

CULTURAL COMPETENCY OF DISTRICT LEADERS:
THE INFLUENCE ON CAMPUS LEADERS

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the cultural competence of district leaders and their potential resulting influence on campus leaders in the face of a rapidly changing educational and community landscape. A secondary purpose was to ascertain district and school leaders' placement on the cultural proficiency continuum to gain a greater understanding of (a) the potential effect, if any, that district leaders' level of cultural competency had on the cultural competency of campus leaders, and (b) how the cultural competency level of both district and campus leaders influenced district policies, practices, and school climate. The analysis and interpretation of findings of this research study were based on a conceptual framework, informed by the six constructs of the cultural proficiency continuum as developed by R. Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, D. Lindsey and Terrell. Four district office leaders and three campus principals, from the same district, were selected as participants. The campus principals represented elementary, middle, and high schools. Data were gathered from semi-structured face-to-face interviews with each participant, three meeting observations, and document analysis. Findings revealed evidence of a strong relationship between district leaders' cultural competence, campus principals' cultural competence, and district policies and procedures. There was also a direct relationship between the district leaders' cultural competence levels and their direct reports' level of cultural competence. This study can afford school districts an opportunity to recognize the value and implications of culturally proficient leaders, as they serve all students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The United States' public education system evolved in the twentieth century, as education leaders attempted to provide an equitable education for all students. In the 1960s, President Lyndon B. Johnson advanced the idea that full educational opportunities should be our first national goal and his advocacy helped lead to the birth of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA, 1965). ESEA offered new grants to districts serving low-income students, federal grants for textbooks and library books, funding for special education centers, and scholarships for low-income college students. Additionally, the law provided federal grants to state educational agencies to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education.

The original ESEA (1965) was considered a civil rights law and was a progressive step towards equity, following in the wake of the landmark supreme court case *Brown v Board of Education* (1954), a court decision declaring that separate public schools for Black and White students were unconstitutional. The *Brown v Board of Education* supreme court ruling overturned the *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896) ruling that allowed segregation of Black and White students, given facilities were equal.

To address educational achievement gaps and “ensure that *all* children in America reach challenging academic standards” (U.S. Department of Education, 1995, para. 7), the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA, 1994) was signed into law by President Bill Clinton. The IASA was a reauthorization of the ESEA (1965) that provided additional support and called for Title I schools to be held accountable “through the use of state assessments that measure students' progress toward new state standards” (U.S. Department of Education, 1995, para. 5).

Under President George W. Bush's administration, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002), another notable reauthorization of ESSA, exposed disparity among traditionally underserved students, heightened awareness, and generated an important national dialogue for education improvement. The increasing national focus on accountability required critical measurement of student achievement and monitoring of schools, to ensure a quality education for all children. Although this act was created with good intentions, the nearly unattainable goals did not reflect the work many schools were doing, nor the gains students were making beyond standardized testing. Limitations of this law also presented challenges with effective implementation. NCLB was scheduled for re-visitation in 2007, for another reauthorization of ESEA (1965) and a more comprehensive version of the testing requirements contained in IASA (1994).

Because of how NCLB was implemented, the inflexible requirements became increasingly unrealistic for schools and educators. After three years of delay in reauthorizing the ESEA, in 2010, the Obama administration united with educators and families to revisit NCLB. The intent of this reauthorization of ESEA was to create a law that focused on the goal of fully preparing all students for success in college and careers (Education Week, 2015). In 2010, the Obama administration penned a new set of educational priorities through the report, *A Blueprint for Reform* (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, para. 1). The report proposed greater flexibility for schools regarding the requirements and sanctions contained in NCLB. Five years later, in exchange for rigorous and comprehensive state-developed plans designed to close achievement gaps, increase equity, improve the quality of instruction, and increase outcomes for all students (Education Week, 2015), Congress approved the third reauthorization of the ESSA, renamed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In December 2015, President Obama signed

the ESSA into law and the priorities of the Obama administration, after a year of transition in 2016-2017, were slated to go into effect for the 2017-2018 school year.

According to U.S. Department of Education, ESSA (2015) included provisions to ensure success for all students and schools through specific criteria and law, including, but not limited to:

- Advances equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students.
- Requires—for the first time—that all students in America be taught to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers.
- Ensures that vital information is provided to educators, families, students, and communities through annual statewide assessments that measure students' progress toward those high standards.
- Helps to support and grow local innovations—including evidence-based and place-based interventions developed by local leaders and educators—consistent with our Investing in Innovation and Promise_Neighborhoods.
- Sustains and expands this administration's historic investments in increasing access to high-quality preschool.
- Maintains an expectation that there will be accountability and action to effect positive change in our lowest-performing schools, where groups of students are not making progress, and where graduation rates are low over extended periods of time. (ESSA, 2015)

The success and progress of schools are measured by set criteria, which typically includes academic performance on high-stakes standardized assessments. When populations of students underperform on standardized tests, as defined by the state, achievement gaps are identified for areas of improvement. Yet, according to Martin and Vaughn (2007), there is another gap that goes unexamined: the cultural gap students often experience in their school environment. For school leaders to ensure academic growth for all, and minimize academic achievement gaps, they must understand and value the population of the students they serve. Specifically, Martin and Vaughn noted that leaders need to possess: (a) an awareness and acceptance of potential

personal cultural diversity shortcomings, (b) insight into how beliefs and values about diversity tend to present hurdles for leaders in trying to connect across cultures, (c) an understanding of culture differences, and (d) cross-cultural skills.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of practice examined in this study focused on the cultural competence of district leaders and their potential resulting influence on campus leaders in the face of a rapidly changing educational and community landscape. According to Howard (2007), when a district and its campus leaders encounter a rapid growth in student demographics, these changes create a demand for the leadership to “engage in a vigorous, ongoing, and systemic process of professional development to prepare all educators in the school to function effectively in a highly diverse environment” (p. 16). School leaders face the daunting challenge of guiding educators and community members, with various perspectives, through demographic shifts and population increases.

Understanding and appreciating each student’s individual unique life experiences foster relationships and create an inclusive, emotionally safe learning environment. Leaders who are culturally proficient advocate for and value inclusivity, despite economic status, race, religion, gender, disability, program needs, or any difference other than one’s own (R. Lindsey, Nuri-Robbins, D. Lindsey & Terrell, 2009). It is important to understand how the cultural understandings of a school leader impact the success of the students and teachers at the school. As cultural competence increases among school leaders, equitable opportunities increase, ultimately benefiting students.

Courageous leadership is the ability to identify areas of growth needed for the organization to thrive. Such leadership requires the will to address areas that need change. One

leadership area that warrants attention is that of ensuring equity for all students. District leaders are required to provide a firm educational foundation for the students they serve. To do so, they are expected to expand educational opportunities and improve student outcomes, as mandated by federal and state requirements (ESSA, 2015).

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2016), the elementary and secondary public-school student population transitioned in 2014. For the first time, non-Hispanic White students were the minority population. The overall number of Latino, African American, and Asian students in public K-12 classrooms surpassed the number of non-Hispanic White students. This trend remains and is projected to continue. This demographic shift presents a number of challenges for educators, including more students living in poverty, more who require English-language instruction, and more whose life experiences may differ from those of their teachers, who remain predominately White. In the 2011-12 school year, 82% of 3.4 million public school teachers in this country were non-Hispanic White, while 7% were non-Hispanic Black, and 8% were Hispanic (NCES, 2016).

Pathway Independent School District (ISD) (pseudonym), the district selected as the focus for the current study, borders a fast-growing large metropolitan area in the south-central U.S. Suburbs in this metroplex are experiencing unprecedented challenges with growth. Communities with rapid growth often experience discord with how historical residents respond to new residents moving in with cultural differences, while historical residents push to maintain tradition (Lichter, 2012). When fast-growing small towns experience growth of varying populations, the shifts in district demographics present potential distractions from the role of public education, that of preparing students to be productive citizens who are ready for entering adult life and the workplace (Garcia, 2015). Some leaders are unaware of the biases they may

have and/or how certain biases can contribute to the creation of undesired reactionary measures rather than proactive leadership. The ways that district leaders respond to inevitable change can impact the types of educational opportunities that are made available for all learners, including those in early childhood programs, elementary schools, secondary schools, and postsecondary readiness programs. It is important to recognize and understand the changes in mindset that may be required when a small community experiences rapid growth and transforms into a fast-growing city, particularly changes related to culture.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how the cultural competency of district office leadership influenced the cultural competency of campus principals. A secondary purpose was to ascertain the current placement of district and school leaders on the cultural proficiency continuum to understand the potential effect that the level of competency of district office and school campus leaders might have on the district and its policies, practices, and school climate.

Conceptual Framework

Supporting the purpose and goals of this qualitative study, that of understanding how the cultural proficiency of district leaders might influence the cultural competency of campus leaders, Figure 1 represents the conceptual framework for the study, as adapted from R. Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, D. Lindsey and Terrell (2009) cultural competency continuum model. The continuum moves from left to right through six constructs, reflecting traits from a tolerant reactive leader to one who is a transformative proactive leader. The conceptual framework offers a way to conceptualize the intent of the study, through the lens of the stages of cultural proficiency. Both individuals and organizations often are at various levels of awareness,

knowledge, and skills along the cultural competence continuum (Cross, 1989). According to Cross, cultural competency evolves over time through the process of attaining cultural knowledge; becoming aware of when cultural morals, values, beliefs, and practices are being demonstrated; being consciously sensitive to these behaviors; and purposely utilizing culturally based techniques while interacting with the workplace and with service delivery.

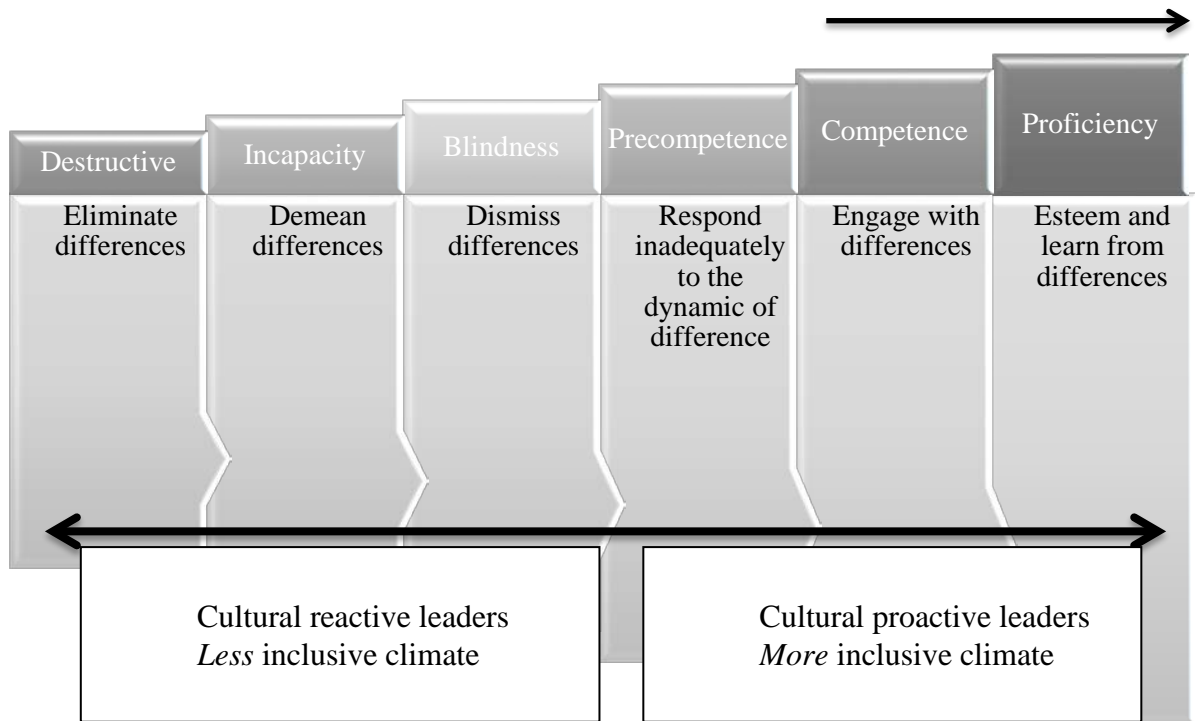


Figure 1. Culturally proficient conceptual framework (adapted from Lindsey et al., 2009).

Transformative Leadership

When district leaders operate from a transformative perspective and a culturally proficient mindset, principals are more likely to be transformative themselves, resulting in a higher level of principal cultural competency; this influence is also known as the inside-out process (Cross, 1989). The culturally proficient conceptual framework was used as a guide in ascertaining central office leaders' level of cultural proficiency and the influence they might

have on both the district's and its schools' climate, as revealed through the cultural competency of principals. Through a review of district documents and observations of district board meetings, as part of data collected for this study, understanding district leaders' written policies and implemented practices helped to reveal the district leaders' placement on the continuum.

Research Questions

One overarching research question (ORQ), paired with three sub questions, guided this study. The sub questions were designed to guide specific data collection to fully answer the ORQ.

ORQ: To what extent does the cultural competency of district office leaders influence the cultural competency of principals?

Sub RQ1: Where on the cultural proficiency continuum are the district leaders?

Sub RQ2: Where on the cultural proficiency continuum are the campus principals?

Sub RQ3: How does the cultural proficiency of district leaders influence policies, practices, and the climate of the campuses within the district?

Significance of the Study

Understanding how district leaders influence campus principals regarding cultural proficiency can offer beneficial information for districts experiencing significant cultural shifts amidst rapid growth. Findings from this study may afford Pathway ISD and other districts facing similar challenges the opportunity to be proactive in developing a strategic plan for working with diverse student populations. Data collected revealed the existing status of cultural competency for this district's school leaders and provided additional insight into understanding how placement on each of the six constructs on the cultural proficiency continuum can influence campus leaders in this fast-changing cultural and community environment.

Delimitations

This study presented delimitations, such as the sample size of one school district, including four district leaders and three campus principals, which are researcher controllable characteristics (Simon, 2011). Data collected through individual interviews and group observations may be relevant only to the participants selected, this rural district, or districts similar in demographics, thus minimizing the generalizability. Data were gathered in a limited timeframe; however, the methods used to triangulate the data supported the data analysis and overall findings.

Assumptions

For this study, I assumed that participants would be authentic in conversations and in responses, rather than reflexive. I also presumed that the participants' comfort level would contribute to an open dialogue between me as the researcher and the participants, and that discussions would be rich in conversation and details. I also assumed that participants would feel safe in providing forthright responses.

Definition of Terms

The definitions of terms are presented to ensure a clear understanding of how each term was relevant to this study or was specifically used in the study.

- *Campus leadership or campus administration.* For this study, the principal of the school is referred to as campus leadership or campus administration.

- *Central office leadership or administration.* At this level, administrators have executive oversight and supervision of school district decisions and campus principals.

Specifically, in this study, central office leadership included the superintendent and assistant superintendents.

- *Climate*. Climate is considered the mood, or morale, of a group of people of an organization or district (Gruenert, 2008).
- *Cross-cultural skills*. Such skills include the ability to understand and engage effectively with people of diverse cultural backgrounds (Rasmussen & Sieck, 2015).
- *Culture*. The collective personality of the organization or district is considered to be its culture (Gruenert, 2008).
- *Cultural competence or proficiency*. Being aware of one's own world view, as well as the ability to understand, communicate, and effectively interact with people across cultures, are the elements encompassed in cultural competency (Cross, 1989; R. Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, D. Lindsey & Terrell, 2009, 2018).

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the introduction to the study, as well as the statement of the problem, conceptual framework, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, delimitations, assumptions, and definitions of terms. Chapter 2 includes literature relevant to effective influential leadership and cultural competency frameworks that are essential for a district growing in population and varying cultures. The literature review provides summarizes of how district leadership impacts campus leaders, staff, and students, and highlights the best practices of culturally proficient leaders. The literature reviewed shows the interconnectedness of the elements of cultural proficiency with the skills and characteristics of effective district-level leaders. Chapter 3 includes a description of the research methods used in the study and the data analysis procedures selected to answer the research questions. Chapter 4 provides the data analysis and findings of the study. A discussion

of the findings and their relationships among the literature, the implications for practice, and recommendations for future studies are addressed in Chapter 5.

Summary

Like much of the nation, as north Texas grows in diversity, it is imperative that all students are provided opportunities and experiences of inclusivity. The purpose of this study was to explore how the cultural competency of district office leaders influenced the cultural competency of campus principals, as well as the district's policies and practices. While school district leaders evolve in effective leadership regarding cultural competence, it is important for leaders to be mindful of the students and families they serve, providing equitable opportunities for all, even while there is rapid growth in district student enrollment and changing demographics. Prior research in both effective leadership and cultural competence is presented in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As changes in demographics often present challenges for school leaders in rural, small but rapidly growing districts, the current study is important for determining how school district leaders' cultural proficiency can impact how school campus leaders in such districts adapt to those changes. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how the cultural competency of district office leadership influenced the cultural competency of campus principals. This chapter presents a synthesis of literature and research related to cultural proficiency in education, and the impact of influential school leadership. The following topics are explored: changing demographics, opportunities for underrepresented student groups, culturally proficient organizations, and the influence of leaders in school transformation. The chapter concludes with the essential components of the literature specific to culturally proficient leaders, as included in the cultural proficiency conceptual framework continuum.

Changing Demographics

A critical component of shifting demographics in public schools in this country is race and ethnicity. According to Rivkin (2016), the integration of Black and White students rapidly increased between 1968 to 1980. These shifts in demographics were largely fueled through efforts of President Richard Nixon, who conditioned federal aid to southern schools on their compliance with desegregation court orders. Rivkin claimed that steps taken to desegregate schools and increase interactions between White and Black students were not strong enough after 1980. He explained that demographic shifts evolved with the increasing amount of contact between both White and Black students and the children of immigrants from Latin America, Asia, and elsewhere. Rivkin suggested that researchers and policymakers focus on discovering

solutions designed to improve the quality of education for all children, instead of desegregation policies, which have been more difficult to evaluate in terms of impact on student achievement. Rivkin also emphasized that schools do not have to be race-based or income-based to be effective. As shown in Figure 2, the racial compositions of students in U.S. public schools changed notably over a 44-year period. Data in this graphic go only through the year 2012.

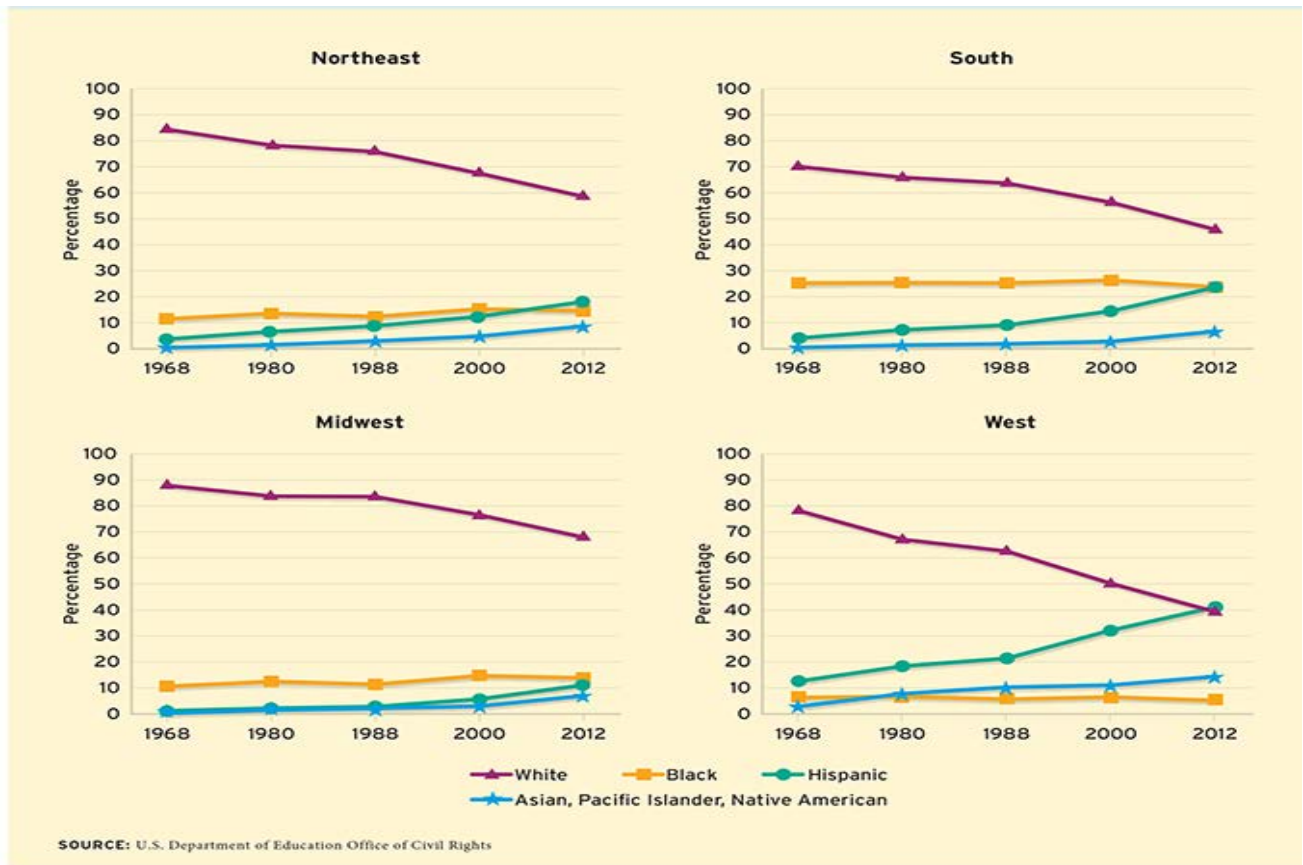


Figure 2. Racial composition of public schools in the United States. This graphic reflects school demographic changes in four U.S. regions since 1968. Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2012.

The results of the 2015 census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015) revealed that the U.S. was experiencing the most growth in terms of ethnic and linguistic diversity in the history of this nation. The nation’s linguistic diversity increased with over 350 languages spoken.

Emerging majority populations contrast with the history of the nation; thus, changes are evidenced in our public schools. The minority population will soon be the majority, bringing about changes in multiple aspects in society. The 2015 U.S. Census Bureau projections illustrate a continuous shift in student enrollment by 2025. The number of White students will decrease, accounting for 46% of K-12 enrollment. The number of Hispanic students is predicted to increase, accounting for approximately 29% of the total U.S. student population, and Asian/Pacific Islander students are projected to increase to close to 6% of the nation’s total student enrollment. The number of Black students is expected to fluctuate as well, accounting for 15% of the total student enrollment in our nation’s schools. Additionally, the percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native students is projected to decrease over time, accounting for less than 1% of the total enrollment. These results indicate the likelihood that the ratio of White to non-White students will be approximately 46% to 54% by 2025, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

U.S. Student Population in 2015 and Census Projections for 2025

	White	Hispanic	Asian	Black	American/ Alaskan Native
Population of students in 2015	51%	25%	5%	14%	1%
Projection of students for 2025	46%	29%	6%	15%	< 1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015.

The 2015 census report emphasized the dramatically changing demographics of students in the U.S. While the percentage of White students declined dramatically over the past 50 years, the percentage of Black students changed very little and the percentage of Hispanic students

spiked. Specifically, the south and west regions of the U.S. have grown in diverse student populations, with exponential growth in the Hispanic student population.

Race is not the only changing component in student populations in public schools. Religion is another factor of ethnicity that can present potential challenges to public school organizations, especially district and school administrators within districts experiencing a rapid influx of families and a burgeoning number of students from various ethnic groups, often referred to as fast-growth districts. It is important to recognize that the nation's population is not predominantly Protestant Christian as it was years ago, regardless of geographic location. A recent national Pew research survey on religion and public life breaks down the U.S. religious landscape as follows: Protestant 51%, Roman Catholic 24%, unaffiliated 16%, other Christian 3%, Jewish 2%, Buddhist < 1%, Muslim <1%, Hindu <1% and all others 2%. In comparison, the Pew survey showed that the north Texas region reflects the nation's shifting religious population, with the following religious demographics: Protestant 78%, Roman Catholic 15%, unaffiliated 18%, other Christian 1%, Jewish 1%, Buddhist < 1%, Muslim 1%, Hindu < 1%, and all others 2% (Pew Research Center, 2018). These survey responses are important to note as they relate to the purpose of the current study, which is how a district's changing student and family demographics can impact the cultural proficiency of district office leadership as well as the cultural competency of campus principals.

Since the birth of America's public-school system in 1647, schools have reflected the demographic characteristics of the communities in which they were located. Until recently, the U.S. was mostly Protestant Christian; therefore, many schools and educational practices were built upon the values of Christianity. Traditions such as students singing Christmas songs at Christmas programs or praying publicly at graduation ceremonies and football games were not

uncommon. Furthermore, some school districts considered and/or chose to teach creationism alongside the theory of evolution (Bindwald, 2015).

However, as the country became more religiously diverse, federal courts reviewed several of these Christian practices in cases that applied the First Amendment's Free Exercise and Establishment clauses to school situations (Pew Research Center, 2007). It is critical for school leaders to be aware of the court rulings on religion as they face the changing demographics and viewpoints of community members, especially in fast-growth districts where changes in ethnicity may impact leaders' cultural proficiency. Furthermore, a more significant value is for public school leaders and administrators to recognize that at the core of each case lies an issue of majority versus minority values about religion's place in local public schools. School leaders have an urgency to respond to shifting religious demographics in their communities. As our nation's religious demographics change, being more aware and culturally informed about other people's religious beliefs and cultures may help minimize some conflict (Howard, 2007).

Clearly, changes in population can impact various aspects of schools. As race, ethnicity, religions, languages, and cultures emerge or change, school districts and campus leaders may feel compelled to rethink how students are served and make appropriate adjustments. For example, English language learner and bilingual programs are increasing in enrollment (Gandara & Hopkins, 2010). The need for specialized, qualified teachers is increasing, along with the need for revising curriculum and instructional resources (Alnefaie, 2016). In addition, school leaders must contemplate methods of accessibility and language when communicating with students, parents, and guardians of students (Calderón, Slavin, & Sánchez, 2011). In response to demographic changes and the impact on schools, Rigby and Tredway (2015) suggested that there is a need to go above the rhetoric of closing the achievement gaps and be very specific

about what it means to work toward equitable school outcomes for all children. They noted three important components of infusing equity into leadership practices include: (a) use explicit language about equitable outcomes in conversations and actions;

(b) communicate clear next steps for individuals involved in the equity actions; and (c) connect small micro issues to macro context, framing equity as a larger social issue. Rigby and Tredway highlighted how individuals are more likely to take actions toward creating more equitable schooling when leaders use implicit equity language combined with clarity about what the school constituents are supposed to do, rather than when a principal uses explicit equity language that is less clear about what to do next.

Opportunities for Underrepresented Student Groups

Urban school districts are no longer the only organizations with diverse student enrollments (Freidus & Noguera, 2015). The responsibility of meeting the needs of diverse learners is now shared with suburban and rural districts. Nevertheless, Picower (2009) contended that minoritized students continue to attend schools in systems with curricula that are predominantly designed for and by White Americans. To close the opportunity gap among student populations, educational leaders must first recognize that disparities among student populations currently exist and systems of oppression and entitlement contribute to the opportunity gaps in public education for students of color (R. Lindsey, Nuri-Robbins, D. Lindsey & Terrell, 2009). Grogan (2017) emphasized the continuous problem of educational gaps among underrepresented minority populations. Instructional practices which, intentionally or unintentionally, recognize groups of students as more advanced than others also contribute to the educational gap by reinforcing perceptions of color and differing economic statuses (Freidus & Noguera, 2017).

When students are allowed to graduate high school with weak literacy and numeracy skills, their options for a successful life are minimized. An under-represented percentage of students of color are enrolled in advanced academic courses while, at the same time, an over-representative number of students of color who are placed in alternative education programs continues to exist (Office of Civil Rights [OCR], 2012). OCR reports also revealed prevalent disparities in the opportunities for underserved student populations to gain access to high-level mathematics and science courses. While 78% of the schools serving the lowest percentages of Black and Latino students offered chemistry and 83% offered algebra II, only 66% of schools serving the highest percentages of Black and Latino students offered chemistry and 74% offered algebra II, respectively. Additionally, less than half of American Indian and Native Alaskan high school students were able to access the full range of mathematics and science courses in their high schools. Among the 97,000 public schools that existed in the U.S., as reported by the OCR in 2012, Black, Latino, and Native American students attended schools with an elevated number of first-year teachers and less than 60% of the teacher population met their state's certification requirements. In addition, students of color were nearly three times less likely to access highly qualified instruction and curriculum. Data on Asian and White students continued to reflect opposite results, revealed by a higher enrollment in advanced academics and fewer placements in alternative education programs (Perzigian, 2016).

Regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or other cultural differences, students must be afforded equitable opportunities for success. When schools offer every student a quality education, equal access of school resources, and an inclusive environment for all, achievement increases for all students (Gay, 2002). Negative stereotypes about ability can also have a

significant negative impact on the intellectual performance of students in areas in which they feel strongly identified (Steele, 2004).

Effectively engaging students in the learning process requires teachers to know their students, both individually and culturally, as well as their academic abilities, rather than relying on racial or ethnic stereotypes or prior experience with other students of similar backgrounds (Guild & Garger, 1998). Many educators, for example, admire the perceived academic prowess and motivation of Asian-American students and fail to recognize how even a positive stereotype is not necessarily positive if it presses students into molds not been built or based on who they are as individuals (Hoang, 2012). Subsequently, Ning Li (2014) highlighted the counterintuitive idea that an organizational support climate is not guaranteed to always have consistent positive effects. A supportive organizational climate may reinforce the importance of including both individual and work context factors when attempting to understand the effects of cross-level empowering leadership. Organizational leaders must not only expect others to behave in ways that minimize disparities through cultural awareness and display skills of mutual humanity, they must also model such expectations (Ezzani, 2014). Such systemic expectations help to maximize equitable student opportunities.

Cultural Proficiency in Educational Organizations

Administrators within educational systems are charged with the responsibility to ensure that schools are inclusive learning environments (Grindal, Hehir, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016). They are also expected to make sure the practices that constitute a culturally proficient organization are consistent (Ezzani, 2014). Organizations comprised of culturally proficient stakeholders are essential for educational equality in districts of diversely growing student populations. To promote and maintain the existence of culturally proficient educational

organizations, schools need effective leadership from principals. Culturally proficient leaders must also be willing to recognize their cultural awareness and biases, value diversity, manage dynamics of difference, adapt to diversity, and advocate for equitable practices within an organization (R. Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, Terrell, & D. Lindsey, 2018).

Meeting the needs of culturally divergent students, while subsequently holding high expectations for all, is critical for leaders in a culturally proficient organization (Landa, 2011). Among those who work in the area of multicultural education, one must exhibit caution to keep from generalizing about cultural trends rather than seeing the individual student (García, 2002). Understanding each student and what is valued in their culture can expedite efforts aimed at closing the educational opportunity gap. Curriculum and text selections that include voices and multiple ways of knowing, experiencing, and understanding life can help students find value in their own voices, histories, and cultures (Futtermann, 2015). Guild and Garger (1998) contended that limited knowledge of individual differences encourages a repetitive practice of one-size-fits-all for learning, teaching, and the curriculum.

Howard (2013) claimed that even in the most standard curriculum, educational leaders can influence others' decisions about whose history is worthy of study and whose books are most worthy to be read. Howard argued that such instructional practices exclude those with unlike backgrounds and lead to unnecessary referrals and labeling of students with disabilities, contributing to the over-representation of students of color being referred for special education services. Other referrals include those for ineffective discipline actions, rather than providing the academic or social emotional support that students may need. Fenning and Rose (2007) explained, "Suspension and expulsion, the most common responses in discipline policies, are not

effective in meeting the needs of any student and, ironically, exacerbate the very problems they are attempting to reduce” (p. 539).

Little research is available about the influence school district leaders have on campus leaders, related to district and campus leaders’ cultural proficiency. However, research in the area of leadership preparation regarding cultural competence supports the need for ongoing development. Jean-Marie, Normore, and Brooks (2009) examined leadership preparation and training in terms of social justice and its importance for both research and practice on a national and international level. They specifically explored how successful leadership programs were with preparing future leaders to think globally and act courageously about social justice. Their quantitative data analysis revealed four dominant issues regarding leadership preparation and social justice matters. These overarching issues were (a) conceptualizing social justice and a new social order in leadership preparation, (b) moving beyond traditional leadership preparation to leadership for social justice, (c) moving toward critical pedagogy - leadership for liberation and commitment to social justice, and (d) making connections between local and global research to extend leadership for social justice. Implications from their research support the need for additional preparation for emerging school leaders to face political, economic, cultural, and social pressures and create schools that advocate for education that advances all children. These authors suggested that coordinated efforts which provide opportunities for critical dialogue and education through field-based curricula, national and global collaborative research, and alternative research designs may lead to more effective leadership development.

Educational leaders at both the district and school levels must be aware of the need to adopt culturally proficient leadership practices in all aspects of their work. Moreover, they must be willing to implement unconventional practices, when necessary, particularly in situations that

involve personnel and organizational change (Ezzani, 2014). When leaders infuse ethics, moral purpose, and cultural proficiency into the overall operational aspects of the school or district as an organization, they reflect who they are rather than what they do. Little research exists on connecting ethical leadership to culturally proficient leadership. Yet, studies continue to support ways in which district leaders effectively influence student achievement through organizational structures.

Transformative Leadership

For nearly 30 years, studies evolved around transformational leadership, contributing to an evolving theory of transformative leadership. Aronowitz and Giroux (1985), Foster (1986), and Quantz, Rogers, and Dantley (1991) all contributed to this emerging theory of transformative leadership, which is grounded in the critical elements of critique and possibility. Recognizing the impact and crucial role a transformative leader plays in education, Quantz et al. (1991) suggested that schools are sites of cultural politics and argued that because organizations must be based on democratic authority, leaders must learn to use their “power to transform present social relations” (p. 103).

In the current study about the challenges that school district-level leaders confront in the face of a rapidly growing and dramatically changing education landscape, an understanding of the type of leader needed in such settings warrants a close look at transformative leadership. Transformative leadership embraces challenges while promising to address and meet both academic and equity demands of complex and diverse education systems (Shields, 2010). Though the terms transactional, transformational, and transformative leadership are sometimes used interchangeably, there is a distinct difference. Transformative leadership differs from transactional and transformational leadership in the approach one uses to assess, support, and

lead an organization. Transactional leadership involves a reciprocal transaction, such as a compromising give-and-take approach. Transformational leadership focuses on organizational improvement with the collective interests of groups working toward consensus (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990), placing the leader as the hub of shared decision making, and cultivating a culture that encourages participation in school decisions.

Transformative leadership begins by challenging inappropriate uses of power and privilege that create or perpetuate inequity and injustice (Shields, 2010). Terms such as inclusiveness, impartiality, and equality are heard when describing transformative leadership, demonstrating value-based leadership (A. Astin & H. Astin, 2000), working collaboratively towards higher levels of engagement, and advocating ethics, to foster opportunities of equity in schools (Shields, 2003). Transformative leaders are morally courageous and take appropriate action to ensure an inclusive culture that genuinely affords students equal opportunities to access quality academics and student organizations (Shields, 2010).

Recent research reveals that metacognitive cultural intelligence is a strong predictor of transformative leadership (Brannen, 2016). For transformation to effectively occur, educational leaders need to recognize that culturally proficient change is much like any other education focus, requiring a total dedication on the part of the leader(s). Mandating what matters is not effective; however, leading an organization through a systemic process creates sustainable change (Fullan, 2011). According to Fullan, to lead an educational organization through change, school leaders must effectively navigate system-wide strategic planning and collaboration with stakeholders. Through the strength of vision and personality, transformative leaders can inspire followers to change expectations, perceptions, and motivations to work toward common goals.

Leaders in diversity-enhanced schools, those who are successfully transforming

themselves and their organization, share common practices which progress through five identified phases (Howard, 2007). These phases include (a) building trust, (b) engaging personal culture, (c) confronting issues of social dominance and justice, (d) transforming instructional practices, and (e) engaging the entire school community. Transformative leaders give a lot of themselves to the team and care deeply about the group's ability to accomplish its goals. Turnover tends to be low as such leaders are influential and able to inspire a great deal of commitment in their followers (Cherry, 2017).

Leaders of demographically diverse schools play important roles in maintaining or changing dynamics that occur in such contexts (Madsen & Mabokela, 2014). Madsen and Mabokela emphasized the importance of school leaders attaining skills that grow and transform teachers' educational practices. Such influential skills result in lofty expectations, equitable discipline methods, and advanced performance for all students. In alignment, Johnson (2014) argued for race-conscious and culturally specific leadership development that goes beyond the color-blind approach, develops a critical consciousness about issues of race and identity, and promotes new leadership approaches that consider the importance of culture and context. Transparency and optimizing opportunities are critical components when highlighting areas of growth due to inequities and complex dynamics. Opportunistic leaders approach challenges as avenues for inclusion rather than as dismal problems.

District-Level Leaders

Perhaps teachers are the most identifiable influences in schools; however, they represent only a portion of the personnel who impact student learning. District leaders, such as members of the school board, the superintendent, and assistant superintendents, play an intricate role in supporting their schools and principals (Meador, 2018). A comprehensive breakdown of district

roles (Table 2) depicts how district leaders are charged with various responsibilities, including supporting school campus leaders.

Table 2

School District Leader Roles and Responsibilities

District Leadership Position	Roles and Responsibilities
Board of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consists of elected community members, usually consisting of five or more members, depending on district size • Meets a minimum of once a month • Responsible for hiring the superintendent of schools • Creates school policies and ultimately makes district decisions with input from the superintendent
Superintendent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversees day-to-day operations of the district • Responsible for providing recommendations to the school board • Handles financial matters of the school district • Serves as a district lobbyist with the state government • Supervises associate or assistant superintendents
Assistant Superintendent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports to superintendent • Oversees a specific part or parts of a school district’s daily operations such as: curriculum, operations, human resources • Supervises and supports campus principals
Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports to assistant superintendents or superintendent • Oversees the daily operations of an individual school campus • Oversees the students, faculty, and staff of a campus • Serves as an instructional leader • Responsible for hiring and making recommendations to the superintendent • Responsible for building community relationships within the community
Assistant Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports to the principal • Oversee a specific part or parts of a school’s daily operations • May be responsible for a specific area of school, such as discipline, specific grade levels, curriculum etc.
Athletic Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports to superintendent or assistant superintendent • Oversees all athletic programs in the district • Is responsible for all the athletic scheduling • Is responsible for hiring coaching staff • Manages budget and spending for the athletic Department

Source: Meador, Derrick. (2018, January 28). A Comprehensive Breakdown of the Roles of School Personnel. Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/a-comprehensive-breakdown-of-the-roles-of-school-personnel-3194684>

While the school board is ultimately responsible for creating policies and district-wide stewardship, as the most senior district-employed leader, the superintendent of the schools within the district reports to the school board. The superintendent also is referred to as chief executive officer (CEO) in many organizations (Meador, 2018).

The size of a school district dictates the number of district level leaders, starting with the number of assistant superintendents. A small district may not have an assistant superintendent, while a larger district may have several assistant superintendents who oversee specific programs, such as curriculum, student services, and business services, etc. School districts may have additional directors or coordinators, which also depends on funding and the number of students enrolled. Meador (2018) described three additional yet distinct categories of a school district's personnel, including school leaders, faculty, and support staff.

Debates regarding whether school district leaders play a significant role regarding their impact on student achievement came to the forefront in the 1980s. Former Secretary of Education William Bennett characterized superintendents, district office staff, and school board members as part of the education blob, as reported in a 1987 *Education Week* article. In his state-of-education speech in the spring of 1987, Bennett explained that the blob consists of people in the education system who work outside of classrooms, soaking up resources and resisting reform without contributing to student achievement. More than 10 years later, Bennett and his co-authors' of the book *The Educated Child* continued to express this mindset by writing:

The public-school establishment is one of the most stubbornly intransigent forces on the planet. It is full of people and organizations dedicated to protecting established programs and keeping things just the way, they are. Administrators talk of reform even as they are circling the wagons to fend off change, or preparing to outflank your innovation ... To understand many of the problems besetting U.S. schools, it is necessary to know something about the education establishment christened the "blob." (Bennett, Finn, & Cribb, 1999, p. 628)

Waters and Marzano (2006) reported that a statistically significant positive correlation between district leaders and student achievement was present when district leaders effectively fulfilled their leadership responsibilities. In their study, they focused specifically on the impact of the superintendent in five critical areas. Critical areas which emerged from their study included (a) a collaborative goal-setting process, (b) non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction, (c) school board alignment with and support of district goals, (d) monitoring of the goals for achievement and instruction, and (e) use of resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction.

A popular, yet perplexing, term heard in educational systems is the term autonomy. Findings from the Waters and Marzano (2006) meta-analysis study provided information which, initially, seemed to conflict with the five district-level leadership responsibilities described above. Their findings revealed a positive correlation between the increase of school leadership autonomy and an increase in student achievement, while revealing that site-based management had a reliable correlation to student achievement. After further analysis of their data, Waters and Marzano found that when the superintendent advocated for strong school-level leadership, encouraging principals to assume responsibility for school success, the superintendent fulfilled another responsibility, that of establishing a relationship with schools. The responsibility of fostering relationships with school leaders, combined with the initial five district-level leadership responsibilities, supported growth in student achievement. Thus, the effectiveness of superintendent and district-level stakeholders is crucial for student achievement as these leaders align and implement policies and procedures defined by the district goals. Therefore, Waters and Marzano suggested that this concept is that of autonomy.

School Campus Leaders

According to Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013), principals influence the quality of a school through many channels. The impact a principal has on a school and on student achievement varies due to the district's individual methods and organizational structures that define principal authority.

The principal plays a crucial role in ensuring excellence in schools and student learning. Highly effective school leaders can impact student achievement in their schools by up to seven months of learning in a single school year, while ineffective principals can lower student achievement by the same amount (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). The impact a principal has on a school's performance accentuates the importance of ensuring that strong leaders are placed in schools needing transformation.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework chosen to guide this study is that of cultural competency. Awareness of a shift in demographics is vital for educators to appreciate the need for emphasis on cultural proficiency. Cultural proficiency, also referred to as cultural competence, is the ability to work effectively with people of varying abilities, cultures, ethnicities, gender, languages, national origins, races, social class, sexual orientation, and religious backgrounds (Miranda, 2014). A culturally proficient educational organization evolves when members of the school community honor, respect, and value diversity, both in theory and in practice. Subsequently, academic goals and instruction are made relevant and accessible to students of all backgrounds.

R. Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, Terrell, & D. Lindsey (2009) proposed a conceptual framework for assessing personal and organizational progress while providing common language to describe both healthy and dysfunctional events and policies. Further development of this framework

evolved into a cultural proficiency continuum depicted in the conceptual framework visual in Chapter 1. The points along the continuum (a) identify the current state of a situation or practice, (b) project a future state of development, or (c) gauge the distance between the current and future states (Nuri-Robins, D. Lindsey, R. Lindsey & Terrell, 2012).

The terms *cultural competence* or *cultural proficiency* are used when referring to the capacity of a practitioner or organization when responding to cultural differences (Cross et al., 1989; Lindsey et al., 2009). Issues of respect and valuing of differences are critical elements for eliminating barriers for students from underrepresented populations. An advantageous goal for educational professionals, including school district leaders, is continuous development in cultural competence. Genuine growth in this area requires an understanding of the six stages within the cultural proficiency continuum, starting with cultural destructiveness and moving to cultural proficiency (Lindsey et al., 2009). The six phases of the R. Lindsey, Nuri- Robbins, D. Lindsey and Terrell continuum are described as follows.

- *Cultural destructiveness*. This is the first stage on the continuum when moving toward cultural proficiency. This initial phase is characterized by attitudes, policies, structures, and practices that are destructive to a cultural group within a system or organization (Lindsey & Terrell, 2009).

- *Cultural incapacity*. Lindsey and Terrell (2009) explained that, at this level, there is a lack of capacity of organizations to respond effectively to the needs, interests, and preferences of culturally and linguistically diverse groups. Characteristics such as practices that may result in discrimination in hiring and promotion, disproportionate allocation of resources that may benefit one cultural group over another, and subtle messages that some cultural groups are neither valued nor welcomed are examples of cultural incapacity.

- *Cultural blindness.* Cultural blindness is a philosophy of viewing and treating all people the same. Characteristics of such organizations may include approaches in the delivery of services and supports that ignore cultural strengths, placing little value on training and development of cultural and linguistic competence, or employing personnel that lack diversity (Lindsey et al., 2009).

- *Cultural pre-competence.* This level involves an awareness within an organization of strengths and areas for growth to respond effectively to culturally and linguistically diverse populations (Lindsey et al., 2009). Characteristics include an organization which expresses value in the delivery of high-quality services and supports to culturally and linguistically diverse populations; demonstrates a commitment to human and civil rights; employs hiring practices that support a diverse workforce; enacts efforts to improve services for a specific racial, ethnic, or cultural group; has a tendency for token representation on committees and boards; and has no clear plan for achieving organizational cultural competence.

- *Cultural competence.* Organizations that exemplify cultural competence demonstrate an acceptance of and respect for cultural differences and create a mission statement that articulates principles, a rationale, and values for cultural and linguistic competence in all aspects of the organization. Such competent organizations implement specific policies and procedures that (a) integrate cultural and linguistic competence; (b) develop structures and strategies to ensure balanced community participation in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of the organization; (c) enact policies and procedures that recruit, hire, and maintain a diverse and culturally and linguistically competent workforce; (d) provide support, professional development, and incentives for the improvement of cultural and linguistic competence at all levels; (e) dedicate resources for both individual and organizational self-assessment of cultural

and linguistic competence; and (f) build capacity to analyze data which have a meaningful impact on culturally and linguistically diverse groups. They embed a practice of community engagement that demonstrates the transfer of knowledge and skills between all collaborators, partners, and key stakeholders (Lindsey et al., 2009).

- *Cultural proficiency.* Organizations that are culturally proficient hold culture in high esteem, use a guide for all their endeavors, and continue to add to the field of cultural and linguistic competence by conducting research and developing new treatments, interventions, and approaches in creating policy, education, and the delivery of services (Lindsey et Al., 2009). Such organizations employ faculty and community members with expertise in cultural and linguistic competence in their practice, education, and research. They support and mentor other groups and organizations as they progress along the cultural competence continuum. They develop and disseminate materials that are adapted to the cultural and linguistic contexts of populations served and pursue resource development to continually enhance and expand the organization's capacities in cultural and linguistic competence. They advocate with and on behalf of populations that are traditionally underserved and establish and maintain partnerships with diverse constituency groups, which extend boundaries of traditional education organizations, to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities.

According to R. Lindsey, Nuri- Robins, D. Lindsey, and Terrell (2009, 2003), there are five essential elements that align with cultural proficiency within schools. Culturally competent educators use the elements as standards for individual behavior and organizational policies and practices. Culturally proficient educators utilize these elements for assessment, implementation of protocol, or guidelines for interaction. These five elements include:

- (1) Assessing the culture of the site and articulating cultural expectations to all who interact there

- (2) Valuing diversity through articulating a culturally proficient vision for the site and establishing standards to hold staff accountable to the vision
- (3) Managing the dynamics of difference by providing training and support for conflict management and helping faculty learn to distinguish between behavioral problems and cultural differences
- (4) Adapting to diversity through examining policies and practices for overt and unintentional discrimination and changing current practices when appropriate
- (5) Institutionalizing cultural knowledge by modeling and monitoring schoolwide and classroom practices. (Lindsey et al., 2009, p. 26)

School district and campus administrators have distinct roles which correspond to each of the above essential elements. Through shared decision making, each element can be dissected for the assessment of current practices. The creation and implementation of goals and action steps that develop and complete the elements help to foster a culturally proficient learning community (Fullan, 2011). Williams (2017) declared that successful educational leaders are educators who disrupt the educational system to cultivate ongoing success for all students and all staff, and for the longevity of the system. Doing so requires a deliberative, culturally proficient lens. To serve as an effective culturally intelligent leader, educators at all levels value the importance of the five cultural competency elements. Unbiased attitudes, impartial policies, and culturally proficient practices must be harmonious within all levels of the system. Such practices require “ethical leaders [who] must have the moral conviction to challenge policies which are detrimental to a caring and inclusive learning environment” (Ezzani, 2014, p. 1).

Paris (2012) challenged teachers and researchers to take up a new stance on what is often referred to as “culturally relevant pedagogy.” He proposed the term “culturally sustaining pedagogy” as an avenue to revise what it means to foster cultural pluralism and equality (p. 94).

If cultural competence means supporting students in maintaining their community and heritage language and other cultural practices in the process of gaining access to dominant ones,

there is little evidence of this being the customary practice in all districts. For example, in many schools today, there are several Spanish bilingual education programs. Each program fits into one of three basic models: transitional, enrichment, or maintenance. Popular models include full immersion in English classes with English language support, early program exit, late program exit, one-way dual language, and two-way dual language. One-way language and two-way dual language models are known as additive bilingualism forms because they attempt to preserve cultural practices while gaining access to others. Other models quickly eliminate one's native language and culture, also known as a form of subtractive bilingualism (Hurajová, 2015).

Paris (2009, 2011) argued that educators who attempt to be inclusive often use terms that are culturally responsive and culturally relevant; yet, at times, educators use terms that may not be as culturally proficient. Paris described how various terms may appear to mean one thing while they denote something entirely different. The term *tolerance*, for example, in multicultural education and professional development, does not align with proficiency. To tolerate insinuates tolerating or putting up with, rather than inclusivity, which values and appreciates difference. Relevance and responsiveness in meaning do not protect or value cultural and linguistic sharing across differences to support and sustain multilingualism and multiculturalism. The terms do not explicitly support the linguistic and cultural dexterity and plurality necessary for success and access in our demographically changing U.S. and global schools and communities.

Summary

This chapter includes a review of literature related to cultural demographic shifts, opportunity gaps in underrepresented student groups, culturally proficient organizations, and transformative leaders. In addition, key components of the cultural proficiency continuum are defined and explained to explicate the elements of the conceptual framework for this study. In

Chapter 3 the research design is described, along with the methods of data collection and data analysis utilized in this study. Furthermore, ethical considerations, limitations, and trustworthiness of the study are discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to identify the cultural competency of district office leaders and how they might influence the cultural competency of campus principals. The overarching research (ORQ) question was: To what extent does the cultural competency of district office leaders influence the cultural competency of principals? Three additional sub-questions guided this study:

Sub RQ1: Where on the cultural proficiency continuum are the district office leaders?

Sub RQ2: Where on the cultural proficiency continuum are the campus principals?

Sub RQ3: How does the cultural proficiency of district leadership impact campus decisions, policy, and climate within the district?

Research Design

This qualitative study was an explanatory case study (Yin, 1993) of a public-school district anticipated to quadruple in population over the next 10 years. Explanatory original case studies, as defined by Stake (2005b), provide an opportunity for the researcher to seek to generalize information for the greater good of all. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) suggested that an explanatory qualitative research design is appropriate when the researcher seeks to focus on district improvement. Due to minimal research on this specific topic, an explanatory research design within a qualitative methodology was most appropriate for addressing the objective of discovering the cultural aspects of the selected district.

According to Agee (2009), an explanatory case study allows the researcher to look for a naturalistic causality through patterns and connections. For this study, in-depth individual interviews were conducted with district leaders and campus principals. Data obtained from individual interviews, observations of district and principal leaders, and analyses of district

documents provided a deeper understanding of district leaders' cultural competency and their resulting influence on campus principals. Rather than testing a hypothesis, this qualitative research approach closely aligned with my desire to describe leadership patterns and processes within the organization. The goal was to provide insight and potential answers to the ways in which district leaders influence principals and link the connectivity of district leaders with principals as they each applied cultural competency. Comprehensive and discerning explanations were expected to emerge due to focusing on a smaller sample size. Perceived causal inferences, reality, and insightful interpersonal behaviors and motives were strengths of approaching the research question and sub-questions via an explanatory case study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

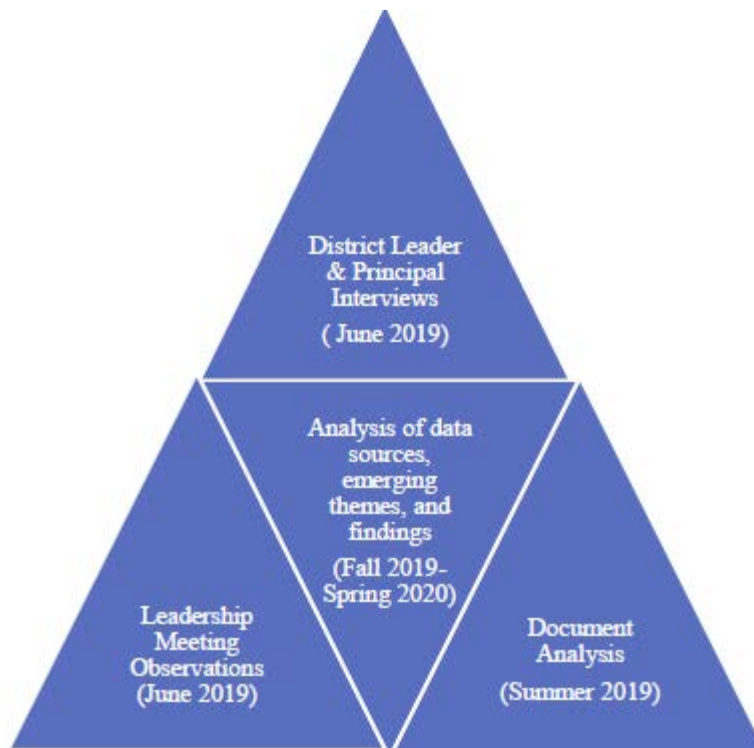


Figure 3. This research design visual depicts the data collection and analysis steps and the timeline for each step.

Although this was an explanatory case study about Pathway ISD, the data recording

methods and sampling techniques were important for potential reproducibility. Observations of leadership discussions during campus meetings, conducting in-depth interviews with district and campus leaders, and reviewing district documents allowed me to make a stronger connection and supported the need to triangulate the data and findings (Olsen, Haralambos, & Holborn, 2004).

Figure 3 depicts the phases of the research study, including the actions taken to collect and analyze data, including face-to-face interviews with district leaders and campus principals, observations of district and campus principal meetings, and analysis of selected district documents. Also indicated are the timelines when the various phases of the study took place, beginning with the interviews, then the observed leadership meetings, followed by the review of district documents. Data analysis occurred during the spring of 2020.

Population and Sampling

Pathway ISD is a north Texas rural school district encompassing approximately 100 square miles and is geographically located less than 50 miles north of the ninth largest city in the U.S. It is also approximately 15 miles from a fast-growing large suburban city, estimated to have 180,000 people at the time of this study, with an increase of nearly 80,000 residents since 2010 (Census, 2015). The entire north Texas metropolitan area is growing rapidly and is one of the fastest growing areas in the nation. Such growth can significantly impact the overall culture of school districts, especially the district and its schools that were chosen for this study.

Pathway ISD is projected to grow exponentially over the next 10 years. The district's current demographic report projects Pathway ISD to nearly quadruple by 2027-2028, with a total projected enrollment of almost 10,000 by 2028. Yet, the district had less than 3,000 students enrolled for the 2017-18 school year and was comprised of one early childhood campus, two elementary campuses, one middle school campus, and one high school campus.

The district's central office senior leadership, at the time of the study, included the superintendent and three assistant superintendents, three males and one female, all identified as Caucasian. The campus leadership at that time consisted of five principals, including two males and three females, four of whom are Caucasian and one who is Hispanic. Pathway's district and campus leaders are prideful about their district's culture and town history and are passionate about maintaining traditions.

Given that this study was about cultural competence and the influence district leaders have on campus principals regarding cultural competency, thus impacting the policies and practices of the district, it is important to identify the demographics of each campus included in this case study. To maintain confidentiality of the district and campuses studied, the demographics provided are approximations. The 2019 demographics which collectively made up Pathway ISD's student population included roughly 65% White; nearly 25% Hispanic/Latino; less than 5% African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander combined; and less than 5 % of Two or More Races.

Pathway Elementary School

This campus served grades kindergarten through fifth grade. The elementary school's population totaled over 500 students. Demographics reflected a less than ethnically diverse campus with the following approximate percentage breakdowns: nearly 70 % White; nearly 25% Hispanic/Latino; less than 5% African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander combined; and less than 5% Two or More Races. Of the total, just over 25% were identified as economically disadvantaged, with about 10% served in the bilingual or English language learner program, and nearly 35% considered at risk.

Pathway Middle School

This campus housed grades six through eight. The middle school's population was roughly 600 students. Demographics reflected this school as a less than ethnically diverse campus as well, with the following approximate percentage breakdowns: 70 % White; nearly 25% Hispanic/Latino; less than 5% African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander combined; and less than 5% Two or More Races. Of the total enrollment, nearly 25% were identified as economically disadvantaged, with less than 5% served in the bilingual or English language learner program, and approximately 25% considered at risk.

Pathway High School

The high school served grades nine through twelve. The high school's population totaled over 700 students. Like the elementary and middle school, the high school demographics reflected less than a diverse campus with the following percentage breakdowns: nearly 70% White; nearly 25% Hispanic/Latino; less than 5% African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and less than 5 % Two or More Races. Among the total, over 20% were identified as economically disadvantaged, less than 5% were served in the bilingual or English language learner program, and just under 20% were considered at risk.

Participants

Participants in the study were purposefully selected. The goal was to understand patterns in how district leaders influence the cultural competency of campus leaders within a small rural district; hence, specified participants were necessary. Four district office administrators, identified as the superintendent and three assistant superintendents, as well as three campus

principals, were invited to participate in the case study. Principals represented campus leadership from Pathway Elementary School, Pathway Middle School, and Pathway High School. The selected principals led campuses that reflected district-wide demographics, allowing for exploration of patterns and common themes on the cultural competence continuum.

The criteria for selection of the individual participants included district leaders who directly impacted or supervised principals who were in their role two or more years. The impact a leader has on his or her building's success is statistically significant (Marzano, 2005). Selection of the campus principal participants was based on the following criteria: (a) principals of the two middle and high schools, (b) the principal of an elementary school with demographics similar to district demographics, and (c) principals who served their campus as principal two or more years. The specificity of selecting only principal participants who served two or more years was to acknowledge the time it takes to establish campus-based practices and influence others. However, the selected elementary principal served a campus that opened for the 2017-2018 school year. Though the school was new, the principal served in prior leadership roles in the organization. The purpose of selecting this elementary campus leader was to evaluate the district leadership's influence through the perspective of a principal of a recently opened school while the principal was establishing that school culture.

Researcher Positionality

In this qualitative study, as the researcher, I was the one who collected and analyzed each data source. To achieve pure objectivism is a naïve quest, and we can never truly divorce ourselves of subjectivity (Bourke, 2014). Humanistic character naturally presents biases and perspectives, hence the importance of addressing positionality. Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee,

Lee, Ntseane, and Muhammad (2001) asserted that positionality is “determined by where one stands in relation to ‘the other’” (p. 411).

It is important to share that, as an individual with some prior knowledge of the community, I was interested in the educational system and in what ways the system influenced the community. Furthermore, I had a professional relationship with one of Pathway ISD’s assistant superintendents, whom I had known for four years. In addition, my personal perspective of leadership and the influence school leaders have is through the lens of an educational practitioner of 20 years, including service as a campus principal and district office leader.

Positionality represents a space in which objectivism and subjectivism meet. As Freire suggested, the two exist in a “dialectic relationship” (2000, p. 50). Through bracketing of myself, I held in abeyance any pre-existing knowledge about the district or campus leaders, by focusing critical attention on the participants’ lived experiences rather than my own interactions within the community, as suggested by Creswell (2013). To engage in that bracketing process, I continually monitored and memoed my thoughts and perspectives to assure that any potential bias was not represented in the data.

Data Collection Strategies

Purposeful data collection is crucial for analysis and interpretations. Safeguarding reliability and objectivity, data were gathered through triangulation of three methods, as suggested by Hesse-Biber (2011). Triangulation is accentuated through the utilization and application of multiple data collection sources to support the expectations for reliability (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) within a qualitative research approach. Selected data sources allowed for examination, interpretation, eliciting meaning, and developing an in-depth understanding of

leaders' perceptions and their influence on a climate of cultural proficiency. In accordance to Roller and Lavrakas (2015), semi-structured, face-to-face individual interviews, observations of district office and principal leadership interactions, and document reviews were conducted and analyzed to validate the findings.

Individual Interviews

Individual face-to-face, semi-structured one-hour interviews were conducted with each of the participants. These in-depth interviews focused on district leaders' values and understanding of cultural proficiency, as well as systems in place that might influence the cultural competence of campus principals. In accordance with Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), this interview process capitalized on the unique individual perspectives of the interviewed leaders. An interview protocol (Appendix A), consisting of open-ended questions regarding leadership, cultural competence, and district practices, was utilized when questioning each of the district leader participants; a similar interview protocol (Appendix B) guided the campus leader individual interviews. The semi-structured questions allowed participants to express their thoughts on the topic, as well as afforded dialogue to go in-depth, as needed. The questions guided but did not limit the interview, and the goal was to listen to the participants, focusing on what the respondents felt was important. This process created an unbiased conversation, providing consistency and focus on data to answer the research questions, allowing a "Give-and-take: process of co-participants" (p. 113). This method of semi-structured interviews fostered fluid and natural conversations, providing an opportunity for information to surface which may not have been considered in advance (Reinharz, 1992). Lines of inquiry were pursued in the interview, allowing for exploration of themes within the continuum of cultural proficiency. Dialogue referencing, or lack thereof, of cultural awareness, inclusiveness, and climate were

points of emphasis for notation. The hope was to gain perspective leading to answers as to how the district leaders influence campus leaders, regarding cultural proficiency.

Minimizing apprehension, the participants were reassured of confidentiality and checkpoints for clarity, as part of the informed consent process. To strengthen credibility, participants were asked to member check upon completion of transcriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Data from the interviews were collected via my scripted notes as well as transcription of the audio-recorded interviews. I personally transcribed the audio recordings to fully understand the perspectives of the participants. Participants were asked permission for the audio-recording prior to the interviews.

Observations

Instantaneous sampling and naturalistic observation, also referred to as nonparticipant observation, were utilized as a second method of data collection, as supported by Cohen and Crabtree (2006). This format allowed for simultaneous observation of multiple participants. Observation of district leadership meetings, determined in advance and with permission, occurred, and participants were made aware of my attendance and intent prior to each meeting. Meetings observed were audio-recorded, with participant permission. Pseudonyms were assigned each study participant in an observed setting. Interactions observed and transcribed were captured using a chart (Appendix C), with participants' pseudonyms, ensuring participant confidentiality. Although additional district staff members attended observed meetings, observational data collection only included the identified participants.

The design strategy required that the observations were used as a follow-up to the in-depth interviews, rather than vice versa. This allowed for potentially rich data to “verify individual interview data, examining how responses differ in a group setting, expose individual

interviewees to the group dynamic as a means of education or empowerment” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 177). Individual and group-level observations were included in the meeting observation data. This form of data collection allowed an opportunity to capture spontaneous behaviors of participants in their natural surroundings and the common setting.

As a non-participant observer, I sought insight by scribing thick descriptive field notes, as described by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011). Thick descriptions included the exact words of respondents, as well as specifics of the setting, and any sensory observations recorded. It is important to be cognizant and transparent as there are multiple levels of meaning in the transcription process, regarding the way something may be verbally or non-verbally implied. Verbal and nonverbal behaviors were observed, compared, and associated with one or more of the six stages on the continuum of cultural competence (Lindsey & Terrell, 2012). Non-verbal data were noted, including emotions, pauses, and gestures. As interactions occurred, common themes, perceptions, and genuine levels of cultural competence were observed. Key words or phrases were recorded, ensuring accuracy of potential preliminary codes and themes, emerging during each aspect of the data collection process. Significant and core values of the sample were developed inductively and deductively, providing an opportunity to listen for soft data that focused on organizational leadership culture, behavioral interactions among participants, and cultural proficiency. This process helped provide powerful insight, while intentionally observing interactions among district and campus leaders. An advantage of this method is the increased ecological validity since it may generalize to other leadership settings or districts (Shuttleworth, 2009).

Document Analysis

Document analysis served as the third source of data collection, guided by a protocol

matrix (Appendix D). This is an effective and minimally intrusive method to complete the triangulation of the study. Data analysis of documents was completed simultaneously along with the interviews and observations. Evidence of the organization's documentation is stable and reviewable data, providing additional coverage of events or settings over a longer span of time (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Documents used for systematic evaluation as part of this study took a variety of forms. They included district and campus improvement plans; bond proposals; agendas, attendance registers, periodicals, and minutes of meetings; program outlines, district and campus policies, and district and/or campus-level handbooks; demographer reports; maps and charts; and various public records. Utilizing documents as a data source helped to ensure my presence did not alter what was being studied (Merriam, 1988).

Angers and Machtmes (2005) analyzed documents as part of their ethnographic case study, which explored the beliefs, context factors, and practices of middle school teachers that led exemplarily to a technology-enriched curriculum. They stressed the need to triangulate the study methods, which also included observations and interviews, to validate and corroborate data obtained during the study. It is important to specify what documents are analyzed during a study, to alleviate speculation of biasness (Bowen, 2009). In this study, after all data were collected and synthesized, evolving themes and connections to the conceptual framework are presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Timeline for Data Collection

In-depth individual semi-structured interviews with Pathway ISD district leaders and the principals of Pathway Elementary, Pathway Middle School, and Pathway High School took place during the early part of summer 2019. Observation of leadership meetings took place in the summer of 2019 to take advantage of scheduled district meetings. Lastly, document analysis

took place by the end of August 2019. Researcher notes were taken during interviews and the interviews were audio-recorded, then transcribed after each session. Member checking occurred once data were transcribed and analyzed.

Data Analysis Plan

A systematic procedure for data analysis included critically reviewing and evaluating notes from interviews, observations, and documents. This analytical method required data to be examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge regarding the research questions, which is supported by Corbin and Strauss (2018).

Initial a priori codes that were labels of the six stages on the cultural competence continuum first guided data analysis. Descriptive codes, eventually leading to themes, were created as they emerged directly from the analyzed and interpreted data. Quotes and thick descriptions were utilized for illustration and to bring the data to life (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003).

The emerged themes were then aligned to the phases of competence on the cultural competence continuum (Cross 1989; Nuri-Robins, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2012). Through a spiral model, connecting common themes and topics throughout the study allowed for varying levels of specificity.

Audio recordings and transcribed interviews, coupled with transcribed field notes, were analyzed, categorized, and synthesized for naturalistic causality, as recommended by Wolcott (2001). Transcribed manuscripts from leadership interviews and meeting observations were analyzed and re-read, spiraling for further evaluation. This approach fosters knowledge, connecting various levels of information gained from the various phases of the study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2015). Charts and coding were used as an organizational approach for analysis

and for identifying key phrases and content related to the research questions. Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) suggested that themes of ideas, behaviors, interactions, and terminology be identified. Following the guideline of Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), abbreviated codes were assigned to emerging categories, followed by careful analysis which led to relevant emerged themes.

Data from the one-on-one interviews were analyzed and interpreted first. Identifying the district leaders' cultural proficiency, in accordance with the Cross (1989) and Nuri-Robins, D. Lindsey, Terrell, and R. Lindsey (2012) cultural proficiency continuum, was essential prior to linking potential evidence of district leaders' influence on principals. When examining leadership meeting observation data, individual and group level analysis was considered, as a conglomeration. Emerging individual responses and group narratives served as the sum of the parts. Recorded observations of research participants' dynamic interactions, including potential verbal or non-verbal interactions, also contributed to analysis. In summary, interviews, observations, and document analysis comprised the elements for triangulation and connecting emerged themes in relationship to the cultural competence continuum.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the practice of professional ethics, participants received an explanation of the purpose and process of the study, partnered with assurance that their responses, through confidentiality, would be protected. Informed consent information was provided, and moral integrity was upheld through confidentiality and honesty. The district, school campuses, and participants were all given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Principal responses will not be shared with district administrators, nor will district administrators' responses be disclosed. Participants were informed that the university institutional review board approved the study and

participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time, with no repercussions. No tokens of appreciation were offered to participants. Data were stored on a password-protected iCloud account throughout the duration of the study, then will be stored on a password-protected flash drive in a locked cabinet in the university office of the major professor, for the required three years.

Limitations

One assumption of the study was that the participants would be authentic in conversations and in responses, rather than reflexive. However, participants' comfort level, or reservations, potentially might have altered their responses or stifled the level of detail discussed by participants. Although interviewees were reassured of confidentiality, it is possible that some participants might not have felt safe in providing forthright comments. Accurate recall of responses was critical to eliminate skewed findings. Member checking helped assure that the interpretation of the findings was accurate. Subjective opinions or professional relationships with participants can present biases, thus such potential impacts were imperative to avoid.

During leadership meetings and observations, a level of trust and security was established to avoid unnatural or forced responses due to pressure. Capturing and making sense of the group dynamics, including the extent to which group members may influence each other, may offer limitations (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). It was important to consider, when observing district meetings, that power dynamics, as described by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2015), can affect the interpretation of the research results; therefore, it is possible that some comments and/or behaviors observed were the direct result of varying levels of power that might have influenced participants' comments or behaviors. Due to time constraints and sensitive agenda topics, leadership meeting observations were, at times, limited in duration and frequency. This allowed

for a snapshot of what may or may not be a district culture in its entirety. Documents analyzed were limited to those which were accessible, possibly not reflecting information not otherwise observed. Reliability of this study, whether this case study can be replicated with comparable results (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007), may be a consideration.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the findings of this study was established by providing layers of research and various methods which interacted with one another. The analytic generalizability results from a detailed trail of multiple source documentation, fully described informants, and use of proven techniques (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Analysis of three different data collection methods led to triangulation to discover convergence in the research findings and to strengthen validity, as suggested by Green (2007).

Summary

This chapter offers insight on the methodology and data sources used for connectivity. Outlined is an explanation of the research design, participant population and sampling procedures, data collection methods and data analysis plans, and limitations of the study. The goal for this explanatory case study was to seek to produce compelling information which explains the impact of culturally proficient leadership on organizations and individuals. The findings also present communicative validity by providing further information, adding to the current research on cultural competence of leaders in schools and school districts. Chapter 4 includes an explication of the findings of this explanatory study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

As stated in Chapter 1, the purposes of this study were to examine how the cultural competency of district office leadership influenced the cultural competency of campus principals and to ascertain the current placement of district and school leaders on the cultural proficiency continuum. I sought to understand the potential effect the level of competency of district office and school campus leaders might have on the district and its policies, practices, and school climate. The overarching research (ORQ) question was: To what extent does the cultural competency of district office leaders influence the cultural competency of principals? Three additional sub-questions guided this study:

Sub RQ1: Where on the cultural proficiency continuum are the district office leaders?

Sub RQ2: Where on the cultural proficiency continuum are the campus principals?

Sub RQ3: How does the cultural proficiency of district leadership impact campus decisions, policy, and climate within the district?

Research was conducted during the summer of 2019. Results are presented through a triangulation of qualitative data points. Findings discussed in this chapter include data from individual participant interviews, observations of district level personnel and principal leadership interactions during district meetings, and selected document analysis. Pseudonyms were assigned to the studied school district, individual schools, and individual participants.

This qualitative case study provides further explanation as to how district leaders influence campus leaders, specifically related to cultural proficiency. Through analysis of collected data, the data were analyzed respectively according to one or more of the six stages on the continuum of cultural competence (Lindsey & Terrell, 2012). Through determining where district and campus leaders aligned with the continuum, this chapter includes the four themes

which emerged through detailed responses from individual interviews, group observations, and document analysis results. Themes of ideas, behaviors, interactions, and terminology were identified, via triangulation of data sources. A spiraling method of connecting common themes allowed for specificity among the findings. Since the focus of this study chiefly pertained to how the cultural competence of district leaders influenced the cultural competence of principals, district office leaders with decision making and potentially influential roles were identified for the study.

Analysis of Data

To examine the data, I used a two-phase process. In the first phase, data were analyzed through a deductive process, using the six a priori codes that were the six stages on the cultural competence continuum (Cross 1989; Lindsey et al., 2009). In the second phase, I used an inductive analysis approach to generate codes which evolved into categorical themes. Through careful exploration of participants' recorded interview responses and body language, observations of leaders in groups, and analysis of pertinent documents, the themes which emerged from the data analysis included: (a) cultural differences, (b) curricular programs, (c) leadership awareness and focus, and (d) tradition. In vivo examples of participants' responses are included in this section. Although I chose to present the findings in a way that reveals where the district and campus leaders align with the stages of cultural competency, it is important to note how these four emerged themes pair with those six stages of the continuum.

Emergent Themes Paired with the Stages of the Continuum

Topics which surfaced from participant responses during the in-depth individual interview process, observations, and document analysis were given abbreviated codes. Those codes were then classified into categories, from which four themes emerged: cultural differences,

curricular programs, leadership awareness and focus, and tradition. Table 3 shows the frequency of how often those themes were mentioned by participants and how those themes were evidenced among the six stages on the cultural competency continuum. For each theme, there was no evidence of the given theme revealing participants' alignment with the least inclusive stage of cultural destructiveness or most inclusive stage of cultural proficiency.

Table 3

Emerged Themes and the Corresponding Stages of the Cultural Competence Continuum

Emerged Themes	Stages of Cultural Competence Including Frequencies
Cultural Differences	Cultural Destructiveness (0) Cultural Incapacity (18) Cultural Blindness (5) Cultural Pre-Competence (2) Cultural Competence (5) Cultural Proficiency (0)
Curricular Programs	Cultural Destructiveness (0) Cultural Incapacity (5) Cultural Blindness (9) Cultural Pre-Competence (9) Cultural Competence (3) Cultural Proficiency (0)
Leadership Awareness and Focus	Cultural Destructiveness (0) Cultural Incapacity (4) Cultural Blindness (11) Cultural Pre-Competence (8) Cultural Competence (8) Cultural Proficiency (0)
Tradition	Cultural Destructiveness (0) Cultural Incapacity (10) Cultural Blindness (6) Cultural Pre-Competence (1) Cultural Competence (0) Cultural Proficiency (0)

Emerged themes were then categorized and aligned with the stages of the cultural competence continuum (Cross 1989; Lindsey et al. 2009). Responses from participants in the in-

depth interviews, combined with observation notes and the analysis of documents, presented evidence of four stages on the continuum, those of cultural incapacity, cultural blindness, cultural pre-competence, and cultural competence within Pathway ISD. The findings did not reveal that any district or campus leader fell at the lowest stage or the highest stage on the continuum. As shown in Table 4, three of the seven participants exhibited evidence of six or more behaviors which fall in the stage of cultural incapacity. One of the seven participants exhibited evidence of six or more behaviors reflecting the stage of cultural blindness. One of the seven participants exhibited evidence of six or more behaviors aligning with the cultural pre-competence stage. Lastly, two of the seven participants exhibited behaviors in alignment with cultural competence.

Table 4

A Priori Code Response Frequency

Continuum A Priori Codes	Reference Frequency
Cultural Destructiveness	00 references
Cultural Incapacity	37 references
Cultural Blindness	31 references
Cultural Pre-Competence	20 references
Cultural Competence	16 references
Cultural Proficiency	00 references

General Evidences of Cultural Competency Stages

Findings from this study indicate that leaders’ perceptions of *cultural differences* impact the way they interact, respond, and afford opportunities for others. Direct statements, underlying messages, and critical actions depict in which stage a leader, or an organization, is within the six constructs of the cultural competence continuum. Leaders were asked about current and projected demographics, as well as the strengths and challenges presented by the changes in the district’s cultural groups. Cultural differences in newly enrolled families repeatedly surfaced in

conversations when participants were asked about how they, as leaders, were supporting other leaders, campuses, and the district, specific to demographics. The district way and community and district *traditions* were repeatedly mentioned by all seven participants. District leaders' responses and behaviors reflect overarching connections and perspectives among the district stakeholders and campus leaders. On several occasions, phrases were stated by two or more participants, such as: the district way, institutionalizing tradition or maintaining tradition, it is in our strategic plan, faith-based community, football community, buy in to the community, and a right fit. Often, participants avoided questions that sought specificity of demographic strengths and challenges, even when probed. When some participants didn't readily comment when questioned about the strengths and challenges of district demographics, the response finally given was that I should reference the strategic plan for that information. However, three participants did provide the statistical breakdown of demographics. Participants who provided those data also initially gave a more in-depth response regarding the strengths and challenges they face with shifting demographics. Participants who hesitated, or gave vague demographic data, were also vague or did not respond to the strengths and challenges, unless probed.

Leaders' Alignment with the Cultural Competency Stages

Examples of in vivo responses and behaviors of the participants are discussed next in support of the above summary of the findings. These responses are reported in alignment with the components of the cultural competence continuum. The first and last stages on the continuum were not evident in the findings so cultural destructiveness and cultural proficiency are not discussed in these findings. As noted previously, to protect the confidentiality of the participants and to strive to avoid any recognition of the district, participants are referred to simply as P1, P2, and so forth.

Cultural Incapacity (Stage 2)

As explained in Chapter 3, actions leading to categorization of cultural incapacity include lack of ability to respond effectively to the needs, interests, and preferences of culturally and linguistically diverse groups. At this stage, characteristics leading to practices which may be discriminative in hiring and promotion are embedded in practice. One could also argue there is disproportionate allocation of resources, benefiting some groups over others. Responses in alignment with cultural incapacity included in vivo comments from various participants. These first set of interviewed participants' responses relates to how they viewed the district's practices regarding inclusivity, specifically regarding new families in the community, as well as when considering new hires for the school district. Some participants displayed resistance and voiced concern about cultural differences and changes necessary for culturally and linguistically diverse groups. While these participants communicated a desire to preserve the existing district culture and practices, they did not exhibit traits of cultural destructiveness, the lowest stage on the continuum. They did recognize cultural and linguistic differences; however, they did not want these differences to impact the district's existing culture and practices. Several participants commented in ways that indicated their stage of cultural incapacity.

We are getting people moving in from all over. Districts from the south of us, a lot of out-of-state folks, many from California with corporations, with their mindset and from all over. We are getting higher income families, more entitlement, more Indian families, other religions. It's not a small town anymore. We are solid in our [district] way and they just want to come here and change it. Frankly, I like it the way it is, or should I say was. (P5)

We are upfront when hiring people and let them know that it may not be the place for them. If they don't see eye to eye on our traditions and beliefs, it's not going to be a good fit. It's a faith-based community. It is what it is. Embrace it or not, but you're going to have a challenge if you're not accepting of the culture. (P3)

Participant P7 echoed a similar message and focused on how a district-provided card is given to

all stakeholders:

[District] is as a faith-based, football, tight knit community, that does what is best for kids. I give every new student, teacher, and parent this card of our expectations. I make sure they know this is a partnership, and they aren't going to just come in here and not do their part. Everything on this card is an expectation. Same for teachers. (P7)

The card mentioned by this participant is a district-wide document given to students, staff, and parents at every campus. Although the message is basically the same, there are three separate cards designed per audience to communicate the district culture and values, as well as student, staff, and parent expectations. Values described on the card support the participants' statements as the card text addresses faith, family, relationships, respect, integrity, loyalty, character, and traditions.

When reflecting on challenges that come with growth and cultural change, two specific scenarios occurring in spring of 2019 were recalled by two different interviewed participants. The following described situations were based on policies and practices in place. Normally, school districts have dress codes as part of their policies; this district is no different as there is a defined dress code stated in the student handbook. Related to that district policy, Participant P7 recalled the scenario of a male student being reprimanded at the school level for wearing make-up and earrings, though this was not a policy that applied to girls. While chuckling, changing seat position, leaning head back, and rolling eyes, P7 commented:

After pushback and appeals from the student, it was taken to the top, and changes were made. Now we have to allow that.

The discussion of dress code brought up related topics, those of hair length for boys and headgear for any student. These policies also are clearly defined in the student handbook, under dress code. Participant P7 shared:

This [boys' hair length] had been in the student handbook and enforced for years, but we had to change that too. Now, the expectation for boys with clean cut hair, out of face,

above collar, and above ears is enforced on the football team. And, playing football is extracurricular and a privilege so coach can still enforce it. Just like our dress code that is having to change with times too. Just like not long ago, I had a girl with a headwrap on, and there is no hats or headgear in school. So, I called her in, and she told me it was for her religion. I trust then verify, so I called her parents to confirm. And it was.

Other common district policies include those related to extra-curricular school-related practices and/or traditions, sometimes related to or impacted by community religious practices.

One such practice came up during interviews when Participants P2 and P7 shared a scenario which involved a senior whose parent filed discrimination, due to the senior baccalaureate practice during school hours at the local Baptist church. Participant P7 sighed, raised both hands, and stated:

The student had an option to attend or not and it wouldn't affect his attendance. I don't see the big deal. Now, I guess this practice will have to change because of one student.

Participant P2 discussed a perspective about the issue of religion and school:

We are working on a plan for the upcoming year, but it will be difficult because of the tradition and the political pull that church has within this district. This is a Christian based community with a conservative culture. How do we maintain conservative culture, institutionalize the traditions, and provide for diverse cultural groups? How do you do it equitably and legally?

Through data collected from observations of district leaders in leadership meetings, principals meeting with district leaders, and school board meetings, various stages of the cultural competence continuum were evident among different district and campus leaders' actions. In these meetings, participant leaders demonstrated traits described as cultural incapacity. For example, when a food order was given for an upcoming professional development event, two of the participants snickered, rolled eyes and shook their head when it was stated that there was a request for a gluten free option. Reacting in such a way, without knowing the purpose of the request, demonstrates lack of ability to appropriately respond to needs, as defined in the cultural incapacity stage.

Making assumptions regarding cultural practices is also considered to be at the culturally incapacity stage. During the observed campus and department updates, a non-participant leader shared that they recently had a night event for information for parents of ESL and bilingual students. When it was reported that nine parents showed up, the leader sharing sounded disappointed in the turn out. In response, Participant P3 shrugged their shoulders, and P4 stated:

Nine showed up, nine were appreciative. Its ok. That's typical with that type of program. All you can do is put it out there, and if they come, they come.

During an update on new hires given at an observed meeting, one candidate hired for a key role was being discussed; the non-participant person reporting made reference to the candidate's speech. The person sharing the information was impressed about the candidate's work experience and stated they were happy the new hire was coming on board. However, while laughing and smiling, this person alluded to a speech problem, saying that it was due to the candidate's nationality. Furthermore, when the person made the comment in jest and laughed, P3 joined in laughter, and P5 snickered, then P2 recognized the culturally insensitive comment and quickly redirected the meeting saying:

Ok thank you for the update, we look forward to [person] great qualities and having them join our team. They bring a lot to the table. (P2)

Each of the observed meetings began or ended with prayer or other acts of faith-based practices. While this may be acceptable by the current leadership team, it is an example of how hiring new staff with diverse backgrounds could present a problem.

Though findings support that the district's leaders do not intentionally seek to be culturally destructive, there is a lack of attention to diverse families or communities, revealing behaviors and comments that align with cultural incapacity. Participants' responses regarding groups unlike themselves who impose change into district policies and practices, as well as

stated assumptions about underrepresented populations and religious affiliations, insinuate that district leaders believe that their own culture is superior to others.

Furthermore, the district leaders influence hiring practices through verbal expectations as well as in district documents, declaring the characteristics that considers one to be a good fit for the district. These described characteristics include valuing faith, family, relationships, respect, loyalty, and character. Diversity is referenced, only in the staff expectations, highlighting respect and tolerance. This is more of a reactionary approach to tolerance of mandated equity, as described in stage two of the conceptual framework.

Cultural Blindness (Stage 3)

Cultural blindness, the third to least inclusive stage on the continuum, includes a mindset of viewing and treating all people the same, ignoring cultural strengths, and placing little value on the importance of cultural or linguistic competence. Also, at this level is a lack of diversity in personnel.

When participants were asked to speak to the protocol items that asked about strengths and challenges of their school and district demographics, as well as projected demographics, four of the seven interviewed participants showed lack of awareness or interest in the way demographics may impact the district. Participants' comments reflecting their perspectives were such as these:

Oh, I am sure you can find that in the strategic plan. I don't know off the top of my head, but you can find it there. I know we are growing, though. (P7)

Participant P7 inferred that anything related to projected district demographics was in the district strategic plan, thus that participant showed no interest in revealing knowledge of demographic projections or even recognizing that demographic changes were pertinent. When probed further about district response to enrollment growth, participant P7 responded: "The same

way we have been, by doing what is right for all kids and stick to the strategic plan. Our 10-year plan is vetted and its good. We are ahead with facilities in response to the growth coming.”

When asked the same protocol item, after a long pause, P1 addressed a perspective on the topic of changing district demographics:

Well, we are predominantly White, several ELs who are mostly Hispanic and some African American and Asian. I don't know the exact breakdown but that is the order of our largest populations.

Similarly, when queried about the same topic, P5 hesitated, shifted in chair, and looked out the window, then stated their personal perspective on changing district demographics:

Hmm ... we are about the same and I don't believe we have changed that much. Our enrollment is growing because of big corporations coming in, but I don't see that will change what we do for kids. We do what is best for kids regardless of race or religion; that doesn't really matter.

Showing a similar perspective on changing district demographics, P4's comments during the interview referred again to the strategic plan and district traditions:

Our district traditions, the [district] way, and our strategic plan is a way of life. There are opportunities for all, if they buy in. I care about how everyone is doing.

Regarding awareness of the student populations' needs, various examples surfaced during leadership meeting observations. When discussing district technology policies and procedures, the issue of paying for devices came up. For nearly six minutes, a non-participant district leader, using negative comments, shared information regarding technology polices and expectations not being met. While there were opportunities for participant leaders to redirect, they remained silent. Then when the statement was made by that speaker that regardless of who you are, you pay or you do not get a device is fair for everyone, P3 and P4 snickered and nodded. However, P6 curtly interjected with:

Are we communicating the expectation, and can we support the language used? We don't want kids without devices because of money or reasons we don't know.

Participants' lack of awareness, passive comments, and avoidance of discussion regarding implications of changing demographics highlight the cultural competence level of cultural blindness. The statements and behaviors observed support the mindset that cultural differences do not matter, and in some instances, there was insinuation that there are no differences among and between cultures.

Cultural Pre-Competence (Stage 4)

Observations and interview responses encompassed participant behaviors which are considered in the stage of cultural pre-competence. As previously described, this stage involves an awareness within an organization of strengths and areas for growth that are necessary to respond effectively to culturally and linguistically diverse populations. Characteristics include understanding the value of delivering high-quality services and supports to culturally and linguistically diverse populations. At this stage, school leaders enact efforts to improve services for a specific racial, ethnic, or cultural group.

Three interviewed participants expressed a need for a plan to support diversity and provide additional professional development for diverse learners, including students with disabilities and English language learners:

The need for social and emotional support is growing among all demographics and we need to equip our teachers to meet student needs. (P1)

We are looking into next steps to better support our special education students. We are currently with the co-op and will soon need our own special education department as a district, in order to better meet all the needs. (P2)

We need to enhance and offer quality professional development for staff serving second language learners. In effort to prepare, and according to our strategic plan, we now are in the beginning phase of requiring staff to have their ESL certification. We also need to focus on our curriculum and instruction department to support English language learners and staff. (P1)

Regarding efforts to provide leadership opportunities to all teachers, participant P2 communicated:

We also are implementing our leadership academy to give all teachers opportunities for growth and exposure.

While the stage of cultural pre-competence is considered more inclusive than the stage previously discussed, leaders at the pre-competence stage often recognize the limitations of an organization's practices when interacting with other cultural groups. Leaders at this level typically lack a clear plan for achieving organizational cultural competence. While cultural pre-competence is the beginning stage of proactive transformation towards desired equity, the in vivo passages reported in this section reveal that these district leaders do not yet have such a clear plan for moving to the next level on the cultural competency continuum.

Cultural Competence (Stage 5)

Less than half of the participants consistently exhibited characteristics of leaders described as culturally competent on the continuum. Participant responses also suggest that these participant leaders are stifled by stakeholders and by challenges resulting from the district's overall level of cultural proficiency. According to comments made during the interviews, two participants shared the understanding and need for progression with inclusivity; however, these two participants recognized they are in the infant stages of being able to influence leadership, practices, and policies that would lead to the most inclusive stages of cultural proficiency.

Participant P2 made the following comment related to concerns about equity:

We have a long way to go, and the challenge is real as we balance maintaining district traditions and the growth that is coming.

Showing similar perspectives that demonstrate how Participant P6 is progressing on the continuum, Participant P6 discussed inequities within the district:

How can we raise the bar for all kids, not just the average White kid? How can we show individual growth for every single student? Stop making excuses why students are not showing growth. Assess our bilingual and ELL program, adjust if needed. Intervention at an earlier age, offering programs and enrichment during school hours to meet kid's needs. Restorative practices so students are spending less time in the office and more time in the classroom. We need an instructional plan for all kids, holding staff accountable for the goals they have set. I am not afraid to make change if it is good for kids. Culture drives everything and as a leader you have to assess what is needed, give staff what they need so they can help kids, and also give staff opportunities for leadership.

Other evidence of how Participant P6 is progressing on the continuum is revealed in the response to questions regarding leadership support. This participant's response shows awareness of the need for leaders to progress in the area of cultural competence. P6 stated:

It depends on who you report to and how long you have been in the district. All of the leaders have good relationships, and campus principals are supported. However, it is trust and verify, so for those with not as much experience, they may take on the mindset of what is allowed or supported.

In general, these two participants demonstrated traits of the cultural competence stage on the continuum. Comments made by these two participants, during their interviews, reveal that they are progressing on the cultural competence continuum. Their level of competence is supported in their comments made during observed meetings, as discussed in the previous section.

In summary, the combination of participants' comments during the interviews, behaviors and comments during observed leadership meetings, and the review of selected district documents revealed that participants ranged from cultural incapacity (the second stage on the continuum) to cultural competence (the next to highest stage on the continuum). None of the findings indicated that participants demonstrated alignment with the lowest level (cultural destructive) or the highest level (cultural proficiency) on the continuum; however, the two participants described under cultural competence show evidence that there is district leadership

moving toward cultural proficiency.

Organizational Behaviors Evident in District Documents

The district strategic plan, along with the district website, the previously described stakeholder expectation cards, the 10-year demographic report, and meeting agendas were reviewed to shed light on organizational behavior. The 10-year demographic report was reviewed to ascertain existing and projected demographic information. These public documents included instructional foci, facility, and staffing plans that are necessary for continuous growth. However, evidence showed a lack of a clear strategic plan around cultural diversity and inclusivity; the strategic plan in place had no clear blueprint for achieving organizational cultural competence.

One of the expectation cards the district provides to students, parents, and staff gives an example of culturally incapacity. A quote from the faculty version of the card is: “Tolerance: Appreciates diversity and works to cultivate respect and tolerance...” The use of the word tolerance indicates the level of cultural incapacity. Another example of cultural incapacity is related to the district website. Typically, when a district has a bilingual program, the district website includes options for visitors to read information in the language of the bilingual program. While this district has a Spanish bilingual program, the website front page presents information in English only. However, for new student registration, you can find a Spanish version of the form embedded in the parent resource link. Similarly, district meeting agendas seemed to follow a common format which includes very little cultural information. One example found in a meeting agenda was when a federal requirement was discussed, but only for the purposes of following regulations.

In reviewing the district strategic plan, there was a lack of specifics regarding cultural needs and changing demographics. As situations arise with cultural differences, according to the examples shared by interviewed participants, the lack of specific strategic planning documents may present future challenges in practice and policy, regarding cultural differences. Because there currently is a lack of diversity among district leaders, future challenges may arise regarding staff hiring since there were no clear guidelines for hiring a diverse staff in the district strategic plan. As stated by Howard (2007), it is important that school staff are culturally competent and representative of student populations.

Evidence of the Influence of Leadership

As discussed in Chapter 2, district leaders, such as members of the school board, the superintendent, and assistant superintendents, play an intricate role in supporting their schools and principals (Meador, 2018). The influence of district leaders on campus leaders, in respect to cultural competence, was evidenced in the study. In order to bridge the overarching question of the study, the sub questions regarding district and campus leaders' cultural competence were first analyzed and addressed. Once verbal and nonverbal responses from individual interviews, leadership meetings, and documents were recorded and analyzed, each leader's actions and mindset were aligned to a stage within the six stages on the cultural competence continuum. Next, I analyzed relationships among the participant leaders, and the influence they had on one another and the organization, regarding cultural competence. Table 5 reflects each participant and their stage of cultural competence in alignment with the six phases on the cultural competence continuum. While it is not advisable to reveal which level of leadership was held by any given participant, this table does pair upper level leaders who had direct oversight of lower

level leaders, thus showing the evidence of influence among the participants regarding cultural competence.

Table 5

Participant Stages of Cultural Competence Showing Influence

Stages of Cultural Competence	Participant
Cultural Destructiveness	
Cultural Incapacity	P3, P7
Cultural Blindness	P4, P5
Cultural Pre-Competence	P1
Cultural Competence	P2, P6
Cultural Proficiency	

The data reflect that district leaders have a direct influence on the cultural competence of campus leaders. Four of the six stages on the cultural competence continuum include behaviors exhibited by the seven participants. These four stages include cultural incapacity, cultural blindness, cultural pre-competence, and cultural competence. The two stages on the continuum not represented among the participants are cultural destructiveness (the least inclusive level) and cultural proficiency (the most inclusive level). From the four represented stages of the continuum, in three stages there were pairs of participants. These pairings suggest there was potential leadership influence as a result of a direct supervisor and subordinate relationship. The participant who solely demonstrated behaviors and perspectives aligned with the pre-competence stage on the continuum has an indirect reporting relationship with the others. There also is a clear distinction among the years each participant had worked in the district and their level of cultural competence. Respectively, participants who led or reported to one another within the two years just prior to the study demonstrated perspectives and actions showing an alignment between participants who had a direct-report relationship.

Summary

The findings in this chapter are in response to the overarching and three subsequent research questions. During the initial phase of the study, data were collected and thoroughly examined from one-on-one interviews of district and campus leaders, as well as descriptive notes of observations of leadership meetings. To strengthen the results of the study, district documents were analyzed to triangulate the findings. Participant responses, observations, and analyzed documents provided insight into leaders' stages of cultural competence, as well as the extent of influence district leaders have on campus leaders, policies, and practices within the district. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the results and presents suppositions based on the findings from the analysis of data. Implications, revelations, and recommendations for further study also are shared in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the qualitative study of a rapidly growing north Texas school district. Key findings and conclusions presented are drawn from the data presented in Chapter 4. The chapter includes a discussion regarding the extent of influence school district leaders have on campus leaders, in the area of cultural competence. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications, revelations, and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Study

Like much of the nation, as north Texas grows in diversity, it is imperative that all students are provided equitable opportunities and experiences of inclusivity. The school district studied was experiencing rapid growth in population and was facing changes in the demographic landscape. The purpose of this study was to examine how the cultural competence of district leaders influences the cultural competence of campus principals, as well as how district-level leaders influence district policies, practices, and school climate. While there is a substantial amount of research regarding ethics and efficacy of leadership regarding academics, there is little research showing ethics and efficacy of leadership regarding cultural competence.

The findings in this qualitative case study were validated by triangulation of face-to-face semi-structured individual interviews, observations, and document analysis. After careful and thorough data collection and analysis, data were analyzed through a deductive analysis using six a priori codes that were grounded in the six stages of the cultural competence continuum (Cross 1989; Lindsey et al., 2009). Additionally, an inductive analysis approach was used to generate codes which evolved into categorical themes. Through thorough exploration of participant interview responses, observations, and document analyses, the final themes which emerged from

the data analysis include: (a) cultural differences, (b) curricular programs, (c) leadership awareness and focus, and (d) tradition.

Discussion

Urban school districts no longer are the only organizations with diverse student enrollments (Freidus & Noguera, 2015). The responsibility of meeting the needs of diverse learners is now shared with suburban and rural districts. For school leaders to ensure academic growth for all and minimize cultural and academic achievement gaps, they must understand and value the population of the students they serve. Specifically, leaders need to possess: (a) an awareness and acceptance of potential personal cultural diversity shortcomings, (b) insight into how beliefs and values about diversity tend to present hurdles for leaders in trying to connect across cultures, (c) an understanding of culture differences, and (d) cross-cultural skills (Martin & Vaughn, 2007).

To ensure the purpose of this study was reached, the findings are discussed as they aligned with the research questions. This discussion includes how the findings relate to previous literature.

ORQ: To what extent does the cultural competency of district office leaders influence the cultural competency of principals?

The findings of the study present evidence of a strong relationship between district leaders' cultural competence, campus principals' cultural competence, and district policies and procedures. These findings are in alignment with what Lindsey et al. (2009) described as the stages of cultural competency. There was also a direct relationship between the district leaders' cultural competence levels and their direct reports' level of cultural competence, as shown in Table 5. Participants' interview responses and the observation of participants in meetings

revealed that participants with more years of employment with the district exhibited traits described in the constructs of cultural incapacity and cultural blindness. These findings align with reactive and less inclusive leadership styles, according to the cultural competence framework. Respectively, participants who had fewer years of employment with the district exhibited characteristics of proactive inclusive leadership and demonstrated alignment with cultural pre-competence and cultural competence. It is important to note that the total years of experience a participant had in a leadership role was not a strong indicator of where leaders would align within the six stages on the cultural continuum framework.

Four of the seven participant leaders exhibited traits which were reactive and less inclusive on the cultural competence continuum. The variation of participant leaders' placement on the cultural competence continuum supports Cross' (1989) claim that both individuals and organizations often are at various levels of awareness, knowledge, and skills along the cultural competence continuum. Three of the seven participants demonstrated inclusive proactive leadership traits, ranging from cultural pre-competence to cultural competence. Furthermore, two of the seven leaders demonstrated attributes of transformative leaders. Shields (2003) suggested such findings may occur when leaders model collaboration and higher levels of engagement by fostering opportunities of equity in their district and schools. As observed in leadership meetings and individual interviews, these two participant leaders presented evidence of taking appropriate actions which genuinely afforded all students equal opportunities and accessibility.

While the two identified culturally competent leader participants demonstrated in interviews and district meetings that they practice inclusivity, they continued to adhere to district expectations according to their roles and responsibilities. Also, in the observed meetings, these

two participants demonstrated that ethical leadership was present and embedded in their core leadership values. Shields (2010) stated that ethical leadership is critical. Even so, for these two participants, it appeared that balancing ethics and inclusive practices which advocate for equitable opportunities for all student groups was challenging. Due to the existing district culture, as previously described, and the leaders' varying levels of cultural competence, the two identified culturally competent transformative leaders were cautiously thoughtful and intentional, as evidenced by their acts of advocacy and interactions with others. Their caution was possibly influenced by the role they played in the district and/or by the actions and behaviors of their direct report. These participants' cautious approach was one of the contributors to their being aligned with the fifth stage on the continuum, that of cultural competence, rather than with the constructs of the sixth and most inclusive stage of the cultural competence continuum, that of cultural proficiency. This is not to say the participants' personal beliefs did not align with more inclusive stages, it is simply to note that their responses aligned them with the stage of cultural competence.

In analyzing how district leaders influenced campus leaders, participant comments and observed behaviors revealed how a leader superior to another leader influences the cultural competence of the leader reporting to the superior district person, as the result of the positional power of the upper leader. Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013) discussed their research regarding the influence of leaders in educational organizations. They found that there is a correlation between supervisors and direct reports regarding the influence a superior has.

Sub RQ1: Where on the cultural proficiency continuum are the district office leaders?

The district office leaders in this study demonstrated a range of characteristics described within four of the six constructs of the cultural competence continuum (Lindsey et al., 2009).

The four stages with which different district leaders' behaviors identified are cultural incapacity, cultural blindness, cultural pre-competence, and cultural competence. Results of the current study indicate that district leader participants who were employed by the studied district longer aligned with attributes described in the constructs of cultural incapacity and cultural blindness on the cultural competence continuum. Examples of actions which overtly highlighted cultural incapacity and cultural blindness included ignoring differences, complacency with one-size-fits all programs and curriculum, lack of awareness of the demographic changes, support of exclusive dress codes, and communicating district expectations which benefit cultural groups in which those participant leaders identify. Findings also revealed that district office participants who had fewer years of employment by the district aligned with attributes which are more inclusive. Similar to the work of Averill and Rinaldi (2011), examples of inclusive actions included re-evaluation of the code of conduct, adjustments made to practices which ensure accessibility for all students, revising curricular focuses, and revisiting policy to amend requirements to be in the best interest of student and staff needs.

Evidence of the least and most inclusive stages, cultural destructiveness and cultural proficiency, withheld by Lindsey et al. (2009), was not present in the findings among the district leaders. Though the least inclusive and most inclusive stages on the continuum were not apparent in the findings, this does not eliminate the possibility that the participants may align with traits in these stages; those traits may simply not have been revealed. While perspectives of the district leader participants surfaced in interviews and observations, it is possible that specific traits could be masked due to the influence of organizational practices and structures, as suggested by Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013).

The varying levels of cultural competence exhibited among the district office leaders was more profound in the individual interviews than in the group observations. The observations alone would not have revealed the depth of understanding as to where each individual participant's leadership perspective aligned, within the cultural competence scale. Subsequently, verbal and nonverbal behaviors observed during leadership meetings spiraled and supported findings that surfaced in the individual interviews. Recognizing the behaviors in the different settings supports the evidence of influence that leaders have on one another.

Sub RQ2: Where on the cultural proficiency continuum are the campus principals?

The principal-level participants in this study, like the district leaders, demonstrated leadership characteristics that ranged from traits of cultural incapacity to cultural competence on the cultural proficiency continuum (Lindsey et al., 2009). Also, like the district leaders, campus leaders employed longer in the district were found to align with the constructs of cultural incapacity and cultural blindness. Those who were employed fewer years with the district had traits in alignment with behaviors that display cultural competence. Examples of actions where principals demonstrated cultural incapacity and cultural blindness included ignoring differences, making general statements about what all students need, expressing frustration with necessary changes in practices to meet the needs of certain populations, demonstrating a lack of awareness of the demographic changes, and communicating their desire of not wanting change but having to respond to mandates. Examples of principal behaviors demonstrating cultural competence included a constant practice of evaluating school programs to meet student needs, creating opportunities for leadership for all staff, implementing social and emotional practices to maximize student opportunities, and supporting and advocating for student and family needs, regardless of students' background. Evidence of the least and most inclusive stages, cultural

destructiveness and cultural proficiency, were not present in the findings among the campus leaders.

Though the least inclusive and most inclusive stages on the continuum were not apparent, this does not eliminate the possibility that the participants may align with traits in these stages. It may simply be that those traits were not revealed. Insights and perspectives of the principal participants surfaced during the individual interviews and observations, but there is a possibility that specific traits could be disguised as a result of organizational practices or the influence of others. The varying levels of cultural competence (Lindsey et al., 2009) exhibited among the principal leaders were more evident during the individual interviews than in the group observations. As with the district leaders, the observations of campus leaders alone may not have revealed the depth of understanding as to where each individual participant's leadership perspective aligned with cultural competence. Subsequently, as predicted by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), verbal and nonverbal behaviors observed during leadership meetings spiraled and supported findings that surfaced in the individual interviews.

Sub RQ3: How does the cultural proficiency of district leadership impact campus decisions, policy, and climate within the district?

In the face of a rapidly growing district and changing demographics, little indication was evident by participant leaders about their concern or consideration for acquiring knowledge of the cultures of their new populations. Potential implications of not serving the needs of all members of the community had not fostered an urgency to change district policies, procedures, or practices. Though participants did describe their reaction to specific needs, and there were isolated attempts to influence practice and policy, the overall leadership in this study is a non-example of transformative leadership, specifically in respect to cultural competence, as suggested by Shields (2010). The district leaders addressed potential challenges with population

growth and change by communicating a consistent message, in various methods, about their expectations for students, staff, and parents. This message included maintaining and institutionalizing the values, traditions, and practices which have been established for years. These traditions included an emphasis on faith, family, athletics, and community values. Policies, procedures, and the climate of the district directly reflected the overall level of district leaders' cultural competence. Waters and Marzano (2006) explained how educational organizations can be influenced by leaders, which supports findings in this study. Examples of how district leaders significantly influenced practices and policies include the practice of prayer at the start of meetings and public events, religious symbols as décor in district buildings, school programs held at the local church, and student handbooks that were exclusive to some groups.

Districtwide programs, such as afterschool tutoring for secondary students, were provided at a central location. Sports, clubs, student groups, and organizations were also offered. However, most of the extracurricular activities, as well as enrichment and support programs, were offered before or after school, minimizing access. Evidence showed that access for families of varying populations was minimal. For example, information and communication for families regarding curriculum, parent information nights, and specific events was often minimal or delivered via only one method. Parent information meetings were often offered once, in the evening, addressing only a small population. For example, meetings for the parents of students in the bilingual programs were seemingly held in response to mandates rather than to meet the needs of those families. According to analyzed documents, these meetings were held at certain times and at a certain location, and various methods of sharing the information were limited. During an observed meeting, when district leaders reflected and commented on the low turnout at a recent meeting for parents of bilingual students, their statements and apparent mindset

indicated that parents had lack of interest. As Garcia (2002) suggested, rather than making assumptions about low parent attendance, leaders could have been less biased by gaining insight as to why there was low parent participation. Assessing and seeking input from families was not practiced but district and campus leaders could potentially offer more inclusive methods of communication and accessibility.

Pre-determined notions surfaced through dialogue, regarding students of various ethnic and economic backgrounds, which contributes to the opportunity gap. Steele (2004) confirmed that negative stereotypes about ability can have a significant negative impact on the intellectual performance of students. In this study, evaluation of the district's curriculum and programs through a culturally responsive lens seemed minimal. Alnefaie (2016) explained that a culturally responsive curriculum, opportunities for equitable student accessibility to programs, and valuable parent resources should be aligned and offered in response to the various cultural groups in the population served. Martin and Vaughn's (2007) findings support the need for district leaders to recognize the opportunity and cultural gaps in the district which contribute to academic achievement gaps. Furthermore, an understanding of how the curriculum, as well as exclusive extracurricular programs, contributes to opportunity and cultural gaps is advantageous for student achievement. Howard (2013, 2007) suggested that until district leaders reflect on the practices they employ and the policies they enact, the sense of urgency to respond to the needs of all learners will be stagnant.

Revelations

While conducting the current study, contributing factors surfaced which indicate additional areas to explore. When selecting the participants for this study, using the described criteria, the intention was to explore the influence the district leaders had on the campus

principals, regarding cultural competence. However, during the observations and interviews, comments were made that pointed to the influence of other leaders in the district, and how those leaders may influence district educators' cultural competence. Participants mentioned the athletic director, the technology director, and the security director, all potentially influencing practices and policies. The influence of these additional leaders may or may not have been due to those actual district departments as much as it might have been due to the frequency of interactions and relationships with district and campus leaders. Including leaders in such roles in further studies would be helpful. Also, while the general influence of district leaders on principals regarding cultural competence was found to be substantial, an unforeseen potential influence was unveiled. A strong relationship specifically between a supervisor's level of cultural competence and their direct report's level of cultural competence was not anticipated. Regarding cultural competence, the relationship of supervisors and their direct reports could be further explored in other educational settings.

Implications for Practice

In relation to cultural proficiency, understanding how district leadership influences campus leadership may offer valuable insight for districts experiencing significant cultural changes among rapid growth in population. Findings from this study can afford this district, and other districts facing similar challenges, an opportunity to recognize the value and implications of culturally proficient leaders. Recognizing the relationship between transformative leaders and cultural proficiency may be essential for any organization's leaders that strive to be successful in meeting the needs of their stakeholders. The alignment of the findings with the stages of the conceptual framework used in this study is a strong indicator of how a leaders' cultural competence may influence others. Similarly, this alignment indicates how transformative

leaders are dependent on their identified levels of cultural competence. It is also important to recognize that cultural competency evolves over time, through the process of attaining cultural knowledge; becoming aware of when cultural morals, values, beliefs, and practices are being demonstrated; being consciously sensitive to these behaviors; and purposely utilizing culturally based techniques while interacting with the workplace and with service delivery (Cross, 1989).

To institutionalize culturally inclusive practices that benefit all student groups, district leaders, such as those in the studied district, should understand how important it is to have a culturally proficient organization to ensure equity for all. District leaders are advised to first recognize the noble responsibility and influence they have, self-reflect and acknowledge biases, learn more about the groups in the community, and model cultural proficiency through transformative leadership. Fullan (2011) agreed that it is essential to design a well-crafted plan, which is part of a district strategic plan, that addresses implementation and sustainability of culturally proficient practices. This plan needs to include professional development for all staff, educational opportunities for cultural inclusivity for students and parents, and ongoing evaluation of practices. An intentional plan for embedding the desired culture into daily practices, procedures, communication, and curriculum needs to exist. It is essential that culturally proficient leaders recognize their cultural awareness and biases, value diversity, manage dynamics of difference, adapt to diversity, and advocate for equitable practices within an organization (R. Lindsey, Nuri- Robbins, Terrell, & D. Lindsey, 2018). A culturally proficient organization is not a program; it is a way of being, a practice to be infused in an organization to reflect who the leaders are rather than what they do (Ezzani, 2014).

For educational leadership preparation programs, the findings of this study might be useful for determining curricular designs that include the development of cultural competency.

Program designs are needed that prepare future educational leaders for dramatic cultural changes within a rapid-growth school district, guiding those future leaders to be intentional in how they address cultural variances during such changes within a district. Future school leaders must be prepared for meeting the needs of all students in the district, as well as the needs of campus teachers. Too often, preparation programs focus on helping future school leaders understand how curricular changes occur, how financial needs must be addressed, and how student achievement is seen as the report card for the district. Yet, often little attention is given to embedding cultural proficiency practices that are transformational. Future leaders should advocate for all students and all faculty; thus, preparation programs are needed that include experiences leading to an understanding of transformational policies and practices.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study revealed a strong relationship between district leaders' cultural competence and how those leaders can influence campus leaders' cultural competence. However, it would be interesting to see how each of the participants would rate themselves using the constructs of the cultural proficiency continuum framework. Recognizing the substantial influence that district leaders have on principals, another study might explore the influence of the school board on the superintendent and senior leadership, as well as the influence of principals on teachers, regarding cultural competence. Another study might replicate the design of the current study, in a suburban or an urban setting, to examine how transformational such district and campus leaders are and to ascertain how much influence those district leaders have on their direct reports. Also, replicating the current study in another rural setting with rapid growth might support, or possibly refute, the findings of this study. Different findings might be obtained in a study that surveys all district leaders, including those mentioned earlier and that

were not part of the current study, to determine any alignment with those leaders on the cultural competency continuum. It could be informative to look at a cross-section of urban, suburban, and rural district strategic plans, to determine evidence of where a given district is on the cultural competence continuum. Continuing to explore and provide research in the area of cultural competence in school leadership will strengthen the findings of this study and ultimately maximize opportunities for all.

Conclusions

As diversity increases in school communities, there is a critical need for school district leaders to have a deeper understanding of the role culture may play in the performance of school leaders, staff, and students. Hence, it is necessary that school district leaders consider how differences in culture can impact student achievement, in respect to academic and cultural gaps. Recognizing a need to equip themselves and campus leaders, as well as other stakeholders, with skills to enhance their interaction and communication with diverse populations is critical to afford all students equitable opportunities. It is essential that leaders see value in cultural proficiency and fully understand the role they play in influencing others.

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to explore a school district through a qualitative research method to better understand how school district leaders' cultural proficiency may influence a campus principal's cultural proficiency. Participants revealed evidence that aligned them with four of the stages on the continuum but did not place them at the least or the most inclusive stages. Through data collected from individual in-depth interviews, group observations, and document analysis, four themes emerged in this study regarding cultural competency: cultural differences, curricular programs, leadership awareness, and tradition.

Those four themes paired well with the four stages of the cultural competence continuum where participants aligned. This was evident in how often the language of the themes showed up when analyzing participants' placement on the continuum. The findings of this qualitative study have the potential to inform district leaders about how their levels of cultural competence can influence their principals' levels of cultural competence, as well as district policies and practices. The findings also may provide district leaders evidence of how essential transformative leadership is for a growing district.

APPENDIX A

SUPERINTENDENT AND ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent Interview Protocol

Pathway ISD- District Leadership

Interviewee (Title and pseudonym): _____

Interviewer: Katie Babb

I am a doctoral candidate in educational leadership at the University of North Texas and am working on my dissertation. You were selected to speak with me today because you are identified as someone who has a great deal to share about campus leadership in a district with shifting demographics. My research project focuses on the influence of leadership in a district changing in demographics, with an interest in understanding how district leadership influences campus principals. The purpose of this study is not to evaluate your techniques or experiences. Rather, I am seeking to learn more about district leadership practices that help improve campus leadership practices within a district that is rapidly growing toward a change in student demographics. To facilitate my note taking, with your permission, I would like to audio tape our conversations today. I am the only person who will be privy to the recordings, which will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

Thank you for consenting to participate in the study. This interview should last approximately one hour. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete the line of questioning. Do you have any questions before we begin?

A. Interviewee Background

1. Describe your academic background and your professional experiences.
2. Describe the demographics of your district. What are the district's strengths and challenges related to these demographics? What are the projections for district demographics 10 years from now? (RQ1)

B. Leadership Perspective

1. Describe the ways you are involved in supporting campus leadership as your district faces demographic changes? To what extent do you see a widening of the circle of awareness or engagement of demographic shifts? (RQ overarching) Probe: What factors influence how you guide campus leaders?
2. Describe the overall district strategies in place to support campus leaders as they encounter demographic shifts. Probes: Please note the purpose of the strategy, how and when it was developed, how it is administered. (RQ 3)
3. Describe resources that are available for district leaders and principals as the district addresses significant enrollment growth and demographic shifts. (RQ 1 & 3)
4. What district initiatives are currently in place to address a growing student enrollment and the demographic changes occurring in the district? What is being accomplished through these district-based initiatives? (RQ overarching & 3)
5. Describe any resistance you or the stakeholders (staff, students, parents, community) in this district have already encountered regarding reforms necessary to address the growing student enrollment and the shift in district demographics. Probe: How did you respond to that resistance? (RQ overarching, 1 & 3)
6. What are some of the major challenges you face as district leaders in attempting to evolve yourself and your principals in leadership and growth? What are the major opportunities? (RQ overarching, 1 & 3)

C. Community Awareness

1. Describe your view of how much the district community members are aware of the impact of enrollment growth and demographic shifts. (RQ overarching)
2. Describe when, where, and how your approach to leading the district in the face of enrollment growth and demographic shifts is discussed. (RQ overarching & 3)
3. To what extent is the influence of your leadership valued within the district, regarding enrollment growth and demographic shifts? (RQ 3)

D. Influence of Leaders

1. What are the characteristics that you associate with district or campus leaders who are successful in implementing initiatives or effective leadership in a district with shifting populations? (RQ overarching)
2. What types of leadership development opportunities do you see emerging in the district for district leaders as well as principals? (Institutional or disciplinary) (RQ 3)
3. What professional development activities do you have planned for principals as they adjust to population shifts? How frequently do you visit with campus leaders to address their concerns related to population shifts? (RQ overarching, 1 & 3)

E. Additional information

Is there anything else you would like to say that might help with my study?

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:

APPENDIX B
PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Principal Interview Protocol

Pathway ISD- District Leadership

Interviewee (Title and pseudonym): _____

Interviewer: Katie Babb

Note: I will begin the interview by informing the interviewee about myself and the study. Pertinent background will be provided, such as leadership being an essential component for systemic change by assisting school leaders with systemic cultural competence, which can impact students' ultimate success. Leaders must also be aware of conditions and efforts which cultivate cultural competence through ongoing learning, generate schools which are supportive toward these efforts, and allocate resources toward closing the educational and opportunity gap. Understanding, development in cultural competence is a process; the discussion will contribute to answering the research questions for the study. It also allows examination of cultural competence identifying strengths and areas of personal and professional growth, to assist staff in examining cultural competence within the district.

An explanation will be provided regarding the audio-recording of the interview and that responses will be strictly confidential. They will also be informed that if there is something they would like to say off audio-recording, I will oblige by stopping the recording midstream for their commentary.

A. Interviewee Background

1. Describe your academic background and your professional experiences.
2. Describe the demographics of your district and any recent changes you have encountered. Probes: How have these changes impacted your district? What changes in demographics, if any, are projected for your district over the next 10 years?? (RQ2)

B. Leadership Perspective

1. What district strategies are in place to support you as a campus leader as you plan for meeting the needs of enrollment growth and demographic changes? Probes: Please give an example: note the purpose of the strategy, how and when it was developed, how it is administered. (RQ 3)
2. In what other ways have district leaders supported you or helped you respond to demographic changes? To what extent do you see a widening of the circle of awareness or engagement of demographic shifts? (RQ overarching)
3. What types of resources are available to you to address increased enrollment and changing student populations? (RQ 2 & 3)
4. What types of district initiatives are in place to address this growth and change in student populations? (RQ overarching & 3) Probe: Please give some examples and explain what is being accomplished with these initiatives.
5. How have these changes in enrollment and demographics affected district staff, students, parents, the community? Have you or the stakeholders encountered resistance regarding reforms necessary to address the growing student enrollment and the shift in district demographics. Probe: How did you respond to that resistance? (RQ overarching, 2 & 3) Probe: Ask for examples.
6. Have you faced any challenges as a district and/or principal in your attempts to respond to these changes and growth? Probe: Can you give me some examples? (RQ overarching, 2 & 3)

C. Community Awareness

1. How much do you think the members of the community are aware of the changing student demographics and their impact on the district? (RQ overarching) Probe: How are you engaged with various community members and groups in this effort? (RQ2)
2. What leadership approach have you taken on your campus due to the changes in your student populations? (RQ overarching & 3)
4. Do you believe your leadership approach and involvement with the community and its various groups is valued? Probe: In what ways? Can you give me an example? (RQ 3)

D. Influence of Leaders

1. What are the characteristics that you associate with district or campus leaders that make them successful in meeting the needs of various demographic groups? Probe: How frequently do district leaders visit with you to address your concerns related to population changes? (RQ overarching)
2. What types of leadership development opportunities do you see emerging in the district for district leaders as well as principals? (Institutional or disciplinary) (RQ 3)

3. What professional development activities do you have planned for your staff as they adjust to population changes? (RQ overarching, 2 & 3)

E. Additional information

Is there anything else you would like to add that you haven't mentioned?

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:

APPENDIX C
DISTRICT CENTRAL OFFICE LEADERS/ PRINCIPAL MEETING OBSERVATION
PROTOCOL

Date: __ Type of Meeting: _____

Time: __ Participants Present: _____

Location: _____ Non-Participants Present (by category): _____

During the meeting, with participant permission, I will audio record and take running notes. I

will note specific records of whether the following items are discussed and/or used:

District & Campus leadership meeting Observation List	Notes/Comments
1. Purpose of meeting	
2. Frequency of this meeting	
3. Topics discussed	
4. Characteristics of leadership style	
5. Verbal and nonverbal behaviors, statements of cultural competence	
6. Interactions with other leaders Authentication of Cultural Competence Focus on historical factors Observation of elements of Cultural Competence	
Capacity Building- Evolving leadership Self-awareness of self as leader Reflection on role of leader Self-evaluation Examples or evidence of influence of leaders including who and how	
Other questions or items I will look for: Formal agenda; who generated it; levels of interaction among participants; formal and informal discussions	

APPENDIX D
SUPERINTENDENT AND ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT MEETING OBSERVATION
PROTOCOL

Date: __ Type of Meeting: _____

Time: __ Participants Present: _____

Location: _____

With participant permission, I will audio record and take running notes during the meeting. I will note specific records of whether the following items are discussed and/or used.

District Office Leadership Meeting	Notes/Comments
1. Purpose of the meeting	
2. Frequency of this meeting	
3. Topics & initiatives discussed	
4. Characteristics of leadership style	
5. Verbal and nonverbal behaviors	
6. Interactions among attendees	
7. Statements of cultural competence	
8. Examples of levels of cultural competence	
9. Capacity Building- Evolving leadership Awareness of self as leader Reflection on role of leader Self-evaluation Examples of influence, including who and how	
Other items I will look for: Formal agenda (who generated it); levels of interaction among participants; formal versus informal discussions	

APPENDIX E

SUPERINTENDENT AT SCHOOL BOARD MEETING OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Date: __

Time: __

Location: _____

I will note specific instances of how the superintendent leads and responds to school board members.

District & Campus leadership meeting Observation List	Notes/Comments
1. Purpose of meeting	
2. Frequency of this meeting	
3. Topics & initiatives discussed	
4. Characteristics of leadership style	
5. Verbal and nonverbal behaviors, statement of cultural competence	
6. Interactions with board members Authentication of Cultural Competence Focus on historical factors Observation of elements of Cultural Competence	
Capacity Building- Evolving leadership Self-awareness of self as leader Reflection on role of leader Self-evaluation Examples or evidence of influence of leaders including who and how	
Other questions or items I will look for: Formal agenda; who generated it; levels of interaction among participants; formal and informal discussions	

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