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# Advancing Equity-Minded Leadership Practices to Improve Educational Outcomes for Black Immigrant Students: A Phenomenological Case Study

Charmaine C. Marshall

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Seattle University

2023

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## Abstract

As schools become increasingly diverse, there has been increasing demand for accountability for school districts to seek to improve student performance (Portz, 2021). A qualitative phenomenological research study was used to explore how school leaders in Seattle Public Schools were responding to the academic needs of Somali immigrant students, the largest Black immigrant group in the district. By using equity mindedness as the theoretical framework, the research study examined how the response to Somali immigrant students might also promote positive outcomes for other historically marginalized and underserved students. This study recruited participants who were former and current school principals, members of the principals of the Association of Washington School Principals and the Principals Association of Seattle. Two research questions guided this study and centered on how school leaders enacted equity mindedness in their decision making and practices. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyze the qualitative dataset. The four overarching themes that emerged from the data included: (a) critical self-reflection that inspires asset-based perceptions and transformative work, (b) proactive listening and strong collaborations that lead to achieving the school community's common good, (c) equity-minded leaders promote a safe learning environment and access to culturally responsive resources, and (d) equity-minded leaders leverage structures and processes to build a culturally responsive school for students and staff. This dissertation offers tremendous opportunity for future research because the goal of achieving and promoting equity-minded policies in education is multifaceted, complex, and transferrable to other marginalized and historically underserved students.

*Keywords:* immigrants, equity-minded, school principals, Somali, marginalization, transcendental phenomenology

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work to my ancestors, the maroons of Jamaica, whose strength and resilience were lifelines that I drew on when I felt like giving up. This dissertation is possible because of them. I know the shoulders that I stand on and I am eternally grateful for the path that was cleared for me. This dissertation is dedicated especially to my late mother, Evelyn Whyte. I will never forget your prayers and words of encouragement. To my sister, Sonia, and my brother, Junior, for your daily encouraging calls! Thanks to the amazing teachers and staff at Bryant Elementary, Seattle, WA, especially my administrative secretary (and lifeline), Amy Shanafelt, retired teacher Kevin Gallagher, Pauline Pfohl, and Kathleen Brown. To Eric, Evan and Chase, the loves of my life, this work was ultimately completed because of your insistence and to demonstrate the importance of grit! This work is ultimately dedicated to the countless immigrants who continue to enrich the U.S. educational landscape and those who support them to achieve their dream!

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

Early scholarship in educational leadership (Taylor, 1987) asserted that educational policies were designed by a "White, male, avowedly heterosexual, able-bodied elite, primarily for the elite, and had failed children from disadvantaged backgrounds" (p. 13). Consequently, educational policies have mirrored the racial inequities found in society. Equal opportunities and radical transformation in educational leadership are needed (McCray & Beachum, 2014; Taylor, 1987). Radical transformation includes large scale change in recruitment, curriculum, and pedagogy to develop more culturally agile leaders. The role and scope of the school leader as a social justice leader is equally important.

Contemporary public schools and their leaders were tasked with providing access to equal educational opportunities for all students. Even though racial integration and globalization had shifted the discourse on the concept of school leadership, knowledge production remains exclusionary to the dominant culture, or Whiteness. Hallinger and Kovačević (2021) noted, from 1960 to 2018, 83% of contributors to *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership*, a preeminent journal in the field of educational leadership, came from four anglophone countries: United States, Canada, United Kingdom, and Australia. Other major educational leadership publications, like *Journal of Educational Policy, Educational Administration Quarterly* and *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership*, were striving to promote research from underrepresented, indigenous or native authors in non-Eurocentric countries such as Africa, Latin America, and Asia authored by indigenous or native researchers. The underrepresentation of indigenous voices, Black voices, and other minority scholars had not only resulted in inequality, exclusion, and stigma, but also had inadequately prepared school leaders to support

the changing demographics of U.S. schools and increasingly marginalized communities (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Taylor & Piche, 1991).

Enrollment of multilingual learners (MLL) increased exponentially from 4.9 to 5.1 million (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022) since 2010. The diversity of languages and cultures present in the United States has been reflected in urban and rural schools. MLLs are defined as students who identify as culturally and linguistically diverse and are qualified to receive English language instruction (He & Yu, 2017). Black immigrant students from sub-Saharan African countries shared the intersectional characteristics and lived experiences of MLL students and U.S. born Black students. Darling-Hammond (1990) further noted the U.S. educational system was one of the most unequal in the industrialized world and that students routinely received dramatically different learning opportunities based on their social status. Gándara and Orfield (2012) found that MLLs were generally from lower socioeconomic households with varying levels of academic abilities and gaps in education. In the Seattle area, the economic disparity was more dire for Somali students (Aileen Balahadia Consultation, 2016). The 2014 American Community Survey (ACS) report in Seattle confirmed the wealth gap existed for Somalis because they, like other immigrants, had significant decreased levels of homeownership (Aileen Balahadia Consultation, 2016). This wealth gap was reflected in educational opportunities. According to the 2014 ACS report, 8.1% of Somalis over 18 do not have any formal schooling versus 1% of other Seattle residents. At the time of the 2014 ACS survey, 14.1% of Somali women had given birth in the last 12 month versus 4.3% of other Seattle residents, who would be, as of 2024, school age in Seattle schools. However, the high cost of living has forced over 54% of Somalis to be on public assistance versus 10% of other demographic groups. According to Equity in Education Coalition (n.d), in 2016, 60% of White

children in Seattle Public Schools attended the highest performing public schools in the district, versus only 8% of Black children. In addition, only 1 in 4 elementary schools in southeast Seattle, where the majority the Somali student attend, is considered high performing, compared to 67% of elementary schools in the rest of the district (Aileen Balahadia Consultation, 2016).

Much of the educational literature regarding social justice leadership (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Theoharis, 2010) examined how principals, informed by social justice theory, developed a leadership philosophy to (a) factor in the unique needs of learners to transform curriculum and best instructional practices, (b) change the school's culture and climate, and (c) establish partnership with members of the community and the stakeholders.

As the state became more diverse, the Washington State Professional Educator Standards Board created the Cultural Competency Standards to ensure educators developed and honed their cultural competence at each progressing level of the educator continuum (i.e., preservice, induction, professional, and career). The Cultural Competency Standards ensured that students had access to school leaders who were knowledgeable of their histories and contexts, were culturally competent, could access community and family resources, and had skills in adapting instruction to students' experiences and individual cultural contexts. Furthermore, in 2021, this policy was updated to include a deeper lens of cultural competency, diversity, equity, and inclusion standards. The standards demonstrated the state's commitment to cultural responsiveness, dismantling systemic racist practices, and ensuring all educators are prepared to recognize diversity as an asset and build upon students' diverse strengths (Washington State Professional Educator Board, n.d.).

## Problem Statement

School leaders and districts in the United States have responded to the educational needs of Black, Brown, disabled, immigrant, and other marginalized groups (Khalifa, et al., 2016). The response has been influenced by a myriad of factors including state and district fiscal policies, leader and teacher preparation programs, legacy of systemic racism, and other exclusionary practices and policies (Khalifa et al., 2016; Muhammad, 2022). Significant progress has been achieved in improving educational equity; yet demographic and socioeconomic factors continue to impact the educational process (Nation's Report Card, 2017). In Washington State, schools were also impacted by the increasing number of Black immigrants from Somalia (Kumi-Yeboah et al., 2020; Watson & Knight-Manuel, 2017). According to the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (n.d.), Somali students were the largest Black immigrant demographic in K–12 public schools (OSPI, n.d.).

Lopez and Jean-Marie (2021) posited that systemic anti-Black racism and Islamophobia created a cumulative disadvantage for Somali students. Consequently, some Somali students may have struggled for acceptance, integration, and a high-quality education because of the intersectionality of being Black and the stigma of their religion. The Office of Public Instruction and schools in King County, WA, conducted a comprehensive qualitative study with an appreciative inquiry approach with members of the East African community in 1996 begin to understand the needs of the Somali community, including recommendations to address the specific concerns of all stakeholders (OSPI., n.d.). Most school leadership development programs fostered and sustained a Eurocentric or westernized epistemology that stigmatized the history and experiences of Black immigrants (Taylor, 1987). These students experienced less than optimal educational outcomes because district policies and leadership practices relied on a

single, homogenous approach to address future educational transformations, new roles, and habits (Kim & Senge, 1994). Theorists (e.g., Anderson, 1988; Fulmer, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2004; Waters et al., 2004) had found the importance of school leadership in promoting academic success and improving student outcomes for marginalized students.

A multifaceted examination of the practices of school leaders was proposed for Seattle Public Schools with a high enrollment of Somali students. The increasing complexity of this problem suggested that a qualitative research design approach would have provided comprehensive data and offered greater insight into solving this vexing problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, using equity-minded leadership as the theoretical framework would have assisted school leaders in addressing the historical and systemic educational barriers Black domestic students and Black immigrant students, including Somalis, experienced.

## Purpose Statement

This qualitative research study aimed to explore how school leaders in Seattle Public Schools responded to the needs of Somali immigrant students, as at the time of the study they were the most rapidly growing Black immigrant group in the district (OSPI, n.d.). Additionally, equity-minded leadership was used as the conceptual framework, and the study examined how researching the school leaders' response to Somali immigrant students might have helped contemporary school leadership promote positive outcomes for other groups of immigrant students, specifically those who identify as Black.

## Research Questions

The following questions guided this qualitative study:

1. What are the salient skills and competencies school leaders need to have to support the academic needs of immigrant students, specifically Somali students?

2. How can they use these leadership skills and competencies to address the needs of Somali and other immigrant students?

## Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

An equity-minded theory was used as the theoretical framework of this study. The American Psychological Association (n.d.) employed a definition of equity that included creating opportunities for historically underrepresented populations to have equal access to and participate in educational programs that effectively eliminated the achievement gaps in academic achievement and completion. Venet (2023) forwarded that equity mindedness was a perspective or schema that guided an organization's policies, practices, and actions to recognize and redress oppressive systems. Furthermore, the practice of equity mindedness is characterized continuous self-reflection, examining, and identifying who had been most directly impacted by racist policies, and it questioned the status quo to ensure that equity was at the forefront of the work, followed by action. Venet (2023) examined trauma-informed educational practice notes and stated that equity should be the focus of those practices if one wanted to promote sustainable positive change. The equity-minded theoretical framework was antiracist and against all forms of exclusionary practices. Venet (2023) also proposed that equity-minded leaders should ensure that all students, regardless of race, had access to high quality education and the resources they needed to be successful in school.

## Equity-Minded Theory

As communities and schools became increasingly more diverse, there remained an urgent mandate for school districts to seek solutions to promote the academic achievement for historically marginalized and underserved students, including Black students, immigrant students, and Muslim students. The equity-minded framework presented here could be used to

better understand the practices and policies through which K–12 institutions in Seattle and Washington state strove to promote, enact equity, and improve outcomes for Somali students and other students furthest away from educational justice.

The equity-minded theory was evident in other social justice-related conceptual frameworks, including funds of knowledge theory (González et al., 2005), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018), and most recently, culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016). According to Gregory et al. (2016), this pedagogy directly countered other exclusionary approaches (e.g., discipline, suspensions), which had rendered school leaders unable to adapt effectively to an evolving and complex K–12 educational environment.

Seattle Public Schools 2019–24 Strategic Plan – Seattle Excellence supports teaching and learning to improve academic and socio–economic outcomes for historically underserved Students of Color. The concept of equity-mindedness was aligned with the tenets of Seattle excellence, which was guided by the vision and principles of targeted universalism—a strategic framework where targeted and differentiated efforts were required to meet the needs of specific student populations (e.g., Somali) so every student met the universal goal. Targeted universalism, like equity-mindedness , support the needs of marginalized students who were removed from societal neglect to the center of societal care at the same time that more powerful or favored groups' needs were addressed (Powell et al., 2019).

## Significance of the Study

This qualitative research study provided more insight into the scholarship on leadership development and process improvement to support the increasingly diverse demographic of Black immigrants and other marginalized students focused on the growing Somali immigrant

population in Seattle Public Schools. At the macro level, this inquiry sought to expand the existing literature and research by gathering relevant data for school districts that underwent tremendous demographic shifts with increased numbers of marginalized students who had varying educational needs.

Findings from this study improved the understanding that the equity-minded framework had impacted how school leaders responded to demographic shifts. Contemporary educational research needed more authentic and indigenous voices from historically marginalized groups (Conrad, 2022). Brown (2004) proposed that contributions from marginalized communities warranted a more accurate perspective in academic literature. This research was significant because it incorporated contemporary and emerging concepts that celebrated the mythology of historically marginalized groups from an in-group researcher perspective and had input from school principals who led schools with underrepresented immigrant students (Bolden & Kirk, 2012; Fitzgerald, 2006).

## Summary

Chapter 1 explored how school leaders in Seattle Public Schools responded to the needs of Somali students, the largest Black immigrant demographic group in Seattle (World Population Review, 2024). The initial chapter included the introduction, problem statement, purpose statement, theoretical or conceptual framework, and significance of the study. The study used equity-minded leadership as the conceptual framework and examined the responses to the needs of Somali students to help current school leaders promote positive outcomes for other marginalized groups. Two additional aims of this research were to inform school districts and leaders on implementing and enacting policies and practices that promoted equity-minded leadership practices. The study sought to add to the emerging scholarly discourse on the theory

of equity-mindedness mindedness from the perspective of school leaders committed to dismantling systemic exclusionary practices and promoting improved academic outcomes for marginalized student populations.

# Chapter 2. Literature Review

Mills and Gay (2019) stated a literature review is essential to the research process. Reviewing existing literature provided vital contextual information for examining the research questions that guided the study. This qualitative study aimed to examine the experiences of K–12 school leaders in Seattle Public Schools and how they enacted equity-minded leadership practices to promote improved educational outcomes for Somali students. Koch (2007) noted that educational researchers had been striving for decades to understand how to meet the needs of immigrant students. This study also reviewed literature addressing race, religion, and the intersectionality of race, religion, and culture in the U.S. educational system (Ramasubramanian et al., 2021).

Khalifa et al. (2016) argued that racial disparities and inequities have characterized the U.S. educational system since its inception, and have created and exacerbated systemic disparities in wealth and social status. Krulatz and Christison (2023) noted multilingual learners—those experiencing economic instability, immigrants, and minoritized racial groups—have little to no access to quality educational opportunities, high-quality resources, and highly qualified teachers, and principals were often marginalized in school settings. Miller and Martin (2015) stated that 21st century principals must develop skills and strategies to promote a learning environment that fostered optimum learning outcomes for diverse students. Bensimon et al. (2006) shared that since the 1980s across the country, school administrators were beginning to have real conversations about diversity, equity, inclusion, and antiracism in education.

The literature review's focus was broad. The research questions provided ample justification to investigate the literature on the intersectionality of race and religion in leadership development programs, pedagogy, and practice—and the impact on marginalized students,

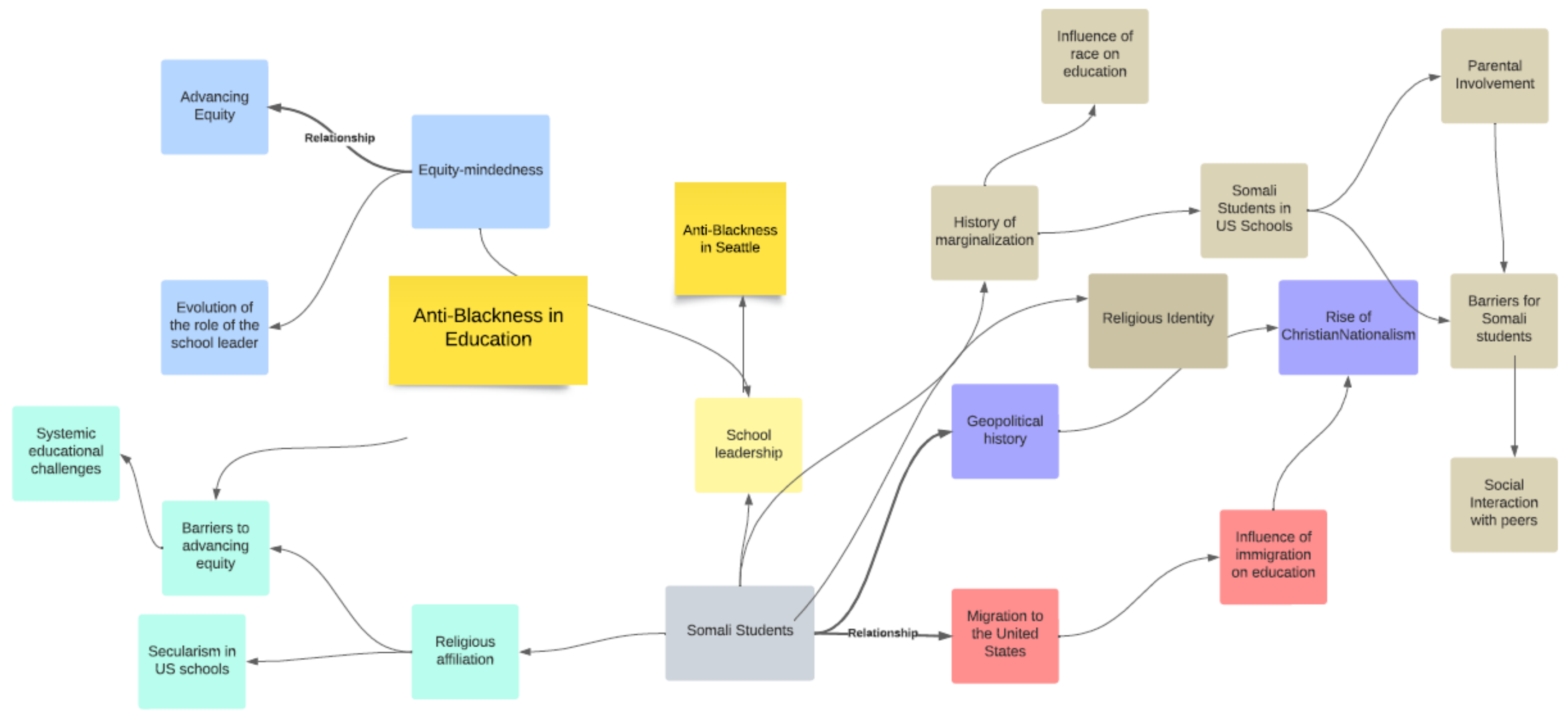
specifically Somali immigrant students. The context of the study provided merit in examining the historical and contemporary implications of educational inequities, the historical leadership development programs, and the evolution in leadership pedagogy and practice. Additionally, the literature review provided the rationale for the selected qualitative research methodology. Finally, the literature review justified further investigation into how past exclusionary and anti-Black practices continued to have ripple effects on contemporary leadership practices and their implications for the educational outcomes of this new immigrant group (Sevon, 2022).

The literature reviewed in this chapter addressed the marginalization of Somali students and how equity-minded leaders could successfully promote their academic achievement. According to García and Guerra (2004) and Simone (2012), marginalized students are usually of low socioeconomic status from families whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds differ from those of their White peers. For Ryan and Rottmann (2007), marginalized students experience exclusion because of how their identit(y)ies, typically related to gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Freire (2001) and Simone (2012) defined marginalized or oppressed as the minority groups who are excluded from the dominant groups along race, class, gender, language, and ethnicity lines. The conceptualization of equity could be viewed through various lenses, including differing meanings due to varied life experiences, race, and cultural backgrounds. In Webster's dictionary, *equity* is defined as the state, quality, or ideal of being just, impartial, and fair. For my dissertation, *mind* means to observe or pay close attention. In this study, *minded* refers to a focus on equity and the mindset of principals. So, *equity-minded leadership* refers to a leadership style in which leaders commit to advancing what is fair and equitable, while promoting the academic achievement of marginalized students in their schools.

Although a majority of the emerging researchers studying African students in the United States had concentrated on the academic performance of early immigrants, far fewer had been writing about school officials' (and districts') views toward this new immigrant population. Roxas (2010) proposed that Somali students in public schools encountered systemic discrimination akin to the discrimination against their ethnic group (i.e., Bantu), and the civil war in their native country resulted in sporadic access to education and minimal success. Roxas underscored that U.S. educators had no contextual knowledge of Somali culture. School leaders lacked cultural agility, were ill equipped, and failed to meet Somali students' social, emotional, and academic needs. The research questions served as a lens to evaluate the validity and significance of the findings for the proposed problem statement. The literature map highlighted the common themes identified in the literature review and relevant literature related to the overarching subject. Figure 1 depict the first themes identified in the initial phases of the literature study.

**Figure 1**

*Literature Topic Mapping*



The literature review also chronicles (a) the history of marginalization in education, (b) influence of race on education, (c) anti-Blackness in Seattle, (d) anti-Blackness in education, (e) Somali migration to the United States, (f) geopolitical history, (g) Somali students in U.S. schools, (h) barriers for Somali students, (i) parental involvement and barriers, (j) social interaction with peers, (k) religious affiliation, (l) resettlement, (m) secularism in U.S. schools, (n) religion in Washington State and Seattle Schools, (o) the influence of immigration on education, (p) systemic educational challenges, (q) the evolution of the role of the school leader, (r) theoretical framework, (s) equity-minded approach, and (t) the importance of school leadership in advancing equity.

## History of Marginalization in Education

A deeper understanding of the marginalization, traumatic and exclusionary practices, and policies in the contemporary U.S. educational system required an examination of the historical context that defined the foundations of present-day K–12 public education. Anderson (1988) asserted the exclusionary practices originated from the urgency to subjugate an increasing African slave population. Anderson (1988) noted, "It was believed that Virginia's peace, prosperity, and civilization depended as much, if not more, on the containment and repression of literate culture among its enslaved population as it did on the diffusion of literate culture among its free population" (p. 1).

Anderson (1988) further added that after the abolition of slavery in 1863, "the organization, scope, and schooling were transformed into an articulated structure of free, tax-supported public institutions" (p. 2). Many formerly enslaved people fought for access to educational opportunities but faced continued disenfranchisement from federal and state legislatures. Laws, especially in the southern states, were enacted to legalize segregation, which

made it difficult for Black Americans to take advantage of the reforms in public schools (Anderson, 1988; Hillstrom, 2013). Sharp (2016) documented that segregation had been permissible since the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* statute as long as Black institutions were considered equivalent to White institutions. It was not until the 1954 case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, that segregation in schools was ruled illegal. Hillstrom (2013) stated "segregation forced Blacks to accept facilities and services that were inferior in every way. African American students attended schools that were grossly dilapidated, unheated, overcrowded, and understaffed" (p. 66). Additionally, Hillstrom (2013) cited, in 1910 in Beaufort, South Carolina, the state spent $40.68 for each White student and only $5.95 per Black pupil. These significant disparities prevailed until the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision because Black students were considered second-class citizens, intellectually inferior, and incapable of benefiting from the resources (Hillstrom, 2013).

Schmidt et al. (2009) stated the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 "proved to be the most important of federal legislation for advancing the desegregation of schools, while the Title VI of the Act provided a mechanism whereby federal funds could be withheld from school districts that failed to eliminate discrimination" (p. xii). A year later, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to incentivize schools to integrate while penalizing those states that refused to allow African American students access to predominantly White institutions. McGuin (2015) noted that ESEA was one of the most significant pieces of legislation, and Title I was central to that legislation. Title I emphasized federal support for underrepresented and disadvantaged states, despite opposition to federal action from certain states.

States were given the authority to manage the billions of dollars in funding for education and the five titles or components of the legislation. However, the federal government was met with tremendous resistance from southern states, who continued to resist desegregation efforts. However, McGuin (2015) highlighted that the stipulation to receive ESEA funds resulted in prioritizing equity as an education policy. The reauthorization of ESEA led to other legislation, including the 2002 No Child Left Behind, that began addressing African American students' educational needs (Thomas & Brady, 2005).

However, with the passage of the Every Child Succeeds Act in 2015, some critics, including Alvoid and Black (2014) and Heise (2018) argued that because it was less restrictive than previous legislation, it grossly limited the federal government's power over education and relinquished more authority for states to self-regulate, much of the progress toward advancing equity in schools had been significantly undermined or undone. States were ultimately allowed to decide the level of resources that they spent on students from disadvantaged backgrounds, unraveling decades of federal protections (Ray, 2023).

The literature reviewed highlighted the historical and contemporary legislations enacted to level the playing field and, subsequently, promoted more equitable policies and practices for African American students and other students of color, and the systemic maneuvers to marginalize and reverse the gains made. Therefore, it was essential to examine the challenges that educational leaders faced and explore the strategies they had taken to advance equitable practices. This research was vital because African American students continued to face structural inequities—disparities that have also resulted in less-than-optimal academic and social-emotional results for Somali students, which were compounded by the intersectionality of race and religion (Bigelow, 2008; Koch, 2007; Pollock, 2004).

**Influence of Race on Education**

Darling-Hammond (2020) asserted the educational experiences of African American and other minority students in the United States continued to be substantially separate and unequal despite the assertion of equality. The U.S. educational system was one of the most inequitable systems in the industrialized world, and students routinely received vastly different learning opportunities based on their race (López, 2003). López (2003) further added that racism had evolved from overt displays of hate to a more discreet system that permeated the educational system.

Researchers, including Schofield (1991), have shown that systemic inequity in schools persisted because Black, indigenous students of color were concentrated in high-minority schools. National enrollment trends highlighted that one third of Black students were enrolled in deeply segregated schools (90% or more minority enrollment), with most schools located in metropolitan cities (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022). Inequitable school funding disproportionately harmed Black and Brown economically disadvantaged students (Taylor & Piche, 1991). Tatum (2007) proposed the economic effects of racism are measurable and impactful. Housing discrimination, underemployment, and incarceration were all sustained and exacerbated because of systemic racism. Many of the states with the highest intrastate disparities in educational expenditures were central manufacturing states. In these states, many economically disadvantaged and minority students residing in property-poor urban districts received the lowest educational expenditures (Allegretto et al., 2021). Tatum (2007) noted that inequalities in reading achievement among students could be accounted for not by socioeconomic class or race but by the quality of teaching they received.

Increasing research has shown that the quality of instruction received by African American pupils was significantly inferior to that of White students, resulting in a racial achievement gap by the conclusion of the first grade (Assari et al., 2021). However, Aronson et al. (2002) argued that stereotype threat characterizes Black students as intellectually inferior without factoring in the complexity and impact of fiscal policy on hiring, training, and retention of highly qualified teachers in high poverty schools. Additionally, the mischaracterization and delegitimization of the intellectual capabilities of Black students has failed to address the issue holistically and contextually (Morgan, 2020). In the literature, there was an imbalance in the historical records about the best instructional practices that have been used to support Black students, particularly Black immigrant students (King, 2019; Krasnoff, 2016; Smedley et al., 2001). Additionally, Black domestic students and African immigrant students have voiced feelings and experiences of invisibility, marginality, and exclusion in U.S. schools (Esquivel, 2003). Federal legislation, like No Child Left Behind, had not successfully promoted equitable access to high-quality education.

**Anti-Blackness in Seattle, Washington**

The University of Washington Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project (Gregory, 2006) documented that Seattle was as committed to racial supremacy as other regions of the United States for much of its history. James Gregory was the director of the University of Washington's online Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project and a history professor. He had chronicled the history of segregation and the activists who fought for civil rights in Seattle, not in the South. The study noted Black people and other people of color were excluded from most occupations, neighborhoods, schools, stores, restaurants, hotels, and other commercial establishments, including hospitals. Gregory (2006) noted Seattle prided itself on being a liberal

city with a respectable track record of racial inclusion. However, it was a city with a short memory. One should not forget that Seattle was a sharply racially segregated city only a few decades ago, and in recent years, gentrification had returned because of income inequities.

Gregory (2006) further noted that north of the ship canal in Seattle was a “sundown” zone until the late 1960s. As a result, hardly any people of color lived there, and African Americans were expected to leave after work. Particularly after dark, Black people were routinely stopped and interrogated by police and warned not to return to the area. North Seattle and other neighborhoods, including Queen Anne, Magnolia, and West Seattle, also had “sundown” clauses. It was far worse in the suburbs, where Black people and other people of color were actively discouraged and legally prohibited from living in Shoreline, Lake Forest Park, Bothell, Bellevue, Burien, and even White Center. The ship canal, however, represented a different type of barrier, a clear demarcation between the areas of Seattle that were off-limits to people of color (Gregory, 2006).

Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project (Gregory, 2006) vividly described that in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, restrictive covenants played a significant role in determining municipal demographics, according to Silva (2009). Neighborhoods in north Seattle, west Seattle, south Seattle, and the new subdivisions across Lake Washington enacted deed restrictions that excluded families of color and occasionally Jewish families. William Boeing, the founder of Boeing Aircraft, acquired vast tracts of land in what is now northwest Seattle and Shoreline to develop and sell residential lots and residences jointly with his wife, Bertha were the most prominent private landowners who enacted restrictive covenants prohibiting people of color from residing in these subdivisions (Schultz & Wilma, 2006).

Central neighborhoods, including Capitol Hill, Queen Anne, and Madison Park, adopted covenants (Honig & Rainey, 2019). By the end of the 1920s, a circuit of deed restrictions limited the alternatives available to persons of color. The only "open neighborhoods" in Seattle were the older areas of the Central District and Chinatown. African Americans, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Filipino Americans, and a portion of the Jewish population shared a ghetto that followed an L-shape from the International District, east along a corridor of blocks surrounding Jackson Street, then north along a corridor surrounding 23rd Avenue to Madison. After 1948, covenants lost their legal force, but the segregation map they helped to create lasted much longer (Gregory, 2020; Moskovitz, 2024).

## What Is a Racial Restrictive Covenant?

The Civic Unity Committee defined and upheld the racial restrictive covenants in their 1946 publication as agreements entered into by a group of property owners, subdivision developers, or real estate operators in a given neighborhood, binding them not to sell, lease, or otherwise convey their property to specified groups based on race, creed, or color for a specified period unless all parties agree to the transaction (Gregory, 2020; Patti et al., 2015). When a restrictive covenant existed on a property deed or plat map, it was prohibited for the owner to sell to the minority group or groups specified in the covenant. Thus, these contracts limited the signer's and all subsequent property owners' ability to sell to whomever they wished. A property owner who violated the restriction could be sued and held financially liable. Due to this legal requirement, ethnic restrictions were rarely challenged, which was the primary factor contributing to their effectiveness. Additionally, the use of ethnic restrictive covenants rendered zoning regulations obsolete and served to segregate cities without holding municipal leaders accountable (Boyer, 1986; Gregory, 2020).

In 1917, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that municipal segregation ordinances were unconstitutional, which marked the beginning of the pervasive use of racially restrictive covenants (Newcombe, 2022). The court ruled in *Buchanan v. Warley* that flagrant segregation ordinances violated the Fourteenth Amendment. A decade later, the Supreme Court upheld the legality of restrictive neighborhood covenants, which segregationists had adopted in response to this decision (W. R. Day & The Supreme Court of America, 1917). In 1926, *Corrigan v. Buckley* ruled that although the Fourteenth Amendment prohibited states from enacting laws based on race, private deeds and developer plat maps were not similarly affected. Individuals who entered into covenant agreements did so voluntarily, whereas populations were forced to comply with segregation ordinances (Evans, 2024). Therefore, racially restrictive covenants have supplanted segregation ordinances to promote and establish residential segregation among races in U.S. cities.

The National Housing Act of 1934 also contributed to the increase of these covenants (Evan, 2024). The Housing Act, enacted during the Great Depression to preserve affordable housing, established the practice of *redlining*, or drawing lines on city maps to indicate the optimal geographic areas for bank investment and mortgage sales. These regions were considered unsuitable for mortgage support, and banks were discouraged from offering mortgages in these regions. This law fostered inequality as banks refused to lend money to properties below a specific price. It exacerbated racial segregation in other areas of facet of life (Federal Reserve History, 2023).

Contributors from Historylink.org, including Honig and Rainey (2019), have chronicled that the Housing Act encouraged land developers, real estate agents, and community members to draft racially restrictive covenants to prevent redlining of neighborhoods. This trend was evident

on the redlined "residential security maps," which divided cities based on their racial demographics to determine the economic desirability of specific neighborhoods. This practice financially justified racially restrictive covenants and permitted widespread implementation. In addition, redlining made it extremely difficult for people of color to purchase real estate because their financing was denied in the only communities where they could reside (Little, 2023; Wikipedia Contributors, 2023).

Even when racially restrictive covenants were no longer legally enforceable, they were not illegal to establish and privately enforce (Williams et al., 2023). Despite the state court's decision, these null and void restrictive covenants continued to govern where minority individuals could reside. Seattle's minority populations resented and resisted restrictive racial covenants initially. The history of resistance started earlier than establishing the first racial covenant in Seattle (Taylor, 1987).

**Race and Seattle Public Schools**

Morton and Bazzazz (2019) and Morton (2018) as reporters with the Seattle Times have examined the various challenges facing public education including those in Seattle Public Schools. Morton (2018) noted that Seattle Public Schools were committed to closing the achievement gap between learners of color and their White counterparts for over a minimum of 7 decades. Despite district officials' assurances that their new initiatives were more than just rhetoric, the gaps widened (Morton & Bazzazz, 2019). Stanford researchers discovered that Black students in Seattle performed 3.5 grade levels worse than their White classmates in their 2016 study and, in a subsequent 2017 study, the difference had expanded to 3.7 grade levels (Powers et al., 2016). Morton (2018) described an opened time capsule from the principal of Meany Middle School, C.S. Barbo, who in 1963 lamented that the cultural, racial and economic

disadvantages that he believed slowed the learning of some of his students. C.S. Barbo's note read that "*If this box is ever opened," his letter reads, "I would assume the problems we face today in understanding the racial differences will have been resolved. I trust this will happen."* Morton and Bazzazz (2019) sadly noted more than half a century had passed from when Barbo wrote that letter, and since then, there had been repeated commitments by the district to improve outcomes for pupils of color. The organization's previous attempts had all failed, usually because of a lack of resources or political will.

Bazzazz (2023) also highlighted that Seattle was the nation's first large city to unilaterally integrate its schools in 1978. However, as the city's population became increasingly diverse, children attended schools that were noticeably more racially segregated than those their parents attended. Black students were still separated, just like during Nixon's presidency. Even while White student enrollment had decreased, the number of schools with a majority of White students had virtually risen during the 1990s (Baum-Snow & Lutz, 2011). Bazzazz's (2023) commentaries also noted that inequity seemed to have worsened, as schools were still primarily determined by the neighborhoods in which their students resided, and these neighborhoods were often a holdover from segregationist policies, wealth acquired through inheritance and institutional apathy. If not addressed, these factors may have permeated educational settings. One reason racial integration was implemented 40 years ago was because of these factors' role in perpetuating disparities in education. Black and Latino kids have been shown to benefit from integration because it helps them overcome discrimination based on race and improves their academic outcomes (Leath et al., 2019).

## Somali Migration to the United States

Lincoln et al. (2021) noted that Somali immigrants embodied multiple marginalized identities. The lived experiences of Somali immigrants provided essential examples of the complex but unexplored interplay between race, religion, immigration, and their lived experiences of discrimination, difficulty of acculturation, lack of neighborhood resources, and well-being. Ellis et al. (2010) chronicled that in the early 1990s, many Somalis arrived sponsored by social services groups and religious organizations and were resettled in various states around the United States, mostly in Minnesota. As Black Muslim immigrants, Somalis face a triple risk of marginalization due to their color, religion, and immigration status (Ellis et al., 2010). They noted that Somalis encountered systematic racism because of their race (i.e., Black) and identifying predominantly as Muslim. As immigrants of minoritized racial and religious groups, Somalis have identified with multiple marginalized identities and have experienced discrimination related to these intersecting identities. The Somali community experience higher levels of housing discrimination than other immigrant groups (Lincoln et al., 2021). Additionally, Somali Americans have had the greatest unemployment rate among East African immigrants in the United States and the lowest graduation rate among other African immigrant groups (Diamant, 2017).

### Geopolitical History

Understanding the history of Somalia was essential to understanding the response to their current experiences in the U.S. educational system. Khayre (2016) detailed that Somalia was a stable democracy after independence from Italy and Great Britain in 1960. However, political instability in the early 1990s led to a lengthy humanitarian crisis and a territorial civil conflict. Past elections in Somalia were relatively peaceful, but the government was profoundly split by

insurgent groups and competing militias despite these positive developments (Khayre, 2016). The civil conflict, catastrophic starvation (especially in rural areas), inefficient aid distribution, and minimal economic prospects have contributed to the huge exodus of Somalis. Poorer ethnic groups, like the Somali Bantus, continued to experience extreme discrimination when they found themselves in refugee camps before being repatriated to the United States (Lewis, 2008).

**Somali Students in U.S. Schools**

Aqoon la'aani waa iftiin la'aan (Being without knowledge is to be without light).

– Somali proverb

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention website (n.d.), the resettlement of Somalian refugees to the United Stated began in the 1990s. Between 2011 and 2014, the number of Somali refugee arrivals to the United States roughly tripled. Since 2014, the number of Somali refugees arriving to the United States has stabilized to around 9,000 per year. From 2010 to 2016, more than 47,000 Somali refugees entered the United States, with the majority under the age of 45 and almost equal numbers of men and women. Minnesota and New York received the most Somali primary refugees during this period, followed by Texas, Arizona, Ohio, and Washington state (Center for Disease Control and Prevention Immigrant Health, n.d.)

Koch (2007) chronicled the experiences of Somali students in the United States, specifically Minnesota—a state with the most significant number of Somali immigrants. Very little literature has addressed the educational needs of Somali students in Seattle schools. Nevertheless, the literature I reviewed, highlighted that the educational community has been working for years to address issues regarding the immigrant population's schooling (Fisher, 2021). Many of these studies (Bemak & Chung, 2003; Olneck, 2004; Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Williams & Butler, 2003) have sought to answer critical issues including: (a) What influences,

positive or negative, contribute to the success or failure of immigrant students in schools?; (b) How do immigrant students feel about their education in the United States?; and (c) How can educators best support immigrants in adjusting to life in a new country?

As the most recently arrived immigrant community in the United States, little research has been undertaken to support Somalis in adjusting to their new life (Kapteijns & Arman, 2008). Somali families, regardless of their religion, gender, and age, were concerned about access to education (Nderu, 2005; Robillos, 2001). Theorists (Nderu, 2005; Robillos, 2001) have proposed that educational leaders should have engaged not only the learners but also their relatives and parents in the educational process.

Existing literature strongly indicated Somali scholars might have needed more support in academic settings because of past experiences with marginalization in their native country and the United States, as they have had few opportunities for input in academic journals and educational literature (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002; Forman, 2004; Hersi, 2011). For Somali students, educational issues were directly tied to their immigrant or refugee status. In the United States and throughout Europe, many Somali households were led by women, as men were forced to fight in the civil war, and many youths arrived in the United States and Europe as unaccompanied minors (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002). Alitolppa-Niitamo (2002) discovered that among Somali high school students, the most vulnerable groups were unaccompanied minors who did not receive parental support or guidance. The group labeled “the generation in-between” referred to the fact that they arrived in the United States as adolescents and, had a few years to learn the curriculum, achieve proficiency, and graduate. These students were expected to explore their cultural/ethnic identity; deal with dislocation, loss, and trauma; learn a new cultural system; learn a new language; and become academically successful in a few years, even though many

lacked parental or familial support and typically possessed a limited educational background (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002). According to Birman et al. (2001), some experienced tremendous cognitive load, were fatigued and drained, had trouble focusing, developed behavioral issues, and reverted to an indifferent mentality. Additionally, Birman et al. noted inadequate time was allotted for those who arrived as teenagers to finish their education. Due to the age restriction on being in school, students had to exit the 12th grade by 21 years old.

Farid and McMahan (2004) reported immigration-related stress on Somali families included concerns such as isolation, parenting, role reversals in families, financial pressures associated with relatives still living in Somalia, and pressure associated with caring for relatives who may arrive in the United States. They also highlighted the consequences of trauma and refugee-living on Somali children, how Somali youth behave, and how their parents and teachers were (or were not) suited to deal with these circumstances (Farid & McMahan, 2004). These issues provided solid justifications for the need to increase social, emotional, and academic support for Somali students by school leaders steeped in equity-minded leadership (Johnson et al., 2021).

**Barriers for Somali Students in U.S. Schools**

According to Kumi-Yeboah et al. (2020), who drew on the research of Watson and Knight-Manuel (2017), immigrant students from African nations suffered disadvantages that impeded their access to high quality and equitable educational experiences in the United States. These inequities included simplistic, generalized, and stereotypical assumptions about Africa, African culture, and low expectations regarding academic and behavior performance. Although most young immigrants brought new ideas and values to the United States, including high educational goals, strong family connections, and a determination to succeed, they faced

obstacles such as hostile environments upon arrival (Awokoya, 2012; Ukpokodu, 2018), racism and discrimination (Obiakor & Afolayan, 2007; Okpalaoka, 2014), difficulties in social integration and inclusion (Omanović & Langley, 2023; Penninx, 2019) and language and communication barriers (Osman et al., 2020; Wilczewski & Alon, 2023) all of which had a significant impact on their ability to learn and adapt in their new urban schools (Scuglik & Alarcon, 2005).

Black African-born immigrant teenagers got less attention in educational settings populated by other immigrant students, contributing to their invisibility (Awokoya, 2012; Ukpokodu, 2018; Watson & Knight, 2017). Few studies (Chude-Sokei, 2015; Suárez-Orozco, 2001) focused on the experiences of Black immigrants in K–12 public schools, and even less research existed on school districts and their leaders' experiences with Black immigrants. Khalifa et al. (2016) suggested the U.S. educational system is racialized, and the intersectionality of religion has complicated and exacerbated the marginalization and mistreatment of Somali immigrants.

**Parental Involvement and Barriers**

Academic institutions in U.S. and European countries have begun to conduct studies examining the lives of Somali students and their families (Koch, 2007). Somali students were very dependent on parental engagement and support in their education. European studies on Somali students proposed they needed more parental encouragement than students of other immigrant groups (Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000). There was a widespread acceptance among Somali students of traditional family values, including respect for adult authority and limits on a child's freedom of choice. Even though the researchers interpreted this to suggest Somali students were less acculturated than their peers, it may instead have shed light on the

significant effect Somali parents have on their children's development (Koch, 2007). Despite their best efforts, Somali parents only sometimes had the time or means to be actively involved in their children's lives. After being orphaned or abandoned by their parents, many Somali children were raised by relatives or guardians. Even when students lived at home with their parents, they may have had problems getting help with school assignments. For some Somali students, having parents who were illiterate, poorly educated, and jobless created social isolation (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2004). Young Somali immigrants in Finland were studied by Alitolppa-Niitamo (2002), and the results indicated that Somali parents often had to argue with school leaders over teaching art, music, and physical education due to their concerns about their children absorbing "western" ideals. Acculturation stress hindered parents' ability to help their children adjust to a new culture.

In comparison, Nderu (2005) conducted a qualitative study on Somali parent participation in U.S. schools. The results suggested that although parents were enthusiastic about their children's schooling and pleased with the quality of education, they also encountered challenges when assisting their children with their schoolwork, as they needed to understand what was being asked of them entirely. Several parents cited not wanting to "interfere with the work of experts" (Nderu, 2005, p. 7), so they kept away from their children's schoolwork. On the other hand, Birman and Trickett (2001) shared that school leaders and teachers reported dissatisfaction with parents' lack of engagement and poor lines of communication. These findings were consistent with previous studies that revealed schools should do more to engage parents of immigrant children, and there were communication barriers between teachers and parents (Birman & Trickett, 2001). Awokoya (2012), Nderu (2005), and Roubeni et al. (2015) outlined several barriers to parental engagement in their children's education, such as microaggressions

about acceptable conduct and prejudicial parental expectations of which Somali parents were unaware.

Nderu (2005) noted that Somali parents remarked that in their native country, they were used to informal social interactions between teachers and parents outside of school however, in the United States, teachers seldom recognized them if they met outside of school. They shared that being ignored contradicted their cultural values and they often felt uneasy approaching their child's teacher to address their concern or ask question about academic performance. Conflicts with work schedule often hindered parental engagement because U.S. teachers tended to schedule appointments far in advance (Ahmed, 2015). This is countercultural because Somali parents must remember these meetings due to their oral culture and lack of adherence to written calendars (Osman et al., 2019). Parents believed teachers only called them when there was a conduct issue with their children, often during an academic crisis. Parents of newcomers often expressed a need for clarification or guidance on academic standards and school expectations and a desire for educators or school employees to visit their homes. Nderu (2005) also proposed the Somali community could better support new parents by educating them on U.S. school requirements, and that schools should provide a welcoming and inclusive space conducive to community building and social engagement. Some parents also mentioned positive aspects of U.S. schools, such as the free education, safety, and security provided for children at school and on school buses, and children were free to play and study (Smith, 2023).

**Social Interaction With Peers**

Forman (2001) argued that Somalis have "entered a social landscape that reflect[ed] a strong psychological and political minefield" (p. 36) without a clear understanding of the racial dynamics of the United States. Misconceptions and racial and religious biases often marked

interactions between Somali students and their classmates. Other theorists (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007; Kusow, 2006; Mohamed, 2001) highlighted that Somalis were often subjected to discrimination, segregation, prejudice, and racism comparable to Black people and Muslims. T. A. Forman (2004) argued that Somali students were often reclassified as Black children. Because educational institutions played a crucial role in forming cultural identities, newly or recently arrived Somali students often had difficulty adjusting to Black American cultural norms. T. A. Forman (2004) further argued Somali students often "adopt[ed] elements of Black North American culture into their own identity (both deliberately and unconsciously)" (p. 55). T. A. Forman (2004) continued, "Hip-hop music, clothing that fuse[d] traditional Somali and Western styles for women, and hip-hop wear for men [we]re all part of this movement, as [wa]s the use of Black English" (p. 55).

Birman and Trickett (2001) highlighted that regarding social concerns, Somali children were frequently isolated at school and outlined other pressing negative interactions with their peers and schools. Students sought to adopt socially acceptable behavior in schools while balancing their culture and school. Birman and Trickett (2001) found the following concerning the students' experiences: (a) being different, (b) getting into fights with other kids, (c) struggling with religion, (d) adjusting to school, (e) dealing with trauma, (f) having families, and (g) planning for a better future in the United States. Students said they avoided getting into trouble with their families by only spending time with other Somalis or with their families. Many students felt alienated that they did not have the chance to share their stories or experiences with their peers or teachers, and many students reported being unprepared for the degree of teasing and abuse they received in U.S. schools. Many students said bullying and teasing have contributed to fights at school. Students sought to wear bandannas to school to blend in, and at

times stated, school leaders prohibited the head coverings as a sign of gang connection and a threat to other students' safety. Most Somali students thought their African American peers lacked respect for teachers, while their American peers thought that Somalis were "acting White" when they studied or tried to be "smart" (Birman & Trickett, 2001, p. 6).

### Religious Identity

According to a 2014 U.S. Department of State report, Islam was recognized constitutionally as the sovereign religion in Somalia and mandated that all laws conform to Sharia's main principles. Less than 1% of the population was estimated to comprise members of different religions (e.g., Christian, Shia Muslim; Bramson & Veneer, 2019). De Voe (2002) noted that clothing was a silent emblem of self and community, and the way certain Muslim women dressed represented the community's assimilation into a western nation. De Voe (2002) also added that Islam may have been an immensely gendered topic when discussing immigration and education. As a result, the negative and positive effects of wearing the hijab to school have varied significantly between national and local settings, and the sociocultural milieu significantly impacted how Muslim kids felt at school. Additionally, De Voe (2002) proposed that as a sociocultural construct, veiling varied between Muslim communities and even over time in a particular society.

## Religion Versus Secularism in Public Schools

Honig and Rainey (2019) opined that in the latter half of the 20th century, the United States remained just as divided about the role of religion in public school as it had been for the last 2 centuries. The Supreme Court decisions that banned prayer and Bible reading in 1962 and 1963 and the political and cultural unrest of the decade's final years gave way to the thinking that "God was kicked out of the public schools in the 1960s." There was a counterresponse in

other communities, specifically conservatives, and the Christian Right began to campaign to impose religion on historically secular public schools (Fraser, 1999).

Eaton (2010) proposed that secularism was often described as the separation of religion from civic affairs and the state. However, it may have also referred to a viewpoint that seeks to eliminate or diminish religion's presence in any public realm. It may have entailed pro-government, atheism, naturalism, non-sectarianism, religious neutrality, or eliminating all religious symbols from public institutions. Nevertheless, Blumenfeld et al. (2009) stated that the influence and privilege of Christianity has historically manifested as a source of tyranny and oppression. In U.S. schools, with a separation of church and state, religion focused on policies and practices permissible in public classrooms. Public schools have received federal, state, and local tax revenues, with primary oversight from local government agencies. Given that the U.S. Constitution prohibited government agencies from establishing or promoting religion, public schools must have struck a delicate balance between educating religious students alongside nonreligious students and have taught concepts in a neutral manner whose understanding is situated in a religious context (Cornman et al., 2021). Theorists, including White (2011), have proposed that the social construction of Whiteness, religion, culture, gender, and education influenced teachers' and leaders' instructional behaviors and practices.

Social scientists including Marsden (1990) and Randall (2013) have found that religion was also essential in defining culture. Marsden (1990) stated, "Formal religious ideology will [has] often play[ed] a major role in shaping both the expressed ideas and beliefs of individuals and the assumed patterns of shared meanings and values that make culture possible" (p. 4).

After the turn of the century, the debate over whether religion should be taught in public schools evolved to how religion should be taught or integrated (Herbstrith et al., 2020). After

2000, publications emphasized the necessity of integrating religious viewpoints in schools (Gates, 2000; C. Johnson, 2006; Kunzman, 2003), while others addressed how to incorporate religious curricula or observance (Bishop et al., 2001; Dever et al., 2001). White (2009) forwarded that the emergence of multiculturism, which emphasizes teacher identity about student learning, minimized religion as an aspect of cultural experience. Multiculturalism concerns one's ethnic or cultural group, gender, social class, religion, language, ability, and sexual orientation (Banks & Banks, 2019). White (2009) proposed that the conceptualization of multicultural education to include critical concepts such as culture, immigration, and institutional racism. White (2009) summarized that even though early literature on multiculturism failed to include religion, it was a significant component of a teacher's and leader's perception, and further exploration of this cultural identifier and its effects on instructional and leadership practices was warranted.

Alvoid and Black (2014) stated, from the United States's inception, an educated citizenry was recognized as necessary to make democracy work. Children of school age in the newly formed states were educated in private charter schools and religious schools. As more states were added to the union, a public education system was created that provided a typical nonsectarian education to some citizens (Logan, 2015; Weiner & Zellman, 2022). It has been well documented (Weiner & Zellman, 2022) that U.S. democracy was initially one of racial exclusion rather than inclusion; states unevenly meted out public education based on race intersected with the religion of the dominant group (i.e., Christianity). This exclusion has created racialized, religious, status-based hierarchies that marked White people as the exclusive in-group in U.S. democracy's conception of citizenship (Harris, 1993).

**Rise of Christian Nationalism**

Despite its long history in the United States, White Christian nationalism has recently come to the forefront of U.S. politics, especially after the January 6th rebellion (Neiheisel, 2023). Contemporary literary works (Giroux, 2012; Whitney & Candelaria, 2017) proposed that one of the most consequential recent waves of educational reform since No Child Left Behind was that of Christian nationalism and its effort to privatize schools and influence educational policy in the United States. Whitney and Candelaria (2017) asserted that new developments in applied theories and public policy (e.g., expanded school choice, the targeting of LGBTQ students and faculty, the banning of any discussion of racial discrimination in school curricula) and have made clear the increasing influence of White Christian nationalism on education.

Beliefs about the superiority of White racial identity and Christian-inflected theological arguments that historically supported colonization, enslavement, segregation, and displacement of people of color provided the ideological underpinnings for the political and cultural movement of White Christian nationalism (Jones, 2023). In addition, White Christian nationalists viewed violence as a reasonable means of defending their version of a Christian nation (Burke et al., 2023), often appealing to their emotional sense of victimhood to justify their position. White Christian nationalism, as pointed out by Gorski and Perry in an interview with Mitchell Atencio on September 8, 2022, was a “constellation of beliefs . . . that manifest[ed] in political goals.” Recent years have seen a rise in the political power of White Christian nationalists, notably at the state level (Burke et al., 2023).

Burke et al. (2023) underscored the growing prominence of White Christian nationalism in classroom instruction. White Christian nationalists saw and named public schools as a crucial front in the fight to transform the United States into a Christian country. Believers in White

Christian nationalism were becoming more influential in state and local public education policy arenas. White Christian nationalist ideologies were pervasive and influential in public discourse on a variety of educational issues, including but not limited to, public funding for private school vouchers, curtailing discussions of race, religion other than Christianity, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and power in the classroom, and recent State Supreme Court decisions that have sided against public educational institutions.

Wright (2022) added that most Republican governors and legislators in over a dozen states attempted to give parents more control over what their children learn in public schools, betting so-called parents' rights legislation would be a political victor. However, educators feared that allowing parents to veto textbooks and history courses would force many already overwhelmed instructors to leave the profession. Additionally, legislation in states like Indiana would allow the state department of education to revoke or suspend the licenses of educators or school administrators who taught the banned concepts or refused to allow parents to view material or curriculum (Smith, 2022). The bill would have profoundly affected more school leaders and educators out of the profession and have hampered their skills and ability to promote and teach the curriculum effectively (Hilton et al., 2015).

Christian nationalization has shaped culture wars across educational policies that required school leaders to be more committed to educational equity. The term "culture wars" originated in the 1920s as an expression of conflict between rural and urban U.S. values (Hunter, 1991). However, Hunter (1991), a sociologist at the University of Virginia, reintroduced the expression and described what he saw as a dramatic realignment and polarization that had transformed U.S. politics and culture. During the 1990s, the culture wars influenced the debate over state school history curricula in the United States (Nash et al., 2000). Later in the 2000s, social groups fueled

by epic tribalism divided the country. Many of these social conservative groups expanded their own beliefs and practices into almost all facets of life including educational policies and reshaping local school boards, which resulted in book bans, limited the teaching of critical race theory in Republican-led states, and other restrictions that have limited the authority of school leaders and districts. This also resulted in removal, teacher exodus, and difficulty hiring educators in many states (Superville, 2023). Superville (2023) also added that districts serving majority-White students were the staging grounds for many of the new culture war fights. Browne (2012) found that education was a very political process, meaning that there were always competing agendas and interpretations or rationales of what is needed to achieve desired results. Browne (2012) also proposed to "walk the equity talk," school districts and leaders needed to be culturally and morally courageous to fully implement policies that benefited historically underserved students of color.

## Influence of Immigration on Education

Schwartz et al. (2010) and Viruell-Fuentes (2007) noted that the success of immigrants in North America depended not only on individual characteristics but also on the context of reception or the opportunity structures, attitudes, and behaviors of the receiving societies toward immigrants. Schwartz et al. (2010) further added that some immigrant groups were subjected to high levels of discrimination and marginalization due to their race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, immigrant status, and prevailing national sentiment. In addition to contributing to unfriendly settings for immigrants and their children, restrictive immigration laws also resulted in undesirable conditions for immigrants and their children, which resulted in social exclusion, marginalization, and physiological problems (Perreira & Pedroza, 2019).

Results of a 2017 report from the Southern Poverty Law Center highlighted that discriminatory immigration policies have increased over the past decade, especially anti-Muslim sentiment and treatment. Somali students who relocated to the United States, particularly from the Bantu tribe, faced significant marginalization, much as they had in their home country and later in refugee camps. Anti-immigrant attitudes have been observed in multiple sectors of society, including prekindergarten through 12th grade and even higher education. Devine (2013) proposed that for school leaders to be serve effectively in newly multiethnic schools, these schools must be well-planned and have multifaceted approach, with the ethic of justice if the needs of immigrant students are to be addressed and challenged.

## Systemic Educational Challenges

In addition to psychosocial challenges, the educational system presents specific hurdles to Somali students' academic success (Hersi, 2011). Hersi (2011) noted from interviews with educators on the educational and social experiences of urban Somali high school students the need for English language literacy. Students were generally assigned to age-appropriate classrooms as opposed to academically appropriate ones. Additionally, students could not access native language instruction to supplement English language acquisition, becoming discouraged and disillusioned when entering mainstream classrooms. Students felt pressure to get passing scores on standardized examinations and believed this pressure had a detrimental impact on the Somali student dropout rate (Hersi, 2011). Federal and state assessment policies hindered Somali student progress in various ways (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2004). Alitolppa-Niitamo (2004) found there were systemic exclusionary, divisive, unwelcoming, and racist practices and behaviors by school leaders and teachers that contributed to Somali students feeling unwelcome and unsafe. Hersi (2011) detailed other students' narratives, indicating that they were subject to unfair,

discriminatory policies in grading, access to places to pray, or prohibited from praying or following the rituals of praying (e.g., washing their feet in the sink). Birman and Trickett (2001) observed that schools prohibited religious observances, as girls were required to remove their head coverings for student photo identification cards. The researchers noted that the girls reported feelings of embarrassment, refusal to attend school and felt unwelcomed in the school community.

Alitolppa-Niitamo (2002) used ethnographic data to build a multivariable framework that illustrated how intricately interconnected factors influence the academic achievement of Somali pupils. This concept was formed by the interaction between entering resources (e.g., human, financial, social capital) and receiving societal characteristics (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2002). These factors interacted with human initiative to promote academic success. For Somali students, the absence or interruption of past schooling, being unaccompanied, and having illiterate/low-educated/unemployed parents who, as a result, were removed from society and an unwelcoming school environment were noted as specific problems (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2004). This work expressed that Somali children may have required unique educational settings, and the repercussions of repeated migrations merit further investigation. Alitolppa-Niitamo (2004) stated, “The key is almost certainly to look at each student as an individual, not a group member” (p. 99).

Birman and Trickett (2001) also found students and educators had different ideas about how trauma affected them. Professionals in education were often worried about past trauma and how it might show up in the classroom, but the students did not see themselves as traumatized. Educators said they did not understand specific cultural issues or the students’ personal histories but were afraid to ask students about their pasts. Teachers and school leaders were concerned

about mental health and social issues and did not feel they had enough training to help students who had been through trauma in the past. School leaders noted the inadequacy of mental health experts or counselors who they could talk to, reach out to parents, or train school staff. These problems generally contributed to Somali high school students' marginalization, low academic achievements, and high dropout rates.

Farid and McMahan (2004) provided a guide for educators highlighting Somali families' stress, how Somali students felt in public schools, and how having been a refugee affects Somali students. They shed light on the cultural dissonance that the women (e.g., female caretakers) experience, whether in shaking hands with U.S. citizens or a lack of labels on the food in the school cafeteria. There were no spaces to pray, and the school staff did not understand Islam. Music and art were used in the classroom, and holidays like Valentine's Day and Halloween could have been challenging.

## Evolution of the Role of the School Leader

Liu (2013) established that prior studies had shown leadership development was lifelong and iterative. It is widely recognized that the accumulation of relevant experience throughout one's life is crucial in order to become an effective leader. These studies have shown that developmental work experiences, purposeful practice, leadership programs, and organizational cultures have all contributed to the growth of future leaders (D. Day & Thornton, 2018). Liu et al. (2021) further noted that additional research is needed into the influencing mechanism of experiences during the leader development process. They thought that an interdisciplinary perspective was needed to explore the critical developmental experiences of leadership at each stage in one's life. They premised that these experiences from childhood to one's working life (i.e., adulthood) may possibly influence a leader's behavior and practices.

Although many companies had formal leader development programs, theorists (McCall, 2004, 2010) updated their work to propose that, ultimately, nothing beats the power of real-world, on-the-job experience. The widely held but unproven belief that 70% of a leader's growth came from on-the-job experiences, 20% through developmental relationships, and 10% from formal programs provided some insight into the significance of such events (D. Day & Thornton, 2018).

According to D. V. Day et al. (2009) and Kolb (2014), leadership development was a lifelong endeavor long before a person enrolled in a classroom and continued after retirement. Targeted professional development, environmental shifts, experience, critical self-analysis, and one's perceptions all played a role in shaping a leader. According to contemporary theorists, including Schleicher (2012), the evolving global educational policies, including the United States, changed the demographics and roles of school leadership (Schleicher, 2012). Schleicher (2012) forwarded that it was well-established in the policy and research sectors, that great leaders were essential to successful academic achievement of students. ten Bruggencate et al. (2012), C. Day et al. (2016), and Gu and Johansson (2013) also proposed the theory of the positive and negative effects of leadership, specifically principal leadership, on school organization, culture, and conditions, the quality of teaching and learning, and student achievement. Capper and Green (2013) expanded on the discourse regarding culturally responsive leadership by exploring an equity-based framework that may better inform socially just schools, districts, and improve leadership preparation pedagogy. In so doing, they further revealed how the current organizational theory texts persistently centered on White, conventional notions of leadership while marginalizing the perspectives, lived experiences, and racial realities of people of color.

Educational leadership preparation programs had been critiqued for their lack of training on race and racialized policies and practices (Evans, 2007; López, 2003; Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Parker & Shapiro, 1992). Despite the increase in the use of culturally responsive teaching in educational research (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and research in education leadership (Alemán, 2009; Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Riehl, 2005), culturally responsive teaching had yet to make a significant impact on the preparation of educational leaders (Hawley & James, 2010). Whiteness persisted in organizational theory texts despite the rapid demographic shifts in the United States. To address the needs of this demographically changing and racially diverse population, some scholars agreed that educational leaders must have been prepared to grapple with and critically assess issues of racism, racial identity, and racial oppression (Evans, 2007; López, 2003; Parker & Villalpando, 2007). López (2003) asserted, as scholars who prepare future educational leaders, it was essential to prioritize issues of race and racism in society and had an ethical responsibility to question systems, organizational frameworks, and leadership theories that privileged certain groups and perspectives over others. Brown (2004) agreed race and culture should have been the foci of preparation programs rather than a peripheral program aspect. A focus on racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity in schooling and its impact on school leadership could be found in some leadership programs; however, these issues were often given only cursory attention without an analysis of factors such as power differentials between majority and minority group members. Brown (2004) further noted students in educational administration programs may have tended to treat theories of school administration as an objective science without considering changes in the sociopolitical arena between majority and minority groups.

Ultimately, some educational administration theorists still needed to account for the contextual nature of leadership. The assumption that school administration was neutral in ensuring access to high-quality education to children of all races and ethnicities failed to consider disparities in political power among racial groups. Brown (2004) underscored that if issues of race and racism remained peripheral to leader preparation, then power, privilege, and racially unconscious school leaders and systems remained intact. Therefore, frameworks like equity-focused theory countered the marginalization of issues of race and the lived experiences of immigrants and "othered" students (McNair et al., 2020).

## Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by the theory of equity mindedness and was guided by a critical feminist lens, with the goal of problematizing social justice issues such as the significant achievement in gaps in education, lack of access to advanced courses, and others to help bring about positive changes and decrease inequities. Aspects of this theory which informed this study included: (a) the belief that everything is political, including lack of action; (b) what administrators and teachers chose to do and chose not to do indicated a political perspective or inclination; (c) the belief that people (i.e., students) were unique fountains of knowledge; and (d) students were not empty vessels to be filled with information (Freire, 2001). Along with these aspects came the importance of incorporating the individual knowledge and experiences of school administrators and a belief in positive change, or as Kincheloe (2004) and Freire (2001) might call it—radical love which leads to action and therefore positive change. Cohen et al. (2007) proposed a critical approach to educational research that sought to "emancipate the disempowered, to redress inequality, and to promote individual freedoms in a democratic society" (p. 26).

One of the primary goals of this study was to assist in making education more equitable and inclusive through examining and uncovering why equity-minded educators chose to engage in equity work. The theoretical framework, equity mindedness, that grounded the research was used to explore the experiences of Black Somali immigrants in K–12 institutions in Washington State, specifically in Seattle Public Schools. Additionally, it was used to examine the development of school leaders and how the district was preparing current and future leaders to meet the evolving roles of the principalship. The conceptualization of the equity-minded framework originated at the Center for Urban Education (n.d.) at the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California. The institution had been at the forefront of leading the work on equity and social justice in education. Its goal was to make educational opportunities more equitable for racial and ethnic groups who historically have been victims of persecution and colonialism (McNair et al., 2020). For the Center for Urban Education, it was crucial to encourage a radical change away from a deficit perspective to a mode of thinking exhibited by school leaders and teachers who were willing to examine their own racialized assumptions, admit their misconceptions of the history of race and racism, accept personal accountability for the academic success of traditionally underrepresented student populations, and conduct critical self-reflection on their racialization in the workplace.

**What Is Equity?**

Bensimon et al. (2006) proposed that diversity was a major concept that emerged in the 1980s and advocated increasing access to higher education for minority groups with a history of exclusion and marginalization. Although school districts also experienced a decline in public funding for education, there was a steep increase in the number of types of evaluation and accountability systems.

Several early researchers, including Jencks (1988), spotlighted the importance of equity in education and its complexity with its multiple meanings. Jencks proposed that some people believed a definition of equity meant everyone received the same things. For others, equity meant that more should have been given to those in need (Jencks, 1988). For others still, equity included calculations of merit based on fair or meritocratic competition (Jencks, 1988). Determining who should get what and how was not an easy task and it was highly dependent on context and the distribution of political power (Stone, 2012). Those with more voice and political power would have had a greater influence over the distribution of all other assets.

The term equity was used to describe processes where individuals were working to achieve fair and equal opportunities for all students based on their individual needs, and it "does not necessarily entail equal treatment" (Solomon et al., 2011, p. 15). In this case, the work that equity-minded educators were doing would have been specifically targeted toward helping students overcome barriers to achievement, such as discrimination and oppression-based group membership, identity characteristics, socioeconomic status, and access to high quality educational programming and opportunities (Banks & Banks, 1995; Ryan, 2012).

McNair et al. (2020) defined equity as "understanding student needs and addressing those needs by providing the necessary academic and social support to help level the playing field so that students can achieve their goals" (p. 20). They highlighted multiple conceptualizations of equity in the United States, and one of the most common applications was aligned with student performance. McNair et al. (2020) shared, "We want[ed] to close the equity gap in graduation, progression, and retention for our underrepresented students" (p. 2). School leaders were tasked with using multiple data points to identify and provide interventions to eliminate academic and social barriers related to inequitable policies and practices.

McNair et al. (2020) and Bensimon (2018) noted the term equity was highly divisive and concerning among politicians, policymakers, and educational institutions, mainly because of its connection to race. Additionally, McNair et al. added that there was the assertion that inequity persisted because of educators' biases in how students were viewed, how data were presented, and the types of interventions selected to eliminate systemic inequities. Bensimon noted that as a contemporary concept, equity was synonymous with social justice movements. The concept of equity had continued to gain increased application as it was foundational in the strategic plans of most school districts, including Seattle Public Schools. It was incorporated in the framework of school reform, and it promoted policies and leadership to improve educational access and successful outcomes for students who had been historically and continuously marginalized. Bensimon et al. (2006) further stated that equity mindedness was inextricably linked to structural inequality and institutionalized racism and demanded system-changing responses. Therefore, equity was essential to ensuring that all children might have achieved academic success. Social scientists, including McNair et al. (2020) and Strayhorn (2022), proposed that equity minded policies and leadership practices could close the achievement gap when implemented with fidelity and when diversity and inclusion strategies were incorporated.

Equity-minded framework may be viewed as an umbrella or a comprehensive concept that incorporated and extended other frameworks, including critical race theory, mindfulness, asset-based, and other antiracist frameworks. Roegman (2017) hypothesized that equity-minded school leadership was a contextual framework for school districts' and leaders' approaches. Enactments were influenced by a plethora of factors including environmental pressure (e.g., specific economic, political demographic) and social context (e.g., personal and societal ideologies, beliefs on race and gender). For Seattle Public Schools, equity-minded (i.e.,

informed) decision making and leadership were tenets of the district's strategic plan (Seattle Public Schools, 2019).

**Equity-Minded Approach**

McNair et al. (2020) noted that conceptually, equity mindedness in educational settings referred to the worldview or approach of understanding how teachers and school systems brought awareness to unjust and unfair policies in student outcomes. Equity-minded educators were willing to accept personal and institutional accountability for their students' growth and engage in a cycle of continuous and critical analysis of their behaviors. Practitioners were required to be mindful of race (i.e., conscious) and the social and historical backdrop of discriminatory practices in public educational institutions. Equity-minded practitioners resist blaming students for their lack of achievement (i.e., a deficit-minded approach) nor depend on racial stereotypes or prejudices to rationalize or ignore inequitable outcomes. Additionally, school leaders who are committed to equity mindedness recognize and acknowledge that race and racism are pervasive from prekindergarten through the secondary and tertiary levels (Newsome et al., 2022; Powers et al., 2016).

Historically and specifically during the 1950s and 1960s, the superintendent, school boards, and principals were White men with similar worldviews (Johnson, 1996). However, as schools became increasingly diverse, the concept of education as a social justice issue emerged. Although there was no standard definition of social justice, Bogotch (2002) and Bruccoleri (2008) theorized that the concept had become cliché with the sociopolitical, cultural, and economic meanings not fully correlating to educational outcomes. Equity-minded leadership transcended the concept of social justice. As Bogotch (2002) stated, the term social justice was nebulous because society was constantly evolving, nevertheless, they ultimately summarized that

the primary focus of equity-minded leadership was collaboratively seeking solutions to closing the equity gaps experienced by racial and ethnic minorities, low-income students, and other marginalized groups to promote improved educational outcomes for everyone.

## What Is Equity Work?

Equity work has taken many forms, including but not limited to differentiating instruction and materials based on student needs (Delpit, 1995); encouraging participation in teaching and learning from all stakeholders (e.g., parents, community organizations) about what education should be like (Athanases & De Oliveira, 2008; Smith et al., 2011); ensuring students could see themselves, their backgrounds, and their beliefs reflected in their education (Dei & Kempf, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ríos & Montecinos, 1999); ensuring all students have had the resources and opportunities to achieve success, broadly defined as respecting the multiple and differing beliefs and values of students and community members (Banks & Banks, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995); helping students to develop agency to change their situations (Nieto, 2017); and providing an academically rigorous environment that was supportive of the development of critical thinking (Freire, 2001; Jay, 2003; Nieto, 2017). The questions this study explored were (a) why educators engaged in these types of activities and (b) what informed their understanding, beliefs, and actions regarding equity.

## The Importance of School Leadership in Advancing Equity

Lakomski and Evers (2021) forward that there should be a reconceptualization of how leadership ought to be studied. They noted the importance of context in educational leadership warrants further investigation and that there should be further examination of school leaders' influence on improving student outcomes is of equal importance, especially for marginalized students. Flores and Kyere (2021) stated further examination of school leadership is needed

because school leaders need more evidence-based practices and strategies to improve educational justice and equity for historically marginalized students and those at risk of being disenfranchised. Flores and Kyere proposed and developed an equity-based engagement model highlighting how school leaders employed the power of relationships to engage parents, building trusting relationships with parents and prioritizing positive relationships with racially and ethnically diverse and economically disadvantaged families.

Kinzie and Kuh (2017) emphasized that educational institutions and school leaders were responsible for student success and should communicate their commitment to it as part of the strategic plan. School leaders should have prioritized enacting equity-minded policies in the school's budget, motivating teachers and staff to implement an equity-minded perspective in their instructional practices and relationships with historically underserved students (McNair et al., 2020; Thompson & Thompson, 2018). The enactment of equity-minded leadership had to have been systemwide as a part of the institution and building's culture.

Much of the literature regarding equity-mindedness including Howard (2016) and McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) have examined how school leaders should also have developed a schema that (a) factored in the unique needs of the students to transform the curriculum and best instructional practices; (b) reset the learning culture; and (c) established collaborative relationships with parents, teachers, and other stakeholders. McKenzie and Scheurich proposed that principals should have encouraged their teachers, especially White teachers, to become more culturally intelligent by getting to know their students, their students' families, and their students' culture. Howard (2016) noted that equity-minded school leaders must have been committed to understanding and respecting the communities where they serve if they intended to eliminate achievement gaps.

## Summary

The literature review explored the framework of equity-minded leadership that guided the development of this study's qualitative methodology. Chapter 2 also explored the historical lens of race in education, how the context of racialized oppression in Seattle affected current educational leadership and enrollment challenges, the history of the Somali immigrants in their native country before their settlement in Washington state, race in education, religion and its impact on education and leadership, leadership development pedagogy, and the importance of the role of the school leader on successful student outcomes. The literature review noted emerging scholarly work on equity-minded leadership and the theoretical framework. This inquiry into equity-minded school leadership was pertinent in the current national climate because of the shifting demographics in Seattle schools, and Washington state was generalizable nationwide. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology used in this research. Ultimately, the literature review was useful in grounding the findings and recommendations in the remainder of the study found in Chapters 4 and 5.

# Chapter 3. Method (Qualitative)

Chapter 3 describes the research method, study design, participants, data collection, data analysis, measures of quality, and limitations. The primary purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the skills and competencies school leaders needed to support the academic requirements of immigrant students, specifically Somali students. The emergent theoretical framework that guided this inquiry was that of equity mindedness.

## Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

1. What are the salient skills and competencies school leaders need to have to support the academic needs of immigrant students, specifically Somali students?
2. How can they use these leadership skills and competencies to address the needs of Somali and other immigrant students?

Chapter 3 begins with the restatement of the research questions and continues with the proposed methodology, explaining how the data were collected and analyzed. This chapter highlights the researcher's role as one of the most important elements because of the duality as both observer and participant in the study. I also disclose the professional and personal relationships with the participants, how my role in the research might have led to bias, steps took to mitigate bias, and any other ethical issues. Finally, this chapter concludes with an overall summary of the chapter.

## Approach

A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to examine the experiences and skills that school leaders needed to achieve more optimal academic performance from Somali immigrant students. This research was conducted using structured interviews via Zoom to collect

and analyze qualitative data. Additionally, to gain a deeper understanding of the research questions, a qualitative case study approach was used to investigate participants' lived experiences related to a particular phenomenon. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted a case study, as a research design, is an intensive, systematic investigation of a single person, group, community, or other unit in which the researcher investigates in-depth data regarding multiple variables. This qualitative study design investigated how school leaders developed the skills and experience to support Somali students (Creswell & Guettermann, 2019; Yin, 2016). This investigation into the enactment of school leadership with Somali immigrant students sought to add to other investigations focused on African American and other marginalized groups (Ferguson, 2021; Kohli et al., 2017; Scherr & Mayer, 2019) and other emerging studies on equity-minded leadership. The participants used their personal experiences as primary data to explain how they applied their education and training to assist this immigrant population that has been rapidly expanding.

Transcendental phenomenology, a qualitative research methodology, was used in this study's design because it facilitated a tailored approach to data collection from participants considering their unique lived experiences, including their perceptions, thoughts, and the truths they have come to accept about those experiences (Moustakas, 2011). Husserl (1982) asserted phenomenology focuses on intentionality and intuition to capture the inner consciousness of research subjects as it relates to experiences that characterize their behaviors and life responses. Participants in a transcendental phenomenological study describe their experiences in a nonnaturalist style, which allows the researcher to capture the essence and spirit of the participants' experiences without introducing their own biases, assumptions, or expectations (Madison, 2009; Moustakas, 2011).

Regarding my role, personal experiences must not have unintentionally influenced data collection and analysis. The transcendental phenomenological approach incorporated an element known as epoché, which translated from Greek means refraining from judgment based on one's perceptions of everyday experiences (Moustakas, 2011). During the data collection and analysis processes, the concept of epoché required me to first check for my own biases based on my personal experiences with or perceptions of the phenomenon and then set my intentions to focus solely on the participants' experiences. Listening attentively to participants' interpretations of their experiences with racism, discrimination, and bias through a self-differentiated lens allowed the narratives to influence the results authentically.

The following stage of the process, transcendental phenomenological reduction, further differentiated my experiences from those of the participants by allowing me to assign meaning to their experiences that could only be their own. Participants' accounts of how their experiences affected how they felt, thought, acted, and perceived future events provided a depth of meaning (Moustakas, 2011). The final stage of the process was imaginative variation, which allowed the participant to separate their experiences from those of the external environment and to seek meaning through the experiences of others, such as their supervisors, colleagues, subordinates, or clients (Moustakas, 2011). My role as the researcher was to gather more objective information to provide structural context for the essence of the participants' experiences to fully comprehend the phenomenon from the participants' perspective.

## Context of the Study

This qualitative study collected data from 11 school leaders in public schools in all demographic areas except north Seattle. The scholarly literature reviewed evidenced that due to systemic efforts of anti-Blackness and racial covenants, the schools in north Seattle historically

have had the lowest enrollment of Somali students (OSPI, n.d.). Seattle Public Schools is the largest school district in Washington and King County. This study drew exclusively from school principals at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Each participant was purposefully selected and was required to meet the prescribed criteria for inclusion in the study. The researcher recruited potential participants from the Washington Association of School Principals and the Principals' Association of Seattle, who were currently their members.

## Study Participants and Data Sources

According to the latest Seattle Public Schools enrollment data, there were varying numbers of students who self-identified as Somali present in all schools. However, a significant number (39%) attended schools in all areas except north Seattle (Seattle Public Schools, n.d.). As a learning organization, Seattle Public Schools had supported and partnered with educators, including school leaders, in conducting and participating in action research that aimed to improve instructional and learning outcomes for school sites and the district. Seattle Public Schools had also been at the forefront of national and state initiatives on equity and pro-immigration policies (Seattle Public Schools, n.d.). I aligned and extended the educational component of a 2016 study commissioned by the city of Seattle, which brought the East African community and the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs together to discuss their concerns and assessed existing policies and services to improve the lives of the East African communities.

Creswell (2019) and Mills and Gay (2019) noted that for purposive sampling that researchers select participants who are representatives of the population being explored or have experience or knowledge of the central phenomenon or key concept being explored. The selection of research participants was done using purposive sampling or judgment sampling.

### Participant Recruitment

I identified participants for the study after receiving an exemption from the International Review Board (IRB). Then, I sent an invitation to school principals. Participants were given an informed consent form to attest that they agreed to participate in the study. To participate in the research study, participants needed to meet the following inclusion criteria:

1. Be over 18 years old
2. Identify with the construct of being a school principal
3. 3 years minimum as a school leader
4. School geographical zone could be in any area of Seattle except the north
5. Had worked at the elementary, middle, or high school level

I sent an email containing a brief explanation of the study, an informed consent form, and a demographic questionnaire to determine if the potential participants met the study's inclusion criteria and a calendar link of available dates to schedule their interviews. Participants were interviewed using the video conferencing platform, Zoom. Videoconferencing allowed me to make limited observations of facial expressions and body language while engaging in a pseudo-face-to-face experience during interviews. Videoconferencing also provided the opportunity to record the interview sessions for transcribing verbal and nonverbal communication (Irani, 2019). Each participant was assigned a unique identification number to maintain their confidentiality. There was no compensation or incentive to participate in the study.

## Data Collection Process

Data collection for this study was conducted in two phases. The following sections outline the data collection process for each phase of the study.

**Semistructured Interviews**

As previously mentioned, in this research study, data collection occurred in two phases and gathered data efficiently for a comprehensive analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Initially, I collected demographic data to understand the impact of identity on each participant's experience with the phenomenon (Hughes et al., 2016). The additional data collection was conducted during a semi structured interview, lasting approximately 45–60 minutes, which allowed the participants to provide their responses (Granot et al., 2012; Seidman, 2006). The Seidman (2006) approach to qualitative interviewing included implementing an interview protocol that identified pre-established interview questions. The interview protocol also provided a script to guide the open-ended dialogue process, which allowed the participants to express their lived experiences freely (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Granot et al., 2012).

In Phase 1, the participants indicated their interest in participating by responding to an email invitation with a link to the informed consent form. They also completed a brief demographic questionnaire that identified whether they met the criteria to participate in the study while providing data for future analysis.

In Phase 2, the participants engaged in a confidential, open-ended, semistructured interview to discuss their lived experiences in the context of the historical progression of their careers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 2011; Seidman, 2006; see Table 1). The 45–60 minute interviews were conducted via Zoom. I scheduled individual appointments with six school principals who met the criteria for inclusion in the study. The open-ended questions were prewritten and designed to facilitate dialogue about how the participants felt, thought about, and perceived their experiences, skills, and barriers they encountered in supporting Somali students (Moustakas, 2011).

**Table 1**

*Data Analysis by Phase*

| Phase | Data collection | Analysis |
|---|---|---|
| Phase 1 | Via Zoom<br>Structured questions<br>Demographic data collection<br>Criterion purposeful sampling method | Interpretative phenomenological analysis |
| Phase 2 - School leader interview | Open-ended questions | 1. Organize and prepare data for analysis<br>2. Review all data to eliminate redundancy and overlap<br>3. Code data by a common theme or description<br>4. Organize codes based on similarities<br>5. Identify themes and record |

**Interview Questions**

1. What are the lived experiences of school principals in Seattle Public Schools?
2. How would you characterize your school leadership experience? What are the challenges?
3. How has your background, training and experience contributed to your growth as a school leader in an increasingly diverse school community?
4. What targeted strategies, environment, and resources have been provided or are currently receiving to support your unique learning and growth needs as a school leader?
5. How would you characterize your school leadership experience with Somali and other Black immigrant students? What are the challenges working with Somali and other Black immigrant students and families?
6. Can you describe any professional development centered on working with immigrant students and families that you have participated in or initiated in your building?

7. Can you describe any professional development specifically centered on equity for Somali and other Black immigrant students that you have participated in or initiated in your building?
8. What challenges or barriers have you faced in your attempts to promote the academic achievement of Somali and other Black immigrant students?
9. What leadership skills and practices do you use to support and promote the academic achievement of Somali students?
10. What advice would you give to other (aspiring) school leaders with similar principal problem of practice?

## Data Analysis

I collected and analyzed the qualitative datasets resulting from the 10 open-ended questions. The data included narratives of school leaders' experiences obtained from their responses to open-ended questions and conversation (Mills & Gay, 2019). To safeguard the privacy of each participant, a unique code was assigned to every participant.

### Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

I used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore how the participants personally experienced or perceived the phenomenon or event (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal of this study was to use participant-centered analysis that retained the depth of experience in understanding the data (Moustakas, 2011). Data collected through structured interviews was subjected to a thorough qualitative analysis using the IPA framework. Instead of trying to create objective memories that diverted from the influence of their experience with the phenomena, the analytical process was considered the subjective response (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). When reflecting and analyzing the participants' answers to the open-ended interview questions, I

needed to recognize my positionality in the setting of the research (Smith, 2017). Using the IPA procedure aided in minimizing researcher bias, and the findings were verified through theme classification and constant comparison (R. K. Yin, 2016).

**Thematic Coding**

This study used thematic coding, or thematic analysis, to identify themes in the transcribed text by analyzing the interpretation of words and sentence structure (R. K. Yin, 2016). Throughout the interview series, I analyzed the data using the abductive or repetitive process of constant comparison. Through offering direct responses, I pinpointed specific themes and established corresponding codes. The analysis was conducted using a constant comparison approach (Glaser, 1965).

1. Reviewed the dataset, organized, and prepared data for analysis.
2. Reviewed all data to eliminate redundancy and overlap.
3. Coded data by a common theme or description.
4. Compared data with previous codes and labeled with the same code.
5. First, the data was coded. Then, the codes were organized into groups based on their similarities. Finally, a theme was identified and recorded for each group.

**Measures of Quality: Credibility**

In conducting a qualitative phenomenological study that involves interviewing individuals who may have shared experiences, Mills and Gay (2019) emphasized the importance of considering the researcher's positionality and trustworthiness. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), experiments were designed to reduce the threats to validity. I used various strategies to ensure the validity (i.e., trustworthiness) of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I established credibility by triangulating the different data sources, examining the evidence, and

identifying common themes from the interviews. Validity and reliability were essential to establish the scales' trustworthiness and measures used for the open-ended survey questions (Pallant, 2016). Per Mills and Gay (2019), the survey instrument's validity was addressed to assure "the degree to which [this] test assesse[d] what it was designed to measure, and so facilitated appropriate interpretation of scores" (p. 178).

## Controls for Bias

I acknowledged the risks of bias in this qualitative research study because of several factors. I was aware of the potential for bias in my qualitative research study due to my professional and personal relationships with most of the participants. To ensure objectivity and minimize the impact of any potential biases, I employed research reflexivity principles, which involved ongoing self-examination of my role in the research process. I set aside my professional experience, personal views, assumptions, and biases, as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Ivankova (2015). This was especially important in my role as a school principal in Seattle Public Schools, and reflexivity helped me maintain a fair and honest approach to the study's collection and analysis of data. participants in the study. I maintained as much objectivity and minimized the potential impacts of biases during the collection and analysis of data by incorporating the principles of research reflexivity through the honest and ongoing examination of my role in the research process and bracketing of professional experience, personal view, assumptions, and bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ivankova, 2015). Incorporating reflexivity was critical in this study, given my professional role as a school principal in Seattle Public Schools.

## Ethical Concerns

The research included human subjects and, therefore, began when the exemption from IRB review was received. This dissertation followed ethical and scientific standards.

Participants' rights and privacy were respected and maintained throughout the research process. Participants were able to withdraw from the study at any point. Data were collected following the recognized methods and standards for such scientific study, while all participants' confidentiality was maintained. The participants were informed of the survey's results. Survey results will be stored securely for at least 3 years after completing the study.

**Positionality**

I provided a statement of my positionality to ensure transparency in the research process. Like the subjects, I am an immigrant from Jamaica who has worked as a social worker, interpreter, and translator for Haitian and Latin American families before becoming an educator. I had worked with immigrant groups from Cuba, Latin America, Haiti, and Asia in many school districts in Florida, North Carolina, and Washington state. It is worth noting that at the time of the study, I was also a principal employed in the same school district as the study participants. Additionally, I was in my 5th year as an elementary school principal in Washington state. I also had prior experience as a school principal, assistant principal, district coordinator, and social worker in Florida and North Carolina. As an educator, I was intimately aware of immigrant students' challenges when seeking educational advancement compared to their domestic peers. Ultimately, I was aware of the systemic barriers, including district and state budget deficits that limit school leaders' professional development opportunities and their ability to access resources to promote academic achievement for marginalized students.

**Delimitations**

The study was conducted in Seattle Public Schools, the largest school district in King County and Washington state. I sought to understand how school principals promoted improved academic outcomes for Somali and other immigrant students using equity-minded leadership

framework. I conducted an initial inquiry using a demographic survey to determine eligibility to participate in the survey (Gay et al., 2009). For this qualitative study, I used purposive sampling to interview eleven current and former principals, who had served at any level (i.e., elementary, middle, alternative, or high school) for more than 3 years in Seattle Public Schools. The school had to be in a geographic area that had a significant number of Somali students. There was intentionality in selecting this small sample size school leaders who met the prescribed criteria as they were able to provide innovative strategies and recommendations to resolve the problems that Black immigrant students encounter in their school communities.

This qualitative phenomenological case study design investigated two research questions:

1. What are the salient skills and competencies school leaders need to have to support the academic needs of immigrant students, specifically Somali students?
2. How can they use these leadership skills and competencies to address the needs of Somali students?

The study generated findings that supported the development of the skills and competencies that school leaders needed to support the academic requirements of immigrant students, specifically Somali students. Participants were selected from Seattle schools with a considerable enrollment of Somali students. The participants were required to hold leadership positions in the school for at least 3 years. Participants engaged virtually in semistructured interviews and used the video conferencing platform, Zoom. I implemented the Seidman (2006) approach to qualitative interviewing through the interview protocol that identified the preestablished interview questions and a script to guide the open-ended dialogue process that allowed participants to express their lived experiences freely. Data were collected using a single point-in-time interview with open-ended questions. Interview data were analyzed through a

coding matrix, combined, and organized by themes. The data coding was aligned with the study's theoretical framework of equity mindedness (Maher et al., 2018). The theoretical framework of equity-mindedness provided potential recommendations for school leaders and districts seeking to promote improved academic outcomes for Somali students and other immigrant groups.

Chapter 4 presents comprehensive findings from the semi-structured interviews with the 11 school principals. Research questions guided the analysis of participants' responses to open-ended questions. The questions were then thematically coded to inform the discussion and recommendations in Chapter 5.

# Chapter 4. Findings

This qualitative study aimed to explore the response of school leaders to the academic needs of Somali students in Seattle Public Schools. The first three chapters of this study presented historical and contemporary insights into school leadership pedagogy, policies, and practice; a review of relevant scholarly works; and the conceptual framework selected for this study. Chapter 3 presented the argument for conducting a transcendental phenomenological qualitative study and the procedures used to conduct sampling, instrumentation, and the methodology used for both data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this research, which were collected and presented using a conceptual framework referenced for this purpose.

The study used a transcendental phenomenological research design to incorporate an individualized viewpoint in data collection, focusing on participants' holistic lived experiences encompassing their emotions, thoughts, and personal truths (Moustakas, 2011). The research, done using transcendental phenomenology, centered on exploring how the participants' personal experiences have provided insight, was specifically in relation to the experiences that shaped their actions and responses in support of the academic needs of their students.

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the findings from the two research questions. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 11 current and former school leaders of schools in various Seattle areas, excluding the north and northeast regions. It is worth noting that these areas were excluded due to the lack of a substantial Somali student population, as indicated by enrollment data from Seattle Public Schools. Initially, eight principals were interviewed. However, when the leaders returned for their Opening of School Leader training in early August, three additional principals who met the criteria were also interviewed. I included

additional information from another principal who was referred to participate in the study, which can be found later in the dissertation. All findings presented served to answer the following research questions for this study:

1. What are the salient skills and competencies school leaders need to have to support the academic needs of immigrant students, specifically Somali students?
2. How can they use these leadership skills and competencies to address the needs of Somali and other immigrant students?

## Summary of the Research Design

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to understand better how school leaders were adapting their leadership response to meet the academic needs of Somali immigrant students and their families. I used an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) qualitative approach (Smith, 2017) to examine the lived experience of school leaders and how they brought these experiences to bear to create equity-minded, culturally responsive, and welcoming school environments. In an IPA design, the researcher is the instrument, data analysis is inductive, and the results are descriptive. The overall purpose of the research design was to understand how participants used their lives and experiences to make meaning (Smith, 2017). Researchers who used basic qualitative study were interested in (a) how people interpret their experiences, (b) how they construct their worlds, and (c) what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). The participants were given the necessary information about the interview protocol such as date, time, and name of the interviewee, as well as:

- Introduction that included the purpose of the study, structure of the interview, and definition of important terms used during the interview.

- Opening questions about the participant journey to current role and the demographics of the school.
- Interview questions that are informed by the two research questions.
- Closing instructions regarding final questions, maintaining confidentiality, and future communications.

The interview protocol was piloted with a nonparticipant school principal to test run the questions, ensure clarity of the questions, and receive feedback on improving the protocol (Jacob & Ferguson, 2015). I honed my interviewing skills during the pilot interviews by recognizing any confusing or poorly worded questions. I also discovered which questions could have provided more valuable information and which were essential to include (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I received permission from the participants to record the conversation prior to each interview. I recorded the interviews to capture the participant's verbatim transcription Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Listening to the interviews also allowed me to reflect on adjusting or improving the questioning techniques for the proceeding interviews. I used the "record" and "transcribe" features of Zoom and Microsoft to document the participants' responses.

## Data Analysis

As noted in Chapter 3, the data analysis consisted of interpreting data by organizing the content and identifying patterns and themes to result in a holistic meaning of the lived experiences of school principals. Thematic coding was used to analyze the information presented to make the data more manageable (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview transcripts were read multiple times during the coding process to identify the major themes and content. Each

demographic question and the open-ended questions were coded and analyzed into a conceptual map to reflect the flow of ideas.

## Study Setting and Participants

This section provides background information on the study's setting and participants.

### Study Setting

This case study was conducted in Seattle, Washington. Seattle is the largest city in King County, a region in the Pacific Northwest area of the United States. The total population of King County in 2018 was over 2.1 million residents (about the population of New Mexico). The county had become increasingly diverse, with much of the diversity concentrated in the south and southwest sections of King County. Various methods were used to contact and solicit possible participants: emails, phone calls, and referrals. I sent an email invitation with a demographic questionnaire to school leaders who fit the inclusion criteria. The questionnaire revealed that 10 potential participants met the criteria. All 10 school principals completed the survey and participated in virtual, semistructured interviews lasting 45–60 minutes. The interviews were conducted using the Zoom video platform and were recorded. An additional principal with experience working with Somali students was referred and interviewed. I transcribed each response and identified common themes and experiences during the coding process.

### Participant Profiles

Table 2 gives an overview of the 11 school leaders in this study. Each participant was given a pseudonym to ensure their anonymity during the interview process and met a prescribed list of criteria. All participants met the prescribed inclusion criteria:

- Identified as over 18 years old

- School leader at the elementary, middle, high school, or alternative high school
- Minimum of 3 years in the role of principal
- Schools located in any geographic area (with significant Somali population) excluding north and northeast Seattle

**Table 2**

*Participant Profiles*

| Pseudonym | Ethnicity | Age | Years as leader | Building level | Geographical location |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Shirley N. | African American | 55 | 21 | Elementary | SE |
| Manny M. | African American | 58 | 22 | High | South |
| Bryan G. | African American | 58 | 22 | High | West |
| Adrian B. | Black | 53 | 10 | Elementary | SE |
| Lorena P. | Mexican | 59 | 20+ | High | Central |
| Will G. | White | 50 | 10 | K–8 | SE |
| Paula C. | African American | 57 | 15 | Elementary, Alt. high | West |
| Sara W. | African American | 50 | 20 | Middle | SE |
| Peter K. | White | 53 | 17 | Elementary | West/ SE |
| Aubrey B. | African American | 40 | 6 | High | Southeast |
| Maisha C. | African American | 63 | 27 | Elementary | West |

**The Significance of Participants' Experiences**

This study's findings could inform how public-school principals created an inclusive, equity-minded and culturally responsive school environment for immigrant students and their families by transforming the organization. Moreover, this research could provide examples of how school principals became equity-minded instructional leaders by ongoing critical self-reflection to create a transformative school staff, teachers, and curriculum. Specifically, this research could shed light on how school leaders created equitable learning opportunities and dismantled racist systemic policies to enhance the educational experiences of students from historically marginalized backgrounds. This research could expand the practice of an equity-

minded school leadership framework and enable school leaders to leverage the strengths of Black immigrant students to achieve educational equity and inclusion. Finally, some potential policy significance of this study related to teaching and curriculum designs, professional development, leadership preparation, and human resources decisions.

The study was significant because according to C. Day et al. (2016) and Pont (2014) proposed that when school leaders and educators expressed or had high expectations, it was internalized by students and was manifested in their actual performance.

## Findings

The 11 school leaders in this study included one newly appointed superintendent, who was an assistant superintendent that served as a principal for more than 15 years, and 10 current school principals. The study drew additional school leaders who were interested in participating and met the inclusion criteria but because of the study's limitation, could not be included. At the time of the study, I was grateful for their willingness to contribute to the emergent literature on contemporary leadership practices to support the academic needs of Somali immigrants. Each participant agreed to participate in a virtual 45–60-minute interview via Zoom.

### Developing Categories for Analysis

I identified preliminary themes after I reviewed and analyzed the 11 transcripts based on the demographic questionnaire and the interview questions guided by the research questions. As noted in Chapter 2, the theoretical framework of equity mindedness was foundational to this study. Additionally, this conceptual framework incorporated the concepts of culturally responsive leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016) and transformative leadership (Burns, 1978; Downton, 1973), dominant themes from the interviews that were revealed by the findings. Implementing culturally responsive and transformative leadership allowed school leaders to

remain dynamic and pivot based on modern day's changing internal and external context facilitated by equity-minded leadership (Campos-Moreira et al., 2020). Table 3 shows the sample categories developed into thematic data driven findings.

**Table 3**

*Sample Categories Developed Into Thematic Data Driven Findings*

| Research questions | Themes | Subtheme |
|---|---|---|
| Research Question 1: What are the salient skills and competencies school leaders need to have to support the academic needs of immigrant students, specifically Somali students? | Theme 1: Critical self-reflection inspires asset-based perceptions and transformative work. | × Critical self-reflection<br>× Asset-based perceptions<br>× Equity minded<br>× Transformative work |
| | Theme 2: Proactive listening and strong collaborations lead to achieving the school's common good | × Proactive listening<br>× Collaborative leadership |
| Research Question 2: How can they use these leadership skills and competencies to address the needs of Somali and other immigrant students? | Theme 3: Equity-minded leaders promote a safe learning environment and access to culturally responsive resources. | × Building a safe learning environment<br>× Access to culturally responsive materials |
| | Theme 4: Equity-minded leaders leverage structures and processes to build a culturally responsive school for students and staff | × Strong class advisory<br>× Counseling department<br>× Equity team<br>× Ongoing PD on equity and cultural responsiveness<br>× Hiring diverse staff |

Next, I present the results gathered from participants related to the research questions that were used to guide the interviews.

## Thematic Findings

Research Question 1: What are the salient skills and competencies school leaders need to have to support the academic needs of immigrant students, specifically Somali students?

### Theme 1: Critical Self-Reflection Inspires Equity-Based Perceptions and Transformative Work

Bart (2011) and Jacoby (2010) defined critical self-reflection in several ways including (a) engaging in a process of analyzing and making judgments about one's experiences, such as a conscious exploration or a deep deliberate search; (b) observing, asking questions, and putting facts, ideas, and experiences together to derive new meaning and self-understanding; and (c) a vehicle for critical analysis, problem solving, synthesis of opposing ideas, evaluation, identifying patterns, and creating meaning.

As part of the study, 11 participants were interviewed and asked to reflect on their personal experiences and how those experiences have influenced their interactions with immigrant students. The study identified three key areas that influenced their responses: personal values, cultural background, and professional experience. These factors influenced the participants' perspective that ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse students and families enriched students' and staff's educational experiences (Öztürk, 2013; Parra, 2012; Richards et al., 2007). These factors have been the primary reasons why school leaders challenge exclusionary and discriminatory policies and practices, ultimately seeking to disrupt systems that promote inequities in their schools. School leaders regardless of race or ethnicity shared they have ongoing formal and informal conversations about race with their staff members if they were to address systemic inequities and served as advocates for their historically underserved and immigrant students (DeMatthew et al., 2021). The participants also expressed that schools could have been very isolating, as immigrants still experienced a sense that they do not belong. Although they were often identified as Black, the Somali culture vastly differs from African American culture. Iheduru (2012) highlighted various reasons why a disconnect persisted

between Africans and African Americans, such as inaccurate media representations, a lack of authentic and historically relevant voices in psychology, and the misrepresentation of the African continent in history.

Aubrey B., a high school leader, who grew up in southeast Seattle and at the time of the study was a leader in the area noted:

> As an [African American] leader, I recognize that people are different, including within my own ethnicity. By developing a better understanding of myself as an African American male and a leader, I can better understand others and therefore provide a healthy and thriving school culture that supports the needs of all. Many of the Somali students and their parents get terribly upset if you label them as African American–you know they feel insulted. They believe the image they see of African Americans in the media and in the South Seattle community. Some of the African American kids threaten and tease the Somali kids. We have a really bad situation here with gangs and violence in this area; however, we are working with a lot of community organizations to support us. There is also a lot of in-fighting among the Somalis also, especially the girls. I have to lead with intentionality and acknowledgement that our two cultures are distinct and try to figure out ways for each side to respect each other and to work together.

Lorena P., who identified as being the daughter of Mexican immigrants, expressed:

> I was intentional in seeking to work in Seattle Public schools versus other districts in Washington because of the district's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. I am a daughter of immigrants, and I am the wife of an immigrant, so I have that as my background. I remember being the only Mexican family where we were in Eastern Washington and in my school, I didn't want my dad to come to school dressed a certain

way. I didn't speak Spanish. I looked White, so most people did not know I was Mexican until I was almost out of high school. I think that's why now, I celebrate who I am, and I advocate for immigrant students and our families. I do a lot of critical self-reflection and I encourage and coach my staff to engage in this practice also, to acknowledge our mistakes and to commit to improving on our practice. I ensure that there are interpreters at conferences and community events; all newsletters and other communications are translators in the home language of all the spoken languages in the building.

***Critical Self-Reflection: Understanding Oneself Then Others so You Can Bridge the Gap***

The principals saw themselves as a major part of the success of Seattle Public School's initiative that increased diversity and improved equity and inclusion among its cadre of school leaders to better reflect its increasingly multicultural/ethnic teaching staff and students. Their self-reflection highlighted similar lived experiences as some of the immigrant students they served. Will G. shared:

> SPS' [Seattle public schools] Racial Equity policy requires that one of our Wednesday monthly staff meetings is dedicated to a 2-hour professional development on race and equity. This is a time when our staff engage in critical self-reflection, lived experiences and how it affects our decision making and practices. Sometimes, the discussions are not very pretty, but there is little to no staff turnover, so they have developed trusting and collaborative relationships among each other and the administrative team.

Paula T., a veteran principal with more than 15 years of school leadership experience, shared:

> Before the Somali students came, a lot of our schools in the south and central areas, the same geographic area, there were more African American, poor, working-class Whites and Southeast Asians, but it was very still segregated. Everyone stayed within their

> affinity groups. Today, our leadership teams have been intentional in planning and hosting a lot of community activities that bring the various community groups together. Our various multicultural nights, Math and Reading nights, back-to-school events, we have literature, food, and music from all the diverse cultures that make up our schools. Sometimes, we will have the local Imam come to our staff meetings and talk to our teachers about the Somali culture and the importance of prayer and to answer questions the teachers may have. I share resources with other school leaders who are close by, for example sometimes we have our teacher professional development events together.

Maisha C. shared:

> Seattle is a very White city and boasts that as a very liberal city it and doesn't see race, is color blind and often tries to whitewash its racist history. My school has more diverse populations than others in the northern section of Seattle, due to systemic racialized exclusionary practices: redlining, gentrification, income disparity, etc., there still is a dominant White culture in my school that causes a power imbalance as the teaching staff is majority White.

All 11 participants recognized a leader needed to value diversity to support culturally diverse students and families. Principal Adrian B. explained appreciation for diversity and equity informed his leadership work. He shared:

> I chose my school because of its diversity and the importance that I place on being able to support students who have been traditionally unsupported and who are traditionally underrepresented in advanced learning environments. I was that Black boy that like to write poems and excelled at math and science. I had one African American elementary teacher who believed in me. I want to do the same for other Black boys and girls.

Adrian also added:

> As a leader, I show care and compassion for school families in other ways besides academics. Somali students and their families are supported by trained culturally responsive parent-liaisons, social workers, nurses, and other support staff, and have access to interpreters, translators, food and rent assistance. My administrative team and I conduct home visits and make phone calls when the kids don't show up to school.

Participants' appreciation of diversity in their leadership behavior was also influenced by their personal and family backgrounds. Participants in this study have identified a range of personal experiences, both positive and negative, that have contributed to their cultural sensitivity in their leadership roles. These experiences included diverse upbringings and belonging to immigrant families. For example, Lorena P. said, "My upbringing and growing up feeling very isolated helped me to value diversity and inclusion. I lived in two different worlds-at home, I spoke Spanish and at school."

Will G. and Bryan K., two White school leaders, had differing self-reflection because of their lived experiences. Will G. stated:

> I believe I have had an atypical lived experience for a White school principal. I was one of a handful of White students whose parents agreed to bus me to predominantly African American schools. I have also taught and have served as a school leader in the Southend in a predominantly African American school. My school has changed over the last 10 years to now be over 90% families of color with over 20 different languages spoken.

He further reflected:

> So, I had a sort of a different lens on just sort of just how school systems are built for some folks and not for other folks. And I experienced that both as a student and then as

> an educator. One of the things that has always really helped me be grounded is just the fact that regardless of what kids look like, what languages they speak, where they go to church on Sunday, families all want their kids to be successful. When you are able to build those relationships with families and you really get to know their children, there is so much that has been accomplished, with the realization that this district is still not doing enough to support us as leaders and therefore our Somali students. For example, our students need more trauma supports, but we don't have the support of the Somali parents with providing mental health and special education services to their children.

Bryan K. shared:

> I never experienced busing, as students were bused to our school; however, I had the unique experience of having the first African American principal in Seattle and I had only one White teacher throughout my elementary years. In thinking about the question really thoughtfully, I've always wanted to make sure that I had ways of connecting my schools to a system so that I could navigate that for families and to grow the accessibility for all families in my schools. As a White assistant principal to an African American female principal, I remember I was asked to work specifically with some African American male students because the principal did not want the perception of being an authoritarian toward Black males. I take that same intentionality and critical self-reflection in my relationship with our Somali students and their family especially because so many things can go sideways because of the religion and culture.

Overall, principals' reflections of their values and their personal and professional backgrounds became pivotal in understanding and appreciating the benefits of culturally diverse students and families in the school community. The 11 principals understood embracing different

cultures and building relationships with people of different backgrounds was imperative in promoting a welcoming and inclusive school community. They also understood that critical and ongoing self-reflection of their personal and professional experiences, including their implicit and explicit biases, was the first step in breaking down barriers, honestly self-reflecting, and beginning to acknowledge their privilege and harm to peers, staff, parents, and students. They also challenged deficit views against students and dismantled inequitable policies and practices in their buildings. This self-reflection process allowed the principals to see the Somali community as an asset that could improve the school climate and culture. Therefore, one strategy was the development of partnerships with local community leaders and mosques to invite the Somalis or members of Muslim community to be part of the decision-making process and teams in the schools.

**Theme 2: Proactive Listening and Strong Collaborations Lead to Achieving the School's Common Good**

The 11 participants shared the importance of showing respect to the families through proactive listening and collaboration. They shared that the first step was being a good listener as they built effective relationships with the students and families. They believed active listening helped them to gain a clear understanding of the perspectives of all stakeholders including improving the relationship between parents and teachers. Listening fosters trust, respect, and a healthy school climate. Principal Peter K., a Caucasian principal, shared an interaction he had as a new principal with a group of Somali mothers:

> I always tell people one of the hardest meetings I ever had was as an assistant principal at K–8 school during the early years, and my job was to get the Somali moms to feel better about the meal service of turkey ham in the lunchroom. I could not convince them that it

> was not ham, but we eventually compromised and ended up with little symbols on laminated cards, which the lunchroom manager would put by the food of a cow or a carrot. So, the students could have a meat or vegetarian option and that's how we made sure that we made sure that our Somali students and others had a vegetarian option going forward in our schools.

Will G. reflected:

> Each year, I earn the trust and more acceptance by members of the Somali community by actively listening, respecting their culture and partnering with families. I let them know that their children are safe and well taken care of. I believe I still have to go out of my way to convince them that their students will be successful at school and some do. And I continue I acknowledge the trauma that many Somali families suffer from their experiences in public schools, whether that be Seattle schools for any other schools' setting. And so being cognizant of the harm that has been caused and continues to be caused and acknowledging that on the front end of conversations goes a long way in building trust with families and community. It's important for my staff and I to critically reflect on the development of trust and work to earn the parents' trust.

In the next section, I discuss how the principals demonstrated culturally responsiveness and equity mindedness in their transformative work and how these concepts align with Research Question 2: How can they use these leadership skills and competencies to address the needs of Somali and other immigrant students?

**Theme 3: Equity-Minded Leaders Promote a Safe Learning Environment and Access to Culturally Responsive Resources**

The 11 principals expressed they engaged in culturally responsive professional leadership development activities in district-led offerings and in their master's and doctoral program, and they have incorporated the use of reflective practice and used their power positively to transform their schools in novel ways. They challenged deficit opinion, deleterious and exclusionary practices targeted at immigrant students and their parents, by having intentional and reflective conversations centered on race, bias, culture, and religion with their staff. The principals expended a lot of their efforts to create a safer school environment and built a vision and mission respectful of cultural differences. For example, Sara W. shared:

> To foster a more welcoming and inclusive school environment, it was imperative that I look at the limited resources and support that I had as a new middle school principal in shaping the school's culture and prioritizing resources. I was grateful that I had two great thought partners and fellow principals to help me reflect on how to dismantle segregated school structures and transform the school culture. After careful consideration of the existing research on language acquisition, inclusion and equity, I made sure my teachers were dual certified, especially those who worked supporting students whether they were receiving language acquisition support or exited because more than 70% of the students were multilingual learners. I had to change the way I hired and trained staff because of the demographic shifts of the students, we had to make sure that we had other supports in place by hiring teachers who had dual areas of certifications—something that other principals in less diverse schools would not necessarily think to do.

Maisha C., an African American principal, had led the west Seattle school for over 14 years. At the time of the study, the school was over 75% Somali. She originally visited the school as a member of the Seattle Public Schools transformational team. She noted:

> I am proud of all that we have accomplished over these 14 years! Through reflection and recognition that the Somali students and the community need to see themselves reflected in all areas of the operation and decision making, I trained members of the communities to not only be instructional assistants, but certified teachers, one person got his principal's endorsement and continues to have a leadership role with the families. I believe that with the community being majority Somali, there should be leadership in the school that is representative of that ethnic group as well.

Other principals, for example Paula T., Peter K., and Sara W. shared that they trained a small cadre of Somali community members as instructional assistants to deliver reading instruction for newcomers, conduct home visits and to provide interpreting and translating support during parent/teacher conferences. The principals leveraged immigrant families' personal and cultural experiences to spur them to become more actively involved them at school. For example, several principals asked parents and community members to share their rich culture and work experiences to infuse global experiences into the school community, to provide experiential learning and role models, and to foster a sense of pride for the students. The principals also asked immigrant parents to serve on the building leadership team at school and to participate in the decision-making process.

**Theme 4: Equity-Minded Leaders Leverage Structures and Processes to Build a Culturally Responsive School for Students and Staff**

Shirley N., Aubrey B., Lorena P., and Manny M. shared that they had to rely on their local community and community-based organizations to support the rapid creation of an infrastructure if they were going to be successful. They started strong partnerships with various community organizations including the local mosques, Burmese community, Refugee Women's Alliance, El Centro de la Raza, and the great Horn of Africa, and they would encourage them to hold their monthly meetings in their building. They received support from the school district with the technical aspects of the partnership work. The district provided great race and equity annual professional development and paid for team stipends in select schools. The 11 principals were deliberative and ensured that communication to the Somalis were translated in Somali and that there were interpreters at all school events. Paula T. recounted:

> As an African American woman and educator, I believe my struggles with very racist administrators and teachers have made me realize how I need to treat others with kindness and respect. I try to treat our Somali students with a lot of caring because I know many of them are scared, unsure of what to do. The parents are combative out of anxiety and fear not from anger. I believe as a Black woman, I have a better understanding of the African women versus White staff members as they often say that a parent is so angry, because of the body language or the facial expression when the parent is "passionate" or "excited." I have also travelled outside of the U.S. and that has helped me to be culturally agile. The hardest part as a Black and female leader is getting into confrontations with parents who disrespect me in my office, that I should not speak with males as a female leader. I respectfully disagree letting them know that it is a

> nonnegotiable, they have to respect me in my space. I will not be disrespected, and parents have ultimately come to the realization that culturally responsive goes both ways. It's important that the families (and students) develop an understanding of academic and educational expectations.

She also spoke candidly about the Somali parents' resistance to the FLASH (i.e., sexual health) and gender issue. She was able to advocate and got a waiver from the district to offer the Somali students an alternative to FLASH, art, music, and curriculum (i.e., more reading) aligned to the needs of her students. Shirley N. shared:

> My school enrollment is half Somali. Our district sponsored race and equity committee had a panel with parents at the beginning of the school year. We had interpreters and gave parents an opportunity for parents to learn about expectations, ask questions and know what's going on with their children. Most parents expected school would last about a couple of hours instead of 6 hours. The parents don't want any of the "extra stuff" like music or art. It is difficult getting them to understand that at the elementary level we have to offer that, so we offer extra library.

Peter K. noted:

> One of the major challenges in working with predominantly White teachers and coaching them through their own journey of developing of cultural competence and culturally responsive instruction is around classroom expectations. The kids enter schools not knowing the expectations, so they use inappropriate language, get into a lot of fights and conflicts, and because so many of the families still have families back in the refugee camps in Kenya, the kids are often sent back to the grandparents (and other relatives) when teachers express a concern. So, I have to "coach" teachers to be really cognizant

> about how they discuss issues with parents and be patient with the students. Although we are all aware that they have to set clear expectations. The teacher should be prepared to review and reteach the expectations often. We are starting to put a lot of culturally responsive social-emotional support in place for students and families.

Lorena P. was proud of her work when she was a principal:

> I was very intentional in ensuring that my leadership team was reflective of the community because it was important to get it right. The other thing I did was I hired people who represented my students. And so, whether it was through the health clinic, the clinic staff had the same values, looked like the community, etc. We wanted the students to feel like they were at home with having folks who looked and sounded like them. It is also great for staff to have peers who look like them also and to build their own adult community also.

Aubrey B. added:

> I have a similar lived experience as the Somali students, growing up in Seattle in a racially segregated Seattle. I have a pretty good understanding that many of the students by the time they get to high school feel jaded. I think that there's always room for opportunity and more conversations in terms of how we can support students, particularly those in high school as they often get ignored and overlooked. One of my major challenges as a leader is ensuring the safety of students. There has been violence in the community of southeast Seattle, with a lot of gun violence, and the trauma that comes from that. If students don't feel safe, they are not going to come to school and no learning will occur. I think one of the other challenges too is just in terms of when it comes to curriculum, when it comes to best practices, like how we are best supporting our students

> that are coming in with language. What we lack in resources, we fortunately make up for in staff who are dedicated to the students and their families. They are very much invested in making sure that students are supported. Over the years, the staff have learned a lot about the culture, participated in a lot of professional development and taught siblings and other family members.

Bryan B. stated:

> For most in dominant culture, they see the same Black skin and think African American and Somalis are the same. It difficult to get the White teachers to respect the culture and history of not just African American students but more so, Somali students. The teachers get upset when the students are pulled out of school without notice and they are gone for months. The teachers and I find it difficult to communicate with Somali parents even with interpreter support. The impacts of student learning were exacerbated during and post-COVID for our Somali students, especially with on-line schooling, vaccine and misinformation and lack of information. I think other principals with Somali students are experiencing the same thing.

Even though the principals have engaged in at least one race and equity related professional development during the 2022–2023 school year, none of these events have been focused on supporting Somali students. The principals shared there was ongoing work with teachers and staff and with the parents on being culturally responsive. However, they were committed to taking the time to support their teachers and staff to get to not only a level of cultural competency but ultimately to that of cultural proficiency.

## Summary

In summary, the 11 principals in this study demonstrated ongoing critical self-reflection in their leadership practice, which resulted in their belief systems, personal and cultural backgrounds, and professional experiences. This critical self-reflection process enabled them to see the changing demographics as an asset for enhancing the educational experiences of both native-born and immigrant Somali students and their families. The principals' reflective practices have also helped them recognize the exclusionary and discriminatory policies and practices against immigrants in their schools. Finally, the reflective practice prompted them to act decisively to correct negative stereotypes of immigrants and dismantled inequitable structures in their schools, thus, creating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for all. The process of bringing about a positive transformation in schools varied for each school leader; however, they all faced resistance, mainly from the staff. The 11 principals shared there were missteps along their journey. They shared strategies to promote student success that included collaborating with the Somali community, learning alongside their staff, and using their positional power to implement the desired changes successfully.

Chapter 4 provided a detailed analysis of the results from semi-structured interviews with 11 school principals. These principals were selected because they led schools with a large population of Somali students. The methodology selected was a qualitative phenomenological approach, which aimed to comprehensively understand the lived experiences of school principals in Seattle Public Schools. This study aimed to examine the school leadership practices and skills that have been shown to positively impact the academic outcomes of Somali immigrant students. I exclusively drew data from a network of school principals I knew either directly or indirectly as members of the Washington Association of School Principals and the Seattle Association of

School Principals. The data collection process involved using two instruments, including a demographic questionnaire, to determine whether the participants met the eligibility criteria.

An interview protocol was also used to gather data related to the open-ended research questions. I also conducted a thematic analysis of the responses collected from the research questions. This analysis sought to identify recurring themes in the transcribed text through the analysis of sentence structure. Themes emerged in the study that provided a deeper understanding of how each school leader responded to the needs of Somali students as reflected in the interview summaries and the novel strategies other school principals could consider along their career trajectory.

Chapter 5 extends the discussion of the findings in response to the research questions. Recommendations are provided based on participants' contributions to the research study, and additional literature is applied to new concepts emerging from their responses. In addition, Chapter 5 also covers the potential implications for social change and future research.

## Chapter 5. Discussion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine how school leaders in Seattle Public Schools were responding to the academic needs of Somali students, who at the time of the study were the largest Black immigrant demographic group in the school district and Washington state. School leaders were responsible for advocating and preparing students with the skills to learn, adapt, and succeed academically and socioemotionally. Additionally, they must have invested in ongoing professional development to be responsive to education changes, policies, and practices that had resulted from a myriad of factors including fiscal, geopolitical, and demographic shifts with an increasing number of Somali immigrants. Browne (2012) posited:

> Educators and families with children of school age in the 21st century are witnessing a seismic shift, equivalent to a tsunami, in the challenges and changes being implemented or on the horizon that will fundamentally and permanently impact the nature of the teaching and learning process. We must make sure that no one is left behind during this cataclysm. The contemporary experiences of teachers and school site administrators, especially those in culturally diverse low-income urban settings give new meaning to the phrase “being on the firing line.” (p. 1)

Seattle Public School was reflective of the cultural tsunami described by Browne (2012), which had an increasing number of immigrant students in its public schools. This study investigated strategies that these identified school leaders employed to be responsive to the expanding and complex intersectionality to address state- and district-mandates to improve student academic performance.

The first three chapters offered an introduction to the problem surrounding leadership development and capacity including a review of copious literature to better understand school leaders, their lived experiences, decision making, professional training, and their responses to Black immigrant students. There was also an examination of the dynamics impacting Somali students for a deeper understanding of this demographic group. Also, Chapter 3 described the methodology for conducting the study, data collection, and analysis. Chapter 4 presented the findings that emerged from the data collection and analysis using both the structured interviews and the research questions constructed for this study. The study was a comprehensive examination of the experiences of 11 school leaders in Seattle Public Schools and the practical strategies they employed in enacting equity-minded leadership. The four overarching themes that emerged from the analysis of the data were as follows: (a) critical self-reflection that inspires asset-based perceptions and transformative work, (b) proactive listening and strong collaborations that lead to achieving the school community's common good, (c) equity-minded leaders promote a safe learning environment and access to culturally responsive resources, and (d) equity-minded leaders leverage structures and processes to build a culturally responsive school for students and staff. These thematic findings were detailed in Chapter 4 and aligned to the two research questions and the literature review.

I identified extracts of participants' lived experiences that were most significant to the focus of this study and combined them into a paragraph, which created a collection of narratives that follow in the next section. Answers to the research questions were introduced with the collection of narratives, highlighting why, how, and in what ways school leaders examined how to support marginalized students using equity mindedness. Also discussed were the recommendations for practice and future research implications.

## Discussion

The findings of this study that I presented provided a deeper understanding of the lived and professional experiences of the 11 school leaders. It offered robust context and content into their varied experiences and strategies they used to support Somali students, the barriers they encountered in enacting equity-minded decision making, and the need for continuous, practical learning opportunities. Alvoid and Black (2014) noted:

> The job of a modern-day principal has transformed into something that would be almost unrecognizable to the principals of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The concept of the principal as a building manager has given way to a model where the principal is an aspirational leader, a team builder, a coach, and an agent of visionary change. (para. 2)

Several theorists (Gay, 2018; Souers & Hall, 2016) suggested that the perception of immigrant students by administrators, teachers, and the school organization may have had a significant influence on their academic achievement. Strayhorn (2022) attributed the leadership focus on academic achievement to the revised teacher- and principal-appraisal systems that were contributing to the principal's changing landscape. These changes have rightly put student performance at the forefront, and principals were being asked to develop new competencies centered around data, curriculum, pedagogy, and human capital development to meet the new expectations. School administrators have had a significant responsibility in establishing a school atmosphere that emphasizes high expectations, a mindset that fosters growth, and an affirming teaching and learning environment that nurtures the academic achievement of all students, especially immigrants and their families, in the public school system.

Despite district mandates, school leaders who set out to develop genuine relationships with students and their families created a sense of belonging, gave students feelings of security,

identity, and community, which, in turn, supported academic, psychological, and social development (Jethwani-Keyser, 2008). A sense of belonging was defined as feeling accepted and liked by the rest of the group, feeling connected to others, and feeling like a member of a community (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943). Human beings in general, but teenagers, have desired strong social ties and valued acceptance, care, and support from others (Osterman, 2000). In addition, this study sought to add to the gaps and growing interest in the literature regarding the concept of equity mindedness and how it may have been an effective leadership response to improving the academic performance for immigrant students and other historically underserved students. Chapter 5 also answers and expands on the two research questions and the 10 interview questions. This study sought to answer two main research questions.

**Research Question 1**

What are the salient skills and competencies school leaders need to have to support the academic needs of immigrant students, specifically Somali students?

Research has indicated that schools that effectively educated students from diverse ethnic backgrounds had a consistent practice by school leaders of modelling, fostering an inclusive climate, and leading with an ethic of caring (Furman, 2012). The 11 school principals were empathetic of the struggles that the Somali immigrant students were going through; and they were striving to improve the school culture and climate. As such, the principals prioritized fostering opportunities, policies, and practices, thereby creating the environment that nurtured and supported immigrant students. The four overarching themes that resulted from the findings highlighted that the school leaders' philosophy and practices that have evolved around the school districts focusing on customer service, which is detailed in the next section.

**Research Question 2**

How can they use these leadership skills and competencies to address the needs of Somali and other immigrant students?

For the principals to turn their schools into learning communities that were culturally inclusive and accessible for Somali students, it was essential to build relationships and trust among teachers, students, and families. Shields and Edwards (2005) suggested the use of a carnival as a catalyst to recreate and rejuvenate dialogue. In addition, they indicated informal conversation could have been used not only to build relationships but also to diminish certain organizational factors that perpetuated inequities and hindered a healthy learning community. Therefore, it was imperative that the school principals created nonacademic activities that could provide the opportunities for immigrant families and the teachers to get to know each other on a personal level. Findings of this study noted other nonacademic, fun activities, and strategies to build community and to create an inclusive and welcoming environment.

**Critical Self-Reflection Inspires Strength-Based Perceptions and Transformative Work**

The findings also revealed critical self-reflection was significant for school leaders to examine their perceptions of race and equity. Continuous self-reflection was a meaningful practice that encouraged school leaders to consider equity mindedness as an asset to enrich their leadership practice and their interactions with immigrant students, their families, and the school staff. Critical self-reflection also allowed school leaders to examine their personal biases, the instructional practices of teachers and the curriculum, use of resources, community engagement, and staff hiring. This leads to more sustainable, culturally responsive leadership and transformative practices (Khalifa et al., 2016; Shields, 2014). In the context of the increasing number of Somali students in Seattle Public Schools, critical self-reflection has served as a guide

for school leaders on how they can leverage students' strengths to enrich the school community (Khalifa et al., 2016). Through this process, school principals gained critical awareness of their biases and prejudices, which allowed them to be more inclusive when leading diverse students with different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds (Silverman et al., 2023).

However, some principals conceded that the development of critical self-reflection did not occur naturally. Hallberg and Santiago (2021) shared that many leaders were willing to engage in the work of leading for equity but lacked clarity about where to start and how to proceed, often seeking out external tools. Some of the principals, including Manny M. and Paula C., said they needed professional development on reflective inquiry and needed to have the motivation to do so before engaging in equity-minded and transformative leadership practices. Other principals in this study shared that they routinely examined their values and beliefs, perhaps because of their family backgrounds and personal experiences, including racism, marginalization, and exclusion. Dugan and Humbles (2018), Madsen (2020), and Patti et al. (2015) proposed that the research on equity mindedness supported the literature in that critical reflection and self-awareness were two of the most crucial components in developing equity-centered leaders. Leading for equity requires the leader to face both personal bias and professional challenges (Boske, 2014; Patti et al., 2015). The principals reflected on their decision-making and leadership styles due to their backgrounds as immigrants (i.e., Principal Lorena P.) or discriminatory personal and professional experiences (i.e., Principals Sara W. and Maisha C.). Kohli et al. (2017) and Zarate and Mendoza (2020) found critical reflection and the awareness of privilege were more noticeable among people of color than White people who used dismissal and silent dialogue strategies (e.g., collaborative writing vs. talking) when asked to reflect on their racial privilege, positionality, and biases. Zarate and Mendoza (2020) noted that

White people were more likely to share their feelings and internal conflicts when engaged in conversations about race and privilege.

Zarate and Mendoza (2020) noted that critical reflection of one's personal and professional experiences mapped how individuals interpreted readings and discussions about race, privilege, and bias. Therefore, current and aspiring leaders must have engaged in critical self-reflection of their identities to facilitate awareness concerning institutional racism, privilege, and biases, which hopefully would have resulted in advocacy for a more equitable and inclusive school environment for marginalized groups.

Scholarly literature indicated providing school leaders with the opportunities for critical self-reflection, whether through district-directed professional development, master's or doctoral curriculum, or reflective inquiry opportunities, was significant for facilitating school leaders' commitment to lead schools for social justice and equity (Dantley, 2010; Diem & Carpenter, 2013; Drago-Severson et al., 2014; Furman, 2012; Welton et al., 2018) and to attempt to redress inequities in schools (Hernandez & Marshall, 2017). School leaders who incorporated a reflective practice into their leadership work were more likely to become transformative and culturally responsive leaders, resulting in a more equitable and inclusive school environment (Khalifa et al., 2016; Shields, 2014; Theoharis, 2010).

Bradberry and Greaves (2009) proposed critical reflection was one of the most essential abilities to engage with emotional intelligence, a critical component of leadership development. As Patti et al. (2015) indicated, critical self-reflection was crucial to action and decision making. Patti et al. (2015) went on to state that it required work in three areas: "1) reflection on what matters, 2) reflection on how we make sense of the world around us, and 3) reflection on our emotions" (p. 442). Without this kind of reflection and insight, it was difficult to motivate others.

Developing critical self-reflection habits effectively allowed the lived experiences to provide meaningful opportunities for those being led and created transformational experiences for everyone (Madsen, 2020).

**Proactive Listening and Strong Collaborations Lead to Achieving the School Community's Common Good**

When it came to supporting Somali students and their families, there was consensus among the participants that proactive listening indicated strength-based perceptions of what immigrant students and their families could have contributed to the school, and equally importantly, the support they needed from the school. Proactive listening from all stakeholders, especially from students and families, allowed school leaders to gain a deep understanding of the community they served, their strengths, and their needs. In this study, several school leaders prioritized listening to their students, who believed their feedback and ideas were significant in school improvement. They described the inclusion of Somali students on the Student Council and other leadership committees to add diverse voices and input into the day-to-day operation and decision-making processes.

This finding suggested that the practice of soliciting diverse students' voices was critical to their leadership role, particularly in the decision-making process concerning issues that affect students. When school leaders spoke for the students, instead of allowing them to speak for themselves, the students' self-advocacy became limited (Fielding, 2001). Mansfield (2014) argued that often marginalized students, due to race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status, were "the subject of policies rather than the actors in shaping policy" (p. 398). Therefore, school leaders should make every attempt to prioritize students' ideas, opinions, and feedback because

this effort was "the most authentic means of advocating for social justice and promoting change in communities" (Mansfield, 2014, pp. 398–399).

Findings in this study also suggested equity-minded leaders, like culturally responsive leaders, valued the input of diverse parents regarding the kind of school programs and activities that were meaningful to them. In the traditional school–parent partnerships, there was an underlying assumption that teachers and other professionals, were the experts who determined the needs and resources provided to students and their families (Henig & Stone, 2008; Rowley & Cooper, 2009). This resulted in parents becoming passive clients or beneficiaries of the school's services and resources (Ishimaru, 2014). In contrast, several principals in this study negated this assumption because they valued parents' voices by allowing parents to provide input on the school's instructional programming, the resources they needed, and professional development relevant to their students and families. Valuing immigrant students' and parents' voices were an indication that the principals welcomed and valued the collaborative relationship. They acknowledged immigrants as having equal importance as the other stakeholders and must have been heard for the school community's benefit. "In the best of all possible worlds," wrote Adams and Christenson (2000), "the family-school relationship would be based not only on two-way communication, cooperation, and coordination, but also on collaboration" (p. 478).

One of the characteristics of an equity-minded school leader was their rejection of preferential race-based policies and policies that harmed Black immigrants. This did not mean that the principals were not aware that there were still remnants of exclusionary and deficit assumptions against the Somali students and the families in the school community. In this case, an equity-minded school leader used their positional power to confront and address racist and exclusionary policies in the school organization. These actions required the school leader to have

the moral courage to initiate courageous conversations in the community and used their power positively to implement policies and procedures to ensure an equitable and inclusive environment for all. All the principals acknowledged the importance of demonstrating that they cared about the welfare of the Somali students. Knowing principals, teachers, and other school staff had their children's best interests at heart was critical to families developing trust in schools (Goddard et al., 2001). Even small things, such as learning a few words in a families' native language, made a difference. Peter K., a Caucasian principal, showed respect for all families; however, he was very mindful of his interactions with the Somali parents. Other principals echoed the development of a similar cultural competency. Voltz (1994) advised educators to use titles, such as Mr., Ms., or Mrs., when addressing parents, unless they told you otherwise. According to Voltz (1994), "Although the use of first names in some cultures may be viewed as a means of establishing a collegial, friendly relationship, in other cultures, it is viewed as disrespectful or forward." Using "a tone of voice that expresses courtesy and respect" was also important (Voltz, 1994, p. 290).

The 11 school leaders also believed in the value of collaborative leadership—leveraging the expertise of teacher–leaders inside the school building, at the district level, and establishing partnerships with community organizations—to support immigrant students. Some principals (i.e., Maisha G., Aubrey B., and Paula C.) believed in the power of shared responsibility between families, the school professionals, and community organizations to advance academic achievement for all students. For example, some principals in this study (i.e., Bryan G., Manny M., and Will G.) served as instructional leaders during collaborative planning. They sought district specialists, subject area consultants, and other experienced principals with similar student immigrant demographics.

Multiple researchers (e.g., Grissom et al., 2021; Mofield, 2020) have reported that the benefits for diverse students when school principals shared responsibility with teachers, district staff, and the community in collaborative approach. Cardy and Leonard (2011) proposed that when community partners were involved in students' lives directly, it promoted their development because new opportunities arose, especially if they were interacting with "mature or experienced" (p. 997) people. Moreover, Liljenberg (2021) found that when district-level personnel and school-based administrators implemented a "web of instructional leadership" (p. 555), the achievement of immigrant students increased as measured by standardized assessments.

The instructional web included the collaborative and supportive leadership between central office personnel, curriculum specialists, school-based administrators, and school leaders (e.g., facilitators, instructional deans, department chairs). Principal Lorena P., who was one of the earliest administrators to lead in a school with Somali students, initiated many of these early practices. She proudly stated she partnered with other leaders in other cities and started to develop a plan to support arriving students and the community as her school served as a newcomer center.

Participants' responses corroborated the literature because both groups stated the importance of leaders who valued the contributions of multilingual teachers in the language development of linguistically diverse students. School leaders, who affirmed teachers who used the native language of their students, gave new insight by sharing a resource and asset that promoted equity and excellence for bilingual students (Hopkins, 2013; Scanlan et al., 2016).

**Equity-Minded Leaders Promote a Safe Learning Environment and Access to Culturally Responsive Resources**

Data in this study revealed that equity-minded principals built safe teaching and learning environments by encouraging their faculty to integrate diverse experiences and perspectives during instruction. Vélez-Ibáñez (1983) emphasized the value of creating safe spaces for immigrants to increase their engagement in the school. Gonzalez et al. (2005) proposed that the theory of fund of knowledge or the "social history of households, their origins and development . . . the labor history of families, how families develop social networks including knowledge skills and labor, that enhance the households' ability to survive and thrive" (p. 133). This approach explicitly confronted the deficit views that teachers had of some disenfranchised communities. Instead, there was an assumption that "people [were] competent and ha[d] knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 625). They noted that the curriculum in U.S. schools either misrepresented or ignored far too many communities of color, and the funds of knowledge approach represented "communities in terms of the resources, the wherewithal they do possess, and a way to harness these resources for classroom teaching" (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 625).

School principals led with equity in mind and created a safe learning environment when they coordinated and facilitated the inclusion of diverse resources in teaching and in the curriculum that was reflective of students' backgrounds. For instance, in this study, one principal (i.e., Maisha G.) purchased diverse texts that were culturally responsive to needs of their Somali students. They also offered alternate, culturally relevant curriculum options that sought the input of parents, who were members of their building leadership committee. Amthor and Roxas (2010) suggested that to best serve immigrant and refugee students, and more explicitly include them in

the field's discourse, school leaders should have argued for a conceptual move to widen the scope of multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy.

**Equity-Minded Leaders Leverage Structures and Processes to Build a Culturally Responsive School for Students and Staff**

Equity-minded school leaders leveraged structures and processes to create culturally responsive schools for students and staff. For instance, these leaders encouraged their teachers to optimize the advisory period to learn more about their students and support their social and emotional learning needs. Rivas-Drake et al. (2014) found youth who had greater opportunities to experience social–emotional learning in their classrooms were more likely to explore and make meaning of their ethnic and racial identities. One of the main goals of advisory programs was to promote relationships between teachers and students (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Van Ryzin, 2010). Moreover, there was an emphasis on psychosocial mentoring that focused on developing close and supportive relationships, especially with youth who lacked such relationships with adults at home (Parra et al., 2012). The trusting and supportive advisor–student relationships that developed during advisory could also have promoted school-related outcomes such as academic achievement and adjustment (Van Ryzin, 2010).

Findings from this research suggested that principals followed the district procedures and used the resources provided by the district's newcomer center to understand the educational background of Somali students enrolling in their schools. However, there were limited data demonstrating that the principals used a team-based approach to further understand the academic and cultural backgrounds of incoming immigrant students when they registered at the school. Martin et al. (2022) found successful schools with increasing numbers of immigrant students understood each student in-depth, beyond the district's initial intake procedures.

Successful schools used a team-based approach to assess the literacy and other content area knowledge of incoming students, using multiple sources, such as traditional assessment, interviews with the student and caregivers, and collecting work samples. From these data, the schools developed effective and strategic plans to support their incoming students (Sánchez-Martín et al., 2020). As Lorena P. mentioned, it was significant to have a school-based team approach for the induction or onboarding of newly arrived older immigrant students because the team's work "revolved around their knowledge of students' backgrounds and language abilities."

Iddings (2009) also found that when schools created their version of a welcome center and had an organized onboarding mechanism that is was a significant benefit for recently arrived immigrants. Iddings (2009) reported a school-based welcome center could have provided an array of services and benefits (e.g., tutoring assistance; information center; access to health, legal, and social services). The welcome center could also empower immigrant families. Other benefits of school-based welcome centers included disruptions of a sense of exclusion and increased respect by the school staff. Moreover, increased awareness of how the school could have leveraged cultural knowledge and experiences of immigrant families fostered and supported their students' literacy development (Iddings, 2009).

Although there were very limited data in this study to suggest that the participants had a heightened awareness of racial justice and equity in their schools due to the racial injustice and discrimination, which became prevalent in the country due to the deaths of several African Americans, especially in the summer of 2020 (Yeh et al., 2022). An unnamed (i.e., unrecorded) principal voiced that there seemed to be a heightened cultural responsiveness and "racial reckoning" in schools. There were more focused conversations and professional development on race, implicit and explicit biases, and other racialized concepts conducted by the principals

among their staff and at the district level. These may not have correlated directly with Somali students but most certainly with equity-minded leadership practices.

Principals (i.e., Manny M., Paula C., and Shirley N.) shared that it took tremendous moral courage to initiate difficult conversations with their staff and to address social justice issues in education, especially racial injustice. Several studies documented the adverse effects of implicit racial bias—the attitudes and stereotypes to like or dislike different racial groups and their traits (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). There were also biased evaluations of students' performance and their potential (Chin et al., 2020; Papageorge et al., 2020) and racial disparities in school discipline (Chin et al., 2020; Gregory et al., 2010). Fortunately, disparaging beliefs against a particular racial group could have been countered through professional development and appropriate training (V. E. Johnson & Carter, 2020; Mellom et al., 2018; Nieto, 2017).

Second to classroom instruction, principals' leadership created academic success for all students and a climate that was hospitable to education (Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004, 2020). The school leader had the fundamental responsibility to lead staff through the process of uncovering and resolving racism in the school (Khalifa et al., 2016; Skrla et al., 2004; Welton et al., 2018). However, the principal may have also been a hindrance toward addressing racial inequities in their schools due to factors such as their racial identity privileges (i.e., Whiteness; Swanson et al., 2018), their own insecurities and lack of cultural awareness, the school community's reactions of their decision to be an antiracist leader (Brooks, 2012), and fears of resistance from staff members (Swanson et al., 2018).

Another process that principals leveraged in response to promote better academic outcomes for immigrant students was in their human resource response. Principals hired linguistically and culturally adept teachers and staff. Responses from the participants that aligned

with the literature indicated most participants either hired multilingual teachers or candidates who had demonstrated cultural awareness and/or prior experience with working with students from diverse backgrounds. The hiring of personnel could have been a vehicle for social justice (Achinstein et al., 2010; Furman, 2012; Laura, 2018).

Moreover, the hiring of staff members who had different cultural backgrounds from students provided the latter the opportunities to expand their perspectives on differences and intercultural understandings through day-to-day interactions between staff and teachers (Ezzani et al., 2021). Shirley N., Maisha C., and other principals had made very intentional hiring and professional development decisions specifically designed for the cultural demographics of their building. Thus, findings from this research study aligned with the literature on various fundamental arguments that led to associations on conceptual framework, social change, and the practice of equity-minded school leadership.

## Limitations and Strengths

This research study had several limitations and strengths. A major strength was the purposive sampling in the selection of participants for the study. The selection of school leaders was a strength because it aligned with the goal of the study and provided sufficient data for the analysis of the data of the structured, open-ended survey questions. Another strength of the study was that the participants varied in age, gender, race, ethnicity and level of experience which allow for broader perspectives and multiple recommendations Additionally, the focus of the research with the ability to obtain practitioner-based input from current school leaders proved to be a strength of the study. One of the most significant strengths was the similar lived experiences of all the participants and the common interest in advancing equity and equity-informed decision making. The overall strength of the study was that although it was not generalizable, it did give

beneficial insight into how principals could support not only Somali students but also other historically marginalized groups.

The study was limited in its lack of attention to the impact on students in terms of academic outcomes or in equitable educational outcomes. Additionally, the study solely relied on the perspective of current and former school principals in Seattle, Washington. The study did not yield sufficient data to support the claim that principals who reflected on their background and were critical of social injustice were more likely to see diversity as an asset to their schools. The research was limited to a small sample size and participation was hampered due to time constraint as data collection began as the school year was ending.

## Recommendations and Implications of the Study

The findings from this research study yielded multiple recommendations about how school leaders may effectively support the needs of Black immigrant students. The recommendations are consistent with not only the literature and this study's findings, but from my experience as school principal and district leader. The recommendations include those for stakeholders, school principals, implication of personal and professional attributes and opportunities for future research.

### *Chief Equity Officer*

The findings of the study strongly recommend that Seattle Public Schools and other school districts who are undergoing similar demographic shifts provide principals and other leaders with authentic supports to enable the development and promotion of equity mindedness and equity-minded leadership. School districts should demonstrate their commitment to equity by having a strategic plan.

Some districts like Seattle Public Schools have hired an equity officer in the past and allocated significant budget to support a number of equity-based initiatives. However, lower enrollment threatens this department when there is still so much work left to be done. Districts should still consider the importance of maintaining the position of chief equity officer even with lower enrollment because of the scope of this office's work. One of the roles of the chief equity officer is to ensure that there is an equity policy to provide accountability and legitimacy. Districts should also allocate a budget to support the work. Many of the leaders in the research study used their own initiatives to develop equity mindedness. The district should provide the principals with the opportunity to attend professional development on equity mindedness as it is a very novel concept for many leaders. Unfortunately, at the time of the study diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives were under attack in many states; however, equity mindedness sought to support the needs of all marginalized students. Therefore, the practice and behaviors that were being recommended could have been applied to other historically underserved students. There were so many challenges that K–12 school districts were confronted with, and they had found novel ways to respond to the many upheavals and rapidly changing educational milieu.

***School Principals***

Based on the literature and the findings of this research study, the following recommendations for practice for school leaders who are leading schools with historically marginalized students. The equity-minded framework has been proposed to be an effective leadership framework for school principals, especially as school districts become increasingly diverse. An examination of the equity mindedness reflects its correlation to many core leadership behaviors and characteristics that theorists including Darling-Hammond et al. (2022) and Gates et al. (2008) have found were indicators of effective school principal practices that included: (a)

articulating instructional goals; (b) engaging with teachers, parents, and students in instructional decisions; (c) building trusting relationships with teachers, parents, and students; (d) inspiring teachers to innovate; (e) creating strong working conditions for teaching; (f) promoting community collaboration; (g) setting high standards for students' behavior; and (h) adequately resourcing classrooms.

***Critical Self-Reflection***

I recommend school leaders continue to practice the most critical personal and professional attributes of equity mindedness critical self-reflection. Principals become better instructional leaders through their own critical self-reflection by helping their teachers and staff hone their critical race consciousness by raising their awareness of systemic racism in their routine teaching, mentoring, and hiring practices (Ching, 2018; Liera, 2020; Onyeador et al., 2021).

During their leadership training programs, aspiring school leaders should be offered the opportunity to begin to engage in critical self-reflection. More and more districts, including Seattle Public Schools, include critical reflection in their leadership preparation programs. Seattle Public Schools' evaluation policy for teachers and administrators incorporates critical self-reflection, as does the Association of Washington School Principals and the Seattle Danielson Framework (i.e., teacher evaluation framework). Researchers including Brown (2004), Drago-Severson et al. (2014), Furman (2012), and Gooden (2015) noted that research strongly supported the importance of aspiring school leaders to use learning experiences for critical self-reflection to build their knowledge and spur them to action regarding equity and inclusion for diverse groups, particularly minority groups. Similarly, it was crucial that practicing principals also actively participated in critical self-reflection opportunities during professional leadership

development sustained over time, departing from the "one-shot guest speaker paradigm" (Huchting & Bickett, 2021, p. 60). The development of the practice of critical self-reflection, informed by professional development, "[was] imperative to pay attention to social justice, democratic values, promotion of, and respect and appreciation for diversity" (Gardiner et al., 2015, p. 1).

### *Professional Development That Aligns With the Needs of the School Leader*

The recommendation for school leadership development that aligns with not only current but also future needs include decision-making and cross-functional skills. Future leaders should have an understanding of business and global politics. They should embrace digital transformation and be adaptive and agile to deliver transformative and innovative leadership. Additionally, the geopolitical divisions will reshape how schools address diversity, equity, and inclusion in the future. As schools are losing teaching and administrative personnel, the district is requiring principals to attend regular professional development.

Gusa (2010) noted most college and university principal preparation programs may not be adequately equipped to implement culturally proficient curricula. Also, many teachers reported that they felt inadequate to teach multiculturalism and White blindness (Levin et al., 2012). Access to high-quality preparation and professional development differed across states, reflecting their different policies. As school districts returned to in person professional development, I suggested organizing the principals in smaller group settings or affinity groups. Murrell (2006) coined the term circles of co-practice, which were partnerships among urban teachers, universities, and community to improve urban education. For instance, training sessions for professional development might be specifically designed for school leaders who work with special education, multilingual, or other marginalized students. Each principals learning network

(PLN) is comprised of seven to eight principals who are in the same geographic area and level (i.e., elementary, middle, high). The principals meet monthly to conduct learning walks in each other's building, discuss a problem of practice, and review a professional article.

I would recommend that the PLNs could be further improved if the groups could be organically created around the principals' goals, or a similar principal problem of practice. For example, if the principals want support in developing strategies to extend advanced learning options for Black and other marginalized students, this resource could assist them. The PLNs, whether conducted virtually or in person, should be incorporated as an integral component of the principal leadership development. I believe PLNs are so effective that that even if schools are challenged with limited administrative resources, virtual meetings offer the opportunity for principals to share resources and strategies.

Virtual meeting PLNs and leadership meetings have been very effective throughout the COVID-19 global pandemic and with the return to in-person instruction. Given the 21st century advances in technology, expansion of internet capability, partnerships, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams, equitable access to technology was realizable. The district, school leaders, and teachers have been using an online platform for professional development, conducting "online learning walks" and sharing their practices with other leaders without leaving their building, thus being more efficient.

### ***Increased Outreach to the Somali Community/Parents/Professionals***

Finally, I recommend leveraging the skills of Somali parents and the community in the decision making, not only for public relations, but also as thought partners in creating the school's vision/mission and professional development. The Somali community is increasingly becoming more economically stable as they are establishing businesses and are very

entrepreneurial. Somali instructional assistants should be encouraged and incentivized to become educators and, ultimately, school leaders. District leadership would be well advised to seek to create a better system of supports for an initial cadre of future Somali school leaders or to expand on its race and equity work, even when considering the current fiscal challenges. I have sought to make recommendations that would use existing technological and human resources and would not need additional funding. Hecht (2020) stated that current and future leaders need to be more prepared for racial equity, diversity, equity, and inclusion work, and moving their organizations toward becoming antiracist and more inclusive of the changing demographics (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021).

The recommendations in this research study also identified schools working toward racial equity, parent–community partnership, and becoming antiracist had cultures more conducive to ensuring more inclusive and welcoming school communities for Somali families and had a greater chance of success in their leadership roles (Khalifa et al., 2016). The literature provided three steps for organizations to take in the beginning to dismantle systems of racism and sexism: (a) get educated on intersectionality, (b) establish a system for collecting reliable data on race and ethnicity, and (c) start the conversation about racism. The 11 educators who took part in this survey were asked what they would tell prospective school leaders. Participants emphasized the value of fostering relationships, building and creating a warm and welcoming school community, and surrounding oneself with positive people. Finding a mentor, participating in leadership development, establishing and maintaining a clear course of action, and overcoming inevitable setbacks were also mentioned as essential steps.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings raised questions that future research will need to address. This study had its limitations and delimitations, as outlined in Chapter 1. Future research studies should seek to include a larger participant pool of school administrators from a larger geographic area and seek perspective of Somali students or other marginalized groups. There is no individualized academic data available for marginalized groups like Somalis because the numbers are too few to be counted as a cohort; and therefore, they are counted as “other” or “African.” However, there was significance in knowing the academic performance for this demographic group and other marginalized groups. Individual schools tracked their own academic data, but these data were often not transferrable if the student moved to another district. There is a further recommendation for a longitudinal research study, perhaps exploring the 10-year period from 2011–2022 academic data for Somali students, other Black students, and students of color to extract more data points. This study offered tremendous opportunity for future research because the goal of achieving and promoting authentic equity-minded policies in education was multifaceted, complex, and transferrable to other marginalized and historically underserved students.

There is a significant gap in the literature because of the singular research design and technique coupled with a small participant pool used in the majority of research studies to evaluate the scholarship on equity-minded leadership practices and behaviors. Future research studies should emphasize large-scale quantitative or mixed methods approaches to address this significant research design weakness. This research did not seek to address participants’ formation of equity mindedness or how some participants’ White privilege informed their understanding of leadership for social justice. The concept of equity mindedness included

recentering Whiteness that perpetuated oppressive structures and relations, engaged in safe concepts of transformational change, and benefited from systems that prioritized individual status over community solidarity. Leadership training must center critiques of Whiteness and other privileges. This study implied that we need to study how leaders with different privileges promote social justice to better understand the limits and possibilities of educational leadership for social justice (Dei & Kempf, 2006; Freire, 2001; McGovern et al., 2021).

## Summary

Chapter 5 presented an overview of the study and a discussion of the study's findings. This chapter covered three areas: (a) discussion of findings, (b) limitations and strengths of the study, and (c) recommendations and implications for future research. I identified four overarching themes that emerged from the analysis of the research questions: (a) critical self-reflection that inspires asset-based perceptions and transformative work, (b) proactive listening and strong collaborations that leads to achieving the school community's common good, (c) equity-minded leaders promote a safe learning environment and access to culturally responsive resources, and (d) equity-minded leaders leverage structures and processes to build a culturally responsive school for students and staff. I also provided a set of implications from studying the lived experiences of school principals, their practices, and their behaviors that promoted successful academic outcomes for Black immigrant students, including Somalis. There were limitations and strengths in the study. The strengths of the study included the purposive sampling of 11 school principals, as rich data was collected, and the multiple perspectives of their responses enabled deep analysis. The limitations included the purposive selection of the 11 participants from a generalized group of school leaders and the limited geographic area of Seattle, Washington.

The recommendations that came from the literature review further added to the support for Somali and other immigrant students. As the student demographics continue to diversify due to the arrival of culturally and linguistically diverse immigrant students, effective school leaders must adapt to this phenomenon. This critical self-reflection process urged them to challenge exclusionary and discriminatory policies, attitudes, and practices among their teachers, staff, and community to dismantle or disrupt inequitable structures and processes that were present in the school organization.

There were various limitations and strengths in this study. A major strength of the research study was that the strategies were applicable for not only Somali students, but other historically underserved students. At the time of the study, I was also a school leader and identified as an immigrant. The geographic area was widened to ensure a larger participant pool. The limitations were the constraints of the recruitment and participant pool, the timing of the research study, and the beginning of school year.

I made the following recommendations. The first recommendation is that aspiring and current school leaders should engage in critical self-reflection to develop and enhance equity-minded practices. The next recommendation is to offer professional development that aligns with the needs of the school leader at a time and on a platform that works for the school leaders. Lastly, I recommended an increased outreach to the Somali community and other culturally proficient professionals who can authentically support the unique needs of the increasingly diverse student demographics.

Future research studies should seek to include a larger participant pool and include other marginalized groups. This study offered tremendous opportunity for future research because the

goal of achieving and promoting equity-minded policies in education is multifaceted, complex, and transferrable to other marginalized and historically underserved students.

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**Appendix A**

**Institutional Review Board (IRB) Exemption**

Admin 201 | 206-296-2585

irb@seattleu.edu

June 30, 2023

Charmaine Marshall
Dept. of Educational and Organizational Learning and Leadership Dear Charmaine,
Thank you for your materials. Your study **Advancing (equity-based) school leadership practices to improve educational outcomes for Black immigrant students: A phenomenological case study** meets exemption criteria from IRB review in compliance with **45CFR46.104(d)**: 2) Research that includes only interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if (i) the investigator records information in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained (directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects); (ii) any disclosure of the data outside the research would not reasonably place subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or damage the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) the investigator records information in such a manner that the participant's identity can readily be ascertained, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review.
Note that a letter of exemption does **not** mean IRB "approval." *Do not include statements for publication or otherwise that the SU IRB has "reviewed and approved" this study*; rather, say the SU IRB has "determined the study to be exempt from IRB review in accordance with federal regulation criteria." Please retain this letter with your study files.
If your project alters in nature or scope, contact the IRB right away. If you have any questions, I'm happy to assist.

Best wishes,

Andrea McDowell, PhD IRB Administrator

cc: Dr. Brian Taberski, Faculty Adviser

**901 12th Avenue | P.O. Box 222000 | Seattle, WA 98122-1090**

## Appendix B

## Demographic Questionnaire

1.Are you 18 years or older?

a. Yes

b. No (Go to end of survey If you have selected response “b”, then you do not meet the criteria for participation in the study. You do not need to complete the rest of the questionnaire)

1. Are you currently public school principal or have you served as a public school principal previously?

a. Yes

b. No (Go to end of survey- If you have selected response “b”, then you do not meet the criteria for participation in the study. You do not need to complete the rest of the questionnaire)

2. How many years have you served as a school principal?

a. Less than 3 years - (Go to end of survey- If you have selected response “a” above, then you do not meet the criteria for participation in the study. You do not need to complete the rest of the questionnaire)

b. 3–5 years

c. 5–10 years

d. More than 10 years

3. Current or past building level

a. Elementary

b. Middle

c. High

d. Alternative (Go to end of survey- If you have selected only “d or e” as your response above, then you do not meet the criteria for participation in the study. You do not need to complete the rest of the questionnaire).

e. Other -(Go to end of survey- If you have selected only “d or e” as your response above, then you do not meet the criteria for participation in the study. You do not need to complete the rest of the questionnaire).

4. In which geographic area of Seattle Public Schools is (was) your school) located? -

a. South

b. North

c. West

d. East

**Ineligible End of Survey Response:**

Thank you for taking the time today to participate in the demographic questionnaire. At this time, you are not eligible to participate in this research study and all data provided in this survey will be deleted.

If you have any questions, please contact the principal investigator of the study, Charmaine Marshall at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

**Eligible End of Survey Response:**
*Thank you for your time and interest in completing the demographic questionnaire. Based on your results, you are eligible to interview. Please review the consent to participate information below. After you review the consent information and are interested in moving forward, please find a day and time to participate in a 60-90 minute recorded Zoom interview within the next two weeks.*

## Appendix C

## Recruitment Email Message to Potential Participants

Dear School leader:
My name is Charmaine Marshall, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational and Organizational Learning and Leadership program at Seattle University. I am currently recruiting participants that hold positions in K-12 education such as principals, district office executives, and superintendents to participate in a research study required of my doctoral program at Seattle University. The dissertation study entitled, *Advancing (equity-based) school leadership practices to improve educational outcomes for Black immigrant students: A phenomenological case study*, will explore how school leaders are responding to the academic needs of Black immigrant students, specifically Somali students. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine how school leaders in Seattle Public Schools are responding to the needs of Somali immigrant students as they are the most rapidly growing Black immigrant group in the district. Additionally, by using equity-minded leadership as the conceptual framework, the study will explore how researching the response to Somali immigrant students may also help contemporary school leadership promote positive outcomes for other groups of immigrant students, specifically for those who identify as Black
You are receiving this e-mail because you are a current member of the Association of Washington School Educator (AWSP) and the Principals Association of Seattle (PASS). I invite you to participate in the qualitative component of this research study.

The qualitative component of the study will be done through individual interviews. You will be interviewed and recorded through a videoconferencing platform named Zoom. The length of the individual interview will last no longer than 90 minutes. Should you choose to participate in an interview, your answers would be held completely confidential, and pseudonyms will be used in the final report.

In order for participants to participate in the study, they will have to meet specific criterion as a means to ensure that the phenomenon being studied is relevant to the population of interest. That being the case, the following criteria will need to be met: (a) identify as a principal, (b) be over 18 years old, (c) have worked for at least three years in the role of a principal, (d) have worked as a principal in a school located in South Seattle.
Your participation is voluntary, and all responses will remain confidential. The URL below named Demographic Questionnaire is a screening survey based on the criterion described previously. If you meet the eligibility criteria, you will receive immediate follow up information to include the consent to participate information and a scheduling calendar link. However, if you are not eligible, you will be alerted right after the completion of the survey and the data provided will be deleted. Should you need to leave the survey before finishing, your progress will be saved provided you return using the survey link provided below:
https://seattleux.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_e35BNYu1SqXRVeS
I will be conducting this study under the supervision of my faculty advisor, Dr. Brian Taberski. Thank you in advance for your consideration of these research efforts and consideration of participation.

Charmaine Marshall
Doctoral Candidate in Educational and Organizational Learning and Leadership (EOLL)
School of Education
Seattle University

## Appendix D

## Interview Protocol and Informed Consent Notification

The following introduction will be provided for all participants:
Thank you for your participation in this research study. This research is being conducted by Charmaine Marshall, a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at Seattle University. As part of my thematic dissertation experience as a doctoral candidate I am interested in gathering perspectives from k-12 school principals in south, west, and east Seattle. As someone who meets the criteria for this research study, you have no obligation to participate in this interview. If you do choose to participate in this interview, you can leave the interview at any time or ask that the information not be used.
· Do I have your permission to record this interview? (If you do not want to be recorded, we will not be able to move forward with the interview process. Thank you for your time.)
· Are you in a private location where no unconsented individuals can accidentally enter the recording during the interview? (If you do not have access to a private location at this time, could we identify a date and time that works better for you?)
· Would you please click the "rename" button and delete any information in the identification box?
· I am now going to push the record button and you will receive a prompt to accept the recording of this interview.
I would like to further clarify that to protect the privacy of participants,
• all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms,
• your responses are confidential,
• only group data will be reported in the final study,
• your participation is voluntary,
• you can refuse to participate and may stop your participation at any time,
• and you may choose not to answer any question.
The interview should take approximately 60 minutes or less. If you do not want to be recorded, we will not be able to move forward with the interviews. Are you still willing to be recorded? Do you have any questions before I begin?

## Appendix E

## Survey Questions

Email Address:

General Questions for individual interview:
1. What is your age?
2. What is your race and ethnic background? Generation?
3. What languages do you speak? Are you able to understand other languages, but respond in a different language?
4. What is your educational background?
5. Could you briefly describe your professional background?
6. What is your current position and its location (geographical)?
7. Is there any information that you would like to share that you feel would be important to understanding you and your personal identity or root knowledge as a principal?

**Interview Questions:**
1. What are the lived experiences of school principals in Seattle Public Schools?
2. How would you characterize your school leadership experience? What are the challenges?
3. How has your background, training and experience contributed to your growth as a school leader in an increasingly diverse school community?
4. What targeted strategies, environment, and resources have been provided or are currently receiving to support your unique learning and growth needs as a school leader?
5. How would you characterize your school leadership experience with Somali and other Black immigrant students? What are the challenges working with Somali and other Black immigrant students and families?
6. Can you describe any professional development centered on working with immigrant students and families that you have participated in or initiated in your building?
7. Can you describe any professional development specifically centered on equity for Somali and other Black immigrant students that you have participated in or initiated in your building?
8. What challenges or barriers have you faced in your attempts to promote the academic achievement of Somali and other Black immigrant students?
9. What leadership skills and practices do you use to support and promote the academic achievement of Somali students?
10. What advice would you give to other (aspiring) school leaders with similar principal problem of practice?

## Appendix F

## Consent to Participate in Research

*TITLE: Advancing (equity-based) school leadership practices to improve educational outcomes for Black immigrant students: A phenomenological case study*

INVESTIGATOR: Charmaine Marshall, Educational and Organizational Learning and Leadership, College of Education/Seattle University, 980-422-1536

ADVISOR: Dr. Brian Taberski, Clinical Assistant Professor in the Educational and Organizational Learning and Leadership program, Seattle University, XXX-XXX-XXXX

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in a research study that seeks to investigate. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to provide insight into
educational leaders lived experiences in K-12 administrative principals to deeper the understanding of the practices and skills that are needed to promote improved academic outcomes for Black immigrant students, specifically Somali students.

You will be asked to participate in a 60–90-minute individual interview via Zoom, depending on your schedule and preference. Your responses will be recorded and transcribed for future reference. If you do not wish to be recorded, you should not register for an interview. You may be asked to read and respond to a transcribed record of the interview to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. Additionally, you may be asked to participate in follow-up questions after the initial interview.

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Seattle University.

RISKS: There are no known risks associated with this study beyond the ordinary risks of daily life. However, there may be very minimal risks involved in the qualitative portion of the study. Participants may be asked to think about and address specific issues that they may be uncomfortable discussing such as experiences directly relating to stereotypes, biases, oppression, culture, identity, and personal or professional interactions with others. During the individual interview, there could be the possibility of psychological or emotional risks, such as embarrassment or nervousness, associated with discussing one's own experiences.
To minimize this risk, the researcher will provide complete confidentiality to all survey participants and provide research results in such a manner that confidentiality cannot be compromised. Additionally, you are under no obligation to answer any questions or discuss subject matter and/or situations that might be uncomfortable or distressing.

BENEFITS: There is no direct benefit to individual participants. The societal benefits will be centered around adding to the body of literature in educational leadership, specifically focusing on the practices school leaders need to effectively support the academic needs of Black immigrant students in K-12 educational settings.

INCENTIVES: You will receive no gifts/incentives for this study. Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY: You will need to be in a private location, so that no unconsented individuals can accidentally enter the recording during the interview. If you are unable to be in a completely private setting, you may use a blurred background for confidentiality purposes. You will also be guided on how to remove any identifying information, such as your name from the video. Although the video will display your face and demographic, you will be given a pseudonym for the recorded data. Additional demographic data will be collected to disaggregate the data for the group and not connected to any individuals. Your name will never be used in any public dissemination of these data (publications, presentations, etc.).

All research material, including interview recording will be stored on a Seattle University OneDrive account that is encrypted and, in a password, protected folder. Human subjects research regulations require that data be kept for a minimum of three (3) years. Once the project is complete, and/or the PI graduates, Dr. Brian Taberski will be the only one retaining a copy of the data set for the prescribed retention period. All of the information you provide will be kept confidential.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: Your participation in this study is *voluntary*. You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.
XXXX NE 88th Street, Seattle, WA 98115; XXX-XXX-XXXX; xxxxx@seattleu.edu

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any concerns about my participation in this study, I may call Charmaine Marshall who is asking me to participate, at XXX-XXX-XXXX. If I have any concerns that your rights are being violated, you may contact Dr. Michael Spinetta, Chair of the Seattle University Institutional Review Board at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Scheduling Calendar-Charmaine Marshall-Interview https://outlook.office.com/bookwithme/me

**Participant Profiles**

Table 1 gives an overview of the 11 school leaders in this study. Each participant was given a pseudonym to ensure their anonymity during the interview process and met a prescribed list of criteria. All participants met the prescribed inclusion criteria:

- identifying as over 18 years old
- school leader at the elementary, middle, high school or alternative high school.
- Minimum of 3 years in the role of principal
- Schools located in any geographic area (with significant Somali population) excluding north and northeast Seattle