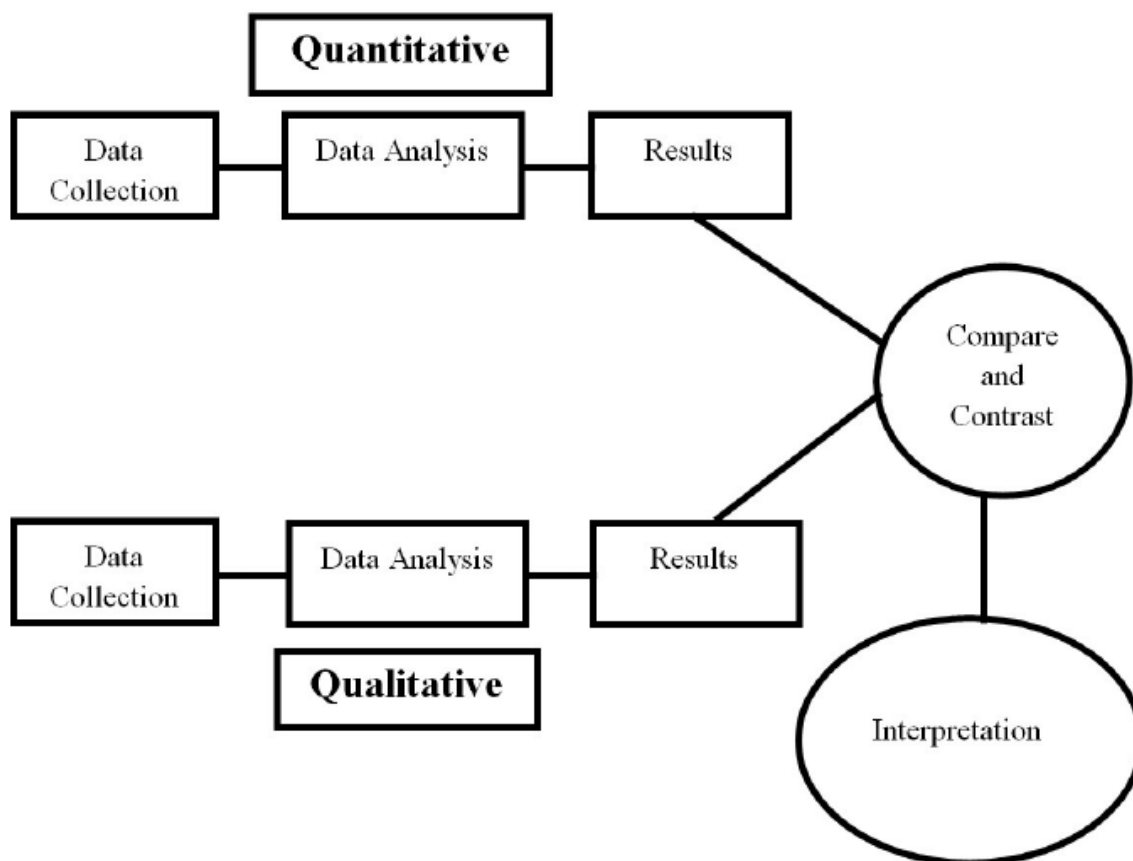
### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to determine the implementation of CRL strategies in three high schools in Alpha County in Eastern North Carolina. This chapter outlines the process I followed to complete the research. The data collected from the research will be shared with district leadership to assist in future decisions regarding CRL strategies and potential training for school leaders.

#### **Research Design**

For this study, I reviewed the leadership actions of principals of low-performing schools with a high population of minority students. I chose to do a case study to focus on the specific strategies being used in Alpha County. By conducting the literature review, I realized gaps in student achievement across the nation and state are mirrored in these three schools. I wanted to find out what, if any, strategies were being used to specifically help school staff engage the minority students. A convergent mixed methods research design was used for the study.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated, “Collecting diverse types of data best provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either quantitative or qualitative data alone” (p. 17). In a convergent mixed methods research design, quantitative and qualitative data are collected at essentially the same time. The data are analyzed separately, and the results are compared. Embedded in this research method is the mixed methods case study design. Figure 2 shows how the data were collected and compared to determine the themes for the case study.

**Figure 2***Mixed Method Research Design Approach*

*Note.* Mixed methods research design image was adapted from Creswell (2012), by A. Opoku, & V. Ahmed (2013), *Understanding sustainability: A view from intra-organizational leadership within UK construction organizations*. ResearchGate.

[https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Mixed-method-research-design-approach-Adopted-from-Creswell-2012\\_fig1\\_366524214](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Mixed-method-research-design-approach-Adopted-from-Creswell-2012_fig1_366524214). Creative Commons Share Alike

***Mixed Methods Research***

The first phase of the research was the collection of quantitative data. A survey was used to measure teacher perceptions of the presence of CRL in the schools. The researcher-created survey was administered to staff members in each of the three high

schools via Qualtrics. The survey began with four demographic questions (school, total number of years in education, current role, and number of years at current school). For each of the eight domains of the CRSL framework, three items were created for a total of 24 survey items. Each item was rated on a 4-point Likert scale (strongly agree–SA, agree–A, disagree–D, strongly disagree–SD). The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. In addition to calculating the mean for each survey item, the distribution of responses for each action was analyzed. For the actions with the lowest ratings, I used a chi-square test for independence. The goal of this test was to determine if the school of the participants had an impact on the survey results. The survey was validated using the Lawshe method.

The Lawshe method is used to determine the content validity ratio (CVR) of the survey. Each item of the survey was reviewed by a panel of experienced educators and rated to determine its relevance. For each survey item, participants were asked to select whether the item was “essential,” “useful but not essential,” or “not necessary.” Then the CVR formula was used to find the CVR for each question. Eight experienced educators were asked to participate in the validation process. The panel included three teachers, one principal, two certified instructional support staff members, and two district leadership members. A Google form was used to email the survey to participants. For a panel of eight experts, the CVR must be 0.75 or greater in order to be determined valid (Zach, 2021).

Twenty-three of the items had a CVR of 0.75 or greater. One survey item in the adult learning and development domain received a CVR of 0.25. The item stated, “The administration makes an effort to learn about the personal identities and background of

staff members (SA, A, D, SD).” This item was rated “essential” by five panelists. Two panelists rated the item “not necessary,” and one panelist rated the item as “useful.” After discussing this item with members of the panel, I realized that teachers completing the survey may not have a thorough understanding of how this element translates into a culturally responsive learning environment. Because of the low CVR, this item was removed from final the survey. Table 11 shows the survey items, the alignment to the framework, and the CVR for each question.

**Table 11***CVR for Teacher Perception Survey*

Domain		Survey item	CVR
Lead for equity and access	1	The school facilitates partnerships with diverse groups in the community.	0.75
	2	The leadership team is made of a diverse group of staff members.	0.75
	3	The administration seeks to recruit and retain a diverse staff.	1
Align mission, vision, and values	4	The school's mission and vision were created and reviewed by a diverse group of stakeholders.	1
	5	The school regularly reviews processes to ensure academic and extra-curricular opportunities are accessible to all students.	1
	6	The mission and vision reflect a desire to create a learning environment that is engaging for students from diverse backgrounds.	1
Focus on instruction	7	The school makes intentional plans to meet the academic needs of students from ethnically diverse backgrounds.	1
	8	Instructional methods and skills are routinely used to engage ethnically diverse and minority students.	0.75
	9	The school reviews the academic performance of various subgroups.	0.75
Facilitate adult learning and development	10	Professional development has been offered at the school to deepen the staff's understanding of diverse cultures.	0.75
	11	The administration makes an effort to learn about the personal identities and backgrounds of staff members.	0.25
	12	The administration supports the efforts of staff to implement new culturally responsive instructional strategies.	1

(continued)

Domain		Survey item	CVR
Manage operations and resources	13	Resources are allocated to eliminate disparities in the academic, social, and emotional growth of students.	0.75
	14	The administration confronts issues of inequity or negative bias.	1
	15	Policies and protocols are in place that support the social and emotional health of all students.	0.75
Engage in personal learning and development	16	The administration uses feedback from stakeholders to guide their leadership actions and decisions.	0.75
	17	The administration stays abreast of current research and issues of equity and shares information with staff.	1
	18	The administration makes decisions that ensure all students have access to rigorous college-and-career-ready instruction.	1
Strategize change and continuous improvement	19	The school improvement plan includes actions to address cultural gaps in achievement and discipline.	1
	20	The administration assesses program implementation and is willing to make adjustments as necessary.	0.75
	21	Specific engagement activities are planned to engage families of ethnically diverse and minority students.	0.75
Cultivate community care and engagement	22	School communication is presented in a way that can be understood by all families.	1
	23	The school plans activities to acknowledge the cultural backgrounds of students.	0.75
	24	Classrooms and common areas display images and literature that represent students from different cultures.	0.75

The second phase of research was conducted through a structured focus group discussion with open-ended questions. The focus group format allowed for robust conversations to take place between the school leaders. Prior to the focus group discussion, participants read an article entitled “Culturally Competent Schools: Guidelines for Secondary School Principals” (Klotz, 2006). This article defined culturally competent schools and highlighted some successful practices high school principals may



implement. The focus group discussion was recorded, transcribed, and coded for themes and trends and compared to the research from the literature review. The questions for the focus group discussion can be found in Table 12.

**Table 12**

*Focus Group Questions*

Domain	Focus group question
Lead for equity and access	Are there elements of culturally responsive leadership embedded in your leadership practice?
Align mission, vision, and values	Does the school's mission, vision, and values reflect a commitment to equitable practices? How?
Focus on instruction	Are efforts made to integrate student experiences into the learning environment? How?
Facilitate adult learning and development	Do you think there is a need for more professional development on culturally responsive learning for your staff?
Manage operations and resources	Do you feel you have adequate resources to meet the needs of an ethnically diverse population?
Engage in personal learning and development	How does your own cultural lens impact your leadership actions?
Strategize change and continuous improvement	What strategies are being used to ensure minority and ethnically diverse students have equitable opportunities for success?
Cultivate community care and engagement	How often are opportunities provided for students at your school to interact with community members of different cultures and backgrounds?

The discussion included one question from each domain. The discussion was open-ended to allow for follow-up questions based on participant responses.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was the CRL Framework developed by The Leadership Academy (2022). The CRL Framework has eight specific actions to describe the actions of culturally responsive school leaders. Items for the survey and questions for the structured focus group discussion were aligned to the eight actions.

The responses from the survey and the structured focus group helped to answer the following research questions:

1. What CRL strategies are currently being used by school leaders in schools with high populations of minority students?
2. How do staff members perceive the implementation of CRL strategies?

## **Research Setting**

Alpha County School District is located in Alpha County in Eastern North Carolina. This study sought to determine to what degree CRL practices are being utilized in Alpha County in Eastern North Carolina. Alpha County School District serves over 17,000 students. There are 13 elementary schools, nine middle schools, six traditional high schools, three innovative high schools, and two alternative schools in the district.

To determine potential participants for this study, the academic performance and demographics of each of the six traditional high schools in Alpha County were reviewed. The North Carolina Accountability Model is comprised of three components—growth, achievement score, and performance grade. Several factors are used to determine a high school's achievement score, including a school's graduation rate and the progress of English language learners on the language assessment (Public Schools First NC, n.d.). The number of juniors who receive a composite score of 19 or above on the ACT is also

used in the achievement score calculation. State assessments are given in four subjects in high school—Math 1, Math 3, English 2, and Biology. Students receive a scale score and a level score ranging from 1 to 5. The percentage of students who receive a level 3, 4, or 5 on the state assessment is used to determine the achievement score.

A school's growth formula is based on the percentage of students who grow academically by 1 year on state assessments. The state uses a value-added growth model to assign a school's composite growth index between -10 and 10. A school's growth is based on the growth index; then the index is converted to a 100-point scale. There are three growth categories for schools: meets growth, exceeds growth, and does not meet growth. A school's performance grade is calculated using 80% of the achievement score and 20% of the growth score. The numerical score is then converted to a letter grade using a 15-point scale.

- A: 85–100
- B: 70–84
- C: 55–69
- D: 40–54
- F: Less than 40

Table 13 shows the performance scores for each of the district's six traditional high schools for the 2022-2023 school year.

North Carolina designates a school as low-performing if the school met or did not meet expected growth and the performance grade is a D or F. Three of the county's high schools did not meet expected growth and received a performance grade of D or F for the 2022-2023 school year and were therefore identified as low-performing schools by the

state's accountability model. These schools were Magnolia High School, Walnut High School, and Maple High School.

**Table 13**

*Alpha County School District Performance and Growth Scores for 2022-2023*

School	Achievement score	Growth score	Growth status	Performance score	Performance grade
Dogwood High School	63.4	56.8	Not met	62	C
Magnolia High School	48.1	52.8	Not met	49	D
Walnut High School	33.5	55.5	Not met	38	F
Spruce High School	65.9	76.9	Met	68	C
Maple High School	45.7	50	Not met	47	D
Holly High School	52.7	85.5	Exceeded	60	C

In addition to performance on state assessments, the graduation rate for each of the high schools was reviewed. According to Taie and Lewis (2022), there was an increase in overall graduation rates across the country from 2010 to 2011. In North Carolina, the average graduation rate over the last 10 years was 87%. Table 14 shows the graduation rates for North Carolina, the district, and the traditional high schools in Alpha County for the past 5 years.

**Table 14**

*Cohort Graduation Rates in North Carolina and Schools in Alpha County*

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
North Carolina	86.5	87.6	87	86.4	86.5
Alpha County	82.6	81.3	81.6	77.6	78
Dogwood High School	85.2	85.1	84.7	83.3	87.8
Magnolia High School	88.6	82.8	85	81.5	79.2
Walnut High School	73.8	63.1	67.1	57.2	52.8
Spruce High School	90.5	87.6	91.9	90.6	90.3
Maple High School	76.7	77.7	75.8	74.3	70.8
Holly High School	76.7	78.9	75.8	73.7	76.1

According to the North Carolina school report cards, the graduation rate in North Carolina has been above 86% for the past 5 years. Alpha County's graduation rate has been above 77% during this time span. Spruce High School had the highest graduation rate for 4 of the last 5 years. Magnolia High School and Dogwood High School had the second-highest graduation rates in the district for 2 of the 5 years. Walnut High School had the lowest graduation rate every year, while Maple High School had the second lowest graduation rate during this time for 4 of the 5 years. Walnut High School and Magnolia High School had the lowest graduation rates for the 2022-2023 school year.

One indicator of college readiness in North Carolina is student performance on the ACT. The UNC system has set a composite score of 19 as the minimum requirement for college admission. All students are administered the ACT during their junior year. I reviewed the ACT data for the state, district, and each of the six traditional high schools for the last 2 years. The percentage of students receiving the minimum composite score for the past 2 school years is displayed in Table 15.

**Table 15**

*Percentage of Students Receiving Minimum Composite Score on ACT*

	2021-2022	2022-2023
North Carolina	41.7	41.1
Alpha County	28	27.1
Dogwood High School	25	32.3
Magnolia High School	22.4	13.9
Walnut High School	<5	5.1
Spruce High School	23.9	30
Maple High School	20.9	21.7
Holly High School	26	22.8

Over 40% of the students in the state received a composite score of 19 or above on the ACT. In Alpha County, the percentage is significantly lower with approximately

27% of students receiving the minimum score. Holly High School and Dogwood High School had the largest percentage of students who were proficient in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 respectively. The school with the lowest percentage of proficiency for both years was Walnut High School. Maple High School had the second-lowest score in 2021-2022, and Magnolia High School had the second-lowest proficiency in 2022-2023. The three schools with the lowest percentage of proficient students for the 2022-2023 school year were Walnut, Maple, and Magnolia High Schools.

I recognized graduation rate and ACT performance are used to determine the school's performance grade. Because of their performance trends, I also reviewed the demographics of these three schools and realized the majority of the students in each of these schools are minorities. The demographics for each of these schools according to their school improvement plans can be found in Table 16.

**Table 16**

*Demographics of Select High Schools in Alpha County School District*

School	White	African American	Hispanic	Asian	Two or more
Magnolia High School	24%	54%	15%	1.50%	4%
Walnut High School	2%	89%	5%	0%	4%
Maple High School	25%	30%	42%	0%	3%

The majority of the students in Magnolia High School and Walnut High School are African American, while the majority of the students in Maple High School are Hispanic. Maple High School has a significant number of students from three different ethnicities.

In order to gain a better understanding of each school's academic progress, I reviewed the school improvement plans to determine the student and staff populations. I

also reviewed the North Carolina school report cards to review each school’s academic performance history. It should be noted that performance and growth scores were not given in 2020 and 2021 because of the global pandemic.

### ***Magnolia High School***

Magnolia High School has a total enrollment of approximately 885 students in Grades 9–12. There are 39 classroom teachers, three administrators, three school counselors, and 32 other support staff positions. Over the past 8 years of the accountability reporting cycle, Magnolia High School met growth twice. Since the pandemic, the school’s performance grade has been a D. Table 17 shows the growth and performance history of Magnolia High School.

**Table 17**

#### *Growth and Performance History for Magnolia High School*

	Growth history		Performance history	
	Score	Status	Score	Grade
2014	58	Not met	60	C
2015	71	Met growth	64	C
2016	66.6	Not met	61	C
2017	65.5	Not met	60	C
2018	62.9	Not met	61	C
2019	76.2	Met growth	67	C
2022	52.8	Not met	50	D
2023	52.8	Not met	49	D

The performance score of Magnolia High School was 60% or above from 2014 to 2019. The performance and growth scores declined during the pandemic. Magnolia High School has been designated as a low-performing school for the past 2 years. I also reviewed the performance of each subgroup on each state assessment for the 2022-2023 school year. State assessments were administered in biology, English 2, Math 1, and

Math 3. A score of 3 or better out of 5 is considered to be proficient. Table 18 shows how each subgroup at Magnolia High School performed.

**Table 18**

*Performance on State Assessments by Subgroup—Magnolia High School*

	Biology	English 2	Math 1	Math 3
All	28	33.3	18.9	16.7
Black	26.2	27.8	14.5	10.4
Hispanic	25	38.7	23.7	33.3
White	31.4	40.6	31.4	20
Two or More	50	53.3	*	*

*Note.* There must be at least 10 students in a subgroup in order for performance data to be reported. The \* indicates performance data were not calculated because of the size of the subgroup.

White students and students of two or more ethnicities at Magnolia High School scored higher than their peers in biology, English 2, and Math 1. Hispanic students scored higher in Math 3. Black students scored lower than their peers in English 2, Math 1, and Math 3. In order for data for a subgroup to be collected, there must be at least 30 students in the group. There were not enough students to create a subgroup in Math 1 or Math 3.

***Walnut High School***

Walnut High School has a total enrollment of approximately 590 students in Grades 9–12. There are 33 classroom teachers, three administrators, two school counselors, and 19 additional support staff positions. Walnut High School has not met growth since 2014. Since the pandemic, the school has received a performance grade of F. The performance history for Walnut High School can be found in Table 19.



**Table 19***Growth and Performance History for Walnut High School*

	Growth history		Performance history	
	Score	Status	Score	Grade
2014	58.5	Not met	46	D
2015	54.5	Not met	43	D
2016	57.2	Not met	44	D
2017	59.3	Not met	42	D
2018	58.8	Not met	44	D
2019	54.8	Not met	44	D
2022	55.5	Not met	38	F
2023	55.5	Not met	38	F

Walnut High School has been a low-performing school every year since 2014.

The school's performance score declined significantly after the pandemic, which resulted in the school's performance grade decreasing from a D to an F. Data on how each subgroup performed on state assessments during the 2022-2023 school year can be found in Table 20.

**Table 20***Performance on State Assessments by Subgroup—Walnut High School*

	Biology	English 2	Math 1	Math 3
All	34.4	32.4	15.7	25.1
Black	26.2	24.3	7.1	24.6
Hispanic	28.1	24.6	16.7	23.7
White	51.6	55.7	24.7	23.3

White students at Walnut High School scored significantly higher than their peers on the biology and English 2 assessments. While they also scored better in Math 1, the gap between the next subgroup is smaller. In Math 3, the scores for all subgroups are within 2 percentage points of each other, with Black students receiving the higher score.

### ***Maple High School***

Maple High School has a total enrollment of approximately 1,120 students in Grades 9–12. There are 51 classroom teachers, three administrators, three school counselors, and 18 additional support staff positions. Maple High School has not met growth since 2014. The school performance grade has been a D every year except in 2018. Table 21 displays the growth and performance trends for Maple High School.

**Table 21**

#### *Growth and Performance History for Maple High School*

	Growth history		Performance history	
	Score	Status	Score	Grade
2014	50.4	Not met	51	D
2015	50	Not met	51	D
2016	51	Not met	53	D
2017	50	Not met	49	D
2018	54.9	Not met	56	C
2019	58.5	Not met	54	D
2022	53.7	Not met	49	D
2023	50	Not met	47	D

Maple High School’s growth score increased slightly from 2017 to 2019, which resulted in an increased performance grade in 2018 from a D to a C. The school’s performance score increased slightly from 2017 to 2018. The growth score and performance score have been decreasing consistently since 2019. The percentage of students who were proficient on each assessment by subgroup can be found in Table 22. Data can only be reported for two subgroups in Maple High School. Hispanic students outperformed Black students in English 2 and Math 1. Less than 5% of the Black students and all students tested were proficient in Math 1.

**Table 22***Performance on State Assessments by Subgroup—Maple High School*

	Biology	English 2	Math 1	Math 3
All	28.3	19.3	<5	8.5
Black	26.9	15.2	<5	6.6
Hispanic	*	33.3	7.1	*

*Note.* There must be at least 10 students in a subgroup in order for performance data to be reported. The \* indicates performance data was not calculated because of the size of the subgroup.

These three high schools differ in the size of their student and staff populations; however, they all serve a large percentage of minority students. Because of their academic progress over the past several years and the percentage of minority students being served, Magnolia High School, Walnut High School, and Maple High School were selected for the case study.

**Data Collection**

Data were collected using a mixed methods research approach. Research for this study was done during the spring of 2024. Quantitative data were collected by surveying certified staff members of the three high schools. A focus group discussion was the format for the collection of qualitative data.

***Participants***

Participating schools were selected based on their academic performance and percentage of minority students. After receiving approval from the school district, an invitation to participate in the survey was sent to all staff members in the identified schools. Participation in the survey was voluntary. The survey was administered through Qualtrics, and participant anonymity was protected.

Principals and assistant principals of each of the three high schools were invited to participate in the focus group discussion. Participation in the focus group was voluntary. Assistant principals were invited to participate in an effort to expand the data collection pool. The focus group discussion allowed school leaders the opportunity to discuss common challenges they were facing as leaders of schools with a large population of minority students.

### **Summary**

The case study allowed me to determine whether CRL strategies are being used to meet the needs of ethnically diverse learners in specific high schools in Alpha County School District. The high schools were selected based on their academic performance and demographics. The information gained from this study will be shared with district leaders to support their efforts to increase the academic performance of minority students in the district and improve the overall academic performance in these schools.

## Chapter 4: Results

As public schools in America become more diverse, educators must be intentional about their efforts to engage ethnically diverse students and families in their learning experiences (Burns et al., 2005). Research suggests that a school practicing culturally responsive strategies will have a positive impact on all students (Hawley & Wolf, 2011). The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not CRL strategies are being used to increase the academic performance of students in three high schools in Alpha County in Eastern North Carolina. In addition to exploring the actions of the administrators, the perception of the school staff as it relates to CRL was also explored.

A convergent mixed methods design was used in this study. A focus group discussion was facilitated with high school administrators for qualitative research. To collect quantitative data, a survey was administered to the staff members. The data were analyzed separately and then the results were compared to answer the following research questions.

1. What CRL strategies are currently being used by school leaders in schools with high populations of minority students?
2. How do staff members perceive the implementation of CRL strategies?

The research was guided by The Culturally Responsive Leadership Framework: A Framework for Schools and School System Leaders developed by The Leadership Academy (2022). The framework outlines eight specific actions for educational leaders to create culturally responsive learning environments (The Leadership Academy, 2022). The items for the survey and focus group discussion were developed with these actions as a guide. This chapter explains the results of the research findings.

## **Data Collection**

Permission to conduct research in Alpha County was granted by the district. After gaining initial approval, I reviewed the demographic and academic data of the traditional high schools in the district to determine the setting for the study. Three high schools were selected based on their academic performance and student demographics. The majority of the students in the selected high schools are minorities. Additionally, each school has been designated as low-performing based on North Carolina's Accountability Model for the past 2 years. Once I received approval from the Institutional Review Board of Gardner-Webb University, data collection began.

### ***Qualitative Data Collection***

A focus group discussion was facilitated to determine the level of implementation of CRL strategies by the administrators of the three selected high schools. According to the school improvement plans, each school had three administrators. The goal was for five administrators, with at least one from each school, to participate in the discussion; however, the number of administrative positions at Walnut High School had recently been reduced by one. Additionally, one of the administrators was on leave. As a result, Walnut High School had one practicing administrator at the time of my study; therefore, a total of seven administrators were invited to participate in the focus group discussion.

An invitation to participate in the focus group discussion was emailed to each of the administrators on January 16, 2024. A reminder email was sent 1 week later. Four administrators agreed to participate in the discussion; however, one administrator was not able to attend the discussion on the scheduled date. The focus group discussion was held on February 8, 2024, with three administrators representing two of the three schools

present. Table 23 shows the years of experience in education and administration for the focus group participants.

**Table 23**

*Focus Group Participant Data*

Administrator	Current school	Years in education	Years in administration	Years at current school
Administrator 1	Magnolia	26	8.5	1.5
Administrator 2	Magnolia	23	10	7 months
Administrator 3	Maple	28	10	7 months

All of the focus group participants have over 2 decades of experience as educators. While they are all relatively new to their current schools, each one of them has served as an administrator for at least 8 years, which included tasks and assignments relevant to this study.

Focus group participants responded to eight open-ended questions that aligned with the domains of the CRL Framework. The responses were recorded by me, and I then transcribed the discussion. The transcript was then coded for themes and patterns. The themes from the focus group discussion were then compared to the survey results for further analysis.

***Quantitative Data Collection***

The staff of the three high schools were invited to participate in a survey to explore the perceptions of school staff on the implementation of CRL strategies. The survey was administered anonymously using the Qualtrics platform. The 23-item survey was validated in advance by a team of experienced educators using the Lawshe method. The CVR for each question was determined, and the survey was determined to be valid. The survey also included four demographic items to collect information about the

participants' educational experiences.

The initial plan was to invite the certified staff members of the selected high schools to participate in the survey using the district-created email groups; however, there were no separate email groups for certified staff and classified staff. As a result, the invitation to participate was emailed to all staff members of the selected schools. The survey was adjusted to account for the potential participation of classified staff members. The goal was to have 15 participants from each of the high schools for a total of 45 participants. The invitation to participate in the survey was emailed on Wednesday, January 17, 2024. A reminder email was sent 1 week later, and a final reminder was sent 3 days before the survey closed. The survey closed on Thursday, February 8, 2024.

The survey began by collecting demographic information of the participants. Participants identified their current school, current role, number of years in education, and the number of years they have worked at their current school. A total of 35 participants completed portions of the survey. Table 24 shows the number of surveys completed at each high school and the positions in the school they represent.

**Table 24**

*Survey Participant Data*

Number of participants by school		Number of participants by role	
Magnolia	12	Classroom teacher	24
Walnut	5	Counselor/social worker	3
Maple	18	Media/technology/career dev.	1
		Other certified personnel	3
		Classified personnel	3
Total surveys	35		34

The goal of 15 surveys completed was met at one of the three schools. There were 18 participants at Maple High School. Magnolia High School had 12 participants, while



Walnut High School had five participants. While the total number of surveys completed was less than the goal of 45, the total number of responses for each question was at least 60% of the goal. The years of participants have worked at their current school as well as the total number of years in education can be found in Table 25.

**Table 25**

*Educational Experience of Survey Participants*

	Years at current school		Years in education	
	N	%	N	%
0-5 years	17	48	4	11
6-10 years	4	11	5	14
11-15 years	5	14	8	23
16-25 years	5	14	9	26
More than 25 years	4	11	9	26

*Note.* N represents the number of participants in each category.

The majority of the respondents are relatively new to their current school. Seventeen of the participants, which was 48%, indicated they had worked at their current location for 5 years or less; however, the responses indicated that many of the participants were experienced educators. Twenty-six of the educators, or 78%, have more than 10 years of experience in education.

## **Data Analysis**

### *Qualitative Data Analysis*

**Research Question 1. What CRL Strategies Are Currently Being Used by School Leaders in Schools With High Populations of Minority Students?** Culturally responsive school leaders must work with staff, students, parents, and the community to create an environment where every student will receive the tools and support they need to

be successful (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). In addition to focusing on academic success, one must be able to implement policies and procedures that will result in equitable practices school-wide (Grant, 2021). A focus group discussion was facilitated by me to understand what strategies are currently being used in high schools in Alpha County to support minority and ethnically diverse students.

I began the focus group by asking participants to read the article, “Culturally Competent Schools: Guidelines for Secondary School Principals” (Klotz, 2006). The article began by explaining the demographic shift in our nation’s schools and the need for increased culturally responsive learning environments. Culturally competent schools are defined, and examples of strategies for culturally responsive high schools are given. I provided this article to help the focus group center their thoughts around the concept of CRL. After reading the article, each participant was asked to share any highlights they gained from the reading. Administrator 1 found it alarming that according to the article, 39% of the children living in the country were living in or near poverty. Administrator 2 stated that by the year 2040, there will be no majority ethnic or racial group present in the nation’s public schools. Administrator 3 added that there is a big paradigm shift. We are seeing it right now in our schools with the culture, the language, and discipline. Participants agreed this is a timely topic especially because of changes currently happening in Alpha County.

***Focus Group Question 1–Action 1: Lead for Equity and Access.*** Are there elements of CRL embedded in your leadership practice? The first action of the CRL Framework is the foundation for all other actions in the framework. This action emphasizes the need for school leaders to be aware of their own beliefs and experiences

as well as the differences between the adults and students in their buildings. Efforts must be made to ensure all students and staff members are treated fairly by reviewing school policies and practices.

The first question of the focus group discussion asked administrators to identify any elements of CRL embedded in their leadership practice. Administrator 1 from Magnolia High School wants to find ways to highlight the cultures and histories of all students, not just African American students during Black History Month. He wants to give all of his students “a chance to have their culture and their history reflected.” Administrator 2 from Magnolia High School stated that she is “trying to be more understanding of cultures.” One example she shared is to know that it is disrespectful in the Hispanic culture for Hispanic students to make eye contact with adults. In American culture, this practice is often disrespectful, and she has had to help her teachers understand this as well. She has also had to make adjustments because of an increase in language barriers for students. Their school has several Asian and Haitian students as well as Hispanic students. Many of them do not speak English. As a result, she has had to rely on tools like Google Translate on electronic devices to help communicate with students on a daily basis. Administrator 3 from Maple High School stated that they work to send out communication in different languages. One of the most frequently used examples he shared was in the communication of bus information. He noted that communicating effectively with families is both a safety and security issue. Often, he relies on other adults in the building who are multilingual to assist in communicating with students in disciplinary or traumatic situations.

***Focus Group Question 2–Action 2: Align Mission, Vision, and Values.*** Does the

school's mission, vision, and values reflect a commitment to equitable practices? How?

When asked about their school's mission, vision, and values, all administrators agreed that their mission and vision statements reflect a commitment to equitable practices.

Administrator 1 and Administrator 2 (Magnolia) stated that their mission is to prepare all students for a globally competitive environment; however, they admitted that they are not sure if all students are actually receiving what is needed to be successful. Administrator 3 (Maple) feels that their mission and vision need to be revisited with input from students from other cultures. He believes specific work needs to be done to the school's mission and vision to address the changes in the school's demographics to ensure the needs of all students are met.

***Focus Group Question 3–Action 3: Focus on Instruction.*** Are efforts made to integrate student experiences into the learning environment? How? Administrator 3 shared how he specifically discusses this expectation with teachers after observing or conducting walkthroughs. He stated,

I ask teachers to engage the students so they can tell how what is being taught relates to their culture. I want them to see how their experiences interact with the teaching. I want them to see connection and real life.

He also wants their peers to see these connections and hear the experiences of other students. Administrator 1 feels that seasoned teachers are less apt to step back from some of their routine practices and allow this level of engagement to happen. He stated that seasoned teachers need to “allow more students to suggest ideas or learning experiences” to make learning more relevant. Administrator 3 mentioned how helpful students could be in minimizing the language barrier for students who are not proficient in English.

***Focus Group Question 4–Action 4: Facilitate Adult Learning and***

***Development.*** Do you think there is a need for more professional development on culturally responsive learning for your staff? When asked about the need for professional development, Administrator 1 stated, “Professional development is needed to help teachers understand ways to successfully engage and communicate with students.” He has compared the demographics of the staff to the students and has reviewed the school’s discipline data. He feels that some teachers are intimidated by some students and hesitate to engage students in class or push them academically. Administrator 3 believes that this type of professional development is “long overdue.” He agrees that there are teachers who are intimidated because of a lack of understanding of cultures. He stated, “Professional development needs to be hands-on with situations and scenarios to practice” how to address classroom issues. Administrator 2 added the importance of teachers taking time to build relationships with the students in the classroom and other students in the school.

***Focus Group Question 5–Action 5: Manage Operations and Resources.*** Do you feel you have adequate resources to meet the needs of an ethnically diverse population? Administrator 3 began this discussion. He feels there are more than enough resources, but teachers are not well-versed in how to use the materials effectively. Therefore, resources are often kept in classrooms unused. Administrator 1 agreed that millions of dollars have been spent on resources over the past several years, but the county could probably do more to ensure the needs of the ethnically diverse students are met. Currently, the district provides various documents in English and Spanish; however, recently, there has been an influx of students from other countries as well, many of whom do not speak any English.

He believes there should be some programs in place to provide services and instruction to these students instead of placing them directly into schools. We do not have the resources to provide adequate instruction to high school students who do not speak any English.

Administrator 2 added that human resources must also be considered. More staff members who speak multiple languages are needed as demographics continue to change.

Administrator 2 also shared that it is important for the district to communicate with teachers and school leaders directly to determine the needs. Often the teachers are not using the resources because they had no input in the selection and adequate training on the resources is often not provided. She suggested allowing student input to be a part of the selection of resources or programs. Administrator 2 said what is needed is “a round table discussion” because “everybody has something to bring to the table.”

***Focus Group Question 6–Action 6: Engage in Personal Learning and Development.*** How does your own cultural lens impact your leadership actions?

Administrator 3 mentioned how he has had to understand how his priorities and the priorities of the school are not necessarily shared by some of the families in his school. One example he gave is how the school and state view end-of-course testing. He serves as the testing coordinator, and there were several students who were not coming to school because this was not important to them. He worked with his staff and transportation to create additional bus routes to make home visits to pick up students. Administrator 2 recognizes the need to make sure students are not treated unfairly because they are from a different culture. She tries to be extra encouraging and bases her interactions with students on respect. Administrator 1 currently works at the same high school from which he graduated. He shared how different students are not in comparison to when he was in

high school. When dealing with students, he tries to understand their “approach to things and their mindset.” He tries to make them all understand they can control their narrative as long as they make good choices and work hard.

***Focus Group Question 7–Action 7: Strategize Change and Continuous Improvement.*** What strategies are being used to ensure minority and ethnically diverse students have equitable opportunities for success? Administrator 2 says the school counselors play a big role in determining the different needs of students. Counselors have individual conversations with students to determine their goals and plans and use that information to guide students appropriately. Administrator 1 agreed counselors at their school do an excellent job working with students; however, there are times when counselors will send out information about opportunities and scholarships and no one will take advantage. Some of these opportunities are specially created for minority students. He wonders if they have a clear understanding of the benefits of some of the programs.

Administrator 2 mentioned the importance of exploring opportunities at the community college with students to help them understand other opportunities besides attending a 4-year college or university. Their school uses student performance on the ACT to help students explore future goals. Administrator 3 suggested more opportunities be created to talk to students so they can “help us to understand what we can do to make them successful.” Once schools have that information, they should share it with the community. He mentioned schools used to have business and community partners. Those relationships need to be reinforced, and everyone should share in providing opportunities for all students.

***Focus Question 8–Action 8: Cultivate Community Care and Engagement.*** How

often are opportunities provided for students at your school to interact with community members of different cultures and backgrounds? Administrator 3 explained how Maple High School is intentional about inviting members of the community to school to “have meaningful dialogue and conversations with students.” Maple High School combines students from three different townships, and it is important that efforts are made to help them understand one another. Administrator 1 stated Magnolia High School probably does not have enough opportunities. He has started speaking to members of the community organizations about coming into the school to share information about the work they do in the community. Topics may include business attire, setting career goals, or community service initiatives. He noted opportunities for visitors to speak to students stopped during the pandemic and have not returned to their pre-pandemic rates.

When questions were asked about specific strategies being used in their leadership practice (Action 1 and Action 7), the administrators mentioned the challenges of communicating with students and families because of the language barriers. A few translation resources were listed, but not many specific strategies were explained. When discussing professional learning needs (Action 4), all of the administrators agreed there was a need for school-wide professional development in the areas of culturally responsive instruction. When asked about how they use their own leadership lens (Action 6), administrators understand the need to be respectful and to try to use a variety of methods to engage all students. When reflecting on the school’s mission and vision (Action 2), administrators believe the goal of meeting the needs of all students is stated; however, whether or not schools are meeting this goal is unclear. When reflecting on the school’s operations and resources (Action 5), administrators felt that efforts have been made to



ensure schools have the materials in place to meet the needs of students; however, there was room for improvement to ensure staff was adequately trained and that schools have enough human resources to help all students be successful. Adequate training, materials, and professional development for staff on culturally responsive instruction will impact the ability of school staff to integrate student learning experiences into the learning environment (Action 3). Administrators understand the value of increased interaction with the school and community but stated there is room for improvement in this area as well (Action 8).

### *Quantitative Data Analysis*

**Research Question 2. How Do Staff Members Perceive the Implementation of CRL Strategies?** Educators must combine their own beliefs with the beliefs and cultures of their stakeholders to create a vision for their schools (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). Effective school leaders will develop a clear vision with input from a variety of stakeholders and communicate that vision with those in the school and community. An administrator who practices CRL understands the importance of creating a culturally competent staff to enhance the academic success of all students. The purpose of this survey was to determine how the staff of these high schools perceived the implementation of CRL strategies in their schools.

There was a total of 27 items in the survey. The first four items collected demographic information about the participants. There were 23 Likert scale items based on the eight actions of the CRL Framework. For seven of the actions, there were three statements. There was one action with two statements. For each statement, participants selected one of the following answers: SA—strongly agree; A—agree; D—disagree; SD—

strongly disagree. Table 26 was created to summarize the ratings each action received. For each action, the total number of responses, N, is stated, and the average number of responses each rating received is represented by n. Finally, the percentage of the participants who chose each rating in the action is shown.

**Table 26**

*Summary of Responses to Staff Perception Survey*

Domain	Strongly agree			Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	N	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Lead for equity and access	27	10.66	39.5	13.66	50.6	2.66	9.9	0	0
Align mission, vision, and values	26	12	46.15	12.66	48.69	1	3.85	0.33	1.28
Focus on instruction	27	11.66	43.19	13	48.15	2.33	8.6	0	0
Facilitate adult learning and development	27	12	44.4	9.5	35.19	5.5	20.37	0	0
Manage operations and resources	28	9	32.14	14	50	4.66	16.67	0	0
Engage in personal learning & development	27	11.66	43.19	12.66	46.89	2.66	9.85	0	0
Strategize change and continuous improvement	27	9	33.33	12.33	45.66	5.66	20.96	0	0
Cultivate community care and engagement	27	7.33	27.16	12.33	45.66	7	25.93	0	0

The first action of the CRL Framework for principals is to “lead for equity and access.” This action is the foundation for all other actions of the framework. The administrators competent in this standard are mindful of their own cultural lens, utilize the viewpoints of other stakeholders when making decisions, and understand the challenges faced by minoritized populations. Participants were asked if their school creates partnerships with diverse community groups, has a diverse leadership team, and makes an effort to recruit and retain a diverse staff. On average, almost 90% of the

participants agree or strongly agree that their administrators have equitable leadership practices.

The alignment of the mission, vision, and values is the focus of Action 2. Administrators competent in this action will collaborate with other stakeholders to develop a mission and vision that will help all students be successful. Participants were asked if the group of stakeholders who created the school's mission and vision was diverse and if the desire to create an engaging learning environment for a diverse group of students was evident. The survey also asked if processes are reviewed regularly to ensure that academic and extra-curricular opportunities are accessible to all students. Ninety-five percent of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements for Action 2.

Action 3 is "focus on instruction." Administrators competent in this standard would ensure learning environments are culturally responsive, are equipped to support students socially and emotionally, and offer rigorous and challenging content to all students. The survey asked participants to state whether their schools are intentionally planning to meet the academic needs of ethnically diverse students with specific instructional practices. Additionally, the survey asked participants to consider whether the review of the academic performance of subgroups was a regular practice. Ninety-one percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there was a focus on instruction for ethnically diverse students.

The fourth action focuses on the learning and development of the adults in our schools. In order to create culturally responsive schools, administrators must be intentional about increasing the cultural competence of their staff through professional

development and instructional coaching. In the survey, participants rated whether professional development had been offered to increase the staff's understanding of diverse cultures. Respondents also indicated whether the implementation of culturally responsive instructional strategies was supported by the administration. While almost 80% of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statements, 20% of those surveyed disagreed that there was a focus on adult learning and development in their schools.

The school leader's ability to manage resources and operations to ensure all learners have equitable access to rigorous content is the focus of the fifth action. This action relates to the management of human, material, and fiscal resources as well as how policies and practices are implemented and evaluated. Participants were asked if resources were allocated to eliminate disparities in the academic, social, and emotional growth of students. Participants rated their administrator's ability to confront issues of inequity or negative bias and if the social and emotional health of all students is supported by the school's policies and protocols. On average, 82% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with their leader's efforts to manage their school's resources and operations effectively.

Action 6 centers around the professional growth of the school leader to support students, staff, and families in an equitable manner. This section asked participants to rate their administrators' uses of feedback from stakeholders to guide decision-making, and if the decisions were made help to ensure all students will have access to college and career ready instruction. The participants were also asked if their administrator was aware of current research on the issues of equity and if that information was shared with the staff.

On average, 90% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements.

Strategic planning and continuous school improvement are the focus of the seventh action of the CRL Framework. A culturally responsive school leader will utilize a variety of data sources to determine areas of improvement and work with a variety of stakeholders to develop a plan of action. Respondents were asked to consider whether their school improvement plan addresses cultural gaps in achievement and discipline and if adjustments are made to implement programs as needed. Participants were also asked if specific activities are planned to engage families of ethnically diverse and minority students. On average, 79% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements. Twenty-one percent of the respondents disagreed with the statements in this domain.

The final action in the framework relates to the administrator's ability to develop a school culture where all stakeholders feel included. The statements in this section asked if the school presents communication in a way that can be understood by all families and whether the school plans activities to acknowledge the cultural backgrounds of all students. Participants were also asked if literature and images are displayed in classrooms and common areas that represent students from different cultures. On average, over 25% of the respondents disagreed with the statements in this section, while agree or strongly agree was selected by over 72% of those surveyed.

Actions 4, 7, and 8 received the lowest ratings by survey participants. Twenty percent of the respondents disagreed with the statements in Action 4–Facilitating Adult Learning and Development and Action 7–Strategize Change and Continuous Improvement. Statements for Action 8–Cultivate Community Care and Engagement were

disagreed with by 25% of the participants.

The chi-square test for independence was conducted on the survey items for Actions 4, 7, and 8. The purpose of the test was to determine if there was an association between the school of the respondents and their responses to the survey items. For this statistical analysis, strongly agree and agree responses were combined. The responses for disagree and strongly disagree were also combined. The observed outcomes were compared to the expected outcomes to determine a  $p$  value. The threshold for this test was  $p = 0.05$ . The null hypothesis, if  $p > 0.05$ , states there is no association between the school and the survey responses. The alternative hypothesis, if  $p < 0.05$ , states there is an association between the school and the survey responses. The  $p$  value for the survey items for Actions 4, 7, and 8 can be found in Table 27.

**Table 27***Chi-Square Test of Independence*

Action	Survey item	SA	A	D	SD	<i>p</i> value
Facilitate adult learning and development	Professional development has been offered at the school to deepen the staff's understanding of diverse cultures.	13	6	8	0	0.004
	The administration supports the efforts of staff to implement new culturally responsive instructional strategies.	11	13	3	0	0.707
Strategize change and continuous improvement	The school improvement plan includes actions to address cultural gaps in achievement and discipline.	9	14	4	0	0.022
	The administration assesses program implementation and is willing to make adjustments as necessary.	11	12	4	0	0.664
	Specific engagement activities are planned to engage families of ethnically diverse and minority students.	7	11	9	0	0.077
Cultivate community care and engagement	School communication is presented in a way that can be understood by all families.	7	16	4	0	0.664
	The school plans activities to acknowledge the cultural backgrounds of students.	9	10	8	0	0.463
	Classrooms and common areas display images and literature that represent students from different cultures.	6	11	9	0	0.0005

The chi-square test reveals there is no association between the school and the

responses for five survey items.

- The administration supports the efforts of staff to implement new culturally responsive instructional strategies.
- The administration assesses program implementation and is willing to make adjustments as necessary.
- Specific engagement activities are planned to engage families of ethnically diverse and minority students.
- School communication is presented in a way that can be understood by all families.
- The school plans activities to acknowledge the cultural backgrounds of students.

Action 4 of the CRL Framework states that the culturally responsive school leader will ensure professional learning is offered to ensure all students have access to equitable opportunities. Table 28 shows the survey items for Action 4 and the responses each item received.



**Table 28***Survey Responses for Action 4: Facilitating Adult Learning and Development*

Statements	N	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Professional development has been offered at the school to deepen the staff's understanding of diverse cultures.	27	13	48.1	6	22.2	8	29.6	0	0
The administration supports the efforts of staff to implement new culturally responsive instructional strategies.	27	11	40.7	13	48.1	3	11.1	0	0

Based on the survey responses, 29.6% of the participants disagree that the school has offered professional development to increase their understanding of diverse cultures.

Some specific qualities outlined in the framework for school leaders are

- Determine the learning needs of the staff in the areas of culture and diversity (4a)
- Create a space for collaborative conversations about individual and implicit biases, deficit thinking, and forms of racism (4b & 4c)
- Set clear expectations and provide coaching and support for effective culturally responsive practice (4d & 4f)
- Develop a professional learning curriculum on culturally responsive practices (4e)
- Ensure professional learning focuses on instructional practice and the concepts are reflected in routine work and student learning (4d)

Action 7 of the CRL Framework outlines how school leaders use data to develop their strategic plan and overall mission and vision for the school and whether or not all stakeholders are a part of the planning process. There were three survey items for Action 7: Strategize Change and Continuous Improvement. The items and the responses received for this action can be found in Table 29.

**Table 29**

*Survey Responses for Action 7: Strategize Change and Continuous Improvement*

Statements	N	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
The school improvement plan includes actions to address cultural gaps in achievement and discipline.	27	9	33.3	14	51.9	4	15.8	0	0
The administration assesses program implementation and is willing to make adjustments as necessary.	27	11	40.7	12	44.4	4	14.8	0	0
Specific engagement activities are planned to engage families of ethnically diverse and minority students.	27	7	25.9	11	40.7	9	33.3	0	0

Over 30% of the participants disagree that their school plans specific activities to engage families of minority students. This statement aligns with the following qualities from the framework for culturally responsive leaders:

- Utilize a variety of perspectives from the school and community when making decisions (7b)

- Be mindful of disparities in the areas of race, language, ethnicity, and ability when developing school improvement goals (7a & 7c)
- Create specific strategies to engage all stakeholders in program development and implementation (7c)

Research suggests that incorporating students' lived experiences in the educational setting will help students feel more connected to the school. When students feel connected and included, they are more likely to be successful (Hoytt et al., n.d.). Cultivating community and engagement is the focus of Action 8. The survey items and the responses for this action can be found in Table 30.

**Table 30**

*Survey Responses for Action 8: Cultivate Community Care and Engagement*

Statements	N	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
School communication is presented in a way that can be understood by all families.	27	7	25.9	16	59.3	4	14.8	0	0
The school plans activities to acknowledge the cultural backgrounds of students.	27	9	33.3	10	37	8	29.6	0	0
Classrooms and common areas display images and literature that represent students from different cultures.	27	6	22.2	11	40.7	9	33.3	0	0

The survey responses indicate potential areas of improvement in creating an inclusive and inviting environment for ethnically diverse students. Over 30% of the

participants disagree that their school displays literature and images that represent students from different cultures. Over 29% of the participants disagree that the school plans activities to celebrate the cultural backgrounds of students. The following statements are examples of how these statements align with the CRL Framework:

- Create an inclusive school by using a variety of perspectives (8a)
- Adjust communication so that it will appeal to different audiences (8b)
- Seek to understand how students and families feel about their school experiences (8c)
- Use a variety of platforms to communicate with families (8d)
- Develop a school culture that highlights the existing cultures and backgrounds of the students in the school (8e)

### **Summary**

There were several actions administrators felt could be areas of growth. At least one administrator mentioned suggestions for improvement for Actions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8. Additionally, specific strategies were not given for Actions 1 and 7. Based on the data from the staff survey, three actions are potential areas of improvement for the district: Actions 4, 7, and 8. Actions 4 and 8 are listed as areas of improvement in both sets of responses. These data were further supported by the chi-square test for independence, which yielded five statements that may be areas of concern for school leaders in the district.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

Alpha County, like North Carolina, has seen a shift in demographics over the last decade. According to data from the U.S. Census, Alpha County has become more diverse since the 2010 census. The percentage of White people decreased from 55.8% in 2010 to 51.3% in 2022. During this same time, the percentage of Hispanic individuals increased from 10% to 13.4%. There was also an increase in individuals of two or more races from 1.7% to 2.5%.

In recent years, schools have seen an increase in the number of students with parents from different countries, many of whom do not speak English. In order to support these students and help them be successful, schools must be intentional about finding ways to engage students and parents in the learning process. School administrators play an important role in working to increase the capacity of their staff to create a culturally responsive environment for students (Khalifa, 2020).

The research for this mixed methods study was conducted in two stages. Three high schools were selected for this study based on their demographics and academic performance data. To collect qualitative data, a focus group discussion was facilitated with practicing administrators in Alpha County. I sought to determine to what extent CRL strategies are currently being used in high schools with high populations of minority students. Three administrators from two high schools participated in the discussion. Each administrator had over 20 years of experience in education and had been an administrator for at least 8 years. The questions for the focus group discussion were aligned with the CRL Framework.

A survey was conducted via Qualtrics for the quantitative data collection. The

goal of the survey was to gain information about the perception of the staff members and the implementation of CRL strategies in their schools. An invitation to participate in the survey was sent to all staff members of the three high schools. The goal was to have a total of 45 survey participants with a minimum of 15 participants from each school. A total of 35 participants completed portions of the survey. Each question had at least 27 responses. While the participation goal for the survey was not met, the number of participants is relatively proportional to the size of their staff. According to their school improvement plans, Walnut High School has 41 teaching positions, Magnolia High School has 51 teaching positions, and Maple High School has 63 teaching positions. The total number of survey responses was at least 60% of the desired goal.

### **Research Questions**

This mixed methods study was guided by the following research questions.

#### ***Quantitative Research Question***

What CRL strategies are currently being used by school leaders in schools with high populations of minority students?

#### ***Qualitative Research Question***

How do staff members perceive the implementation of CRL strategies?

This chapter explains the findings of the study and how those findings connect to the research. Also included in this chapter are suggestions for further research.

### **Explanations of Research Findings**

#### ***Research Question 1: What CRL Strategies Are Currently Being Used by School***

#### ***Leaders in Schools With High Populations of Minority Students?***

The quantitative data collected during the focus group discussion were analyzed

to answer the first research question. The administrators who participated in the focus group discussion have a school mission and vision that speaks to the success of all students. (Action 2). Efforts are made at the school to consistently communicate with parents in English and Spanish (Action 1). Both of the schools are working to increase the presence of community members in their school buildings (Action 8). The CRL Framework has eight specific actions. The strategies shared by the administrators are found in the actions listed below.

- Action 1: Lead for Equity and Access
- Action 2: Align Mission, Vision, and Values
- Action 8: Cultivate Community Care and Engagement

The participants in the focus group discussion acknowledged the challenges they are currently facing in ensuring the needs of ethnically diverse students are met. Several themes emerged from the discussion. The first was the need to have intentional conversations with students to better understand their needs. Administrator 3 from Maple High School often mentioned during the discussion his desire to meet with diverse groups of students about their educational experiences. When discussing the mission and vision, instructional strategies, and the need to provide equitable opportunities for minority students, the administrators stated that there is room for improvement in these areas. In order to truly meet the needs of students and connect them with the school and the community, the schools must give students and families the opportunity to share their concerns and feelings (Action 7 & Action 8). Educators need to understand how their educational journey is viewed by the cultures they represent.

Administrator 2 mentioned how she has dealt with the language barriers. Each of

the administrators stated there are students in their schools who speak little to no English. They are aware of the need to be able to communicate more effectively with all students and families (Action 8). While the district has provided a resource to use when having conversations with families, the ability to send written and oral communication in all languages represented in the schools has not yet been provided. In order to hear and understand the needs of these students and families, there must be a way to clearly communicate with them.

Another theme that emerged from the discussion is the need for professional development (Action 4). Administrator 1 mentioned the difference in student and staff demographics. He also noted that several of his teachers are hesitant about engaging students of diverse populations and encouraging them to work. Administrator 3 discussed specific conversations he has had with teachers about inviting students from different cultures to share their varied experiences. Teachers and administrators need to understand the specific culturally responsive strategies that can be used to improve the overall academic success of students. In order for that to happen, a clear plan for professional development that will strengthen their pedagogical skills is needed. Professional development should not be limited to teachers alone. As the instructional leaders of the school, the principals must participate in professional development as well so they can be effective instructional coaches.

The final theme that emerged from the discussion with principals is the need to review the process for resource selection and allocation. Administrators 1 and 3 referenced the abundance of resources schools have received over the past several years; however, they do not believe all of the resources are being used to their fullest extent.



Administrator 2 expressed the need to allow students to be a part of the selection of resources before final decisions are made. Administrator 2 also mentioned the need to increase the number of staff members in the schools who speak multiple languages, although finding staff members with this skill may be difficult.

The focus group discussion did not yield specific strategies being used consistently in schools in Alpha County. The administrators were able to share some of their challenges and some suggestions that would help make some processes smoother. Overall, it seems there is a lack of consensus on the CRL strategies administrators say are a part of their regular practice

***Research Question 2: How Do Staff Members Perceive the Implementation of CRL Strategies?***

Descriptive statistics were used to determine the overall perception of teachers about the implementation of CRL strategies. The mean value for each survey item was calculated to determine the overall rating for each question. To determine the mean, each rating in the Likert scale was given a numerical value (strongly agree = 4; agree = 3; disagree = 2; strongly disagree = 1). Table 31 shows the three statements with the highest mean value.

**Table 31***Survey Items With Highest Mean Values*

Domain	Survey question	N	Strongly agree SA = 4	Agree A = 3	Disagree D = 2	Strongly disagree SD = 1	Mean
Focus on instruction	The school reviews the academic performance of various subgroups.	27	15	11	1	0	3.519
Engage in personal learning and development	The administration makes decisions that ensure all students have access to rigorous college-and-career ready instruction.	27	13	14	0	0	3.481
Align mission, vision, and values	The mission and vision reflect a desire to create a learning environment that is engaging for students from diverse backgrounds.	26	13	12	1	0	3.462

A mean value of between 3 and 4 means the majority of respondents agree with the statement as it relates to their administrator's leadership practices. The statements with the highest mean value align with the following actions:

- Action 3: Focus on Instruction
- Action 6: Engage in Personal Learning and Development
- Action 2: Align Mission, Vision, and Values

Table 32 shows the statements with the lowest mean value.

**Table 32**

*Survey Statements With Mean Values Below 3*

Domain	Survey question	N	Strongly agree SA = 4	Agree A = 3	Disagree D = 2	Strongly disagree SD = 1	Mean
Manage operations and resources	Resources are allocated to eliminate disparities in the academic, social, and emotional growth of students.	28	6	16	5	0	2.929
Strategize change and continuous improvement	Specific engagement activities are planned to engage families of ethnically diverse and minority students.	27	7	11	9	0	2.926
Cultivate community care and engagement	Classrooms and common areas display images and literature that represent students from different cultures.	27	6	11	9	0	2.777

There are three statements with a mean value between 2 and 3. This means that these are the areas where the average of respondents disagreed that their administrator was proficient in this action. These statements represent three actions:

- Action 5: Manage Operations and Resources

- Action 7: Strategize Change and Continuous Improvement
- Action 8: Cultivate Community Care and Engagement

Based on the results from the quantitative survey, there are some areas where staff members agree that their administration is utilizing CRL strategies. Efforts are made to review performance data by subgroup. Students have access to college and career ready instruction, and the school's mission and vision state the desire to meet the needs of all students; however, there are also areas of improvement in the management of resources, creating activities to engage minority families, and ensuring literature and images are representative of diverse cultures.

### ***Comparing the Results***

In a mixed methods study, qualitative and quantitative results are compared to determine if they confirm each other. According to the results of the qualitative research, there are leadership strategies aligned with Action 1, Action 2, and Action 8 in the practice of the administrators of Magnolia and Maple High Schools. The quantitative research shows the staff recognizes elements of Action 2, Action 3, and Action 6 in the work of their administrators. Action 2, the alignment of the school's mission, vision, and values, is the only action that is consistent in both sets of data.

From the quantitative results, Actions 4, 7, and 8 received the lowest ratings by survey participants. Additionally, the statements with the overall lowest mean ratings can be found in Action 7 and Action 8. The chi-square test of independence showed that there is no association between the survey responses and the school of the participants for five of the eight survey items in these actions; therefore, those specific survey items are potential areas of improvement for all three schools. Action 4 involves the need for

professional development for school staff. This area was also mentioned by administrators as an area of concern. A survey item related to managing resources received one of the lowest mean values and was mentioned by administrators as a need; however, strategies in Action 8 were highlighted by administrators as areas they were currently working on, while receiving the lowest mean score in the survey.

There is consensus between both sets of data with Action 2 being implemented. There is also consensus that Actions 4, 7, and 8 are areas that need improvement. Based on the research findings, I was unable to conclude that there is a significant presence of CRL strategies being consistently used in these high schools in Alpha County in every area of the framework.

### **Connections to the Literature**

The achievement and opportunity gap that has been prevalent in schools in America for decades is evident in high schools in Alpha County as well. Traditionally, White students in these schools outperform their peers on state assessments and the ACT. Minority students in Alpha County have higher rates of chronic absenteeism and are more likely to be suspended or expelled. Table 33 shows the absentee rates and suspension rates by subgroup for Alpha County for the 2022-2023 school year.

**Table 33***Alpha County Absentee and Suspension Rates for 2022-2023*

	Chronic absenteeism	Short suspensions	In school suspension
All	36.82	265.75	257.93
American Indian	25	210.53	157.89
Asian	23.04	184.21	115.79
Black	42.97	509.71	464.51
Hispanic	35.07	110.74	144.25
Two or More	40.18	219.16	213.91
White	31.72	136.25	135.35

*Note.* Chronic absenteeism refers to the percentage of students who have been absent for at least 10% of the days they are enrolled in a school. The suspension rates are given per 1,000 students.

Black students and multi-racial students have the highest rate of chronic absenteeism for the 2022-2023 school year in Alpha County, while White and Asian students have the lowest absentee rates. When comparing suspension rates, Black students are more than three times as likely to be suspended short-term or receive in-school suspension than White students. White, Asian, and Hispanic students have the lowest rates of short-term suspension or in-school suspension. Time away from the classroom and away from the school has an impact on student achievement, engagement, and other opportunities and will contribute to the achievement gap.

According to MyFutureNC, the childhood poverty rate in Alpha County is almost 30%. Forty-seven percent of Alpha County's high school graduates enroll in postsecondary institutions, and 58% of those who enroll receive a degree or certificate within 6 years. The implementation of CRL strategies involves a commitment to ensure that every student has access to the tools and supports needed to be successful. A

productive CRL plan can increase motivation, attendance, college acceptance rates, and community engagement (Grant, 2021).

### ***Limitations***

A key limitation of the study is the absence of input from the administrators at Walnut High School. At the time the focus group discussion was being planned, Walnut High School had only one acting administrator. While members of the staff participated in the survey, without having input from the administration, I did not have information about the leadership practices at the school to consider in the qualitative analysis portion of the study.

### **Recommendations**

The role of the principal is essential in ensuring that the culture of the school is one that prioritizes equity and inclusiveness for all students. In order to develop missions, visions, policies, and procedures that will support all students, the principal must understand the tenets of CRL. Each of the administrators who participated in the focus group discussion is an experienced educator with over 8 years of experience in administration. Because of their tenure in education, it is probable that a concentration in CRL was not a part of their principal certification programs. The same is true for many of the individuals working in these high schools. Efforts should be made for these schools to develop a professional development plan that has CRL at its forefront.

The Culturally Responsive Leadership Institute offers professional development and online courses to help educators become more proficient in implementing culturally responsive strategies effectively (Culturally Responsive School Leadership Institute, n.d.). Participants can receive a professional certification in the areas of CRL. The

Leadership Academy offers professional development and leadership coaching on the topics of CRL and equity. Both of these organizations offer opportunities for individual and district-wide professional development that can be tailored to the district's needs.

In addition to professional development, it is suggested, "that districts appoint people in jobs dedicated to facilitating conversations about culturally responsive learning and diversity" (Brown, 2024, para. 14). These individuals could provide intentional support to district and school leaders. Once in place, a district-wide plan could be developed to outline ways schools will increase family engagement, hire diverse staff, provide professional development, and improve communication strategies.

Many schools and districts state the importance of conducting an equity audit (Hanover Research, 2020). An equity audit could determine the status of the school's current practices and highlight areas of improvement that would result in overall achievement equity. According to the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Institute (n.d.), equity audits are needed to determine what gaps exist and why and how to create a process for addressing and eliminating the gaps. In order to truly determine if the school is meeting the needs of its students, an equity audit conducted by an outside organization is advised.

### **Summary**

There are gaps in achievement for ethnically diverse students in Alpha County. The findings of this study suggest that there is no significant evidence that CRL strategies are embedded in the leadership practices of the administrators of the three selected schools. The research suggests that the implementation of CRL strategies will result in increased academic success and opportunities for all students. Research further suggests



that if students are engaged and successful in secondary education, there will be a decrease in disciplinary issues, increased attendance, and increased college enrollment. It is suggested that Alpha County commit to professional development for school and district leaders in the areas of CRL. As the district continues to become more diverse, having staff who are knowledgeable of ways to engage ethnically diverse students will have a positive impact on student achievement and ultimately improve future trajectories.

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