ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	PREPARING SCHOOL LEADERS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS IN POVERTY
	Sandra G. Vecera, Doctor of Education, 2022
Dissertation directed by:	Dr. Douglas Anthony, College of Education

Opportunity gaps for certain student groups are well documented across the United States as well as in the Mid-Atlantic state where this research occurred. According to Miksic (2014), "American public education aspires to provide rich and poor, Black and White, immigrant and native-born, with equal opportunities for success" (para. 1). While all of these identifiers matter greatly, researchers from Stanford University concluded, "It's the difference in the poverty composition that is most predictive of the achievement gap" (Samuels, 2019, para. 4). As educators, we are challenged by the question, how do we ensure equity in order to eliminate these opportunity and access gaps for students in poverty?

According to recent research by the Wallace Foundation, the impact of effective principals is even larger than previously thought. Highly effective administrators have meaningful impacts on student achievement and attendance as well as teacher satisfaction and retention (Grissom et al., 2021). Leithwood et al. (2004) had also found principals to be the second most important school-level contributor, after teachers, to student achievement. Focusing on school-based leadership and principal pipelines can reduce

opportunity gaps for students in poverty. One way to ensure high-quality administrators in every school is through a standards-based induction program for new administrators that is grounded in equity. This study focused on an existing Assistant Principal (AP) Induction Program in a medium-sized public school district in a Mid-Atlantic state.

The purpose of this sequential mixed-methods study was to (a) explore the district's new APs' (defined as those within their first two years in the role) knowledge related to equity according to Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness and (b) determine new APs' needs for induction related to providing equitable supports to students and families. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. For which of the elements of Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness do new APs rate their practice as effective or highly effective?

2. What do new APs perceive as the key administrative practices needed to achieve equity and cultural responsiveness?

3. What barriers or challenges do new APs report that prevent them from meeting or exceeding PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness?

New APs completed a baseline knowledge survey as well as participated in individual, structured interviews. Survey responses were summarized and interview transcripts were coded for themes. A document analysis was also conducted in order to triangulate the quantitative and qualitative data. This study found that administrators did not rate their practice as effective or highly effective for PSEL Standard 3 Elements B, D, and F. New APs also identified the key administrative behaviors they needed to achieve educational

equity, which were to create a sense of belonging, ensure students have access to resources, and additional supports. Participants also identified the barriers to achieving equity in their practice as systemic decisions and structures, staff mindset, demands of the AP role, and access to resources. Current findings suggest that the school district should consider expanding equity professional learning as part of administrator induction, emphasizing equity at the element level as a part of the induction program, and partnering with other offices and university programs to further enhance administrator induction and training.

PREPARING SCHOOL LEADERS TO MEET THE
NEEDS OF STUDENTS IN POVERTY

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my partner, Nicole. You believed in me even when I didn't believe in myself. You have truly supported me throughout this process more than anyone could ever know and I am eternally grateful to have you in my life. To my sister, Melissa, who always provided a listening ear and sarcastic response when I needed one. Thank you for being such a positive presence in my life. To my parents, for emphasizing the value of education and instilling a love of learning in me. To the educational leaders in my district, your hard work makes a difference for students every day. Your jobs are not easy but you approach them with grace, dignity, and love. Lastly, to our students (and all students) experiencing poverty. You have taught me so much about the world, which is often unfair and unjust. I can only hope this research makes a small difference in helping us be better for you.

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I would like to thank my advisors: Dr. Anthony and Dr. McLaughlin. Dr. Anthony, you kept me on target and helped me cross the finish line with your supportive and calming approach. Dr. McLaughlin, you pushed my thinking and challenged me to strive for excellence through your humor and candid feedback. I would also like to thank my committee members: Dr. Bolger, Dr. Grimes, Dr. Neumerski, and Dr. Shetley. Your support and feedback have been invaluable. Additionally, I would be remiss if I did not express gratitude to Dr. Snell. I started this program from a hospital bed and she went above and beyond to keep me in the program, exemplifying the very best of what teachers have to offer. Thank you for your compassion, your empathy, and your graciousness toward a student you barely knew. Lastly, I must thank my team, my cohort members, and my colleagues from my district. To each and every one of you who supported me, asked me about my progress, and encouraged me to keep going, I am forever grateful for your continued support.

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Section I: Introduction

Problem Statement

Delling County Public Schools (DCPS) is a diverse school system that is often recognized as one of the top school systems in the Mid-Atlantic region and across the nation (Loudenback, 2018). The system is growing and continues to diversify. For example, the percentage of students who qualified for Free and Reduced-price Meals (FARMs) doubled from 11% to 23% in just ten years and is anticipated to continue to grow (State Report Card, 2018). Although DCPS is known for strong academic achievement, students receiving FARMs in the system are outperformed by their more affluent classmates on almost every academic measure. According to data from the Educational Opportunity Project at Stanford University, "Delling County Public Schools shows declining educational opportunity. Average scores have declined by -0.09 grade levels less than districts with similar socioeconomic status" (Reardon et al., 2019). This data is highlighted in Figure 1. The school district is in a county that is wealthier than most other places, yet students in poverty have fewer opportunities.

Figure 1

Educational Opportunity for Students Receiving FARMs in DCPS
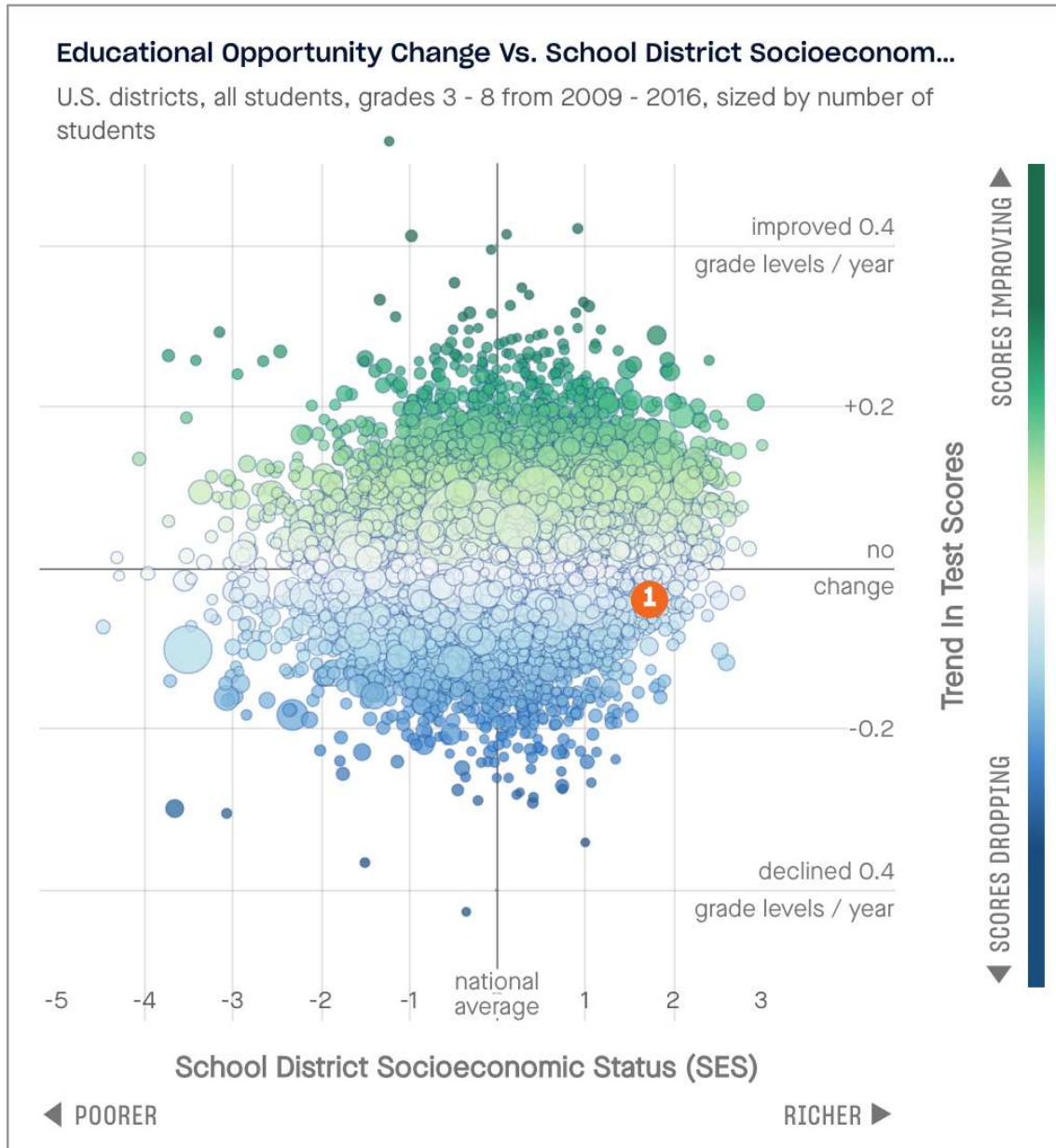
Note. From *Educational Opportunity Project* by Reardon, S. F., Ho, A. D., Shear, B. R.,

Fahle, E. M., Kalogrides, D., Jang, H., & Chavez, B. (2021).

Stanford Education Data Archive (Version 4.1). Retrieved from

http://purl.stanford.edu/db586ns4974. Reprinted with permission.

According to the 2018 State Report Card published by the State Department of Education (SDE), the percent of DCPS third grade students scoring proficient on the statewide reading assessment was 51.4, compared to 23.9% for third grade students who were receiving FARMs. In math, the percent of all DCPS third graders scoring proficient on the statewide assessment was 57.9, while only 25.5% of the third graders receiving FARMs reached proficiency (State Department of Education, 2018).

An additional measure of the inequities is observed in the percentage of students scoring a three or higher on Advanced Placement (AP) exams across all high schools in DCPS. According to the district's 2016 annual report, 47.2% of the AP exam scores for all DCPS students were three or better compared to 21.7% for those receiving FARMs. Further, the graduation rate for all students in DCPS for the 2015-16 school year was 93%, while students receiving FARMs graduated at a rate of 83% (DCPS Annual Report, 2016).

Often the differences in data across student groups such as achievement scores and graduation rates are referred to as achievement gaps; however, Gorski (2013) refers to these as educational opportunity gaps. Gorski notes that there are "many troubling ways in which youth in poverty, on average, are denied the level of educational access granted to more affluent youth" (p. 86). For the purposes of this paper, the terms opportunity gap and access gap will be used synonymously. As further evidence of the opportunity gap in DCPS, in the school year 2015-16 29% of all elementary students were enrolled in gifted and talented mathematics classes, but only 7% of students receiving FARMs were enrolled. During the same year, 71.3% of all students took at least one AP course, while only 50.2% of students receiving FARMs did so. The

district's 2016 annual report also shows that students receiving FARMs are suspended out of school at higher rates than their peers not eligible for FARMs. During the 2015-16 school year across all grade levels, less than 3% of all DCPS students were suspended, yet the suspension rate for students receiving FARMs was 7.3% (DCPS Annual Report, 2016).

The school system's strategic plan explicitly focuses on equity, yet opportunity gaps persist for students in poverty. According to the school system's website, the mission of the school system is to ensure "academic success and social-emotional well-being" while also focusing on closing gaps. Two examples of specific goals from the plan are that graduation rates are high among all student groups and every student receives exemplary instruction, supports, and opportunities (System Strategic Plan, 2018). These goals specifically refer to equitable opportunities and exemplary levels of performance for all demographic groups; however, based on the data presented above, opportunity gaps for students receiving FARMs are evident.

In order to close the opportunity gap DCPS needs to focus on providing equitable opportunities for students receiving FARMs in areas such as academics, discipline, parent outreach, staffing, and budgetary resources. One key factor in successfully reducing opportunity gaps for students in poverty is to provide every student in poverty with effective and highly trained school administrators (Loeb et al, 2010; The Aspen Education & Society Program and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017). The 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) emphasized the need for "a renewed focus on school

leadership and acknowledge[d] the importance of school principals to school improvement and effective instruction" (Public Law No. 114- 95, 2015).

As stated earlier, DCPS is known for being a top-notch school system. In general, the district's overall performance looks great when compared to other systems in the state. However, when looking at the data for specific student groups, some learners are not being served well. As the fastest growing school system in the state, the school district continues to become more diverse. It is critical that the school system closes the opportunity gap between more affluent students and their peers receiving FARMs. Service to students receiving FARMs must be improved if DCPS is to remain a high-performing and world-class school system for each student it serves.

This paper focuses on the access gap for students who are living in poverty, as determined by those who receive FARMs, to be educated in a school led by well-prepared administrators with the skills and knowledge needed to meet their needs as defined by national equity standards. Currently, this district's school administrators are not adequately prepared or supported to meet the unique needs of students in poverty and thus these opportunity gaps persist.

Evidence Supporting the Problem

Why Focus on Poverty: Author's Note and Acknowledgement of Complex Intersectionality Related to Poverty and Other Social Identifiers

Race, ethnicity, language proficiency, demographics, and parental education levels are all important factors to consider when it comes to opportunity and access gaps for students in U.S. schools. These social identifiers are complex and critical to understand in order to meet each student's unique learning needs and ensure they

experience academic success as learners. While the impact of intersectionality cannot be denied related to the achievement gap and deserves further research, this paper will focus on opportunity gaps for students in poverty as defined by those receiving FARMs, regardless of race/ethnicity or other identifying factors. The author of this paper fully acknowledges the privileges from which White students, regardless of socioeconomic status, benefit; and the systemic racism, historic barriers, and structural oppression students of color experience regardless of income level. As the data above indicated and as demonstrated in the literature (Reardon et al., 2019; Jensen, 2009), poverty is a significant and predictive factor when it comes to learning outcomes for U.S. public school students and therefore, will be the focus of this research study.

Many factors contribute to access and opportunity gaps for students in U.S. schools. It is well documented that race/ethnicity as well as other identifying factors are often conflated with poverty when it comes to achievement gaps in our schools. According to Miksic (2014):

> American public education aspires to provide rich and poor, Black and White, immigrant and native-born, with equal opportunities for success. That it fails in this aim is evidenced in the persistent differences in academic performance between groups of students, also known as achievement gaps. (para. 1)

Achievement gaps (or opportunity gaps) are well known and monitored at the national level by socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, language proficiency, and gender (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Rabinovitz (2016) reported the following educational inequities based on more than 200 million test scores nationwide:

- Almost every school district enrolling large numbers of low-income students has an average academic performance significantly below the national grade-level average.

- The most and least socioeconomically advantaged districts have average performance levels more than four grade levels apart.

- The socioeconomic profile of a district is a powerful predictor of the average test score performance of students in that district.

- Average test scores of black students are, on average, roughly two grade levels lower than those of white students in the same district; the Hispanic-White difference is roughly one- and-a-half grade levels.

Sean Reardon, the lead Stanford researcher for the above body of work concludes, "It's the difference in the poverty composition that is most predictive of the achievement gap," (2019). Additionally, Miksic (2014) found, "The income achievement gap, defined as the gap between children who come from low socioeconomic status (SES) families and high-SES families, is even worse than that between Black and White students; in fact, it is now twice that size" (p. 1).

National Scope of the Problem

To fully comprehend the educational opportunity gaps for students receiving FARMs in DCPS, it is important to understand the larger national context as well as the vast numbers of children impacted by poverty. According to U.S. Census data, 12.8 million children were living in poverty in 2017, representing 22.7% of the total population under the age of 18 (Fontenot et al., 2018). Additionally, the National Center for Children in Poverty (2018) reported that 41% of children in the United States were

living just above the federal poverty threshold and were considered low-income, meaning they were living below the threshold to have their basic needs met.

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of high- versus low-poverty schools in 2017 across all 50 states and Washington D.C. High-poverty schools were those where over 75% of students received FARMs and low-poverty schools were where under 25% of students received FARMs. Mid-high poverty schools contain 50-75% of students receiving FARMs and mid-low poverty schools have 25-50% of students receiving FARMs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

Figure 2

National Distribution of Public School Students by School Poverty Level for 2017
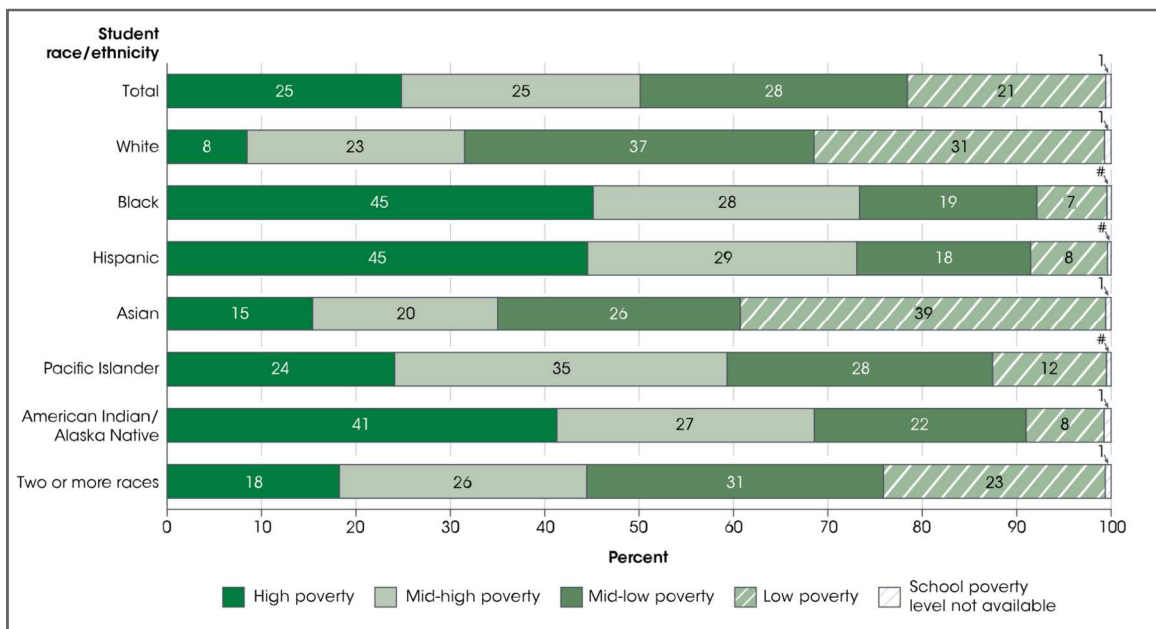
Note. From *National Center for Education Statistics*, 2019, https://nces.ed.gov/.

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Students in poverty often struggle with academic success due to a lack of access and opportunity (Gorski, 2013; Jensen 2009). Gaps are more evident in schools where poverty is most concentrated (Rabinovitz, 2016). However, many practices can be implemented to counter the negative effects of poverty on education.

Some students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds are starting with less than their peers, and therefore require additional resources to achieve the same level of success. Educational equity means that every student has access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background and/or family income. (The Aspen Education & Society Program and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017, p. 3).

This report provides recommendations for educational leaders to support educational equity and improve outcomes for under-served students. The recommendations include increased accountability and funding, prioritizing early education, providing differentiated supports, more equitable assessments, providing family and community supports, focusing on school climate and culture, and prioritizing teachers and leaders (The Aspen Education & Society Program and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017). Because the focus of this paper is on school-based administrators' ability to close opportunity gaps for students in poverty and the gap in access to quality school leadership students in poverty often experience, that will be the key recommendation that is explored further next.

School leaders are a key driver of positive outcomes for students. According to recent research by the Wallace Foundation (2021), the impact of effective principals is

even larger than previously thought. Highly effective administrators can have meaningful impacts on student achievement and attendance as well as teacher satisfaction and retention (Grissom et al., 2021). In fact, Leithwood et al. (2004) concluded they are the second most important factor in student achievement after teacher impact. High-quality school leaders can also positively impact teacher retention and teacher quality, which are also related to positive student outcomes (Herman et al., 2016). However, according to Loeb et al. (2010), schools with higher numbers of low-income students are more likely to have a building leader who is less experienced and/or less qualified when compared to lower-poverty schools. Additionally, higher poverty schools are more likely to have higher turnover in both school administration and classroom teachers, factors which have been linked to negative outcomes for students and disruption to the school community (Beteille et al., 2012).

The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reported that during the 2016-17 school year, 7% of principals in low-poverty schools left their position, compared to 11% for principals in high-poverty schools. Similarly, the percentage of principals staying in their position in high-poverty schools was 79%, while 86% of principals stayed in their positions at low-poverty schools. Additional data indicated that during the 2015-16 school year only 82% of nationally surveyed principals stayed in their positions in the following year, with at least 10% of those who left their positions leaving the principalship altogether (Goldring & Taie, 2018). Although data was not available regarding assistant principals, a reasonable conclusion is that assistant principals need to be prepared through principal pipeline initiatives to step into these numerous principal vacancies. In fact, Goldring et al. (2021) suggest it is "paramount to reimagine the

training and skills for assistant principals to fulfill leadership responsibilities and prepare them to take on the responsibilities of the principalship" (p. 2).

According to a recent publication by Levin and Bradley (2019), there are five key reasons principals choose to leave their jobs outside of retirement or dismissal. They are:

- inadequate preparation and professional development

- poor working conditions

- insufficient salaries

- lack of decision-making authority

- high-stakes accountability policies

National Efforts to Support Administrators in High-Poverty Schools

In the US, the achievement gaps between children living in poverty and their more affluent peers have been well documented. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was created to ensure fairness and equal opportunities for all students to achieve on standardized assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). President Lyndon Baines Johnson signed the bill in 1965 and stated, "full educational opportunity" should be "our first national goal" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, para. 9). The most recent reauthorization of ESEA, the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama in order to advance "equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students" (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, para. 8). The nation's congress and presidents have been prioritizing funding and legislation to eliminate achievement gaps for low-income students for decades, yet U.S. children continue to suffer the consequences of poverty and opportunity gaps.

As noted earlier, an important component addressed in ESSA is that of school leadership. When renewed in 2015 ESSA emphasized "a renewed focus on school leadership and acknowledges the importance of school principals to school improvement and effective instruction (Public Law No. 114-95, 2015). The act allows states and districts to use federal funds for activities targeting the quality of school principals and other school leaders" (Herman et al., 2016, p. 1).

Another national effort to build and support the capacity of administrators leading high-poverty schools is the development of national professional standards, which guide administrator induction programs and principal pipeline initiatives. Two sets of national standards have been developed as a way to ensure principals and assistant principals in the pipeline are ready to lead in diverse settings. The National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards guide programs that prepare educational leaders at the school and district levels and have a specific focus on preparing administrators to be leaders of equity (National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2018). The NELP Standard 3: Equity, Inclusiveness, and Cultural Responsiveness states that building leaders must "understand and demonstrate the capacity to promote the current and future success and well-being of each student and adult by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to develop and maintain a supportive, equitable, culturally responsive, and inclusive school culture" (p. 15). Sample topics under this standard include (pp. 16-17):

- advocate for equitable access to educational resources, procedures, and opportunities;
- evaluate root causes of inequity and bias;

- develop school policies or procedures that cultivate equitable, inclusive, and culturally responsive practices among teachers and staff; and

- broader social and political concern with equity and inequality in schools.

The second set of standards, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) are model professional standards that set the expectations for practitioners, supporting institutions, professional associations, policy makers and the public about the work, qualities, and values of effective educational leaders. "Grounded in current research and the real-life experiences of educational leaders, they articulate the leadership that our schools need and our students deserve. They are student-centric, outlining foundational principles of leadership to guide the practice of educational leaders so they can move the needle on student learning and achieve more equitable outcomes" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 1).

The PSEL standards are used in DCPS to guide school-based administrator induction programs and serve as the framework for the school-based administrator evaluation process. Similar to the NELP standards, the PSEL standards emphasize equity. Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness expects effective building leaders to be proficient in the following (NPBEA, 2015, p. 11):

- ensure that each student is treated fairly, respectfully, and with an understanding of each student's culture and context;

- ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and other resources necessary for success;

- 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;

- act with cultural competence and responsiveness in their interactions, decision making, and practice; and

- address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership.

Both the NELP and PSEL standards make clear that equity, inclusiveness, cultural responsiveness, and awareness of biases are essential practices of effective school administrators. In order to close opportunity gaps for students in poverty, building leaders must be proficient in these practices beginning with their pre-service training and continuing through their induction programming and ongoing professional learning.

State-wide Poverty and Leadership Data

National patterns of the association between child poverty and academic needs are mirrored at the state level. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2019), 30% of the children in the state were considered poor or low-income in 2018, which is over 1 million children across the state. In terms of educational outcomes, the State Department of Education reported an average 16 percentage-point gap in English/Language Arts proficiency as measured by the state assessment program (SAP) between third graders receiving FARMs and their peers across the state. The gap grows to 18 percentage points when looking at math proficiency on the SAP for third grade students receiving FARMs statewide. In some school systems across the state, the gaps increase to more than 30% for both reading and math proficiency as measured by SAP data. Additionally, the State Department of Education reported an overall graduation rate

of 87% for 2018, but only 78% of students receiving FARMs graduated from high school. That represents nearly one in four students in poverty who did not receive a high school diploma in the state. Furthermore, 19% of all students across the state were categorized as chronically absent, meaning they were absent more than 10% of the time, compared to 28% of the students receiving FARMs who were chronically absent (State Report Card, 2018).

In terms of leadership, according to the Office of Leadership Development and School Improvement within SDE, during 2017-18, highly-effective principals, as measured by principal evaluation ratings, were more likely to be in schools with lower rates of students in poverty. As shown in Figure 3, 63% of the principals from low-poverty schools were rated as highly effective, whereas only 42% of principals from non-low-poverty schools were rated as highly effective. Additionally, when looking at high-minority and high-poverty schools, the percentage of highly effective principals was 10% across the state (SDE, 2019).

Principals new to their role or new to their building were less likely to be evaluated as highly effective compared to principals who were not new to the role nor their building (SDE, 2019). Principal attrition data was not available through the SDE; however, the Office of Leadership Development and School Improvement states that it prioritizes an initiative called *The Promising Principals Academy*. The initiative is described as a "year-long professional learning experience designed to equip participants with the skills and knowledge to successfully transition to the principalship," indicating a focus and a need to invest in principal pipelines and preparation across the state (SDE, 2021).

Figure 3

2017-18 SDE Principal Effectiveness Data

Figure 14. Low Poverty Schools Have the Highest Rate of Highly Effective Principals

Low Poverty ..

N: 50.05% (499), 42.43% (423)
Y: 35.51% (98), 63.41% (175)

% of Principals

■ Highly Effective ■ Effective ■ Developing ■ Ineffective

Figure 15. High Minority and High Poverty Schools Have the Lowest Percent of Highly Effective Principals

High Poverty.. High Minority ..

Y Y: 19.52% (41), 68.57% (144), 10.00% (21)

% of Principals

■ Highly Effective ■ Effective ■ Developing ■ Ineffective

Note. From *School Year 2017-18 Teacher and Principal Evaluation Results: A Descriptive Analysis of Effectiveness Ratings*, by T. Booker-Dwyer and L. Wang, 2019, https://statepublicschools.org/. Copyright 2019 by State Department of Education Office of Leadership Development and School Improvement. Reprinted with permission.

DCPS Poverty and Leadership Data

As of 2018, an estimated 16,800 people lived below the federal poverty line in the county in which DCPS is located (LiveStories, 2021). When considering the county's poverty statistics, it is important to also note that this county is one of the wealthiest counties in the nation, often ranking in the top ten (Lerner, 2017). This means that even those living above the poverty line may struggle with housing and food insecurities due

to the high cost of living. Many children in the county may be considered low income and eligible for FARMs, even if they are not living below the federal poverty line.

As stated earlier, DCPS is a top-performing school district in the state with a reputation for academic excellence. According to the State Department of Education, as of 2018, 23% of DCPS students received FARMs. It is important to note that this number represents only those students who applied for FARMs and likely does not include all students in need of the service. The total enrollment for DCPS in 2018 was over 56,000 students, meaning that over 13,000 students in the school system were receiving FARMs (State Report Card, 2018). As indicated in Table 1 students receiving FARMs in DCPS are outperformed academically and also suspended at much higher rates than their peers. Further, the 2016 graduation rate for all DCPS students was 93%, but 83% for students receiving FARMS. Of note, the 2018 graduation rate for students receiving FARMs was 78%, a five percentage-point reduction from just two years before.

Table 1

2016 DCPS Student Outcomes: Overall Compared to Students Receiving FARMs

Student outcome	% All students	% Students receiving FARMs
ES students enrolled in GT Math	29	7
MS students in GT Math	34	9
Pass rate for Biology HSA	92	76
Grade 11 PSAT takers meeting CCR benchmark	51	18
Graduation rate	93	83
Dropout rate	4	10
MS suspension rate	4	13

Note. CCR = College and career readiness; ES = Elementary school; GT = Gifted/Talented; HSA = High School Assessment; MS = Middle school. Adapted from the 2016 State Report Card.

Reardon et al. (2019) reports the following for DCPS when compared nationally to places with similar socioeconomic status:

- Test scores are lower.
- Learning rates are lower.
- Test scores are declining faster.
- Non-poor students outperform poor students based on average test scores by a difference of 3.24 points.

In addition to gaps in student outcomes, gaps in school-based leadership also exist for students in poverty in DCPS. Trends in school-based leadership in DCPS mirror national and state trends. According to the 2018 DCPS Human Resources Annual Report, 23 school-based administrator vacancies were posted and filled during the 2017-18 school year (DCPS Human Resources Report, 2018). By cross-referencing the promotion lists with the school profiles from the system website, it can be determined that DCPS places new and inexperienced administrators in its higher poverty schools. In 2019, of the 13 Title I elementary schools in DCPS, three had principals with less than five years of experience. The other ten schools had principals ranging in experience from just over five years to more than ten years. Furthermore, nine of the 17 assistant principals (APs) in those schools had less than five years of experience. In other words, 53% of the APs in the Title I schools that year were new. Of the remaining non-Title I elementary schools in DCPS, 13 APs had less than five years of experience and 18 APs had more than five years of experience. Thus, 42% of the APs in the non-Title I elementary schools were new. This represents an 11 percentage-point gap in the placement of new assistant principals in Title I schools versus non-Title I schools in DCPS. Staff turnover in Title I schools is high and often administrators placed in those settings are inexperienced, emphasizing the point that induction training and pipeline support for new leaders on the topic of supporting students who live in poverty are essential in DCPS.

Consequences of Inexperienced Leaders for Students in Poverty

According to Gorski (2013):

socioeconomic status is a good predictor of a variety of measures of reading achievement; in other words, the wealthier the student, the better, on average, she

will perform on reading assessments. On the other hand, the poorer the student, the more likely she will experience reading difficulties. (p. 86)

National data consistently reflect the opportunity gaps for students experiencing poverty. The evidence is reflected in academic performance, school attendance, discipline, and high school graduation rates among other educational indicators. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019) reported, "living in poverty during early childhood is associated with lower-than-average academic performance that begins in kindergarten and extends through high school, leading to lower-than-average rates of school completion" (para. 2). In fact, NCES (2019) reported a 7 percentage-point gap in graduation rates between economically disadvantaged students and all other graduates for the 2016-17 school year. Furthermore, "in 2019, the average reading score for 4th-grade students in high-poverty schools (206) was lower than the scores for 4th-grade students in mid-high poverty schools (217), mid-low poverty schools (227), and low-poverty schools (240)" and during the same year, "the average reading score for 8th-grade students in high-poverty schools (249) was lower than the scores for 8th-grade students in mid-high poverty schools (259), mid-low poverty schools (268), and low-poverty schools (279)" (NCES, 2020, paras. 10 and 14).

In addition to the national achievement data, the assessment and other data presented above for the state and DCPS indicate that students who receive FARMs underperform on average when compared to their non-FARMs peers.

Principals often think of high-poverty schools as stepping-stones or places to begin their career, and then move on to more affluent and prestigious placements (Beteille et al., 2012; Loeb et al., 2010). If we do not provide professional learning

around poverty and address administrator mindsets from the beginning of their careers, these outcomes will continue to persist for students receiving FARMs. The consequence of not addressing the principal pipeline in DCPS is a continuous cycle of academic and discipline gaps which are disproportionate for students in poverty that may lead to these students dropping out of high school, having lower paying jobs, struggling in life, and perhaps even resorting to criminal activity and jail time.

The national, state, and local data show a clear and consistent pattern of underachievement leading to dropping out of high school among other negative outcomes. According to Cramer et al. (2014), "Dropping out of school makes it difficult to find a job that offers adequate living wages, which often translates into higher incarceration rates, especially for males" (p. 462). High school dropouts have limited opportunities for quality, high-paying jobs. According to NCES (2019), an $8,000 a year salary difference exists between males who completed high school and those who did not; and a staggering $35,000 annual salary difference between males who attained a bachelor's degree and those who dropped out of high school. Dropping out of school has many consequences for the U.S. public, not just for those living in poverty:

> It's estimated that half of all Americans on public assistance are dropouts. If all of the dropouts from the class of 2011 had earned diplomas, the nation would benefit from an estimated $154 billion in income over their working lifetimes. Potentially feeding that number is the fact that young women who give up on high school are nine times more likely to be, or become, young single mothers. A study out of Northeastern University found that high school dropouts cost taxpayers $292,000 over the course of their lives. (Lynch, 2014, para. 5)

Cramer et al. (2014) also noted that the school-to-prison pipeline is beginning as early as elementary school for many students of poverty who are over-disciplined both in K-12 settings as well as in the criminal justice system. A report from the Brookings Institution (2018, as cited in Couloute, 2018) based on IRS data from almost 3 million people, stated that, "boys born into families at the bottom 10% of the income distribution are 20 times more likely to experience prison in their 30's than their peers born into the top 10%" (paras 1-2).

Students living in poverty face many inequities including where they live, food insecurity, and access to healthcare (Jensen, 2009). The experiences of children in poverty are unique and in turn, schools need to serve each child differently according to their needs. This support begins with ensuring students have principals and assistant principals who understand and can respond to the needs of students in poverty.

In a recent survey of over 3,000 principals and 15,000 teachers nationwide, Johnston and Young (2019) found that just over 60% of principals and teachers said they felt prepared to work with diverse students (i.e., Black, Latino, low-income). Put another way, almost 40% of the educators surveyed did not feel prepared to work with diverse groups of students. This percentage was even larger among White principals and White teachers. Leithwood et al. (2004) also reported:

> effects of successful leadership are considerably greater in schools that are in more difficult circumstances. Indeed, there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader. Many other factors may contribute to such turnarounds, but leadership is the catalyst. (p. 5)

In the following sections, I will describe some of the factors that contribute to the opportunity and access gaps for students in poverty in DCPS. Specifically, I will focus on the leadership gap students receiving FARMs experience in DCPS because less experienced administrators are not prepared or supported to close gaps for students in poverty. I will then provide data and research to support the importance of investing in principal pipeline initiatives, specifically equity-based professional learning for new assistant principals, to help close this leadership preparation gap.

Theory of Action

Causal Systems Analysis (CSA)

Redefining achievement gaps as opportunity gaps represents a shift in U.S. education. Achievement gaps suggest that the students themselves are to be blamed for underachievement. Opportunity gaps instead focus on the denial of the same opportunities and access to educational benefits as afforded to their peers. This places the onus on the teachers, school leaders, and the school system itself. Therefore, the causes for the leadership opportunity gap must be explored further in order to attempt to close the gap and improve outcomes for students in poverty.

The causal systems analysis (CSA), which is presented below, was based on an extensive literature review on the impact of school leadership on closing opportunity gaps for students in poverty, as well as multiple empathy interviews with a variety of school staff. The interviews were conducted to gain staff's perceptions of where the district is currently related to serving students in poverty. Six interviews were conducted with staff who represented all three school levels (elementary, middle, high). Interviewees included two teachers, two administrators and two central office staff. Overwhelmingly, staff

reported feeling that issues related to poverty and homelessness should be concerns for the school system; however, most stated that they lacked understanding and background in these areas. Staff also noted that bias and lack of cultural awareness impacted educators' treatment of and ability to educate students. Furthermore, staff desired professional learning in this area, but few had experienced it. The following quotes from the interviews provide context and a broad overview of the current state of the school system related to supporting students in poverty.

- An elementary assistant principal said, "I believe that there is minimal change in instruction for FARMs students."

- A secondary curriculum coordinator who was formerly a high school teacher shared, "I think the concern is that there are some teachers that might associate poor performance based on socioeconomic status due to personal biases. The first thing I think needs to happen is a bias training to help teachers become better aware."

- An elementary teacher leader who had previously been recognized as Teacher of the Year stated, "I believe the main factors that contribute to the achievement gap for students receiving FARMs are the low expectations and lack of cultural understanding of the communities which we serve."

- One middle school assistant principal shared, "I've tried to provide staff with a PD [professional learning] about both [poverty and homelessness] at my previous school, but administration [the principal] did not think this was necessary."

The scope of this analysis is focused on issues related to the school system and school leadership for students in poverty. More specifically, the CSA hones in on

systemic barriers that are often present for students in poverty, the inadequate preparation of school administrators to understand and address the opportunity gaps for students in poverty, the lack of on-the-job training and support, and ultimately the high staff turnover in higher poverty schools. While the focus of this CSA and this research is on school leaders, a discussion on relevant research related to teachers and staff is crucial as they have an impact on a leader's ability to move a school forward. Teachers and staff also comprise a large portion of the system and therefore contribute to systemic issues. The researcher's goal in this research analysis is to provide empirical support for actions a school or school system can implement so that every child in poverty is educated in a school with a highly effective principal as defined by the state evaluation system for administrators as well as the PSEL standards.

The current CSA using a fishbone diagram has two problems identified at the head (see Figure 4).

- The major problem of practice is: Opportunity gaps persist for students receiving FARMs in DCPS.

- The minor problem of practice, which contributes to the major problem of practice, is: School-based administrators in DCPS are not adequately prepared or supported to be able to close opportunity gaps for students in poverty.

The CSA focuses on the main contributing factors for the minor problem of practice. The major ribs in the fishbone diagram are:

- Systemic barriers (policies, practices, culture, and decisions) impacting students in poverty

- Administrator preparation, training, and leadership

While these points are not meant to be an exhaustive list, each of these issues contributes significantly to an administrator's ability to lead as well as to close opportunity gaps for students in poverty. Each major rib along with minor ribs will be described and analyzed in detail in the following sections and are also highlighted in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Casual Systems Analysis/Fishbone Diagram
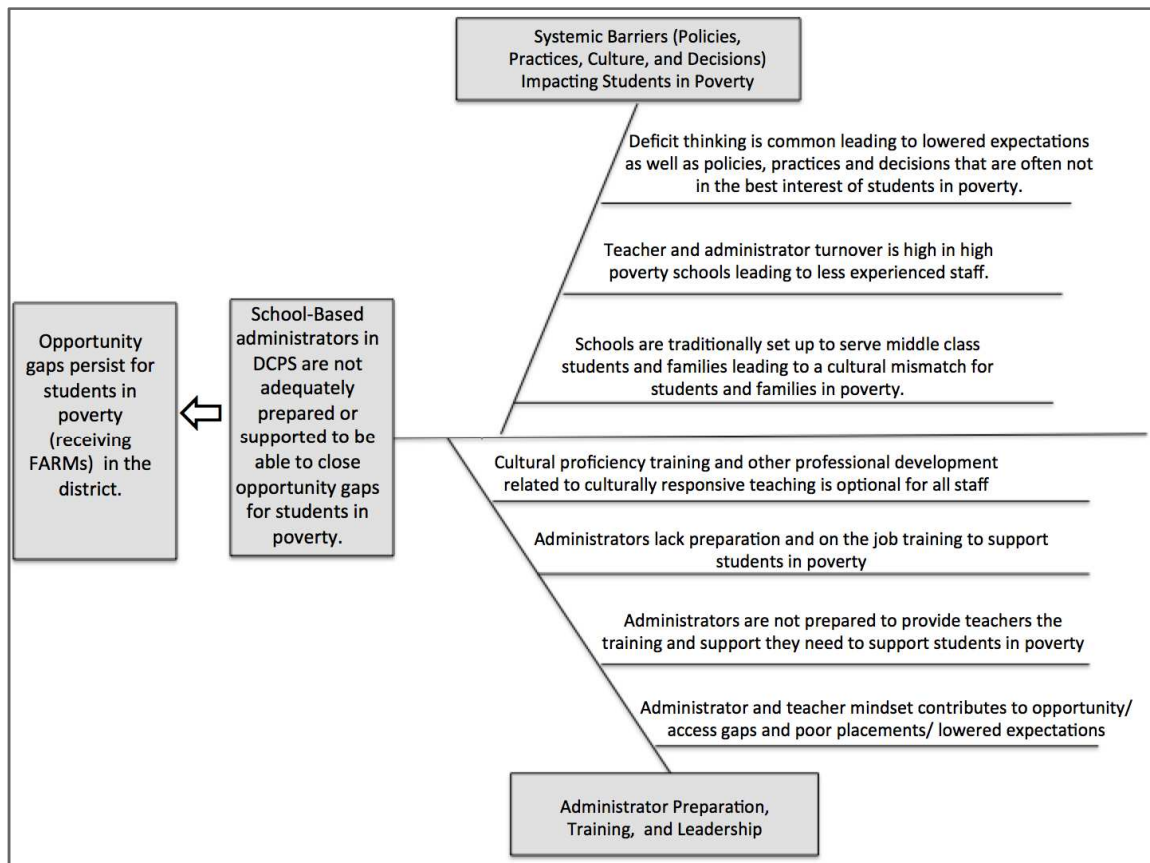
Systemic Barriers (Policies, Practices, Culture, and Decisions) Impacting Students in Poverty.

Deficit Thinking is Common Leading to Lowered Expectations as well as Policies, Practices, and Decisions are Often Not in the Best Interest of Students in Poverty. Students in poverty often have differing needs from their more affluent peers due to a variety of factors (Jensen, 2009). In order to overcome these barriers and close opportunity gaps, it is essential that all staff have a deep understanding of the unique needs of their students and work to dismantle these barriers in the classroom and systemically.

The challenges for students in poverty are compounded by belief systems that are prevalent in U.S. culture. Ideologies in U.S. society such as meritocracy make poverty easy to dismiss. Meritocracy is the belief that one's class or placement in society is based on performance or work ethic; the harder you work, the more successful you will be in society. This ideology gave rise to the classic idiom, pull yourself up from your bootstraps. The problem with meritocracy is that it assumes everyone is playing by the same rules and that society is equal for those from all religions, races, genders, and socio-economic classes. This belief system is dangerous because the idea of poverty feels distant and unrelatable for some people and makes it easy to place blame. This ideology makes it acceptable to believe that poverty only affects those people who do not work hard or do not deserve wealth without having to acknowledge the generations of systemic and institutional discrimination that exist in the fabric of U.S. society. This mindset leads to deficit thinking, or the belief that certain students, such as those in poverty, are inferior and therefore deserve less than other students.

Similar to the idea of meritocracy is the notion of personal-individual perspective. Budge and Parrett (2018) state that "personal character, values, and behaviors of the individual [are used to explain] poverty. This is consistent with the belief that poverty is the result of poor choices and weak moral character" (p. 34). The authors go on to say that this line of thinking is prevalent among U.S. educators who are essentially perpetuating these ideas and contributing to the playground to prison pipeline. Gorski (2013) asserts that in many ways believing in these paradigms makes things simpler for educators:

> It can be difficult to free ourselves from the shaky perception that poor people don't do as well in school as their wealthier peers because they just don't work hard enough or because they just aren't capable of doing so. It can be difficult to free ourselves from the dangerous assumption that it's all *their fault*. (p. 17)

As far back as the 1960's and 1970's researchers have been connecting the idea of educator expectations to outcomes in student performance. Multiple studies have demonstrated that the higher the expectations a teacher places on a student, the more successful the students will be in the classroom (Harvey & Slatin, 1975). Thus, when you connect this idea to the potential biases that many teachers bring into the classroom, deficit thinking is born. When educators believe students from poverty have lower potential and are somehow damaged, then the expectations educators have of those students is lowered. Students are likely to live up to these lowered expectations and therefore reinforce the educator's negative stereotypes of their abilities and performance capabilities. As Fergus (2019) notes:

Among the nearly 1,600 practitioners surveyed, nearly a third agreed (ranging from somewhat to strongly agree) that the values students learn growing up in disadvantaged neighborhoods conflict with school values; more than a quarter agreed that such students do not value education, and roughly one in six believe poor kids lack the abilities necessary to succeed in school. In short, a significant percentage of school practitioners appear to believe that the values and behaviors learned in low-income communities conflict with those taught in school. (p. 32)

Considering the school system's leadership (central office and school-based administrators) is largely made up of former teachers, it is easy to see how this deficit mindset permeates the school system's culture and impacts its policies, practices, and decision-making for the preparation, training, and placement of school-based administrators. Ultimately, such a deficit-mindset culture has a negative and inequitable impact on students in poverty.

Multiple research studies have sought to understand the impacts of policies, budgets, and systemic decisions on students in poverty. For example, Baker et al. (2016) reviewed over twenty years of educational funding as it relates to teacher salaries, class sizes, and educational outcomes for students. The premise of their analysis was simply more equitable funding would lead to higher academic outcomes for students. "A strong case can be made that state and federal policy focused on improving state finance systems to ensure equitable funding and improving access to resources for children from low-income families is a key strategy to improve outcomes and close achievement gaps" (p. 1).

Gerstl-Pepin (2006) put forth a similar case related to inequitable funding for students in poverty in her policy analysis. Her analysis begins with the Title I section of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965 and ends with No Child Left Behind in 2006. Her argument remains relevant today. Rather than accept the fact that high-poverty schools are being underfunded through policies, we as a society are satisfied with blaming poor schools for failing without assuming any responsibility for our role in their failing. High-poverty schools in the U.S. have been historically underfunded, but it is easier to blame the schools and the students within those four walls than to take any responsibility as citizens who accept such inequities.

This rings true in DCPS as well. Public financial reports and school system policies reveal inequities across Delling County schools. According to a 2017 school system financial report presented to the local Board of Education, one DCPS high school received over $160,000 in total donations for the year, while another DCPS high school received less than $45,000. When looking at fundraising, one high school raised $191,000 while another high school raised only $49,000. These patterns are also observed at the elementary and middle school levels. While the school system is not directly responsible for the amount of fundraising and donations received by individual schools, they are responsible for the district policies, which allow for such inequities to exist. Furthermore, this report only details financial gains from one fiscal year, which are compounded over time to create substantial differences from school to school. With such stark contrast in resources and funding, administrators are simply under-equipped to provide a learning environment for students in high-poverty schools that would be similar to that experienced by their more affluent peers. The funding deficits are too great to

overcome without major policy changes and administrators are not adequately prepared or supported to close the gaps in experiences or programming for children in poverty.

Another example of a policy that is detrimental to those in poverty and overserves those in the middle to upper SES classes in DCPS is its policy on nutritional and physical wellness. While this policy may have been created and implemented with positive intentions, it negatively impacts students in poverty. The policy implementation procedures state, "…no foods or beverages are to be sold or given without charge to any students in a school from 12:01 a.m. until after the end of the last lunch period except through the School Food and Nutrition Service." Understandably, the school system aims to serve healthy foods that are allergen free. However, this policy fails to acknowledge that many students are food insecure in DCPS. School lunch may be the only meal students eat in a 24-hour period. If a student has skipped dinner and then skips breakfast the next day, they are not going to be able to focus in class. Historically, teachers or administrators had kept granola bars or other non-perishables in their desks for such situations where students were hungry and unable to focus. Educators would discreetly ensure students had breakfast and allow them to go on with their learning for the day. With the implementation of this wellness policy, teachers and administrators now have to choose between following the rules and letting their students suffer in hunger or violating district policy and providing their students with food to support their learning.

Strong leaders both at the central office and school building level are key to challenging and changing these beliefs. Central office administrators must be informed in order to make policies and decisions to shift the culture of deficit thinking. Principals and assistant principals must create and maintain a strong teaching workforce that can

recognize and overcome these belief systems. Principals must be transformative leaders who help teachers prioritize this work and implement asset-based instruction in their classrooms (Kose, 2009). A principal is the key instructional leader in a building who has the responsibility to ensure high-quality instruction and learning in every classroom that supports academic success for each and every student (Lynch, 2012). Principals must be able to guide, train, and support their teachers in the work of shifting their mindsets if the obstacles of poverty are ever to be overcome in the classroom.

> ***Teacher and Administrator Turnover in High-Poverty Schools.*** Multiple studies conclude that higher teacher salaries are associated with better outcomes for students due to more years of experience (e.g., Baker et al., 2016). Unfortunately in DCPS and nationally, the more qualified, more experienced teachers tend to teach in the schools with students who have higher socioeconomic status. According to a 2018 report, the DCPS elementary school with the highest percentage of new teachers had a FARMs rate of 61%, while the elementary school with the highest number of experienced teachers (20+ years) had a FARMs rate of only 11.5%.

This trend is mirrored across all schools in DCPS in which newer, less experienced teachers are overrepresented in higher poverty schools and more experienced teachers are overrepresented in schools with lower FARMs rates. This practice may be one of many factors contributing to higher student performance in low-poverty schools and lower academic performance in higher-poverty schools. Additionally, this practice implies that the school system is spending more on teachers in its more affluent schools than in its poorer schools because teacher salaries increase with experience. "In short, although salaries are not the only factor involved, they do affect the quality of the

teaching workforce, which in turn affects student outcomes" (Baker et al., 2016, p. 4). Many of these policies and decisions related to the teacher transfer and placement process are decided centrally. Administrators in high-poverty schools, in many cases, have to deal with the staff they have when they arrive. Administrators may try to hire more diverse, qualified teachers; but often they lose those teachers due to the surplus process in DCPS. The hiring report is presented annually and often highlights these inequities, but the inequities are allowed to persist, leaving school-based administrators helpless to address the inequities of teacher turnover in high-poverty schools.

In addition to teacher experience and salaries, principal tenure is also crucial in school performance. Two studies have demonstrated that principal turnover is high in high-poverty schools, leading to less experienced and less qualified principals in those settings (Beteille et al., 2012; Loeb et al., 2010). According to Loeb et al., (2010), "schools serving many low-income, non-White, and low achieving students have principals who have less experience and less education and who attended less selective colleges" (p. 205). Beteille et al. (2012) found:

> principals initiate the move, often demonstrating preferences to work in schools with higher achieving students from more advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. Principals often use schools with many poor or low-achieving students as stepping-stones to what they view as more desirable assignments. (p. 904)

These studies explain national trends, which are also true within DCPS. As stated earlier, of the 13 Title I elementary schools in the district, three have principals with less than five years of experience and eight of the assistant principals in those schools have less

than five years of experience. This pattern of high administrator turnover and lack of experience can lead to lower staff morale, higher staff turnover, and lower academic outcomes for students, ultimately contributing to the already large opportunity gaps for students in poverty.

Schools and Middle Class Culture. Schools and school systems are traditionally set up to serve middle class students and families. One example of this is that educators are mostly middle class and often do not reflect the economic diversity of the student body. According to the NCES (2019), the average salary in 2016-17 was $58,950 for public school teachers, placing them squarely in the middle class. Additionally, the NCES reported the average salary for public school principals during the 2017-18 school year to be $98,300. This middle class orientation is also evident in the practices and unwritten rules of schools and school systems. The dominance of middle class culture leads to a cultural mismatch for families in most schools that educate poor students.

One factor contributing to this cultural mismatch and biases is that many teachers and administrators have never experienced poverty. Further compounding this mismatch is that most teachers and principals nationally and within DCPS are White while over half of their students are from other racial/ethnic groups. In fact, during the 2015-16 school year 80% of the nation's K-12 public school teachers were White and 78% of the principals were White in 2017-18 (NCES, 2019). In DCPS during the 2016-17 school year, the percentage of White teachers ranged from 80-83% depending on the school level, and over 70% of DCPS central office leaders and school-based administrators was White (DCPS Annual Report, 2018). Overwhelmingly, DCPS staff are White and middle class.

This cultural mismatch is further evidenced in Johnston and Young's (2019) study, in which they combined nationally representative survey results to analyze trends in teacher and administrator preparedness when working with students from diverse and low-income backgrounds. Two major findings include, "White principals and teachers had lower rates of agreement that their pre-service training prepared them to work with black, Latino, and low-income students compared with their nonwhite peers" (p. 2) and "White principals reported lower levels of preparedness to support black, Latino, and low-income students when they began working as a principal compared with their nonwhite peers" (p. 2). Nationally, principals and teachers are not trained appropriately and thus are struggling to understand and meet the needs of diverse students.

In a qualitative study examining a national sample of high-achieving, low income students, Williams et al. (2017) found empathy and cultural knowledge to be major factors in a student's ability to thrive when living in poverty. More than half of the students interviewed reported teachers' cultural knowledge as having

> an impact on their daily lives [and] as contributing to their academic success. In particular, such teachers provide students with opportunities to complete their homework in class, make sure that they have school supplies, allow students to tell their story, provide students with snacks throughout the day, refer students to outside services and programs to meet their basic needs, and connect the curriculum to their reality. (p. 191)

Teachers must have a deep understanding of the needs of their students and be able to empathize in order for gaps to close.

As discussed earlier, the school system's teachers are largely middle class. Since almost all administrators are promoted from within the system, the generalization can be made that school-based administrators who once were teachers, are also middle class. Additionally, central office administrators, many of whom earn over $100,000 a year, are middle to upper class. Furthermore, according to a former Board of Education member, "[Prior to 2019] Locally, our Board of Education was made up of White, wealthy conservatives." It is easy to understand how those making the policies, as well as those implementing them on a daily basis, are almost entirely middle or upper class and White; therefore schools are framed by middle-class thinking and values. "Class inequities are also embedded in the norms that shape schooling. Middle-class families are often able to maneuver their children through public schooling in a way that results in higher achievement" (Gerstl-Pepin, 2006, p. 145).

Administrator Preparation, Training, and Leadership.

Cultural Proficiency and Other Related Training are Optional. In DCPS many professional development offerings are optional, including Cultural Proficiency and other trainings offered by the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. According to the school system website, "Cultural Proficiency is a process and framework that engages a person to become aware of their assumptions, bias, beliefs, and values, in order to better serve the students they work with" (para. 1). While this sounds like an excellent fit for helping staff understand their cultural beliefs and biases related to students in poverty, the training is offered optionally to a few staff members per building per year. According to a 2019 DCPS equity report, "Currently, 60 percent of DCPS schools have between 25% and 50% of their staff trained through some type of diversity, equity, and inclusion

professional development. This year there were over 400 staff members participating in cultural proficiency, trauma informed care, culturally responsive teaching, mitigating bias, or student voice seminars and 58% of DCPS schools were engaged in some type of restorative justice work" (p. 15). While these numbers sound promising, the question remains, what about the other 40% of schools? What about the 50% to 75% of staff who have not received those trainings? The same equity report acknowledges the following:

> If the ability of staff to consistently maintain equitably nurturing learning environments is impacted by implicit bias, limited perspectives, inability to empathize with others' lived experiences, and lack of understanding on how history and culture continue to shape opportunities for success, then it is unlikely that all students will receive the support and challenge they need to succeed. When there is limited diversity among teachers and administrators and little explicit professional learning on the impact of such factors, combined with societal pressures outside of DCPS's control, the result is too often disparate access to opportunities based on actual or perceived race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and immigration status or national origin. (p. 10)

No longer can students of poverty be blamed for low, weak performance, but rather, now we must look to teachers, administrators, schools, and school systems to begin to understand why these gaps persist. What is happening inside of U.S. schools denies certain students the access and opportunities their middle and upper class peers experience. Schools must look inward to systemic barriers and institutional discrimination that is a result of years of underservice to students living in poverty. To close achievement gaps for students receiving FARMs, educators must take a deep look

at themselves and the institutions they represent. They must engage in meaningful professional learning experiences to increase their understanding of equity. As previously stated, one major causal factor of these gaps is the knowledge and skill level of the school administrator placed in each and every building. Administrators must be fully prepared and supported to close gaps for students receiving FARMs.

Administrator preparation. Several research studies have sought to determine what leadership and principalship factors make a difference in high-poverty schools. Kose (2009) found, "It is unlikely that principals can lead for social justice without engaging in ongoing self-examination; developing networks of difference, hope, support, and critique; and continuously deepening and reconnecting with the passion, courage, and responsibility of truly serving all students" (p. 656) and that "principals would benefit from district support and ongoing professional development from professional organizations" (p. 656). Unfortunately, principals in high-poverty schools tend to be less experienced and less prepared to handle these complex situations (Loeb et al., 2010). Loeb et al. found:

> a pattern similar to that found in prior research in which lower-achieving schools are led by less-qualified principals. This pattern is reflected in the initial match of principals to schools but is compounded by differential attrition and the systematic transfer of more qualified principals to higher-achieving, lower poverty, and higher-proportion-White schools. (p. 205)

Unfortunately, many principals see high poverty schools as the stepping-stone needed to launch their career. They begin in these schools with less experience and less education, then often choose to move to higher performing, "easier" schools to finish their careers

(Béteille et al., 2012). These practices culminate in a pattern whereby the most experienced leaders are in the schools with students who likely need them the least.

Administrators support for teachers. Because administrators are not receiving the preparation or support needed to close opportunity gaps, they are often unprepared to provide such learning experiences to their staff. This is not because of a lack of will, but rather because administrators lack the knowledge and skills to provide professional learning to their staff. Still, this pattern impacts outcomes for students in poverty. According to Kose (2009), in the world of education, it is widely assumed that the way to improve outcomes for students is through high-quality professional development for teachers to improve their practices and behaviors. Further, principals have a substantial influence on the quality of teacher professional development as they can determine a school's focus for development as well as serve as the accountability measure to ensure professional development strategies and practices are being implemented in the classrooms.

The responsibility for ensuring that professional development focuses on the needs of students in poverty is supported by a Chicago-based study by Jacob and Lefgren (2004), who concluded that the professional development provided to teachers was not enough to impact outcomes for students:

> We find that marginal increases in in-service training have no statistically or academically significant effect on either math or reading achievement, suggesting that modest investments in staff development may not be sufficient to increase the achievement of elementary school children in high-poverty schools. (p. 1)

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Stabb and Reimers (2013) investigated the components of effective poverty training for psychologists in order to help them address the barriers presented by poverty. Although this study did not focus on teachers, the conclusions supported the recommendation that "Training as a competent psychologist means considering poverty and class in all aspects of our professional work. It means being part of the solution, for doing nothing means remaining part of the problem" (p. 179). These conclusions suggest that if professionals are to have an impact on countering the effects of poverty, they must actively work against it, not just passively receive training and hope for improved outcomes for the students they serve. If school principals are not focusing on poverty, then it can be assumed there is not a school-wide focus on this work for teachers as well.

Yet another example of a factor impacting education for students in poverty is that of toxic stress. Toxic stress is a major source of the problems faced by many children living in poverty. According to Rumberger (2013):

> Family poverty is associated with a number of adverse conditions — high mobility and homelessness; hunger and food insecurity; parents who are in jail or absent; domestic violence; drug abuse and other problems — known as "toxic stressors" because they are severe, sustained and not buffered by supportive relationships. (para. 4)

These adverse conditions are known as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) factors. A certain amount of stress is considered normal for a developing child as is experiencing some level of adversity, but when these experiences reach a toxic level, there can be detrimental results for children (Hunt et al., 2017). Hunt et al. examined ACEs among a pediatric sample. They found that exposure to four or more ACEs was associated with a

33 times higher likelihood of a reported learning or behavioral problem as compared to children without ACEs. Johnson (2018) noted:

> Trauma corrupts the biological and social systems that children need to succeed in school…traumatic experiences and conditions in childhood can diminish comprehension, memory, trust, language abilities, and the ability to self-regulate.
>
> Traumatic distress among children can manifest as emotional and behavioral disorders that are detrimental to achievement. (p. 241)

Understanding the impacts of toxic stressors on a child's development and learning is an important area for school-based professional development so that staff know how to address the behavioral issues and academic achievement gaps that can result from these stressors. Currently, DCPS does not require mandatory training for administrators, teachers or other staff in DCPS related to poverty, trauma, or toxic stress.

Administrator and Teacher Mindsets. Jensen (2009) explained that the main risk factors for children growing up in poverty are "emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues" (p. 7). Jensen adds that none of these challenges are permanent. Children from poverty can learn and grow just as their middle class peers, but the risk factors are important and teachers must understand them and how to serve students effectively in order to overcome them.

Pit-ten Cate and Glock (2018) analyzed the impacts of teacher bias based on the education level of parents. They found:

> implicit attitudes [about race, ethnicity, parental education level, and socioeconomic class] may account for differences in teacher behaviors toward different groups of students and in turn their [the students'] educational

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opportunities, and could therefore partly account for consistent findings of educational inequalities based on the social status of families. (p. 725-6).

This study also explored the differences between implicit and explicit bias. While educators rarely admitted explicit biases toward students, implicit biases were found in their behaviors (e.g., instruction, class placements, tracks moving from one school to another) and therefore impacted the opportunities they provided students and their educational outcomes overall (Pit-ten Cate & Glock, 2018).

Based on these findings, teacher beliefs and mindsets about poverty can make a difference for students in the classroom and ultimately can impact student academic outcomes and feelings of belonging. Principals need to take this into consideration when making hiring decisions in their buildings. Lynch (2012) noted that the hiring and retention of qualified staff is one of the key components of every principal's role. Kose (2009) added that transformative principals intentionally recruit and hire teachers from a variety of backgrounds and who will be able to support the needs of diverse learners. Furthermore, Loeb et al. (2010) found that principals who had graduated from more reputable institutions were more likely to hire teachers from reputable institutions as well, making the connection that graduating from a more reputable university would lead to increased staff performance and effectiveness. The hiring and retention of staff is a major function of every school principal and thoughtful decisions must be made if opportunity gaps are going to close for students in poverty.

In addition to providing professional development to teachers and leading school improvement efforts, another main job of the building principal is to provide oversight in behavior and safety among students. This often translates into implementing disciplinary

decisions including suspensions. It is widely documented that discipline gaps exist in U.S. schools for certain racial groups as well as for students receiving special education and/or FARMs services. So the question arises, what causes these disparities in discipline? Might administrator actions be swayed by their biases and beliefs about certain student groups?

> The belief that poor people are in need of discipline rests, in turn, on a highly debatable premise, the idea that the economic status of a community determines the value of its cultural practices: The poorer the community, the more impoverished and dysfunctional its culture; the richer the community, the more culturally refined it must be. (Fergus, 2019, p. 32)

Just as teachers fall victim to their biases and beliefs in the classroom, so do the administrators. Human actions result from previous experiences; therefore, if a principal believes students from poverty behave differently or need more discipline or are inferior, then their beliefs would be reflected in their actions that result in higher referral and suspension rates for students in poverty.

In researching principal placement and turnover at high-poverty schools, Loeb et al. (2010) concluded that principal preference was at least partially responsible for their placements in their districts. If principals prefer to be placed in low-poverty schools, does that imply a bias against the students in high-poverty schools? The notion that certain schools and certain students are tougher environments, have lower academic performance, and have more behavioral issues suggests a preference toward more affluent students. Principals are choosing to work in schools with certain populations,

providing us insight into their thoughts and beliefs related to students in poverty. Only through training and ongoing professional learning can these mindsets begin to change.

Drivers of Improvement and Driver Diagram

As stated in the CSA, administrators in DCPS are not adequately prepared or supported to close opportunity gaps for students receiving FARMs in DCPS. To improve the knowledge and capacity of DCPS school leaders to lead in closing opportunity gaps for students living in poverty, two of the primary drivers for improvement are (a) improving the university or other pre-service administrator preparation programs and (b) improving the professional development and support of DCPS school administrators. The scope of the improvement effort is limited to new assistant principals since this position is at the start of the principal pipeline, so that every new assistant principal in DCPS meets or exceeds at least six of the eight components within PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness by the 2023-24 school year. PSEL Standard 3 is emphasized in this research study because it most closely aligns to the stated problem of practice. Additionally, from a practical standpoint, PSEL Standard 3 accounts for 40% of an administrator's evaluation in DCPS and therefore is a critical component in ensuring administrators are effective in their roles.

In this section, each primary driver will be discussed and considered with secondary drivers to delineate a change initiative proposal designed to increase progress toward the intended aim. Of the two primary drivers, the researcher focused on improving the on-the-job professional learning and support of current and aspiring DCPS school administrators since the other primary driver of improving administrator

preparation programs at the university level was outside of the researcher's scope of control.

Figure 5

Driver Diagram
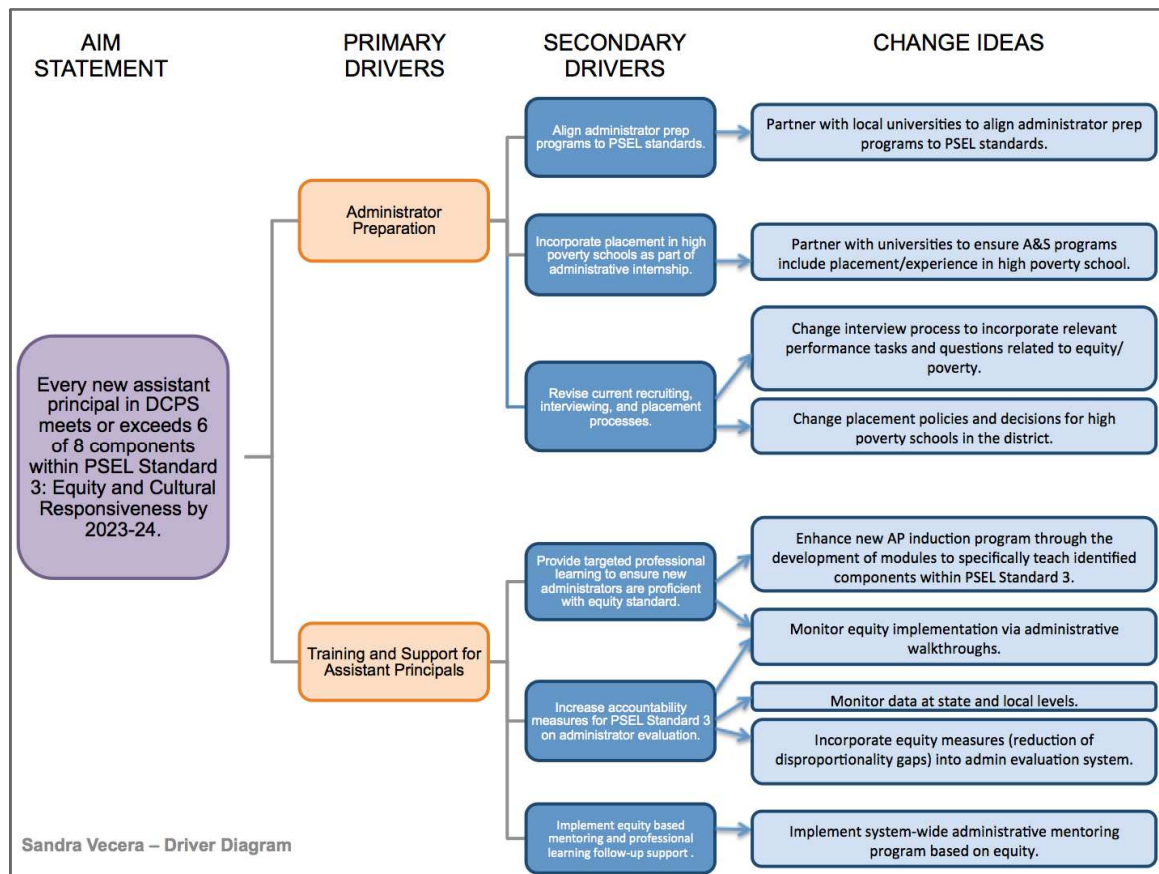
Administrator Preparation. Statewide, every school-based administrator must have a certification in Administration and Supervision (A&S) prior to taking on the role. Currently, DCPS partners with at least five universities in the state to support teachers in obtaining their leadership certification. Leadership cohorts are offered to current teachers

at a reduced tuition rate and in partnership with the universities. The components and major focus areas of an effective administrator preparation program are described in Table 2.

Table 2

Research on Administrator Preparation Programs

Source	Components	Major Focus Areas
Brown (2006)	● Rigorous admissions criteria ● Coursework grounded in practice rather than theory ● Fieldwork experiences observing, participating and reflecting on leadership ● Focused on standards with rigorous completion criteria ● Internships in diverse settings	● Leadership Skills ● Academic Achievement ● High Standards for All Students
Darling-Hammond et al. (2007)	● Active support of candidates including mentoring, cohort groups, advising, and financial support. ● Inclusion of a robust internship ● Strong relationships between the university and the school system ● Well-designed and aligned coursework	● Instructional Leadership ● Organizational Development ● Change Management
Gates et al. (2019)	● Active recruitment of pre-service candidates ● Develop both internal and external pre-service courses ● Grounded in leadership standards and aligned to school system ● Investment of resources for principal pipeline preparation ● Extended on the job clinical experience	● Student Achievement
Southern Regional Education Board (2005)	● Collaboration between university and local school system ● Real-world activities linked to an internship ● Assignments designed to apply knowledge and skills ● Experiences observing, participating and leading school-based activities ● Field placements in diverse settings ● Ongoing supervision and rigorous evaluation	● School Improvement ● Student Achievement ● Ability to work with others ● Sound instructional practices

Based on the literature in Table 2, the secondary drivers related to the primary driver of administrator preparation are (see Figure 5):

- Align administrator preparation programs to PSEL Standards. Each of the studies mentioned either the importance of standards-based preparation programs or of alignment between the university and the school system to prepare administrators. DCPS should ensure all preparatory programs are aligned to the PSEL Standards because they are the leadership standards currently used in the district to support and evaluate school-based administrators. Enhanced partnerships between local universities and the school system would also be beneficial to ensure alignment of coursework and school system priorities.

- Incorporate placement in high-poverty schools as part of the administrative internship. Another theme that emerged from the literature is the importance of the administrative internship, which may be referred to as field placements or clinical experience. Additionally, each of the studies emphasized the importance of student achievement and/or school improvement as major focus areas. DCPS needs to partner with local universities to reconsider its current internship expectations to ensure all candidates receiving their A&S certification have a robust internship in a diverse school setting focusing on student achievement and the closing of gaps.

- Revise current recruiting, interviewing and placement processes. Several studies discussed the importance of recruiting and selection of candidates for leadership certification. A more rigorous selection process may lead to higher performing administrators. Alignment between the university and school system is also

relevant in considering the interviewing and placement process for administrators in DCPS. With better alignment, DCPS decision makers would be more involved in preparatory programs and could make better informed decisions about who to promote and where to place them for a successful experience.

Each of these secondary drivers is a critical part of administrator preparation in DCPS. Change initiatives aligned to these drivers may move the system closer to the aim of increasing proficiency in PSEL Standards among assistant principals. The change ideas identified in Figure 5 require partnering with either local universities or offices within DCPS, both of which are outside of the researcher's scope of control. For this reason, this primary driver will not be explored further in this study.

Training and Support for Assistant Principals. Because the aim of the current study targets new administrators, this section hones in on best practices in induction for new administrators. Table 3 highlights the literature on this topic. Trends and themes will be discussed in detail as related to the Driver Diagram.

Table 3

Research on Administrator Induction Programs

Source	Components	Major Focus Areas
California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (2016)	- Learning grounded in practice - Collegial networks - Mentoring or coaching - A learning continuum throughout admin. career - Connected to standards and accountability	- Classroom Practice - Observations - Models of Leadership - Study Groups and Ongoing Support for Problem Solving
Darling-Hammond et al. (2007)	- Connect theory and practice - Coaching and mentoring - Collaborative learning through ongoing networks - Ongoing professional development that is standards-based	- Instruction - Organizational Development - Change Management
Gates et al. (2019)	- Three years of standards-based support aligned to administrator evaluation process - Continuous feedback through a mentor or coach - Provide on the job professional development - Provide support via teams and networks	- Student Achievement - Instructional Leadership
Hall (2008)	- Providing honest feedback - Problem analysis and decision making - Focus on lifelong learning as a leader	Mentoring
Southern Regional Education Board (2005)	- Regular opportunities to develop knowledge and skills - Ongoing mentoring - Opportunity to reflect on classroom practices - Increased rigor for the evaluation of principal candidates	- Continuous Improvement related to Curriculum, Instruction, and Student Achievement - Leadership Practices

Based on this research, the following three secondary drivers have been identified related to the primary driver of administrator training and support (see Figure 5):

- Provide targeted professional learning to ensure new administrators are proficient with the equity standard. Each of the studies emphasizes the importance of professional development for administrators, sometimes referred to as lifelong learning, opportunities to reflect, or standards-based professional learning. No matter what it is called, the literature is clear high-quality professional development must be a key part of administrator induction programs. The training must be ongoing, grounded in practice, and aligned to standards. Since the current study's aim targets components within the PSEL equity standard, professional development for new administrators in DCPS must be aligned to components of leading with equity in mind.

- Increase accountability measures for PSEL Standard 3 on administrator evaluation. The majority of the research on this topic emphasizes the importance of accountability connected to administrator induction. Some of the studies explicitly mention administrator evaluation while others highlight the importance of honest feedback or continuous improvement. DCPS currently evaluates school-based administrators using PSEL Standard 3; however, the evaluation does not focus on all components within the equity standard. DCPS would benefit from a more rigorous focus on equity as a part of administrator evaluations, including elevated measures of student equity data and a renewed focus on decreasing equity gaps for students in poverty.

- Implement equity-based mentoring and professional learning follow-up support. Each study mentioned mentoring or coaching as a crucial component of any effective induction program. There was significant discussion of the importance of the mentee/mentor match, mentors' training, and the feedback process for new administrators. Importantly, feedback for new administrators should include constant questioning and analysis. While DCPS has a mentoring program established for new administrators, the process could be enhanced by focusing on equity, providing more rigorous training for mentors, and analyzing the effectiveness of the current mentor/mentee matches.

The research in Table 3 summarizes induction programs for all administrators and does not focus solely on high-poverty or Title I schools. Gates et.al. (2019) conducted a subgroup analysis focused on high-minority, high-poverty schools and found that investing in a principal pipeline initiative had a statistically significant positive effect on student achievement. Gates et al. concluded that "the lowest-performing schools in PPI (principal pipeline initiative) districts benefited in meaningful ways from improvements in school leadership" (p.69). A report prepared by the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (2016) found:

administrators who participate in innovative induction programs report significantly higher perceptions of their training and stronger leadership outcomes... [and] administrators who participated in exemplary induction programs that included school visits, peer observations and principal networking were judged to be much more effective than administrators who participated in traditional, less intensive induction programs. (p. 15)

The quality of administrator induction matters for students in poverty and thus is the focus of this study. To reiterate, the aim of the current study is for every new assistant principal in DCPS meets or exceeds six of eight components within PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness by 2023-24. The theory of action outlined in Figure 6 illustrates how this aim could be achieved. The primary driver on which to focus is training and support for assistant principals, which is in the researcher's sphere of influence. The secondary driver is to provide targeted professional learning to ensure new administrators (i.e., within their first two years on the job) are proficient with the equity standard (PSEL Standard 3). The change idea is to enhance the current new assistant principal (AP) induction program through the development of modules to specifically teach identified components within PSEL Standard 3.

Figure 6

Theory of Action: Driver Diagram
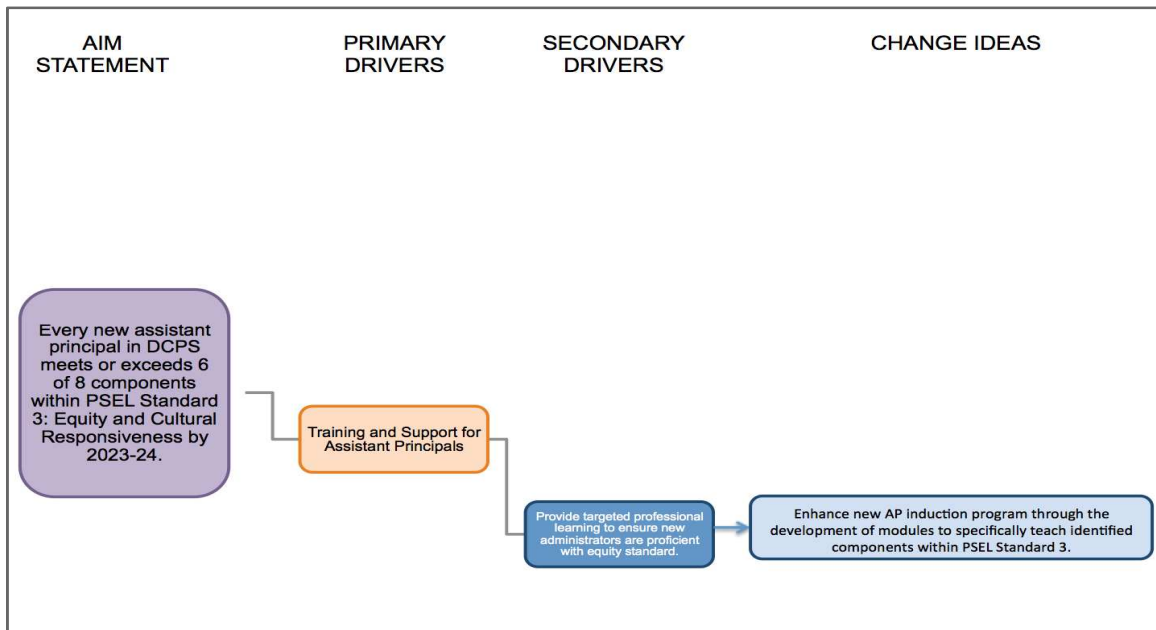
Description and Analysis of Prior Attempts

DCPS prides itself on celebrating and embracing diversity. The school system consistently attempts to meet the needs of its diverse student body, yet opportunity and access gaps persist for many student groups, including students of color, those who are economically disadvantaged, those receiving special education services, and those receiving English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services. This section details the district's previous attempts to increase administrator knowledge related to equity in general, as well as specific strategies for students in poverty.

Cultural Proficiency Training

Since 2007, DCPS has invested heavily in cultural proficiency training. A new office was created with multiple staff members dedicated to this work. According to the school system website, "Cultural Proficiency is a process and framework that engages a person to become aware of their assumptions, bias, beliefs, and values, in order to better serve the students they work with" (DCPS, 2020, para. 1). This training is available to all staff, including administrators, but it is optional. There is no mandatory cultural proficiency staff training in Delling County Public Schools. Therefore, an employee could go from teacher to assistant principal to principal without ever having experienced a single in-service lesson in cultural proficiency. Furthermore, DCPS defines cultural proficiency as a journey about oneself, which requires individuals to reflect on themselves, such as their own experiences and biases, in order to serve others; it does not teach about poverty. The cultural proficiency training topics cover broad concepts of diversity and equity. These trainings do not provide participants the strategies and skills needed to meet the needs of students in poverty.

Poverty Matters Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Course

In an attempt to supplement cultural proficiency training, a continuing education course called Poverty Matters began in 2013. The course targeted teachers and other staff who were interested in gaining knowledge, skills, and strategies for effectively working with students and families in poverty. While this course sought to teach the content needed to meet the needs of students in poverty, it was optional and only 17 of about 200 school-based administrators chose to take the course from 2013 through 2019.

Administrator Professional Learning and Induction

All administrators are required to attend a full-day training led by school system officials each month. Depending on the system's strategic focus for the school year, these sessions cover content like policy updates, school-based data discussions, and equity. At least one session was dedicated to poverty in the last few years, but it was offered as an optional breakout choice and no one was mandated to attend. Furthermore, the sessions could be described as a "one and done" rather than an intensive, targeted professional learning that incorporates follow-up sessions throughout the year.

Because the monthly administrator meetings cover a large breadth of topics, additional programs have been designed to meet the specific needs of administrators new to the role. The school system currently has a new principal program, a new assistant principal program, and a leadership intern program. Each of these programs is evidence-based and touches on topics related to equity in alignment with the system's strategic plan. This paper focuses on the new assistant principal (AP) development program, which is a two-year differentiated program. The two main components of the new AP program are monthly professional learning sessions and a professional learning team (PLT). The

monthly professional learning sessions aim to give the new APs the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the new role and are aligned to the PSEL Standards, although they are covered at the standard, not element level. The PLT meets eight times over the two years and includes mentors and other supports for the new AP. The purpose of the PLT is to help the new AP grow in both a non-evaluative and evaluative way through assignments and collaborative discussions with members of the PLT. While the placement of administrators into the new AP program is differentiated based on the prior experiences of the newly promoted AP, the content is not. The new AP program has no explicit connection for how to work with students in poverty, nor are administrators from high-poverty schools given priority or extended learning during their induction experience. The program operates from a system level. Every AP gets either one or two years of support, depending on internship experience, receives the same content during the professional learning sessions, and has the same assignments during their PLT experience.

Critical Analysis of Possible Solutions

Gates et al. (2019, p. 30) outlined four components to a successful principal pipeline initiative:

1. Developing leader standards

2. Ensuring high quality pre-service preparation

3. Revising hiring and placement procedures

4. Implementing on-the-job evaluation and support

This study focuses on the fourth component: implementing on-the-job evaluation and support; specifically, this study focuses on implementing support. When planning support

and professional learning for administrators, it is essential the support is standards-based and grounded in sound practices. Included in their vision, mission and beliefs section, Learning Forward (2020) postulates that, "When all educators engage in high-quality professional learning, all students experience equity and excellence in teaching and learning" (para 11). It is critical that the induction program experienced by DCPS assistant principals is of the highest quality and focused on equity. Likewise, it is also important to consider the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, which according to NPBEA, 2015):

> [The PSEL Standards] are student-centric, outlining foundational principles of leadership to guide the practice of educational leaders so they can move the needle on student learning and achieve more equitable outcomes. They're designed to ensure that educational leaders are ready to effectively meet the challenges and opportunities of the job today and in the future as education, schools and society continue to transform. (p. 1)

Using the standards from Learning Forward and PSEL to guide this work in DCPS, a successful and effective induction program can be developed for new APs.

The quality of school leaders matters when it comes to student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004). More specifically, "Assistant principals, as leaders in their schools, are well positioned to make important contributions to school and student success" (Goldring et al., 2021, p. 75). The way we produce effective school leaders is through a standards-based induction program (Gates et al., 2019). Investing in administrator induction leads to increases in achievement for students (California County Superintendents Educational Services Association [CCSESA], 2016; Gates et al., 2019).

Furthermore, a high-quality induction program can lead to increased perceptions of leadership effectiveness among teachers as well as higher leadership outcomes for the leaders themselves (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Training for leaders should include standards-based professional learning which use on-the-job observations, readings, and discussions to prepare future leaders (CCSESA, 2016). In the context of the focus of this study, which is on reducing opportunity gaps for students in poverty through increased administrator performance, on-the-job observations, readings, and discussions should directly relate to equity and poverty. Hernandez and Marshall (2017) suggested a successful way to train leaders is by

> asking future leaders to reflect upon their personal experiences and beliefs around poverty and race/ethnicity seems to be helpful when it is accompanied by assignments which also require future leaders to analyze data and create an action plan to redress inequities. (pp. 221-222)

According to Gates et al. (2019), investing in future leaders, including the principal pipeline, works for improving student achievement outcomes.

Much of the research on the success of school-based administrators focuses on the success of the principal (Brown, 2006; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Gates, et al., 2019; Kose, 2009); however, the principal pipeline starts long before a principal's first day on the job. The principal pipeline begins in the classroom, when teachers take an interest in school leadership and when staff sign up for an A&S program. The literature points to the importance of a high-quality preparation program for school leaders (CCSESA, 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Gates et al., 2019). What is missing from DCPS and therefore, the focus of this paper, is what happens in between this initial

interest in principalship and the placement of the staff into the role of a principal. Prior studies indicate that effective principals are essential to student success in high-poverty schools. Existing research also supports the importance of pre-service preparation and on-the-job training for school leaders. An investment in our APs who are in the principal pipeline makes a difference in improving our leadership. A high-quality, differentiated, standards-based induction program for new APs would also make a positive difference for students in poverty. Emerging research suggests that assistant principals can have a positive impact on school outcomes and can be leaders for equity in their buildings as long as the proper training is in place (Goldring et al., 2021). Waiting until someone is promoted to principal is too late to begin the journey of understanding the needs of students in poverty. DCPS must focus on supporting educational equity and the needs of diverse students through equipping each administrator with relevant skills and knowledge, beginning with new APs. The school system has recently implemented an induction program for new APs and there is room for improvement related to educational equity. Improving the system's school-based leaders through better in-service training focused on supporting students living in poverty can propel the school system forward to be a high-performing school system for all students.

Summary and Statement of Purpose for Proposed Investigation

Poverty is a significant factor in determining the academic outcomes for students in U.S. public schools (Budge & Parrett, 2018; Jensen, 2009). If students' needs are not met in school, the impacts and consequences are far reaching for our youth, including higher dropout rates, a lifetime of lower paying jobs, and sometimes even criminal activity and time spent in prison (Couloute, 2018; Lynch, 2014). It is the responsibility of

every public school system in the US to educate and support every student who comes through their doors, including students in poverty.

Poverty does not need to be an indicator of success or failure for our students. Through effective school leadership, outcomes for students in poverty can be improved (Gates et al., 2019). According to Gates et al.:

> pipeline activities, if done well, have potential to improve the quality of the people leading schools and in particular, the quality of those newly hired into leadership positions. They represent an investment in better leaders and, in turn, better teachers and better and more-equitable outcomes for kids. (p. 5)

It is essential that school districts invest in training assistant principals who are ready to step up into the principalship when called upon to do so.

One major factor that needed to be explored further in DCPS was that of administrator induction, specifically, the support provided to new assistant principals during their first two years in the role. The change initiative for this study is to enhance the existing system-wide induction program for new assistant principals by focusing on all elements within PSEL Standard 3 in order to increase knowledge, skills, and capacity related to leading with equity. The change initiative will be differentiated and measured by using PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness. **If** I can determine the current skill level of new APs related to equity measured through the components within PSEL standard 3, **then** I can design, develop, and implement an equity-based intervention for all new administrators that leads to them increasing their skills, knowledge and capacity related to PSEL Standard 3. **And** all new administrators will be better prepared

and more effective in their roles, (they will have met or exceeded 6 out of 8 elements within PSEL Standard 3).

Therefore, the purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore the current knowledge of new APs related to equity (as measured by knowledge of and proficiency in PSEL Standard 3) as well as to determine their needs for induction related to equity. New assistant principals (within their first two years in the role) have completed a baseline knowledge survey as well as participated in interviews for this study. Data were collected through a survey and interviews. Additionally, a document analysis was conducted to triangulate the data. Recommendations are shared regarding potential improvements to the DCPS induction program based on the current findings.

<p style="text-align: center;">**Section II: The Investigation**</p>

Purpose Statement

Based on the extensive literature review detailed in the previous sections, it is evident that a principal pipeline must be well established in order for school districts to be successful in closing opportunity gaps for students in poverty. Additionally, one component of that principal pipeline initiative must be a standards-based induction program for new administrators. With that in mind, the purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore the current knowledge of new APs related to equity (as measured by knowledge of and proficiency with PSEL Standard 3) as well as to determine their needs for induction related to equity. Participants were new APs within their first two years in the role and they have completed a baseline knowledge survey as well as participated in one-on-one interviews for this study. Data were collected through a survey and interviews. The data were further triangulated with a document analysis of induction program materials, including agendas and feedback forms.

Research Questions

Three research questions guide this study:

1. For which of the elements of PSEL Standard 3 do new APs rate their practice as effective or highly effective?

2. What do new APs perceive as the key administrative practices needed to achieve equity and cultural responsiveness?

3. What barriers or challenges do new APs report that prevent them from meeting or exceeding PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness?

<p style="text-align: center;">62</p>

Design

The study employed a sequential mixed method design. The quantitative portion was conducted first and consisted of a survey of all assistant principals in DCPS with at least six months in the position but no more than two years to obtain their self-reported level of knowledge and specific skills related to PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness. According to Allen (2017), "Quantitative research is a way to learn about a particular group of people, known as a sample population. Using scientific inquiry, quantitative research relies on data that are observed or measured to examine questions about the sample population" (p. 1378). The quantitative portion of this study was accomplished through a web-based survey using the Qualtrics platform. The survey asked APs to rate their current practice by indicating which of the given prompts based on elements within PSEL 3 they felt their current practice was either *effective* or *highly effective*. The researcher chose not to include other ratings such as *ineffective* or *developing* in order to fully focus on those behaviors and practices for which APs felt their current practice was already effective in alignment with research question one. Results from the survey were used to inform the qualitative part of the study which consisted of individual interviews with a sample of new APs. In all, 64% (9 out of 14) of the new APs participated in the survey and 43% (6 out of 14) of the new APs participated in the interviews. Interviews allowed the researcher to go deeper in exploring and understanding the current state of knowledge and practices of the new APs. The interviews also allowed the researcher to dig deeper into the behaviors needed to reach the desired state of practice as well as barriers prohibiting APs from reaching those practices. Based on their self-reported strengths and weaknesses among PSEL Standard

3 indicators, the researcher leveraged the interviews to more deeply explore the new APs'
understanding of their current state as well as their desired state of skills and their needs.
The use of a sequential mixed methods design enabled the researcher to not only
determine new APs' self-reported current level of knowledge of PSEL Standard 3
elements, it also allowed the researcher to obtain a deeper understanding of participants'
perceptions of PSEL Standard 3 and their current skills and practices. The mixed methods
study was further enhanced by using a document analysis of school system induction
materials to triangulate findings from the survey and interviews.

Participants

The participants recruited for this study were all new APs in DCPS who had been
appointed to the position between June 2019 and May 2021. Thus, they had served as an
AP for no more than two years. According to DCPS data, 14 APs that met this criterion
as of May 2021. These APs represented a variety of schools across the district, including
Title I and non-Title I schools. The racial and cultural demographics of the schools were
also varied. Included in the pool of 14 were three high school APs (21%), five middle
school APs (36%), and six elementary school APs (43%). Of the 14 new APs, five were
in their first year (36%) and nine were in their second year (64%). All 14 APs were
contacted via school system email and invited to participate in the research study.

After gaining approval for this study from the University of Maryland
Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the school district, the researcher emailed the 14
new APs in DCPS and invited them to participate in the survey. The recruitment email
included background information on the researcher, the purpose of the study, that it was
being conducted as part of the requirements of a Doctor of Education program, and a

brief explanation of the task and time commitment to complete the survey. (See Appendix A for the email.) The email briefly explained that the anonymous survey asked respondents to rate their knowledge and proficiency in the components within PSEL Standard 3. The email also said that the survey would take no more than five minutes to complete and did not link responses to an individual. It was also made clear that participation in the study was completely voluntary and that participants could stop participating at any point in the study with no negative impact on their job. The APs were asked to click a link in the email to be taken to the first page of the survey, which was the electronic consent form. The survey remained open for two weeks and one additional recruitment email reminder was sent to APs one week into the survey window (see Appendix B).

Survey Participants. Of the 14 new APs invited to participate, nine completed the survey, which is a completion rate of 64%. Based on survey data from the nine, five (56%) of the new APs who chose to participate were placed in elementary schools, three (33%) were from middle schools and one (11%) was from a high school; the elementary level was slightly over-represented among survey participants. In addition, one-third of the nine APs who completed the survey had one year of experience while two-thirds had completed two years in the role.

Interview Participants. Each AP that completed the survey was asked if s/he was willing to participate in a one-hour individual follow up interview conducted using Zoom. Survey participants were asked to click "yes" and then email the researcher directly to express interest. If a participant did not agree to an interview, they clicked no. Either way, the survey closed and results were reported in Qualtrics. This procedure

allowed the survey responses to remain anonymous to the researcher. Because the researcher knew the six APs who participated in the interviews, the interview responses were not anonymous like the survey; however the interview responses did remain confidential. Following the analysis of the survey responses, the researcher contacted all six of the new APs who expressed an interest in being interviewed via email (see Appendix E). Once a mutually agreeable time was decided upon, the researcher contacted each individual AP who agreed to participate in a follow up interview one additional time in order to confirm the interview date and time and provide the Zoom link and consent form (see Appendix F). Of the nine new APs who took the survey, six agreed to participate in the interview portion of the study. All six were interviewed. Of the six total interview participants, two (33%) were from middle school and four (66%) were from elementary school. Additionally, two (33%) were in their first year and four (66%) were in their second year as an AP.

Methods/Procedures

The following section presents the instruments and methods used in this research study.

The Survey

The survey was intended to answer research question one: For which of the elements of PSEL Standard 3 do new APs rate their practice as effective or highly effective? An anonymous web-based survey using Qualtrics (https://www.qualtrics.com) was the data collection tool for the quantitative portion of this study. The first page of the survey was an electronic consent form for participants (see Appendix C). Once they consented and selected "yes" on the survey, they were directed to another page that

contained the actual survey questions. If they selected "no" and chose not to participate, then the survey closed. In total, nine new APs provided consent and participated in the survey. Five of the 14 possible participants did not participate in the survey.

The survey, which can be found in Appendix D, began with two general questions asking participants' number of years in the role and level of school assignment. These questions were followed by one more specific question, which was based on PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness (see Figure 7). PSEL Standard 3 was used because the PSEL Standards are the official standards used to evaluate administrators in DCPS and statewide. For this question, participants selected one or more indicators for which they felt their current practice was either *effective* or *highly effective* as defined by the State Department of Education. Figure 8 displays the state's 2019 PSEL Standards Rubric. The indicators from the *effective* column in Figure 9 were used to develop the survey items for this study. As illustrated in Figure 9, the State Department of Education aligns each of the effective indicators to an element within PSEL Standard 3. The survey items allowed the researcher to assess which elements within PSEL Standard 3 APs perceived themselves to be effective in their practice and which ones were areas of growth. As was previously discussed, the final survey question asked APs if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview to explore these concepts further.

Figure 7

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders: Standard 3

STANDARD 3. EQUITY AND CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

a) Ensure that each student is treated fairly, respectfully, and with an understanding of each student's culture and context.

b) Recognize, respect, and employ each student's strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning.

c) Ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and other resources necessary for success.

d) Develop student policies and address student misconduct in a positive, fair, and unbiased manner.

e) 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.

f) Promote the preparation of students to live productively in and contribute to the diverse cultural contexts of a global society.

g) Act with cultural competence and responsiveness in their interactions, decision making, and practice.

h) Address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership.

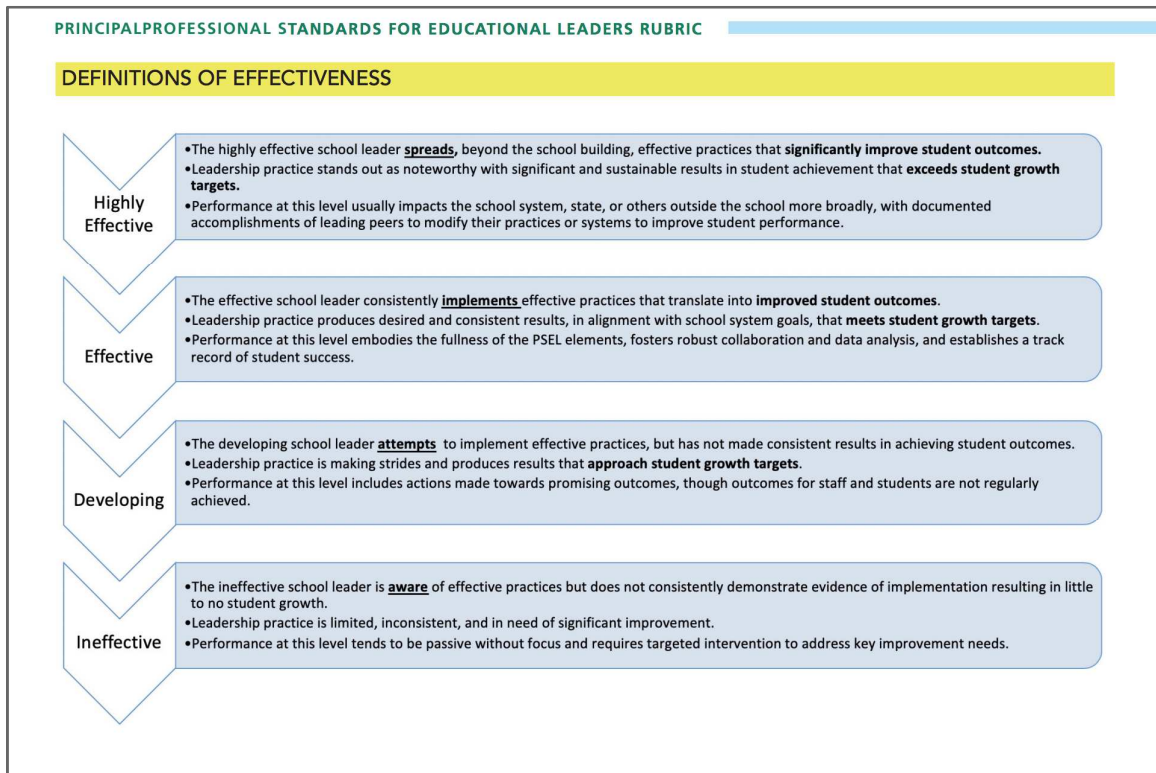*Note*. From *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders*, 2015, https://www.npbea.org/psel/. Copyright 2015 by National Policy Board for Educational Administration Alliance for Advancing School Leadership. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 8

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders Rubric: Definitions of Effectiveness

PRINCIPALPROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS RUBRIC

DEFINITIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS

Highly Effective
- The highly effective school leader **spreads,** beyond the school building, effective practices that **significantly improve student outcomes.**
- Leadership practice stands out as noteworthy with significant and sustainable results in student achievement that **exceeds student growth targets.**
- Performance at this level usually impacts the school system, state, or others outside the school more broadly, with documented accomplishments of leading peers to modify their practices or systems to improve student performance.

Effective
- The effective school leader consistently **implements** effective practices that translate into **improved student outcomes**.
- Leadership practice produces desired and consistent results, in alignment with school system goals, that **meets student growth targets**.
- Performance at this level embodies the fullness of the PSEL elements, fosters robust collaboration and data analysis, and establishes a track record of student success.

Developing
- The developing school leader **attempts** to implement effective practices, but has not made consistent results in achieving student outcomes.
- Leadership practice is making strides and produces results that **approach student growth targets**.
- Performance at this level includes actions made towards promising outcomes, though outcomes for staff and students are not regularly achieved.

Ineffective
- The ineffective school leader is **aware** of effective practices but does not consistently demonstrate evidence of implementation resulting in little to no student growth.
- Leadership practice is limited, inconsistent, and in need of significant improvement.
- Performance at this level tends to be passive without focus and requires targeted intervention to address key improvement needs.

Note. From *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders Rubric*, 2019,

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Figure 9

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders Rubric: Standard 3

Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness

AN INEFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADER...	A DEVELOPING SCHOOL LEADER...	AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADER...	A HIGHLY EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADER...
Inconsistently... Demonstrates equitable and culturally responsive2 practices. (h) Provides student access to learning experiences that promote equity3 and culturally responsiveness2. (a, b) Demonstrates an understanding of data related to course enrollment, educator effectiveness, student achievement, and school climate. (c, f) Demonstrates an understanding of local, state, and federal laws, regulations, or policies that foster equitable practices. (g, h)	Communicates equity3 and cultural responsiveness2 as a priority. (h) Demonstrates understanding of data related to equity3 such as school climate, educator effectiveness, course enrollment, and student achievement. (a, b) Uses data to identify achievement gaps among student groups. (c, f) Identifies institutional and school biases. (e) Improves student policies based on his/her perspective. (d) Provides students accommodations and services in accordance with local, state, and federal laws, regulations, or policies. (g, h)	...reaches the "developing" level and... Implements and expects equity and cultural responsiveness2 initiatives. (h) Collaboratively establishes specific and measurable goals for equity3 that are informed by data and are in alignment with student needs. (a, b) Collaboratively develops and implements an action plan to address the disproportionality of inequities. (a, c, e) Collects and analyzes data to monitor progress towards achieving equity goals and informing continuous improvement. (c, f) Partners with stakeholders to provide learning experiences and resources for all student groups that promote cultural responsiveness2 and equitable practices. (c, e) Aligns and allocates resources to foster equitable student learning environments (This includes but is not limited to access to high-quality instructional materials, effective educators, rigorous courses, and extracurricular experiences.) (c, f) Holds self and staff accountable for engaging in equitable and culturally responsive practices. (a, g) Aligns and coordinates student services to address student needs and promote student academic success and well-being. (c) Involves stakeholders in the development or revision of school policies that promote equitable and culturally responsive practices. (d)	...reaches and maintains the "effective" level and... Informs school system, state or, professional organizations on matters related to equity3 and/or cultural responsiveness2. Serves as a coach or mentor for other school leaders to support the implementation of equitable leadership practices.

2 Cultural responsiveness: Refers to a disposition of valuing the cultures and contexts of others as an asset to learning, (https://www.ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/Leading%20for%20Equity_011618.pdf)

3 Equity: All student groups (e.g. Race, sexual orientation, learning disability) have full access to educational opportunities. (https://www.ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/Leading%20for%20Equity_011618.pdf)

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Individual Interviews

The qualitative aspect of the study involved one-on-one interviews with the new APs. The individual interviews for this study were intended to answer research questions two and three: What do new APs perceive as the key administrative practices needed to

achieve equity and cultural responsiveness? and What barriers or challenges do new APs report that prevent them from meeting or exceeding PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness? According to Babbie (2019), qualitative interviews allow the researcher to be a "miner" of information. For this study, the interviews allowed the researcher to dig deeper into the perceptions of new APs regarding their knowledge and skills, as well as their perceived needs for further professional learning. For example, whereas the survey responses allowed the researcher to gauge new APs' self-perceived level of knowledge related to culturally-responsive strategies, the interview process allowed the researcher to better understand the specific behaviors or actions taken by APs, facilitating a more concrete mapping of skills to perceived knowledge in alignment with PSEL Standard 3. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data together produced rich information to create a picture of the current state that also informs the desired future state.

Following the completion of the survey, the interview portion of the study began. The researcher contacted each AP interested in a follow-up interview via email (see Appendices E and F). One-hour virtual interviews were scheduled with each AP at mutual convenience. All interviews were recorded via Zoom and transcribed through Zoom's transcription software. Participants signed an electronic consent form (see Appendix H) prior to participation in the virtual interview and also understood the interviews were being recorded.

Each interview consisted of six open-ended questions (see Appendix G for the full interview protocol). The interview questions were adapted based on the results of the survey. The interview began with two overarching questions about PSEL Standard 3. The

first question was "Think about a time when this standard was animated in practice either by you or another leader. I'd like you to take a few moments to think about that. What did it look like in action? Tell me about what that looked like. What activities were you engaging in or seeing in practice?" The research prompted the participants to reflect on this question for two minutes and write notes on a piece of paper as they were reflecting. Additionally, the researcher displayed PSEL Standard 3 on the shared Zoom screen so participants could see it as they reflected on their examples. After the two minutes, the researcher prompted the participants to share their thinking around PSEL Standard 3 in action. Next the researcher asked a question related to barriers. The question was "What gets in the way of accomplishing this work in your school?"

As the interview progressed, the questions became more specific and probed the individual AP's actions or specific behaviors with respect to identified elements of PSEL Standard 3. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix G. For each question 1.1-1.3, the identified standard elements were displayed on the screen and then the question was asked about that element. A sample interview prompt is, "Tell me about a time when you did this element or saw this element from another leader. What did this element look like in action?" The interviewer then paused to allow reflection time. After listening to the response, the interviewer followed up with, "Are there barriers that prevent you from leading in this way more often? Can you tell me about those?" The final question asked by the researcher was, "Is there anything else you want me to know related to equity and the current induction program in DCPS?"

By obtaining qualitative information collected from the interviews and triangulating this information with the survey data, the researcher was able to gain a clear

picture of the baseline knowledge level related to PSEL Standard 3 among new APs. Additionally, the data suggested the key administrative behaviors APs felt were indicative of equity-based leadership and the barriers that prevented them from leading in that way.

Analysis

Survey and interview responses were analyzed for common trends and themes.

Survey Analysis

The survey measured participants' self-reported efficacy in PSEL Standard 3 to answer research question one: For which of the elements of PSEL Standard 3 do new APs rate their practice as effective or highly effective? Responses from the survey were analyzed using Qualtrics analytics, which generated a report for each survey question. Survey results were intended to reveal the current state of new APs' knowledge of and proficiency in each component within PSEL Standard 3, such as which components were known and used most often among new APs as well as which components needed to be emphasized in future professional learnings as reported by the new APs. After cross-referencing the responses with the elements within PSEL Standard 3, as well as ranking the eight components, the researcher adjusted the interview questions to better address the current state of the APs. The results of the survey will be discussed in detail in the following section.

Interview Analysis

The individual interviews helped answer research questions two and three: What do new APs perceive as the key administrative practices needed to achieve equity and cultural responsiveness? And what barriers or challenges do new APs report that prevent

them from meeting or exceeding PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness? Each interview was recorded and transcribed using Zoom's transcription software. Each transcript was copied into a word document, reviewed, and coded to identify:

- actions, behaviors, or practices to describe what each PSEL Standard 3 element looks like in practice;

- barriers preventing new APs from achieving these practices; and

- professional learning needed to perform this component in a highly-effective manner.

Document Analysis

In order to triangulate the information obtained via the survey and analysis of individual interviews, a document analysis was completed. According to Frey (2018) when used as part of a mixed methods study, the purpose of a document analysis is to help the researcher gain meaning and also corroborate or refute findings. In the present study, the researcher used the document analysis to determine if the knowledge and experiences as well as the gaps identified by the APs in the survey corresponded to the professional learning they received through their induction experience.

Existing district program overview documents, agendas, and staff feedback form responses were analyzed to help identify strengths and weaknesses among new APs in PSEL Standard 3 and in the current induction program. These documents were provided by the school system as a representative sample of the induction program. Program overview documents presented overarching themes and ideas central to the induction program. Agendas provided insight into the specific topics covered throughout each professional learning session of the program and feedback form responses provided

insight into the experiences of the new APs during the sessions. All documents were analyzed for equity content. Documents pertaining to equity were then further analyzed and the content was coded and categorized into the eight elements within PSEL Standard 3 as a way to determine if the gaps identified by APs on the survey aligned with the gaps identified from the document analysis. This provided additional insight into which elements needed to be included in the AP Induction Program in the future.

Using data gleaned from the survey and interviews, a gap analysis was conducted to determine the current state of new APs' proficiency in PSEL Standard 3. This analysis resulted in recommendations for how to enhance the district's induction program for new APs, which will be presented in further detail below.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

This study was approved by both the University of Maryland's IRB and the school district. Surveys, interview protocols, and appropriate documentation were submitted as part of the request to conduct research. The participants who took part in this study did so voluntarily. In order to protect participants, the following measures were implemented:

- New assistant principals were made aware of the study, the approval process, the researcher, the study purpose and goals, the expectations prior to engaging in the study, and time commitments for participating in the study.

- Participants are not identified by name or school.

- Participants provided electronic consent prior to responding to the survey.

- Participants provided electronic and verbal consent prior to being recorded for interviews.

- An established protocol was followed when collecting information from interviews.

- Aggregate data was used to support, or refute, study goals, not specific participants' feedback.

- Information collected is retained by the researcher electronically on a password-protected computer for seven years as is mandated by IRB.

- Any personally-identifiable information collected as part of this study will be destroyed at the completion of this research.

Section III: Results, Conclusions, and Implications

This section will first present the results of the survey, interviews, and document analysis. A discussion follows with an analysis of the collective findings organized by the research questions. Finally, the theory of action and improvement initiatives will be revisited as part of the impact section. Recommendations and implications for the school system will be discussed.

Results

Survey Results

The researcher emailed a link to the Qualtrics survey to all 14 new APs identified for the study using their school system email addresses. The new APs were given a two-week window to complete the anonymous, confidential survey. The full survey report can be found in Appendix I. Of the 14 new APs invited to participate, nine completed the survey, which is a completion rate of 64%. Based on survey responses, five of the new APs who chose to participate were placed in elementary schools, three were from middle schools, and one was from a high school. A third of the APs who took the survey had just completed their first year in the role and the remaining APs who completed the survey had finished two years in the role. The main purpose of the survey was to answer research question one: For which of the elements in PSEL Standard 3 do new APs rate their practice as effective or highly effective? Question 3 on the survey was designed according to the state department's rubric for effective practice to address this topic. Results for survey question 3 are presented in Figure 10.

Figure 10

Survey Question 3 Results

Q3 - Listed below are indicators of effective practice that align to PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness. For which of the following indicators do you perceive your current practice is effective or highly effective? This is a self-assessment and completely non-evaluative. Please check all that apply. I feel my current practice is effective/highly effective in the following areas:

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Implements equity and cultural responsiveness initiatives.	5
2	Shows high expectations for equity and cultural responsiveness.	8
3	Collaboratively establishes specific and measurable goals for equity that are informed by data and are in alignment with student needs.	3
4	Collaboratively develops an action plan to address the disproportionality of inequities.	6
5	Collaboratively implements an action plan to address the disproportionality of inequities.	5
6	Analyzes data to monitor progress towards achieving equity goals and informing continuous improvement.	4
7	Partners with stakeholders to provide learning experiences and resources for all student groups that promote cultural responsiveness and equitable practices.	6
8	Allocates resources to foster equitable student learning environments.	4
9	Holds self accountable for engaging in equitable and culturally responsive practices.	9
10	Holds staff accountable for engaging in equitable and culturally responsive practices.	7
11	Coordinates student services to address student needs.	8
12	Intentionally promotes student academic success and well-being.	8
13	Involves stakeholders in the development or revision of school policies that promote equitable and culturally responsive practices.	1
		74

Showing rows 1 - 14 of 14

Because the indicators of practice in the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders Standard 3 rubric did not align exactly to the elements within PSEL Standard 3, each of the elements within PSEL Standard 3 had to be cross referenced with the indicators of effective practice based on state's definition and compared to the information provided by the new APs. In other words, the indicators of effective practice

often aligned to more than one element within the standard so averages were calculated to represent each element. Tables 4 and 5 below detail the results of this process. Table 4 aligns each of the survey indicators to a PSEL element as defined by the state department of education. Table 5 then shows the process of calculating a percentage to represent each PSEL element based on the various indicators aligned to that element.

Table 4

Percentage of Respondents Who Self-Reported Effective or Highly Effective on Practice

Indicators Aligned to PSEL Standard 3 Elements

Indicators of Effective Practice (Adapted from state PSEL Standards Rubric)	PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness Element(s)	Respondents who self-rated their practice to be effective or highly effective	
		n	%
Implements equity and cultural responsiveness initiatives	H	5	56
Shows high expectations	H	8	89
Establishes goals informed by data	A, B	3	33
Develops action plan to address disproportionality of inequities	A, C, E	6	67
Implements action plan to address disproportionalities of inequities	A, C, E	5	56
Analyzes data	C, F	4	44
Partners with stakeholders to provide learning experiences	C, E	6	67
Allocates resources	C, F	4	44
Holds self accountable	A, G	9	100
Holds staff accountable	A, G	7	78
Coordinates student services	C	8	89
Promotes student academic success and well-being	C	8	89
Involves stakeholders in policies	D	1	11

Note. Nine new APs responded to the survey.

Table 5

PSEL Standard 3 Element Scores Based on AP Survey Ratings

PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness Element	Indicators aligned to each PSEL Standard 3 Element	APs who self-reported as effective or highly effective	Element score
A	Establishes goals informed by data	3	
	Develops action plan to address disproportionality of inequities	6	(3/9 + 6/9 + 5/9 + 9/9 + 7/9) ÷ 5 =
	Implements action plan to address disproportionalities of inequities	5	
	Holds self accountable	9	67%
	Holds staff accountable	7	
B*	Establishes goals informed by data	3	3/9 = 33%
C	Develops action plan to address disproportionality of inequities	6	
	Implements action plan to address disproportionalities of inequities	5	(6/9 + 5/9 + 4/9 + 6/9 + 4/9 + 8/9 + 8/9) ÷ 7 =
	Analyzes data	4	
	Partners with stakeholders to provide learning experiences	6	65%
	Allocates resources	4	
	Coordinates student services	8	
	Promotes student academic success and well-being	8	
D*	Involves stakeholders in policies	1	1/9 = 11%

E	Develops action plan to address disproportionality of inequities	6	
	Implements action plan to address disproportionalities of inequities	5	(6/9 + 5/9 + 6/9) ÷ 3 =
	Partners with stakeholders to provide learning experiences	6	63%
F*	Analyzes data	4	(4/9 + 4/9) ÷ 2 =
	Allocates resources	4	44%
G	Holds self accountable	9	(9/9 + 7/9) ÷ 2 =
	Holds staff accountable	7/9	89%
H	Implements equity and cultural responsiveness initiatives	5	(5/9 + 8/9) ÷ 2 =
	Shows high expectations	8	72%

Note. Nine new APs responded to the survey.
* Elements with the lowest scores.

The data suggest that new APs felt most effective in the following elements:

- A. Effective leaders ensure that each student is treated fairly, respectfully, and with an understanding of each student's culture and context.

- C. Effective leaders ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social supports, and other resources necessary for success.

- E. Effective leaders 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.

- G. Effective leaders act with cultural competence and responsiveness in their interactions, decision making, and practice.
- H. Effective leaders address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership.

The elements in which APs felt least effective were:

- B. Effective leaders recognize, respect, and employ each students' strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning.
- D. Effective leaders develop student policies and address student misconduct in a positive, fair and unbiased manner.
- F. Effective leaders promote the preparation of students to live productively in and contribute to the diverse cultural context of a global society.

Based on survey question three responses, elements B, D, and F were identified as the areas in which new APs felt least effective in their new roles. These elements were then used as part of the individual interviews with new APs. Those results will be discussed in further detail next.

The final question of the survey asked new APs if they would be willing to participate in an individual interview with the researcher to further explore the concepts elevated from the survey. Of the nine APs who participated in the survey, six were willing to be interviewed.

Interview Results

Six new APs indicated interest in participating in the individual interview portion of this research study. To protect the confidentiality of each participant, the APs were given a number and a pseudonym. The participants were: (1) David, (2) Bianca, (3) Hope, (4) Laura, (5) Connor, and (6) Danielle. The APs who volunteered had no more than two years in the role of AP and served in either elementary or middle schools within the district. The individual interviews addressed research questions two and three: What do new APs perceive as the key administrative practices needed to achieve equity and cultural responsiveness? and What barriers or challenges do new APs report that prevent them from meeting or exceeding PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness? The results are presented in this section. Key administrative behaviors will be discussed first followed by barriers and challenges.

Key Administrative Behaviors. Participants were asked to describe what equity and cultural responsiveness looks like in practice as well as to illuminate elements B, D, and F in practice. An analysis of the interviews suggested three primary themes: creating a sense of belonging for students, the importance of access to resources, and additional supports, which included connections to families and the community. Each primary theme was further subcategorized. Figure 11 is a graphic representation of these interview themes.

Figure 11

Key Administrative Actions, Behaviors, or Practices Related to PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
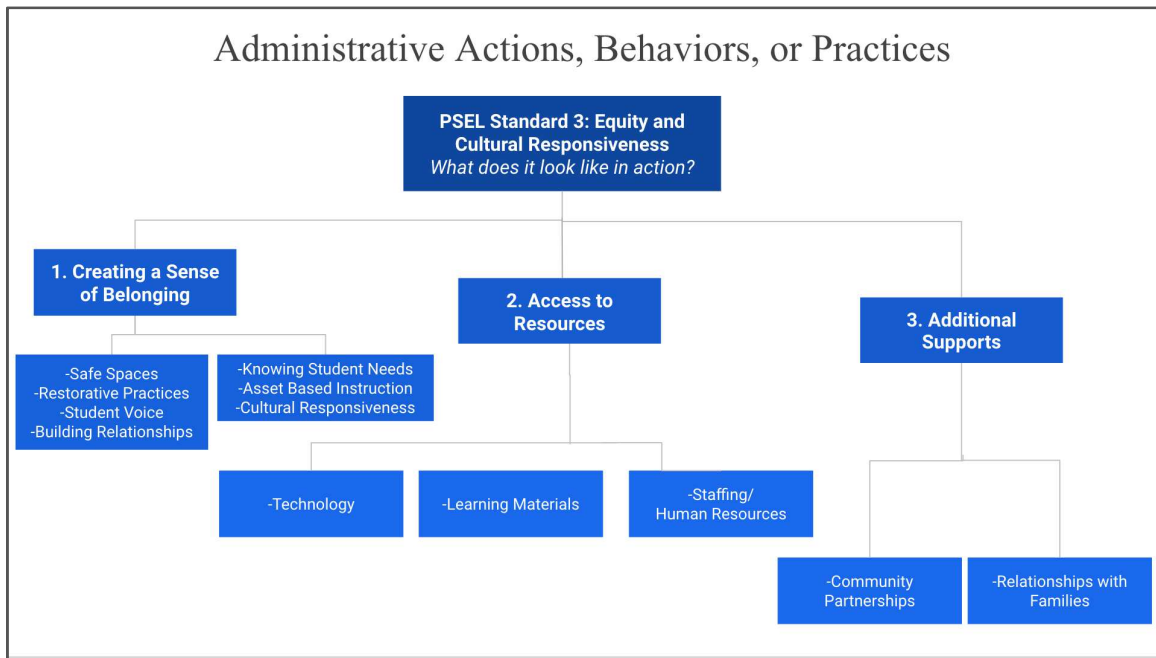
Creating a Sense of Belonging. During the interviews, all six new APs spoke to the importance of creating a sense of belonging for students in order to achieve equitable outcomes. According to the interviews, a sense of belonging includes the structures administrators put in place to create belongingness in a school building. It includes the way students are treated by staff, the openness of educators to receive their students regardless of differences, and the abilities of teachers to meet the needs of their students as learners. As one AP described, "They need to feel that sense of belonging here, they need to feel like this is a safe place where I feel respected." This primary theme can be broken down into two subcategories, both of which contribute to a sense of

belongingness for students. The first subcategory was social-emotional supports. APs described actions like using restorative practices and the need to keep kids in school rather than using more traditional discipline methods such as suspension. They also highlighted the need for creating a safe space for students, elevating student voice, and building authentic relationships with students. In their own words, APs shared the importance of "providing students with an opportunity to share their voice" and "promoting the well being of each individual child." The second subcategory was instructional supports. APs spoke about the importance of cultural responsiveness in teaching, including the books and materials chosen in the classroom. They also talked about the need to emphasize the assets students brought to class as well as knowing the needs of each learner. According to one AP, "Having knowledge of your students and understanding what they're good at is immensely helpful." Additional language from the interviews that fell into this primary theme is provided in Appendix J.

Creating a sense of belonging was emphasized by each of the six APs during the interview portion of the study. APs felt that students need to be nurtured, respected, and heard in order to be successful at school. Students must feel school is a place where they belong. They also need teachers who have the skills and strategies to teach them in a culturally-responsive manner. Creating a sense of belonging was the most prevalent theme raised by the new APs when discussing the behaviors and practices that lead to equity in practice.

Access to Resources. During the individual interviews, ensuring accessibility to resources was raised as a key administrative practice when ensuring equity for students by five of the six assistant principals. An important part of this discussion was how APs

themselves took responsibility for ensuring that access. They described going above and beyond during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure students had the needed technology and learning materials in their hands, as well as creatively using human resources to meet the needs of their students. One AP shared that "technology has been such a support to students" and added that once students have the technology in hand "they can access their world." Another AP said, "We're really looking at putting resources in place that serve people. That's the kinds of things we need to think about. That's what I think promotes, you know, equity in education." The most common resources elevated by the APs fell into three categories. The first was access to technology, which included student laptops during virtual learning and internet access throughout the pandemic. APs often described themselves as the primary person responsible for ensuring students had what they needed to be successful. One AP shared, "It was anything from as basic as access to Wi-Fi, and then reaching out to resources in the county to make sure that they could get a hotspot [despite] financial difficulties." The second category was access to learning materials or opportunities, such as hands-on math manipulatives to be used at home or access to extracurricular activities to support instruction. Several APs highlighted the urgency associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and getting resources into the hands of their students and families. "We had materials to support Language Arts, materials to support Math, we had hands-on art supplies…then we also created individual bags of math manipulatives and resources like mini whiteboard, markers." The third category was access to actual human resources. This topic was often raised in the context of having the appropriate staffing to support the needs of all students in the building and having well-trained staff who can meet the needs of diverse learners. APs specifically mentioned the

key roles of International Liaisons, GT teachers, and those who found authentic ways to connect with their students.

Access to resources was identified by APs as essential when leading with equity. Throughout five of the six interviews the new APs described the ways in which technology, learning materials, and human resources were essential to student success. Additional quotes from the interviews are provided in Appendix J to further illustrate this theme.

Additional Supports. The final theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of additional supports, more specifically, forming strong community partnerships and having meaningful parent/family relationships. This theme emerged in four of the six interviews. The new APs discussed community partnerships in the context of accessing donations and other resources for their school communities, often to fill gaps in funding or human resources. One AP described the following, "We started reaching out to different community organizations, ... and they've been incredible. They've donated thousands and thousands of dollars worth of goods to our school." Several APs also raised the issue of forming meaningful relationships with parents and families as essential to achieving equity for students. Working in collaboration with families was emphasized as an important step in supporting students within the school building. One AP described this in detail by saying, "the staff here really does seek to promote community, and move beyond just a positive home-school relationship, but actually looking at [our school] as an institution that is part of the community." Another AP added, "learning about what is important in each family, or each culture is definitely paramount to making those connections."

Additional supports such as community partnerships or relationships with families emerged in four of the six AP interviews as essential to leading with equity in mind. APs emphasized that they could not do everything alone and relied on their communities in order to provide students with the academic and well-being supports they needed to achieve success. Additional quotes from the interviews, which highlight this theme, are provided in Appendix J.

Barriers or Challenges. After each AP was asked to describe what equity and cultural responsiveness looks like in practice as well as asked to illuminate elements B, D, and F in practice, they were also asked what barriers or challenges prevent them from leading with equity and cultural responsiveness more often. Their interview responses were summarized into four major themes: systemic decisions and structures, staff mindset, demands of the AP role, and lack of access to resources. Each primary theme was further subcategorized. Figure 12 is a graphical representation of the themes from the interview responses related to barriers or challenges to leading with equity.

Figure 12

Barriers or Challenges to PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
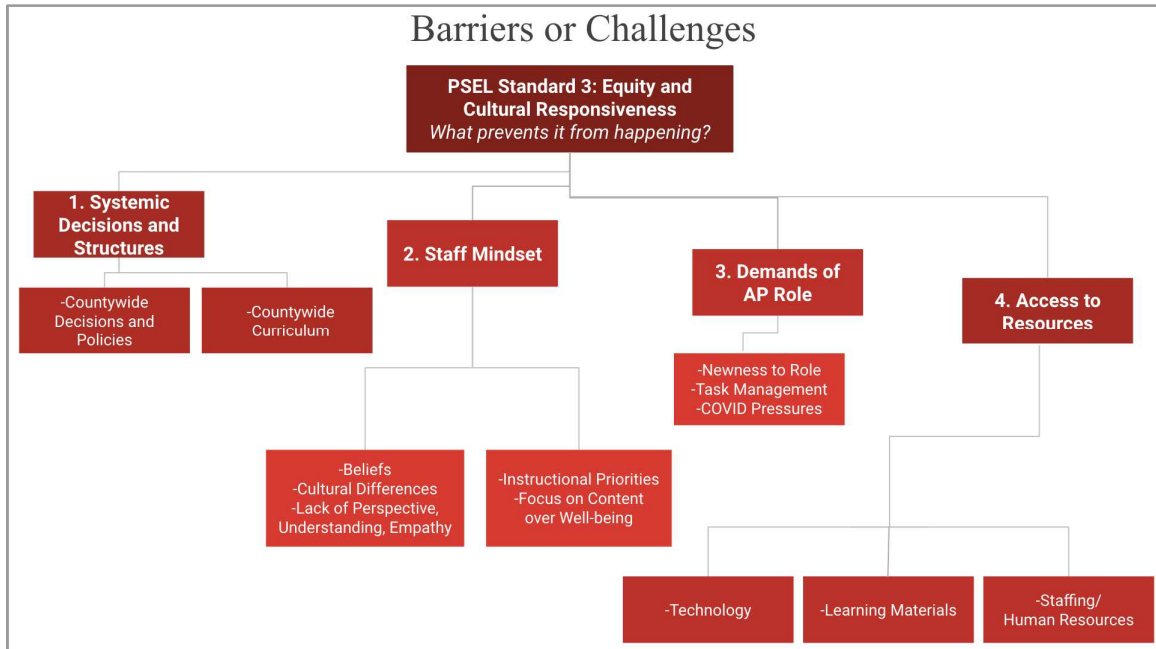
Systemic Decisions and Structures. Comments related to the systemic decisions and structures theme were the most prevalent barriers raised during the six new AP interviews, with each AP making at least one comment. In fact, this type of barrier was raised as a concern at least 21 times across the six interviews. The APs described the decisions made by school system leadership or central office as having a negative impact on their daily practices and abilities. Some of the concerns were that decisions were made quickly or that they changed often. Changing expectations forced APs to go into responsive mode, thus taking them away from other priorities. One AP explained:

> We're in such an unusual time right now, and the county is being as responsive as it can to the needs of individual students and individual staff members and schools and families and communities. The county has to pivot every once in a

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while and what we think is going to happen one day is changed the very next, and we have to be very flexible and adaptive leaders to do that. But that can take up a lot of the time.

Additionally, discussions were raised by the APs regarding system-wide policies, curriculum, or budget decisions that had perceived negative impacts for some students. The two main subcategories that fell under systemic decisions and structures were countywide decisions and policies and countywide curriculum. In the case of countywide decisions and policies, some of the examples provided by APs were the dress code policy, the discipline policy, and funding decisions. One AP shared, "APs definitely have a lot less control over if we're following policy as written…I have said countless times to parents, you know, this is the policy I'm asked to follow, I can't make any exceptions or changes." Another AP shared concerns about the dress code policy saying, "I think that there was bias almost written right into some of the dress codes, and it affected some populations more than other populations, it created power struggles where there really did not need to be conflict." APs also noted countywide curriculum or instructional practices as a barrier due to the fact that countywide curriculum is standardized and often pre-packaged. This standardized curriculum is perceived to result in a lack of teacher and school autonomy in designing instruction, which can negatively impact student outcomes. While they recognized that some standardization in curriculum is important, administrators felt the current curriculum leads to a lack of differentiation and real-time adjustment necessary to meet individual students' needs in the classroom. While the standardization of curriculum is often implemented to attend to equity, one AP shared, "I

don't feel that our approach is equitable. I don't feel that our curriculum in literacy is equitable to these kids and I'm blown away [by the inequities]."

Systemic decisions and structures was by far the most prevalent barrier mentioned throughout the six AP interviews. Due to countywide policies and decisions and the standardization of countywide curriculum, APs felt a lack of control and time to lead with equity for their students. Additional quotes to illuminate this theme are displayed in Appendix J.

Staff Mindset. The next major theme, which arose as a challenge or barrier in all six AP interviews was staff mindset. Staff mindset encompasses the beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, and actions of the staff members in the building. One AP described staff mindset as a barrier in the following way:

> Honestly, it's the mind shift. I think equity is something that's so intangible, and it's not a thing, it's not a meeting, it's not a committee, it's not a package deal. It's honestly a mindset, and it takes each person looking at themselves to review their own biases, review their own history, and how that is showing up in their work, and being aware.

The APs often referred to cultural differences or inconsistencies regarding how staff interacted with all students. Those inconsistencies could be observed in staff managing student behavior, implementing curriculum, or building relationships with students. Some APs mentioned the idea of unconscious bias among educators and the need for additional training to improve cultural responsiveness. This theme is exemplified by one of the APs who said, "It was very interesting to see how many teachers didn't necessarily understand the needs of some of our students when it comes to being culturally responsive."

Comments from this theme were sorted into two subcategories: teacher/staff belief systems and instructional priorities. Comments sorted into the teacher/staff belief systems subcategory included AP reports of staff members' lack of understanding or empathy, lack of perspective, lack of training, lack of cultural awareness, and cultural differences between staff and students. One AP shared, "I think that those cultural differences, if there's not an understanding, can lead to conflict." The second subcategory is instructional priorities. APs noted that teachers have heavy curricular demands and testing pressures, which often lead to them prioritizing content over student well-being. An example an AP shared, which highlights this subcategory is:

> There also is definitely a struggle with sometimes staff either feeling like, why do I have to care about equity and their well being when that has nothing to do with teaching algebra… Unfortunately sometimes, especially now with the pressure that's put on teachers to perform and testing, there's just no way that they think they can do both.

> For all six new assistant principals, staff mindset was a perceived barrier to them leading with equity in their school buildings. Whether it was the belief systems of educators or their instructional priorities and strategies, the APs felt at least some staff were contributing to a lack of equity for students. These ideas are illustrated further in Appendix J.

Demands of the AP Role. The third theme that emerged as a barrier was that of the AP role itself. Five of the six APs interviewed emphasized the demands of the AP role as a barrier to putting equity into action. Many discussed their positive intentions of wanting to do more related to equity, but often mentioned time as a reason why it did not

happen. The APs named newness to the role and trying to learn all aspects of the job as barriers. They also emphasized the pressures of task management and additional burdens placed on the AP role due to the COVID-19 pandemic. One AP summarized the challenges, "with the other responsibilities that we have just in managing the daily responsibilities of the building and the running of the building, there isn't really an opportunity to have those teachable moments with staff." Another AP described this barrier in the following way:

> By just understanding the role of the AP and what typical tasks are on my desk. There's discipline, there's management, there are schedules, there are check ins, so and those are all part of the day-to-day routine of the school and that's okay and I accept them.

> Five of the APs discussed wanting to do more related to equity, but noted the demands of the AP role as a significant barrier. The APs indicated they felt short on time because of so many managerial tasks related to their role, especially during COVID-19. They also indicated newness to the role and the need to build relationships with everyone as reasons why equity work was not always at the front and center of their daily to-do lists. Additional interview quotes related to the demands of the AP role can be found in Appendix J

Lack of Access to Resources. The final interview theme that emerged as a barrier to equity was the lack of access to resources. Comments categorized in the theme of access to resources were mentioned in four of the six AP interviews. The subcategories for this theme were technology access, learning materials, and staffing/vacancies. The APs mentioned that they often wanted to do more related to equity and cultural

responsiveness, but cited a shortage of resources as a challenge. One AP said, "Sometimes you see that there are so many more things that the child needs that they would benefit from… but you don't have the resources to provide those things." More specifically, APs reported that they did not have the physical and/or human resources to meet the needs of their students. This shortage of resources often connected back to the other barriers of systemic decisions and structures as well as the demands of the AP role. For example the APs felt that the lack of resources was due to decisions made at the central office, including budgets or staffing and school system policies. When speaking about current vacancies one AP noted, "these things need to be put in place so that we have the resources to be able to address the problem." APs also cited a lack of community resources at their disposal. One AP said, "It's hard to really put a handle on the inequities." Time was also mentioned as a resource in short supply, but a lack of time was more often in reference to the demands of the AP role than to this theme.

In summary, four of the six APs felt that a lack of resources was a barrier to leading with equity on a regular basis. The resources mentioned included technology, learning materials, and human resources. Additional highlights from the interviews related to this theme are provided in Appendix J.

Document Analysis Results

The last part of this research study was a document analysis of school system administrator induction resources. The purpose of the document analysis was to provide a more comprehensive picture of new APs' induction experience along with the information gleaned from the survey and interviews. Findings from the document analysis informed all three research questions:

1. For which of the elements of PSEL Standard 3 do new APs rate their practice as effective or highly effective?

2. What do new APs perceive as the key administrative practices needed to achieve equity and cultural responsiveness?

3. What barriers or challenges do new APs report that prevent them from meeting or exceeding PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness?

The researcher analyzed 24 documents, which were provided by the district's Office of Leadership Development. The documents consisted of new AP induction program overview documents, insider's agendas for professional learning sessions, and participant end-of-year feedback. The researcher reviewed each of the 24 documents to first identify if they contained any references to equity. Documents that contained equity content were then coded using letters A to H, corresponding to the elements within PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness. Each of these documents and its associated coding will be discussed.

New AP Induction Program Overview Documents. The Office of Leadership Development created a program overview document to summarize the major components of new AP induction in the district. The key components of the overview document are the standards in which the program is grounded, assignments required of new APs for their professional learning teams, roles and responsibilities of AP mentors, and information about professional learning sessions, including session topics and dates. Different overview documents exist for year one and year two of the program. Table 6 presents findings from this analysis.

Table 6

Document Analysis of New AP Induction Program Overview Documents

Document selected	Equity concepts illuminated/ evidence of PSEL Standard 3 and/or connection to PSEL Standard 3 elements	Evidence of gaps/ what's missing
New AP Induction Program Overview Document (Year One)	• Equity is mentioned as part of the PSEL standards as well as a part of the new AP evaluation process. • Document is grounded in PSEL standards. • PSEL Standard 3 is elevated through the Professional Learning Team (PLT) structure (1 of 4 standards emphasized). • PSEL Standard 3 is elevated through New AP meetings (1 of 5 standards covered). • Focus of year one of the program is skill based.	• Equity is only addressed related to evaluation. • Equity is discussed at the standard level rather than element level.
New AP Induction Program Overview Document (Year Two)	• Equity is mentioned as part of the PSEL standards as well as a part of PLT assignments and new AP meetings. • Equity reflection is an assignment during the first PLT meeting. • Focus on equity through a school/classroom visit with another AP. • Equity is addressed as a high level leadership theme and connected to other areas such as data, school improvement planning, staffing and scheduling.	• No discussion of elements; continues to be taught at standard level.

In summary, this portion of the document analysis revealed that the program overview documents mentioned equity for both years of the new APs induction program. Equity was discussed in the context of evaluation for year one and addressed in various

ways during year two of the program, including through the professional learning team (PLT) structure and as a leadership theme in the context of school improvement, staffing, scheduling, etc. A limitation of the induction program identified through this portion of the document analysis was that equity was only referred to or taught at the standard level; equity was not mentioned at the element level in either of these documents.

New AP Induction Professional Learning Insider's Agendas. One main component of the new AP induction program is monthly professional learning sessions led by the Office of Leadership Development. APs attend these monthly sessions for their first two years in their new role. Each of these professional learning sessions is guided by an insider's agendas, which is the detailed agenda that program facilitators create to plan the session activities. A typical insider's agenda contains the session's outcomes, timing, essential content, processes, materials, and facilitators. For this portion of the document analysis 11 insider's agendas were analyzed and coded from year one of the induction program and nine insider's agendas were analyzed from year two of the program. These 20 insider agendas represented the entire curriculum for the new AP induction program's professional learning sessions over the two years. It is important to note that the year-one documents were from school year 2019-20, which was the year when the COVID-19 pandemic forced school building closures beginning in March 2020. Additionally, the year-two documents were from the 2020-21 school year, which was fully virtual for professional development. Tables 7 and 8 highlight the major findings of the document analysis for year one and year two, respectively.

Table 7

Document Analysis of New AP Induction Program Insider Agendas - Year One

Document(s) selected	Equity concepts illuminated/ evidence of PSEL Standard 3 and/or connection to PSEL Standard 3 elements	Evidence of gaps/ what's missing
New AP Induction Program Insider's Agendas for Professional Learning Sessions (Year One)	● Day 3 - Equity discussed as part of AP evaluation process. ● Day 5 - APs looked at equity elements within PSEL Standard 3, discussed what job responsibilities supported equity work and what artifacts aligned to elements needed to support evaluation. 　○ only focuses on 4 of the 8 elements as part of the evaluation process. (A, B, D, E) ● Day 7 - Reflection on work so far and connections to equity. Artifact discussion with partners.	● No equity content (Days 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11). ● Equity is covered only as part of the evaluation process. ● Equity is addressed through discussions or reflections, no evidence of content presented. ● 72% of meeting days contained no equity content (28% did). ● PSEL Standard 3 Elements not addressed: C, F, G, H

Table 8

Document Analysis of New AP Induction Program Insider Agendas - Year Two

Document(s) selected	Equity concepts illuminated/ evidence of PSEL Standard 3 and/or connection to PSEL Standard 3 elements	Evidence of gaps/ what's missing
New AP Induction Program Insider's Agendas for Professional Learning Sessions (Year Two)	- Day 1 - Deputy Superintendent shared her vision for leadership aligned to equity (H). - Facilitators shared program focus for the year would be on instructional leadership and equity (C). - Day 3 - Outcome to deepen understanding of what leading with equity means, second outcome to explore strategies to support equity during virtual learning (C). - Review of school system strategic plan and 'CCSSO Leading for Equity' article. APs read article, detailed key ideas/action steps and implications for their work related to equity. - Day 4 - Outcome to deepen knowledge related to data warehouse tool to inform equitable practices, second outcome to assess current and desired state of equitable practices connected to school improvement efforts (G). - Coordinator of Data presented on equity dashboard, APs spent time doing a disproportionality scavenger hunt, then connected to their SIP. Small group discussions, connections and reflections related to equity and school improvement planning (C, D, E, G, H). - Day 7 - Outcome related to racial equity and implicit bias, second outcome related to racial equity and continuous improvement/SEL initiatives. (A, E)	- No equity content (Days 2, 5, 6, 8, 9). 55% of meeting days contained no equity content (45% did). - PSEL Standard 3 Elements not addressed: B, F

○ Revisit PSEL 3, then read article of choice related to racial equity. Breakout colleague discussions, reflections, and next steps. (A, E, H)

The analysis of the insider's agendas allowed an in-depth look into the daily content of each new AP training offered by the district across the two years of the program. Elements of equity were a part of seven of the 20 daily agendas. This analysis suggested that 13 of the 20 sessions contained no explicit equity content. The seven agendas that contained equity content were then matched to the elements within PSEL Standard 3. The document analysis suggested that element F was never explicitly addressed during the two years of the new AP program. This portion of the document analysis suggested that more sessions excluded equity content than included it.

New AP Induction End-of-Year Participant Feedback. At the end of each school year, participants in the new AP induction program are asked to complete an end-of-year feedback survey created and distributed by the Office of Leadership Development. The survey asks questions related to the program outcomes. The majority of the questions on the surveys ask respondents to respond on a Likert scale, with several open-ended questions. Table 9 highlights the findings of the document analysis for both end-of-year participant feedback surveys.

Table 9

Document Analysis of New AP Induction Program End-of-Year Participant Feedback

Document selected	Equity concepts illuminated/ evidence of PSEL Standard 3 and/or connection to PSEL Standard 3 elements	Evidence of gaps/ what's missing
New AP Induction End of Year Feedback Survey and Participant Results (Year One)	● One question asked related to equity. 13 total questions on the survey. ● 90% of new APs who responded to the survey reported they strongly agreed that year one of the program empowered them to provide leadership that places equity and relationships at the foundation of all decisions and actions.	● Equity is not defined, nor is it broken down or specified by element level. ● Likert question only ● Self reported ● No evidence of or connection to equity in additional feedback/open ended questions.
New AP Induction End of Year Feedback Survey and Participant Results (Year Two)	● One question asked related to equity. 17 total questions on the survey. ● 89% of new APs who responded to the survey reported they strongly agreed that year two of the program empowered them to provide leadership that places equity and relationships at the foundation of all decisions and actions.	● Equity is not defined, nor is it broken down or specified by element level. ● Likert question only ● Self-reported ● No evidence of or connection to equity in additional feedback/open ended questions.

In summary, the feedback form portion of the document analysis suggested that most APs strongly agreed that the induction program empowered them to provide leadership that placed equity and relationships at the foundation of all decisions and actions. However, this end-of-year feedback was self-reported; analyses of the program overview and insider's agendas suggested that equity was addressed only at the standard level, not the element level. Additionally, equity questions on the feedback forms were

only Likert style questions and no additional feedback was provided by participants related to equity.

Summary of Document Analysis Results. The main findings of this document analysis were:

- Equity was often mentioned at the standard level but elements were not elevated.

- Equity was discussed only as part of the evaluation process during year one of induction.

- Equity was not emphasized in the year-one program overview document, nor was it emphasized in either year's participant feedback surveys.

- Element F was not taught in either year of the program.

- More professional learning sessions' insider's agendas excluded equity content than contained it explicitly.

    - 72% of professional learning sessions were without equity content in year one of the program.

    - 55% of professional learning sessions were without equity content in year two.

Conclusions

Research Question One: For which of the Elements of PSEL Standard 3 do New APs Rate their Practice as Effective or Highly Effective?

Research question one was primarily answered through the results of the survey. As displayed in Tables 4 and 5, APs rated their practice as effective or highly effective for five of the eight elements within PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness. The five elements were A, C, E, G, and H, which are:

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- A. Effective leaders ensure that each student is treated fairly, respectfully, and with an understanding of each student's culture and context.

- C. Effective leaders ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social supports, and other resources necessary for success.

- E. Effective leaders 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.

- G. Effective leaders act with cultural competence and responsiveness in their interactions, decision making, and practice.

- H. Effective leaders address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership.

Each of these elements received an average score of 60% or higher based on survey results, indicating that most APs who participated in the study agreed that their practice was effective or highly effective for these elements. Elements B, D, and F were each rated much lower, receiving average scores of 33%, 11%, and 44%, respectively, from the APs. Those elements are:

- B. Effective leaders recognize, respect, and employ each students' strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning.

- D. Effective leaders develop student policies and address student misconduct in a positive, fair and unbiased manner.

- F. Effective leaders promote the preparation of students to live productively in and contribute to the diverse cultural context of a global society.

Because the survey data were self-reported, the findings were supplemented with information gleaned from analyses of new AP induction program documents. An analysis of the insider's agendas for new APs' professional learning sessions suggested that element F was not addressed in either year of the program and element B was not addressed in year two of the program. Year two, according to program overview documents, is when the focus should be on equity as a leadership theme. Element D was found to be addressed in both years of the induction program, but at 11%, was the element which received the lowest rating among the eight elements. The document analysis also suggested that equity was taught to new APs at the standard level, and not intentionally broken down by element.

The most important finding in addressing research question one was the understanding of the elements with which APs did not feel effective. Elements B, D, and F received the lowest ratings on the survey; elements B and F also appeared as gaps in professional learning content based on the document analysis. Thus, the district should ensure the inclusion of elements B, D, and F in planning for future induction programming. New APs in the district cannot be expected to be effective in being equitable in their practices if certain elements are never taught. These findings provided the researcher and subsequently the district with invaluable information about the gaps in professional learning offerings for new APs related to effective practice for PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness.

Research Question Two - What do New APs Perceive as the Key Administrative

Practices Needed to Achieve Equity and Cultural Responsiveness?

Three themes were identified from interviewing six new APs individually related to their perceived key administrative practices needed to achieve equity and cultural responsiveness. These themes were creating a sense of belonging, access to resources, and additional supports (see Figure 11). During the interviews the APs focused heavily on the actions they took to achieve these themes for their school community. Many of them painted a picture of going beyond the requirements of their role as AP to achieve these outcomes. Several of the APs commented on how equity practices were "innate" for them and shared sentiments like, "this would be an area where I think I actually thrive." Rarely did an AP focus on their training or induction experience as why or how they were able to enact equity practices.

The purpose of the document analysis was to supplement the qualitative data obtained through the individual interviews. The document analysis supported these claims made by the APs. One of the major findings through the document analysis was that equity was only discussed as part of the administrative evaluation for first-year APs. Equity was not a significant part of their professional learning during year one. Further, the document analysis suggested that across both years of the induction program, more of the new AP meetings excluded equity content than contained it. The statement that APs referred to equity practices as "innate" rather than something that they learned through induction cannot be refuted based on the current information.

According to this study, APs identified a sense of belonging, access to resources, and additional supports (working with families and the community) as the key

administrative behaviors, which define equity in action. Many of the APs felt they did this innately and not as a result of training they had received. This perception suggests that the administrative induction program was not a significant source of their learning as it relates to equity and thus unlikely to have been influential in shaping their equity practices. The district should consider additional study into how equity practices are embedded into their current training program and identify additional needs in order to improve the connection between the professional learning offered and the practices implemented in school buildings. Additionally, throughout the interviews, the APs were rarely able to distinguish between elements B, D, and F in practice. Their responses to different elements often overlapped, suggesting that the new APs understood equity in the general sense (or at the standard level), but did not understand it more deeply (or at the element level). The district needs to consider going deeper into the topic of equity in its induction planning to ensure that each of the eight elements is taught.

Research Question Three - What Barriers or Challenges do New APs Report that Prevent Them from Meeting or Exceeding PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness?

The six individual interviews with new APs on their perceived barriers or challenges to achieving equity and cultural responsiveness suggested four main themes: systemic decisions and structures, staff mindset, demands of the AP role, and access to resources (see Figure 12). In contrast to their responses to research question two in which APs focused on themselves and described the ability to enact equity as "innate," when the conversation switched to barriers, APs were much more likely to focus on external factors as causing the challenges. They described the decisions made at the board or

central office level, the mindsets of others, the extreme demands of their role, the added burdens caused by COVID-19, and the lack of resources as the major barriers to achieving equity-based leadership on a more regular basis. The APs expressed sentiments like "that's been really hard for me," and "I haven't been able to do [equity work] as a leader but… I want to as an AP and I can. I did it better as a teacher."

As with the previous analyses, the document analysis provided additional information to supplement themes identified in the interviews. An analysis of the insider's agendas for year two of the induction program suggested that the barriers and challenges raised by the APs during the interviews were not focus areas of their professional learning. The equity content in year two focused on data analysis, connecting equity to instructional leadership, and school improvement efforts. Although one session was dedicated to bias and racial equity, many of the barriers raised by the APs during the interviews were not focus areas in their professional development as new administrators.

The barriers and challenges identified in this study have implications for the district. Opportunity exists to improve the factors external to APs' control, such as district decisions or building staff mindset, as well as an opportunity to leverage professional learning for new APs. The induction program can be enhanced by ensuring that each element within PSEL Standard 3 is addressed throughout the two years of the program. Finally, APs often referred to equity practices as innate and equity barriers as outside forces. The district needs to consider this finding and how the induction program can address or change this mindset. Professional learning must be structured so that APs see both the practices and the barriers related to equity as within their scope of control.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations of this study exist. Due to the size of the district, the sample size of participants was limited. The number of APs who met the criteria for having fewer than two years of experience in the role was 14. The survey was sent to all 14 possible participants and nine chose to respond. Because the survey was anonymous, it is unknown which five APs chose not to participate in the study. Their input is not represented in the survey data presented here. Of the nine who completed the survey, six agreed to participate in the interview portion of the study. This means there were eight APs who did not participate in interviews. Their stories and experiences are therefore missing from the interview data presented here. While the number of participants was relatively small, the survey and interviews yielded rich data. Additionally, while survey participants worked at elementary, middle, and high school levels, no high school administrator volunteered to participate in the interviews. In other words, interview responses were strictly from the elementary and middle school levels.

Another limitation of this study was its timing. This study took place in the fall of 2021 while the COVID-19 pandemic caused major disruptions to daily life. The pandemic had major impacts on schools, including the role of APs. COVID-19 was raised as a concern in many of the interviews because of the additional burden it placed on APs at the time. APs were dealing with staffing shortages, contact tracing, and elevated behavioral challenges from students re-entering school buildings after 18 months of virtual learning. The fall of 2021 was not a normal start to the school year for anyone. At the time of the research request, staff were feeling overburdened and overwhelmed. This stress may have contributed to the lower participation rate in the interviews.

Additionally, because of school building closures due to COVID-19, much of the school system's operations were conducted virtually. For safety reasons, the interviews took place virtually using the Zoom platform rather than in person, which also may have been a limitation to the study.

Lastly, the role of the researcher may be a limitation to the document analysis portion of this study. The documents used were artifacts from the office for which the researcher works in the district. Some of the documents analyzed were written and implemented by the researcher as a part of her role in the district. Every attempt was made by the researcher to remain impartial and unbiased during the document analysis and all parts of the study, but should be mentioned as a possible limitation.

Reflections and Future Investigations

Overall, this research study went as planned and yielded rich data for the researcher, the school district, and the university. As mentioned earlier, the participant sample size was small. Additionally, the study took place after 18 months of virtual and hybrid learning just as students and staff were transitioning back into the brick-and-mortar school building. It would be beneficial to conduct this study again in the future without the limitations presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. This study represented two cohorts of new APs. It would be worthwhile to conduct the study again with several additional cohorts of new APs, especially those who have a more typical experience of induction (not during a global pandemic).

Impact for the School System

In order to consider the impact of this research study for Delling County Public Schools**,** it is important to return to the theory of change presented in Section I of this

paper. When I sought to conduct this research I proposed that, *if I can determine the current skill level and understanding of new APs related to PSEL Standard 3, then I can design, develop, and implement an equity-based intervention for all new assistant principals that leads to them increasing their skills, knowledge and capacity related to PSEL Standard 3. And all new assistant principals will be better prepared and more effective in their roles.* Based on this study, I believe I have determined the current skill level and understanding of PSEL Standard 3 for this cohort of new APs. Now it is time to design, develop, and implement an equity-based intervention for all new APs that will lead to them increasing their skills, knowledge, and capacity in order to better meet the needs of their students experiencing poverty. My goal has been to create an enhancement to the district's current induction program based on the results of this study. For the rest of this school year, I will work with the district to create that enhancement, which will then be implemented in the fall of 2022 with the newest cohort of APs. Thus, after two years, DCPS will have a cohort of new APs who have been through the enhanced induction program, therefore achieving my aim: *Every new assistant principal in DCPS meets or exceeds at least 6 of the 8 components within Professional Standards for Education Leaders (PSEL) Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness by the 2023-24 school year.*

The first step in creating this equity-based intervention will be to share the results of this research study with the district. The researcher will recommend the following changes and considerations to enhance the experience of new APs.

Expand Equity Professional Learning as a Part of Induction

This study revealed that equity is taught mostly through year two of the program and covered in year one as part of the mandatory AP evaluation process. My recommendation will be to expand the way equity is taught as a part of the two-year professional learning series. Equity should be taught for the sake of equity, not for the sake of evaluation. In DCPS, equity accounts for 40% of an administrator's evaluation, the highest percentage of any part of the evaluation. The Office of Leadership Development should revise the scope and sequence of the New AP Induction Program to explicitly teach equity content during year one of the program. APs need to know what equity is and how to lead with equity prior to their second year in the role. Additionally, the barriers and challenges identified in this study should be considered in planning equity-focused professional learning. Teaching new administrators how to manage these barriers would be helpful as they navigate their new roles.

Emphasize Equity at the Element Level

As the Office of Leadership Development is revising their scope and sequence for the induction program, equity content should be reviewed and implemented at the element level. This study revealed that certain elements were emphasized and others were ignored, leading to gaps in APs' knowledge. The team should audit the current content and consider additional content to ensure that each of the eight elements within PSEL Standard 3 is explicitly taught as part of the two-year professional development series. To ensure equity-focused professional learning extends beyond induction, the Office of Leadership Development should partner with other offices to ensure that all APs receive equity content at the element level as a part of other professional learnings in the district.

Partner with Other Offices and University Programs

The current study suggested that APs felt they had other equity learning outside of AP induction that enhanced their knowledge. They mentioned graduate coursework, book studies, and professional development from other offices within DCPS. The Office of Leadership Development, as the primary team responsible for AP induction, should partner with others to ensure a more streamlined, holistic approach to equity for new administrators. This approach should begin with a partnership between all universities that offer administration and supervision courses to DCPS teachers. The programs should be reviewed for equity content to ensure alignment with DCPS beliefs and principles, as well as to ensure a smooth transition from coursework to induction. Additionally, the Office of Leadership Development should partner more intentionally with the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to create coursework for leaders and pathways for aspiring leaders. We cannot operate by happenstance when it comes to equity. There must be intentionality in what is taught, when it is taught and by whom.

Summary

The purpose of this sequential mixed-methods study was to explore the current knowledge of new APs related to equity (as measured by knowledge of and proficiency with PSEL Standard 3), as well as to determine their needs for induction related to equity. New APs (within their first two years in the role) completed a baseline knowledge survey and participated in interviews. The data obtained from survey and interview responses were further reviewed alongside findings from a document analysis.

The goals of this research study were accomplished. The main goal of this dissertation was to close opportunity gaps for students in poverty. Leveraging high-

quality leadership development, specifically administrator induction, is a way to accomplish this long-term goal. Unfortunately, much more needs to be done before opportunity gaps are closed for students experiencing poverty. DCPS still has work to do until each student has the access and opportunity they deserve. That access and opportunity begins with a highly-trained and highly-skilled administrator leading each and every building in Delling County.

Appendix A

Initial Email to New Assistant Principals (Research Study Invitation)

Dear New Assistant Principals:

My name is Sandra Vecera and while you may know me through my role in -----, I am contacting you today solely as a research student. I am working on earning my doctoral degree from the University of Maryland, College Park in Educational Leadership and am ready to begin collecting information around my problem of practice. I would like to invite you to participate in a research project looking at ----- County's New Assistant Principal Induction Program and its effectiveness related to PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness. This dissertation study, "Preparing School Leaders to Meet the Needs of Students in Poverty" is designed to explore the current skills and proficiency levels of new APs related to equity as well as to make recommendations for future needs related to our school system's new AP induction.

I have obtained permission from ███████████████████████████ and the University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct a mixed methods study that will include an anonymous survey with as many new APs (those promoted between June 2019 and May 2021) as possible from all schools in the county and a follow-up 1:1 interview. I am inviting you to participate in this study by completing an electronic survey (via the Qualtrics platform) and a follow-up interview. The survey will take less than 5 minutes and can be completed between September 30th through October 12th. Once you've completed the survey, you will be asked if you are willing to participate in an individual interview with me to further explore the above-mentioned topics via a recorded Zoom interview. If you choose to participate in the interview portion, please send me an email, which will keep your survey responses anonymous. I will respond via email to set up a mutually agreeable time for the individual interview. Otherwise, you'll click no and submit your survey responses. Please know, your participation is completely voluntary and there is no obligation to participate. You can choose to end your participation at any time without fear of negative consequences.

Completion of a consent form and [this survey](link) indicates your consent to participate in the survey portion of the study. You'll complete another consent form for the interview. Survey results and interview information may be presented at professional conferences or published in professional journals. There will be no attribution to you specifically as results will be presented in the aggregate and maintain anonymity. The results of the study may help inform the county about additions or modifications to our New AP Induction Program that could increase administrator capacity related to equity. Please

keep this email for your records. Feel free to contact me with questions via email at svecera@umd.edu.

Respectfully,

Sandra G. Vecera, Doctoral Candidate Doctorate in Education, UMD College Park

Appendix B

Email Reminder to New Assistant Principals

Dear New APs:

A week ago I sent an email inviting you to participate in a research project looking at ---- County's New Assistant Principal Induction Program. This dissertation study, "Preparing School Leaders to Meet the Needs of Students in Poverty" is designed to explore the current skills and proficiency levels of new APs related to equity as well as to make recommendations for future needs related to our school system's new AP induction.

   THANK YOU TO THOSE WHO HAVE ALREADY SUBMITTED THEIR SURVEY RESPONSE!!!

If you have not had a chance to complete the survey and wish to participate in this study, please click here to complete this survey through Qualtrics.

I have obtained permission from ████████████████████████ and the University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct a mixed methods study that will include an anonymous survey with as many new APs (those promoted between June 2019 and May 2021) as possible from all schools in the county and a follow-up 1:1 interview. I would like to invite you to participate in this study by completing a Qualtrics survey and follow-up interview. The survey will take less than 10 minutes and can be completed at home between September 30th and October 12th. Once you've completed the survey, you will be asked if you are willing to participate in an individual interview with me to further explore the above mentioned topics via a recorded Zoom interview. If you choose to participate, please send me an email indicating this. I will contact you to set up a mutually agreeable time for the individual interview. Otherwise, you'll click no and submit your survey responses. Please know, your participation is completely voluntary and there is no obligation to participate.

Completion of a consent form and this survey indicates your consent to participate in the survey portion of the study. You'll complete another consent form for the interview. Survey results and interview information may be presented at professional conferences or published in professional journals. The results of the study may help inform the county about additions or modifications to our New AP Induction program that could increase administrator capacity related to equity; however any information you provide will be kept safeguarded, confidential and de-identified. Please keep this email for your records, and feel free to contact me with questions or comments via email at svecera@umd.edu.

Respectfully,

Sandra G. Vecera, Doctoral Candidate Doctorate in Education

Appendix C

Qualtrics Survey Consent Form

Thank you for your interest in this research study. This study will explore our district's New AP Induction Program and its effectiveness related to PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness. This dissertation study, "Preparing School Leaders to Meet the Needs of Students in Poverty" is designed to explore the current skills and proficiency levels of new APs related to equity as well as to make recommendations for future needs related to our school system's new AP induction.

You will be asked to select your school level as well as your years of experience as an AP. You will then be asked several questions aligned to the components within PSEL Standard 3. Please be honest and candid with your responses. Your responses are anonymous and will be kept completely confidential. At the end of the survey, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview with the researcher. If you are interested in participating in the interview, you will be directed to a new page where you will provide contact information.

This survey will take no more than 5 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study. The Principal Investigator of this study, Sandra Vecera, can be contacted at svecera@umd.edu.

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are 18 years of age. You are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation at any time for any reason.

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

For more information regarding participant rights, please visit:
https://research.umd.edu/irb-research-participants

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

Please reference IRBNet Package number 1786529-1.

I consent, begin the study.

I do not consent, I do not wish to participate in the study.

→

Appendix D

Qualtrics Survey for New APs

To what level are you currently assigned as an assistant principal?

Elementary

Middle

High

How much experience do you have as an assistant principal (not counting Leadership Intern experience)?

I have completed two years in the role.

I have completed one year in the role.

I have completed less than one year in the role.

Listed below are indicators of effective practice that align to PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness. For which of the following indicators do you perceive your current practice is effective or highly effective? This is a self-assessment and completely non-evaluative. Please check all that apply.

I feel my current practice is effective/highly effective in the following areas:

Implements equity and cultural responsiveness initiatives.

Shows high expectations for equity and cultural responsiveness.

Collaboratively establishes specific and measurable goals for equity that are informed by data and are in alignment with student needs.

Collaboratively develops an action plan to address the disproportionality of inequities.

Collaboratively implements an action plan to address the disproportionality of inequities.

Analyzes data to monitor progress towards achieving equity goals and informing continuous improvement.

Partners with stakeholders to provide learning experiences and resources for all student groups that promote cultural responsiveness and equitable practices.

Allocates resources to foster equitable student learning environments.

Holds self accountable for engaging in equitable and culturally responsive practices.

Holds staff accountable for engaging in equitable and culturally responsive practices.

Coordinates student services to address student needs.

Intentionally promotes student academic success and well-being.

Involves stakeholders in the development or revision of school policies that promote equitable and culturally responsive practices.

Are you willing to participate in an individual interview via Zoom to explore these concepts further?

If yes, email Sandra Vecera after completing this survey. Thank you.

If no, you have reached the end of the survey. Thank you.

→

Appendix E

Interview Email and Consent Form Link for New APs

Dear (Name of New Assistant Principal):

Thank you for completing the survey I shared with you looking at ██████████████ New Assistant Principal Induction Program and its effectiveness related to PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness. I am now ready to begin the second phase of collecting information around my problem of practice. I would also like to thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview portion of the research project. As you know, this dissertation study, "Preparing School Leaders to Meet the Needs of Students in Poverty" is designed to explore the current skills and proficiency levels of new APs related to equity as well as to make recommendations for future needs related to our school system's new AP induction.

I have obtained permission from ██████████████████████████ and the University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct a mixed methods study that will include individual interviews with new assistant principals to learn more about the effectiveness of the school system's current induction program for new administrators as well as barriers to your success as a new assistant principal related to equity. As a follow up to your expressed interest in participating in the interviews, I would like to schedule a one-hour interview with you via Zoom. Each interview will follow a pre-established, structured protocol, and will be recorded. Please complete this Doodle link to select a time that works best for you. Once you've secured your 60-minute time frame, I will send a Zoom link for us to use during our scheduled interview.

Participants in this interview must sign a consent form prior to the beginning of the interview. Please click here to complete the electronic consent form. Interview results may be presented at professional conferences or published in professional journals. There will be no attribution to you specifically as results will be presented in the aggregate and maintain anonymity. The results of the study may help inform the county about additions or modifications to our New AP Induction Program that could increase administrator capacity related to equity. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can choose to end it at any time without fear of negative repercussions. Please keep this email for your records, and feel free to contact me with questions or comments via email at svecera@umd.edu.

Respectfully,

Sandra G. Vecera, Doctoral Candidate Doctorate in Education, UMD College Park

Appendix F

Confirmation Email to Interview Participants including Zoom Link

Dear New AP,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project looking at ███████████ s New Assistant Principal Induction Program and its effectiveness related to PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness. As you know this dissertation study, "Preparing School Leaders to Meet the Needs of Students in Poverty" is designed to explore the current skills and proficiency levels of new APs related to equity as well as to make recommendations for future needs related to our school system's new AP induction.

Your interview is scheduled for:

Your Zoom link is:

As you know, I have obtained permission from ████████████████████ and the University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct these interviews. Each interview will follow a pre-established, structured protocol, and will be recorded. Participants in this interview must sign a consent form prior to the beginning of the interview. Please click here to complete the electronic consent form if you have not already done so. Interview results may be presented at professional conferences or published in professional journals. There will be no attribution to you specifically as results will be presented in the aggregate and maintain anonymity. The results of the study may help inform the county about additions or modifications to our New AP Induction Program that could increase administrator capacity related to equity. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can choose to end it at any time without fear of negative repercussions. Please keep this email for your records, and feel free to contact me with questions or comments via email at svecera@umd.edu.

Respectfully,

Sandra G. Vecera, Doctoral Candidate Doctorate in Education, UMD College Park

Appendix G

New Assistant Principal Interview Protocol

Welcome and Opening (5 minutes)
- Welcome and thank the new assistant principal for participating in the 1:1 interview.
- Introduce myself and inform participants that the Zoom session will be recorded.
- Provide information related to confidentiality and anonymity of responses.
- Encourage participants to have a paper and pencil to allow for maximum reflection and note-taking during the interview.
- Review the purpose of our interview, which is to:
  - gain insights into leadership practices which exemplify PSEL Standard 3.
  - understand barriers preventing each AP from effectively using the components within PSEL Standard 3 in their practice.

Interview (45-50 minutes)
The Interview questions will be open ended and based on the elements within PSEL Standard 3. Questions will be refined based on survey data received.

Opening Questions (PSEL Standard 3 Overview Questions)
1. PSEL Standard 3 will be displayed on the screen. "Think about a time when this standard was animated in practice either by you or another leader. I'd like you to take a few moments to think about that. What did it look like in action? Go ahead and pause to reflect for a few moments. You might consider examples that are formal or informal, with small groups or with larger groups, any example would be fine." Pause for reflection. Then say, "Tell me about what that looked like. What activities were you engaging in or seeing in practice?"
2. "Thank you for sharing that example. It was very helpful to hear. Now we're going to shift focus a bit. What gets in the way of accomplishing this work in your school?"

Core Questions (PSEL Standard 3 Questions Based on Elements A-H)
Note: Based on the survey results, the following questions will be asked about the 3-4 components ranked lowest by the new APs.
1. For each component identified by the survey results, simple language will be displayed on the screen for participants to read and familiarize themselves with the content of that component.

1.1. "Tell me about a time when you did this or saw this from another leader. What did this look like in action?" Allow reflection time and after listening, follow up with, "Are there barriers that prevent you from leading in this way more often? Can you tell me about those?"

1.2. "Reflect back on a time when this component came to life in your building. Take me back to that time. Tell me about it." Pause and listen. Then say, "Are there barriers that prevent you from living this component on a more regular basis? Could you share them with me?"

1.3. "Think about a time when you led (or saw someone else lead) with this component in mind. Describe it for me." "Do you have any additional barriers or challenges to share that haven't already been mentioned?"

1.4. ~~"Envision the interactions in your school related to this component. Describe what that looks like for me." "Are there additional barriers and challenges you'd like me to be aware of related to this component?"~~ (This prompt was not used during interviews because only 3 elements surfaced as not effective/highly effective.)

2. "Is there anything else you want me to know or consider related to PSEL Standard 3 and New AP Induction in ▮▮▮▮?"

Closure (5 minutes)

● This concludes our interview today. I'll be reviewing the data you provided and combining it with information from the other new APs across the district. With this information, I'll be able to determine a current state related to PSEL Standard 3 as well as make recommendations for how to improve our New AP Induction Program across the school system. Your contributions have been very valuable to this process. Thank you very much for taking the time to participate today and thank you for the work you do to support our students everyday.

● If you have any questions or any additional information you'd like to share, please contact me at svecera@umd.edu or 410-404-8441.

Appendix H

Interview Consent Form

UMD Interview Consent to Participate

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE
Click here to read the consent to participate.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1VX7O8PUkQlX9auhzFTR3lwua98SbzF_k-fQCha7iQvg/edit?usp=sharing

After reading the consent to participate, do you agree to participate in this research study?

○ Yes

○ No

Please type your name below to indicate your willingness to participate in this research study.

Your answer

Please type your name below to indicate your willingness for the interview to be audio and video recorded. If you do not consent to the interview being recorded, the researcher will take notes on a word document rather than recording the interview.

Your answer

Submit

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	Preparing School Leaders to Meet the Needs of Students in Poverty
Purpose of Study	This research is being conducted by Sandra Vecera at the University of Maryland, College Park. It is directed by Dr. Doug Anthony, advisor. The purpose is to conduct individual interviews with new assistant principals in ▮▮▮▮ to determine the current state of knowledge and understanding around the components within PSEL Standard 3 as well as to explore potential barriers to achieving PSEL Standard 3 in a highly effective manner among new assistant principals. The results of these interviews may inform system AP induction.
Procedures	You are being asked to participate in an individual interview, which will last 60 minutes. Every new AP has been asked to participate. The interview will be based on PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness and the components within it. You will be asked to describe identified components in action, potential barriers to applying each component in practice, and professional learning needed in order to apply the component in a highly effective manner.

The interviews will be conducted virtually via Zoom. They will be recorded and transcribed. The interview will not contain any identifying information such as your name or school. I will be the only person who will have access to the transcriptions or any reports of the information obtained during these interviews. They will be reported in summary form and will not contain any information that will identify you or your school. |
| Potential Risks and Discomfort | There are no known risks to participants.

You can skip any questions you do not wish to answer. All findings will be presented in summary form and will not identify you or other leaders by name. |
| Potential Benefits | There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. However, it is hoped the district's increased understanding of the effectiveness of new AP induction will lead to improvements across the school system. |

Confidentiality	Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized. Transcripts and other research materials will not contain individual names. You will be assigned a pseudonym prior to the interview and that code will be used in all documents. Digital recordings, transcripts and notes will be maintained on a password protected computer and no one other than me will have access to those materials. Any identifiable information/data (i.e. audio recordings, survey data, etc.) will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research study, which is anticipated to end by December 2021. Any written reports of the findings of this research will not focus on a specific assistant principal but rather presented in summary or aggregate form. 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.
Compensation	There will be no compensation for this research study.
Right to Withdraw and Questions	Your decision to participate or not participate will not have a positive or negative impact on your employability, relationship with the school system, future promotions or placements. 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. If you decide to stop taking part in this study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to this research, please contact the investigator: *Sandra G. Vecera* *880 Boxwood Drive* *Hampstead, MD 21074* *svecera@umd.edu* *410-404-8441* *Or* *Dr. Douglas Anthony* *College of Education, University of Maryland* *danthony@umd.edu*

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 Phone: 301-405-0678 For more information regarding participant rights, please visit: https://research.umd.edu/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	Your signature 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 will receive a copy of this signed consent form. If you agree to participate, please click yes and then type your name in the Google Form.
Signature and Date	See Google Form for automatic signature.

Appendix I

# Completed Consent Form and Survey Report

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Thank you for your interest in this research study. This study will explore our district's New AP Induction Program and its effectiveness related to PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness. This dissertation study, "Preparing School Leaders to Meet the Needs of Students in Poverty" is designed to explore the current skills and proficiency levels of new APs related to equity as well as to make recommendations for future needs related to our school system's new AP induction. You will be asked to select your school level as well as your years of experience as an AP. You will then be asked several questions aligned to the components within PSEL Standard 3. Please be honest and candid with your responses. Your responses are anonymous and will be kept completely confidential. At the end of the survey, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview with the researcher. If you are interested in participating in the interview, you will be directed to a new page where you will provide contact information. This survey will take no more than 5 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study. The Principal Investigator of this study, Sandra Vecera, can be contacted at svecera@umd.edu. By clicking the button below, you acknowledge: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are 18 years of age. You are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation at any time for any reason. 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 For more information regarding participant rights, please visit: https://research.umd.edu/irb-research-participants This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects. Please reference IRBNet Package number 1786529-1.	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	9

#	Field		Choice Count
1	I consent, begin the study.	100.00%	9
2	I do not consent, I do not wish to participate in the study.	0.00%	0
			9

130

Q1 - To what level are you currently assigned as an assistant principal?
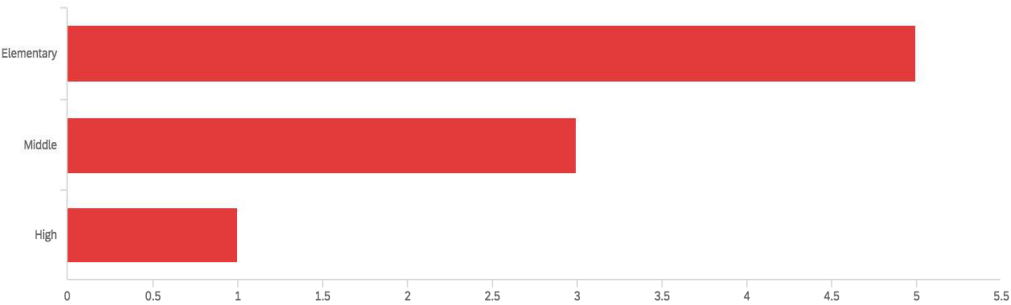
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	To what level are you currently assigned as an assistant principal?	1.00	3.00	1.56	0.68	0.47	9

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Elementary	55.56% 5
2	Middle	33.33% 3
3	High	11.11% 1
		9

Q2 - How much experience do you have as an assistant principal (not counting Leadership Intern experience)?
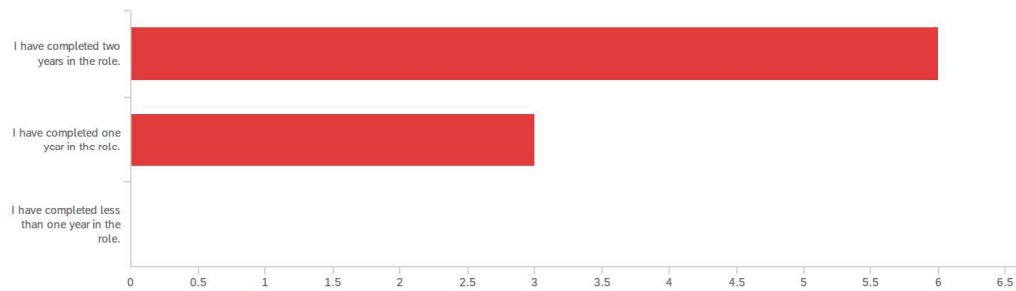
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How much experience do you have as an assistant principal (not counting Leadership Intern experience)?	1.00	2.00	1.33	0.47	0.22	9

#	Field		Choice Count
1	I have completed two years in the role.	66.67%	6
2	I have completed one year in the role.	33.33%	3
3	I have completed less than one year in the role.	0.00%	0
			9

Showing rows 1 - 4 of 4

Q3 - Listed below are indicators of effective practice that align to PSEL Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness. For which of the following indicators do you perceive your current practice is effective or highly effective? This is a self-assessment and completely non-evaluative. Please check all that apply. I feel my current practice is effective/highly effective in the following areas:
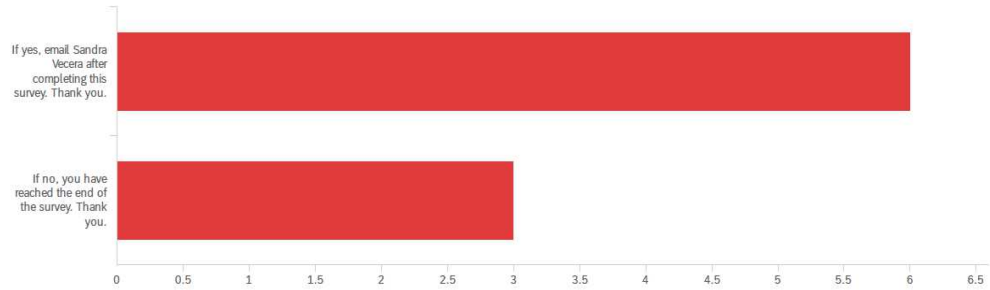
# ▼	Field	Choice Count
1	Implements equity and cultural responsiveness initiatives.	5
2	Shows high expectations for equity and cultural responsiveness.	8
3	Collaboratively establishes specific and measurable goals for equity that are informed by data and are in alignment with student needs.	3
4	Collaboratively develops an action plan to address the disproportionality of inequities.	6
5	Collaboratively implements an action plan to address the disproportionality of inequities.	5
6	Analyzes data to monitor progress towards achieving equity goals and informing continuous improvement.	4
7	Partners with stakeholders to provide learning experiences and resources for all student groups that promote cultural responsiveness and equitable practices.	6
8	Allocates resources to foster equitable student learning environments.	4
9	Holds self accountable for engaging in equitable and culturally responsive practices.	9
10	Holds staff accountable for engaging in equitable and culturally responsive practices.	7
11	Coordinates student services to address student needs.	8
12	Intentionally promotes student academic success and well-being.	8
13	Involves stakeholders in the development or revision of school policies that promote equitable and culturally responsive practices.	1
		74

Showing rows 1 - 14 of 14

Interview Yes/No - Are you willing to participate in an individual interview via Zoom to explore these concepts further?

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Are you willing to participate in an individual interview via Zoom to explore these concepts further?	1.00	2.00	1.33	0.47	0.22	9

#	Field	Choice Count	
1	If yes, email Sandra Vecera after completing this survey. Thank you.	66.67%	6
2	If no, you have reached the end of the survey. Thank you.	33.33%	3
			9

Showing rows 1 - 3 of 3

End of Report

Appendix J

Tables Highlighting Major Themes from Individual Interviews

Interview Data Related to Key Administrative Behavior of Creating a Sense of Belonging

for Students

Social-emotional supports	Instructional supports
● "Providing students with an opportunity to share their voice." ● "Promoting the well being of each individual child" ● "I think just helping students to build those connections make them feel connected to the school." ● "We did a book study about restorative practice and what it means to be culturally responsive." ● "We want it to be restorative, and we want to have conversations with the students." ● "We had teachers trained on having restorative conversations" ● "Bringing students together to share their different life experiences to share different elements of their culture with each other." ● "At this time we have to do what's right for kids" ● "I love to provide the safe space." ● "We wanted to really focus on ... conversations with kids and ... also building relationships." ● "We have a student voice committee."	● "Having knowledge of your students and understanding what they're good at is immensely helpful" ● "Taking the time to get to know them, create a relationship with them, find out what is important to them really lends itself to then having that teachable moment." ● "Students really should be able to see themselves reflected in the books that they read the stories that are told. They should be reflected in the history that they learn." ● "If I know that my student really enjoys dance and loves going to dance...then I can use my knowledge of her strength." ● "I feel like you have to know a child well." ● "We did a book study about what it means to be culturally responsive."

Interview Data Related to Key Administrative Behavior of Access to Resources

Technology	Learning materials	Staffing/ human resources
• "It was anything from as basic as access to Wi-Fi, and then reaching out to resources in the county to make sure that they could get a hotspot [despite] financial difficulties" • "By providing these resources... when you have a Chromebook in your hand, you teach them, you teach their parents and then they can access their world." • "I can provide you a hotspot... It's hard to really put a handle on the inequities. We had people who were coming up to the building and sitting in the parking lot just use the Wi Fi, so it's those kinds of supports and you need [to put] structural things in place."	• "We had materials to support Language Arts, materials to support math, we had hands on art supplies... then we also created individual bags of math manipulative and resources like mini whiteboards, markers". • "We're really looking at putting resources in place that serve people. That's the kinds of things we need to think about. That's what I think promotes, you know, equity in education. • "Equity of just accessibility to extracurricular activities is one thing." • "I think we were celebrating the fact that we had put those materials into kids hands before instruction actually started."	• "She [International Liaison] came to us [and] it was so incredibly helpful that... I don't know what we would do without her." • She's [a teacher who] found a way to connect with her students in a way that's genuine." • "Not everybody has to be in GT, but they should have access and opportunity… looking at that with equity mind."

Interview Data Related to the Key Administrative Behavior of Additional Resources

Community partnerships	Relationships with parents/families
● Our "leadership team put a lot of effort into reaching out to community organizations to try to help provide [our] students with access where inequities exist."	● Referring to Chromebook distribution during the pandemic - "It was about supporting the community and supporting the students in our school."
● "We started reaching out to different community organizations, ... and they've been incredible. They've donated thousands and thousands of dollars worth of goods to our school."	● "Honestly we need to build relationships with parents a lot."
● We partnered with [community organization] and I'm thinking really about well-being, and how our partnership with them was helpful in establishing safe spaces for students to talk about conflict."	● "When we say promote each student's academic success and well-being, I would put in parentheses and family success and well-being."
● "We're trying to make everyone in our community aware of the things that we're doing."	● "At this time we have to do what's right for kids, like if a child is in crisis you can't consequence out of a crisis. That doesn't work, so providing support to families, making referrals to family preservation, so we're looking more holistically. Do you have food? Do you need clothes? Things like that."
● "I think it's just such a great idea to really help to promote community oneness... you know, continuing to hear those voices individually to know who's in your community."	● "Learning about what is important in each family, or each culture is definitely paramount to making those connections."

Interview Data Related to Barrier of Systemic Decisions and Structures

Countywide decisions and policies	Countywide curriculum
● "APs definitely have a lot less control over if we're following policy as written and we're following code of conduct. I have said countless times to parents, you know, this is the policy I'm asked to follow, I can't make any exceptions or changes." ● Referring to agenda books being eliminated from the school system budget - "Small decisions, or what might seem like a small decision on a large scale, on a smaller scale when you get to a specific community might have a great effect where now some schools are providing something because they can afford to do it on their own, while another school that doesn't have the funds available, is entirely missing out on something." ● Referring to recently updated dress code policy - "I think that there was bias, almost written right into some of the dress codes, and it affected some populations, more than other populations, it created power struggles, where there really did not need to be conflict." ● "The county has to pivot every once in a while and what we think is going to happen one day is changed the very next, and we have to be very flexible and adaptive leaders to do that, but that can take up a lot of the time too."	● "And then of course extending that into classrooms where you're choosing materials that students can see themselves in, especially for populations that historically when you look through our curriculums are underrepresented or not represented at all, or had a very specific aspect of their culture represented and that was all." ● "So one of the things that I've heard teachers say a lot is, everything's already given to us, so how are we supposed to modify everything or accommodate our students' culture when everything is given to us, even the social-emotional lessons are given to them. And that is very true though, that's one of the barriers." ● "I think that these things need to be incorporated in the curriculum and effort needs to be made from the top down on that." ● "Making sure the lessons that our students are receiving reflect the diversity of the culture and the society in which we live. And I don't think that's always been the case and I don't think it's always the case now."

Interview Data Related to Barrier of Staff Mindset

Teacher/Staff belief systems	Instructional priorities
● "I think that for some people, they feel most comfortable teaching to or learning from people who have a lot in common with themselves, and unfortunately I think that that does apply to some educators, and I think that it's not something that is intentional and it might not even be always be conscious, but I think that it's difficult for some people to recognize and respect the strengths and diversities [that] are coming from cultures that are not like their own because they don't have a connection to those cultures."	● "There also is definitely a struggle with sometimes staff either feeling like, why do I have to care about equity and their well being when that has nothing to do with teaching algebra… Unfortunately sometimes, especially now with the pressure that's put on teachers to perform and testing, there's just no way that they think they can do both."
● "I think that cultural differences and that's, they can be socio economic differences between teachers and students, racial, religious differences, I think that those cultural differences, if there's not an understanding, can lead to conflict."	● "What we were noticing is that there was inconsistency with our staff."
● "If you don't agree on what respectful behavior looks like, or you haven't even had the discussion, then telling a student that they're being disrespectful is not going to have the effect that the teacher intends because the student doesn't understand why it was disrespectful [or] might not agree that was disrespectful. And then you're creating tension that might carry on throughout the year. That student might feel disconnected, or unwanted or like they don't belong in that class."	● "They're not doing what they signed up for. They're not able to just come in and teach."
● "And what I found is that it is very much sort of segregated in some of the schools that if you have an IEP, I know I have to support you with your IEP because that's a formal plan. If you have a 504 for then I have to support what's on your 504, but if you aren't labeled with one of those two things, then you're just expected to be at a certain level with a certain family home life and a certain amount of academic ability, and there is no recognition for anything other than typical."	● "It almost seems like we teach them what they need to do within the silo of the school building but they're not translating that into the bigger picture, and even what we do teach inside the school building is not enough."
	● "It's a difference that we haven't really focused in on before. I think we looked at [what] was good for one is good for all, which is clearly not true."

Interview Data Related to Barrier of Demands of the AP Role

Demands of the AP Role

- "The way that I view my role is, if I can take as many things off of my principal's plate as I can to allow her the freedom of time and space to lead the school as the principal."

- "And by just understanding the role of the AP and what typical tasks are on my desk. There's discipline, there's management, there are schedules, there are check ins, so and those are all part of the day to day routine of the school and that's okay and I accept them."

- "I would say time is a lot [of the barrier]...and this is where I'm trying to figure out my role as an assistant principal."

- "And when you're serving lunches and directing buses and all of that the opportunity to have those conversations goes away."

- "The feeling of needing to build relationships with everybody, and also figuring out your role as an AP on structures... the structures for if it's a suicide [threat], if it's bullying, if it's a bus. If it's like noncompliance in a certain area, because in your first year, like a lot of them came right to me...And then the other part is in trying to prove yourself. It's like, I want to help everybody I could possibly help, but I can't. That's what I'm realizing, and I never want to be a person that says that's not my lane."

- "We're talking hours of support to parents, and then the next day more time because it takes so long to really understand one step and then the other."

- "What's my role like? Your first year as an AP, you're learning so many things and you're trying to build relationships. You want to work hard and you want to be there for everybody."

- "Responsiveness is an obstacle because county mandates, county to county level decision making trickles down to the schools and school level implementation is not always easy. It's time consuming."

- "We have students with some really challenging behaviors, and it has been a very difficult start of the year."

Interview Data Related to Barrier of Access to Resources

Technology	Learning materials	Staffing/ Human resources
● Referring to PTA discussion - "So we had to just talk about how that [fundraiser] may not be affordable for every family, especially families that have multiple children in the school. And then they were like well we can do something virtually, and the kids can log in, that may lower the cost. And then it was but every family doesn't have a [school-issued] computer...well they can just use a computer from home. So again, every child does not have access to that." ● "It's hard to really put a handle on the inequities there and we had people who were coming up to the building and sitting in the parking lot just use the Wi Fi."	● "If you have 700 kids in a school, you probably need 800-900 agenda books. If the agenda books are $4 a piece, you're looking at thousands of dollars and agenda books. That is a drop in the bucket for some schools. That is more money than other schools have in their entire PTA funds where that might be coming from." ● That's the kinds of things we need to think about, what I think promotes, you know, equity in education. We... pull little bits and pieces together for people, and it's still not fair. [Students] need to do things at home, you know and maybe have to stay after school because they don't have access."	● "Staffing is hard. Yeah, you know right now I mean we had been waiting for 13 people that we had put in from June, you know, just waiting on those folks so you know and having the bodies to support such a large initiative in a large school." ● "In the past, [we] hosted nights for our Hispanic families to help them get acclimated to our school expectations and for us to become more familiar with their culture, but that hasn't happened this year just because we don't have enough staffing." ● Referring to vacancies - "Some of these things need to be put in place so that we have the resources to be able to address the problem."

Appendix K

University of Maryland Institutional Review Board Approval

UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

1204 Marie Mount Hall
College Park, MD 20742-5125
TEL 301.405.4212
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DATE: September 28, 2021

TO: Sandra Vecera, EdD
FROM: University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1786529-3] Preparing School Leaders to Meet the Needs of Students in Poverty
REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: September 28, 2021
EXPIRATION DATE: August 25, 2022
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Prior to final approval of this project scientific review was completed by the IRB Member reviewer

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulations. This project has been determined to be a MINIMAL RISK project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of August 25, 2022.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Unless a consent waiver or alteration has been approved, Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate Amendment forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of seven years after the completion of the project.

- 1 -   Generated on IRBNet

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 or irb@umd.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB's records.

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