ABSTRACT

Title of capstone: COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP, COLLECTIVE PURPOSE: INVESTIGATING INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

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This study examined how principals and community school coordinators in one Maryland school district's Community Schools define, implement, and experience the conditions that support or hinder inclusive leadership. Although inclusive leadership is identified as a core pillar of the Community Schools strategy, its consistent implementation across schools remains uneven, highlighting a need to better understand how leaders interpret and enact this practice. Using an exploratory approach that included surveys and semi-structured interviews, the study captured the perspectives of principals and Community School Coordinators (CSCs).

Across data sources, participants consistently defined inclusive leadership as a value-driven practice rooted in equity and shared responsibility for students and families and described enacting it through collaborative decision-making and the principal-CSC partnership as a central leadership structure. However, participants also identified barriers, including misaligned district systems and limited professional learning. The findings suggest that while school leaders

demonstrate strong commitment to inclusive leadership, its consistent enactment depends on relational partnerships, supportive district systems, and access to targeted professional learning.

The study has practical implications for districts implementing or expanding community school strategies, particularly in clarifying expectations, strengthening leadership partnerships, and expanding professional learning opportunities. Findings are limited to one district and reflect self-reported perceptions during a period of ongoing implementation.

Overall, this study suggests that the success of the Community Schools strategy depends not only on collaborative structures but also on the development of coherent systems that intentionally support inclusive leadership practices. By aligning district systems, professional learning, and school-level leadership structures, districts can create the conditions for inclusive leadership to become a consistent and sustainable practice within community schools.

COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP, COLLECTIVE PURPOSE: INVESTIGATING INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

by

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Preface

Rhonda Simley's Preface

From an early age, I've felt a strong pull toward advocating for individuals whose rights seem overlooked or absent. With 27 years of experience as an educator in urban districts serving diverse socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, and often limited resources, I've seen firsthand the disparities that can impact student success. One constant in my work has been the critical need for consistency in schools to ensure that we cultivate and educate all students equally. This commitment to equity is what drew me to the EdD program. I am driven to develop policies and procedures that eliminate the concept of the underdog or disadvantaged student. Educational institutions hold the power to transform children's futures, but only when they are equipped with the human and physical resources that nurture students' interests and curiosities.

Even as we are challenged with staffing vacancies, student absenteeism, and engagement, there are things we can and must do differently to create a more equitable and effective educational system. Our current system often falls short in addressing the diverse needs of all students, providing equal access to resources, and preparing learners for the demands of the future. We need to shift towards innovative, student-centered approaches that prioritize personalized learning, support mental health, and actively engage families and communities in the educational process. By reimagining education, we can ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Through this capstone experience, my partner and I aim to develop a framework that districts can use to identify essential elements for every community school, with the goal of fostering innovative and courageous students who challenge the current norms of rigorous instruction and academic achievement. Inclusive leadership plays a critical role in this process,

as it brings together diverse voices and perspectives, ensuring that the needs of all students and community members are met. By embracing inclusive leadership, we can create environments where every student feels valued, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential. This approach not only enhances the educational experience but also strengthens the connection between schools and their communities, ultimately leading to greater success for all.

Tricia Blackman's Preface

At the heart of my work as an educator is a belief that meaningful student learning depends on how well educators and leaders are supported by the systems around them. In my current role as a curriculum specialist in a large school district and drawing on 23 years of experience in public education spanning from classroom teaching to central office leadership, my passion is building the capacity of educators and leaders to support student learning. Post-pandemic, and upon the return to in-person schooling in 2021, it became clear that our educational ecosystem had fundamentally shifted. Teachers and students alike returned to school with new needs, new challenges, and new perspectives. We lost the depth of in-person professional learning that previously strengthened educator capacity, and we quickly learned that we must pay closer attention to the social, emotional, and basic needs of everyone in the schoolhouse.

As a result, I was inspired to learn about schools in my district that were finding new ways to build wraparound services for students and families. The expansion of the Community Schools movement, in alignment with the state's recent educational law (Blueprint for Maryland's Future), provided significant funding and opportunity for schools to address the needs of students and families. I soon realized that our district had grown to over 100 Community Schools, many of which were middle schools that I directly support; yet I had not heard much about how the initiatives, funds, and overall changes were impacting students or shaping teaching and learning experiences.

Around the same time, I learned that my own daughter would be attending a Community School. What a unique prospect to study as a researcher while also engaging as an educator, a parent, and a community member. While Community School funds can provide support for

services that “wraparound” the students and extend beyond the school day, I was left wondering how “wrapping around” leads to change if the instructional core, or the intersection of students, teachers, and content, remains unchanged.

This prompted me to explore how educators' and leaders’ capacities are being developed to transform and enhance teaching and learning in Community Schools, particularly those serving our most vulnerable populations. My professional role provides me with access to systemic decision-making processes and a broad view of district-wide initiatives, which influences how I perceive the implementation of school-based work. However, I also acknowledge that my vantage point differs significantly from the daily experiences of teachers, school-based administrators, and the communities they serve.

With this in mind, I embarked on a research partnership with a dynamic Community School principal. Our partnership provides a unique opportunity to understand perspectives from both within the schoolhouse and through a district-level lens, allowing us to better understand *if* and *how* this reform strategy can offer a new way to support teachers and school leaders in the essential work of improving outcomes for all students.

Dedication

Tricia Blackman's Dedication

I dedicate this work to the loves of my life…Damon, Juliana, and Maya.

Rhonda Simley's Dedication

As a principal for the past 10 years, my responsibility has always been to ensure that students are positioned to become the very best versions of themselves. However, as a community school leader, the work transcends the walls of the building—it becomes a part of who you are and shapes how you envision and advocate for your community.

I dedicate this paper to the many students and communities whose voices often go unheard. May this work serve as a reminder that you are seen, you are valued, and that change is not only necessary—it is coming.

I also dedicate this paper to the many mentors who have inspired, guided, and poured into me along this journey. Your influence has been instrumental, and it is my hope that you see the fruits of your labor reflected in this work and beyond.

I would also like to offer a heartfelt dedication to my capstone partner, Tricia Blackman. Thank you for being brave enough to say yes—to this journey, to this partnership, and to the work. You believed in our ability to navigate this process successfully, even in moments when I had doubts. Your encouragement, patience, and ability to push me to dig deep and give my very best will never be forgotten.

Lastly, I dedicate this to my family—Stacy, Sylas, and Saxton. Thank you for your unwavering support and for believing in my dreams, both big and small. I love you all to the moon and back.

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We would like to begin by expressing our sincere gratitude to our advising team, Dr. Douglas Anthony and Dr. Christine Neumerski, for their unwavering guidance, expertise, and support throughout this entire process. The many phone calls and Zoom meetings we shared provided the clarity, direction, and reassurance needed to see this work through to completion.

We are equally grateful to our professors and committee members, Dr. Eubanks and Dr. Hunter, for their care, encouragement, and genuine investment in our growth throughout this program. A special note of appreciation goes to Dr. Claudia Galindo, an expert in community schooling. Your willingness to serve on our advisory committee was both an honor and a privilege. We look forward to continuing this important work in ways that reflect the foundation you have helped to build and that make you proud.

To PhiXavier Holmes, thank you for being a constant, steady voice in our ears. Your friendship, honesty, and support came at the moments we needed them most, and we are truly grateful.

Lastly, we are grateful to our Cohort 8 family for four incredible years of shared experiences—filled with growth, resilience, and determination. Through the blood, sweat, and tears, we persevered together. Cohort 8 has what it takes—Eight is Great!

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List of Abbreviations

i. **Community Schools (CSs) -** Public schools that integrate academics, health and social services, youth development, and family engagement to address the holistic needs of students and their communities. They form partnerships with local organizations to provide wraparound services and resources.

ii. **Community Schools Initiative (CSI)** - The terminology used by Metropolitan Junction Public School System to encompass the implementation of the Community School strategy within the district in alignment with the Concentration of Poverty Grant from the state of Maryland.

iii. **Concentration of Poverty (COP) Grant -** A Maryland state grant program that provides funding to schools with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students. These funds support the hiring of Community School Coordinators and the implementation of wraparound services to address students' academic and non-academic needs.

iv. **Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) -** A federally funded model of Community Schools that offers a wide range of academic, health, and social services to students and families. FSCS programs focus on removing barriers to learning by providing access to healthcare, counseling, afterschool programs, and family support services.

Section 1

Introduction

Community Schools (CSs) offer a transformative approach to how public education can improve student outcomes, foster healthier families, and empower more connected communities through coordinated academic, health, and social services (Caldas et al., 2019; Daniel et al., 2023). Defined as "public schools that partner with families and community organizations to provide well-rounded educational opportunities and supports for students' school success" (Partnership for the Future of Learning, 2018, p. 3), CSs integrate wraparound services that address students' needs both inside and outside of the classroom by attending to the whole child.

While traditional schools generally emphasize classroom academic instruction and rely on families to access external services independently, CSs position themselves as integrated community hubs that proactively address academic and nonacademic needs through coordinated support (Maier et al., 2017). As a school reform strategy, CSs leverage family engagement, community partnerships, and educator expertise as vital strengths rather than deficits, adopting an asset-based approach that mitigates the impacts of poverty through targeted resources and supports that extend beyond a traditional school model (Caldas et al., 2019; Daniel et al., 2023).

Community Schools have expanded in the United States over the past twenty years through federal, state, and private grants bolstered by promising research findings (Anderson et al., 2019; Biag & Castrechini, 2016; Caldas et al., 2019; Houser, 2016; Scanlan & Park, 2020). While any school can elect to adopt the strategy, the state of Maryland (MD) codified the creation of CSs through the 2019 Concentration of Poverty (COP) Grants and the 2021 Blueprint for Maryland's Future legislation (Blueprint) (Maier and Rivera-Rodriguez, 2023). Maryland schools that qualify for the COP Grant are designated as CSs and receive funding for a site-based

Community School Coordinator (CSC), a healthcare practitioner, and a per-pupil formula grant allocation determined by the percentage of students living in poverty (Maryland State Department of Education, n.d. a). The leaders of these schools are expected to build collaborative partnerships with community organizations, local governments, and other stakeholders to provide services for students and families, guided by the six pillars of the CS strategy: community support services, family and community partnerships, inclusive leadership, positive behavior practices, strong and proven curriculum, and high-quality teaching (National Education Association, 2020).

Metropolitan Junction Public School System (MJPSS) is located in Maryland and home to a high percentage of CSs. Over the past six years, the number of MJPSS CSs has grown from 46 in 2019 to 147 in 2026. In fact, 74% of all MJPSS schools are now designated as CSs. This exponential growth is due to the progressively lowering Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS) threshold that determines COP Grant eligibility.

In recent years, the state of Maryland has dramatically increased financial investment in CSs through COP grant funding, with statewide funding increasing from $363.3 million in FY 2025 to $492.6 million in FY 2026, reflecting a significant (35%) upward trend in financial support over the two-year period (Maryland General Assembly Department of Legislative Services, 2025). Of that amount, MJPSS received $129 million (MJPSS, 2024). This substantial and growing investment underscores the state's commitment to CSs and reflects the belief that the CS reform strategy has the potential to drive educational equity in Maryland.

Despite the considerable state-level investments, funding alone is not enough to solve the complex inequities faced by students and schools in communities with lower socio-economic status. The absence of centralized, statewide leadership limited early strategic oversight of CSs.

In fact, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) did not appoint an executive director to oversee implementation until 2023, four years after the initiative began (Cech, 2023).

At the district level, MJPSS also took several years to build a central office with sufficient staffing to provide technical assistance for monitoring, assessing, and refining CS implementation efforts. Some districts in Maryland, such as Baltimore City Public Schools, partner with lead agencies as intermediaries to support implementation, whereas MJPSS relies on a centralized district office model**.** Although the central office has expanded over time, this growth has lagged behind the rapid expansion of CSs across the district. In 2020, the central office team consisted of one director and three specialists; by 2024, the office had expanded to one director, a coordinating supervisor, and seven specialists. This delayed infrastructure development has strained both school-based staff responsible for carrying out the work and district staff tasked with providing support. Although the scale of implementation has grown, the infrastructure needed to support schools and evaluate impact has not kept pace.

This context frames our motivation and urgency for studying MJPSS CSs. In Maryland, CSs are a once-in-a-generation public education investment. While CSs hold tremendous potential to support students with the greatest needs, the current national political climate, economy, and growing demand for taxpayer accountability make the initiative vulnerable. Without clear, measurable progress outcomes, sustaining widespread support for this bold investment in equity-driven reform may prove challenging.

As career educators with over 45 years of combined experience working in MJPSS, we bring firsthand knowledge and diverse expertise to this research. As a current CS principal and central office curriculum specialist, the contrast of our professional roles provides us with the opportunity to combine unique perspectives for understanding the complexities of leading and

supporting CSs. Our common dedication to the teachers and students in MJPSS also means that the success of the CS strategy is very personal and important to us. Having both worked as teachers in schools with students experiencing the impacts of poverty, we have firsthand knowledge of the needs and struggles that families face. We seek to learn how CS practitioners engage in their work to inform the future success of CSs in MJPSS.

Given the scale, investment, and urgency, a critical question emerges: how are CSs in MJPSS being led and supported to reach their full potential? The rapid expansion of CSs across the district underscores the need to understand the internal conditions required for sustained success, particularly as they relate to those leading the work. After all, research consistently shows that the success of school reform is heavily influenced by leadership practices (Grissom et al., 2021).

Inclusive leadership is a central pillar of CS implementation and is defined as a collaborative relationship among administrators, educators, and other stakeholders characterized by shared decision-making and accountability (National Education Association, 2020). In this study, we define high-quality inclusive leadership as aligned with the Community Schools Standards for Collaborative Leadership, emphasizing shared ownership, accountability, and authentic engagement of diverse stakeholders (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2017). Our inquiry focuses on examining how leadership practices are implemented. Our problem of practice is that, while inclusive leadership is a key pillar of CSs, high-quality inclusive leadership is not yet a systemic and consistent practice in MJPSS CSs.

While CS implementation rests on the principles of collaboration, partnership, and equity, research on CS implementation has historically emphasized technical components such as needs assessments, site coordination, and service delivery, rather than the role of leadership in shaping

inclusive school cultures and sustaining systemic reform (Ishimaru, 2020; Sanders, 2016; Tredway & Militello, 2019). Without a strong leadership infrastructure to coordinate integrated practices, CSs risk becoming fragmented service hubs rather than transformative learning communities.

Scholars argue that inclusive leadership must be prioritized at every stage of CS development and implementation (Bradley et al., 2020; Campo & Fernandez, 2022). Also commonly referred to as *collaborative leadership*, inclusive leadership emphasizes the co-creation of a shared vision, authentic stakeholder engagement, and structures that elevate diverse voices and distribute decision-making power (American Institutes for Research, 2024). It ensures that priorities are tailored to local contexts and that services are continuously adapted through feedback and reflection. Research indicates that successful scaling of CSs depends on intentional collaboration and community-driven leadership (Maier et al., 2017; FitzGerald & Quiñones, 2018; Sanders, 2016, 2018).

In contrast, when inclusive leadership is absent, implementation risks becoming top-down, transactional, and disconnected from the foundational principles of equity, shared power, and authentic collaboration (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Lareau & Muñoz, 2012). Without a clear understanding, CSs risk diluting into compliance-based models rather than authentic, community-driven reforms (Ishimaru, 2020; Oakes et al., 2017). This undermines the strategy's transformational potential, and weak implementation, combined with *exclusive* leadership practices, can lead to the erosion of community trust, particularly in historically marginalized communities (Ishimaru, 2014; Lansing et al., 2023).

With this in mind, the purpose of our study is to understand the implementation of the CS reform strategy in MJPSS from the perspective of implementers, with a particular focus on the

degree to which inclusive leadership functions as a linchpin for effective CS implementation. By examining how MJPSS CS practitioners understand and enact inclusive leadership, we aim to inform how the district can better align funding, systems, and supports to sustain the strategy.

To ground our inquiry, we begin with a discussion of the problem of practice by examining the Community School Initiative (CSI) in MJPSS. We then provide background on the CS movement in the United States to contextualize the strategy's impact, as demonstrated in other localities. A review of relevant literature on CS reform and effective CS leadership practices frames our causal system analysis and the development of our theory of improvement. Finally, we describe our exploratory study, which integrates qualitative and quantitative data sources, with primary emphasis on qualitative analysis. The study centers on the perspectives and experiences of CS principals and Community School Coordinators (CSCs). Situated within the local context of MJPSS CSs, it uses a survey with both open- and closed-ended items, along with semi-structured interviews, to explore the conditions, challenges, and systems that influence inclusive leadership. These methods intentionally focus on answering the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1. How do school-based leaders define inclusive leadership practices in Community Schools across MJPSS?

RQ2. How do school-based leaders enact inclusive leadership practices in Community Schools across MJPSS?

RQ3. What conditions support or hinder the implementation of inclusive leadership in MJPSS Community Schools?

Background

The Problem of Practice

Community Schools as an Equity-Focused Reform Strategy

Students from lower-socioeconomic-status communities, particularly those living in low-income households, continue to face systemic barriers to high-quality education (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Maier et al., 2017; Rothstein, 2004). Community Schools (CSs) represent a significant, systemic shift in how the field of education seeks to disrupt persistent educational inequities by providing integrated supports tailored to each school community's unique needs. Defined as "an equity strategy for organizing school and community resources around student success," CSs are grounded in the belief that educational opportunity is deeply linked to coordinated academic, social, emotional, health, and basic supports such as food, clothing, and housing stability (Maier et al., 2017, p. 4).

Although referred to as both the *CS strategy* and the *CS model*, the literature generally agrees that there is no single, fixed implementation model. Instead, community schooling is better understood as a flexible approach or strategy, guided by a core set of pillars and adapted to the unique context, assets, and challenges of each school (Benson et al., 2009; Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002; Quinn & Blank, 2020). For the purpose of our Capstone, we use the term "reform strategy" as an umbrella concept to encompass this dynamic approach to transforming school communities, particularly as we investigate how CSs are being implemented as a school reform strategy in our local context.

In the Metropolitan Junction Public School System (MJPSS), the implementation of the CS strategy is known as the Community Schools Initiative (CSI). Throughout this study, the term "*pillars"* refers to the research-based set of practices most commonly associated with the

successful implementation of the reform strategy (Learning Policy Institute, 2024; Partnership for the Future of Learning, 2018).

Rapid Expansion, Substantial Investment, and Uneven Early Outcomes

While CSs have expanded nationwide, Maryland's CS expansion is among the most ambitious statewide community schooling reform efforts in the nation (Maier, 2025). Although there is a long history of CSs in Baltimore City Public Schools, statewide expansion did not accelerate until Maryland Senate Bill 1030 (§5–203) specifically defined a CS as:

> …a public school that establishes a set of strategic partnerships between the school and other community resources that promote student achievement, positive learning conditions, and the well-being of students by providing wraparound services (Maryland General Assembly, 2019, p. 11).

Maryland codified the creation of CSs across the state through the 2019 Concentration of Poverty (COP) Grants and the 2021 Blueprint for Maryland's Future legislation (Blueprint), formally positioning community schooling as a central component of statewide educational reform efforts (Maier and Rivera-Rodriguez, 2023).

Since that time, the scale of expansion has been substantial in both size and cost, raising important questions about how implementation and leadership capacity are developing in light of the growth. From 2020 to 2025, the number of CSs in Maryland increased from 193 to 715 schools, serving more than 350,000 students statewide during the 2025-2026 school year (MSDE, n.d.).

Statewide financial investment scaled accordingly. By fiscal year 2025, Maryland allocated $363.3 million in COP aid, and the Governor's proposed budget projects more than $572 million by fiscal year 2027 (Office of Governor Wes Moore, 2026). This scale and cost

expansion is due to the eligibility threshold progressively decreasing from schools with 80% Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS) in the 2019-2020 school year to 55% FARMS in 2024-2025 and beyond. This pattern of rapid funding growth reflects the state's commitment to advancing educational equity through sustained investment in the CS strategy.

MJPSS is located in Maryland and is home to many CSs. In the 2025-2026 school year, 74% of MJPSS's schools were designated as CSs, receiving more than $131 million in annual state aid. This funding supports each school's Personnel Grant, which funds a Community School Coordinator (CSC) position and a professional healthcare practitioner, as well as a Per Pupil Grant that funds wraparound support and services identified by the school's steering committee. The Per Pupil Grant is distributed to schools based on the FARMS-based funding formula and progressively lowering grant thresholds. Table 1 illustrates the growth of MJPSS CSs across cohort years and details the changes to the grants' thresholds each year. Notably, of the current 147 CSs, 64 have operated as CSs for five or more years, while the remaining schools represent more recent cohorts.

Table 1

Snapshot of MJPSS Community Schools by Year

CS Cohort Year	Personnel Grant Threshold	Per Pupil Grant Threshold	MJPSS Schools Added Each Year
Cohort 1 2019-2020	80%+ students qualifying for FARMS	*Not did not begin until FY2022*	39 elementary schools 4 middle schools 2 high schools
Cohort 2 2020-2021	75%+ students qualifying for FARMS	*Not did not begin until FY2022*	13 elementary schools 5 K-8/middle schools 1 high school
Cohort 3 2021-2022	70%+ students qualifying for FARMS	80%+ students qualifying for FARMS	8 elementary schools 3 K-8/middle schools 1 regional school

CS Cohort Year	Personnel Grant Threshold	Per Pupil Grant Threshold	MJPSS Schools Added Each Year
Cohort 4 2022-2023	65%+ students qualifying for FARMS	75%+ students qualifying for FARMS	9 elementary schools 6 K-8/middle schools 2 high schools
Cohort 5 2023-2024	60%+ students qualifying for FARMS	70%+ students qualifying for FARMS	11 elementary schools 1 K-8/middle schools 3 high schools
Cohort 6 2024-2025	55%+ students qualifying for FARMS	65%+ students qualifying for FARMS	12 elementary schools 5 K-8/middle schools 5 high schools
Cohort 7 2025-2026	55%+ students qualifying for FARMS	60%+ students qualifying for FARMS	12 elementary schools 1 K-8/middle schools 4 high schools 1 regional school
Current Total as of School Year 2025-2026			**Total of 147 schools**

Note. CS = Community School. FARMS = Free and Reduced Meals. Data sourced from the MJPSS.

The rapid local and statewide expansion, combined with the escalating financial investment, would reasonably lead policymakers and the educational community to anticipate improvements in school performance indicators. However, the scale and pace of investment have outpaced the development of systems for assessing impact. In fact, the specific outcomes of the first five years of investment have not been fully assessed (Bohannon et al., 2025). Neither the state nor the district prescribes a specific framework or checklist for measuring the unique impact of CSs. Initial indicators, such as community needs assessments, student attendance, and academic growth, provide a starting point for evaluating the impact of funding, yet comprehensive data and results have not yet been published by the district or the state.

MSDE Accountability Framework

In MJPSS, CS performance is evaluated using the same accountability measures applied to all Maryland public schools. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) compares public schools based on a combination of student achievement, student growth, access, credit for a well-rounded curriculum, graduation rate, multilingual learner proficiency, student readiness for postsecondary success, chronic absenteeism, and school climate survey results. These combined measures provide an overview of the school's performance. Overall points across categories are calculated, and a school performance rating is determined and correlated with a star rating on the MSDE "School Report Card."

Limitations of Current Measures

While the MSDE star rating system offers a broad view of school performance, it does not capture the distinct goals, interventions, and wraparound supports central to CSs. Moreover, evaluating CSs solely on academic performance overlooks the strategy's broader goals, which include enhancing student safety, support, and trust (Heller, 2022). Analysis of culture and climate surveys could yield valuable insights, but the district has not conducted a comprehensive analysis of these data specifically for CSs. Currently, while MJPSS tracks CS budget expenditures, it is unclear how the impact of these services is being evaluated beyond the use of funds.

Recent independent, external analyses further illustrate the complexities of assessing the impact of CS investments. In *The State of Reading in Maryland* report, the Maryland READS (2025) organization analyzed statewide reading proficiency data and found that, on average, CSs experienced smaller gains in reading than non-community schools. When examined more closely, individual CSs showed great variance, with some demonstrating notable gains and others

declining. At the same time, a statewide study by the Maryland Center for Community Schools at Towson University (2025) analyzing Maryland School Survey data found that students in CSs reported higher engagement, stronger relationships with staff, and greater feelings of safety and inclusivity than non-community school students. Together, these findings underscore the challenges of assessing CS impact, as no single measure can capture the full impact of CSs.

Local CS Performance Trends

Rather than overgeneralizing from statewide trends, we examined MJPSS CS performance to describe patterns in local student outcomes using publicly available data. First, we reviewed MJPSS CS report card data, focusing on the 104 schools in Cohorts 1 through 5 with more than 2 years of CS implementation. Table 2 summarizes the total number of schools in each CS Cohort and compares the number that improved, declined, or maintained star ratings.

Table 2

MJPSS Community School Report Card Trends by Cohort with Non-Community School Comparison (2022 through 2025)

Cohort	Schools (n)	Improved	Declined	Maintained/ Mixed	Reached 4-5 Stars
1	44	14 (32%)	13 (30%)	17 (39%)	2 (5%)
2	18	6 (33%)	3 (17%)	9 (50%)	2 (11%)
3	12	4 (33%)	3 (25%)	5 (42%)	1 (8%)
4	18	6 (33%)	4 (22%)	8 (44%)	1 (6%)
5	12	3 (25%)	2 (17%)	7 (58%)	0 (0%)
CS Total	**104**	**33 (32%)**	**25 (24%)**	**46 (44%)**	**6 (6%)**
Non-CS Comparison	**27**	**4 (15%)**	**9 (33%)**	**14 (52%)**	**12 (44%)**

Note. CS = Community School. The Non-CS Comparison group is not cohort-based and is

presented for contextual comparison only. “Improved” indicates an increase of one or more stars; “Declined” indicates a decrease of one or more stars; “Maintained/Mixed” indicates the star rating remained stable or fluctuated up and down over the time period. Percentages are calculated within each cohort. Data from *Maryland School Report Card*, Maryland State Department of Education, n.d., analyzed by the authors.

Across MJPSS CSs (Cohorts 1-5), School Report Card outcomes varied over the past three years (see Table 2). A total of 33 schools experienced net growth in their star ratings during this period, including six schools that achieved a 4-star rating for the first time. A net decline in star rating was observed in 25 schools. The remaining 46 schools maintained their star rating or demonstrated fluctuations, moving up and down across the three-year period. These results illustrate variability in reported outcomes across CSs and over time (Maryland State Department of Education, n.d.).

When examined by cohort, star rating patterns also varied, with no consistent pattern of growth associated with the length of CS implementation. For example, Cohort 1 schools, which have the longest duration of CS implementation, demonstrated both increases and decreases in start ratings and had the highest proportion of schools with declining ratings (30%) across cohorts.

To contextualize these findings, a comparison sample of MJPSS non-CSs was analyzed using the same criteria across the 2022-2025 period (see Table 2). Within this group, 15% of schools improved their star ratings, 33% declined, and 52% maintained their ratings over time. In contrast to CSs, which showed higher improvement rates (32%), non-CSs were more likely to remain stable or decline. Despite lower rates of improvement, non-CSs were substantially more likely to attain higher performance ratings, with 44% earning or maintaining a four- or five-star

rating by 2025 compared to only 6% of CSs. This pattern suggests a distinction between upward movement and high-level attainment, where CSs appear more likely to demonstrate incremental improvement over time, while non-CSs are more frequently represented among the highest-performing schools.

While overall star ratings provided one indicator of school performance, chronic absenteeism offered another important measure. Research has identified attendance as an early indicator of CS impact, as improvements in student engagement and access to supports may be reflected in attendance patterns before gains in academic outcomes are observed (Covelli et al., 2025; Maier et al., 2017). To further examine local trends, we analyzed chronic absenteeism from 2022 to 2025 in Cohort 1 schools. Table 3 summarizes changes to chronic absenteeism for the full cohort and then compares it to the average changes for the schools that decreased and those that increased rates. While overall absenteeism declined slightly across Cohort 1 schools, variation within the cohort showed that nearly one-third of schools experienced increases.

Table 3

Chronic Absenteeism Trends for MJPSS Cohort 1 Community Schools (2022-2025)

Category	**Schools (n)**	**2022-2023 Avg. % Chronically Absent**	**2024-2025 Avg. % Chronically Absent**	**Average Change**
All Cohort 1 CSs	44	34.1%	31.5%	-2.6%
Schools with Decreased Chronic Absenteeism	30	36.2%	29.1%	-7.1%
Schools with Increased Chronic Absenteeism	14	31.4%	34%	+2.6%

Note. Chronic absenteeism represents the percentage of students absent for 10% or more of

enrolled school days and enrolled for at least 10 days. Data from *Maryland School Report Card*, Maryland State Department of Education, n.d., analyzed by the authors.

Taken together, the data describe mixed patterns across indicators. Furthermore, MSDE data are lagging, and evaluating the success of school reform should incorporate interim measures (Maier et al., 2017). Given that "full implementation of complex change efforts can take 5 to 10 years with schools generally achieving partial implementation in the first 3 to 4 years," it is important to gather insights from practitioners directly engaged in CS work to understand current realities and challenges (Maier et al., 2017, p. 80). Especially since evaluating CSs solely on academic success neglects broader objectives that encompass improving student safety, support, and trust (Heller, 2022).

These considerations highlight the importance of examining how CS strategies are enacted at the school level, including the practices and conditions that shape implementation.

Recognizing these limitations in available data, the Maryland legislature revised the Senate Bill in August 2025 to require CSs to submit an annual evaluation to the Department of Education (Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 5-223, 2025). These evaluations must include funding allocations, the number of students who need and receive services, the number of volunteers and community partners, the chronic absenteeism rate, and student disciplinary actions. These changes to the legislation establish the first statewide requirement for more consistent reporting on CS implementation.

Despite new legislative requirements, publicly available information describing how CSs are enacted remains limited. As more localities, including MJPSS, implement community schooling as a school reform strategy, there is a need to examine how the strategy is enacted in practice. After all, expansion without thoughtful local adaptation can risk undermining the

foundational intent. Successful CS implementation requires staff to engage in deep, relational groundwork to build community trust, foster meaningful partnerships, and cultivate shared ownership (Community Schools Forward, 2023). These implementation factors cannot be measured using traditional performance data.

The emphasis on relational practices and community responsiveness is not new. In fact, they reflect the historical roots of community schooling itself. To better understand why leadership and relational practices are central to the success of CSs today, it is helpful to examine the historical roots of the community schooling movement.

Historical Roots and the Role of the CS Pillars

Community schooling is an approach to education reform with deep historical roots in social reform, educational philosophy, and community empowerment. The concept of integrating educational institutions with community support systems has evolved over time into what is now known as the contemporary CS movement (Blank et al., 2023).

CSs have taken shape in various ways, influenced by policy, funding availability, and local needs. For example, one modern iteration of CSs, known as Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS), has been supported through federal discretionary, competitive grants administered through the Department of Education (Lieberman, 2025). Other CSs, like those in Maryland and New York, have access to state entitlement grant funding (Jacobson, 2016; Maier, 2025; Maier & Rivera-Rodriguez, 2023). Still other CSs have sought outside investments, university partners, and private partnerships to develop their own programming (Blank et al., 2003).

Regardless of their origin story, individual CSs are designed to provide services to students and their families through a model of collaborative engagement between schools and

communities that aims to support improved student outcomes, enhanced family supports, and neighborhood-community partnerships (Caldas et al., 2019; Daniel et al., 2023). According to the Coalition of Community Schools (n.d.), "A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources."

Early Foundations. The idea of a school being responsive to its community is not novel; in fact, the earliest seeds of community-based schooling trace back to Jane Addams's Hull House in Chicago in the late 1800s and to John Dewey's 1902 proposal to reimagine schools through community partnerships (Benson et al., 2009; Jacobson, 2016; Quinn and Blank, 2020). Early settlement houses were responsive to the unique needs of newcomer and recent immigrant populations in urban areas. Later examples from the 1930s and 1940s include African American schools that supported students and families during legal segregation (Benson et al., 2009; Daniel et al., 2023). In the post-Brown v. Board of Education era, marked by ongoing racial inequality, community schooling was built on concepts of Black liberation and community self-determination (Benson et al., 2009; Daniel et al., 2023).

Central to this evolution in CSs was the ongoing connection between community-identified needs and a school-to-community partnership as the mechanism for addressing those needs.

Modernization and the Coalition for Community Schools. During the 1980s, researcher Joy Dryfoos modernized the CS movement by advocating for a specific model that provided direct community partnerships with individual schools (Min et al., 2017). It took a decade, but by the 1990s, the Coalition for Community Schools was created, and modern CSs expanded through collaboration among like-minded schools and the development of a CS framework (Min et al., 2017).

Encouraged by the findings of Bryk et al. (1999), which emphasized the potential of decentralizing district control and shifting reform at the school level, the United States CS movement steadily grew throughout the first twenty years of the 21st century. Other growth accelerants included the 2009 Full-Service Community School Act, which provided grant opportunities, and ongoing publications from the Coalition for Community Schools that summarized best practices (USDOE, 2014).

Expansion and the Foundational Pillars. While the structures and funding sources of CSs may vary, most are grounded in a set of shared research-based practices known as the foundational pillars. The original pillars of Integrated Student Supports, Expanded Learning Time and Opportunities, Family and Community Engagement, and Collaborative Leadership and Practices were identified by Oakes, Maier, and Daniel (2017, p. 1) as four key features that appear in most CSs. The four CS pillars, working in synergy, make CSs what Jacobson (2016) referred to as "hubs of the community where educators, families, nonprofits, community members, and others unite to create conditions where all children learn and thrive" (p. 1).

The publication of the four foundational CS pillars in 2017, followed by the 2018 *Community Schools Playbook*, contributed to rapid expansion with nearly 10,000 CSs established in the United States before the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 (Partnership for the Future of Learning, 2018; Quinn and Blank, 2020). Over time, studies have demonstrated that well-implemented CSs can lead to improvements in student attendance, academic achievement, and engagement, particularly for economically disadvantaged and linguistically diverse populations (Anderson et al., 2019; Biag & Castrechini, 2016; Caldas et al., 2019; Houser, 2016; Scanlan & Park, 2020). These promising findings have prompted school districts and state governments to invest in expanding CSs through the support of collaborative initiatives and

consortia (Min et al., 2017).

As the national momentum for CSs continues to grow, so does the body of research supporting the strategy's effectiveness. Early studies produced mixed results, but more recent findings have highlighted the academic and engagement outcomes associated with the CS pillars.

Evidence of Impact for the CS Pillars

Early variability in CS outcomes was evident in Whitehurst and Croft's (2010) large-scale study in New York, which found no evidence of higher academic outcomes for CS students. Similarly, Cummings et al. (2011) found that while CSs improved academic outcomes for students classified as the most economically disadvantaged, they did not significantly benefit other students in the same school.

Research since 2015, however, has increasingly highlighted more positive academic outcomes in studies of CSs, often focusing on direct student academic outcomes to support continued CS expansion. For example, two 2016 studies found that extracurricular or enrichment programs in CSs were associated with student achievement by way of improved attendance, with positive impacts observed in both linguistically and culturally diverse student groups (Biag & Castrechini, 2016; Houser, 2016). Biag and Castrechini (2016) also noted that when students participated in more than one enrichment opportunity, the positive outcomes were greater.

In the Learning Policy Institute's synopsis of 143 research studies, Maier et al. (2017) examined alignment between the four pillars of Community Schools (CSs) and characteristics of high-quality schools. This crosswalk identified and justified the integrity of the four pillars by comparing them with established indicators of school quality (Maier et al., 2017).

Pillar 1: Integrated Student Supports. The first original pillar, Integrated Student Supports, has been widely researched and shows positive associations with both academic and

nonacademic outcomes across various studies (Bradley et al., 2020; Partnership for the Future of Learning, 2018; Warren, 2005). Integrated support includes a wide array of coordinated services, such as mental health care, nutrition assistance, housing support, and mentoring, provided in partnership with community organizations. Findings emphasize the benefits of school partnerships with outside agencies, a central aspect of CSs (Maier et al., 2017).

For example, an integrated support program in Massachusetts, known as the "Wraparound Zones program," emphasized school-based support for non-academic student needs and school climate through community partnerships. It was associated with significantly better performance in English and mathematics compared to students at other schools (Jones, 2014, p. 10). A four-year analysis of the Kent School Services Network in Michigan, which offered school-based behavioral health support, found multi-year attendance gains for students (Johnson Center at Grand Valley State University, 2014). These findings highlight how integrated, non-academic student support can be linked to improved outcomes, reinforcing the central role of partnerships and whole-child wellness in the CS strategy.

Pillar 2: Expanded Learning Time and Opportunities. The second original pillar, Expanded Learning Time and Opportunities, was examined by Maier et al. (2017) across 14 scholarly research reviews. For example, Biag and Castrechini (2016) found that across several studies, youth who participated in extended learning opportunities or had engaged families had higher attendance and academic achievement. Additionally, a three-year evaluation of a middle school after-school program in New York City found that students participating in extended learning reported gains in self-esteem, school engagement, school attendance, and future aspirations (Krenichyn et al., 2008).

Of note, Maier et al. (2017) reported that the effectiveness of extended learning time was

not contingent on the quantity of additional time, but rather, more positive outcomes were observed when additional time was focused on academic enrichment and remediation aligned to the students' specific academic needs and learning gaps, rather than generic programming. These findings describe how expanded learning beyond the classroom can connect to student outcomes when it is planned thoughtfully and strategically.

Pillar 3: Family and Community Engagement. The findings for the third original pillar, Family and Community Engagement, indicated that when families were engaged in CS programming, changes in student attitudes toward school and other positive benefits were observed (Maier et al., 2017). Specifically, studies of the Redwood City CSs in California found benefits for students' perceptions of care and school attendance when families engaged with the school's support services (Castrechini, 2011; Castrechini & London, 2012). A case study of Quitman Community School in New Jersey described how providing family and community services and classes developed connections between parents, teachers, and students (Warren, 2005). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that family engagement in CSs has fostered positive outcomes and home-to-school partnerships.

Pillar 4: Collaborative Leadership and Practice. Finally, research into pillar 4, Collaborative Leadership and Practice, emphasized the intentional design of shared decision-making in CSs. As early as 2003, before the creation of the four pillars, the Coalition for Community Schools highlighted collaboration among schools, communities, and families as central to the CS framework (Blank et al., 2003). Heck and Hallinger (2010) define collaborative leadership as emphasizing "governance structures and processes that foster shared commitment to achieving school improvement goals, broad participation and collaboration in decision making, and shared accountability for student learning outcomes" (p. 228).

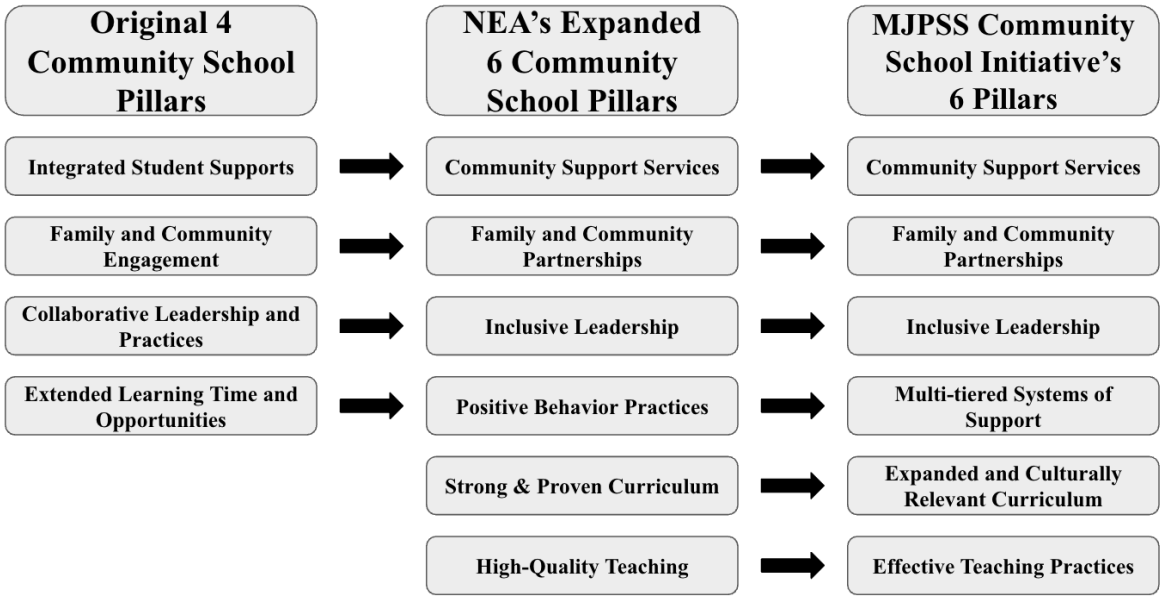
Maier et al. (2017) further emphasized the need for shared decision-making that includes families and community members, as well as other stakeholders such as universities and labor partners. Their synthesis of collaborative leadership studies also highlighted the role of trust in shaping school culture (Maier et al., 2017). By promoting shared decision-making and trust, collective leadership becomes the coordinating structure through which the other pillars are coordinated and put into practice.

Expansion to Six Pillars. While the original four pillars emphasized support outside of the classroom, they did not explicitly address how academics and instruction should be enhanced within a CS. In response to the growing body of CS research, in 2020, the National Education Association (NEA) revised the CS pillars by adding two additional pillars: Strong and Proven Curriculum and High-Quality Teaching. These changes drew critical attention to how the work of CSs not only focuses on the outside *wrap-around*, but also directly impacts the instructional core, which is the intersection of teacher, student, and the content (NEA, 2020).

NEA also changed the name of Collaborative Leadership to Inclusive Leadership, but this terminology shift has not been universally accepted, and the terms are still used synonymously in the literature. MJPSS's CSI has adopted an aligned model of NEA's 6 pillars with slight variations in wording. See Figure 1 for a visual depiction of the evolution of the original CS pillars to the MJPSS version. In addition, Appendix A provides the MJPSS definitions of each CS pillar.

Figure 1

MJPSS Community School Initiative's Six Pillars Aligned with Previous Versions



Note. Information sourced from MJPSS Office of Community Schools and NEA (2020). Figure created by the authors.

Evidence of Continued Impact. Research continues to document positive associations between CSs and academic and engagement outcomes, particularly for students from traditionally underrepresented groups (Anderson et al., 2019; Caldas et al., 2019; Scanlan & Park, 2020; Swain et al., 2025). A key bellwether of CSs' impact is a change in attendance rates. In fact, attendance has been identified as a key indicator of early CS success, as engaged and supported students are more likely to achieve long-term gains, such as improved test scores (Covelli et al., 2025; Maier et al., 2017).

For example, as recently as fall 2025, the Learning Policy Institute presented findings on California's first full year of a state-level CS program, including 458 schools, and found that CSs were associated with reduced chronic absenteeism, lower suspension rates, and improved student

test scores, with the greatest academic gains observed in schools with the largest reductions in absenteeism (Swain et al., 2025).

However, school policies and family attitudes toward student absenteeism shifted during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a de-prioritization of daily attendance due to health concerns and inconsistent virtual learning (Evans et al., 2023). In fact, some families continue to see school attendance as more flexible than before the pandemic, and this has been associated with sustained increases in chronic absenteeism (Fuller et al., 2024). This presents a challenge for comparing pre- and post-pandemic absenteeism rates as a measure of CS success, while also highlighting the role of family-school partnerships in shaping attendance patterns.

These complexities reflect the challenges of understanding and measuring reform data, especially for a complex reform like CSs, which simultaneously seeks to impact multiple academic and non-academic dimensions. Studies of CS implementation have employed a range of methodologies, including longitudinal quantitative analyses focusing on attendance and achievement (Biag & Castrechini, 2016) and qualitative case studies exploring relational trust and stakeholder engagement (Scanlan & Park, 2020). A consistent, broader challenge across CS studies is how to capture both the tangible and intangible elements of success that do not always appear in student achievement data.

Since it takes many years to truly measure both impact and sustainability, research has tended to emphasize outcomes over the internal leadership practices and decision-making processes that shape how CS reforms are enacted over time. While the pillars outline the structural components of CSs, existing literature suggests that implementation is closely connected to leadership practices that foster collaboration, shared ownership, and inclusive decision-making among school and community stakeholders (Maier et al., 2017; FitzGerald &

Quiñones, 2018; Sanders, 2016, 2018).

A Deep Dive into Inclusive Leadership as the Pillar of Greatest Leverage

Inclusive leadership is one of the pillars of CS that is often positioned in the literature as most directly influencing the implementation of the CS strategy, since it characterizes the work of the individuals responsible for leading the change. Originally referred to as *collaborative leadership* in the first versions of the CS pillars, the term has evolved, with the wider literature also using inclusive leadership synonymously with shared governance and participatory leadership (Maier et al., 2017; Ryan, 2007). By positioning inclusive leadership as a focal point of our discussion, this section examines how power, decision-making, and participation influence CS implementation and impact.

MJPSS defines inclusive leadership as developing a sense of ownership where all stakeholders see their role as critical to ensuring the success of the school, but the concept is not solely an educational idea or term. Definitions from sectors beyond education, including health services, finance, and manufacturing, emphasize participatory decision-making, processes that promote inclusive experiences between leaders and followers, and accessible, high-quality communication within team structures (Benton, 2023; Carmeli et al., 2010; Nishii & Leroy, 2022; Rajun et al., 2024; Xin et al., 2024). Research across disciplines has identified two primary functions of inclusive leadership: fostering exchange of knowledge within an organization and balancing individual group member needs for both uniqueness and belonging (Ashikali et al., 2021; van Luttervelt, 2024).

In the context of CSs, inclusive leadership has distinct characteristics that extend beyond traditional school-based roles, requiring school leaders to actively engage families, community members, and external partners as co-leaders rather than simply as participants. This expansion

of leadership beyond the schoolhouse is a defining feature of inclusive leadership in the CS strategy.

Actualizing Inclusive Leadership. Within CSs, the principal and CSC play key roles in actualizing inclusive leadership. Research highlights that effective CS principals embody collaborative leadership, emphasize shared governance, and build strong partnerships with diverse stakeholders (Maier et al., 2017; FitzGerald & Quiñones, 2018; Sanders, 2016, 2018). This inclusive leadership style requires principals to integrate community partners, resolve conflicts, and navigate tensions while maintaining a strong commitment to equity (Galindo et al., 2017; Adams, 2019; Medina et al., 2019). In addition to the principal, the CSC also plays a critical role in "institutionalizing the community school strategy" by positioning themself as a key player within the school and the primary connection to families and resource partners outside of the school (Hine et al., 2024, p. 2).

While the school principal and CSC are identified in the literature as central to inclusive leadership, the CS steering committee further operationalizes the practice. In their 2017 review of evidence for CSs, Maier et al. explain that school-based leaders, like principals and CSCs, structure teams and committees to engage families, educators, community partners, and students. These teams are described as working to build social capital and prioritize shared decision-making. The steering committee, for example, often includes the CSC, teachers, parents, students, and community partners. Such committees are described as defining attributes of inclusive leadership within CSs.

Beyond Role Distribution: Enacting Inclusive Leadership. While these structures create opportunities for shared leadership, inclusive leadership is not merely about one leader distributing leadership roles among team members. Instead, it involves a dynamic, relational

process, as Nishii & Leroy refer to it, the promotion of "inclusive collective-level interactions" (2022, p. 284). Practices such as building awareness of work-style preferences and identifying group member strengths are described as functions of inclusive leadership that can build shared understanding and collective identity among a group (Nishii & Leroy, 2022).

To engage diverse partners, psychological safety and trust, defined as conditions where staff and community members feel empowered to contribute, are essential conditions for fostering an inclusive team climate (Alharbi et al., 2022; Pelled et al., 1999). In non-education organizations implementing inclusive leadership, psychological safety has been developed through structured team chartering activities that define purpose, roles, and responsibilities (Nishii & Leroy, 2022). Similar indicators for collaborative leadership can be found in the 2017 Community School Standards, which include a "clear definition of leadership team roles, responsibilities, and empowerment to make decisions," along with regular meetings with an agenda and minutes (Institute for Educational Leadership, p. 6).

A common misconception is that being an inclusive leader involves neutrality or treating everyone the same in attempts to make everyone feel *included*. Instead, it involves awareness of the social positions and structures within an organization or group and applying purposeful attention to how role categories and individuals interact (Nishii & Leroy, 2022). This requires inclusive leaders to continuously reflect on their own biases, challenge dominant power structure narratives, and actively create environments where all voices are invited and valued (DeRue, 2011; Lord & Hall, 2005).

Inclusive Leadership and Organizational Outcomes. While much of the research about inclusive leadership predates the 2020 Covid pandemic, more recent studies from outside education emphasize how inclusive leadership is associated with employees' perceptions of

inclusion, perceptions of leaders' responses to crises, and higher workplace well-being (Alharbi et al., 2022; Randel et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2024). Across industries, inclusive leadership has been shown to impact organizational climate and promotion of employee innovation (Rajun et al., 2024; Xin et al., 2024).

In education, a 2024 study also found a positive association between principal inclusive leadership and teachers' innovative behavior, concluding that stronger principal inclusive leadership was associated with greater teacher innovation (Bao, 2024).

Inclusive leadership is also described in the literature as important to the implementation of the other CS pillars. In fact, the Community School Standards name "Collaborative Leadership" as Standard 1, noting its central to "the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that school and community partners need to plan and implement successful and impactful community schools" (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2017, p. 5).

Gaps in Research on Inclusive Leadership. While the CS literature often references collaborative leadership, few studies systematically examine how school leaders enact inclusive practices within CSs, particularly in large, urban districts undergoing rapid, state-level financial backing and scaling. The specific ways in which inclusive leadership practices are connected to CS implementation processes and outcomes remain underexplored. In particular, limited research has examined how principals and CSCs work together to enact inclusive leadership practices that align school and community efforts. This gap highlights the importance of examining inclusive leadership as a potential key leverage point for implementing the CS strategy.

Dimensions of High-Quality Inclusive Leadership

Building on the discussion of inclusive leadership as a key pillar of the CS strategy, this study focuses on how leadership practices are operationalized within MJPSS CSs. While

research demonstrates the potential impact of CSs, particularly for historically underserved students, less is known about how leadership practices support consistent implementation (Anderson et al., 2019; Biag & Castrechini, 2016; Caldas et al., 2019; Houser, 2016; Scanlan & Park, 2020).

The centrality of school leadership to school reform efforts is well documented. School leaders shape school culture, support their staff, and drive instructional quality, all of which are associated with student outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Grissom et al., 2021). In fact, research suggests that principals are second only to classroom instruction in their impact on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004; Grissom et al., 2021). In schools undergoing reform, such as CSs, leadership plays a key role in creating the conditions for trust and shared responsibility to support lasting transformation (Bryk et al., 2010; Fullan, 2005). As such, principals in CSs act not only as instructional leaders but also as facilitators of partnerships.

A central component of a principal's expanded role in a CS is inclusive leadership. Inclusive leadership, also known as collaborative leadership, involves educators, families, students, and community partners being authentically engaged in the decision-making process. However, despite the growing implementation of the CS Initiative in MJPSS, there is limited clarity around how inclusive leadership practices are operationalized within these schools, particularly regarding their role in supporting sustainable, equitable school reform.

Our problem of practice centers on this implementation gap: while inclusive leadership is a key pillar of CSs, high-quality inclusive leadership is not yet a systemic, consistent practice in MJPSS CSs. For this study, we define high-quality inclusive leadership as aligned with the CS Standard for Collaborative Leadership, which emphasizes shared ownership, accountability, and authentic engagement of diverse stakeholders (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2017).

Specifically, high-quality inclusive leadership is conceptualized in this study as comprising three essential dimensions of collaborative practice.

First, school leaders and external stakeholders share accountability for student and school success, ensuring that all partners take responsibility for outcomes. Second, representative site-based leadership teams guide planning, implementation, and oversight through clearly defined roles and regular collaboration. Third, principals work in tandem with CSCs to intentionally integrate families and community partners into the school's daily life, building trust and leveraging local assets to strengthen the school's mission.

This definition highlights that inclusive leadership extends beyond consultation to include authentic power-sharing and shared accountability, positioning schools as true community-centered organizations. However, within MJPSS, inclusive leadership is identified as a core pillar of the CS strategy, yet its enactment remains uneven across schools. This variation in implementation raises important questions about the conditions that support inclusive leadership at scale.

To better understand these challenges, it is necessary to examine the underlying systems and relationships that shape how inclusive leadership is enacted. The following causal system analysis examines the systems and relationships that shape inclusive leadership practices.

Causal System Analysis & Causal Factor Review

As Benson et al. (2009), community school (CS) advocates, noted, "education has always been a community endeavor" (p. 22). This raises a critical question: beyond additional funding, what distinguishes a CS from a traditional school? Similarly, from a leadership perspective, how does leading a CS differ from leading a traditional school?

In MJPSS, understanding how school leaders implement the CS strategy requires

examining the underlying factors that shape its execution. As noted, our problem of practice centers on why high-quality inclusive leadership is not yet a systemic and consistent practice in MJPSS CSs.

Drawing on the literature, field research, empathy interviews, and personal practitioner experiences, we developed a causal system diagram (Figure 2) to illustrate the key factors that affect the implementation of inclusive leadership practices in MJPSS CSs. This diagram serves as a roadmap for understanding how funding, professional learning, family and community engagement, instructional and equity practices, and systems and structures interact to influence inclusive leadership.

Fishbone Analysis: System Factors Shaping Inclusive Leadership

Causal factors are the foundational forces that shape outcomes and drive change across behaviors, systems, and structures (Bryk, 2021). They identify the underlying conditions and contributing influences that help explain why a problem persists across contexts. The specific causal factors that contribute to our problem of practice include funding, professional learning, family and community engagement, instructional and equity practices, and systems and structures. In this section, we will discuss each causal factor in our fishbone through the lens of the literature and practical reality.

Figure 2

Fishbone Diagram



Note. This figure was created by the authors of this capstone.

Family and Community Engagement. Family and community engagement, a foundational aspect of the CS strategy, is closely linked in the literature to the effectiveness of inclusive leadership. Research emphasizes that authentic collaboration depends on centering community voice (Blank et al., 2023). The challenge for CS leaders is to enact inclusive leadership that fosters authentic engagement, especially when "the struggles of people from low-income communities and people of color to have their voices heard is a historical and present-day reality" (Blank et al., 2023, p. 145).

Recognizing and leveraging the unique expertise and perspectives of external partners is essential to authentic inclusive leadership (Benton, 2023; Blank et al., 2006; Bradley et al., 2020). Engaging families and the community as authentic collaborators requires more than

access; it requires intentionality (Shiller & Teacher's Democracy Project [TDP], 2024; Williams, 2024). Families and external partners may benefit from guidance and support to assume central stakeholder roles. This is especially important because external stakeholders bring broad experiences that may differ from those of school leadership. Families may default to engaging with schools in ways shaped by their own childhood experiences or cultural heritage (Shiller & TDP, 2024). Community partners and businesses may default to traditional transactional engagement with schools rather than partnerships. In addition, stakeholders' perceptions of the power dynamics of collaborating with school leaders can influence engagement.

This complexity underscores the importance of honoring the community. Inclusive leaders must create participatory processes that value and incorporate the knowledge of all families, ensuring that decision-making reflects community strengths (Gonzalez et al., 2005). In a 2023 case study titled "How Community School Members Discuss Power: A Case Study," Benton explains that school communities have traditionally been excluded from decision-making in local schools, but CSs offer potential to help community members understand their roles and opportunities in power-sharing and collaboration.

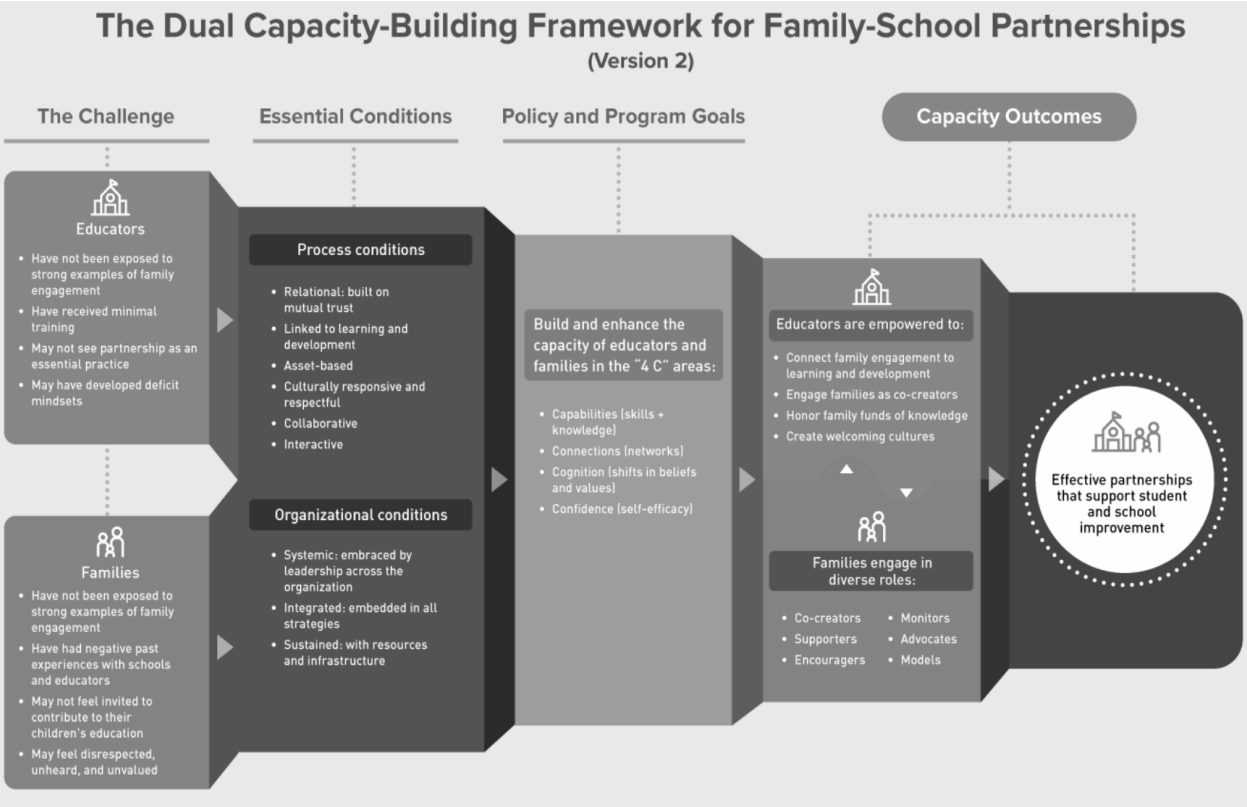
When inclusive leadership is not intentionally enacted, historical patterns can persist. For example, Lewis-Durham and Saastamoinen's (2021) case study examined how CS administrators' deficit-mindsets and deficit-perspectives about families and students were associated with derailed attempts to implement the CS strategy, as classism and racism prevented full inclusive practices. Therefore, the literature describes effective inclusive leaders as needing to continuously reflect on their biases, challenge dominant narratives, and actively create environments where all voices are invited and valued (DeRue, 2011; Lord & Hall, 2005). Yet many CS principals report receiving little to no formal training in inclusive leadership (Mayger

& Provinzano, 2020).

The Dual-Capacity Framework (Figure 3) encourages educational leaders to simultaneously develop staff capacity while empowering family and community agency.

Figure 3

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships



Note. Reprinted from Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships, by K. L. Mapp & P. J. Kuttner, 2013, SEDL. Copyright 2013 by SEDL.

This framework highlights the essence of a reciprocal school-community partnership that reflects the CS strategy (Mapp & Kuttner, 2015). However, the literature provides examples of how gaps in implementation can result in limited integration of family voice, with engagement remaining peripheral rather than embedded in the school culture (Benton, 2023; Shiller & TDP, 2024).

For example, in a case study of educators in a CS, researchers examined how principals, teachers, and staff, in collaboration, can build networks of social capital that provide services and support to students and families inside and outside the classroom (Galindo et al., 2017). The strength of social capital in the CS was built through bonding, bridging, and linking among students, families, educators, and community partners, but the study also revealed that limits on access to resources and racial tensions can undermine social capital in schools (Galindo et al., 2017). This suggests the dynamic and sensitive nature of school-community partnerships.

Consistent with these findings, local patterns in MJPSS CSs suggest that structures to support sustained and authentic participation are not fully developed. While schools may offer events or opportunities for involvement, these are not always designed to foster sustained collaboration. According to empathy interviews with CS leaders, low staff participation in engagement activities, combined with a limited number of stakeholders identified to meet the school population's specific needs, hinders efforts to build strong school-community relationships.

In addition, inconsistent two-way communication between schools and families further limits engagement. When communication is primarily one-directional, families are positioned as passive recipients of information. In MJPSS, this pattern may limit opportunities for families to engage as active contributors. In addition, limited access to year-round resources and support reduces the continuity of services available to families during the summer, which is critical to sustaining engagement and support.

Finally, the absence of shared leadership opportunities in some school contexts constrains families' and community partners' ability to participate in school governance. Schools often struggle to involve families in meaningful decision-making. Without these opportunities,

initiatives are less likely to reflect the unique needs of the school community.

Taken together, the literature and local context suggest that family and community engagement is not only a core pillar of the CS strategy but also a key causal factor shaping how inclusive leadership is enacted in practice. Barriers to family and community engagement shape the extent to which high-quality, inclusive leadership is enacted in MJPSS CSs.

Instructional and Equity Practices. Strengthening instructional quality and advancing equity are central to the CS mission, yet multiple factors contribute to variation in practice and persistent inequities. Across MJPSS CSs, instructional and equity practices are often shaped by competing priorities, with academics sometimes prioritized over student well-being. While important, an overemphasis on academics can limit the integration of whole wellness supports that are foundational to the CS strategy.

In CSs, instructional practice is conceptualized as extending beyond traditional classroom-based approaches to include culturally responsive, community-centered, and whole-child learning experiences (Daniel et al., 2019). Research suggests that CS leaders and teachers adopt expanded approaches to designing and delivering instruction that integrate academic, social, and community-based supports (Galindo and Sanders, 2019). Specifically, Daniel et al. (2019) argue that for CS teachers to bring the qualities of deeper learning into CS classrooms, "it involves extending what it means to be a teacher, beyond traditional classroom-based conceptions of work and identity" (473).

Across the literature on CS teaching, practices such as using culturally relevant resources, real-world experiences, social-emotional learning, and project-based learning are described as ways teachers might actualize deeper learning in CS classrooms (Daniel et al., 2019; Galindo and Sanders, 2019; Sanders et al., 2021). More recent research also highlights the role of teachers in

post-pandemic recovery, noting that teachers were often positioned to support student learning when they actively valued and leveraged partnerships with families and community members (Williams, 2024). Taken together, these studies suggest that effective teaching in CS classrooms extends beyond traditional instructional roles.

This expanded view of instruction aligns with equity-focused practices that center student identity and lived experiences. The Community Teachers Framework highlights the importance of teachers developing knowledge of "culture, community, and identity of the children and their families as the core of their teaching practice" (Murrell, 2001). Research also identifies trauma as a critical factor influencing teaching and learning in CS classrooms, underscoring the need for instructional approaches responsive to students' holistic needs (Medina et al., 2020).

In MJPSS, the implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) to address students' varied academic and behavioral needs was described as inconsistent across schools in empathy interviews, even though it is one of the CS pillars. This may limit school leaders' ability to make data-driven decisions to best support students. Furthermore, local patterns suggest variability in the enactment of culturally sustaining instructional practices, which the literature emphasizes as essential to supportive learning environments. Currently, MJPSS CSs are implementing the same curriculum and utilizing the same instructional resources as all other schools, demonstrating a lack of awareness of how the absence of specialized programming for traditionally marginalized students may perpetuate disparities in academic achievement, access, and participation (TNTP, 2018).

The gap in the ability to implement inclusive leadership practices to strengthen instructional approaches and equity-focused interventions has been recognized at the state level. As part of the 2024 MSDE Comprehensive K-3 Literacy Policy, the Maryland State Department

of Education is tasked with developing statewide MTSS guidelines and providing technical support to districts in designing an MTSS model (Maryland State Board of Education, 2024). However, variation in alignment between state guidance and local implementation may lead principals and CSCs to interpret expectations differently, contributing to inconsistent inclusive leadership practices across schools.

Reducing inequities by mitigating the impact on under-resourced communities through the creation of schools as community hubs is central to CSs' mission, yet several barriers impede progress in this area (Jacobson, 2016). Empathy interviews and practitioner experiences have revealed that MJPSS schools may encounter difficulties in obtaining approval for extracurricular trips and activities, which are important for providing students with enriching experiences beyond the classroom. In addition, food insecurity remains a significant issue, exacerbated by the lack of food options and food service vendors that cater to the specific dietary needs of the diverse cultural populations within the school community. Additionally, limitations in mental health support and disruptions in health and vision services contribute to the inequities. These challenges may limit MJPSS CS leadership's ability to fully address the holistic needs of their students, which is critical to advancing equity through instructional and wraparound practices.

When leaders lack consistent access to resources or the authority to address these needs equitably, opportunities for shared ownership and authentic collaboration with families and community partners are reduced.

Together, these conditions illustrate that variation in instructional and equity practices can function as a causal factor shaping the enactment of inclusive leadership in MJPSS CSs. Without consistent structures such as MTSS, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and adequate wraparound supports, principals and CSCs are limited in their ability to build collaborative,

equity-focused responses to student and family needs. This suggests that leadership teams may operate without a coherent framework for inclusive practice, reinforcing the system-level inconsistency identified in our problem of practice.

Funding. Funding plays a critical role in shaping the execution of inclusive leadership practices in CSs. Research highlights that funding structures and sustainability influence schools' capacity to implement long-term projects and partnerships (Jacobson, 2016). In particular, inequities in funding allocation and the lack of scalable resources have been identified as challenges that may impact the development of CS programming.

In Maryland, the Concentration of Poverty (COP) Grant uses a formula-based funding method. However, variations in funding allocations across schools create differences in the scale and scope of services that can be provided, as well as complications in how the district central office supports individual CSs. Some schools receive significantly more funding than others, making it difficult to provide the same centralized support for schools with tens of thousands of dollars in funding versus those with millions. Table 4 provides a breakdown of the current funding formulas and shows the difference between the Personnel Grant and the Per Pupil Grant amount.

Table 4

Weighted Funding Amounts for Maryland Concentration of Poverty Grant

Funding Type	Amount	Notes
Personnel Grant	$278,614	Adjusted for inflation each subsequent year; program grant available the first year a school is eligible; used to hire staff and administer the needs assessment
Per Pupil Grant	$3,778	Adjusted for inflation each subsequent year; weighted grant given during second year of eligibility to provide the services; based on the number of students living in poverty in the school

Note. Data for school year 2024-2025. Information sourced from MSDE.

Empathy interviews with current MJPSS CS principals indicate that schools often lack clear guidance on how to allocate funds in line with the six pillars of the CS strategy. This uncertainty, coupled with unclear restrictions on fund use, can directly hamper a leader's ability to consistently implement inclusive leadership. For instance, schools are unable to use CS funds to hire additional staff, a critical component in supporting students and developing innovative and responsive programs. Furthermore, delays in disbursing funds to schools exacerbate the problem, leaving them without timely access to the resources they need. During the 2023-2024 school year, for example, the CS funds were not released to schools until more than halfway through the year. These funding challenges leave schools inadequately equipped to fully implement the plans they design, thereby limiting their potential impact.

Since CS programming is tied to funding, a leader's lack of clarity can impede their ability to implement inclusive practices by limiting timely collaboration, constraining stakeholder engagement in decision-making, and delaying support tailored to the community's needs. In this way, funding discrepancies and management become a causal factor shaping the effectiveness and consistency of inclusive leadership practices across MJPSS CSs.

Professional Learning. Professional learning is a critical component of initiating and sustaining inclusive leadership in CSs, yet both the literature and the local context indicate that it is often underdeveloped or inconsistently implemented. Research on CS implementation underscores the importance of ongoing, role-specific professional learning to build capacity for collaborative and equity-centered leadership practices (Campo & Fernandez, 2022; Fehrer et al., 2023). However, limited access to targeted learning opportunities may constrain leaders' ability to fully enact inclusive leadership.

According to empathy interviews with current CS principals and district leaders, professional learning remains an underdeveloped area in MJPSS. For example, one district CS leader shared that "currently, there have been limited offerings on the topic for principals or CSCs, and most opportunities have been optional." Another district CS leader stated that:

> There is truly no professional development focused on inclusive leadership. It simply is a theory without action. Decisions are often made from "above" and presented as options to leaders, which in turn yields no growth for all aspects of leadership.

While principals are expected to share decision-making authority with CSCs and community partners, many enter their roles without sustained, role-specific onboarding that addresses the unique leadership practices required in CSs. This lack of structured preparation may affect leaders' ability to implement practices they haven't fully learned. Green's 2018 Community Equity Literacy (CEL) Framework has been used to assess whether CS principals are aware of the knowledge and skills needed to improve equity in schools (Mayger and Provinzano, 2022; Provinzano and Mayger, 2024).

School leaders lay the foundation for building social capital within a school community, and much of the work of a CS centers on using social networks to partner and collaborate (Green, 2018b). Research also acknowledges the added challenge of leading change and improvement in schools with high teacher turnover, as is the case with many CSs, by the nature of being in lower socioeconomic areas, adding to the need for professional development (Mayger et al., 2022).

Teacher capacity is also a critical component of professional learning in CSs. Research suggests that effective teaching in CS contexts requires dispositions such as academic optimism, teacher self-efficacy, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, and the ability to integrate

community-based knowledge into instruction (Galindo & Sanders, 2019; Galindo & Sanders, 2022; Sanders et al., 2021). However, the literature provides limited guidance on how these capacities are developed or how CS leaders support teachers in building these skills. Professional learning communities have been suggested as a means of building collective teacher efficacy and fostering collaboration (Fehrer et al., 2023; Fensterstock, 2023; Louis & Marks, 1998). Additionally, teacher preparation programs often do not adequately prepare educators for the complexities of working within a CS context (Medina, 2016).

In MJPSS, local patterns indicate limited opportunities for cross-school collaboration, particularly within feeder patterns, which constrain leaders' ability to learn inclusive practices from peers and to build continuity for students and families across school levels. Existing professional development leadership sessions are not grounded in the CS context, and CS-specific supports are not always aligned with findings from school-level needs assessments, contributing to perceptions that professional learning may be generic and disconnected from practice.

This aligns with findings in the literature. Campo and Fernández (2022) highlight that "lack of model clarity" is one of the top barriers to successful CS implementation (p. 10). They note that when leaders have inconsistent knowledge of the CS pillars and inclusive leadership practices, implementation can become fragmented. This is evident in MJPSS, where some leaders remain unaware of how CSs differ from traditional schools beyond additional funding.

Differences in cohort year also affect professional learning needs in MJPSS. CS implementation, like other complex reforms, occurs in stages. Stacey Campo, for the National Center for Community Schools Children's Aid and Community Schools Forward, provided the Stages of Development tool as a resource for understanding CS development (Children's Aid

2023). The stages are labeled emerging, maturing, and transforming. The progression is not linear, but each stage has distinct characteristics. As new CSs have been onboarded in MJPSS across the seven cohort years, schools have operated at varying levels of development, suggesting the need for differentiated professional learning aligned with the implementation stage.

Taken together, the literature and local context suggest that gaps in professional learning shape how inclusive leadership is implemented. Without a shared foundation, principals, CSCs, and other staff risk defaulting to traditional hierarchical practices rather than building distributed, equity-centered leadership. The lack of specialized leadership training can limit a leader's ability to fully embrace and implement the CS approach, resulting in a disconnect among stakeholders (Carmeli et al., 2010; Ashikali et al., 2021). The absence of context-specific professional learning may hinder schools from cultivating a common, systemic culture of inclusive leadership across the district.

Systems and Structure. Systems and structures within MJPSS shape conditions under which inclusive leadership practices are enacted in CSs. This causal system operates across district, school, and interpersonal levels. In MJPSS, local patterns suggest that feedback and monitoring structures have been limited, potentially constraining leaders' ability to make data-informed adjustments and improvements. For example, accountability measures and needs assessments are conducted only every 3 years, which may be too infrequent to effectively monitor and support ongoing progress. In addition, misalignment between district and state accountability systems and expectations further complicates implementation.

A central system-level challenge is the lack of clearly defined support structures for inclusive leadership that help schools understand what it looks like in practice. Research

highlights that implementing inclusive leadership requires navigating the tension between traditional hierarchical leadership structures and distributed decision-making (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Lareau & Muñoz, 2012). CS principals are expected to share authority and decision-making with CSCs and community partners while maintaining responsibility for running the school (Gomez, 2019). However, without clear expectations, research suggests that CSs have struggled to enact inclusive leadership because of ambiguities about leadership roles and power redistribution (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Lareau & Muñoz, 2012; Moll et al., 1992).

Inclusive leadership is not merely about systems for distributing leadership roles. It also entails a dynamic, relational process that continually fosters relationships with families and community partners (Benton, 2024; Mayger & Ewing, 2021). This is especially important when inviting parents, students, and community members to the decision-making table. Without intentional shifts toward power-sharing structures, school leaders risk reinforcing dominant power structures that marginalize historically excluded groups (Ishimaru, 2014). These findings underscore the importance of structures that provide role clarity and shared expectations.

As the primary leader, the principal plays a pivotal role in shaping school-level systems and structures. Leaders must manage complex systems while attending to the interpersonal aspects of relational practices within and beyond the schoolhouse (Sanders, 2018). Relational leadership strategies include active engagement, facilitating interactions, and purposefully selecting staff (Sanders, 2018). CSs implementation requires strong collaborative relationships, and development requires purposefully creating time to collaborate, prioritizing processes, establishing structures and roles, and committing to collective leadership development (Daniel, 2017). These structures are not incidental. They must be intentionally designed to support inclusive practices at the school level.

The role of the CSC further illustrates the importance of systems and structures in implementation. The CSC, sometimes referred to in the literature as CS Managers or CS Directors, commonly serves as a dedicated link among students, families, community partners, and the school's steering committee, and as the primary coordinator of collaboration systems and structures (Hine et al., 2024; Blank et al., 2006; Tagle, 2005). Such actions include conducting community needs assessments, creating community asset maps, and developing relationships with families and community partners (Blank et al., 2006; Sanders, 2016; Tagle, 2005). In addition, the CSC connects the social systems of the school and the community and serves as a primary point of contact for families (FitzGerald & Quiñones, 2018; Sanders et al., 2019).

However, variability in role expectations and qualifications across districts, including certification requirements, reflects differences in system-level expectations for this role. For example, some Maryland districts require CSCs to be state-certified school administrators, while MJPSS does not require administrative certification or teaching experience. MJPSS CSCs' educational requirements include a bachelor's degree and 3 to 5 years of related work experience in community organizing, education, or health or social work. Requiring CSCs to hold administrative certifications may affect school leadership, as the CSC's understanding of leadership expectations is filtered through an administrative lens. On the other hand, MJPSS's CSC job requirements may allow for a broader range of candidates with more diverse experiences, but those experiences may not be connected to instructional leadership. The impact of local job qualifications for CSCs has not been specifically studied, but it may influence the scope of the role an individual may play within the school.

At the district level, leadership structures further shape the conditions for inclusive leadership in CSs. While CSs were originally implemented at the school level, there is a growing

trend of states and districts providing funding and coordinated support for CSs at scale, which has led to published support and technical guidance on how districts can best support development (Campo & Fernandez, 2022; Fehrer et al., 2023).

Specifically, research suggests that district leadership can help to build capacity and understanding of the CS strategy with an emphasis on the role of collaborative, inclusive leadership (Fehrer et al., 2023). District leadership must create conditions for CSs to foster, including site-based decision-making autonomy, organizational coherence, and high-level strategic partnerships (Fehrer et al., 2023). Campo and Fernández's qualitative study of CS technical assistance found that CSs benefit from building clarity around the CS model, professional learning support for CSCs, and data systems for continuous improvement (2022). They specifically suggest developing a common language, implementing advisory committees, and leveraging continuous improvement methodologies (Campo & Fernandez, 2022).

In MJPSS, the central office provides oversight and retains some decision-making power over schools. This may limit the autonomy CS leaders need to respond effectively to their unique challenges. The Community Schools Office includes Community School Specialists who provide technical assistance to each CS. Yearly CS funding budgets and expenses must be approved through the CS Office in alignment with their budgetary guidance. The Office also provides support for hiring and training CSCs. MJPSS has taken steps to strengthen system-level learning through participation in a Research Practice Network with a local university and a nonprofit to study the implementation and sustainability of the overall CS strategy.

The literature and local context indicate that systems and structures are primary drivers of how inclusive leadership is enacted in MJPSS CSs. Structures related to role clarity, decision-making authority, feedback systems, and professional learning are not neutral; instead, they

shape how power is distributed, how collaboration occurs, and how inclusive leadership is socialized as an expectation across the district. When structures are misaligned or underdeveloped, leaders may not reach their potential to implement inclusive leadership practices.

Summary of Causal System

Taken together, these causal factors explain why high-quality, inclusive leadership has not yet become a systemic or consistent practice in MJPSS CSs. Gaps in professional learning, funding inconsistencies, barriers to authentic family and community engagement, uneven instructional and equity practices, and restrictive systems and structures all affect principals' and CSCs' effectiveness in enacting the collaborative, equity-driven leadership envisioned in CS reform. At the same time, these factors clarify the conditions that must be addressed for meaningful, sustainable reform to take hold. To understand how to address these challenges, the next section presents our theory of improvement.

Theory of Improvement

Our theory of improvement is grounded in the belief that inclusive leadership is essential to the success and sustainability of CSs in MJPSS, as demonstrated by our literature review and causal systems analysis. As highlighted in our problem of practice, MJPSS lacks high-quality and consistent inclusive leadership practices. Without inclusive leadership grounded in a shared understanding and commitment to CSs' goals, even well-designed programs risk becoming fragmented, compliance-driven practices rather than transformative school improvement efforts. Furthermore, without clear systems to define, monitor, and support inclusive leadership practices, efforts toward improvement lack a foundation for continuous improvement or scalability.

As the number of CSs in MJPSS continues to grow, our theory of improvement offers a simple yet urgent contention: If CS leaders are adequately prepared, supported, and held accountable for enacting inclusive leadership practices, CSs will be better positioned to build collaborative relationships and implement data-informed decision-making practices, resulting in stronger, more coherent, and more impactful implementation of the CS strategy.

While inclusive leadership inherently involves multiple stakeholders, including teachers, families, and community partners, our theory of improvement focuses on principals and community school coordinators (CSCs) as the primary leverage points for change. As discussed in our literature review, these two roles are uniquely positioned to design structures, set expectations, and facilitate engagement with other stakeholders. Therefore, strengthening their capacity first has the greatest potential to influence how inclusive leadership is enacted.

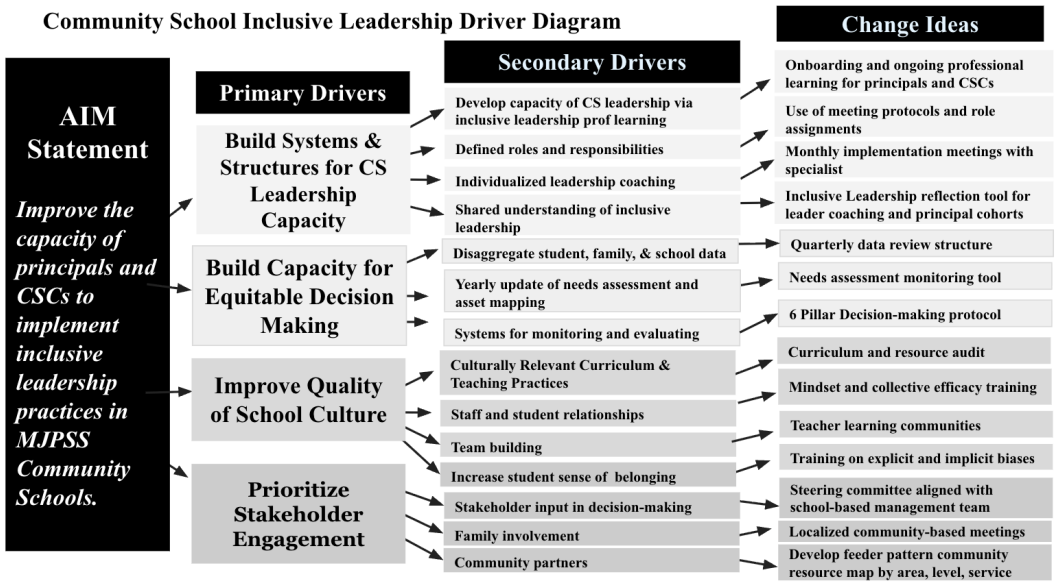
This theory suggests that improving inclusive leadership is not solely about developing individual leader capacity, but about developing aligned systems and structures that support consistent practice. Therefore, to improve inclusive leadership practices in MJPSS CSs, we need to build systems and structures that strengthen CS leadership capacity by establishing clear expectations, shared language, and role clarity. The best way to achieve this is through comprehensive onboarding and continuous development of inclusive practices for principals and CSCs.

We arrived at this theory after examining the various drivers that could change and lead to improvements toward our aim. Through a combination of research literature, empathy interviews, personal knowledge, and an analysis of leadership standards, we narrowed our focus to four primary drivers essential for improvement: 1. build systems and structures; 2. build capacity for equitable decision-making; 3. improve school culture; and 4. prioritize stakeholder

engagement (See Figure 4).

Figure 4

Theory of Improvement Driver Diagram



Note. This figure was created by the authors of this capstone.

Comparing Inclusive Leadership and Traditional Leadership

A key to developing and understanding our theory of improvement was examining how inclusive leadership compares with the work school leaders are already expected to do. This raises important questions: Is inclusive leadership a new approach, or is it connected to more traditional school leadership expectations? When principals are asked to lead CSs, how does that differ from leading any other school?

To explore this question, we conducted a crosswalk comparison of the Professional Standards for School Leaders (PSEL) with the first three standards and indicators outlined in the Community School Standards (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2017). The PSEL standards are a research-based, national framework that outlines the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for school leaders to

promote student success through ethical and effective leadership. The standards are used in the formal evaluation model for school-based administrators in MJPSS. The Community School Standards provide a framework for implementing and sustaining the work of CSs.

The comparison is critical to our theory of improvement because it clarifies the degree of alignment between inclusive leadership practices in CSs and the established expectations of school leadership. By identifying areas of overlap and divergence, inclusive leadership can be framed not as an add-on initiative but as an expansion of existing leadership expectations within a CS context. The crosswalk also serves as a diagnostic tool, revealing where current leadership practices already support CS goals and where targeted interventions, professional learning, and structural adjustments may be needed to further align them. The full crosswalk is included in Appendix A, and a summary of the findings is provided in Table 5.

Table 5

Crosswalk Between Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) and Community School Standards (1-3)

CS Standard	Areas of Strong Alignment with PSEL	Key Gaps/Areas of Divergence	What This Means for Inclusive Leadership
Collaborative Leadership	Emphasis on relationship-building, communication with families and community, distributed leadership, and advocacy	PSEL is less explicit about shared accountability with external partners, formalized decision-making authority for families/community partners, or the CSC role	Inclusive leadership in CSs requires expanded governance structures, role clarity, and shared accountability beyond traditional school staff
Planning	Emphasis on shared vision and mission, data-informed improvement, whole-child development, and	CS Standards are more explicit about partner roles, asset/needs assessments, and structured participation	Inclusive leadership in CSs requires planning processes that are co-constructed with stakeholders, not

CS Standard	Areas of Strong Alignment with PSEL	Key Gaps/Areas of Divergence	What This Means for Inclusive Leadership
	continuous improvement cycles	of families and community in school improvement planning	simply informed by input
Coordinating Infrastructure	Emphasis on collaboration, professional capacity, continuous improvement, and use of feedback	PSEL does not name the CSC role, student participation, or formal coordination of school and community systems	Inclusive leadership in CSs requires clearly defined leadership roles (e.g., CSCs) and coordination mechanisms that extend beyond traditional leadership frameworks

Note. This table summarizes the authors' crosswalk analysis for CS Standards 1-3 (see Appendix A) and highlights areas where inclusive leadership expectations in Community Schools extend beyond traditional school leadership standards (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2017).

Alignment Between PSEL and CS Standards. The crosswalk revealed several areas of alignment between PSEL and the CS Standards 1, 2, and 3. For example, both frameworks call for leaders to co-construct a school vision, engage families and community partners, and engage site-based leadership teams. In addition, across both sets of standards, the work of school planning and improvement requires data-informed decision-making, along with goal setting and monitoring. PSELs focus on management and professional capacity and also align with aspects of the CS Standards, such as intentional team structures and clear roles and responsibilities.

Divergence Between PSEL and CS Standards. The most notable gaps between the PSEL and CS Standards emerged in community partnerships, shared accountability, and the role of the CSC. In all cases, the CS Standards emphasize that leadership responsibilities extend beyond traditional school roles to meaningfully include families, community partners, and

support staff. For example, the CS Standards emphasize formal decision-making power for families and community partners, which goes beyond PSEL Standard 8, which promotes community engagement but stops short of advocating for shared governance. Similarly, the CS Standards prioritize transparent measurement of both academic and non-academic outcomes and emphasize shared accountability with external partners and families, but this is not explicitly addressed in the PSEL Standards. Finally, while the CS Standards clearly define the CSC as a leadership figure integral to planning, coordination, and continuous improvement, PSEL does not include the role, reflecting a more traditional school leadership hierarchy.

The crosswalk between the CS Standards and PSEL highlights specific areas where traditional leadership expectations do not fully capture the collaborative, inclusive practices required for the CS strategy. Building on this analysis, the primary drivers in our theory of improvement target these critical conditions and identify where CS principals and CSCs need strengthened capacity to lead effectively and implement a more aligned approach to the strategy.

Primary Drivers

The primary drivers in our theory of improvement represent the major areas of influence that could be strengthened to enhance the capacity of CS principals and CSCs to implement inclusive leadership practices. Each driver reflects a central condition for change that emerged from the causal system analysis.

Build Systems and Structures for CS Leadership Capacity. A persistent challenge in MJPSS CSs is the absence of clear systems and structures to guide inclusive leadership. Developing leadership capacity requires sustained, job-embedded professional learning, clearly defined roles, individualized coaching, and common tools that foster shared understanding across schools. Without these supports, principals and CSCs risk defaulting to siloed practices rather

than collaborating on inclusive, equity-centered approaches.

Build Capacity for Equitable Decision-Making. Inclusive leadership depends on decision-making processes that are transparent, data-informed, and rooted in equity. This driver emphasizes the importance of using disaggregated student and school data, regularly updating needs assessments, and implementing protocols that ensure the strategy's pillars guide decisions. By strengthening leadership's capacity to engage in this framed decision-making, CSs can align their work with the needs of students and the community.

Improve Quality of School Culture. A strong, inclusive school culture is critical to sustaining CS collaboration. This driver highlights the need to cultivate culturally relevant teaching practices, strengthen staff and student relationships, and foster a sense of belonging across the school community. When principals and CSCs actively shape a culture of trust and collaboration, inclusive leadership can thrive, and the school can more fully actualize as an integrated hub of learning and support.

Prioritize Stakeholder Engagement. At the heart of CSs is authentic engagement with families and community partners. This driver centers on creating structures for meaningful, two-way participation in school decision-making, ensuring that all stakeholders have a voice and agency to participate in shaping school priorities and initiatives. Strengthening this driver ensures that inclusive leadership practices remain deeply rooted in the community's lived experiences, perspectives, and assets.

Systems and Structures as the Leverage Point for Inclusive Leadership Capacity

Among these drivers, building systems and structures emerged as the most promising leverage point because it is the foundation upon which inclusive leadership practices are developed, sustained, and scaled. Without clear systems that define leadership roles, support

collaboration, and integrate CS work into daily operations, inclusive leadership efforts often remain inconsistent or unsustainable.

Building effective systems and structures requires more than technical adjustments. To improve CS outcomes, we must strengthen inclusive leadership capacity, an adaptive-level change. Quinn and Blank (2020) emphasized that "committed, collaborative local leadership is fundamental to the growth, sustainability, and effectiveness" in their ten lessons learned over twenty years of leading the contemporary CS movement (p. 50).

The literature shows that inclusive leaders build and sustain strong partnerships with families, local organizations, businesses, and service providers to bring additional resources and services to the school (Benton, 2023; Blank et al., 2006; Bradley et al., 2020). These partnerships include training in equity, efficacy, diversity, inclusion, and social-emotional learning. By embodying these principles and practices, inclusive leaders in CSs can create an environment where all students have the opportunity to succeed and thrive.

CSs require strong collaborative relationships built through inclusive leadership (Daniel, 2017). MJPSS defines inclusive leadership as developing a sense of ownership where all stakeholders see their role as critical to ensuring the success of the school. Developing collaborative relationships requires purposeful time for collaboration, prioritizing processes, creating structures and roles, and committing to collective leadership development (Daniel, 2017).

Researchers have suggested that one way to address the gap in teacher and administrative leadership preparation is to provide job-embedded support (Fehrer et al., 2023; Fensterstock, 2023). Districts can support CSs in developing inclusive leaders by providing professional learning that helps schools integrate attention to the needs of the whole child into the classroom

environment, resources, and instruction (Fehrer et al., 2023; Fensterstock, 2023).

Summary of the Theory of Improvement

In summary, building strong systems and structures is the most promising leverage point for strengthening inclusive leadership practices in MJPSS CSs. The crosswalk between the PSEL and CS Standards shows that while many elements of inclusive leadership are already embedded in traditional school leadership, CSs require additional emphasis on partnership building, shared accountability, and the CSC's role. By identifying areas of alignment and divergence, the crosswalk serves as a diagnostic tool and a guide for designing our data collection and analysis, helping us focus on specific leadership knowledge and practices to inform our theory. Bridging the gap between the theoretical understanding defined by the standards and on-the-ground implementation will require us to learn directly from CS practitioners.

In our methods section, we outline how we collected and analyzed data from current CS principals and CSCs to identify patterns and surface actionable findings that inform professional learning, role clarity, and the development of shared inclusive leadership capacity across the district.

Section 2

Methods

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of our study was to understand how the CS reform strategy is implemented in MJPSS from the perspectives of those directly involved in the work, with a particular focus on how inclusive leadership is understood, enacted, and supported within CSs. Our problem of practice was that although inclusive leadership is a key pillar of the CS strategy, high-quality inclusive leadership is not yet a systemic and consistent practice. Despite substantial state investments and the rapid expansion of the initiative across the district, MJPSS lacks a systemic approach to monitor and support the development of inclusive leadership mindsets and practices. This study centered on the perspectives of school-based CS practitioners to explore the extent to which inclusive leadership functions as a linchpin for successful CS implementation. By focusing on this leadership gap, our research offers insight into how the district might better align funding, systems, and professional learning to build sustainable, equity-driven CSs that embody authentic collaboration, shared decision-making, and inclusive practices.

Research Questions

The research questions (RQs) for this study focus on understanding the implementation of inclusive leadership within the CS reform strategy in MJPSS. This study is designed as an exploratory study, investigating inclusive leadership within its real-life context, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined in practice (Yin, 2018). An exploratory approach is appropriate given the need to better understand a localized and underexamined area of practice, with the goal of generating insights rather than testing a specific hypothesis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To support this aim, the study draws on both quantitative

and qualitative data sources, including a survey with open- and closed-ended items and semi-structured interviews. This approach allows for a contextualized understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives while also identifying broader patterns across respondents (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The research questions are grounded in the study's problem of practice, which identifies inconsistent implementation of high-quality inclusive leadership across MJPSS CSs. In response, the theory of improvement guiding this study positions inclusive leadership as central to strengthening implementation, enabled by systems and structures that support its enactment into practice. The research questions, therefore, examine how inclusive leadership is understood, enacted, and supported within the CS framework, with attention to supports and hindrances. As an exploratory study, addressing these concepts will help generate a deeper understanding of current inclusive leadership practices and provide insight to further inform the problem of practice and the theory of improvement.

In this study, we examine how two key stakeholder groups, principals and CSCs, perceive and enact inclusive leadership within the CS reform strategy. These methods were intentionally designed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How do school-based leaders define inclusive leadership practices in Community Schools across MJPSS?

RQ2. How do school-based leaders enact inclusive leadership practices in Community Schools across MJPSS?

RQ3. What conditions support or hinder the implementation of inclusive leadership in MJPSS Community Schools?

Study Design

This study employs an exploratory design to investigate the implementation of inclusive leadership within MJPSS CSs. To address our research questions, we used two complementary methods: semi-structured interviews and a survey. We conducted a survey of 88 CS leaders to gain a broad understanding of perceptions and practices of inclusive leadership across a larger sample of CSs, and semi-structured interviews with four principals and four CSCs to explore patterns and perceptions in greater detail. Specifically, the semi-structured interviews provided in-depth, firsthand stakeholder perspectives, while the survey offered broader data on practices and perceptions from a larger sample. Together, these methods allowed us to explore both the depth and breadth of inclusive leadership implementation from the perspective of those implementing the CS strategy. These insights were intended to inform and refine the theory of improvement by identifying patterns in how inclusive leadership is currently understood, enacted, and supported across MJPSS CSs.

Participants in both methods included school principals and Community School Coordinators (CSCs). Although four key internal stakeholders (principals, CSCs, teachers, and district support) are central to inclusive leadership, as discussed in our literature review and causal systems analysis, the focus on principals and CSCs was intentional, beginning with the two roles most central to implementing inclusive leadership. Inclusive leadership hinges on the principal and CSC because they set the foundation and structures that enable teachers, families, and the community to meaningfully engage in shared decision-making and collaboration. Teachers and families are acknowledged as critical contributors; however, their inclusion was beyond the scope of this exploratory study. District support members were not directly included, but survey and interview questions captured participants' perspectives on their role in supporting

respondents' inclusive leadership practices.

Survey

In alignment with our exploratory study, we developed a survey instrument to understand how inclusive leadership is defined and enacted across a broad sample of CS practitioners, and we collected data from 88 CS leaders. The survey prioritized open-ended qualitative data while including closed-ended items designed to generate descriptive statistics that contextualize the sample and support triangulation of findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This methodological choice reflects our intent to explore the experiences of a broad sample of CS practitioners while remaining grounded in the nature of qualitative findings. The design allowed for descriptive comparisons across two specific roles: the CS principal and the CSC. The survey responses provided insight from a larger sample than the interviews, helping us understand general perspectives on inclusive leadership, current practices, and other factors that influence the work.

Survey Participants and Sampling. The target survey population was identified through nonprobability purposive sampling of all principals and CSCs in MJPSS (Nardi, 2018). The sample included CSs from across implementation cohorts to assess potential links between inclusive leadership knowledge and experience. Participation was voluntary, and inclusion in the sample was contingent on individual principal approval, as required by MJPSS research protocols.

We began by sending the appropriate MJPSS "Permission to Conduct Research Form" to each CS principal. Of the 147 total CSs, we invited 143 principals to complete the form. Two charter schools were excluded from the invitation because they have different governing structures, as were two middle schools. One had a principal on leave at the time of the study, and

the other presented a conflict of interest for one of the researchers. (She is the principal.)

To increase the likelihood of response, we sent each principal a personalized email rather than a bulk email request. The MJPSS Office of Research and Evaluation provided us with individual PDF forms. To make responding easier for principals, we converted each PDF into a link for signing and included the original PDF in the invitation email. This allowed two different response options based on the principal's preference: they could either provide a digital signature via the personalized link or download, sign, and send the PDF back to us. The majority of principals who responded selected the personalized link (58 of 74).

In total, 74 principals approved their CS sites for inclusion in our study. Three principals did not approve our study, citing reasons such as being first-year principals or already being involved in multiple site studies. Nine additional principals expressed some level of interest but did not return the signed form within our study time frame, even after multiple reminders. These responses set the final parameters of our survey sample size. We sent survey invitations directly to 74 principals and 71 CSCs, as three schools had CSC vacancies, for a total of 145 invitations.

The preliminary goal in our study proposal was to secure 25-35 responses across both role categories, representing 15% to 25% of the total population. In total, the survey received 88 completed responses, representing approximately 61% of the sample population. Of these respondents, 57 identified as principals and 31 as CSCs. We exceeded our proposed participation for principals and met our proposed range for CSCs. A total of 97 surveys were started, with an 89.8% completion rate.

Participation rates differed by role, with principals responding at a higher rate than CSCs (77% compared to 44%). Because of MJPSS's gatekeeping process, which required the principal's permission before any research could be conducted, the principals in the sample had

already volunteered their schools for inclusion before the survey invitation, while the CSCs received survey invitations via a cold email. We hypothesize that the context and awareness of our study account for the major difference in response rates between the two roles.

The key to drawing broad findings from our survey was ensuring the sample was representative of the overall CS population. Our response sample was broadly representative of the district's CSs in terms of school level and role category, as depicted in Table 6, with only CSCs in K-8 schools/Regional Centers slightly overrepresented in the response data.

Table 6

Survey Participant Representation by School Level Compared to MJPSS Community School Population

School Level	CS Population n (%)	Approved Sites n (%)	Principal Respondents n (%)	CSC Respondents n (%)
Elementary School	105 (71%)	52 (69%)	39 (70%)	17 (61%)
K-8/Regional Centers	6 (4%)	4 (5%)	2 (4%)	3 (11%)
Middle Schools	20 (14%)	10 (14%)	7 (13%)	4 (14%)
High Schools	16 (11%)	9 (12%)	8 (14%)	4 (14%)
Total Count	**147 (100%)**	**74 (100%)**	**56 (100%)**	**28 (100%)**

Note. CS = Community School; CSC = Community School Coordinator. Percentages represent the proportion of the total within each column.

All responses were anonymous. No identifying information was collected in the survey instrument, and no individual school-level results are reported. When a respondent included personal or school information in open-ended responses, that information was scrubbed before data analysis.

Survey Instrument. Data were collected using an online survey administered through

Qualtrics. The branching logic of the survey was tailored by role category, principal or CSC, to ensure that questions were phrased in a way relevant to a participant's positional responsibilities. The survey included Likert-scale, multiple-choice, multiple-select, and ranking items to capture data on participants' experiences, role clarity, and professional learning in inclusive leadership.

Four open-ended questions elicited responses on inclusive leadership practices, collaborative decision-making structures, perceptions of challenges and successes, and conditions that support or hinder inclusive leadership. A final short-answer section invited participants to share any additional comments or experiences related to inclusive leadership or CS implementation. These items allowed participants to provide narrative responses that included personal perspectives, which could not be captured through scaled or other closed-ended items alone. See Appendix D for the full survey.

Although the survey data was anonymous, using Qualtrics's web-based survey platform with direct links sent via email invitations allowed participants to respond to the survey when and where they chose. The survey settings allowed participants to pause and resume the survey at different times, skip any questions, and exit the survey at any time. To increase response rates, we sent personalized email invitations to each principal and CSC rather than sending bulk invitations.

The instrument was designed to address our research questions. Specifically, the research team developed survey items informed by the literature on inclusive research and CS implementation. The survey invitation stated that the survey was estimated to take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete, but Qualtrics data on respondents' completion times reveal a median of 33 minutes. Several extreme values suggest that some participants left the survey open for extended periods before submitting. The actual completion time was likely closer to the

mode, as the most common completion times fell in the 7-8-minute range.

Survey Procedures. Before data collection, approval was obtained from the University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the school district's Office of Research and Evaluation. In accordance with strict district requirements, permission from the principal to conduct research was obtained before invitations were distributed.

Eligible principals and CSCs were sent an email invitation that included a description of the study, information about its voluntary nature, and a link to the online study. To ensure ethical research practices, an informed consent statement was included at the beginning of the survey. Participants were informed that responses would be kept confidential and that all findings would be anonymous. The consent language also detailed that there was minimal risk to survey participation, though participants might experience discomfort when reflecting on personal experiences. While there was no direct benefit to participants, the findings offer an opportunity to inform future support for inclusive leadership practices.

After the initial invitation, two reminder emails were sent. Data collection occurred during the winter of 2026, spanning winter break and an extended weather-related school closure. It is unclear whether the breaks positively or negatively affected response patterns, but the survey remained open, and there was an uptick in responses following each break and each email reminder.

Semi-Structured Interviews

To more deeply explore the lived experiences of school-based CS leaders in relation to our research questions, we also conducted virtual, semi-structured interviews with four principals and four CSCs, each lasting approximately 25 to 65 minutes. While the survey provided broad insights from a larger sample, it was limited by the amount participants were willing to share in a

text box. In contrast, the interviews allowed us to build a deeper understanding of inclusive leadership knowledge and practices by hearing firsthand, role-specific experiences and perspectives. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to provide more detail than could be collected through survey responses alone.

This approach aligns with our exploratory design, enabling participants to describe their experiences and perspectives in their own words. The following section outlines the sampling strategy, protocols, and procedures.

Interview Participants and Sampling. In parallel with the survey structure, the interview sample focused on CS principals and CSCs. To determine who to interview, we began with the total population of 147 CSs and narrowed the pool to those in Cohorts 1-5, for a total of 107 potential schools. We focused on schools in Cohorts 1-5 to ensure that participants were from schools in year two or beyond, having experienced the full CS needs assessment process, hiring of CS personnel, and at least two years of CS budgeting and implementation. We then filtered for principals who had signed the MJPSS "Permission to Conduct Research Form." This reduced the available population to 55 schools.

We used nonprobability purposive/judgmental sampling with quotas for each job category to ensure representation across key roles: principal and CSC. This sampling strategy is appropriate for studies seeking insight from specific expertise and experiences to reveal important group patterns (Patton, 2015).

The sample comprised four MJPSS CSs across different school levels (elementary, K-8, middle, and high school), for a total of 8 interviews. To support triangulation and enable comparison of inclusive leadership perspectives within the same school context, the principal and CSC were recruited from the same school sites. We acknowledge that this criterion made

participant recruitment more complex, but we felt strongly that it strengthened the study's ability to capture patterns. In addition, the four selected schools span different school levels and CS implementation Cohorts. See Table 7 for a distribution of participants by school level and CS cohort.

Table 7

Interview Participants by School Level and Community School Cohort

School Level	Principal (Cohort)	CSC (Cohort)
Elementary School	Cohort 1	Cohort 1
K-8/Regional Centers	Cohort 2	Cohort 2
Middle Schools	Cohort 4	Cohort 4
High Schools	Cohort 5	Cohort 5
Total Participants	4	4

Note. CS = Community School; CSC = Community School Coordinator. Each interview pair consists of a principal and a CSC from the same school and cohort.

Interview Protocols. We used a semi-structured interview format, leveraging a prepared protocol of questions aligned with our research questions, along with follow-up questions and probing to elicit clarity and specificity in interviewee responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Separate interview protocols were developed by the researchers to align with the role categories: principals and CSCs, and with our research questions (see Appendices D-E). Questions were designed to focus on structures, practices, and conditions that have supported or hindered the implementation of inclusive leadership.

Each interview consisted of fifteen questions, grouped into three sections aligned with the study's three research questions. The first section, Understanding and Enacting Inclusive

Leadership, explored participants' perspectives on inclusive leadership and how they engage stakeholders in decision-making and school practices. The second section, Supportive and Hindering Conditions, examined the structural, organizational, and contextual factors that facilitate or constrain inclusive leadership in community schools. The final section, Professional Learning and Leadership Development, focused on participants' experiences with leadership preparation, ongoing professional learning, and supports that influence their ability to lead inclusively. Although principals and CSCs were each asked a total of fifteen questions, the specific questions differed slightly to reflect their distinct roles and responsibilities within the community school model. This structure captured both shared and role-specific perspectives on how inclusive leadership is enacted and sustained in practice.

We selected an interview format rather than a focus group structure so that participants could share their perspectives confidentially and not feel pressured to respond in ways influenced by the presence of supervisors, subordinates, or peers.

Interview Procedures. The semi-structured interviews were held at scheduled times via Zoom. While the survey invitation suggested the interviews would last approximately 45 minutes each, the actual interviews ranged from 25 to 65 minutes.

Informed participant consent was essential to the ethical requirements of qualitative research; as such, we secured signed and dated consent from all participants before conducting interviews. The consent forms outlined the agreement to participate, be interviewed, have data anonymized, and allow their responses to be video-recorded and the audio transcribed. Participants were informed of the option to skip any questions or end their participation. There was no direct harm involved in participation, but limited risks to interviewees included participation anxiety if the expectations of their school's implementation of the CS reform

strategy did not meet their personal expectations.

While there was no direct benefit to participants, we believed the findings offered an opportunity to support future efforts for local CS practitioners. Participants were also entered into a raffle to win one of two $50 gift cards.

To maintain consistency in the interview format, one researcher served as the interviewer throughout all sessions, while the other served as an observer and notetaker. The recorded interview data were transcribed, cleaned, and coded to identify thematic patterns in responses related to the research questions. Participants are identified using role-based pseudonyms (e.g., Principal 1, 2, 3, or 4 and CSC 1, 2, 3, or 4) to protect confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Integration of Data Sources

The survey and semi-structured interviews were conducted in overlapping phases, with early survey responses providing preliminary insights that informed probing during the interviews. While the survey was intended to capture broad patterns of inclusive leadership practices and perceptions across MJPSS, interviews allowed for deeper exploration, clarification of role-specific experiences, and firsthand perspectives and reflections that may not have emerged from survey responses alone. Integrating these methods enabled triangulation, combining the general perceptions and trends found in the survey data with the depth of rich interview responses to strengthen the findings.

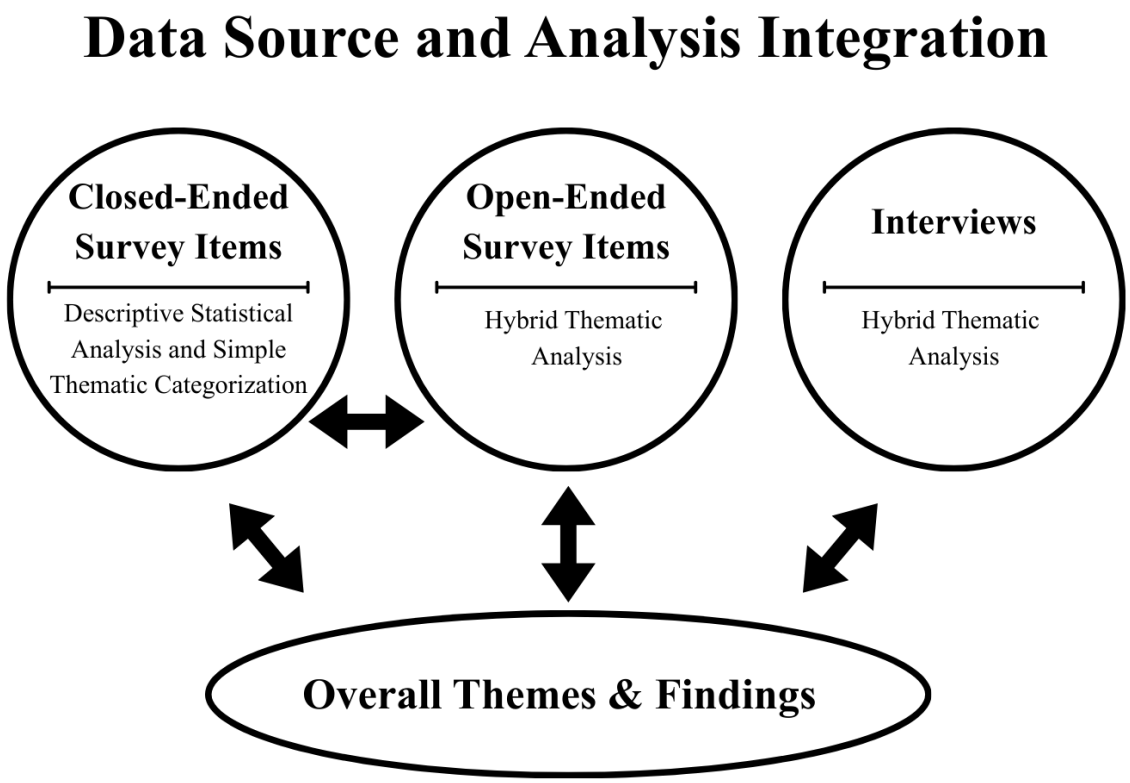
More specifically, the closed-ended survey items provided a structured, descriptive overview of patterns across participant roles, experience levels, and cohort membership, allowing us to identify trends in perceptions of inclusive leadership. Although these items were quantitative in format, including Likert scales, they played an important role within the

qualitative design by highlighting dominant trends and similarities and differences among participants. The multiple-choice and ranking item responses provided contextualized data that further supported, and in some cases quantified, the patterns that later emerged in the coded qualitative response data.

Figure 5 shows how the data sources provided a layered understanding, each informing and strengthening the interpretation of the others.

Figure 5.

Data Source and Analysis Integration



Note. Image created by the authors of this study.

The open-ended survey responses added explanatory depth, often by providing examples, opinions, and even frustrations. The interviews then further deepened understanding of inclusive leadership within the district by providing in-depth narratives and implementation experiences.

Data analysis for both the survey and interview data followed a hybrid thematic analysis approach that combined deductive and inductive coding, as outlined by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). This staged approach draws on the researcher's knowledge of the research subject and allows for the refinement and redefinition of codes and themes throughout the iterative process. Traditional thematic analysis emphasizes that researchers first familiarize themselves with the raw data before generating initial codes, making it primarily an inductive process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The inclusion of a hybrid deductive aspect allowed us to develop an a priori template of codes in the form of a codebook (coding framework) prior to initiating data collection and analysis.

This hybrid approach aligned with our research questions and context because, as practitioner-researchers, we brought relevant professional knowledge and real-world experiences to the research process. In addition, the codebook structure enabled us to organize collaborative and independent coding across both survey and interview data.

Analysis of Survey Data

Closed-ended survey items were analyzed using descriptive statistics to support the interpretation of qualitative findings. Although the overall study employed an exploratory design, these items provided structured data that helped identify patterns across participant roles and contextualize qualitative responses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Survey responses were initially analyzed in Qualtrics using the "Results" and "Data & Analysis" dashboards, then exported to a spreadsheet for further analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize response patterns across participant roles (principal and CSC), years of experience, school level, and CS cohort.

Weighted Ranking Analysis. To analyze participants' prioritization of inclusive leadership practices, ranking data were converted into weighted values. Participants ranked a set of practices from 1 (highest importance) to 6 (lowest importance). Each rank position (1 through 6) was assigned an inverse weight to reflect relative importance. Specifically, rank 1 received 6 points, rank 2 received 5 points, rank 3 received 4 points, rank 4 received 3 points, rank 5 received 2 points, and rank 6 received 1 point. Then, for each practice, the number of responses assigned to each rank was multiplied by the corresponding weight, and the resulting values were summed to generate a total weighted score.

Because the number of respondents varied across role categories, weighted scores were normalized by dividing each group's total weighted score by its number of respondents. This produced an average weighted value for each practice, allowing comparisons across principals and CSCs while accounting for differences in sample sizes. This approach enabled the identification of relative priority patterns across inclusive leadership practices and supported cross-role comparison. Full ranking distributions are included in Appendix F.

Multiple-Select Survey Items. Some survey items that allowed participants to select multiple responses (e.g., inclusive leadership practices enacted, types of professional support received) were analyzed using frequency counts. Frequencies were calculated for each response option and compared across participant roles to identify commonly reported practices and differences in access to supports. These analyses provided insight into patterns of enactment and the conditions influencing implementation.

Text Analysis of Open-ended Survey Definitions. Open-ended survey responses to the inclusive leadership definition question were analyzed using a hybrid thematic analysis approach

supported by NVivo. In addition to coding, basic text analysis techniques were used to identify language patterns.

A word-frequency query was conducted to identify the most commonly used terms across responses by prompting for the top 100 words with 4 or more letters. These patterns were visualized using a word cloud to provide an initial lens into how participants described inclusive leadership. This analysis was used as a supporting tool and was not interpreted independently of thematic coding. Instead, word frequency patterns were used to complement the identification of themes and patterns across responses.

In addition, coding queries were conducted in NVivo to examine the frequency of coded segments associated with specific survey items. These queries identified how often particular codes appeared in responses to individual questions, providing a more targeted analysis of patterns. Frequency counts were used to support the interpretation of dominant codes as described in our findings.

Hybrid Thematic Analysis Process

The staged model of hybrid thematic analysis guided our data analysis, ensuring transparency and integration across data sources (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The stages adapted for this study included: (1) developing a codebook, (2) testing coding consistency, (3) summarizing and familiarizing ourselves with the data, (4) applying the coding template with inductive expansion, (5) connecting codes to generate themes, and (6) refining themes across data sources. Each stage is described below as implemented in both the survey and interview analyses and is depicted in Appendix G.

Stage 1: Development of the Codebook. The coding framework was collaboratively developed by the researchers using a hybrid approach that began with deductive codes. The

codebook served as a structured template to guide the researchers in organizing meaningful segments of text and establishing transparent links among the raw data, codes, and emerging themes.

Based on our literature review and causal systems analysis, our initial deductive codes focused on inclusive leadership practices and CS implementation. The development of a codebook was a collaborative negotiation process in which each researcher developed an independent list, and we then met together and collaborated to refine the language and definition of each code. The final codes addressed features of inclusive leadership, including shared decision-making, role clarity, professional learning, collaboration structures, district support structures, and equity-focused leadership practices (See Table 8).

Table 8

Codebook: Initial Deductive Codes Aligned to Inclusive Leadership Practices

Code	Definition	Source Connections	Sample Indicators
Shared Decision-Making (SDM)	Evidence of collaborative leadership or input from multiple stakeholders	Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Gomez, 2019; Lareau & Muñoz, 2012 *PSEL 6, 7, 8, 10*	Team-based decisions; principal and CSC shared planning; collaborative problem solving; school improvement planning
Role Clarity (RC)	Definitions of roles, responsibilities, and expectations within CS teams	Gomez, 2019; Nishii & Leroy, 2022 *PSEL 6, 7, 9*	Defined roles and responsibilities; group norming; role expectation clarity
Collaboration Structures (CS)	Evidence of formal or informal systems, routines, and processes for collaboration	Daniel, 2017; Maier et al., 2017 *PSEL 7, 8, 9, 10*	Steering committees; meeting schedule; protocols; decision-making framework; communication tools

Code	Definition	Source Connections	Sample Indicators
Professional Learning (PL)	References to PD focused on leadership or CS implementation	Ashikali et al., 2021; Mayger & Provinzano, 2020 *PSEL 6, 7, 10*	Leadership training; onboarding; CSC training; inclusive leadership PD
District Support Structures (DSS)	References to supports, feedback, or policies provided by the district	Campo & Fernández, 2022; Fehrer et al., 2023 *PSEL 6, 9, 10*	District guidance; cross-school collaboration; district tools and resources
Equity-Focused Leadership (EFL)	References to addressing systemic inequities, student needs, and community inclusion	Benton, 2024; Ishimaru, 2014; Mayger & Ewing, 2021 *PSEL 2, 3, 5, 8*	Addressing needs of students, families, and community; culturally responsive practices; needs and asset assessments

These deductive codes guided the initial analysis of the open-ended survey responses and the interview transcripts. Within the codebook, each code included a label, a conceptual definition, alignment with research questions and PSEL standards, and sample indicators to guide consistent application (See Table 9).

Table 9

Deductive Codes Aligned to Research Questions

Research Questions (RQ)	Relevant Deductive Codes
RQ1. How do school-based leaders define inclusive leadership practices in Community Schools across MJPSS?	- *Shared Decision-Making* - *Role Clarity* - *Collaboration Structures* - *Equity-Focused Leadership*

Research Questions (RQ)	Relevant Deductive Codes
RQ2. How do school-based leaders enact inclusive leadership practices in Community Schools across MJPSS?	- *Shared Decision-Making* - *Role Clarity* - *Collaboration Structures* - *Equity-Focused Leadership*
RQ3. What conditions support or hinder the implementation of inclusive leadership in MJPSS Community Schools?	- *Shared Decision-Making* - *Role Clarity* - *Collaboration Structures* - *District Support Structures* - *Professional Learning*

Stage 2: Testing Coding Consistency and Establishing Inter-Rater Reliability. To ensure consistent application of the codes and to build inter-rater reliability, both researchers independently coded one common set of open-ended survey responses and one shared interview transcript (Saldaña, 2021). After independently coding the data, the researchers engaged in a structured comparison process to review coded excerpts, discuss discrepancies, and examine areas of overlap or ambiguity across codes. Throughout this process, consensus was reached through negotiated agreement, and the codebook was refined to improve clarity and consistency in application. This refinement process included revising operational definitions, clarifying inclusion and exclusion criteria, double-coding options, and distinguishing between conceptually related codes, such as Shared Decision-Making and Collaboration Structures. Analytic rigor was further supported through each researcher's analytic memos and continued dialogue throughout the coding process.

Stage 3: Data Familiarization and Summarization. The survey contained both open- and closed-ended items, which required different analytical procedures. Closed-ended survey items were analyzed in Qualtrics using the "Results" and "Data & Analysis" dashboards. Demographic characteristics of the survey sample were summarized to assess sample

representation and to examine respondent roles, experience, school level, CS cohort, and perceptions of inclusive leadership.

Following the initial analysis in Qualtrics, survey data were downloaded into a spreadsheet for sorting, analysis, and data table development. Patterns in response data to questions about inclusive leadership knowledge, preparation, and collaboration were first compared across role categories (principals vs. CSCs). Then, responses were analyzed using a dual-characteristic analysis, including cohort and experience level, to examine potential trends. An analytic memo was created from these initial findings to be included in triangulation with the open-ended item and interview analysis.

Open-ended survey responses were downloaded from Qualtrics into a spreadsheet and scrubbed of personally identifiable information. Responses were then formatted, loaded into NVivo, and sorted by question. Demographic data were retained to allow sorting by role and characteristic after coding. Consistent with hybrid thematic analysis procedures, we carefully read and reread all open-ended survey responses before coding to familiarize ourselves with the data and develop analytic memos summarizing initial reactions (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

A similar process was also used for interview familiarization. First, the audio transcript of each interview was downloaded from Zoom and scrubbed for identifying information. The researchers validated the transcripts by listening to the interviews while reading them. From this process and a review of the original interview notes, we developed analytic memos summarizing initial reactions.

Stage 4: Application of Coding. Following calibration, one researcher applied the deductive codes to the remaining open-ended survey items using NVivo. The other researcher

coded the interviews using the same codebook. During both processes, the researchers captured notable quotes from each survey question and interview. These quotes were saved in the analytic memos for additional consideration when identifying evidence to support findings. A summary of code application frequencies across data sources is provided in Appendices H and I.

When data segments did not fully align with existing codes or suggested a new concept, the researchers added an inductive code. For example, the inductive code "Barriers to Implementation" emerged during survey coding.

Stage 5: Connecting Codes to Generate Themes. As coding was completed, coded segments were re-read within and across codes to identify broader patterns of meaning. Initial themes were generated separately for the survey and interview datasets. These preliminary thematic groupings reflected patterned responses on how participants defined inclusive leadership, how they enacted it, and the conditions that supported or hindered its implementation, in alignment with our research questions. Illustrative quotes were selected to preserve participant voice and to ground emergent themes. In addition, the researchers shared and discussed analytic memos to identify common patterns.

Stage 6: Refining and Integrating Themes Across Data Sources. In the final stage, themes from each data set were compared and integrated with data from the closed-ended survey items to determine the study findings. This triangulation process strengthened our interpretation of the findings and allowed us to connect them directly to our research questions and our proposed theory of improvement.

Positionality Statement

As researchers, we acknowledged common systemic issues, including funding sustainability, resource allocation, and stakeholder misconceptions about the CS strategy. Given

the focus on underserved communities, this study was essential to assess how well CSs addressed systemic inequities and created inclusive environments. Our contrasting perspectives (school-based administrator vs. district-level administrator) highlighted a need for alignment between the practical realities of CS implementation and district-level policy and support. Leadership plays a critical role in CS success. Exploring how leaders at different levels navigate their roles can provide insights into best practices and areas for improvement. Our positionality impacted our perspectives.

Rhonda Simley is a Black female educator with 26 years of school-based experience in urban public education, serving as a classroom teacher, reading specialist, assistant principal, and now, a decorated principal within MJPSS. Her positionality as a school-based leader shaped her approach to researching MJPSS CSs, as her perspective is grounded in daily, hands-on engagement with students, staff, and community. These experiences reflect her commitment to leadership, student success, and community engagement. Of note, Mrs. Simley's CS was not included in any aspect of the population sample for this study as necessitated by the MJPSS Office of Research and Evaluation and MJPSS administrative procedures.

Tricia Blackman is a white female researcher, a Nationally Board Certified Teacher, and a central office district administrator with 22 years of teaching and curriculum development experience. Her positionality within MJPSS shaped her perspective on CSs. In the Division of Academics and Curriculum & Instruction, she has access to systemic decision-making and a broad understanding of district-wide initiatives. However, her current viewpoint differs from the lived experiences of teachers, school administrators, and the communities they serve, underscoring the need to be aware of potential biases stemming from an external gaze on complex school-based decisions.

We both understood the unique demands of CSs, including the need for a holistic approach to addressing students' and families' needs. Since CSs are located in neighborhoods with higher poverty rates, it is important to acknowledge the socioeconomic differences between ourselves and the school communities. As educators and researchers, we sought to respect the expertise of school-based practitioners and value the lived experiences of the students and families while working to understand the complexities of CSs with the goal of respecting the current realities of those closest to the problem of practice. In addition, we acknowledged the power dynamics presented by conducting research within our school district, where we provide training, observations, and supervision.

Section 3

Findings

The findings from our exploratory study provide insight into inclusive leadership in MJPSS CSs. This focus is particularly important given our problem of practice: while inclusive leadership is identified as a key pillar of CSs, high-quality inclusive leadership is not yet a systemic and consistent practice in the district. This study sought to understand how school-based CS leaders in MJPSS define inclusive leadership, one of the pillars of community schooling. In addition, we sought to examine how principals and CSCs enact the practice, as well as the conditions that support and hinder its implementation across CSs in MJPSS.

Our findings are organized around our research questions to maintain alignment between our purpose and our data integration process. Within each research question, we present data and findings from each source, including closed-ended survey items, open-ended survey items, and semi-structured interviews, to provide a cohesive analysis of patterns in the data, and then discuss the themes that emerged.

RQ1 Findings: How do school-based leaders define inclusive leadership practices in CSs?

The first research question examines how principals and CSCs conceptualize inclusive leadership. Although inclusive leadership is one of the six pillars of CSs, it remains unclear whether practitioners share a common understanding. Understanding how leaders define inclusive leadership is critical because their interpretations shape how the practice is enacted, prioritized, and sustained within CSs. Without a shared understanding across schools, implementation may vary widely, leading to inconsistent enactment of a core pillar of the CS strategy. Rather than assuming awareness of a predefined definition, we examined participants' prioritization of inclusive leadership practices, their written descriptions, and their verbal

definitions and explanations during interviews. This multi-method approach allowed us to examine not only what leaders say inclusive leadership is but also which practices they prioritize and how they explain those practices in their own words.

Across data sources for RQ1, two key themes emerged: 1) Equity serves as the moral anchor of inclusive leadership, and 2) shared decision-making functions as the primary mechanism for operationalizing inclusive leadership.

Survey: Prioritization of Inclusive Leadership Practices

As shown in Figure 6, higher average weighted values indicate that an inclusive leadership practice was ranked as more important more often by principals or CSCs, respectively. The six inclusive leadership practices examined were: seeking and using student and family voice, distributing leadership responsibilities, making equity-driven decisions, building a culturally responsive climate, creating collaborative structures, and partnering with the other school leader. Across both role categories, partnering with the other school leader was the highest-ranking inclusive leadership practice. For example, 65% of principals ranked "Partnering with the Community School Coordinator" among their top two most important practices, and 67% of CSCs ranked "Partnering with the school principal" among their top two practices.

This pattern suggests that participants commonly conceptualize inclusive leadership primarily through the principal-CSC partnership lens. The emphasis on this relational connection is notable and deepens our understanding of inclusive leadership as a relational practice rather than just a structural or procedural practice.

Figure 6.

Graph of Survey Results for Inclusive Leadership Practices: Rating Comparisons



Note. Respondents ranked each inclusive leadership practice from 1 (highest importance) to 6 (lowest importance). Rankings were converted to weighted scores using inverse values (6 = rank 1, 1 = rank 6) and averaged by role group (principals, n = 54; CSCs, n = 24). Higher average weighted scores indicate higher perceived importance. The chart displays side-by-side comparisons of average weighted scores by role category.

Beyond prioritizing a shared partnership, a few notable differences emerged. First, CSCs placed greater emphasis on "seeking out and using student and family voice in decision making" than principals. In fact, it was the second-highest practice among CSCs and ranked last among principals. In contrast, school principals ranked "creating collaborative structures for stakeholder engagement" much higher than CSCs, who ranked that practice last.

Taken in comparison, these differences suggest that role influences how inclusive leadership is conceptualized. CSCs appear to emphasize engagement and voice, while principals emphasize structures that enable collaboration.

Survey: Describing Inclusive Leadership in Their Own Words

Early in the survey, participants were asked to describe inclusive leadership in their own words, and 86 of 88 respondents provided a written description. Analysis of these responses focused on identifying patterns in language and meaning.

A word cloud (Figure 7) highlights frequently used terms and offers a visual representation of the language leaders used.

Figure 7

Word Cloud of Most Frequent Terms in Principals' and CSCs' Definitions of Inclusive Leadership (Minimum 4 Characters)



Note: Displays the 100 most frequent terms with a minimum word length of four characters, excluding the words *inclusive, leadership, community,* and *school*. Created by the authors of this capstone using NVivo.

Across the definitions, we noted patterns of action verbs such as *making, creating, sharing, ensuring,* and *valuing,* along with frequent nouns such as *perspectives, stakeholders, students, decision, voices, support, staff,* and *diverse.* The verbs suggest that inclusive leadership is an active, intentional, collaborative process, while the nouns indicate that the work is centered on people and their input. Together, these patterns suggest that participants define inclusive leadership through both the actions leaders take and the stakeholders included in those processes.

Further coding of responses revealed that Shared Decision-Making (n=66) and Equity-Focused Leadership (n=61) were the most frequent codes in participants' descriptions of inclusive leadership (see Table 10 for the Frequency of Codes for Question 6; see Appendix H for full code frequency results from the survey). This pattern suggests that participants primarily describe inclusive leadership as relational and equity-driven, emphasizing who is involved and why it matters.

Table 10

Frequency of Codes in Open-Ended Survey Responses to Question 6: Participant Descriptions of Inclusive Leadership

Code	Frequency (n)
Shared Decision-Making	68
Equity-Focused Leadership	61
Role Clarity	9
Collaboration Structures	4

Note. Frequencies represent the number of coded segments across open-ended survey responses to question 6. Total of 142 coded segments for 86 responses. Responses may be assigned multiple codes; therefore, totals exceed the number of responses.

Participants frequently described inclusive leadership as a process of actively involving multiple stakeholders in school decision-making. Definitions often emphasized inclusion and collaboration across many groups. For example, one CSC response described inclusive leadership as "shared decision making, inclusive of every category of stakeholder." Another CSC said, "intentionally creating spaces where people feel seen, heard, and valued, not just invited to the table, but empowered to participate once they're there." A school principal described inclusive leadership as "ensuring leadership does not become the 'keeper of all knowledge'. Leadership should consist of collective voices from different groups."

Responses across roles often listed staff, families, students, and community members as specific stakeholders to be included. Taken together, the responses suggest a consistent pattern of defining inclusive leadership in terms of who is included in shared decision-making.

In addition to shared decision-making, a few CSCs described inclusive leadership through collaborative structures. Some responses referenced structured opportunities, for example, a CSC mentioned: "serving as chair of steering committee and serving on leadership team." Another gave an example of "having a team of admin, staff, parents, and possibly even students…to help formulate a plan or path to accomplish a goal or tackle a task." These responses illustrate that inclusive leadership is also defined by the structures that support collaboration.

Finally, more than half of all responses (61 out of 86) mentioned an explicit equity focus. Beyond collaborative structures and decision-making, these responses from both CSCs and principals emphasized the intentional awareness of who this work is being done for, reflecting why they see the importance of inclusive leadership. Strong examples include a principal who mentioned, "proactively removing barriers so that all students have access to top-tier

opportunities." Another principal stated, "It is also essential to recognize that not all students are at the same level, but we work to provide services that help level the playing field." And several responses specifically mentioned "historically marginalized groups." CSCs also referred to inclusive leadership as an approach that "centers equity," includes a "commitment to equity," and "prioritizes equity," for example.

Taken together, these coding patterns suggest that school leaders commonly define inclusive leadership as an active, collaborative, and equity-centered process, with the definition shaped by who is involved, how participation is structured, and why it matters. While this overall pattern was consistent across roles, some differences in emphasis emerged: CSCs more frequently mentioned student and family voice, whereas principals more often emphasized the structures and systems that enable collaboration.

Interviews: Deeper Defining Discussions with Leaders

Across both principals and CSCs, inclusive leadership was consistently defined as a collaborative approach grounded in shared decision-making and stakeholder engagement; however, as with the surveys, differences emerged in how each role emphasized and operationalized these ideas. Principals consistently defined inclusive leadership as a collaborative approach that intentionally incorporates multiple stakeholder perspectives into decision-making. Across interviews, inclusive leadership was framed less as an abstract theory and more as a practical leadership stance embedded in daily school operations. One principal summarized this perspective by stating that inclusive leadership means "making sure that I have multiple stakeholders as part of the decision-making process…CSC, teachers, CS liaison" (Principal #3, K–8). This description reflects a leadership approach grounded in collaboration and shared responsibility.

While commonalities emerged across principals' definitions, the dominant pattern was the emphasis on shared decision-making, with principals rejecting the notion of operating in isolation.

One participant explained that inclusive leadership is "never just me making the decisions for the school" (Principal #2, MS), highlighting a deliberate shift away from hierarchical leadership toward collective engagement. Similarly, another principal described inclusive leadership as "not making decisions in a silo by myself" (Principal #3, K–8), reinforcing the importance of collaborative governance within the school environment. Principals' descriptions suggest that inclusive leadership is operationalized through intentional stakeholder engagement, particularly involving teachers, Community School Coordinators (CSCs), and community partners in decision-making.

A second pattern reflected principals' attention to equity and responsiveness to diverse student and community needs. Some principals framed inclusive leadership not only as shared participation in decision-making but also as leadership that intentionally considers the needs of different student groups and the broader community. One principal described inclusive leadership as "thinking about multiple groups of students" (Principal #3, K–8), reflecting an equity-focused approach and indicating that inclusive leadership also involves ensuring that diverse student needs are considered when shaping school policies and programs. Another principal described inclusive leadership simply as "what you do for your community" (Principal #1, ES), suggesting that leadership decisions should be guided by the needs and priorities of the broader school community.

While participants strongly aligned on the collaborative nature of inclusive leadership, subtle differences in emphasis emerged. For one principal, inclusive leadership was primarily

framed as a leadership disposition or mindset, as reflected in comments such as “inclusive leadership is how I’ve always done things in my building” (Principal #1, ES). These responses emphasized the leader’s personal philosophy of collaboration and openness. In contrast, other principals described inclusive leadership in more structural terms, highlighting the specific roles and stakeholders involved in decision-making, such as CSCs, teachers, and other school partners. While both perspectives emphasized collaboration, the latter more directly reflected the operational aspects of inclusive leadership within CSs.

Overall, the principal's responses suggest that inclusive leadership is a collaborative approach that centers on stakeholder voice, shared decision-making, and responsiveness to the diverse needs of students and the community. Together, these patterns indicate that the interviewed principals view inclusive leadership as both a participatory leadership practice and a mechanism for ensuring that leadership decisions reflect the voices and needs of the broader school community.

CSCs described inclusive leadership in similarly collaborative terms, reinforcing shared decision-making as a central practice; however, their definitions more explicitly emphasized community voice, lived experiences, and the integration of non-traditional data into decision-making. In the CSC interviews, inclusive leadership was described as a collaborative, relational process that brings diverse stakeholders together to analyze needs, share perspectives, and make decisions that support students and the broader school community. One CSC explained that inclusive leadership within a community school context involves “bringing a variety of stakeholders and giving each stakeholder autonomy in the shared process of decision making” (CSC#1, ES). This description underscores the importance not only of including diverse voices but also of ensuring they have meaningful influence within the leadership process.

A dominant pattern across CSC responses was an emphasis on shared decision-making as a foundational component of inclusive leadership, consistent with survey findings (see Appendix I for full code frequency results from interviews). One coordinator explained that inclusive leadership "always means sharing in the decision-making that we do" (CSC#4, HS). Participants consistently described leadership as a collaborative effort in which decisions are made collectively rather than by a single authority figure.

A second prominent pattern was integrating community voice and lived experience as data to inform leadership decisions. CSCs emphasized that inclusive leadership requires valuing community members' experiences and insights alongside traditional school performance indicators. One participant explained that "the community school voice is treated as data alongside test scores" (CSC#2, MS), noting that decision-making conversations consider not only academic outcomes but also students' and families' lived experiences. CSCs suggested that inclusive leadership involves examining how community resources, partnerships, and targeted support can address the needs of specific student groups, particularly when academic data reveal disparities.

Another pattern that emerged was an emphasis on intentional collaboration and relationship-building between school leaders and community partners. CSCs described inclusive leadership as a process of building shared understanding and aligning stakeholders' perspectives. One participant explained that inclusive leadership occurs "when two parties gather together to get on one page, speak the same language, understand differences, and use those differences to build and leverage" (CSC#3, K-8). Participants suggested that inclusive leadership requires structures that enable stakeholders to communicate openly, examine differences in perspective, and use those differences as strengths when developing solutions for students.

Although CSCs shared similar perspectives on the collaborative nature of inclusive leadership, subtle differences emerged in how they conceptualized roles within this process. Some CSCs emphasized the importance of a shared vision and alignment, suggesting that inclusive leadership depends on stakeholders working toward common goals. Others highlighted the value of diverse, even contrasting, perspectives within leadership teams. As one participant noted, "in community schools, you need someone to be north and someone to be south…sometimes the shared vision is the key. You need polar opposites for this thing to work" (CSC#3, K-8). This perspective suggests that inclusive leadership is not simply about agreement but about leveraging differing viewpoints to strengthen decision-making and problem-solving within the school community.

Overall, CSCs defined inclusive leadership as a collaborative approach that integrates stakeholder voice, lived experience, and collective problem-solving to address student and community needs. Together, these findings indicate that CSCs view inclusive leadership as both a relational and structural practice that requires intentional collaboration, the integration of community knowledge, and systems that support shared responsibility for improving outcomes for students and families.

Taken together, findings from both principals and CSCs indicate strong alignment on defining inclusive leadership as collaborative and grounded in shared decision-making. However, principals tended to emphasize leadership structures and decision-making practices, whereas CSCs more often emphasized community voice, lived experiences, and relational dynamics. These complementary perspectives suggest that inclusive leadership is jointly constructed across roles, with each role contributing distinct yet interconnected dimensions.

Themes Across Data Sources: Understanding How Leaders Define Inclusive Leadership

Overall, our analysis of the survey and interview data suggests consistent patterns. The data revealed two overarching themes in response to our first research question: (1) Equity serves as the Moral Anchor of Inclusive Leadership and (2) Shared Decision-Making as the Operationalization of Inclusive Leadership.

Across both principals and CSCs, inclusive leadership was described not merely as a set of rules or a definition of decision-making authority, but as a moral commitment to ensuring that all stakeholder voices can influence school decision-making. In the survey, one CSC explained, "Inclusive leadership, to me, is about intentionally creating spaces where people feel seen, heard, and valued, not just invited to the table, but empowered to participate once they're there." A principal's survey response went even further to emphasize the rationale for inclusion:

> I would say, inclusive leadership is a collaborative and asset-based approach to leading that centers students, families, staff, and community partners as essential contributors to school success. Inclusive leaders intentionally create structures and cultures where all voices—especially those historically marginalized—are heard, valued, and reflected in decision-making. They build trusting relationships across home, school, and community, recognizing that shared leadership strengthens collective responsibility for student outcomes. Within the Community Schools framework, inclusive leadership prioritizes equity by identifying and addressing barriers to learning through coordinated supports and wraparound services. Leaders leverage community assets, cultural strengths, and partnerships to co-create solutions rather than impose top-down decisions.

Theme #1: Equity Serves as the Moral Anchor of Inclusive Leadership. Both CSCs and principals framed inclusive leadership as a value-driven practice grounded in equity to

benefit students. This is particularly notable because the MJPSS definition of inclusive leadership as a pillar of the CS strategy neither explicitly references equity nor implicitly suggests that it is a driver. It states:

> Inclusive Leadership: Collaborative leadership is established by creating a shared vision and goals and creating participatory practices for distributing responsibilities across a myriad of people. The leadership team includes principal, community school coordinator, parents, staff, and community partners who ensure that the community school strategy remains central in the decision-making process. Professional learning opportunities, collective trust, and shared responsibility are created through site-based leadership teams and teacher learning communities. A sense of ownership has been established among all stakeholders where everyone sees their role in ensuring the success of the school.

While the district definition emphasizes structure, process, and stakeholder involvement, it does not articulate the "why" behind inclusive leadership, a key insight identified by participants in this study.

Participants emphasized equity as a moral anchor for including participants in the process and for equity-based goals and outcomes. This suggests that the practice is understood not only as a procedural approach but also as a means to advance equity at the core of CS strategy.

Theme #2: Shared Decision-Making Functions as the Primary Mechanism for Operationalizing Inclusive Leadership. Building on the moral anchor of equity, participant responses consistently described shared decision-making as the practice through which inclusive leadership is enacted. Across survey definitions and interview responses, both principals and CSCs emphasized that inclusive leadership requires intentionally involving multiple stakeholders in decision-making, rather than relying on a top-down leadership model. In interviews, principals

described “not making decisions in silos,” underscoring the importance of stakeholder connectivity.

Inclusive leadership is not simply about inviting input but about structuring leadership processes so that diverse perspectives actually shape decisions. By using collaboration structures such as leadership meetings, steering committees, and community events, CS leaders create opportunities for collaborative problem-solving and program development. This is highlighted in a CSC survey response that stated,

> One significant success has been re-centering the parent voice within our leadership meetings, particularly for families of students with disabilities who previously felt sidelined. While building trust with our community was an initial barrier, my commitment to transparent communication and accessible programming has turned that skepticism into a collaborative partnership.

CSCs in particular, emphasized the importance of community voice to ensure the community responsiveness grounds decisions, as evidenced by this other survey response,

> One key success has been having a supportive steering committee, an active parent advisory council, and strong community partners who collaborate effectively. These groups create intentional spaces for shared decision-making and ensure that diverse voices are represented. Through this collaboration, we have been able to provide culturally appropriate programming and resources that are responsive to the needs of our school community.

Taken together, the emerging themes suggest that, while school-based CS leaders define equity as the moral imperative underlying inclusive leadership, the work is carried out through

shared decision-making. Inclusive leadership is conceptualized as both a set of leadership dispositions and the collaborative processes that value, center, and engage diverse stakeholders.

RQ2 Findings: How do school-based leaders enact inclusive leadership practices in CSs?

The second research question moves from defining the concept to action. Through the survey and interviews, we explored how principals and CSCs enact inclusive leadership practices. The findings provide insight into how inclusive leadership is operationalized in practice and how leaders describe their day-to-day enactment of these practices.

Across data sources for RQ2, a theme emerged: the principal-CSC relationship appears to be the central mechanism through which inclusive leadership is operationalized.

Survey: Enacting Inclusive Leadership Practices

To examine how CS leaders enact inclusive leadership practices, we asked participants to select any or all of the inclusive leadership practices (see Table 11) they actively implement in their roles.

As shown in Table 11, principals (n = 54) and CSCs (n = 24) reported high implementation across all practices, suggesting that inclusive leadership practices are widely recognized and reported as part of a leader's work. However, no practice was selected by 100% of respondents, indicating variation in how leaders use these practices.

Table 11.

Reported Implementation of Inclusive Leadership Practices by Role

Inclusive Leadership Practice	Principals (n = 54)	Community School Coordinators (n = 24)
Seeking out and using student and family voice in decision-making	50 (93%)	22 (92%)
Distributing leadership responsibilities through a steering committee or leadership team	48 (89%)	21 (88%)
Making equity-driven decisions	50 (93%)	22 (92%)
Building a culturally responsive school climate	47 (87%)	20 (83%)
Creating collaborative structures for stakeholder engagement	46 (85%)	19 (79%)
Partnering with the Community School Coordinator / Principal	50 (93%)	24 (100%)

Note. Values represent the number and percentage of respondents in each role who reported implementing each inclusive leadership practice. Participants could select multiple practices; therefore, the counts do not sum to the total number of respondents.

Across both roles, partnering with the CSC/principal, making equity-driven decisions, and seeking out and using student and family voices in decision-making were the top three practices. These patterns reinforce alignment with the findings of Research Question 1, suggesting that how leaders define inclusive leadership is reflected in how they report enacting it.

The emphasis on the principal-CSC partnership also appeared in responses to another survey item. Principals were asked how often they involve the CSC in school leadership decisions related to CS implementation, and CSCs were asked how often they are included. As shown in Table 12, both groups reported high levels of CSC involvement. Specifically, 94% of responding principals said they include their CSC in leadership decisions “Most of the time.” Twenty of the 24 CSC respondents, or 83%, reported being involved “Most of the time.” No

respondents selected “Never.”

Table 12

Frequency of Principal and Community School Coordinator Responses Regarding CSC Inclusion in Leadership Decision-Making

Response Choices	Principals (n = 54) n (%)	CSCs (n = 24) n (%)
Most of the time	51 (94%)	20 (83%)
Sometimes	3 (6%)	4 (17%)
Never	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Note. Principals were asked how often they involve their Community School Coordinators (CSCs) in school leadership decisions related to Community School (CS) Implementation, while CSCs were asked how often they are included in such decisions. Percentages are calculated within each role group.

While these findings suggest general alignment, the slightly lower CSC perception may indicate differences in how involvement is interpreted or point to potential role clarity tensions, as reflected in some open-ended responses.

Survey: Principal and CSC Collaboration in Their Own Words

To deepen understanding of how inclusive leadership is enacted, survey participants were asked to describe how principals and CSCs collaborate in practice. Coding of responses revealed that Role Clarity (n=62) and Collaboration Structures (n=57) were the most frequent codes in participants' descriptions (see Table 13 and Appendix H for full code frequency results for the survey). This pattern suggests that participants emphasized the importance of formal structures and clearly defined roles in supporting CSC authority and inclusion in school leadership practices.

Table 13

Frequency of Codes in Open-Ended Survey Responses to Question 13: CSC Involvement in School Leadership

Code	Frequency (n)
Role Clarity	62
Collaboration Structures	57
Shared Decision-Making	5
Barriers to Implementation	2
District Support Structures	2
Professional Learning	1

Note. Frequencies represent the number of coded segments across open-ended survey responses. Responses may be assigned multiple codes; therefore, totals exceed the number of respondents.

Collaboration was not described solely in structural terms. Principals described CSCs as "thought partners." Other positive terms for CSCs included *involved, active, integral, key, valued,* and *leader.* Responses consistently emphasized that the success of inclusive leadership appears to depend on the principal-CSC relationship. One CSC shared:

> My principal actively involves me in school leadership by including me as a member of the school leadership team and valuing my voice in decision-making processes. I am given the autonomy to make decisions and implement programs that support the school's vision, including coordinating parent workshops, family engagement events, and student- and family-centered initiatives. Additionally, I am entrusted to lead professional development for staff and collaborate across teams, which reinforces my role as a thought partner and leader within the school community.

CSCs were often framed as boundary spanners who bridge connections among schools, families, and the community. Through activities such as managing the CS budget, conducting needs assessments, partnering with vendors, and hosting parent events, CSCs were responsible for carrying out the overall work of the CS. One principal described the CSC "as a bridge between the school and community partners, ensuring coordinated services, clear communication, and shared accountability," suggesting that the CSC's role in inclusive leadership extends beyond the schoolhouse.

While the many positive comments about CSCs suggest strong relational dynamics, some responses revealed role ambiguities or relational tensions, and these were deductively coded as Role Clarity and inductively coded as Barriers to Implementation. In these cases, the CSC reported being marginalized or confined to operational tasks. For example, one CSC shared:

> My involvement in school leadership is primarily centered on family engagement and community partnerships, for which I am responsible. However, I am not regularly invited into formal leadership spaces or leadership meetings, nor am I typically referred to as a school leader. Many decisions related to my role are either made independently by me as executive decisions within my scope or directed by the principal based on practices that were in place prior to my arrival. As a result, my leadership is often exercised through implementation and relationship management rather than through collaborative planning or shared decision-making at the leadership level.

Similarly, some principals reported concerns with their CSC. One principal, who reported being involved with their CSC only sometimes, noted that, "She is rarely involved as she has stated she is overwhelmed." Another principal noted that, "My CSC is only collaborative when she wants to be. She works in isolation and is extremely defensive when I meet with her." Still

another principal noted that, “The CSC is crucial to the school. Hiring untrained and unaligned personnel causes barriers to successful support for the community.”

Although these responses were less common, they highlight conditions under which inclusive leadership may be constrained. When a trusting, communicative partnership between the CSC and the principal does not exist, collaboration can be significantly limited. Therefore, in some cases, the absence of a strong partnership may inhibit the enactment of inclusive leadership.

These findings suggest that the conditions for successful enactment of inclusive leadership include a strong principal-CSC partnership, structured collaboration, clear role expectations, and relational trust.

Interviews: Deeper Discussion About Inclusive Leadership Practices

Interviews provided a deeper dive into how principals and CSCs enact inclusive leadership practices. Across both roles, inclusive leadership was enacted through structured collaboration; however, principals and CSCs emphasized different aspects of their work. Across responses, principals consistently described inclusive leadership as beginning with a deep understanding of the school community's needs and ongoing communication with families and staff. Principals emphasized that their leadership practices were shaped by collaboration and by listening to stakeholders. One principal explained: “Much of what I do has come from on-the-job experience and conversations with other principals. I believe it is important to understand the needs of your neighborhood and school community” (Principal#2, MS).

Principals reported regularly engaging parents and teachers in conversations about student success and school improvement. These practices reinforce the importance of equity-focused leadership, as leadership decisions were grounded in the needs of students, families, and

the broader community. Another principal emphasized the importance of transparency and trust in these relationships, noting, "I talk regularly with parents and teachers to ask what they need to support student success. Being honest and direct with them has helped build trust" (Principal#2, MS).

Another dominant pattern was shared leadership and the inclusion of staff voice in decision-making. Principals described collaborating with the CSC to intentionally create spaces where teachers and staff could contribute ideas and participate in discussions about school initiatives.

One principal explained, "During faculty meetings, we also share updates on initiatives and invite staff input. I try to create an environment where people feel comfortable sharing ideas" (Principal#1, ES). Principals also described encouraging innovation and experimentation among staff by fostering a culture where new ideas could be tested without fear of failure: "I often tell staff that as long as the idea will not cause major problems, we are open to trying it" (Principal#1, ES). Principals further emphasized the importance of modeling inclusive practices and involving the CSC as an active partner. One principal highlighted this approach, explaining, "Modeling, I will never ask anyone to do something I wouldn't do myself… when you mention inclusive, it is a culture that we are all doing it within the building" (Principal#2, MS).

Another dominant pattern across responses was the use of formal structures and routines to support collaboration with the CSC. As in the survey responses, principals described how inclusive leadership was embedded within school systems, including scheduled leadership meetings, collaborative planning time, and communication with families. These practices reflect establishing routines that facilitate collaboration. For example, one principal explained, "We have a master schedule that allows for collaborative planning and leadership meetings. These

meetings are scheduled well in advance so that staff know when they will occur" (Principal#3, K-8). Communication with families was also structured through established channels, such as school messaging platforms and websites. One principal described how these systems were used to keep families informed and engaged. "Steering committee meetings are communicated to families through school messenger and our website" (Principal#3, K-8).

Another consistent pattern across responses was the intentional use of disaggregated data to inform decision-making and ensure attention to diverse student populations. Principals described analyzing school data by student subgroups to better understand student needs and plan targeted supports. These practices reflect equity-focused leadership by ensuring that decisions consider the experiences and outcomes of different student groups and often involve collaboration with the CSC, which brings family and community voices into the conversation. One principal explained, "During instructional leadership team meetings and administrative meetings, we break data down into subgroups rather than only presenting broad data" (Principal#4, HS). This analysis included examining multiple student characteristics and indicators: "We analyze data based on gender, free and reduced meals, attendance, chronic absenteeism, and students who belong to multiple subgroups" (Principal#4, HS). Principals also noted that data discussions reinforced the idea that, as a CS, all students belong to the entire school community, even if teachers do not directly serve every student subgroup in their classrooms.

At the same time, CSCs described their approach to enacting inclusive leadership in different ways. Two coordinators emphasized system navigation and district knowledge as critical to implementing initiatives, while the others focused more on cultural understanding and relationship-building within the community. These differences reflected variations in

professional backgrounds and experiences, yet both approaches demonstrated how CSCs enact inclusive leadership by bridging school systems and community needs. All CSC respondents emphasized the value of having a principal who allows them to make decisions and represent the school to the community.

CSCs emphasized that the success of the CS strategy depends on strong partnerships between school leadership and the CSC. One CSC explained, "Inclusive leadership is essential because it holds the community schools' model together. A coordinator cannot do the work alone. It requires a team" (CSC#2, MS). Another stated, "Collaboration between the coordinator and principal is necessary for the initiative to succeed" (CSC#4, HS).

Overall, findings across principals and CSCs suggest that inclusive leadership is enacted through complementary role-based practices. While the principals emphasized creating the conditions for collaboration, the CSCs discussed leveraging those opportunities to integrate family and community voices. These findings reinforce the principal-CSC partnership as central to operationalizing inclusive leadership.

Themes Across Data Sources: The Principal-Community School Coordinator Partnership

Across data sources, findings suggest that inclusive leadership in CSs is enacted primarily through the working partnership between the principal and the CSC. In practice, inclusive leadership is carried out through the structures, communication, and shared decision-making processes that define the day-to-day interactions between principals and CSCs.

While the responses suggest the relationship functions as a cornerstone, it is important to note that it is not structurally equivalent across roles. The principal maintains formal positional authority within the school and therefore shapes the degree to which the CSC is included in leadership spaces. One CSC noted the dynamic in the survey by stating, "The relationship with

the principal can make the CSC job easy or difficult." This statement reflects the importance of role clarity.

Principals leading an inclusive CS remain responsible for all other managerial and instructional aspects of a school. There are decisions and leadership moves outside the community schooling frame, such as supervising custodial staff or hiring paraprofessionals, for which principals still retain authority. Taken together, inclusive leadership is not enacted through equal power-sharing among roles but through the principal's intentional use of positional authority to create an authentic partnership with the CSC.

The principal-CSC relationship, therefore, appears to be the key mechanism through which inclusive leadership is enacted or constrained. These insights align with our theory of improvement by highlighting the principal-CSC partnership as a key leverage for strengthening inclusive leadership practices.

RQ3 Findings: What conditions support or hinder the implementation of inclusive leadership in CSs?

While research question one defined inclusive leadership and research question two examined how it is enacted, the third research question investigates the conditions that shape its implementation. Through the survey and interviews, we explored the supports and hindrances participants described as shaping their ability to enact inclusive leadership. Across data sources, district structural misalignment and insufficient professional learning emerged as key barriers.

Survey: Familiarity, Preparation, and Support

To understand the conditions that support or hinder the implementation of inclusive leadership in CSs, we examined how prepared school-based leaders felt to implement it. Survey participants were asked about their familiarity with the term "inclusive leadership" and their

level of preparedness when they first began implementing the CS strategy. These items, along with reported tenure in role and CS cohort data, provide insight into whether knowledge and preparation served as supports or hindrances to implementation.

As detailed in Appendix J, most respondents reported some familiarity with inclusive leadership. Principals (n = 56) reported that 39% were *very familiar,* 50% were *somewhat familiar,* and 11% were *not familiar at all.* In contrast, CSCs (n = 29) reported substantially higher familiarity, with 79% *very familiar,* 17% *somewhat familiar,* and only 3% *not familiar at all.*

Although familiarity with the concept was high across both groups, perceived preparedness to implement inclusive leadership varied by role. Only 30% of principals reported feeling *very prepared* when they became CS principals, and 17% reported feeling *not prepared at all.* In comparison, CSCs reported higher levels of preparedness, with 50% feeling *very prepared* and only 4% reporting that they were *not prepared at all* when they assumed their role.

These patterns suggest that familiarity with the language of inclusive leadership may not necessarily translate into a sense of preparedness to implement it. CSCs who report higher confidence in their preparation may be partially attributed to the CS model itself, which names inclusive leadership as one of the six pillars. Additionally, principal familiarity with inclusive leadership increased with experience, as the majority of principals who reported being *very familiar* with the concept had six or more years in the principalship.

Differences in role tenure may also shape perceptions. The principal sample was weighted toward experienced leaders, with 91% reporting 3 or more years in the role and 50% reporting 6 or more years as a principal. In contrast, CSCs reported shorter tenures, reflecting the fact that new CSCs have been progressively added as more schools were added each year. These

tenure differences and the time spent in leadership roles may hinder the implementation of inclusive leadership because the practice does not align with traditional hierarchical leadership structures, and leaders often bring established routines from previous experiences.

In addition, the CSC role is still relatively new to MJPSS. Because inclusive leadership relies heavily on this relational partnership, as noted in our research question 2 findings, differences in role tenure may also influence how quickly that cornerstone relationship can be established and fully leveraged for inclusive leadership practices.

Survey participants were also asked to identify the types of support they have received to implement inclusive leadership within the CS strategy (see Table 14). Across both roles, three primary supports appeared most frequently: collaboration with job-alike peers, direct support from the MJPSS CS Office, and professional learning on the six pillars. In fact, 100% of CSCs reported collaborating with other CSCs, and nearly all (96%) have received direct support from the CS Office. The most notable difference across roles was that 7% of principals reported receiving no professional support to implement inclusive leadership.

Table 14

Types of Support Reported by Respondents for Community Schools Implementation (Item 9)

Type of Support	**Principals (n = 54)**	**Community School Coordinators (n = 24)**
Professional learning about inclusive leadership in CSs	33%	63%
Professional learning about the six pillars of CSs	78%	88%
Direct support from the Office of Community Schools	76%	96%
Collaboration with job-alike peers	69%	100%

Type of Support	Principals (n = 54)	Community School Coordinators (n = 24)
Outside support from a vendor or partner organization	28%	50%
Direct support from my Instructional Director (principal supervisor)	26%	—
Direct support from your principal	—	79%
None of the above	7%	0%

Note. Respondents could select multiple options. Percentages represent the proportion of each role group selecting each type of support.

These findings suggest that professional support is a critical condition that can either facilitate or hinder the implementation of inclusive leadership. CSCs' frequent collaboration with peers and the CS Office is a clear enabling condition, while principals' limited access to support, especially among those reporting no support, reveals a barrier. Equitable support structures for all CS leaders emerged as a critical growth area for the effective implementation of inclusive leadership. This finding is further supported by the open-ended survey responses.

Survey: Principals and CSCs Share Successes and Barriers

To better understand the conditions that support or hinder the implementation of inclusive leadership, survey participants were asked to describe successes and challenges related to inclusive leadership.

Participants frequently discussed professional learning as a point of tension. Informal professional learning, in the form of support from the CS Office and job-alike peers, was highlighted as a source of learning and problem-solving. For example, one CSC explained, "Having the support of the Community School Specialist and a network of other Community

School Coordinators has been invaluable," noting that collaboration enables leaders to share best practices.

In contrast, formal professional learning opportunities were described as lacking or insufficient. Both CSCs and principals emphasized the need for more training on the CS strategy, as noted in a response that stated, "barriers- training for CSC and principal on how to put structures in place and what inclusive leadership is." One principal also noted, "One barrier I have experienced is the training provided to community school coordinators. In order for inclusive leadership practices to work seamlessly, there needs to be an understanding of their role beyond the budget provided."

Survey responses suggest that CS leaders value opportunities to learn and connect, yet structured, ongoing, and context-specific professional development remains insufficient. This gap limits CSCs' and principals' ability to fully implement inclusive leadership practices.

District support structures were frequently mentioned. Participants discussed the range of structural conditions and supports outside the school that affect work at the school level. The most common barriers involved district procedures, MJPSS funding regulations, and spending processes. One principal described a key barrier as, "The red tape and intense stipulations on how money is spent, and how things are worded sometimes have caused delays in getting requests approved." Another principal elaborated on the issue by sharing that:

> The current community school program, at my school, is facing a perfect storm of operational strain and financial complexity. Managing a $5 million budget with just a single coordinator has created a severe administrative bottleneck, leading to fragmented data and a lack of clear insight into how essential wraparound services—like health and nutrition initiatives—actually influence student academic success. These internal

pressures are further exacerbated by a slow-moving Central Office; the bureaucratic lag in processing orders prevents the timely delivery of services, leaving the program struggling to meet the immediate needs of its students. Beyond these logistical hurdles, rigid policy restrictions significantly limit the program's ability to provide basic necessities like school uniforms. Currently, strict percentage thresholds prevent many students from receiving these benefits, despite the overwhelming majority of the student population being classified as low-income (FARMS). There is a pressing need to reform these eligibility requirements to ensure that all students in high-poverty environments have access to uniforms, removing a common barrier to attendance and equality within the school community.

These responses suggest that while district support structures are intended to enable the CS strategy, they may also introduce operational barriers that slow schools' work. Principals' and CSCs' descriptions indicate that running a CS may add another layer of complexity to running a school.

Taken together, the survey responses suggest that the implementation of inclusive leadership is shaped not only by dispositions, relationships, and commitments, but also by the organizational conditions in which the work is carried out. Access to meaningful professional learning and coherent district structures may better support, rather than hinder, inclusive leadership.

Interviews: Deeper Discussions of Supports and Barriers

Analysis of interview responses revealed several dominant patterns regarding the conditions that support or hinder the implementation of inclusive leadership in community schools. Across both principals and CSCs, barriers presented by district systems and the desire

for access to more professional learning were consistent. While both roles experienced these conditions, they emphasized different aspects in their interview responses.

A consistent pattern was the importance of collaborative leadership networks and peer support. Principals frequently described relying on trusted colleagues and professional networks to reflect on leadership challenges and strengthen their decision-making. Informal leadership networks enabled principals to share strategies, problem-solve, and gain perspectives from other leaders who understood the complexities of the role. One principal shared that they have "people in my inner circle who push thinking" (Principal#2, MS). Principals also described collaboration among community school leaders as a valuable source of professional support. For example, one principal stated that CS principals "informally share ideas with each other, forming a type of professional learning community where we discuss strategies and workarounds" (Principal#3, K-8).

Despite these efforts, all four principals interviewed consistently identified limited professional development, particularly focused on inclusive leadership in community schools, as a major barrier. Several principals explained that there are few opportunities to intentionally link these principles to the implementation of the CS strategy. One noted that "there has not been any external training that has provided a structured framework for incorporating inclusive leadership into our school processes" (Principal#4, HS). This highlights a gap in professional learning supports that could strengthen principals' ability to intentionally implement inclusive leadership practices within community schools.

Across principal responses, prior professional learning experiences emerged as a key factor shaping principals' understanding of inclusive leadership. Principals described early leadership development opportunities that broadened their awareness of school contexts,

community needs, and leadership practices. For example, one principal reflected on the value of prior leadership development experiences, noting, “Before I was a principal, we did school visits as an induction program for assistant principals, being able to visit other schools in different areas to see what the needs are” (Principal#1, ES). This example was provided to highlight unique ideas for improving professional learning.

District systems and organizational structures also emerged as an influential condition. Several principals described district support as inconsistent. One principal explained that “support tends to be reactive rather than proactive” (Principal#2, K-8), while another described structural barriers, including challenging district approval processes and bureaucratic requirements that slowed the implementation of initiatives intended to support students and families. One principal explained that they must “write extensive justifications and go through multiple levels of approval before implementing something that would benefit families” (Principal#2, MS). Budget timelines and spending rules were also described as barriers to collaborative planning. For example, a principal stated, “We receive the budget and are required to submit a spending plan within two weeks. That timeframe does not allow for meaningful collaboration with stakeholders” (Principal#3, K-8). Principals also noted that once funds are allocated, it can be difficult to adjust spending plans even when new needs arise during the school year.

Principals also emphasized the need for greater alignment across district offices, particularly among community schools’ leadership, central administration, and area offices. One principal described how competing departmental priorities can create confusion about expectations and hinder implementation, stating, “currently, it often feels like there are separate

visions coming from community schools' leadership, area offices, and central administration" (Principal#3, K-8).

CSC interview responses described similar conditions that affected their ability to enact inclusive leadership. As with principals, CSCs frequently highlighted the roles of professional learning and prior professional experience in shaping their ability to enact inclusive leadership. CSCs described learning through both formal education and experiential opportunities that helped them understand school leadership, program management, and the operational demands of CSs. One CSC explained that prior roles within schools had prepared them well for their current responsibilities, noting, "Much of my learning has come from working closely with principals over the years. I have supported principals in various roles, which helped me understand their responsibilities and the challenges they face" (CSC#3, K-8). Formal training also contributed to CSCs' preparation for leadership responsibilities.

One CSC described learning from district-led training, state-level programs, and specialists who provide guidance on CSs, noting that "the Maryland State Department of Education provides many training opportunities related to community schools and inclusive leadership" (CSC#2, MS). CSCs also described learning through collaboration with colleagues and with CS Specialists from the district office who support implementation.

CSCs described parallel challenges related to district structures, particularly in how policies, timelines, and expectations shaped their ability to implement initiatives. While CSCs often navigated these systems more directly through budgeting, partnerships, and program coordination, they also found district processes complex, time-consuming, and sometimes misaligned with school and community needs.

CSCs described how district- and state-level support shapes their ability to implement inclusive leadership practices. Despite these supports, CSCs consistently identified gaps in professional learning focused on the relational and community-centered aspects of leadership. While many training opportunities focus on operational tasks such as reporting and budgeting, one CSC explained that "more training is needed to prepare coordinators for the human side of leadership, not just the logistical aspects like budgets and reporting" (CSC#1, ES). Similarly, another CSC emphasized the importance of professional development that prepares leaders to work within diverse community contexts, noting that "training that helps coordinators understand the different communities across the county would be helpful" (CSC#3, K-8).

Finally, CSCs emphasized that time and experience are essential to effectively implementing inclusive leadership. One participant explained that the CS strategy requires multiple years to fully develop relationships, partnerships, and programmatic outcomes, noting that "community schools often take three to five years before you begin to see significant progress" (CSC#1, ES). As CSCs gained experience, they described becoming more confident in their ability to navigate school systems and build partnerships with staff and families. For example, one CSC shared that "now that I understand the staff, leadership, families, and students better, I feel like we are beginning to see some of the initiatives we started years ago begin to flourish" (CSC#1, ES).

Overall, the findings suggest that CSCs believe inclusive leadership is supported by collaborative leadership relationships with principals, ongoing professional learning, mentorship, and opportunities to analyze community needs, while it is hindered by limited training focused on the relational aspects of leadership and by the complexity of addressing diverse community needs across schools.

Taken together, both roles experience district structural misalignment as a barrier and desire more professional learning opportunities. Principals emphasized system-level barriers, such as competing priorities and bureaucratic processes, while CSCs highlighted gaps in community-centered training. These complementary perspectives suggest that both roles experience the same underlying conditions but engage differently based on their roles.

Themes Across Data Sources: Organizational Conditions Shaping Inclusive Leadership Implementation

Analysis of survey and interview data on conditions that support or hinder the implementation of inclusive leadership revealed two themes regarding the organizational conditions that shape this work: 1) District Structural Misalignment is a Barrier to Consistent Implementation and 2) Insufficient Professional Learning Limits Leaders' Capacity to Implement and Sustain Inclusive Leadership.

District Structural Misalignment is a Barrier to Consistent Implementation. Cross-synthesis analysis suggests that district organizational structures shape leaders' capacity to enact inclusive leadership. Participants frequently described bureaucratic processes, funding regulations, and competing expectations across district offices as structural conditions that complicate leadership within the CS model.

In particular, principals described how administrative procedures related to budgeting, procurement, human resources, and program oversight often slowed or limited their ability to respond quickly to student and community needs. Terms such as "red tape" and "stipulations" underscore the frustration and bottlenecks encountered when navigating the system. Specific interview responses further reinforced this pattern, with district support being reactive rather than

proactive. One principal noted "separate visions" across CS leadership, area offices, and central administration, causing misalignment in the expectations placed on schools.

While district support should be designed to support schools and enable coherence, the findings suggest a pattern of incoherence. The misalignment may limit CSs' ability to be guided by inclusive leadership practices that are responsive and flexibly aligned to unique community needs.

Insufficient Professional Learning Limits Leaders' Capacity to Implement and Sustain Inclusive Leadership. Another theme at the district level concerns professional learning. While participants highlighted informal professional learning as a support, formal opportunities were limited.

Survey responses indicated that informal professional opportunities, particularly job-alike peer collaboration, were widely valued by participants. In addition, the support provided by the Community School Specialists was emphasized as helpful for problem-solving across methods. The informal, relational spaces appear to serve as a mechanism for professional learning and leadership capacity-building.

However, participants consistently described gaps in structured, formal professional learning on inclusive leadership and the CS strategy. The rapid, ongoing expansion of CSs in MJPSS led to uneven knowledge and learning experiences across CS cohorts. As one principal noted in the survey, "I do not believe there has been any external training that has provided a structured framework for incorporating inclusive leadership into our school processes." Respondents reported doing their own research, learning by doing, and just "figuring it out." This gap in professional learning threatens the implementation of inclusive leadership.

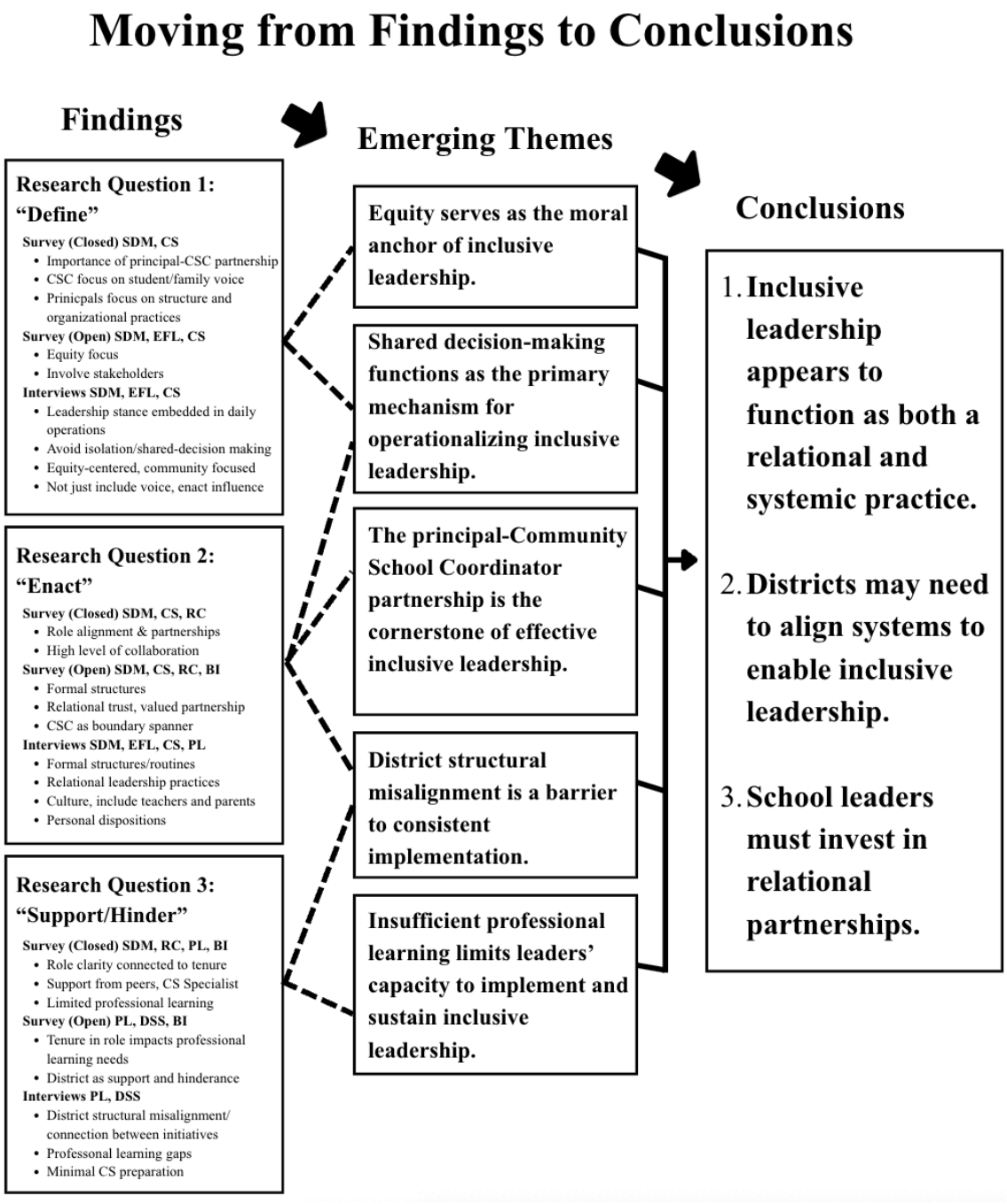
These findings suggest that leaders may develop inclusive leadership capacity through informal or self-directed means rather than through a coherent, district-supported learning system. This uneven access to professional learning may contribute to variation in implementation across schools and CS cohorts.

Across all data and research questions, findings suggest that while CS leaders demonstrate commitment to inclusive leadership, its enactment appears to depend on supportive district systems, access to targeted professional learning, and conditions that enable principals and CSCs to build strong collaborative partnerships.

Figure 8 summarizes the analytic process used in this study to move from findings to emerging themes that informed the study's conclusion. The following section builds on these findings and presents three conclusions that synthesize the results and provide recommendations for the future.

Figure 8

Findings to Conclusions Process Chart



Note. Image created by the authors of this study.

Conclusions

The Community Schools (CS) strategy is a transformative approach to public education, designed to improve student outcomes through coordinated academic, health, and social supports. By partnering with families and community organizations, CSs go beyond traditional schooling to serve as integrated community hubs. In Maryland, the rapid expansion of CSs, driven by the Concentration of Poverty Grant and the Blueprint for Maryland's Future legislation, reflects strong state investment and commitment to equity-driven school reform. The rapid growth in Metropolitan Junction Public School System (MJPSS) presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to concentrate resources where students have the greatest need. However, the infrastructure supporting these schools has struggled to keep pace with rapid growth, suggesting an urgent need to understand how to strengthen support for effective implementation.

Within this context, a critical question arises: how are CSs being led and supported to achieve their full potential? Research on CS implementation has historically emphasized technical components such as service coordination and needs assessments, yet school leadership plays a central role in reform success. Inclusive leadership, also referred to as collaborative leadership, is a core pillar of community schooling. Although inclusive leadership is identified as a key pillar of CSs, high-quality inclusive leadership is not yet a systemic, consistent practice across MJPSS CSs.

With this problem of practice in mind, the purpose of this exploratory study was to understand how school-based leaders responsible for implementing the CS strategy define and enact inclusive leadership. The study was grounded in a theory of improvement, which proposed that strengthening inclusive leadership practices requires building systems and structures that clarify expectations, establish a shared language, and strengthen leadership capacity. Guided by

this theory, the study examined how MJPSS principals and Community School Coordinators (CSCs) understand inclusive leadership, how they operationalize it, and what organizational determinants support or hinder their ability to implement it effectively. Through surveys and semi-structured interviews with CS leaders, the study captured the perspectives of practitioners directly responsible for implementing CS work in MJPSS.

The findings of this study offer important insights into how inclusive leadership is understood and enacted in MJPSS CSs. Across survey and interview responses, the following key themes emerged:

- Equity serves as the moral anchor of inclusive leadership.
- Shared decision-making functions as the primary mechanism for operationalizing inclusive leadership.
- The principal-Community School Coordinator partnership is the cornerstone of effective inclusive leadership.
- District structural misalignment is a barrier to consistent implementation.
- Insufficient professional learning limits leaders' capacity to implement and sustain inclusive leadership.

Collectively, these themes suggest that while CS leaders demonstrate strong commitment to inclusive leadership, its consistent enactment appears to be shaped by relational dynamics, organizational structures, and access to professional learning. Taken together, the findings indicate that the problem of practice may not stem from a lack of commitment to inclusive leadership but from a lack of coherent conditions that support its consistent enactment across schools.

Additionally, the findings suggest that without clearly defined roles, aligned systems and structures, intentional onboarding, and sustained opportunities for collaborative learning, inclusive leadership practices may come to rely on individual relationships and leadership styles rather than on institutionalized practices embedded within the CS strategy. This inconsistency may contribute to varying levels of implementation fidelity and stakeholder engagement, ultimately affecting equitable student outcomes across CSs.

The use of both surveys and interviews also provided an important lens for interpreting the findings. Interview participants were drawn from schools where principals and CSCs were already working in a strong partnership. As a result, the interviews often revealed examples of inclusive leadership functioning at its best. In contrast, the survey responses captured a broader cross-section of CS leaders and therefore reflected a wider spectrum of experiences. Taken together, data from the two methods highlight an important distinction between the promise of inclusive leadership and the realities of implementing it at scale.

Across both methods, CSCs commonly operationalized shared decision-making through daily work coordinating partnerships, facilitating collaboration, and engaging stakeholders, while principals tended to integrate shared decision-making into broader school alignment, governance structures, and strategic planning. Together, these complementary roles suggest that a balance may be necessary to effectively enact inclusive leadership.

From these themes, three clear conclusions emerge that address interrelated levels of inclusive leadership implementation within CSs in MJPSS.

1. **Inclusive leadership appears to function as both a relational and a systemic practice.** At the conceptual level, the findings suggest that inclusive leadership cannot emerge organically at scale without intentional support. Instead, it requires both leaders' moral

and equity-driven commitment and the intentional structures that support shared decision-making. Findings from this study indicate that inclusive leadership may not be sustained solely by individual leadership dispositions. Districts may need to intentionally design systems that cultivate inclusive leadership through shared language, clear role expectations, and leadership development opportunities, so the practice can be consistently enacted across CSs.

2. **Districts may need to align systems to enable inclusive leadership.** At the district level, inclusive leadership may be constrained without policies, procedures, and professional learning that actively support school leaders' work. Findings from this study suggest that misaligned practices, bureaucratic processes, and uneven professional learning are common barriers. To strengthen inclusive leadership, district systems may need to operate more intentionally in service of school leaders, providing coherent external support that makes the internal work of collaboration and decision-making more effective.
3. **School leaders must invest in relational partnerships.** At the school level, the principal-CSC partnership emerges as the operational engine supporting the enactment of inclusive leadership within a CS. Findings from this study show that the quality of this relationship appears to influence how inclusive leadership practices are enacted. Principals and CSCs must intentionally cultivate trust, clear roles, and collaboration practices to translate inclusive leadership into meaningful outcomes for students, families, and the entire community.

These conclusions also directly reinforce and refine the theory of improvement that guided this study. While the original theory proposed that strengthening inclusive leadership

requires building aligned systems, developing leader capacity, and supporting collaborative, data-informed decision-making, the findings suggest a more explicit clarification of how those conditions interact in practice.

First, the theory is strengthened in its assertion that inclusive leadership is not simply an individual leadership disposition but a system-dependent practice. The findings make clearer that without intentionally designed structures, such as shared role expectations and coherent professional learning, inclusive leadership does not scale or sustain across CSs. This refines the original theory by elevating systems and structures from supporting conditions to foundational preconditions for implementation.

Second, the findings sharpen the theory's emphasis on leadership capacity by specifying where capacity-building must be concentrated and how it must function. Rather than generalized leadership development, the study suggests that targeted preparation and ongoing support for principals and CSCs as paired implementation leaders is essential. This refines the theory by underscoring the principal-CSC partnership as the central leverage point through which inclusive leadership is operationalized.

Third, the theory is further refined with attention to relational and cultural dimensions of implementation. While the original driver diagram identified school culture and stakeholder engagement as key drivers, the findings suggest these are better understood as outcomes of effective structural alignment and inclusive leadership practices rather than parallel drivers of change. In particular, trusting relationships, role clarity, and collaborative routines between principals and CSCs appear to serve as the mechanisms through which inclusive leadership is enacted, ultimately shaping the conditions that lead to stronger school culture and more meaningful stakeholder engagement.

Taken together, the theory of improvement is refined by clarifying not only *what* must be strengthened, but *how* inclusive leadership in CSs is activated across system levels. The study suggests that inclusive leadership in CSs is most effectively developed when district systems intentionally align expectations and supports, when principals and CSCs are jointly developed as co-leaders of implementation, and when relational trust and clarity are treated as core implementation conditions rather than secondary outcomes. In this way, the theory of improvement is sharpened to emphasize that inclusive leadership is both structurally enabled and relationally enacted, with the presence of both conditions key to ensuring implementation is coherent and sustainable.

The conclusions of this study have practical, timely, and meaningful implications for districts and the broader field of community schooling. In the short term, district leaders can begin strengthening inclusive leadership by clearly defining the concept, establishing shared expectations, and creating professional learning opportunities that bring CSCs and principals together to collaborate and build shared understanding. In the intermediate term, districts may consider developing leadership support structures that position inclusive leadership practices as core to CS operations. Specific supports include streamlined budgeting processes, role clarification, intentional onboarding, and mentoring for school leaders. Districts should also create structures that foster ongoing collaboration, shared decision-making, and accountability between the principals and CSCs. Long-term implications may involve intentionally realigning policies, systems, and professional learning to embed inclusive leadership and other key pillars of the CS strategy as central to school-level programmatic coherence. This work requires districts to move beyond viewing CSs as isolated initiatives and instead position them as a comprehensive framework for how schools operate, engage stakeholders, and respond to student

and family needs. Community schooling is not an added program, like a side dish or dessert. Community schooling is the foundation. It is the plate.

This study is both relevant and timely as MJPSS and the entire state of Maryland is experiencing rapid CS expansion. By intentionally focusing on the CS pillar that defines leadership work, the study contributes to understanding how school leaders can enact inclusive leadership practices. Additionally, the study addresses a gap in prior research, which focused primarily on technical or service-oriented aspects of CS implementation rather than on a specific pillar and its related conditions.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study was conducted in a single district with state-funded CSs, which may limit generalizability to other contexts. Second, the data relied on participants' self-reported perceptions and practices, which may not capture actual practices. Although findings are generalized across the district, they do not include the perspectives of non-participants. Third, the study captures a snapshot in time and includes perspectives across cohorts and various stages of CS implementation. As with any reform, practices are not static, and as the state, district, and MJPSS CSs continue to develop their CS implementation, leadership practices will shift and mature. Finally, as researchers holding administrative roles in the district under study, we may have influenced participants' responses during interviews, potentially shaping their openness or framing, despite efforts to establish trust and ensure confidentiality. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable practitioner-based insight into inclusive leadership that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Building on these findings and conclusions, future research could examine additional aspects of inclusive leadership, including the role of other key stakeholders such as teachers,

district partners, families, and community members. In addition, comparative studies across districts could help identify broader patterns and state-level needs. Further recommendations also include research into how district officials develop collaborative policies that intentionally engage both district- and school-based personnel in shared decision-making, ensuring that implementation efforts are aligned, responsive, and reflective of on-the-ground realities. In practice, districts and schools can use these conclusions to more intentionally center inclusive leadership as a critical pillar that drives effective Community School (CS) implementation.

Ultimately, this study suggests that the success of the CS strategy depends not only on the presence of collaborative structures but also on the deliberate development of leadership systems that build and sustain relational and equity-driven practices. These systems must intentionally cultivate trust, shared responsibility, stakeholder voice, and organizational coherence in ways that move inclusive leadership from an individual practice to an institutionalized approach embedded throughout the district and school community.

If inclusive leadership is a pillar of community schools, it should also be treated as a priority, with the same intentionality applied to funding, programming, and accountability. Without this intentional alignment, CSs risk becoming fragmented service hubs rather than transformative learning communities. Given the scale of Maryland's once-in-a-generation financial and resource investment, the stakes of implementation are especially significant. By strengthening alignment and coherence among district systems, professional learning, and school-level partnerships, districts like MJPSS may be better positioned to create the conditions necessary for inclusive leaders to fully realize the transformative potential of community schooling to benefit students, families, and the community. Without intentional coherence and

aligned leadership systems, even the most historic investments risk producing fragmented implementation instead of transformational change.

Appendix A: MJPSS Community Schools Office Six Pillars Defined

Expanded and Culturally Relevant Curriculum

The curriculum includes all content areas including the creative arts. Students gain a solid foundation as well as advanced knowledge and skills. Opportunities for rigor are present for all students with students being able to demonstrate mastery in multiple ways. Curriculum is culturally relevant with students having the ability to see themselves through a diverse group of authors, characters, and story themes. The needs of parents and families are addressed through English-as-a-Second Language classes, GED preparation, and job training programs.

Effective Teaching Practices

Educators provide a rich and varied academic program by making learning relevant to the students. Time is spent on mastering learning rather than on preparing for assessments. Opportunities for re-teaching are provided to students as well as opportunities for acceleration. Rather than working in isolation, teachers work collaboratively to plan lessons, analyze student work, and adjust curriculum as necessary. Mentoring and coaching between and among teachers is the norm with experienced teachers supporting novice teachers.

Inclusive Leadership

Collaborative leadership is established by creating a shared vision and goals and creating participatory practices for distributing responsibilities across a myriad of people. Leadership team includes principal, community school coordinator, parents, staff, and community partners who ensure that the community school strategy remains central in the decision making process. Professional learning opportunities, collective trust, and shared responsibility are created through site-based leadership teams and teacher learning communities. A sense of ownership has been established among all stakeholders where everyone sees their role in ensuring the success of the school.

Multi-tiered Systems of Support

Positive relations and interactions between staff and students and parents are the norm and staff models such behaviors. Community Schools have established a discipline policy with the Student Rights and Responsibilities handbook as the guide. A multi-tiered approach to supporting students includes, but is not limited to, restorative practices, PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports), peer mediation, and Rti (Response to Intervention). All approaches are used in a proactive manner. There is an opportunity for students to learn from their mistakes and staff and students are treated with respect. Parents/guardians are part of the equation in helping to create a positive environment. Students work collaboratively with staff in helping to create positive student behavior and conduct.

Family and Community Partnerships

Partnerships are essential in fostering trust and respect between the school and the parents and the community. There should be meaningful and ongoing engagement of families and community members with a system in place to make such engagement happen consistently and with fidelity. Families and community partners are engaged in helping to create dynamic and effective community schools. Family and community partners are part of the leadership for the school and are engaged in the governance and advocacy for the community school.

Community Support Services

Wrap around services are focused on the whole child with services provided to support a child both academically and social/emotionally. Supports are provided to ensure that a child's physical health and mental health are taken care of and provide during and outside of the school day. Services are integrated into the fabric of the school with services available for both students and parents. Services provided are based upon a needs assessment with community partners helping to provide needed services.

Note. Image sourced from MJPSS Office of Community Schools

Appendix B: Crosswalk of CS Standards with the PSEL Standards

CS Standards Elements & Indicators	Aligned PSEL Standards & Elements	Alignment Summary
1. Collaborative Leadership: Nurtures shared ownership and accountability **1.1 Interdisciplinary, cross-sector community partners share responsibility and accountability for student and school success Indicators:** - Partners are active at the school - MOUs define specific agreements - Partners are included in the School Improvement Plan - School and partner goals reflect one another	**PSEL 2. Ethics and Professional Norms** - 2b: Promote professional norms of integrity, fairness, transparency, trust, collaboration, and continuous improvement. - 2d: Safeguard and promote values of democracy, equity, social justice, community, and diversity. **PSEL 6 Professional Capacity of School Personnel** - 6g: Develop the capacity, opportunities, and support for teacher leadership and leadership from other members of the school community. **PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community** - 8b: Create and sustain positive, collaborative, and productive relationships with families and the community for the benefit of students. - 8c: Engage in regular and open two-way communication with families and the community about the school, students, needs, problems, and accomplishments. - 8h: Advocate for the school and district, and for the importance of education and student needs and priorities to families and the community. - 8i: Advocate publicly for the needs and priorities of students, families, and the community. - 8j: Build and sustain productive partnerships with public and private sectors to promote school improvement and student learning. **PSEL 10 School Improvement** - 10c: Prepare the school and the community for improvement, promoting readiness, an imperative for improvement, instilling mutual commitment and accountability, and developing the knowledge, skills, and motivation to succeed in improvement.	Strong alignment in relationship building, collaboration, communication, and partnership development. The CS Standard is more explicit about formal shared accountability with partners through mechanisms such as MOUs and explicit integration into the SIP.
1.2 A representative site-based leadership team guides collaborative planning, implementation, and oversight Indicators: - Team is representative of school and community - Regularly scheduled meetings with agendas and minutes	**PSEL 2. Ethics and Professional Norms** - 2d: Safeguard and promote values of democracy, equity, social justice, community, and diversity. **PSEL 6 Professional Capacity of School Personnel** - 6g: Develop the capacity, opportunities, and support for teacher leadership and leadership from other members of the school community. **PSEL 7 Professional Community for Teachers and Staff** - 7c: Establish and sustain a professional culture of engagement and commitment to shared vision, goals, and objectives pertaining to the education of the whole child; high expectations for professional work; ethical and equitable practice; trust and open	Alignment exists in distributed leadership, collaboration, and shared planning. The CS standard extends participation beyond school staff and is more explicit about representative membership, formal structures, and role clarity, and decision-

CS Standards Elements & Indicators	Aligned PSEL Standards & Elements	Alignment Summary
- Clear definition of team roles, responsibilities, and empowerment to make decisions	communication; collaboration, collective efficacy, and continuous individual and organizational learning and improvement. - 7d: Promote mutual accountability among teachers and other professional staff for each - 7g: Provide opportunities for collaborative examination of practice, collegial feedback, and collective learning. - 7h: Encourage faculty-initiated improvement of programs and practices. student's success and the effectiveness of the school as a whole. **PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community** - 8j: Build and sustain productive partnerships with public and private sectors to promote school improvement and student learning.	making authority for stakeholders.
1.3 The principal works with the community school coordinator, partners, and staff to actively integrate families and community partners into the life and work of the school Indicators: - Principal meets regularly with site-based leadership team - Acts on input from staff and families - CSC sits on leadership team - Principal meets regularly with CSC - Principal is familiar with local community assets	**PSEL 6 Professional Capacity of School Personnel** - 6g: Develop the capacity, opportunities, and support for teacher leadership and leadership from other members of the school community **PSEL 7 Professional Community for Teachers and Staff** - 7b: Empower and entrust teachers and staff with collective responsibility for meeting the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student, pursuant to the mission, vision, and core values of the school. - 7d: Promote mutual accountability among teachers and other professional staff for each student's success and the effectiveness of the school as a whole. - 7g: Provide opportunities for collaborative examination of practice, collegial feedback, and collective learning. - 7h: Encourage faculty-initiated improvement of programs and practices. **PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community** - 8b: Create and sustain positive, collaborative, and productive relationships with families and the community for the benefit of students. - 8c: Engage in regular and open two-way communication with families and the community about the school, students, needs, problems, and accomplishments. - 8d: Maintain a presence in the community to understand its strengths and needs, develop productive relationships, and engage its resources for the school. - 8j: Build and sustain productive partnerships with public and private sectors to promote school improvement and student learning.	PSEL aligns with the principal's responsibility to promote collaboration, community engagement and responsiveness to stakeholder input. The CS Standard is more explicitly about the CSC's role and the principal's responsibility to integrate families, partners, and the CSC into leadership practice.

CS Standards Elements & Indicators	Aligned PSEL Standards & Elements	Alignment Summary
2. Planning: Incorporates the assets and needs of school, family, and community in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) **2.1 A commitment to a shared vision and mission of student success drives educators, families, and community partners in their planning Indicators:** - Shared vision statement created and signed by all partners - Shared vision drives planning.	**PSEL 1 Mission, Vision, and Core Values** - 1b: In collaboration with members of the school and the community and using relevant data, develop and promote a vision for the school on the successful learning and development of each child and on instructional and organizational practices that promote such success. - 1d: Strategically develop, implement, and evaluate actions to achieve the vision for the school. - 1f: Develop shared understanding of and commitment to mission, vision, and core values within the school and the community. - 1g: Model and pursue the school's mission, vision, and core values in all aspects of leadership.	Strong alignment in developing shared mission, vision, and using it for improvement. The CS Standard is somewhat more explicitly about formal partner signing and joint ownership of the vision.
2.2 Data on school and community indicators, disaggregated by race, gender, disability, income, and other factors, informs school improvement goals and plan Indicators: - School and partners collect school and community data - Partner goals and objectives are measured - Data reviewed regularly by site leadership team - Data used to inform SIP	**PSEL 3 Equity and Culturally Responsive Practice** - 3a: Ensure that each student is treated fairly, respectfully, and with an understanding of each student's culture and context. - 3c: Ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and other resources necessary for success. - 3e: Confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status. - 3h: Address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership. **PSEL 4 Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment** - 4f: Employ valid assessments that are consistent with knowledge of child learning and development and technical standards of measurement. - 4g: Use assessment data appropriately and within technical limitations to monitor student progress and improve instruction. **PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community** - 8j: Build and sustain productive partnerships with public and private sectors to promote school improvement and student learning.	Strong alignment around data use for improvement. The CS Standard is more explicit about disaggregated data, community-level indicators, community partner performance, and the inclusion of non-academic conditions in improvement planning.

CS Standards Elements & Indicators	Aligned PSEL Standards & Elements	Alignment Summary
	PSEL 10 School Improvement - 10g: Develop technically appropriate systems of data collection, management, analysis, and use, connecting as needed to the district office and external partners for support in planning, implementation, monitoring, feedback, and evaluation.	
2.3 A needs and assets assessment of the school, students, families, and neighboring community is conducted regularly to inform the SIP Indicators: - Input from students, families, teachers, staff, and community informs assessment - Updated every three years - Publicly available - Leadership team reviews and updates	**PSEL 3 Equity and Culturally Responsive Practice** - 3g: Act with cultural competence and responsiveness in their interactions, decision making, and practice. - 3h: Address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership. **PSEL 5 Community of Care and Support for Students** - 5a: Build and maintain a safe, caring, and healthy school environment that meets the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student. - 5c: Provide coherent systems of academic and social supports, services, extracurricular activities, and accommodations to meet the range of learning needs of each student. - 5d: Promote adult-student, student-peer, and school-community relationships that value and support academic learning and positive social and emotional development. - 5f: Infuse the school's learning environment with the cultures and languages of the school's community. **PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community** - 8d: Maintain a presence in the community to understand its strengths and needs, develop productive relationships, and engage its resources for the school. - 8f: Understand, value, and employ the community's cultural, social, intellectual, and political resources to promote student learning and school improvement. - 8j: Build and sustain productive partnerships with public and private sectors to promote school improvement and student learning.	Alignment in understanding the school and community strengths and needs. The CS Standard is more explicit about the structure, regularity, transparency, and nature of asset/needs assessments.
2.4 The SIP explicitly outlines the role of school staff, families, community partners, multidisciplinary teams, and the CSC in helping achieve specific results Indicators: - Families, partners, and CSCs are listed	**PSEL 2 Ethics and Professional Norms** - 2b: Act according to and promote the professional norms of integrity, fairness, transparency, trust, collaboration, perseverance, learning, and continuous improvement. **PSEL 6 Professional Capacity of School Personnel** - 6g: Develop the capacity, opportunities, and support for teacher leadership and leadership from other members of the school community **PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community**	PSEL supports collaborative planning and inclusion of multiple perspectives. The SC Standard is more explicit in defining roles, naming families, and in requiring roles to be embedded into

CS Standards Elements & Indicators	Aligned PSEL Standards & Elements	Alignment Summary
- Roles are defined - Goals are set - Plan describes how families and partners participated	- 8e: Create means for the school community to partner with families to support student learning in and out of school. - 8j: Build and sustain productive partnerships with public and private sectors to promote school improvement and student learning. **PSEL 10 School Improvement** - 10d: Engage others in an ongoing process of evidence-based inquiry, learning, strategic goal setting, planning, implementation, and evaluation for continuous school and classroom improvement.	the SIP.
2.5 The academic and non-academic results and related indicators that the community school seeks to attain are specified in the SIP Indicators: - SIP includes academic and non-academic results/indicators.	**PSEL 3 Equity and Culturally Responsive Practices** - 3h: Address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership. **PSEL 5 Community of Care and Support for Students** - 5a: Build and maintain a safe, caring, and healthy school environment that meets the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student. - 5b: Create and sustain a school environment in which each student is known, accepted and valued, trusted and respected, cared for, and encouraged to be an active and responsible member of the school community. - 5c: Provide coherent systems of academic and social support, services, extracurricular activities, and accommodations to meet the range of learning needs of each student. - 5d: Promote adult-student, student-peer, and school-community relationships that value and support academic learning and positive social and emotional development. - 5f: Infuse the school's learning environment with the cultures and languages of the school's community.	Strong alignment in emphasis on the whole child supports and student well-being. The CS Standard is more explicit in requiring both academic and non-academic outcomes and indicators to be specified in the SIP.
2.6 The SIP identifies and aligns a range of evidence-based programs and practices to achieve desired results Indicators: - Menu of partners with evidence-based programming - Theory of change or illustration of alignment - Coordinator ensures	**PSEL 4 Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment** - 4a: Implement coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that promote the mission, vision, and core values of the school, embody high expectations for student learning, align with academic standards, and are culturally responsive. - 4b: Align and focus systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment within and across grade levels to promote student academic success, love of learning, the identities and habits of learners, and healthy sense of self. - 4c: Promote instructional practice that is consistent with knowledge of child learning and development, effective pedagogy, and the needs of each student. **PSEL 10 School Improvement**	In combination, the PSEL standards form alignment with the CS Standard across improvement planning, evidence-based practice, and coherence. The CS Standard is more explicit about the coordination of partner-provided programs and the role of community-driven improvement.

CS Standards Elements & Indicators	Aligned PSEL Standards & Elements	Alignment Summary
coordination - Community-driven continuous improvement identifies new programs	- 10c: Prepare the school and the community for improvement, promoting readiness, an imperative for improvement, instilling mutual commitment and accountability, and developing the knowledge, skills, and motivation to succeed in improvement. - 10d: Engage others in an ongoing process of evidence-based inquiry, learning, strategic goal setting, planning, implementation, and evaluation for continuous school and classroom improvement. - 10e: Employ situationally appropriate strategies for improvement, including transformational and incremental, adaptive approaches and attention to different phases of implementation.	
2.7 The School Site Leadership Team plays a decision-making role in SIP development Indicators: - Team is involved in development - Meeting agendas and notes discuss SIP - Team endorses SIP - Surveys/interviews gather satisfaction with decision-making roles	**PSEL 7 Professional Community for Teachers and Staff** - 7b: Empower and entrust teachers and staff with collective responsibility for meeting the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student, pursuant to the mission, vision, and core values of the school. - 7c: Establish and sustain a professional culture of engagement and commitment to shared vision, goals, and objectives pertaining to the education of the whole child; high expectations for professional work; ethical and equitable practice; trust and open communication; collaboration, collective efficacy, and continuous individual and organizational learning and improvement. - 7g: Provide opportunities for collaborative examination of practice, collegial feedback, and collective learning. **PSEL 10 School Improvement** - 10d: Engage others in an ongoing process of evidence-based inquiry, learning, strategic goal setting, planning, implementation, and evaluation for continuous school and classroom improvement.	Alignment exists in collaborative improvement planning. The CS Standard is more explicit in requiring a formal decision-making role and documented participation of the leadership team in SIP development.
2.8 A mechanism for measuring progress toward desired results and indicators is defined in the plan Indicators: - Tracking methods in place - Research partnerships - System-level support for data collection and use - Use of qualitative and	**PSEL 9 Operations and Resources** - 9g: Develop and maintain data and communication systems to deliver actionable information for classroom and school improvement. **PSEL 10 School Improvement** - 10f: Assess and develop the capacity of staff to assess the value and applicability of emerging educational trends and the findings of research for the school and its improvement.	Alignment exists in emphasis on systems for data analysis and use. The CS Standard is more explicitly about research partnerships, system-level support, and the use of both qualitative and quantitative data to assess progress.

CS Standards Elements & Indicators	Aligned PSEL Standards & Elements	Alignment Summary
quantitative data	- 10g: Develop technically appropriate systems of data collection, management, analysis, and use, connecting as needed to the district office and external partners for support in planning, implementation, monitoring, feedback, and evaluation. - 10h: Adopt a systems perspective and promote coherence among improvement efforts and all aspects of school organization, programs, and services.	
3. Coordinating Infrastructure: Facilitates coordination of school and community resources **3.1 A dedicated full-time Community School Coordinator facilitates alignment of school, family, and community resources Indicators:** - Position description outlines responsibilities for joint planning, partner recruitment, facilitation, meetings, collaboration, and data use.	**PSEL 6 Professional Capacity of School Personnel** - 6g: Develop the capacity, opportunities, and support for teacher leadership and leadership from other members of the school community. **PSEL 7 Professional Community for Teachers and Staff** - 7d: Promote mutual accountability among teachers and other professional staff for each student's success and the effectiveness of the school as a whole. - 7h: Encourage faculty-initiated improvement of programs and practices. **PSEL 9 Operations and Resources** - 9a: Institute, manage, and monitor operations and administrative systems that promote the mission and vision of the school. - 9b: Strategically manage staff resources, assigning and scheduling teachers and staff to roles and responsibilities that optimize their professional capacity to address each student's learning needs. - 9c: Seek, acquire, and manage fiscal, physical, and other resources to support curriculum, instruction, and assessment; student learning community; professional capacity and community; and family and community engagement. **PSEL 10 School Improvement** - 10h: Adopt a systems perspective and promote coherence among improvement efforts and all aspects of school organization, programs, and services.	Alignment exists in leadership development, staffing, and resource management. PSEL does not explicitly name or define the role of the CSC, which is central to the CS Standard.
3.2 The CSC is a member of the school's leadership team and supports the site-based leadership team Indicators: - Coordinator sits on leadership team - Records include coordinator input and follow-up	**PSEL 6 Professional Capacity of School Personnel** - 6g: Develop the capacity, opportunities, and support for teacher leadership and leadership from other members of the school community. **PSEL 7 Professional Community for Teachers and Staff** - 7e: Develop and support open, productive, caring, and trusting working relationships among leaders, faculty, and staff to promote professional capacity and the improvement of practice. **PSEL 9 Operations and Resources**	PSEL does not explicitly discuss the role of the CSC.

CS Standards Elements & Indicators	Aligned PSEL Standards & Elements	Alignment Summary
	- 9b: Strategically manage staff resources, assigning and scheduling teachers and staff to roles and responsibilities that optimize their professional capacity to address each student's learning needs.	
3.3 The CSC facilitates close communication among the principal, teachers, other school staff, and community partners Indicators: - Regularly scheduled meetings with principal - Meetings with grade-level teams - Ongoing family meetings	**PSEL 6 Professional Capacity of School Personnel** - 6g: Develop the capacity, opportunities, and support for teacher leadership and leadership from other members of the school community. **PSEL 7 Professional Community for Teachers and Staff** - 7e: Develop and support open, productive, caring, and trusting working relationships among leaders, faculty, and staff to promote professional capacity and the improvement of practice. **PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community** - 8b: Create and sustain positive, collaborative, and productive relationships with families and the community for the benefit of students. - 8c: Engage in regular and open two-way communication with families and the community about the school, students, needs, problems, and accomplishments. **PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community** - 8j: Build and sustain productive partnerships with public and private sectors to promote school improvement and student learning. **PSEL 9 Operations and Resources** - 9g: Develop and maintain data and communication systems to deliver actionable information for classroom and school improvement.	Alignment exists in goal of communication, relationships, and coordination, but the CS Standard explicitly focuses on the role of the CSC.
3.4 The CSC facilitates school and partnership data collection, sharing, and analysis Indicators: - Data sharing agreements; regular review by leadership team and partners - Coordinator trained in data collection and analysis	**PSEL 4 Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment** - 4g: Use assessment data appropriately **PSEL 6 Professional Capacity of School Personnel** - 6g: Develop the capacity, opportunities, and support for teacher leadership and leadership from other members of the school community. **PSEL 7 Professional Community for Teachers and Staff** - 7e: Develop and support open, productive, caring, and trusting working relationships among leaders, faculty, and staff to promote professional capacity and the improvement of practice. **PSEL 9 Operations and Resources**	Alignment exists in the goal of data systems and improvement processes. PSEL does not explicitly discuss the role of the CSC, and the CS Standard assigns this responsibility for facilitating data-sharing and analysis to the CSC.

CS Standards Elements & Indicators	Aligned PSEL Standards & Elements	Alignment Summary
	- 9g: Develop and maintain data and communication systems to deliver actionable information for classroom and school improvement.	
3.5 School personnel and community partners are organized into working teams focused on specific issues identified in the needs and assets assessment Indicators: - Defined purpose for each group - Rosters include families, students, and partners - Agendas and action updates	**PSEL 5 Community of Care and Support for Students** - 5c: Provide coherent systems of academic and social supports, services, extracurricular activities, and accommodations to meet the range of learning needs of each student. - 5d: Promote adult-student, student-peer, and school-community relationships that value and support academic learning and positive social and emotional development. **PSEL 6 Professional Capacity of School Personnel** - 6g: Develop the capacity, opportunities, and support for teacher leadership and leadership from other members of the school community. **PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community** - 8b: Create and sustain positive, collaborative, and productive relationships with families and the community for the benefit of students. - 8e: Create means for the school community to partner with families to support student learning in and out of school.	Alignment in role of team needed for collaboration. PSEL does not explicitly name students onto the team. The CS Standard is more explicit in requiring issue-specific working teams that include a variety of partners, including students.
3.6 School personnel and community partners assess the effectiveness of their relationships regularly to continuously improve opportunities and supports Indicators: - Shared results; evaluation of partner programs - Agenda discussions on effectiveness - Participant satisfaction	**PSEL 2 Ethics and Professional Norms** - 2b: Act according to and promote the professional norms of integrity, fairness, transparency, trust, collaboration, perseverance, learning, and continuous improvement. **PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community** - 8j: Build and sustain productive partnerships with public and private sectors to promote school improvement and student learning. **PSEL 10 School Improvement** - 10g: Develop technically appropriate systems of data collection, management, analysis, and use, connecting as needed to the district office and external partners for support in planning, implementation, monitoring, feedback, and evaluation. - 10h: Adopt a systems perspective and promote coherence among improvement efforts and all aspects of school organization, programs, and services.	Strong alignment exists around evaluation, feedback, and continuous improvement. The CS Standard is more explicitly in requiring assessment of partnership quality and stakeholder satisfaction.

CS Standards Elements & Indicators	Aligned PSEL Standards & Elements	Alignment Summary
feedback		
4. Student-Centered Data: Guides opportunities and support to individual students **4.1. Data systems and protocols are in place to assure access to relevant individual and aggregate information and to assure transparency of decision-making Indicators:** - School uses a data system - Staff and partners are trained - Coordinator and partners have access to school data - Student and school-level reports reviewed by leadership and multidisciplinary teams	**PSEL 2 Ethics and Professional Norms** - 2b: Act according to and promote the professional norms of integrity, fairness, transparency, trust, collaboration, perseverance, learning, and continuous improvement. **PSEL 4 Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment** - 4f: Employ valid assessments that are consistent with knowledge of child learning and development and technical standards of measurement. - 4g: Use assessment data appropriately and within technical limitations to monitor student progress and improve instruction. **PSEL 9 Operations and Resources** - 9f: Employ technology to improve the quality and efficiency of operations and management. - 9g: Develop and maintain data and communication systems to deliver actionable information for classroom and school improvement. **PSEL 10 School Improvement** - 10g: Develop technically appropriate systems of data collection, management, analysis, and use, connecting as needed to the district office and external partners for support in planning, implementation, monitoring, feedback, and evaluation.	Strong alignment around data systems, data use, and transparency. The CS Standard is more explicit about partner access to data and the shared use of both school-level and student-level data.
4.2. Policies and procedures are in place to safeguard student and family confidentiality Indicators: - Data sharing agreements meet legal requirements - Students and families sign release forms - School handbook describes data use	**PSEL 2 Ethics and Professional Norms** - 2a: Act ethically and professionally in personal conduct, relationships with others, decision-making, stewardship of the school's resources, and all aspects of school leadership. - 2b: Act according to and promote the professional norms of integrity, fairness, transparency, trust, collaboration, perseverance, learning, and continuous improvement. **PSEL 9 Operations and Resources** - 9h: Know, comply with, and help the school community understand local, state, and federal laws, rights, policies, and regulations so as to promote student success.	Alignment in ethical parameters and legal compliances. The CS Standard is more explicit in operationalizing confidentiality agreements, release forms, and family-facing documents.

CS Standards Elements & Indicators	Aligned PSEL Standards & Elements	Alignment Summary
4.3. Interdisciplinary teams, with the assistance of the CSC, use data to prioritize resources and prepare individualized plans to ensure every student gets needed opportunities and supports Indicators: - Team agendas include data review - Responses are differentiated - Coordinator identifies programs and partners based on needs	**PSEL 3 Equity and Culturally Responsive Practice** - 3c: Ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and other resources necessary for success. - 3e: Confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status. - 3h: Address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership. **PSEL 4 Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment** - 4c: Promote instructional practice that is consistent with knowledge of child learning and development, effective pedagogy, and the needs of each student. - 4d: Ensure instructional practice that is intellectually challenging, authentic to student experiences, recognizes student strengths, and is differentiated and personalized. - 4g: Use assessment data appropriately and within technical limitations to monitor student progress and improve instruction. **PSEL 5 Community of Care and Support for Students** - 5c: Provide coherent systems of academic and social supports, services, extracurricular activities, and accommodations to meet the range of learning needs of each student.	Alignment in data-informed, differentiated supports and equitable access. The CS Standard is more explicitly about the role of interdisciplinary teams, individual planning, and the CSC's role.
4.4. Agreements are in place to share student data and data on services provided among school personnel, CSCs, and community partners Indicators: - Data sharing agreements and MOUs	**PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community** - 8j: Build and sustain productive partnerships with public and private sectors to promote school improvement and student learning. **PSEL 9 Operations and Resources** - 9g: Develop and maintain data and communication systems to deliver actionable information for classroom and school improvement. - 9h: Know, comply with, and help the school community understand local, state, and federal laws, rights, policies, and regulations so as to promote student success. - 9j: Develop and manage productive relationships with the central office and school board. **PSEL 10 School Improvement** - 10g: Develop technically appropriate systems of data collection, management, analysis, and use, connecting as needed to the district office and external partners for support in planning, implementation, monitoring, feedback, and evaluation.	Alignment in partnerships and data systems. The CS Standard is more explicitly about formal agreements, coordinated service delivery, and data sharing across school and community.

CS Standards Elements & Indicators	Aligned PSEL Standards & Elements	Alignment Summary
5. Continuous Improvement: Deepens the impact of the community school **5.1. Individual student data, participant feedback, and aggregate outcomes are analyzed regularly by the site leadership team to assess program quality and progress and develop strategies for improvement Indicators:** - Data analysis in regular meetings - Plans and tools to collect stakeholder feedback	**PSEL 5 Community of Care and Support for Students** - 5c: Provide coherent systems of academic and social supports, services, extracurricular activities, and accommodations to meet the range of learning needs of each student. - 5d: Promote adult-student, student-peer, and school-community relationships that value and support academic learning and positive social and emotional development. **PSEL 9 Operations and Resources** - 9g: Develop and maintain data and communication systems to deliver actionable information for classroom and school improvement. **PSEL 10 School Improvement** - 10b: Use methods of continuous improvement to achieve the vision, fulfill the mission, and promote the core values of the school. - 10d: Engage others in an ongoing process of evidence-based inquiry, learning, strategic goal setting, planning, implementation, and evaluation for continuous school and classroom improvement. - 10g: Develop technically appropriate systems of data collection, management, analysis, and use, connecting as needed to the district office and external partners for support in planning, implementation, monitoring, feedback, and evaluation. - 10h: Adopt a systems perspective and promote coherence among improvement efforts and all aspects of school organization, programs, and services.	Strong alignment around the role of continuous improvement and data analysis. The CS Standard is more explicit in requiring participant feedback and regular use of individual and school-level data.
5.2. Issues requiring policy or procedural changes and resource needs are communicated to leaders and staff at the systems level Indicators: - Procedures for communication - Coordinator and principal networks raise common issues - Representatives participate in initiative-wide meetings	**PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community** - 8h: Advocate for the school and district, and for the importance of education and student needs and priorities to families and the community. - 8i: Advocate publicly for the needs and priorities of students, families, and the community. **PSEL 9 Operations and Resources** - 9j: Develop and manage productive relationships with the central office and school board. - 9l: Manage governance processes and internal and external politics toward achieving the school's mission and vision. **PSEL 10 School Improvement** - 10i: Manage uncertainty, risk, competing initiatives, and politics of change with courage and perseverance, providing support and encouragement, and openly communicating the need for, process for, and outcomes of improvement efforts.	Alignment in advocacy, governance, and communication of improvement needs. CS Standard is more explicit about creation of formal networks and systems for elevating issues from school to system level.

CS Standards Elements & Indicators	Aligned PSEL Standards & Elements	Alignment Summary
5.3. Strategic opportunities for joint professional development are identified through data analysis and continuous improvement efforts and enable educators, partners, and families to work effectively together Indicators: - PD calendars and agendas; reciprocal invitations to PD - Needs established by participants - PD tied to schoolwide needs and data.	**PSEL 6 Professional Capacity of School Personnel** - 6b: Plan for and manage staff turnover and succession, providing opportunities for effective induction and mentoring of new personnel. - 6c: Develop teachers' and staff members' professional knowledge, skills, and practice through differentiated opportunities for learning and growth, guided by understanding of professional and adult learning and development. - 6d: Foster continuous improvement of individual and collective instructional capacity to achieve outcomes envisioned for each student. - 6f: Empower and motivate teachers and staff to the highest levels of professional practice and to continuous learning and improvement. - 6g: Develop the capacity, opportunities, and support for teacher leadership and leadership from other members of the school community. **PSEL 7 Professional Community for Teachers and Staff** - 7a: Develop workplace conditions for teachers and other professional staff that promote effective professional development, practice, and student learning. - 7c: Establish and sustain a professional culture of engagement and commitment to shared vision, goals, and objectives pertaining to the education of the whole child; high expectations for professional work; ethical and equitable practice; trust and open communication; collaboration, collective efficacy, and continuous individual and organizational learning and improvement. - 7f: Design and implement job-embedded and other opportunities for professional learning collaboratively with faculty and staff. - 7g: Provide opportunities for collaborative examination of practice, collegial feedback, and collective learning. **PSEL 10 School Improvement** - 10d: Engage others in an ongoing process of evidence-based inquiry, learning, strategic goal setting, planning, implementation, and evaluation for continuous school and classroom improvement.	Strong alignment around professional learning and continuous improvement. The CS Standard is more explicit in including partners and families in professional learning and connecting professional learning to schoolwide needs.

CS Standards Elements & Indicators	Aligned PSEL Standards & Elements	Alignment Summary
6. Sustainability: Ensures ongoing operations of the community school **6.1. A strategy for continuously strengthening shared ownership for the community school among school personnel, families, and community partners is in place Indicators:** - Leadership team reviews progress with school community - Partners and families celebrate success - School identity reflects CS model - Facilities accessible for community events.	**PSEL 1 Mission, Vision, and Core Values** - 1c: Articulate, advocate, and cultivate core values that define the school's culture and stress the imperative of child-centered education; high expectations and student support; equity, inclusiveness, and social justice; openness, caring, and trust; and continuous improvement. - 1f: Develop shared understanding of and commitment to mission, vision, and core values within the school and the community. - 1g: Model and pursue the school's mission, vision, and core values in all aspects of leadership. **PSEL 5 Community of Care and Support for Students** - 5b: Create and sustain a school environment in which each student is known, accepted and valued, trusted and respected, cared for, and encouraged to be an active and responsible member of the school community. - 5d: Promote adult-student, student-peer, and school-community relationships that value and support academic learning and positive social and emotional development. - 5f: Infuse the school's learning environment with the cultures and languages of the school's community. **PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community** - 8a: Are approachable, accessible, and welcoming to families and members of the community. - 8b: Create and sustain positive, collaborative, and productive relationships with families and the community for the benefit of students. - 8g: Develop and provide the school as a resource for families and the community.	Alignment found in shared ownership, belonging, and community engagement. The CS Standard is more explicit in requiring practices that reflect CS strategy to sustain over time.
6.2. School personnel, unions, community partners and leaders, and families publicly celebrate successes and advocate for community schools Indicators: - Shared credit - Public meetings - Advocacy training - Media stories - Meetings with elected	**PSEL 2 Ethics and Professional Norms** - 2d: Safeguard and promote the values of democracy, individual freedom and responsibility, equity, social justice, community, and diversity. **PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community** - 8h: Advocate for the school and district, and for the importance of education and student needs and priorities to families and the community. - 8i: Advocate publicly for the needs and priorities of students, families, and the community. **PSEL 10 School Improvement** - 10a: Seek to make school more effective for each student, teachers and staff, families, and the community.	Alignment in advocacy, celebration, and engagement. The CS Standard is more explicit in including broader public advocacy, including connection to elected officials.

CS Standards Elements & Indicators	Aligned PSEL Standards & Elements	Alignment Summary
officials - Visits to successful CSs	- 10c: Prepare the school and the community for improvement, promoting readiness, an imperative for improvement, instilling mutual commitment and accountability, and developing the knowledge, skills, and motivation to succeed in improvement.	
6.3. A plan and process to sustain funding for the community school, including the CSC position and specific programs, is in place **Indicators:** - Coordinator and programming funded through school or partner budgets - Joint grants - Broader organizing for sustainable funding	**PSEL 9 Operations and Resources** - 9c: Seek, acquire, and manage fiscal, physical, and other resources to support curriculum, instruction, and assessment; student learning community; professional capacity and community; and family and community engagement. - 9d: Are responsible, ethical, and accountable stewards of the school's monetary and nonmonetary resources, engaging in effective budgeting and accounting practices. **PSEL 10 School Improvement** - 10h: Adopt a systems perspective and promote coherence among improvement efforts and all aspects of school organization, programs, and services. - 10i: Manage uncertainty, risk, competing initiatives, and politics of change with courage and perseverance, providing support and encouragement, and openly communicating the need for, process for, and outcomes of improvement efforts.	Alignment in resource sustainability and long-term planning. The CS Standard is more explicit in planning to include the CSC position and program supports.
6.4. Principals and community partners work with the site leadership team to prepare budgets with a view toward sustaining the community school Indicators: - School budget includes CS funding - District creates line items - School and partner budgets are aligned	**PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community** - 8j: Build and sustain productive partnerships with public and private sectors to promote school improvement and student learning. **PSEL 9 Operations and Resources** - 9c: Seek, acquire, and manage fiscal, physical, and other resources to support curriculum, instruction, and assessment; student learning community; professional capacity and community; and family and community engagement. - 9d: Are responsible, ethical, and accountable stewards of the school's monetary and nonmonetary resources, engaging in effective budgeting and accounting practices. - 9j: Develop and manage productive relationships with the central office and school board.	Alignment in broad planning and partnerships. The CS Standard is more explicit in requiring collaborative budgeting in alignment with internal and external partners.

CS Standards Elements & Indicators	Aligned PSEL Standards & Elements	Alignment Summary
6.5. Community partners commit to a long-term relationship with the school, driven by student and school needs, and modify their organization and culture to support the partnership Indicators: - Strategic plans and policies name support for CSs - Partner positions support CSs	**PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community** - 8b: Create and sustain positive, collaborative, and productive relationships with families and the community for the benefit of students. - 8j: Build and sustain productive partnerships with public and private sectors to promote school improvement and student learning. **PSEL 10 School Improvement** - 10h: Adopt a systems perspective and promote coherence among improvement efforts and all aspects of school organization, programs, and services.	Alignment related to partnerships. The CS Standard extends to include long-term commitment from partners and internal adjustments to coordinate the partnerships.
6.6. Community partners help generate funding for programs that operate under the umbrella of the community school Indicators: - Fundraising - Budget contributions - Non-financial assets such as volunteers and mentors	**PSEL 8 Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community** - 8f: Understand, value, and employ the community's cultural, social, intellectual, and political resources to promote student learning and school improvement. - 8j: Build and sustain productive partnerships with public and private sectors to promote school improvement and student learning **PSEL 9 Operations and Resources** - 9c: Seek, acquire, and manage fiscal, physical, and other resources to support curriculum, instruction, and assessment; student learning community; professional capacity and community; and family and community engagement.	Alignment in mobilizing community resources and partnerships. The CS Standard explicitly expects partners to actively contribute with financial and/or non-financial resources to help sustain the CS.

Note. This appendix was created by the authors of this capstone using the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015) and the Community School Standards (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2017).

Appendix C: Community School Inclusive Leadership Branching Survey Questions

Researchers: Tricia Blackman & Rhonda Simley

Section 1: Informed Consent (All respondents)
(Exact language from Consent Form, followed by name/signature element question types.)

Project Title Investigating Inclusive Leadership Practices in Community Schools: Survey

Purpose of the Study This research is being conducted by **Tricia Blackman and Rhonda Simley** at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a current Principal or Community School Coordinator at a designated Community School. The purpose of this research project is to examine the implementation of inclusive leadership practices in Community Schools, with a focus on how school Principals and Community School Coordinators understand and operationalize inclusive leadership practices to strengthen their school reform efforts.

Procedures The procedures involve participation in an online survey. The survey will take place using a secure, web-based platform. You may complete it at any location where you can access the internet. There are 15 questions, and the survey will take about 15 to 20 minutes to finish. The survey will begin with background information questions about your role and experience. After that, you will be asked about your knowledge and experiences with Community Schools and inclusive leadership. Your answers will be private and combined with responses from other participants in summary data. No individual people or school names will be connected to your answers.

Here is an example of one of the survey questions:
How familiar are you with the term inclusive leadership as it relates to the Community Schools initiative? (select one)

- Very familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Not familiar at all

Potential Risks and Discomforts This study involves minimal risk. The main risk is that you may feel some discomfort when answering questions about your experiences with leadership, school climate, or challenges in implementing the Community School strategy. You may skip any question that makes you uncomfortable. You may also stop the survey at any time without penalty.
Another possible risk is loss of confidentiality. Because there are a specific number of principals and Community School Coordinators in the school district, there is a chance that someone could connect responses to a specific person. To reduce this risk, survey responses will be collected anonymously, and researchers will remove names, school identifiers, or other details that could reveal your identity.

All study materials will be stored on password-protected devices. Only the research team will

have access to this information.

Potential Benefits There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. However, possible benefits include the opportunity to reflect on your own leadership practices and experiences with Community Schools. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of how inclusive leadership can support the success of Community Schools.

Confidentiality Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing all research data in secure, password-protected digital folders on the University of Maryland's approved cloud storage system. Only the research team will have access to these materials. Survey responses will be collected anonymously to prevent linking responses to individuals.

If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

Right to Withdraw and Questions Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigators:

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Participant Rights If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:

University of Maryland College Park
Institutional Review Board Office
1204 Marie Mount Hall
College Park, Maryland, 20742
E-mail: irb@umd.edu

Telephone: 301-405-0678
IRBNet #2375974-1

For more information regarding participant rights, please visit:
https://research.umd.edu/research-resources/research-compliance/institutional-review-board-irb/research-participants

This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Statement of Consent Proceeding with this survey indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You may print a copy of this consent form. If you agree to participate, please select that option to continue.

Informed Consent: Do you agree to participate in this study?
- Yes, I agree to continue with this study.
- No, I do not wish to participate.

Section 2: Role Identification (All respondents)

Q1. What is your role in a Community School? (select one)
- Principal
- Community School Coordinator (CSC)

Branch 1: Principal Section

Q2. How long have you been a school principal? (select one)
- 0-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6+ years

Q3. Which best describes your current school? (select one)
- Early childhood center
- Elementary school
- K-8 school
- Middle school
- High school

Q4. How long has your current school been designated as a Community School? (select one)
- School year 2025-2026 is our first year as a Community School
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 years
- 5 years

- 6 years

Q5. How familiar are you with the term *inclusive leadership* as it relates to the Community Schools initiative*?* (select one)
- Very familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Not familiar at all

Q6. How would you describe inclusive leadership in your own words? (short answer)

Q7. How prepared did you feel to implement inclusive leadership when you became a Community School principal? (select one)
- Very prepared
- Somewhat prepared
- Not at all prepared

Q8. Please describe how you were prepared to implement inclusive leadership as a Community School principal. (short answer)

Q9. What forms of support have you received to lead a Community School? (Select all that apply)
- Professional learning about inclusive leadership in Community Schools
- Professional learning about the six pillars of Community Schools
- Direct support from the Office of Community Schools
- Direct support from my Instructional Director
- Collaboration with other Community School principals
- Outside support from a vendor or partner organization
- None of the above
- Other (Please describe.) ____

Q10. How would you rank the following inclusive leadership practices in order from most important to least important in a Community School? (Drag the practices into rank order with 1 being the most important practice.)
- Seeking out and using student/family voice in decision making
- Distributing leadership responsibilities through a steering committee or leadership team
- Making equity-driven decisions
- Building a culturally responsive school climate
- Creating collaborative structures for stakeholder engagement
- Partnering with the Community School Coordinator

Q11. Which of the following inclusive leadership practices do you actively implement in your role as a principal? (Select all that apply)
- Seeking out and using student/family voice in decision making
- Distributing leadership responsibilities through a steering committee or leadership team

- Making equity-driven decisions
- Building a culturally responsive school climate
- Creating collaborative structures for stakeholder engagement
- Partnering with the Community School Coordinator
- None of the above
- Other (Please describe.) ____

Q12. How often do you involve your Community School Coordinator in school leadership decisions related to Community School implementation? (select one)

- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Never
- I do not currently have a Community School Coordinator.

Q13. Please describe how your Community School Coordinator is involved in school leadership. (short answer)

Q14. If you have experienced any **successes** or any **barriers** in implementing inclusive leadership practice as a Community School principal, please describe them. (short answer)

Q15. If there is anything else you would like to share about your experience with inclusive leadership or Community School implementation, please use the space below. (short answer)

Branch 2: CSC Section

Q2. How long have you been a Community School Coordinator (CSC)? (select one)

- This is my first year.
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6+ years

Q3. Which best describes your current school? (select one)

- Early childhood center
- Elementary school
- K-8 school
- Middle school
- High school

Q4. How long has your current school been designated as a Community School? (select one)

- School year 2025-2026 is our first year as a Community School
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 years
- 5 years
- 6 years

Q5. How familiar are you with the term *inclusive leadership* as it relates to the Community Schools initiative*?* (select one)

- Very familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Not familiar at all

Q6. How would you describe inclusive leadership in your own words? (short answer)

Q7. How prepared did you feel to implement inclusive leadership when you became a Community School coordinator? (select one)

- Very prepared
- Somewhat prepared
- Not at all prepared

Q8. Please describe how you were prepared to implement inclusive leadership as a Community School coordinator. (short answer)

Q9. What forms of support have you received to lead a Community School? (Select all that apply)

- Professional learning about inclusive leadership in Community Schools
- Professional learning about the six pillars of Community Schools
- Direct support from the Office of Community Schools
- Direct support from your school principal
- Collaboration with other Community School Coordinators
- Outside support from a vendor or partner organization
- None of the above
- Other (Please describe.) ____

Q10. How would you rank the following inclusive leadership practices in order from most important to least important in a Community School? (Drag the practices into rank order with 1 being the most important practice.)

- Seeking out and using student/family voice in decision making
- Distributing leadership responsibilities through a steering committee or leadership team
- Making equity-driven decisions
- Building a culturally responsive school climate
- Creating collaborative structures for stakeholder engagement
- Partnering with the school principal

Q11. Which of the following inclusive leadership practices do you actively implement in your role as a Community School coordinator? (Select all that apply)

- Seeking out and using student/family voice in decision making
- Distributing leadership responsibilities through a steering committee or leadership team
- Making equity-driven decisions

- Building a culturally responsive school climate
- Creating collaborative structures for stakeholder engagement
- Partnering with the school principal
- None of the above
- Other (Please describe.) ____

Q12. How often are you included in school-level leadership decision-making as it relates to Community School implementation? (select one)

- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Never

Q13. Please describe how your principal involves you in school leadership. (short answer)

Q14. If you have experienced any **successes** or any **barriers** in implementing inclusive leadership practices as a Community School coordinator, please describe them. (short answer)

Q15. If there is anything else you would like to share about your experience with inclusive leadership or Community School implementation, please use the space below. (short answer)

Appendix D: Community School Principals Interview Protocols

Thank you so much for meeting with us today. We would love to hear your perspectives and ideas about your work as a school principal working to implement the Community Schools reform strategy at ___ school. We will be asking a series of questions that do not have any right or wrong answers. All of your responses, your identity, and your school's identity will be kept completely confidential through the use of pseudonyms. The interview is scheduled for 45 minutes. You may elect to skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, and you can stop the conversation at any time. The recording will solely be for the purpose of accurately capturing your responses. It will be transcribed, and the recording will be destroyed to protect your confidentiality.

Do we have your permission to capture a recording of our interview? Do you have any questions for us before we begin?

How long have you been a community school principal?

Section 1: Understanding and Enacting Inclusive Leadership (Aligned to RQ1)

1. How would you define "inclusive leadership" in the context of your work in a Community School?
2. Can you describe any strategies or practices you've used to build a sense of belonging and inclusion among your school community?
3. How would you describe your approach to leadership? What values guide your decision-making? *Can you share an example?
4. Are you familiar with the pillars of Community Schools? Can you share how your leadership approach aligns (or doesn't align) with any of the pillars?
5. What role do families, community partners, and staff play in shaping decisions at your school? Describe any examples where input from stakeholders influenced a schoolwide decision or initiative?

Section 2: Conditions that Support or Hinder Inclusive Leadership (Aligned to RQ2)

6. What school-based structures or practices have helped you successfully implement inclusive leadership?
7. What district-level or community-based supports have been most helpful in advancing inclusive leadership at your school?
8. What barriers or challenges have you encountered when trying to implement inclusive leadership practices?
9. How do staffing, scheduling, and resource allocation influence your ability to lead inclusively?
10. What changes would you recommend at the district or state level to strengthen inclusive leadership practices in Community Schools?

Section 3: Leadership Development and Professional Learning (Aligned to RQ3)

11. What types of professional learning experiences have you participated in that influenced your approach to leading inclusively, if any?
12. Are there MJPSS leadership development programs that support inclusive leadership in

Community Schools? If so, how effective have they been?

13. Do you receive any ongoing support in your role to enhance inclusive leadership?
14. Are there any topics or types of professional development you feel would better support you in developing inclusive leadership practices?
15. If you could design a leadership development experience focused on inclusive leadership for Community Schools, what would it include?

Appendix E: Community School Coordinator Interview Protocols

Thank you so much for meeting with us today. We would love to hear your perspectives and ideas about your work as a Community School Coordinator working to implement the Community Schools reform strategy at ___ school. We will be asking a series of questions that do not have any right or wrong answers. All of your responses, your identity, and your school's identity will be kept completely confidential through the use of pseudonyms. The interview is scheduled for 45 minutes. You may elect to skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, and you can stop the conversation at any time. The recording will solely be for the purpose of accurately capturing your responses. It will be transcribed, and the recording will be destroyed to protect your confidentiality.

Do we have your permission to capture a recording of our interview? Do you have any questions for us before we begin?

How long have you been a community school coordinator?

Section 1: Understanding and Enacting Inclusive Leadership (RQ1)

1. How would you define "inclusive leadership" in the context of your work in a Community School?
2. What does inclusive leadership look like in your school's day-to-day operations? Can you provide examples?
3. How do you collaborate with your principal and school-based leadership team to promote inclusive practices?
4. In what ways do you ensure that student, family, and community voices are included in decision-making processes?
5. How does your school prioritize equity, especially when allocating resources or designing programs for students and families?

Section 2: Supportive and Hindering Conditions (RQ2)

6. What conditions at your school (leadership style, culture, policies) have supported the implementation of inclusive leadership?
7. What barriers have you encountered in trying to implement inclusive leadership practices?
8. How do systemic or district-level factors support or hinder inclusive leadership at your school?
9. Can you share an experience where inclusive leadership made a significant difference for students or families?
10. Are there any barriers (time, funding, communication) that make inclusive leadership difficult to sustain?

Section 3: Professional Learning and Leadership Development (RQ3)

11. What types of professional learning or training have you received related to inclusive leadership?
12. Do you feel adequately prepared to lead inclusively in your role as a Community School Coordinator? Why or why not?
13. What leadership development opportunities would better support your ability to

implement inclusive leadership practices?

14. Can you share any experiences you've had (positive or challenging) regarding professional development in equity and inclusion within MJPSS?
15. What advice would you give to new Community School Coordinators or principals about fostering inclusive leadership in their schools?

Appendix F: Comparison of Inclusive Leadership Practice Ranking Across Roles

Principal Data

Q10 (Principals) How would you rank the following inclusive leadership practices in order of importance?	**Count of responses for each level of importance** (1- highest importance to 6-lowest importance)						**Weighted Value**	**Average Weighted Rating per Principal**
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**		
Partnering with the Community School Coordinator	22	13	7	3	4	5	247	4.57
Building a culturally responsive school climate	18	7	5	5	3	16	200	3.70
Creating collaborative structures for stakeholder engagement	7	10	12	10	8	7	193	3.57
Making equity-driven decisions	6	9	12	6	13	8	181	3.35
Distributing leadership responsibilities through a steering committee or leadership team	1	10	6	17	9	11	160	2.96
Seeking out and using student and family voice in decision making	0	5	12	13	17	7	153	2.83

Note. CSCs n=24; Participants ranked each practice from 1 (highest importance) to 6 (lowest importance). Counts in Rank columns represent the number of respondents selecting each rank position. Rankings were converted to weighted scores by assigning inverse point values (6 = rank 1, 1 = rank 6). The number of responses at each rank was multiplied by the assigned weight and summed to produce a total weighted score. Average weighted scores were calculated by dividing the total weighted score by the number of respondents (n = 54). Higher average weighted scores indicate higher perceived importance.

Community School Coordinator Data

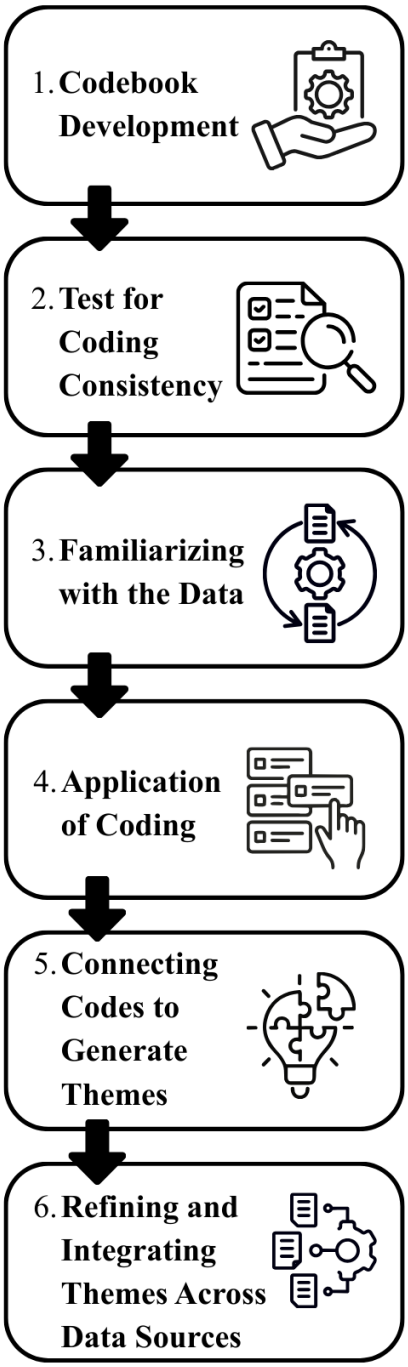
Q10 (CSCs) How would you rank the following inclusive leadership practices in order of importance?	**Count of responses for each level of importance** (1- highest importance to 6- lowest importance)						**Weighted Value**	**Average Weighted Rating per Principal**
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**		
Partnering with the school principal	13	3	5	1	1	1	119	4.96
Seeking out and using student and family voice in decision making	4	7	4	3	4	2	94	3.92
Making equity-driven decisions	0	6	6	7	5	0	85	3.54
Building a culturally responsive school climate	4	4	3	4	4	5	81	3.38
Distributing leadership responsibilities through a steering committee or leadership team	2	2	2	6	6	6	66	2.75
Creating collaborative structures for stakeholder engagement	1	2	4	3	4	10	59	2.46

Note. CSCs n=24; Participants ranked each practice from 1 (highest importance) to 6 (lowest importance). Counts in Rank columns represent the number of respondents selecting each rank position. Rankings were converted to weighted scores by assigning inverse point values (6 = rank 1, 1 = rank 6). The number of responses at each rank was multiplied by the assigned weight and summed to produce a total weighted score. Average weighted scores were calculated by dividing the total weighted score by the number of respondents (n = 54). Higher average weighted scores indicate higher perceived importance.

Appendix G: Stages of Hybrid Thematic Analysis Used in Study

Stages of Hybrid Thematic Analysis

(Adapted from Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006)



In Our Study...

Established and defined initial codes from literature review, research questions, and theory of improvement.

Conducted intercoder reliability checks for both the survey and interview responses.

Holistically and independently read each data source and developed analytic notes of initial reactions.

Implemented deductive coding for open-ended survey items and interview transcripts. Added inductive codes, as necessary.

Analyzed coded survey and interview data for emerging themes.

Integrated and refined themes across coded data sources and in triangulation with closed-response survey items.

Note. Image created by authors of this study.

Appendix H: Survey Open-Ended Response Code Frequency Chart

Code	Frequency (Coded Segments)	Percentage of Total Codes
Shared Decision-Making	110	19.6%
Role Clarity	108	19.3%
Equity-Focused Leadership	102	18.2%
Collaboration Structures	81	14.4%
Barriers to Implementation	71	12.7%
Professional Learning	61	10.9%
District Support Structures	28	5.0%
Total	**561**	**100%**

Note. Frequencies represent the number of coded segments across open-response survey data. Responses may be assigned multiple codes; therefore, percentages reflect the proportion of total coded instances (N = 561), not the percentage of participant responses.

Appendix I: Interview Response Code Frequency Chart

Code	Frequency (Coded Segments)	Percentage of Total Codes
Shared Decision-Making	56	24.9%
Collaboration Structures	47	20.9%
Equity-Focused Leadership	46	20.4%
District Support Structures	32	14.2%
Professional Learning	32	14.2%
Role Clarity	22	9.8%
Total	**225**	**100%**

Note. Frequencies represent the number of coded segments across interview data. Responses may be assigned multiple codes; therefore, percentages reflect the proportion of total coded instances (N = 225), not the percentage of participant responses.

Appendix J: Survey Demographic and Background Characteristics by Role (Items 1-5, 7)

Q1. What is your role in a Community School?

Response Choices	n	%
Principal	57	65%
CSC	31	35%
Total	88	100%

Q2. Years in Role

Principals (n=56)

Years	n	%
0-2 years	5	9%
3-5 years	23	41%
6+ years	28	50%

Community School Coordinators (n=29)

Years	n	%
First year	8	28%
1-2 years	8	28%
3-5 years	13	45%

Q3. School Level

Principals (n=56)

Level	n	%
Elementary	39	70%
K-8	2	4%
Middle	7	13%
High	8	14%

Community School Coordinators (n=28)

Level	n	%
Elementary	17	61%
K-8	3	11%
Middle	4	14%
High	4	14%

Q4. How long has school been a Community School?

Principals (n=55)

Years	n	%
SY25-26 is first	6	11
1 year	3	5
2 years	5	9
3 years	10	18
4 years	4	7
5 years	13	24
6 years	14	25

Community School Coordinators (n=29)

Years	n	%
SY25-26 is first	6	21
1 year	0	0
2 years	5	17
3 years	5	17
4 years	6	21
5 years	6	21
6 years	1	3

Q5. Familiarity with Inclusive Leadership

Principals (n=56)

Response	n	%
Very familiar	22	39%
Somewhat familiar	28	50%
Not familiar	6	11%

Community School Coordinators (n=29)

Response	n	%
Very familiar	23	79%
Somewhat familiar	5	17%
Not familiar	1	3%

Q7. Preparedness to Implement Inclusive Leadership

Principals (n=54)

Response	n	%
Very prepared	16	30%
Somewhat prepared	29	54%
Not at all prepared	9	17%

Community School Coordinators (n=24)

Response	n	%
Very prepared	12	50%
Somewhat prepared	11	46%
Not at all prepared	1	4%

Note. Percentages are calculated within each role group. Totals may vary slightly across items due to the number of responses.

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