Elementary Assistant Principals' Self-Perceived Preparedness to Lead Diverse Schools through the Lens of the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework

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## ABSTRACT

Shifting demographics in the U.S. population, persistent disparities in achievement, and student discipline call for school leaders who are culturally responsive to the diversity present in their schools and communities (Brown, 2005; deBrey et al., 2019; Khalifa et al., 2016a). A review of the literature revealed that researchers maintain the position of assistant principal plays a crucial role in moving forward to the principalship and that this position should be leveraged as an embedded opportunity to learn, which can more effectively prepare leaders for the future role of principal amidst changing school demographics (Oleszewski et al., 2012). Without culturally responsive school leaders and school environments, oppressive systems will continue to thrive in our schools, creating a sense of urgency to carefully explore and understand the ideology of cultural responsiveness concerning school leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016). Culturally responsive leadership practices and behaviors have been noted as "one of the most recent extensions of the research regarding how to meet the needs of culturally diverse learners" (Kranzlein, 2019, p. 22). These practices and behaviors create inclusive school environments responsive to all students' needs (Harris, 2020; Hollowell, 2019; Khalifa et al., 2016a).

The purpose of this study was to investigate elementary assistant principals' perceptions of their preparedness to lead in diverse school settings through the lens of the culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) framework. Additionally, this study sought to identify specific professional development assistant principals perceived they needed to lead diverse schools and determine which components of the CRSL framework assistant principals currently utilize in their leadership practice. This quantitative study sample included 26 elementary assistant principals from a suburban PK-12 school division in Central Virginia. The research questions guiding this study were as follows: (1) To what extent do assistant principals perceive they are prepared to lead in diverse school settings? (2) What components of the CRSL framework do assistant principals currently utilize in their leadership practice? (3) What are self-reported professional development needs for assistant principals to lead in diverse schools? The research method included a researcher-developed survey titled the Self-Perceived Culturally

Responsive School Leadership Preparedness Survey aligned to the CRSL framework created by Khalifa et al. (2016b). The survey instrument consisted of 17 items: one demographic question, 15 Likert-scale questions, and one open-ended question. The researcher used quantitative methodology techniques to analyze the data, including descriptive statistics.

This study offers awareness into the perceptions of assistant principals' preparedness to lead in diverse school settings, identifies CRSL practices utilized by assistant principals, and identifies professional development needs to prepare assistant principals to lead in diverse schools. Results indicated that assistant principals perceive they are prepared to lead in diverse school settings as the building principal and that their duties and responsibilities have prepared them. Additionally, assistant principals indicated a need for professional growth opportunities focused on supporting the development of culturally responsive teachers in their schools and engaging students, parents, and Indigenous contexts.

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**GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to investigate elementary assistant principals' perceptions of their preparedness to lead in diverse school settings through the lens of the CRSL framework. The results of this study offer awareness into the perceptions of assistant principals' preparedness to lead in diverse school settings. Additionally, the study results identify CRSL practices utilized by assistant principals. It also discusses their professional development.

In this quantitative study, a survey research design was used. The study was conducted in a PK-12 suburban public-school division in Central Virginia; the study sample included 26 elementary assistant principals. The research questions guiding this study were as follows: (1) To what extent do assistant principals perceive they are prepared to lead in diverse school settings? (2) What components of the CRSL framework do assistant principals currently utilize in their leadership practice? (3) What are self-reported professional development needs for assistant principals to lead in diverse schools?

Results indicated that assistant principals perceive they are prepared to lead in diverse school settings as the building principal and that their duties and responsibilities have prepared them. Additionally, assistant principals indicated a need for professional growth opportunities focused on supporting the development of culturally responsive teachers in their schools and engaging students, parents, and Indigenous contexts. Recommendations for future studies and implications for practice were provided.

# DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family. I want to extend a special sentiment of gratitude to my loving parents, David and Gloria Winn Jr., for their unwavering belief in me and their words of encouragement throughout my life. I thank them for teaching me the value of education and hard work and loving me unconditionally.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my sister, Rosetta Whalen, for being a role model and always believing in me. She is a true inspiration.

I also dedicate this work to my loving husband and partner in life, Clarence Booth Jr., children, Xavier and Caleb, for their support, encouragement, and understanding throughout this journey. They gave me the strength to go on when I grew weary and defeated and offered patience and grace when I needed it most. They are my heart and my world.

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Last but not least of all, I would like to give a special shout out to my cohort member Kenya Batts for being my friend, thought partner, motivator, accountability partner, study buddy, and so much more throughout this journey.

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# CHAPTER ONE
## THE INTRODUCTION

American public education's history suggests that diversity has been a persistent challenge for school divisions worldwide as systemic racism continues to linger, infiltrating education and society. Over the last few decades, public schools in the United States have experienced substantial growth in their student populations' racial and ethnic diversity and the communities in which they serve (Urban Institute, 2020). These changes ignite a sense of urgency for school leaders and educators who possess "the knowledge, strategies, support, and courage to make curriculum, instruction, student engagement, and family partnerships culturally responsive" (Cooper, 2009, p.695). Grogan (2017) asserted that we must build school leaders' capacity to provide a better education for students who have been historically marginalized.

The National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) (2019) reported by the year 2027, minority (Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander American */Alaska Native, or two or more races) students are predicted to comprise 55% of the public-school enrollment. deBrey et al. (2019) stated, "An awareness of the shifting demographics of the U.S. population can help ensure that educators are prepared to work with diverse groups of students" (p. 26). Hammond (2016) asserted,

> In light of numerous local and national protests against police brutality, unfair judicial systems, and education systems that disenfranchise students of color and lower-income students, public school leaders and teachers must accept their responsibility in leading conversations, practices, and processes that promote equitable, socially just, and culturally responsive educational opportunities for *all* students. (p.24)

Existing research suggests that students from culturally diverse and traditionally marginalized backgrounds experience abysmal educational results compared to their peers (Bennett et al., 2004). Khalifa (2018) argued that leaders using traditional forms of leadership will not create the cultural responsiveness necessary in schools to improve achievement outcomes for diverse student populations. Khalifa et al. (2016a) contended culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) should not stand alone but be embedded in all categories of leadership. Khalifa et al. (2016a) further suggested culturally responsive leadership practices as a way for school leaders to achieve expectations for accountability for all students, specifically those from diverse populations.

Researchers assert that school leadership matters (Leithwood et al., 2019; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2013). Related studies have highlighted the role school leaders must play in making matters of race and other marginalized factors a key focus in their leadership approach and practices to improve achievement and create inclusive learning environments (Blackmore, 2009; Brown, 2006; DeMatthews, 2016; Furman, 2012; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Jean-Marie, 2008; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2007; Wang, 2018). Nevertheless, these studies' focus has been on the principal's role, with limited attention given to assistant principals' preparedness and ability to lead amidst changing demographics and respond to the call for equitable access to education in our country (Boske, 2012; Grogan & Andrews, 2002). Kwan and Walker (2011) asserted that it is vital to pay attention to assistant principals' preparation, given many leaders are assistant principals prior to becoming a principal. Armstrong (2009) affirmed that assistant principals "play a critical role in implementing operational directives and reform policies, shaping school culture, and influencing student outcomes" (p. 21).

Furthermore, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) (2017) postulated, a shortage in elementary, middle, and high school principals "requires immediate attention and careful long-term planning" (p. 2). Specifically, build a strong pipeline to the principalship (Turnbull et al., 2013) and develop principals equipped to be culturally responsive school leaders. Division leadership members are challenged with finding principals to lead school staff who have the ability and knowledge to support and empower marginalized populations (Marshall & Oliva, 2010; Tooms & Boske, 2010), which is why school divisions cannot wait until assistant principals assume the principalship to address their ability to lead in diverse school settings. Assistant principals must be equipped with this skill set before becoming the principal (Gaymon, 2017).

In contrast to other leadership styles that have fallen short of addressing diverse student populations' needs, culturally responsive leadership distinctly addresses diverse schools' needs through the lens of equity while championing change (Hollowell, 2019). Johnson (2014) stated, "Culturally responsive leadership, derived from the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy, involves those leadership philosophies, practices, and policies that create inclusive schooling environments for students and families from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds" (p. 148). Lindsey et al. (2009) believed, "Educational leaders who are successful in creating

culturally proficient learning communities will enable all students to play vital roles wherever they go in the global community" (p. 13).

Culturally responsive practices and teaching have proven to be necessary, but single-handedly they cannot disentangle the major trials facing underrepresented students (Gay, 2010). Focusing on cultural responsiveness at large will not suffice; improving and altering all facets of the educational initiative, including a focus on school leadership, is worthy of attention (Gay, 2010). The research of Harris (2020), which was focused on assistant principals and culturally responsive leadership, suggested that "the current capacities, such as assistant principal roles, responsibilities, and professional development have not explicitly prepared them for leadership in diverse schools" (p. 83).

The purpose of this study was to investigate elementary assistant principals' perceptions of their preparedness to lead in diverse school settings through the lens of the CRSL framework. Additionally, this study sought to identify specific professional development assistant principals perceived they needed to lead diverse schools and determine which components of the CRSL framework assistant principals currently utilize in their leadership practice. The study was conducted in a PK-12 suburban public-school division in Central Virginia. This chapter will consist of an overview of the study, a historical perspective, and the statement of the problem. These sections will be followed by the study's purpose, justification of the study, and the research questions. The theoretical framework driving this research will be discussed, along with the definitions of key terms used. The chapter will conclude with the study's limitations, delimitations, and the outline of the organization of the study.

**Overview of the Study**

The researcher conducted a descriptive quantitative study utilizing a researcher-constructed survey to investigate elementary assistant principals' perceived preparedness to lead diverse schools. The research will contribute to the knowledge and development of school leadership that is culturally responsive to help dismantle systemic, institutionalized racism in education. Morgan (2018) asserted, taking a more in-depth look into assistant principals' practice and capacity will provide researchers the expertise warranted to make more concrete suggestions related to the assistant principalship. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2020) asserted that if assistant principals are given the opportunity early in their

career to build strong leadership skills, they will be capable of transitioning to the principalship with the confidence and knowledge to do so successfully.

**Historical Perspective**

Since the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) Supreme Court ruling, American educational policy has been challenged with constructing educational opportunities that are equitable for all Americans (Blackmore, 2009). *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruled that segregation was a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution in public schools. Rushing (2001) expressed that the schooling system in the U.S. "is not a neutral institution, but one that functions in the context of political, cultural, and social inequalities and plays a role in maintaining and legitimating those inequalities" (p. 32). Despite educational reform efforts, presently, the growing diversity in schools presents a challenge throughout the American educational system, as schools experience increased pressure to ensure all students achieve at equitable levels (Gaymon, 2017).

*Shifting Demographics Contexts*

Over the past 60 years, the identity of the United States has continuously evolved. As a result, schools across the country are experiencing increased diversity in their student bodies' racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural composition. This shift is mirrored across the nation in general. Research shows that the White population has been declining, and minority populations are predicted to make up half of the nation's population by 2044 (Jensen, 2001; Scanlan & López, 2014). In 2008, the Census Bureau reported,

> Elementary and high school students today are more diverse by race and Hispanic origin than the Baby Boom generation of students. In 1970, when the crest of the Baby Boom was enrolled in elementary and high school, the student population was 79 percent non-Hispanic White, 14 percent Black, 1 percent Asian and Pacific Islander and other races, and 6 percent Hispanic. In 2008, 59 percent were non-Hispanic White, 15 percent Black, 5 percent Asian, and 18 percent Hispanic. The Census Bureau's population projections indicate that the population aged 6 to 17 will become increasingly diverse in future years. (p. 5)

Over a decade later, the NCES (2019) reported a decrease in White school-aged children from 62 to 51 percent and Black from 15 to 14 percent from 2000 to 2017. In dissimilarity, the

United States experienced an increase in the proportions of school-age children from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. According to deBrey et al. (2019),

> Between 2000 and 2017, the percentage of U.S. school-age children who were White decreased from 62 to 51 percent and the percentage who were Black decreased from 15 to 14 percent. In contrast, the percentages of school-age children from other racial/ethnic groups increased: Hispanic children, from 16 to 25 percent; Asian children, from 3 to 5 percent; and children of Two or more races, from 2 to 4 percent. (p. 26)

The NCES (2019) projected that from 2015 to 2027, public schools would experience an increase in the percentage of students they serve who categorize as Hispanic (26 to 29 percent), Asian/Pacific Islander (5 to 6 percent), and two or more races (3 to 4 percent). Simultaneously, the NCES (2019) projected a decrease in White students' percentage (61 to 49 percent). Moreover, the U.S. Census reported that by 2040, most children born in the United States are projected to be children of color (Kayne, 2013). By 2055, the United States will not have a racial or ethnic majority (Cohn & Caumont, 2016).

### *Disparities in Achievement*

Recent accountability-based reforms have failed to close achievement gaps for marginalized students (Shaked, 2019). Nationally, since the 1980s, a significant difference has existed among the academic achievement of middle and upper-class White students and their peers from English as a Second Language, low socioeconomic and racially diverse backgrounds (Education Trust, 2006; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Kober, 2001; Kozol, 2005; Murphy, 2010). Therefore, it is vital to consider the existing disparities in education within a greater historical context. For explanatory purposes, reading achievement patterns across three decades has been examined for Black, White, and Hispanic students. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2019) reported that the 2012 assessment results showed progress; however, in 2019, these gaps remained.

Nationally, each group's average reading score was higher in 2019 than in 1992, but there continue to be disparities in achievement between White and Black or Hispanic students (NAEP, 2019). Patterns of student achievement in 4th grade reveal that for the last 40 years, educational disparities in reading have remained consistent. A review of scores during the 1970s and 1980s suggests that the achievement gap was closing for 8th and 12th graders. However, the disparities increased or remained flat for all grade levels throughout the 1990s. The 2019 NAEP results

showed the achievement gaps between White-Black and White-Hispanic students had not changed measurably from 2017 to 2019 (NAEP, 2019). The smallest increase in the White-Black gap, which only narrowed by 2 points, from 30 points in 1992 to 28 points in 2019. The NAEP (2019) reported a 6-point decrease in the White-Hispanic gap between 1992 and 2019, a 26-point score, and a 20-point score difference, respectively. These persistent achievement gaps expose the implications of racial inequality in education.

### *Disparities in Student Discipline*

Exclusionary discipline has been a national issue since the release of the pivotal Children's Defense Fund (1975) report titled, *School Suspensions: Are They Helping Children?* The report emphasized the reality of educational disparities based on race, specifically as seen between Black and White students. Forty years later, the discipline gap was cited as one reason the United States has been unsuccessful in closing the achievement gap between minority and White students (Gregory et al., 2010; Losen et al., 2015). The U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) (2014) snapshot highlights the fact that this gap still exists. According to the OCR (2014), when Black students and White students commit comparable infractions, Black students are suspended and expelled from school three times more than their White counterparts. The OCR (2018) reported that for the 2015-2016 academic year Black, Hispanic male, and American Indian students faced more severe discipline than their White peers. According to the OCR (2016), national statistics indicate, annually 18% of Black boys, 10% of Black girls, 7% of Hispanic boys, and 3% of Hispanic girls receive one or more out-of-school suspensions as compared with 5% of White boys and 2% of White girls.

Woolard et al. (2018) reported that during the 2016-17 school year, Virginia schools experienced an increase in the disproportionate rate of suspensions for Black students and White and Hispanic counterparts. Their analysis of the data revealed that Black students were suspended at a rate of 4.5 times higher than that of Hispanic and White students, revealing a 3.8 times higher rate than shown in 2015-2016 (Woolard et al., 2018). In 2011, Black students in Virginia who experienced multiple out-of-school suspensions were 6.7% compared to 1.8% for White students (OCR, 2011). In Virginia, disparities began to decrease, revealing 5.7% of Black students and 1.4% of White students receiving multiple out-of-school suspensions (OCR, 2013).

**Statement of the Problem**

Demographic changes in school populations around the country suggest that many school leaders in public school settings will be leading schools with students from cultural backgrounds, unlike their own. Scholarly research has focused heavily on the principal's role, overlooking the assistant principal despite the vital role in schools' operation and performance (Hartzell, 1993; Hausman et al., 2002). When provided the opportunities to be involved in various school-related activities, research contends that assistant principals can positively influence student achievement and overall school success (Munoz & Barber, 2011).

In a recent study, Harris (2020) reported findings that recognize the shortfalls in the experience of assistant principals, contending, "Current capacities and professional development opportunities do not prepare [assistant principals] for leadership in diverse schools as culturally responsive school leaders" (p. 89). There is limited research addressing how this specific group of school leaders, assistant principals, promote the needs of marginalized families and student populations as schools become more and more diverse across the United States (Harris, 2020; Theorharis, 2007). However, it is essential for all educational leaders to be culturally responsive and lead through the lens of social justice in an era of accountability, where national and state standards are striving to create a system that is equitable and holds student achievement at the forefront of its efforts across subgroups (Khalifa et al., 2016a). Therefore, as both accountability and diversity increase in schools, all school administrators must acknowledge, cultivate, and understand all students' learning (Deim et al., 2018; Gaymon, 2017; Khalifa et al., 2016a). Barnett et al. (2012) argue that assistant principals have become an even more critical part of school reform efforts and must move past the traditional work of handling discipline to influence student achievement. To make this shift, assistant principals need the knowledge, competence, and determination to engage in culturally responsive leadership practices that create inclusive learning environments in which all students can succeed (Cooper, 2009).

**Significance of the Study**

Schools require a closer look at the educational views, epistemologies, and perceptions of school leaders. School leaders are held accountable for all students' achievement, including aspiring principals (Boske, 2012; Brooks & Miles, 2010; Marshall & Oliva, 2006). Hammond (2016) asserted that to bring about significant change for students of color, future principals must

acknowledge historical injustices in our society and be prepared to take resolute actions within their schools and communities. Also, Nieuwenhuizen (2011) asserted that assistant principals need to be acknowledged in education for their vital role in improving schools and closing gaps in achievement. While many studies have focused on the principalship (Marshall & Hooley, 2006), this quantitative study sought to investigate elementary assistant principals' perceptions about their preparedness to lead in diverse school settings.

Schools need different leadership and teaching practices and skills as trend data discloses that school populations in the United States are increasingly becoming culturally and linguistically diverse (Lindsey et al., 2013). Terry and Irving (2010) asserted, "If we are to maintain a country where social mobility and opportunity are viable possibilities, educators must find ways to offer an excellent education to all students regardless of their background" (p. 110). Brown (2005) contended, "Elementary and secondary education is constantly discussed by the public media and scholars as the best medicine to help America compete effectively in the latest version of economic globalization" (p. 585). Researchers assert that educational leaders will need to be open to addressing racial, cultural, and ethnic dynamics within their school communities to lead effectively in a racially and culturally diverse society (Brown, 2005; Khalifa et al., 2016a). Conversely, research has not directly linked the CRSL framework to the study of leadership practices in the school setting (Johnson, 2006; Khalifa et al., 2016a). Instead, existing research on educating students from culturally diverse backgrounds has concentrated predominantly on teaching pedagogy aspects and how teachers employ culturally responsive practices in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Literature focused on principals' support, leadership practices, and preparation exist. However, a review of the literature revealed that there is very little research on whether assistant principals specifically are prepared to lead in diverse school settings when they ultimately assume the principal's role. Additionally, a review of the literature revealed the absence of research that identifies specific, culturally responsive leadership practices that assistant principals utilize to ensure culturally and ethnically diverse student populations' academic achievement. This study will add to the small body of research that examines assistant principals' practices and professional development to become culturally responsive leaders in diverse schools.

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School divisions that focus on developing and building assistant principals' capacity to lead through the lens of cultural responsiveness will build a strong pipeline of socially just principals, which will impact overall student achievement for all students. As our nation and our world become increasingly diverse, assistant principals need to develop a leadership mindset based on cultural responsiveness and be equipped with the tools and skills necessary to lead a diverse school. This mindset development is not currently the focus of most leadership preparation programs. The CRSL framework serves as a roadmap for leaders to practically engage in the work and provides a means for assessing school leaders' effectiveness (Khalifa et al., 2016a).

This study hopes to expand the body of research on culturally responsive leadership. It will identify specific practices, knowledge, and professional development needs of assistant principals to be influential leaders in diverse schools. When culturally responsive practices are used, schools create learning environments that provide all students with an opportunity to achieve academic success and learn more effectively (Gay, 2002; Han, 2017). Using quantitative methods, this study sought to contribute to the lack of research on culturally responsive leadership and assistant principals and provide insight into the professional growth opportunities assistant principals perceive they need to lead as school populations become increasingly diverse.

**Purpose and Justification of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate elementary assistant principals' perceptions of their preparedness to lead in diverse school settings through the lens of the CRSL framework. Additionally, this study sought to identify specific professional development assistant principals perceived they needed to lead diverse schools and determine which components of the CRSL framework assistant principals currently utilize in their leadership practice. As student demographics continue to change in U.S. public schools, school leaders must be proactive and responsive to diverse students' needs in their schools. School divisions, policymakers, and key stakeholders need to be aware of school leaders' perceived challenges amidst changing demographics. Gay (2010) asserted, "The stakes are too high and the consequences too enduring to take chances on continuing to perpetuate underachievement among students of color" (p. 250). Research has shown the vital role assistant principals can play in improving schools and achieving student success (Armstrong, 2009; Craft et al., 2016; Greenfield, 1985; Marshall,

1993; Spady, 1985). However, a literature review revealed a gap in prior studies on culturally responsive leadership and assistant principals. Available studies have focused primarily on the principal, with little attention given to the assistant principal's role. Johnson (2006) asserted that assistant principals are responsible as culturally responsive leaders to safeguard that all students' cultures, views, and values are recognized and respected. Moreover, it is recommended that further research with a focus on assistant principals be conducted to expand the awareness and knowledge of school leadership's culturally responsive practices (Gaymon, 2017; Harris, 2020; Hollowell, 2019; Khalifa et al., 2016a).

The quality of school leadership has been indicated as a significant factor in improving student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2019). However, researchers' discussions about effective leadership have often overlooked the roles and influences of assistant principals and have focused primarily on principals (Muijs & Harris, 2003; Weller & Weller, 2002). Smylie et al. (2005) substantiated this claim in their search of primary academic educational leadership and administration journals in the EBSCO and ERIC databases revealing, minimal research focused on assistant principals' development. Smylie et al. (2005) found 35 times more articles referencing principals than assistant principals. This study will contribute to the existing research on assistant principals' preparedness to lead in culturally diverse schools and culturally responsive leadership practices. This study sought to add to the current body of literature, apprise training, and policies focused on assistant principals' growth as culturally responsive leaders in preparation for becoming a principal, specifically in diverse school settings. Additionally, this study will add to the professional literature related to CRSL as a framework to support leaders in meeting diverse student populations' educational needs.

## Research Questions

The preparedness of assistant principals to become culturally responsive school leaders was the focus of this study. The data collected and analyzed sought to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do assistant principals perceive they are prepared to lead in diverse school settings?
2. What components of the CRSL framework do assistant principals currently utilize in their leadership practice?

3.  What are self-reported professional development needs for assistant principals to lead in diverse schools?

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical premise of culturally responsive leadership served as the foundation of this study. Specifically, the research of Khalifa et al. (2016a) focused on the CRSL framework, which offers an approach "to make not only teaching but rather the entire school environment, responsive to the schooling needs of minoritized students" (p. 1272). Khalifa et al. (2016a) synthesized the literature on "leadership, social justice, culturally relevant schooling, and students/communities of color" to develop a framework for CRSL (p.1272). Khalifa et al. (2016b) denoted four specific strands in the CRSL framework.

(1) "critically self- reflects on leadership behaviors;

(2) develops culturally responsive teachers;

(3) promotes culturally responsive/inclusive school environment and;

(4) engages students, parents, and Indigenous contexts" (Khalifa et., 2016b, n.p.).

Khalifa et al. (2016a) asserted, "Critical reflection, which is also important to culturally responsive leadership, is foundational and actually precedes any actions in leadership" (p.1285). Critical self-reflection requires school leaders to deliberately reflect on their leadership practices and the context in which they serve (Cooper, 2009; Gooden, 2005; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2006; Lomotey, 1989; Theoharis, 2007). In the second strand, Khalifa et al. (2016a) bring awareness to the critical role that school leaders must play to ensure that their teachers are culturally responsive and continue to grow in their practices to support diverse student populations. The third strand, Khalifa et al. (2016a), contended that CRSL calls for school leaders to engage in culturally responsive practices that challenge exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors to construct and sustain an inclusive environment. Finally, the fourth strand, Khalifa et al. (2016a), task school leaders with engaging families and the community in culturally responsive ways, intentionally traversing the divide between home and school. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework used for this study.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework: The Relationship Between the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework and Student Achievement*
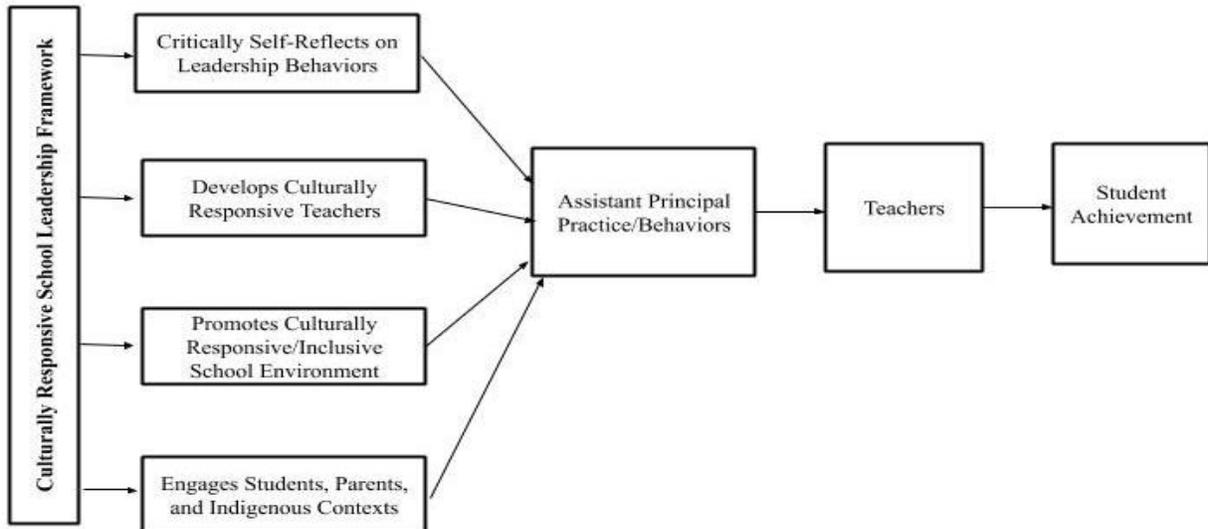


Future implications for research have suggested using the CRSL framework as a resource for school leadership preparation programs providing specific practices that can be integrated into their coursework and field experiences (Gaymon, 2017; Harris, 2020; Hollowell, 2019). Furthermore, Harris (2020) asserted that the CRSL framework "also provides a promising guide for school divisions in the development of core curriculum, learning modules, professional development, and clinical experiences that are a part of division developed leadership academies" (p. 90).

**Definition of Key Terms**

Several key terms used throughout this paper are defined to help understand their usage concerning this study to provide a common frame of reference.

*Achievement gaps.* "Difference in academic performance between student groups" (Virginia Department of Education, 2015.

*Assistant principal.* The title is given to the administrator, who is subsequent in authority to the principal (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). In this study, the term assistant principal will include those administrators serving under the associate principal's title as well.

*Associate principal.* An assistant school leader whose "contract length is extended to a 12-month position and whose duties may include all tasks carried out by the principal such as annual budget completion, master schedule completion, and school improvement planning" (Pope, 2015, p. 27). Also, the associate principal serves in the absence of the principal.

*Culturally responsive leadership.* Leadership that "influences the school context and addresses the cultural needs of students...improves teachers' craft in ways that result in improved student outcomes...and promotes [*sic*] a climate that makes the whole school welcoming, inclusive, and accepting of minoritized students" (Khalifa et al., 2016a, p. 1274-1275).

*Culturally responsive pedagogy.* Facilitates and supports the achievement of all students and includes three specific scopes: (a) institutional, (b) personal, and (c) instructional. For this study, the institutional scope is most relevant to the work of school leaders, as it "reflects the administration and its policies and values" (Richards et al., 2007, p. 3).

*Disparities in School Discipline.* Osher et al. (2015) define disparities in school discipline as "The consequences experienced by subgroups of students (e.g., based on race/ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation) who are disproportionately or differentially disciplined at school, including office referrals, and are overrepresented in rates of exclusionary discipline (school suspension and expulsion)" (glossary p. 3). For this study, disparities in school discipline will focus on race/ethnicity.

*Diversity.* According to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2002), diversity is defined as "the differences among groups of people and individuals based on ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, and gender" (p. 6). The term diversity has many meanings, but for the purpose of this research study, the term will include culture, race, and ethnicity.

*Diverse.* Merriam Webster (n.d.) defines the term diverse as "made up of people or things that are different from each other." For this study's purpose, the term diverse, concerning school settings, will refer to student populations who differ in race, culture, and ethnicity from a larger group to include all students who identify as other than White, not Hispanic.

*Marginalized.* Describes the viewpoints, characteristics, and other phenomena of people who have been ostracized or left out of the dominant society (Lopez, 2001). For this study's purpose, this term will explicitly denote student populations from culturally and ethnically diverse

backgrounds that have been conventionally underserved or excluded in schools in the United States.

*National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).* According to the NCES, "NAEP is a congressionally mandated project administered by the NCES within the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). NAEP is given to a representative sample of students across the country. Results are reported for groups of students with similar characteristics (e.g., gender, race and ethnicity, school location), not individual students. National results are available for all subjects assessed by NAEP. State and selected urban division results are available for mathematics, reading, and (in some assessment years) science and writing." NAEP has been administered since 1969. (https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/)

## Limitations

Three limitations influence this study. First, the researcher is a director of elementary school leadership in the school division in which the research was conducted; this could impact participants' responses to the survey. For that reason, all study participants will remain anonymous, and participation was voluntary. Second, there are limitations to the instrument's validity and reliability, given it is a researcher-developed survey that has not been used in any prior studies. The third limitation is presented by the claim of Khalifa et al. (2016a) that "CRSL is deeply undertheorized and under-researched" (p. 1297). To date, there are no studies explicitly correlating CRSL to improved disparities in student achievement or school discipline for marginalized student populations.

## Delimitations

Two delimitations are presented in this study. First, the study was limited to elementary assistant principals in a suburban PK-12 school division in Central Virginia; therefore, the results may not be transferable to urban or rural school divisions or across the nation. Second, the researcher only collected the self-reported preparedness of elementary assistant principals. Therefore, this was the only perspective provided for this study and does not include secondary assistant principals or principals' perspectives.

**Organization of the Study**

       Chapter One provides an overview of the study, including the problem statement, the study's significance, purpose statement, research questions, and conceptual framework. Following the introductory chapter, Chapter Two includes a literature review related to prior research on assistant principals, culturally responsive practices, student achievement, and school leadership. Chapter Three presents the methodology presented, highlighting the sample selection, the research design, the instrumentation, and the data analysis techniques. The researcher shared the results of the data analysis in Chapter Four. Finally, in Chapter Five, the researcher presented the findings, implications, and suggestions for future research.

# CHAPTER TWO
# REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Assistant principals play a key role in the leadership of schools. As schools across our nation and the world become increasingly diverse, it is critically important for assistant principals to be prepared to use their leadership to create culturally inclusive schools. A literature review on the importance of CRSL with an eye on the assistant principal's role was conducted. The factors of culturally responsive leadership explored include racial achievement gaps, racial disparities in school discipline, and sustained diversity gaps between principals, teachers, and students (Blackmore, 2009; Deim et al., 2018; Hansen & Quintero, 2018; Jean-Marie, 2008; Morris & Perry, 2016). A further examination of the literature related to leadership conceptualizations for cultural responsiveness and school leaders' preparation to lead diverse school settings was explored.

## Literature Search and Review Process

In this study, the researcher drew on specific research and scholarship extents to advance an understanding of educational leadership in amenity of an increasingly diverse student population in U.S. public schools. Specifically, a review of scholarly research on the assistant principal, school leadership impact, and cultural responsiveness in education are donated. The search for relevant literature was conducted through various search avenues to include the Virginia Tech University library website, electronic databases to include Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, and Ebscohost, and through reference lists. For this literature review, the primary methods were online databases to establish adequate scholarly research literature selection. They included numerous professional journals, dissertations, books, relevant websites, and article abstracts. These searches mainly focused on empirical research and information originating over the last decade but include some references before that were deemed relevant to the study. The keywords used in the search included "assistant principal," "impact of school leadership," "assistant principal and culturally responsive leadership," "culturally responsive leadership," "diverse student populations and achievement," "culturally responsive pedagogies and school leadership," "ethnic diversity in schools and leadership," "assistant principals and discipline disparities," "assistant principals and achievement gaps," "principal pipeline," "leadership preparation programs and cultural responsiveness," and "impact of school leadership."

**Importance of School Leadership**

Ancillary only to the act of teaching, educational advocates and scholars have extensively claimed school leadership is a key factor in any reform and improvement in education (Fullan, 2004, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016a; Leithwood et al., 2019). Leithwood et al. (2004) asserted that "leadership is the catalyst" (p. 5) to school improvement and has been connected to the success experienced by turnaround schools. Furthermore, Leithwood et al. (2019) asserted, "School leadership has a significant effect on features of the school organization which positively influences the quality of teaching and learning. While moderate in size, this leadership effect is vital to the success of most school improvement efforts" (p. 2). This assertion justifies why school leaders' roles should not be undervalued.

The Wallace Foundation (2007) contended that "leadership is an essential ingredient for ensuring that every child in America gets the education they need to succeed" (p. 6). In a report titled *Leadership matters: What the research says about the importance of principal leadership*, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2013) shared their belief that "great schools do not exist apart from great leaders" (p. 1). Years of high-quality research on the impact of leadership on school success has confirmed this belief (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2013). Devita (2010) emphasized that school improvement cannot occur in the absence of effective school leadership. Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) asserted that the school leader has "a critical role to play" in shaping the school culture that supports and ensures educational excellence for all students (p. 202).

Marzano et al. (2005) conducted a meta-analysis that found a moderately strong school leadership effect on student outcomes. For over a decade, the Wallace Foundation researched school leadership, finding empirical links between school leadership and improved student achievement (Wallace Foundation, 2012). Nevertheless, the research remains inconclusive. Studies over the former three decades focused on school effectiveness suggest that school leadership's impact on student achievement is indirect, with an uncertain or a statistically insignificant result on student outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Robinson et al., 2008). Though the impact principals may have on school improvement may be indirect, existing research on effective schools indicates that the most effective principals influence various school outcomes, including student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2019). Also, in 2011 the Southern

Regional Education Board reported, "a principal can impact the lives of anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand students during a year" (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011, p. 4).

After six years of research, Seashore et al. (2010) validated the claim that "leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student achievement" (p. 9). Reporting, the impact that school leaders have on teaching and learning is indirect. However, Seashore et al. (2010) found that school leaders have the most influence through motivating staff, their commitment, and providing favorable conditions for teachers to work.

Hattie (2009) completed a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses related to student achievement. Hattie ranked influences related to positive and negative student learning outcomes in the researcher's work on visible learning and student achievement effects. Corwin Visible Learning Plus (n.d.) reported that Hattie specifically reviewed 18 meta-analyses, 635 studies, and over 1.2 million students, which led to Hattie's conclusion that principals and school leaders positively impact student achievement with an effect size 0.37 (http://www.visiblelearningmetax.com/Influences/View/principals~school_leaders). Hattie elected to use effect size to communicate the comparative differences between a variety of school improvement strategies (Hattie, 2012). Coe (2002) stated, "Effect size is simply a way of quantifying the size of the difference between the two groups. It is easy to calculate, readily understood and can be applied to any measured outcome in Education or Social Science" (p. 1). The use of effect size provides a way for educators in search of evidence of best practices to relate the associated impacts of different strategies on student learning. In this case, Hattie demonstrated the effect that school leadership has on student learning.

Andrews and Soder (1987) conducted a study over a two-year timeframe in Seattle elementary schools that examined the principal's relationship between student academic achievement and leadership. The research concluded that students in schools led by stronger leaders experienced more significant reading and mathematics gains than students in schools led by weaker leaders (Andrews & Soder, 1987). The researchers reported in schools led by influential leaders; Black students demonstrated improved mathematics performance, as evidenced by gains ranging from 4.4 pts. In contrast, over the same period, Black students in schools led by weaker leaders regressed by an average of 2.3 points. Their findings revealed that the principal is key to academic achievement, distinctly for Black students.

Principals' leadership effectiveness influences instructional performance (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Marzano et al., 2005). Marzano et al. (2005) stated that influential school leaders can foster a culture that positively influences teachers to influence their students. According to Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005), in a study of the principalship, "School leadership strongly affects student learning. Principals are central to the task of building schools that promote powerful teaching and learning for all students" (p. 3).

## Assistant Principals

### *The Evolving Role of Assistant Principals*

Researchers who have studied assistant principals' roles have accentuated that assistant principals are regularly overlooked, although assistant principals are essential to school success. Barnett et al. (2012) concluded that "Assistant principals have tended to be ignored in the literature and take a back seat to principals in leading school reform" (p. 123). However, Armstrong (2009) attested assistant principals "play a critical role in implementing operational directives and reform policies, shaping school culture, and influencing students' outcomes" (p. 121). Williams (2019) stated, "[assistant principals] are uniquely positioned at the threshold of power, authority, and influence through interpersonal relationships with students, teachers, the larger community, and their principal" (p. 11). Marshall and Hooley (2006) proposed that assistant principals are change agents, much as the principal is responsible for implementing school improvement and leading change (Ross & Gray, 2006). Over the last 50 years, the assistant principal's administrative position has gained significance in its role in schools' operation (Oleszewski et al., 2012). Understanding the evolution of the assistant principal's position may help educators better understand why assistant principals must be regarded as essential influential leaders in schools.

Before 1953, little scholarship existed on the assistant principal's role (Glanz, 1994; Kindsvatter & Tosi, 1971); however, the position had evolved and is much different from when it was created during the 1920s and 1930s (Glanz, 1994; Sun & Shoho, 2017). Initially, the position was formed to relieve principals of their substantial workload (Glanz, 1994) and serve as an assistant to the principal when a school's population became too large for one administrator to manage effectively (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Golanda (1991) put forward that the assistant principal's role was established without a reasonable theoretical basis. Consequently, its rise as a

profession was not a part of a long-term plan but more of a staple of convenience (Glanz, 1994). Close examination of the assistant principal's roles and responsibilities began in the United States in the mid-1980s. These studies indicated that assistant principals functioned as managers, overseeing school operations with limited focus on instruction (Greenfield, 1985; Reed & Himmler, 1985). However, over time, the assistant principal's role has evolved well beyond just assisting but to include various other duties and responsibilities as federal, state, and local demands and mandates have increased (Sun & Shoho, 2017).

Created as an assistant to the principal and commonly described as the "forgotten man" and a "wasted educational resource" (Glanz, 1994, p. 587), the assistant principal has "become an integral and indispensable part of school leadership teams" (Hausman et al., 2002, p. 136). However, assistant leaders' specific roles and responsibilities are not precise (Marshall & Hooley, 2006), nor has a universal definition been established (Oleszewski et al., 2012). Niewenhuizen and Brooks (2013) specified,

> Typically, the duties of assistant principals focus on mundane, yet necessary, managerial tasks, including student discipline, supervision of hallways and lunchrooms, chaperoning dances and co-curricular activities, scheduling assemblies, meeting with parents, and when the principal is away from the building, performing the duties of the principal. (p. 187)

Today, as accountability measures increase and the demand for student achievement grows, principals are looking to their assistant principals to share the responsibility for school-wide improvement (Matthews & Crow, 2003) and personal and professional support (Hohner, 2016). As the assistant principal's role expands, it is vital that "assistant principals' relevance, significance, and position must be understood" (Harris, 2020, p. 11). The principal cannot be solely responsible for leading learning. For this reason, we can no longer ignore the role that assistant principals can play in supporting the principal in this work (Matthews & Crow, 2003). Oleszewski et al. (2012) conducted an extensive review of the literature on the assistant principals' assigned roles, responsibilities, and preparation. The study consisted of a thorough collation of assistant principals' job descriptions across 30 years, ranging from 1970-2011 in the United States and abroad. The researchers analyzed pre-existing data across many contexts and found student management, instructional leadership, and personnel management to be the duties and responsibilities most often assigned to assistant principals. They recognized the need to

reconfigure the assistant principal's role because the duties and responsibilities do not sufficiently prepare them to serve as the building principal.

Furthermore, Barnett et al. (2012) studied assistant principals' perceptions regarding their roles and responsibilities. Determining the assistant principal's role comprises two main tasks: a) managing student needs, mostly discipline and welfare issues, and b) instructional leadership. Additional studies worldwide specify assistant principal duties have included but have not been limited to managing resources and students, growth and development of teachers, instructional leadership, and conducting classroom observations (Busch et al., 2010; Gerke, 2004; Marshall, 1992, 1993).

In an in-depth qualitative study of the role of assistant principals in Hong Kong, Kwan (2009) grouped their roles into the following seven dimensions: "external communication and connection, quality assurance and accountability, teaching, learning and curriculum, staff management, resource management, leader and teacher growth and development, and strategic direction and policy environment" (p. 202). These findings present a broad range of crucial duties to the daily running of a school. Based on the data collected, Kwan (2009) has suggested conducting additional research focused on the job responsibilities and professional development specially intended to connect with assistant principals' needs. Harris (2020) emphasized that the research conducted by Kwan (2009) "further demonstrates the potential benefits of conducting a study on the absence of current research literature, explicitly addressing assistant principals' roles, responsibilities, and professional development to better prepare them to lead in diverse settings" (p. 13).

### *Pipeline to the Principalship*

The necessity to have new school leaders prepared to undertake the task of effectively leading schools is paramount as large numbers of principals continue to retire (Oleszewski et al., 2012). School divisions are experiencing high principal turnover rates (Gajda & Militello, 2008; NASSP, 2017). As a result of the nationwide population increases, the NASSP (2017) asserted that by 2022 there would be a 6% increase in principals' employment at all levels as school divisions build new schools to address their student population growth. Research indicates that divisions cannot retain one out of every two principals beyond their third year of leading a school (NASSP, 2017). This problem will continue to be exacerbated as principals' rates of retiring and burn out increase (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). Oleszewski et al. (2012) proposed examining

assistant principals' existing practices and professional growth opportunities to address the demand for qualified principal candidates. Therefore, preparing a pipeline of highly qualified assistant principals who can lead diverse schools is imperative to ensure that all students learn at high levels and close the persistent gaps in achievement and discipline. Consequently, the assistant principals' development and preparedness must unequivocally be considered (Harris, 2020; Khalifa et al., 2016a; Nieuwenhuizen & Brooks, 2013).

Researchers suppose the position of assistant principal plays a significant role in becoming a principal. This position should be leveraged as an embedded opportunity to learn that can better prepare them for the role of principal amid changing school demographics (Oleszewski et al., 2012). Marshall and Hooley (2006) proposed the assistant principalship is an entry to career advancement in school administration. Similarly, researchers assert that the assistant principal's position is the bridge to the principalship (Militello et al., 2009) and offers apt training for assuming the principal's role (Barnett et al., 2012). However, other scholars argued that assistant principals' daily functions and responsibilities do not allow for sufficient principalship preparation (Harris, 2020; Kwan, 2009). Kelly (1990) declared that it is a myth that the position of assistant principal has served as a training opportunity for moving into the principalship. Furthermore, Busch et al. (2010) and Barnett et al. (2012) endorsed this declaration by further asserting that assistant principals have reported that they do not feel prepared for the principal's role.

Research has demonstrated that the majority of assistant principals strive to become principals (Turnbull et al., 2013). Turnbull et al. (2013) asserted that by providing support, school divisions could build a pipeline of principals equipped with the capacity to improve the quality of teaching to impact student achievement. When exploring the roles and responsibilities of assistant principals, it is essential to consider the principal and assistant principal positions' relationship. Goodman and Berry (2013) proclaimed that the principal and assistant principal's relationship should be levied as a contributing factor to assistant principals' development. Researchers indicate the need for principals to serve as mentors for their assistant principals and provide assistant principals opportunities to participate in authentic leadership experiences (Wood et al., 2013).

Assistant principals hold important positions in education organizations (Morgan, 2018) and directly influence instructional improvement (Fullan, 2003). Many principals and

superintendents believe that promoting talented assistant principals and teachers is the most promising strategy for advancing effective school leadership (Coggshall et al., 2008). Although principals have enacted aspects of distributed leadership, the shared tasks are often sequestered and do not prepare the assistant principal to take on the role of principal (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007); further aggravating the growing scarcity of qualified candidates to undertake future vacancies (Bloom & Krovetz, 2001; Johnson-Taylor & Martin, 2007).

In response to this shortage, the Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline Initiative (PPI) denotes an extensive effort to provide a deliberate career advancement range for developing influential school leaders (Turnbull et al., 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015). The Wallace Foundation supported six large urban school divisions to develop a comprehensive pipeline to the principalship from 2011 to 2016 (Gates et al., 2019). The six divisions included New York, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina; Denver Public Schools, Colorado; Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia; Hillsborough Public Schools, Florida; and Prince George's County Public Schools, Maryland (Gates et al., 2019). In a RAND Corporation study focused on the Wallace Foundation PPI's work, researchers Gates et al. (2019) found the PPI positively impacted achievement, specifically in lower-achieving schools. All six PPI divisions served diverse student populations, with 65% to 96% of minorities represented (Gates et al., 2019).

**Understanding the Sense of Urgency for CRSL**

*Steadfast Disparities in Student Achievement*

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) set out to eliminate the deep inequities within our education system. However, persistent racial inequalities in education continue to expose a pattern wherein African Americans, American Indians, Latinos, and Southeast Asian groups fail to achieve academically compared to Whites and other Asian Americans (American Psychological Association, 2012). Efforts to address achievement gaps continue to be a financial burden placed on taxpayers due to costs associated with the many major legislative initiatives and reform efforts (Morris & Perry, 2016; Payne, 2008). A practical solution to closing this gap has ambiguously persisted (Khalifa et al., 2016a; Shaked, 2019). According to the American Psychological Association (2012), educational disparities,

> (1) mirror ethnic and racial disparities in socioeconomic status as well as health outcomes and healthcare, (2) are evident early in childhood and persist through the K-12 education,

and (3) are reflected in test scores assessing academic achievement, such as reading and mathematics, percentages of repeating one or more grades, drop-out and graduation rates, proportions of students involved in gifted and talented programs, enrollment in higher education, as well as in behavioral markers of adjustment, including rates of being disciplined, suspended, and expelled from schools. (p. 7)

The most recent National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment conducted by the NCES (2019) revealed prevailing score gaps in reading for student groups. The assessment results indicated that Black students scored an average of 27 points below their White counterparts and Hispanic students scored an average of 20 points below (NCES, 2019). These performance gaps were not significantly different from those reported in 1988 (NCES, 2019), presenting a case to argue that the U.S. educational systems require attention to close these achievement gaps.

According to Rojas-LeBouef and Slate (2011), students from minoritized populations perform academically below their White peers despite additional resources, funding, and access to highly qualified teachers. Singleton (2015) believed "the racial achievement gap exists and persists because fundamentally schools are not designed to educate students of color and Indigenous students, and educators lack the will, skill, knowledge, and capacity to affirm racial diversity" (p. 13). Fullan (2003) suggested that schools' moral purpose should consider improving all learners' educational outcomes, focusing on closing the achievement gap. There is a relationship between many factors, including school and non-school related, leading to racial inequities in achievement (Morris & Perry, 2016). Researchers contended that the literature related to the achievement gap has not adequately considered the impact of school punishment on achievement (Morris & Perry, 2016). "While school failure is an experience of too many ethnically diverse students, it is not the identity of any" (Gay, 2010, p. xxiv).

### *The Racial Discipline Divide*

While national discourse on racial disparity leans towards an emphasis on academic achievement, school divisions throughout the United States are experiencing a disproportionate rate of school disciplinary sanctions for Black, Latino, and American Indian students (Barrett et al., 2018; Krezmien et al., 2006; Wallace et al., 2008). Khalifa et al. (2016a) asserted the racial disparity in school discipline "is a direct indication that school cultures are hostile toward minoritized students" (p. 1279). When reviewing research on assistant principal duties, student

discipline emerges as one of the primary duties of most assistant principals (Glanz, 1994; Hausman et al., 2002). School systems across the United States continue to function under discipline systems where students of color are suspended and expelled at rates higher than White students (Barrett et al., 2018). Comprehensive studies have shown that differential rates cannot explain this disparity in infractions' severity (Morris & Perry, 2016). Despite over four decades of research and reports focused on this concern, Black students continue to receive the highest percentage of school discipline infractions and referrals to law enforcement than any other racial or ethnic group in the United States (Barrett et al., 2018; Kemp-Graham, 2015; Morris & Perry, 2016).

As early as preschool, the racial disparity in school discipline becomes evident. According to the OCR (2014), Black children signified 48% of preschool students receiving more than one out-of-school suspension. Nevertheless, the same students only represented 18% of preschool enrollment. In contrast, 43% of preschool enrollment was represented by White students, with only 26% of those receiving more than one out-of-school suspension. Additionally, it was conveyed, Black students are at risk of being suspended and expelled three times more than their White peers. OCR (2014) reported that around 16% of Black students are suspended compared to 5% of White students.

Researchers Morris and Perry (2016) explored school punishment as one explanation for the racial achievement gap. Their longitudinal study aimed to identify a connection between students' race and ethnicity, suspension rates, and achievement. The study occurred over three years, focusing on a sample of 16,246 students in grades 6 through 10 in 17 schools. Their analysis revealed the impact of school suspensions accounted for roughly one-fifth of differences in school performance between Black and White students. The researchers' findings suggest, exclusionary school punishment hampers the academic progress of minoritized students and further subsidizes the racial disparities experienced in achievement in many schools (Morris & Perry, 2016).

Barrett et al. (2018) examined disparities in exclusionary discipline between Black and White students and between poor and non-poor students in Louisiana. The study analyzed student-level discipline data from 2000-01 through 2013-14 school years (Barrett et al., 2018). The researchers revealed harsher and more frequent disciplinary actions for Black and poor students compared to their peers. Additionally, they found disparities in how these same students

were disciplined across divisions, schools, and within the same school, providing compelling evidence of systematic discrimination in student discipline (Barrett et al., 2018). School disciplinarians' absence of understanding concerning cultural norms' significance can lead to cultural incongruence that results in unequal discipline experienced by ethnically diverse student populations (Kemp-Graham, 2015). Assistant principals are often tasked with managing student discipline, as evidenced in a study conducted by Glanz (1994), revealing that assistant principals reported spending 90% of their time handling student infractions related to discipline. This finding makes it imperative for assistant principals to be prepared to lead through the lens of cultural responsiveness to ensure equitable disciplinary practices are implemented.

### *Lack of Diversity amongst Principals and Teachers*

The shortage of racial and ethnic diversity among principals is comparable to that of classroom teachers. The NCES results from its 2015–2016 National Teacher and Principal Survey reported that approximately 90,400 school principals served in K–12 public schools in the United States. The survey revealed that of those principals, 78% were White, 11% were Black or African American, 8% were Hispanic, and 3% were of another race or ethnicity (Taie & Goldring, n.d.).

A more significant gap exists between the percentage of Latino/a teachers and students than any other racial or ethnic group, with Latino/a teachers representing less than 8 percent of all teachers (Carver-Thomas, 2017, p. 2). This gap raises concern given that NCES (2019) reported that the percentage of Hispanic students enrolled in schools continues to increase. Furthermore, there has been a decrease in Black and Native American teachers (Carver-Thomas, 2017). Research indicates that teachers' racially symbolic assortment can positively affect educational outcomes for minority students (Lindsay et al., 2017). Therefore, according to a Virginia Department of Education (2017) report from the Task Force on Diversifying Virginia's Educator Pipeline, teachers' and school leaders' disproportionate racial composition poses a direct threat to increasingly diverse students' success.

### Cultural Responsiveness in Education

### *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*

Culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive pedagogies (Gay, 1994) entered education and reform discussions nearly two decades ago. Pioneers in research on

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cultural responsiveness in education, Geneva Gay (2010) and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 2014) sought to comprehend how to meet culturally diverse students' distinctive learning needs. Their work gave birth to Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). These frameworks have been broadly recognized and offer best practices to provide students from minoritized cultures, equitable access to education and academic achievement (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Expanding on the work of Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings (1994, 2004), scholars Khalifa et al. (2016b) developed the CRSL framework that highlights the essential work school leaders must do to ensure equitable access to high-quality education for all students.

To be culturally responsive, leaders must embrace culturally relevant pedagogy, which Ladson-Billings (1994) defines as empowering "students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes." (16-17). In the early 90s, Ladson-Billings (1995) built upon research adjoining the intersectionality of culture and teaching from which she devised a theoretical framework she entitled CRP. The researcher argued,

> A next step for positing effective pedagogical practice is a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate. I term this pedagogy, *culturally relevant pedagogy*. (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469)

The CRP framework ascertains three central pillars- cultural competence, academic achievement, and sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Educators must view CRP as not merely something that complements one's teaching but as the underpinning from which instructional practices and approaches are grounded and informed (Ladson-Billings, 1995). CRP must serve as the lens through which we approach our work in educating students from diverse backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 1995). "Culturally relevant pedagogy demands a critical, deep, and ongoing understanding of self, other, and context as the foundation of education" (Fraise & Brooks, 2015, p. 10). For education to be culturally relevant, Fraise and Brooks (2015) asserted,

> Teachers and students must begin their work together by reflecting on their own culture, values, knowledge, and situations and by seeking to understand the culture, values,

knowledge, and situations of other people with whom they will co-construct their

education and the multiple contexts in which they will learn and teach. (p. 10)

The literature reviewed on cultural responsiveness and school leadership echoed Fraise and Brooks' assertion about school leaders alike (Bogotch, 2002; Brown, 2006; Theoharis, 2007; Wang, 2018).

According to Ladson-Billings (2006), culturally relevant pedagogies center on cultural competence, which "refers to helping students to recognize and honor their own cultural beliefs and practices while acquiring access to the wider culture, where they are likely to have a chance of improving their lives they wish to lead" (p. 36). Ladson-Billings (2006) believed that sociopolitical consciousness is developed through culturally relevant pedagogies. Contending that educators must help their students identify, comprehend, and evaluate inequalities present in society (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Bazron et al. (2005) asserted that being disconnected from one's culture "often leads to poor self-concepts, discipline problems, and poor academic outcomes for ethnic minorities" (p. 83).

### *Culturally Responsive Practices and Student Outcomes*

Research demonstrates that students' academic achievement can be significantly influenced by their race, ethnicity, or cultural background (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). It has been shown by common indicators of student success that students from culturally diverse backgrounds experience inferior educational results compared to their peers (Bennett et al., 2004; Conchas & Noguera, 2004). Many quantitative studies call attention to the connection between educational practices that are culturally responsive and improved student achievement and success (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Dee & Penner, 2017; Han, 2017).

Han (2017) conducted a study in secondary schools in South Korea that examined "the structural relationships among leadership, organizational learning, and culturally responsive practice" (p. 3). The research defined culturally responsive practice as "a construct that represents the degree to which teachers are aware of students' diversity and are ready to use teaching methods in a culturally responsive way" (Han, 2017, p. 66). In the findings, Han reported that students demonstrate higher improvement levels when they have culturally responsive teachers. Gay (2002) found that

…there are strong correlations between culturally responsive teaching and the school achievement of students of color. The higher the one, the greater the other on all

measures, including academic performance, social adjustment, school satisfaction, self-

concept, and students' feeling of confidence and efficacy.  (p. 627)

Researchers Dee and Penner (2017) expanded upon the work of Gay (2002) in a quantitative

study that analyzed the effects of aligning minority students' cultural experiences with the

instructional practices and content delivered. The researchers piloted an ethnic studies

curriculum in a ninth-grade course across several high schools in a school district in San

Francisco. The study's findings suggested an underlying relationship between CRP and student

achievement.  Dee and Penner (2017) concluded CRP had "large, positive effects on each of our

student outcomes" (p. 3). To include "increased student attendance (i.e., reduced unexcused

absences) by 21 percentage points, cumulative ninth-grade GPA by 1.4 grade points, and credits

earned by 23 credits" (Dee & Penner, 2017, p. 3). The researchers asserted that their "findings

provide a compelling confirmation of an extensive literature that has emphasized the capacity of

CRP to unlock the educational potential of historically marginalized students" (Dee & Penner,

2017, p. 24).

**Culturally Responsive Leadership**

The foundation of culturally responsive leadership emerges from the concept of culturally

responsive and relevant pedagogy (Johnson & Fuller, 2015). Albeit teachers and their classroom

practices have been the focus of research on culturally responsive pedagogy, recent undertakings

have extended this work to school leadership through a culturally responsive framework (Davy,

2016; Gay, 1994, 2010; Johnson, 2006; Khalifa et al., 2016a; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lopez,

2015). Culturally responsive leadership advances the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy

moving beyond the classroom's confines to the larger school context and decision-making in

schools by broadening school leaders' understanding (Khalifa et al., 2016a).

Davis (2002) asserted, "When we talk about culturally responsive leadership, we are

acknowledging the need for educational leaders to value unconditionally the students they serve"

(p. 5). According to Johnson (2014), culturally responsive leadership incorporates "leadership

philosophies, practices, and policies that create inclusive schooling environments for students

and families from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds" (p.145). Madhlangobe and

Gordon (2012) defined culturally responsive leadership as, "The ability and willingness of the

leader to look beyond their own personal beliefs, values, and biases to see other people for who

they are—One who is willing to relate to and learn about others and then embrace their

differences as they lead and impart change" (p. 183). Furthermore, culturally responsive leaders aim to implement inclusive practices and strategies to engage all students. Also, culturally responsive leaders empower parents and the broader community in the schools they lead (Johnson & Fuller, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016a).

Khalifa (2018) argued that leaders enacting traditional leadership forms will not lead to schools' cultural responsiveness. While there are many approaches to leadership, culturally responsive leadership symbolizes a focus on addressing issues of equity, inequity, diversity, and access that can impact change for marginalized student populations and provides an avenue for principals to enact change in their schools (Khalifa et al., 2016a; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). In a synthesis of related literature, Khalifa et al. (2016a) concluded, "Culturally responsive leadership influences the school context and addresses the cultural needs of the students, parents, and teachers. For example, culturally responsive school leaders are responsible for promoting a school climate inclusive of minoritized students, particularly those marginalized within most school contexts" (p. 1274). Khalifa (2018) contended that cultural responsiveness must be interwoven into all aspects of leadership to include curriculum development and professional development and should be "infused throughout all other types of leadership" (p. 137). Horsford et al. (2011) asserted, "School leaders with the capacity to lead culturally diverse school communities are critical to the future of the field" (p. 593). The CRSL framework offers educators an approach to teaching and the whole school environment responsive to traditionally minoritized student populations' needs (Khalifa et al., 2016a). Researchers believe the CRSL framework can serve as a blueprint for leaders to engage in this work in an actionable and practical manner (Davy, 2016; Harris, 2020; Hollowell, 2019).

**CRSL Framework**

In an existing literature review, Khalifa et al. (2016a) sought to draw from current research focused on concepts of CRSL, specifically for historically minoritized student populations. Their synthesis focused on literature related to school leadership, culturally responsive education, social justice, and diverse student populations producing the CRSL framework. The researchers' literature review proposed "culturally responsive leadership influences the school context and addresses the cultural needs of the students, parents, and teachers" (Khalifa et al., 2016a, p. 1274). Kranzlein (2019) stated, "The CRSL framework integrates the instructional methods and materials components of Gay's (2010) culturally

responsive teaching research with the underlying beliefs and dispositions associated with Ladson-Billings' (1995) work in culturally relevant pedagogy" (p. 20).

In the CRSL framework, Khalifa et al. (2016b) denoted four specific strands that reflect the behaviors and practices in which culturally responsive school leaders employ. The four core components identified are 1) "critically self-reflect on leadership behaviors; 2) develops culturally responsive teachers; 3) promote a culturally responsive/ inclusive school environment; and 4) engage students, parents, and Indigenous contexts" (Khalifa et al., 2016b, n.p.). The researchers provide detailed descriptions and support for each strand; therefore, a synopsis of the four components of CRSL behaviors delineated in the framework is discussed explicitly in more detail in the proceeding section.

### *Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behavior*

According to Khalifa et al. (2016a), continuous, critical self-reflection on one's leadership has been identified as necessary in prior research focused on culturally responsive leadership. Khalifa et al. (2016a) asserted, leaders "needed to have an awareness of self and his/her values, beliefs, and/or dispositions when it came to serving poor children of color" (p. 1280). Khalifa et al. (2016a) asserted, "Critical reflection is foundational and actually precedes any actions in leadership" (p.1285). Critical self-reflection requires school leaders to deliberately reflect on their leadership practices (Cooper, 2009; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2006; Lomotey, 1989; Theoharis, 2007) and the context in which they serve. Dantley (2005) claimed that the mindset of critical self-reflection requires school leaders to embrace their identity and compare them to the identities present in the communities they serve. For culturally responsive school leaders, Khalifa et al. (2016a) asserted, critical self-reflection "unearths their personal biases, assumptions, and values that stem from their cultural backgrounds" (p. 1285).

### *Develop Culturally Responsive Teachers*

In this strand, Khalifa et al. (2016a) bring awareness to the critical role that school leaders must play in ensuring that their teachers are culturally responsive and continue to grow in their practices to support diverse student populations. This strand delineates the work school leaders must do to distinguish and test common patterns of inequities and build a collective vision for serving students from diverse backgrounds. It also focuses on "providing professional development to increase teacher capacity in CRE practices and using data to identify cultural

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gaps in achievement, placement, and discipline" (Kranzlein, 2019, p. 20). Additionally, this strand holds school leaders accountable for ensuring that the school's curriculum, teacher's instruction, and assessments address students' needs from diverse cultures (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). To develop culturally responsive teachers and curriculum, school leaders must be willing to model culturally responsive practices (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) and be driven to examine every school leadership element through a culturally responsive lens (Khalifa et al., 2016a).

### *Promote Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environment*

CRSL requires school leaders to engage in culturally responsive practices that challenge behaviors, teachers, and policies that exclude and discriminate (Khalifa, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) "to create and maintain an inclusive and validating environment that values the unique contributions of each student" (Kranzlein, 2019, p. 20). In this context, students from diverse backgrounds are acknowledged through the intentional celebration of their heritage. Culturally responsive school leaders treat all students as respected members of the community. This strand challenges school leaders to engage in courageous conversations around race and inequities to transform attitudes and mindsets (Madhlangobe, 2009).

### *Engage Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts*

The final component of CRSL tasks school leaders with engaging families and the community in culturally responsive ways, intentionally traversing the divide between home and school (Khalifa et al., 2016a). By creating "authentic overlapping school-community spaces" (Khalifa et al., 2016a, p. 1291), culturally responsive leaders can leverage the community as a resource to develop a better understanding of the students and families, they serve (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). This can only be accomplished through cultivating favorable relationships with parents, students, and the school community (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Taliaferro, 2011).

### **Preparation to Lead in Diverse Schools**

### *Educational Leadership Preparation Programs*

Historically, the assistant principal's role has been the most common beginning position for those seeking careers in the field of school leadership (Marshall, 1992; NASSP, 1991), often

taking the same steps toward certification as principals. Alarmingly, Lopez (2003) asserted that traditional educational leadership preparation programs fail to teach aspiring school leaders how race and racism profoundly affect our educational system. A literature review revealed no direct link to university coursework that directly influences assistant principals or equips preservice leaders with culturally responsive leadership practices preparing them to lead in diverse school settings. Horsford et al. (2011) stated,

> The long-documented demographic divide in the United States among public school students, teachers, and administrators poses interesting challenges for educational professionals who may not be adequately prepared to successfully teach or lead in racially and ethnically diverse classrooms, schools, or divisions. (p. 599)

Many researchers have suggested that assistant principals are not adequately prepared to serve as principals in diverse schools (Kwan, 2009; Oleszweski et al., 2012). Khalifa et al. (2016a) suggested that the growing diversity within schools calls for educational leadership preparation programs to emphasize integrating culturally responsive leadership within their programs to prepare school leaders to serve in diverse school settings and meet students' needs from traditionally marginalized populations. Furthermore, Touré (2009) recommended that further research examine educational leadership preparation programs to embed culturally responsive leadership content within their programs.

A qualitative case study conducted by Gaymon (2017) found that assistant principals perceived that they were prepared to serve as culturally responsive leaders in schools with diverse student populations. Contrarily, it was concluded that the assistant principals did not feel that their leadership preparation programs had prepared them to serve as culturally responsive leaders in diverse schools. Additionally, the study concluded that "the duties, responsibilities, experiences, and staff development of the assistant principals are not fully preparing them to be culturally responsive leaders who will lead in diverse schools even though they feel they are" (Gaymon, 2017, p. 157). Furthermore, Gaymon (2017) reported that the assistant principals in the same study did not feel as though merely their experiences as assistant principal prepared them to lead a diverse school but associated their preparedness with their experiences as an educator throughout their career. The study's principal participants did not have an extensive understanding of culturally responsive leadership as defined by the theoretical framework on which the research was based. Additionally, Gaymon (2017) reported that the study's principals

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did not share any specific duties or responsibilities assigned to their assistant principals to support their assistant principals' development as culturally responsive leaders. The researcher further asserted that principals must develop their understanding of culturally responsive leadership before developing their assistant principals and providing them with experiences and opportunities to build their capacity to lead in diverse schools (Gaymon, 2017).

Johnston and Young (2019) examined the relationship between principals' "self-reported preparedness to work with nonwhite and low-income students when they started working as school leaders" and their overall satisfaction with their pre-service programs to do so (p.4). The study included "the perspective of nationally representative sample of principals and teachers through the RAND American Educator Panels" consisting of 3,299 participants (Johnston & Young, 2019, p. 4). The researchers (2019) sought to answer two relevant questions to include, "How prepared to support an increasingly diverse student body do educators report being, and how does this perception vary based on educators' race?" and "For principals, to what extent is their self-reported preparedness to work with non-white and low-income students when they started working as school leaders associated with their preservice training's focus on this aspect of school leadership, and how does the association differ from white and nonwhite respondents?" (p.4). Analysis of the data found that over 60 percent of principals felt "that their preservice programs prepared them to support with Black, Latino, and/or low-income students" (Johnston & Young, 2019, p. 2). The researchers also found that the study's White principals conveyed "lower levels of preparedness to support Black, Latino, and low-income students when they began working as a principal compared with their nonwhite peers" (Johnston & Young, 2019, p. 2).

In a qualitative study, Vogel (2011) "examined how educators that were enrolled or had completed an educational leadership program at a university in Rocky Mountain understood social justice and the role of multicultural education in promoting social justice in the P-12 school setting" (p. 69). Vogel (2011) found that of the 54 educators who participated in the study, "Less than one third (28%) of participants expressed views reflecting cultural proficiency or competence, indicating a need for explicit coverage of social justice issues and cultural responsiveness in the educational leadership program examined" (p. 69). The findings from the study indicated "the need for leadership preparation programs to explicitly address social justice and oppression issues to increase the awareness of leaders and thus their capability to facilitate

change that supports greater social justice and equitable educational outcomes for all students" (Vogel, 2011, p. 69).

Young et al. (2010) specified that principals in their study were not prepared for leadership in schools serving diverse student populations. They further noted that the principals could not articulate meaningful dialogue on the topic of diversity effectively. If this rings true for principals, one can infer that assistant principals are unprepared to lead in diverse schools (Gaymon, 2017). For closely three decades, researchers have been searching for a deliberate approach to leadership preparation that is socially just (Bogotch, 2002; Brooks & Miles, 2008; Capper et al., 2006; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015). Gooden and O'Doherty (2015) asserted, "Programs preparing culturally responsive school leaders must address how race, power, and individual, institutional, and cultural racism impact beliefs, structures, and outcomes for students of color" (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015). Research indicates that educational leadership certification programs often marginalize issues aligned with social justice (Shoho, 2006). As Capper et al. (2006) declared, "current preparation programs aimed toward social justice tend to focus on critical consciousness . . . [and] find it difficult to prepare leaders to acquire the actual skills needed to make equity-based changes in schools" (p. 218). In a call to action, Furman (2012) argued, "These persistent inequalities demand new approaches to transformative action in schools and, thus, new approaches to educational leadership" (p. 212). Educational leadership preparation programs must develop antiracist school leaders capable of recognizing schools' inequitable reproductive functions and have the skills and valor to afford students' different opportunities from traditionally marginalized populations (Lopez, 2003).

In a qualitative study, Black et al. (2014) conducted 30 interviews focused on principal preparation. The researchers "examined four locations along the career continuum of school principals in Minnesota: 1) recruitment and selection; 2) university preparation programs; 3) licensing and certification; 4) continuing professional development of assistant principals" (p.1). The study's conclusions suggest that ongoing opportunities for professional learning are necessary for school leaders. Specifically, principals in the study reported the need for professional development related to "leading schools with diverse student populations, working in communities in which languages other than English were spoken at home, and for the other challenges raised by diversity, such as increasing social cohesion among students in schools" (Black et al., 2014, p. 9).

Research on cultivating culturally responsive leaders continues to focus on principal preparation programs' role in preparing future school leaders to serve as schools become more diverse (Bustamante et al., 2009; Vogel, 2011; Young et al., 2010). In the scarcity of curricula focused on culturally responsive leadership in higher education, school divisions are tasked with providing professional development to support school leaders in building equity in schools and creating schools that meet all students' needs. Supported by an assertion from Fullan (2001) that "it has become increasingly clear that leadership at all levels of the system is the key lever for reform, especially leaders who focus on capacity building and develop other leaders who can carry on" (p. 21).

### *Division Level Professional Development*

Zaretsky et al. (2008) shared that many school leaders specify that they received inadequate training on equity-related issues during their pre-service leadership training. The Every Student Succeeds Act holds school divisions accountable for focusing efforts on principals when making policy and allocating funds and resources for professional development (ESSA, 2015). Equity and cultural responsiveness have been included in the National Professional Standards for Educational Leaders' core standards and the Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards (ESSA, 2015; National Policy Board of Educational Administration, 2015). It has been recommended by the NASSP (2019) for school division leaders to make sure that their "principals and teachers have professional development opportunities to help them assess their cultural viewpoints and biases, set high expectations for all students, acknowledge diverse learning styles, use culturally responsive pedagogy, and effectively engage diverse family and community members." Espinoza and Cardichon (2017) stated, "The Every Student Succeeds Act provides opportunities for states to invest in developing and supporting effective school leaders. One such opportunity includes using federal funds to support the recruitment, preparation, and training of high-quality leaders using the optional state set-aside under Title II" (p. 1). According to the NAESP, "ESSA permits states to reserve up to 3% of Title II funds for programs to improve principal and school leader capacity" (National Association of Elementary School Principals & American Institute for Research, 2017). Strategic allotment of Title II funds would help states build their school leaders' aptitude to lead social justice (Espinoza & Cardichon, 2017).

**Summary**

Scholars and practitioners alike concede that school leadership plays a notable role in improving achievement and fostering school climates and cultures where all students can succeed (Fullan, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016a; Leithwood et al., 2019). However, schools across the United States have not successfully educated students who have been historically marginalized in our educational system (Bazron et al., 2005; Khalifa et al., 2016a; Ladson-Billings, 1995) through the implementation of traditional forms of leadership. Harris (2020) stated, "Culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) is distinguished from other leadership approaches" (p. 25). CRSL is grounded in the credence that to lead diverse schools; impactful school leaders must lead with courage (Khalifa, 2011; Nee-Benham et al., 1988) and engage in self-reflection (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2006) to incontestably discern their biases, assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding cultures that may vary from theirs (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). Considering the responsibility of fostering a culturally responsive and inclusive school culture and supporting teachers with implementing CRT practices resides with leadership; school leaders should be driven to lead through the lens of cultural responsiveness to improve achievement for marginalized student populations. Khalifa et al. (2016a) asserted that CRSL consists of practices that can be utilized by school leaders to meet the rapidly changing demographics in schools. Khalifa (2018) argued, "The lack of CRSL is a reproduction of oppression, despite the good intentions that some educational leaders may have" (p. 27). Therefore, all school leaders must be prepared to lead in a time of increased nationwide diversity (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

As evidenced in the literature, the role of the principal has been widely studied, while the role of the assistant principal is regularly disregarded (Hartzell, 1993; Marshall, 1992; Oleszewski et al., 2012), revealing a gap in research explicitly focused on assistant principals and culturally responsive leadership. In light of scholars' concern, assistant principals are not prepared to face political, economic, cultural, and social pressures present in today's schools based on their historical duties and roles (Kwan, 2009; Nieuwenhuizen, 2011; Oleszewski et al., 2012). Research shows that school leadership matters and can profoundly affect student performance (Marzano et al., 2005). Hence, researchers assert that a focus should be placed on the roles, responsibilities, and practices of assistant principals to improve their preparedness to assume the principal's role (Boske, 2012; Kwan, 2009; Oleszewski et al., 2012). Their readiness

to serve as culturally responsive leaders is essential to improve instruction, enhance student achievement for marginalized student populations, and address diverse students, families, and communities' needs (Khalifa, 2018). Leithwood et al. (2019) claimed that "School leadership can have an especially positive influence on school and student outcomes when it is distributed" (p. 9)—further validating a declaration from Nieuwenhuizen (2011) that, "It is time for the education community to recognize [assistant principals] as an integral part of closing the achievement gap and improving our schools" (p. 205).

# CHAPTER THREE
## METHODOLOGY

According to Holton and Burnett (2005), quantitative techniques are especially solid at studying large groups of people and formulating generalizations from the sample being studied to broader groups beyond the sample. As a result, the researcher selected a quantitative methodology for this study to investigate assistant principals' perceptions of their preparedness to lead in diverse school settings through the CRSL framework lens. This chapter will present the study's purpose, the research design, and the research questions. The following will include the sample selection, data collection and gathering procedures, information about the instrument, and the data analysis techniques.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate elementary assistant principals' perceptions of their preparedness to lead in diverse school settings through the lens of the CRSL framework. This study hopes to help school divisions and school leaders address challenges facing public schools in the United States in light of rapidly changing demographics (NCES, 2019) to include achievement gaps (Khalifa et al., 2016a; Morris & Perry, 2016; Shaked, 2019) and discipline disparities (Barret et al., 2018; Morris & Perry 2016; Office of Civil Rights, 2014). First, this study sought to identify the leadership behaviors and practices utilized by elementary assistant principals through the lens of the CRSL framework created by Khalifa et al. (2016b). Second, this study sought to understand elementary assistant principals' perceived level of preparedness to lead amidst changing demographics in public schools in the United States. Lastly, this study aimed to identify elementary assistant principals' professional development needs to lead in diverse school settings.

## Research Design and Justification

This quantitative study utilized a descriptive research design to examine three research questions. A quantitative methodology involves an empirical analysis of data that has been collected from a sample of people from specific populations to make generalizable observations for the whole (Creswell, 2009). For this study, a quantitative methodology was selected to identify assistant principals' perceptions, practices, and behaviors related to CRSL and preparation to lead in diverse schools.

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According to Creswell (2012), "survey designs are procedures in quantitative research in which you administer a survey or questionnaire to a small group of people (called the sample) to identify trends in attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of a large group of people (called the population)" (p. 25). More specifically, a cross-sectional survey data collection method was utilized. Creswell (2009) rendered a cross-sectional survey method that collects data at one precise point in time and allows the researcher to examine others' attitudes, beliefs, or opinions. This study design utilized a survey research model with data collected at one point in time using a researcher-developed survey tool. This design is apt when a study aims to collect, describe, and evaluate information from a target population (Creswell, 2009). This study's selected group of interest were elementary assistant principals in a local PK-12 suburban public school division in Central Virginia. The researcher used a researcher-developed survey tool for descriptive analyses to answer the proposed research questions.

**Research Questions**

The preparedness of assistant principals to become culturally responsive school leaders was the focus of this study. The data collected and analyzed sought to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do assistant principals perceive they are prepared to lead in diverse school settings?
2. What components of the CRSL framework do assistant principals currently utilize in their leadership practice?
3. What are self-reported professional development needs for assistant principals to lead in diverse schools?

**Site and Sample Selection**

According to Creswell (2012), "Quantitative research is very important in selecting a sample from a population. In this way, the sample is representative of the population" (p. 297). A non-random, convenience sampling strategy was used in this study. This study's sample was obtained from the considered target population, which included individuals serving as elementary assistant principals in a PK-12 suburban public-school division in Central Virginia that serves a population of approximately 60,000 students. Student demographics for the selected school division in the fall of 2019 were 25.4% Black, 48.3% White, 17.6% Hispanic, 5.0%

Multiple Races, 3.3% Asian, 0.2% Native Hawaiian, and 0% American Indian. Division-wide, 11.8% of all students were English Learners; approximately 39.2% of all students were identified as economically disadvantaged.

In their early years, providing students with a strong foundation has increased their chances of thriving and success in school throughout their educational journey (Melhuish, 2010). For this reason, the researcher chose to focus on elementary assistant principals. Also, assistant principals were selected as the focus of this study because that position is viewed as a training ground for principalship (Barnett et al., 2002; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Militello et al., 2009). The survey instrument was accessible for voluntary completion by all assistant principals and associate principals working within any of the elementary schools in the participating division during the 2020-21 school year. The survey instrument was offered to 44 potential study participants employed within the selected division. A total of 26 surveys were completed by participants for a response rate of 59% (26 out of 44).

**Data Collection and Gathering Procedures**

The data for this study were collected using a survey research model utilizing a researcher-developed quantitative survey. A survey design is suitable when the study intends to collect, describe, and evaluate information from a selected target population (Creswell, 2009). The researcher attained the total number of elementary assistant principals and associate principals serving in the participating school division at the study's time from the participating division's Office of Research and Evaluation.

Once approval from the Virginia Polytechnic and Institute University Review Board was granted and the researcher received the *Western Institutional Review Board Approval Letter* (see Appendix D), the researcher sought approval from the participating school division's Department of Research and Evaluation. After the Research Authorization Committee reviewed the research request, the committee's decision was provided to the researcher via the *Research Authorization Committee Approval Letter* (see Appendix E). This study utilized the participating school division's Department of Research and Evaluation personnel to distribute the invitation to participate and the survey to participants via email. The invitations to participate in this phase of the study were sent electronically to all practicing elementary assistant principals and associate principals in the participating school division (see Appendix F). The invitation to participate in the research study was sent over two weeks with a reminder email. The survey was administered

electronically using an online web-based surveying product provided through Virginia Tech. All participants were informed that participation in this study was entirely voluntary and that all responses would remain confidential, with no identifiable information collected to associate them with their responses. The survey was estimated to take approximately 15 minutes for each participant to complete. A major advantage in the use of an online web-based survey as a method to collect participants' perceptions of sensitive issues allows the participants to submit their responses via the internet and does not require face-to-face contact with the researcher (Rea & Parker, 2005)

**Instrument Design**

The study used a researcher-constructed survey titled the Self-Perceived Culturally Responsive School Leadership Preparedness Survey (see Appendix B) designed for this research. The data collected from the survey responses were used to answer the research questions. The researcher-developed survey instrument was developed using the CRSL framework (Khalifa et al., 2016b) to gather the assistant principals' responses concerning their culturally responsive leadership practices. The researcher identified the specific behaviors and practices related to this study's purpose; in doing so, not all components of the CRSL framework were included in the survey instrument. The survey consisted of 17 items organized into four sections: (a) school demographics; (b) self-perceived level of preparation; (c) culturally responsive leadership behaviors; and (d) one open-ended question. In section one, a school demographic question included the percentage of minority makeup of the student body. The demographic data collected were used to describe the sample population.

The second part of the survey instrument asked the respondents to rate their self-perceived level of preparedness to lead in diverse school settings using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1= very poorly prepared, 2= poorly prepared, 3= somewhat prepared, 4= prepared, and 5= very well prepared). The data from this part of the survey were used to address the first research question.

The third part of the survey instrument requested that the participants indicate the culturally responsive leadership behaviors they utilize in their practice. A 5-point Likert-type agreement scale (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= somewhat agree, 4= agree, and 5= strongly agree) was used to determine the respondents' level of agreement with the statements in each of the four strands selected from the CRSL framework. The responses to this part of the

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survey were used to answer the second research question. Finally, the fourth part of the survey included one open-ended question that asked participants to identify the self-reported professional development needs of assistant principals to lead diverse school settings to provide data to answer the third research question.

**Validity and Reliability**

The study used a researcher-developed survey to gather concluding responses from the study participants. Creswell (2009) stated it "is important to establish the content validity of an instrument and to improve questions, format, and scales" (p. 150). Therefore, content validity was used to determine each survey item's appropriateness, given the variables to be measured by the survey. To address the instrument's validity, the researcher sought feedback from a panel of experienced administrators working in the field of educational leadership to produce interpretable results. The group consisted of eight administrators participating in the Virginia Tech Doctoral Program, Richmond Cohort. The survey was shared electronically with the panel, and in return, the feedback was provided electronically to the researcher via email. Participants were asked to give each indicator feedback to ensure it belonged in the survey and were relevant to the measured variables, consider linguistic aspects of the survey items, and the response format's adequacy to confirm the survey instrument's validity. The researcher provided the panel members with a matrix to demonstrate each survey item's alignment with the research questions (see Appendix A). Their review focused on two measures—clarity and relevance of the survey indicators to the research questions and the study's overall purpose. The feedback and input obtained helped the researcher determine whether the survey gathered the intended data to answer the research questions and evaluate whether any bias was present in the wording of survey items. See Appendix B for the full survey as presented in Qualtrics.

Consideration must be given to reliability as a part of the validation process (Cronbach, 1951). Creswell (2014) stated that using a reliable and valid survey instrument for assessment, attitudes, and opinions about a specific population could be acceptably inferred from the sample. The researcher used Cronbach's Alpha (α) to test this study's internal reliability and consistency. Cronbach's Alpha (α) was calculated using the Likert questions from the survey. According to Cronbach (1951), Cronbach Alpha values of 0.7 or greater demonstrates adequate internal reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha for this study's survey was 0.76, suggesting that the survey items have satisfactory internal consistency.

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**Data Treatment and Management**

Before this study was conducted, the human subjects review process was completed as required by the Virginia Tech Review Board to certify the research is in total compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. The researcher completed the required IRB training and received a *Certificate of Completion of the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)* as certified on August 2, 2019 (see Appendix C). Consent and confidentiality will be maintained through the provision of the *Implied Consent Agreement* (see Appendix G). The consent form was provided as an oath of confidentiality regarding participants' identity and the data collected for the only purpose of the study's specifications. All participants were informed of their option to participate and rights, and by completing the survey, they granted their consent.

The participating school division's Office of Research and Evaluation distributed the research survey to participants electronically via Qualtrics on behalf of the researcher. Once the survey responses were attained, all data were saved and protected by login and password only accessible to the researcher. After completing the study and a dissertation defense, all associated data and analyses related to this study will be maintained for three years, remaining accessible only to the researcher. At the end of the three-year timeframe, all data associated with the study will be deleted.

**Data Analysis Techniques**

Qualtrics, an online web-based surveying system provided through Virginia Tech, was used to collect this study's data. Surveys were distributed to study participants electronically via email (see Appendix F). The data gathered were analyzed to answer the research questions posed in the study. For research questions one and two, a descriptive analysis was applied through descriptive statistics. This study's descriptive statistics consisted of percentages, frequencies, measures of central tendency (mean), and standard deviations. The mean and standard deviation of data were reported to illustrate consensus and the divergence of response. The data from the third research question was coded and analyzed for themes.

**Timeline**

The initial study proposal was completed in July 2020 and submitted to the dissertation chair for review and feedback. Upon completing the prospectus examination in August 2020, the

dissertation committee granted permission to move forward with the study. The study was submitted for IRB approval in August 2020. The IRB approval was granted in September 2020. Upon authorization to conduct the study from the participating school division Department of Research and Evaluation, invitations to participate and the electronic survey were sent to practicing elementary assistant and associate principals in the school division in October 2020. The two-week survey window closed on October 23, 2020, and during the months of November and December 2020, the researcher analyzed the survey results to identify the study's findings and future implications.

**Methodology Summary**

Chapter Three described the participants, the research methods, the instrumentation, and the data analysis techniques used in this study. Chapter Four presents the results of the data analysis. Finally, in Chapter Five, the researcher discussed the summary of this study's results as they related to relevant literature and presented implications and suggestions for future research.

# CHAPTER FOUR
# RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate elementary assistant principals' perceptions of their preparedness to lead in diverse school settings through the lens of the culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) framework. Additionally, this study sought to identify specific professional development assistant principals perceived they needed to lead diverse schools and determine which components of the CRSL framework assistant principals currently utilize in their leadership practice. The study used a survey collection methodology. The researcher developed the Self-Perceived Culturally Responsive School Leadership Preparedness Survey to collect this study's quantitative data. The research questions driving this study were:

1. To what extent do assistant principals perceive they are prepared to lead in diverse school settings?

2. What components of the CRSL framework do assistant principals currently utilize in their leadership practice?

3. What are self-reported professional development needs for assistant principals to lead in diverse schools?

This chapter begins with an overview of the quantitative data collected from the 26 assistant principals who participated in this research study. The summary of the analysis will include the procedures within the analysis and a description of the school demographics for each school represented by assistant principals participating in the survey. The results of the assistant principals' responses to each of the research questions were examined.

## Data Reporting

This study's sample consisted of a targeted group of elementary assistant principals in a suburban PK-12 school division in Central Virginia. Consent was implied if the participants completed the survey. The total sample ($n$) size that was identified for the study was 44 elementary assistant principals. The survey was sent to study participants electronically. The researcher used the participating school division's Office of Research and Evaluation to distribute the survey. The invitation to participate in the study was sent to participants via email by the participating school division's Office of Research and Evaluation (see Appendix F) on behalf of the researcher. The email containing the link to the survey was sent to study

participants on Friday, October 9, 2020. After the two-week survey window on Friday, October 23, 2020, there was a response rate of 59% (26 out of 44 assistant principals). While 26 surveys were returned for the study, in some cases, participants chose not to answer each question or skipped a question on the survey. The Qualtrics system did not include items with no response in the statistical examination.

The Self-Perceived Culturally Responsive School Leadership Preparedness Survey (see Appendix B) consisted of 17 items organized into four sections: (1) school demographics; (2) self-perceived level of preparation; (3) culturally responsive leadership behaviors; and (4) one open-ended question. In section one of the survey tool, the school demographic question included the percentage of minority makeup of the student population. This data was collected to describe the student population served in each of the participants' schools. Table 1 reveals the participants' responses. Table 1 shows that half of the assistant principals participating in this study served schools, with over 40% of the student population identified as minority students (13 out of 26). Specifically, 27% of the responding assistant principals (n = 7) indicated 41-50% of their school's student population were minority students, and 23% of the responding assistant principals (n = 6) had more than 50% of their school's student population identified as minority students. In contrast, only 4% of the responding assistant principals (n = 1) serve schools with 0-5% of their student population identified as minority students; there were no assistant principals serving schools with the second-lowest minority student population range provided as a response in the survey, 11-20%.

**Table 1**

*Frequency and Percentage of Minority Student Population Ranges in Schools Served by Elementary School Assistant Principals*

| Minority Student Population Range | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|
| 0-5% | 1 | 4% |
| 6-10% | 4 | 15% |
| 11-20% | 0 | 0% |
| 21-30% | 4 | 15% |
| 31-40% | 4 | 15% |
| 41-50% | 7 | 27% |
| 50+% | 6 | 23% |
| Total | 26 | 100% |

**Data Analysis**

*Research Question 1*

**To what extent do assistant principals perceive they are prepared to lead in diverse school settings?** Descriptive statistics, including means, percentages, frequency of responses, and standard deviations for survey questions 1, 2, and 3 of the Self-Perceived Culturally Responsive School Leadership Preparedness Survey (see Tables 2 and 3), were used to identify the extent to which the assistant principals perceived they were prepared to lead in diverse school settings.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics for Assistant Principals' Ratings of Preparedness to Lead in Diverse School Settings*

| # | Question | *M* | SD | N |
|---|----------|-----|-----|---|
| 1. | How prepared do you feel you are to lead in a diverse school setting as the building principal? | 4.08 | 0.57 | 24 |
| 2. | How well do you feel your current duties and responsibilities as assistant principal has prepared you to be a culturally responsive school leader? | 3.68 | 0.73 | 25 |
| 3. | How well do you feel your leadership preparation program prepared you to lead in a diverse school setting? | 3.28 | 0.72 | 25 |

**Table 3**

*Assistant Principals' Self-Perceived Level of Preparation*

| # | Question | Very Poorly Prepared [1] | Poorly Prepared [2] | Somewhat Prepared [3] | Prepared [4] | Very Well Prepared [5] | Total |
|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | How prepared do you feel you are to lead in a diverse school setting as the building principal? | 0% (N=0) | 0% (N=0) | 13% (N=3) | 67% (N=16) | 21% (N=5) | 24 |
| 2. | How well do you feel your current duties and responsibilities as assistant principal has prepared you to be a culturally responsive school leader? | 0% (N=0) | 4% (N=1) | 36% (N=9) | 48% (N=12) | 12% (N=3) | 25 |
| 3. | How well do you feel your leadership preparation program prepared you to lead in a diverse school setting? | 0% (N=0) | 12% (N=3) | 52% (N=13) | 32% (N=8) | 4% (N=1) | 25 |

The data obtained from study participants in their response to survey question 1 revealed that most assistant principals felt prepared to lead in a diverse school setting as the building principal. Specifically, 88% of assistant principals (*n* = 21) reported that they felt prepared (*n* = 16) or very prepared (*n* = 5) to lead in a diverse school setting as the building principal. Additionally, 13% of assistant principals (*n* = 3) reported that they felt somewhat prepared, and no assistant principals reported that they felt poorly prepared or very poorly prepared.

Question 2 asked assistant principals to rate how prepared they felt their current duties and responsibilities prepared them to be culturally responsive school leaders. Data from question 2 revealed that most assistant principals feel that their current duties and responsibilities have prepared them to be a culturally responsive school leader. Specifically, 48% of the assistant

principals ($n = 12$) felt their current duties and responsibilities prepared them to be a culturally responsive school leader, and 12% of the assistant principals ($n = 3$) felt very well prepared. In contrast, one assistant principal (4%) felt his/her current duties and responsibilities have poorly prepared him/her to be a culturally responsive school leader. No assistant principals reported that their current duties and responsibilities have very poorly prepared them to be culturally responsive school leaders.

Question 3 asked assistant principals to rate how well they felt their leadership preparation program prepared them to lead diverse school settings. Data from question 3 revealed that more than 50% of the assistant principals ($n = 13$) felt their leadership preparation program somewhat prepared them to lead diverse school settings. While 36% of the assistant principals ($n = 9$) felt their leadership preparation program prepared ($n = 8$) or very well prepared ($n = 1$) them to lead diverse school settings. Conversely, a total of 12% of the assistant principals ($n = 3$) felt their leadership preparation program poorly prepared them to lead a diverse school setting. No assistant principals reported that their leadership preparation program very poorly prepared them to lead a diverse school setting.

*Research Question 2*

**What components of the CRSL framework do assistant principals currently utilize in their leadership practice?** Descriptive statistics, including means, percentages, frequency of responses, and standard deviations for survey items 4-15, of the Self-Perceived Culturally Responsive School Leadership Preparedness Survey (see Table's 4 – 9) were used to identify the components of the CRSL framework the assistant principals utilize in their leadership practice.

**Table 4**

*Descriptive Statistics for Assistant Principal Responses to Answer Research Question 2*

| Item# | Item | *M* | *SD* | *N* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I self-reflect on my leadership to be more responsive to the needs of diverse students, families, and the community I serve. | 4.56 | 0.50 | 25 |
| 2 | I am committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts. | 4.63 | 0.48 | 24 |
| 3 | I consider myself to be a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion. | 4.00 | 0.75 | 25 |
| 4 | I help teachers develop and implement instructional practices, skills, and behaviors to meet the needs of diverse students. | 4.16 | 0.73 | 25 |
| 5 | I model culturally responsive teaching for my teachers. | 4.20 | 0.69 | 25 |
| 6 | I use school data to identify and address cultural gaps in achievement and discipline to inform the professional development needs of teachers. | 4.24 | 0.71 | 25 |
| 7 | I challenge exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors. | 4.04 | 0.66 | 25 |
| 8 | I promote a vision for inclusive instructional and behavioral practices. | 4.40 | 0.57 | 25 |
| 9 | I acknowledge and value the cultural and social capital of students in my school. | 4.72 | 0.53 | 25 |
| 10 | I develop meaningful relationships with students, parents, and my school community. | 4.88 | 0.32 | 25 |
| 11 | I honor and celebrate diversity in my school. | 4.52 | 0.64 | 25 |
| 12 | I serve as an advocate and social activist for community-based causes in both my school and the neighborhood community. | 3.68 | 1.05 | 25 |

The third part of the survey consisted of 12 statements that examined the assistant principals' perceptions of the specific components from the CRSL framework that they felt they currently utilized in their practice. Study participants rated their agreement level with each

statement derived from the four strands and behaviors of culturally responsive school leaders denoted in the CRSL framework (Khalifa et al., 2016b). The four strands identified are 1) "critically self-reflect on leadership behaviors; 2) develops culturally responsive teachers; 3) promote a culturally responsive/inclusive school environment; and 4) engage students, parents, and Indigenous contexts" (Khalifa et al., 2016b, n.p.). Table 5 provides the specific behaviors from each strand of the CRSL framework outlined in this study.

**Table 5**

*Strands from the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework and the Specific Behaviors of Culturally Responsive School Leaders*

| Critically self-reflects on leadership behaviors | Develops culturally responsive teachers | Promotes culturally responsive/inclusive school environments | Engages students, parents, and Indigenous contexts |
|---|---|---|---|
| I self-reflect on my leadership to be more responsive to the needs of diverse students, families, and the community I serve. | I help teachers develop and implement instructional practices, skills, and behaviors to meet the needs of diverse students. | I challenge exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors. | I develop meaningful relationships with students, parents, and my school community. |
| I am committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts. | I model culturally responsive teaching for my teachers. | I promote a vision for inclusive instructional and behavioral practices. | I honor and celebrate diversity in my school. |
| I consider myself to be a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion. | I use school data to identify and address cultural gaps in achievement and discipline to inform the professional development needs of teachers. | I acknowledge and value the cultural and social capital of students in my school. | I serve as an advocate and social activist for community-based causes in both my school and the neighborhood community. |

*All phrases were developed from the CRSL framework (Khalifa et al., 2016b, n.p.).*

The data from Table 6 illustrates the assistant principals' level of agreement with the specific statements aligned with the first strand of the CRSL framework. The first strand of the

CRSL framework focuses on a school leader's ability to critically self-reflect on their leadership behaviors. The three statements presented in this section of the survey include specific behaviors Khalifa et al. (2016a) have identified culturally responsive school leaders utilize to critically self-reflect on their leadership behaviors. Khalifa et al. (2016a) asserted, culturally responsive school leaders self-reflect on their leadership to respond to diverse students' needs. They are "committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts" and consider themselves transformative leaders for social justice and inclusion (Khalifa et al., 2016a, p. 1283).

**Table 6**

*Assistant Principals' Responses to Strand 1of the CRSL Framework: Critically Self-Reflect on Leadership Behaviors*

| Statement Number | Statement | Strongly Disagre [1] | Disagree [2] | Somewhat Agree [3] | Agree [4] | Strongly Agree [5] | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I self-reflect on my leadership to be more responsive to the needs of diverse students, families, and the community I serve. | 0% (N= 0) | 0% (N=0) | 0% (N=0) | 44% (N=11) | 56% (N=14) | 25 |
| 2 | I am committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts. | 0% (N=0) | 0% (N=0) | 0% (N=0) | 38% (N=9) | 63% (N=15) | 24 |
| 3 | I consider myself to be a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion. | 0% (N=0) | 4% (N=1) | 16% (N=4) | 56% (N=14) | 24% (N=6) | 25 |

Statement 1 asked the assistant principals to rate the level to which they agreed that they self-reflect on their leadership to be more responsive to diverse students' needs. Responses to statement 1 revealed that 100% of the assistant principals strongly agreed (*n* = 15) or agreed (*n* = 11) that they self-reflect on their leadership to be more responsive to diverse students' needs.

Statement 2 asked the assistant principals to rate the level to which they agreed that they are committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts. Responses to

statement 2 revealed that 100% of the assistant principals strongly agreed ($n = 15$) or agreed ($n = 9$) that they are committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts.

Statement 3 asked the assistant principals to rate the level to which they agreed that they are a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion. Responses to statement 3 revealed that 80% of the assistant principals strongly agreed ($n = 6$) or agreed ($n = 14$) that they perceived themselves as a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion. While 16% of the assistant principals ($n = 4$) somewhat agreed with the statement, one assistant principal (4%) did not consider him/herself to be a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion by selecting disagree.

The data from Table 7 illustrates the assistant principals' level of agreement with the specific statements aligned with the second strand of the CRSL framework. The second strand of the CRSL framework focuses on school leaders' ability to develop culturally responsive teachers in their schools (Khalifa et al., 2016a). The three statements presented in this section of the survey include specific behaviors Khalifa et al. (2016a) have identified culturally responsive school leaders utilize to develop culturally responsive teachers. According to Khalifa et al. (2016a), leaders help teachers develop and implement instructional practices, skills, and behaviors to meet diverse students' needs. They model CRT for their teachers and use school data to identify and address cultural gaps in achievement and discipline to inform their teachers' professional development needs (Khalifa et al., 2016a).

**Table 7**

*Assistant Principals' Responses to Strand 2 of the CRSL Framework: Develop Culturally*

*Responsive Teachers*

| Statement Number | Statement | Strongly Disagree [1] | Disagree [2] | Somewhat Agree [3] | Agree [4] | Strongly Agree [5] | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | I help teachers develop and implement instructional practices, skills, and behaviors to meet the needs of diverse students. | 0% (N=0) | 0% (N=0) | 20% (N=5) | 44% (N=11) | 36% (N=9) | 25 |
| 5 | I model culturally responsive teaching for my teachers. | 0% (N=0) | 0% (N=0) | 16% (N=4) | 48% (N=12) | 36% (N=9) | 25 |
| 6 | I use school data to identify and address cultural gaps in achievement and discipline to inform the professional development needs of teachers. | 0% (N=0) | 0% (N=0) | 16% (N=4) | 44% (N=11) | 40% (N=10) | 25 |

Statement 4 asked the assistant principals to rate the level to which they agreed they help teachers develop and implement instructional practices, skills, and behaviors to meet diverse students' needs. Responses to statement 4 revealed that 80% of the assistant principals strongly agreed ($n = 9$) or agreed ($n = 11$) they help teachers develop and implement instructional practices, skills, and behaviors to meet diverse students' needs. However, a total of 20% of the assistant principals ($n = 5$) somewhat agreed.

Statement 5 asked the assistant principals to rate the level to which they agreed they model CRT for teachers. Responses to the fifth statement revealed that 84% of the assistant principals strongly agreed ($n = 9$) or agreed ($n = 12$) they model CRT for teachers in their school. In contrast, 16% of the assistant principals ($n = 4$) somewhat agreed with the statement.

Statement 6 asked the assistant principals to rate the level to which they agreed they use school data to identify and address cultural gaps in achievement and discipline to inform teachers' professional development needs. Responses to statement 6 revealed 84% of the assistant principals strongly agreed ($n = 10$) or agreed ($n = 11$) that they use school data to identify and address cultural gaps in achievement and discipline to inform teachers' professional development needs. In contrast, 16% ($n = 4$) of the assistant principals somewhat agreed with the statement.

The data from Table 8 illustrates the assistant principals' level of agreement with the specific statements aligned with the third strand of the CRSL framework. The third strand of the CRSL framework highlights the importance of school leaders promoting school environments that are culturally responsive and inclusive (Khalifa et al., 2016a). The three statements presented in this section of the survey include specific behaviors Khalifa et al. (2016a) have identified culturally responsive school leaders utilize to promote school environments that are culturally responsive and inclusive. Culturally responsive school leaders challenge exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors (Khalifa et al., 2016a). They promote a vision for inclusive instructional and behavioral practices. Culturally responsive school leaders acknowledge and value students' cultural and social capital in their school (Khalifa et al., 2016a).

**Table 8**

*Assistant Principals' Responses to Strand 3 of the CRSL Framework: Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment*

| Statement Number | Statement | Strongly Disagree [1] | Disagree [2] | Somewhat Agree [3] | Agree [4] | Strongly Agree [5] | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | I challenge exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors. | 0% (N=0) | 0% (N=0) | 20% (N=5) | 56% (N=14) | 24% (N=6) | 25 |
| 8 | I promote a vision for inclusive instructional and behavioral practices. | 0% (N=0) | 0% (N=0) | 4% (N=1) | 52% (N=13) | 44% (N=11) | 25 |
| 9 | I acknowledge and value the cultural and social capital of students in my school. | 0% (N=0) | 0% (N=0) | 4% (N=1) | 20% (N=5) | 76% (N=19) | 25 |

Statement 7 asked the assistant principals to rate the level to which they agreed they challenge exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors. Data from statement 7 revealed that 80% of the assistant principals strongly agreed (*n* = 6) or agreed (*n* = 14) that they challenge exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors. While 20% of the assistant principals (*n* = 5) somewhat agreed with the statement.

Statement 8 asked the assistant principals to rate the level to which they agreed they promote a vision for inclusive instructional and behavioral practices. Responses to the statement revealed that 96% of the assistant principals strongly agreed (n = 11) and agreed (*n* = 13) that they promote a vision for inclusive instructional and behavioral practices. One assistant principal (4%) somewhat agreed with the statement.

Statement 9 asked the assistant principals to rate the level to which they agreed they acknowledge and value students' cultural and social capital in their school. Responses to statement 9 revealed that 96% of the assistant principals strongly agreed (*n* = 19) or agreed (*n* = 5) that they acknowledge and value students' cultural and social capital in their school. One assistant principal (4%) somewhat agreed with the statement.

The data from Table 9 illustrate the assistant principals' level of agreement with the specific statements aligned with the fourth strand of the CRSL framework. The fourth strand of the CRSL framework suggests that school leaders engage students, parents, and Indigenous contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016a). The three statements presented in this section of the survey addresses specific behaviors Khalifa et al. (2016a) have identified culturally responsive school leaders utilize to engage students, parents, and Indigenous contexts. Culturally responsive school leaders develop meaningful relationships with students, parents, and their school community (Khalifa et al., 2016a). They honor and celebrate diversity in their school and serve as advocates and social activists for community-based causes in both their school and the neighborhood community (Khalifa et al., 2016a).

**Table 9**

*Assistant Principals' Responses to Strand 4 of the CRSL Framework: Engages Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts*

| Statement Number | Statement | Strongly Disagree [1] | Disagree [2] | Somewhat Agree [3] | Agree [4] | Strongly Agree [5] | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | I develop meaningful relationships with students, parents, and my school community. | 0% (N=0) | 0% (N=0) | 0% (N=0) | 12% (N=3) | 88% (N=22) | 25 |
| 11 | I honor and celebrate diversity in my school. | 0% (N=0) | 0% (N=0) | 8% (N=2) | 32% (N=8) | 60% (N=15) | 25 |
| 12 | I serve as an advocate and social activist for community-based causes in both my school and the neighborhood community. | 4% (N=1) | 8% (N=2) | 28% (N=7) | 36% (N=9) | 24% (N=6) | 25 |

Statement 10 asked the assistant principals to rate the level to which they agreed they develop meaningful relationships with students, parents, and their school community. Unanimously, 100% of the assistant principals strongly agreed ($n = 22$) or agreed ($n = 3$) with the statement.

Statement 11 asked the assistant principals to rate the level to which they agreed they honor and celebrate diversity in their school. Responses revealed that 92% of the assistant principals strongly agreed ($n = 15$) or agreed ($n = 8$) agreed that they honor and celebrate diversity in their school. However, two assistant principals (8%) somewhat agreed with the statement.

Statement 12 asked the assistant principals to rate the level to which they agreed they serve as advocates and social activists for community-based causes in both their school and neighborhood community. Data from statement 12 revealed that 60% of the assistant principals strongly agreed ($n = 6$) or agreed ($n = 8$) that they serve as advocates and social activists for community-based causes in their school and neighborhood communities. Seven assistant principals (28%) reported that they somewhat agreed with the statement. Contrarily, two assistant principals (8%) disagreed with the statement, and one assistant principal (4%) strongly disagreed.

### *Research Question 3*

**What are self-reported professional development needs for assistant principals to lead in diverse schools?** The survey's final question was an open-ended question that asked the assistant principals to self-assess and identify the professional development needed to prepare them for leadership in diverse schools. This section of the survey complements this analysis by providing a sense of the professional growth opportunities assistant principals feel they need to serve as leaders in diverse schools in their own words. Fifteen of 26 assistant principals responded to this question.

Analysis of the participants' responses to the open-ended question revealed two prevailing themes as supported by the survey comments. Assistant principals indicated a need for professional development in (1) developing teachers' capacity for cultural responsiveness and (2) family and community engagement strategies in diverse school environments. Of the responses, five of 15 assistant principals expressed a need for professional development aligned to the second strand of the CRSL framework, developing culturally responsive teachers. One study

participant responded that they needed *professional development for teachers to assist them with the diversity in our building, community, county, and world.* Another study participant shared *I would like additional training on conducting PD within my building that helps teachers transform their beliefs and practices to better support our students and families*. A study participant also indicated a need for professional development to *lead teachers to examine their practices and implicit biases in their curriculum, classroom materials, etc*.

Additionally, five of 15 assistant principals indicated a need for professional development aligned to the fourth strand of the CRSL framework, engaging students, parents, and Indigenous contexts, indicating a need for strategies to engage families and communities in diverse schools. One study participant expressed a need for professional development to assist with working with ESL students and families. Another expressed a need for professional development to *help address the injustices experienced in diverse schools and best support the community*. An assistant principal also indicated a need for professional development in *creating an awareness and understanding of diverse families within high socioeconomic communities*.

## Summary

This chapter reported the data collected through the Self-Perceived Culturally Responsive School Leadership Preparedness Survey, aligned with the three research questions for this study. The study utilized a 59% response rate (26 of 44 assistant principals). The data collected and described within this chapter summarize assistant principals' self-perceived level of preparedness to lead in diverse school settings. The data identified components of the CRSL framework the assistant principals in this study currently utilize in their practice. Additionally, the data identified professional development assistant principals indicated they need to lead in diverse schools. Chapter Five will discuss the data findings aligned to each research question, its implications, and future study recommendations.

# CHAPTER FIVE
## FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

As racial and ethnic diversity within schools and classrooms has grown across the United States, school leaders must recognize and acknowledge the unique backgrounds and experiences of the culturally diverse students and families they serve. Shifting demographics in the U.S. population, persistent disparities in achievement, and student discipline call for school leaders who are culturally responsive to the diversity present in their schools and communities (Brown, 2005; deBrey et al., 2019; Khalifa et al., 2016a). A literature review revealed that researchers contend that the assistant principal's position plays an essential role in progressing to the principalship. Researchers assert that the position should be leveraged as an embedded opportunity to more effectively prepare leaders for the future role of principal amidst changing school demographics (Oleszewski et al., 2012).

Preparing a pipeline of highly qualified assistant principals who can lead diverse schools is imperative to ensure that all students learn at high levels and eliminate disparities in achievement and discipline. As a result, the purpose of this study was to investigate elementary assistant principals' perceptions of their preparedness to lead in diverse school settings through the lens of the CRSL framework. This study offers awareness into the perceptions of the assistant principal's preparedness to lead diverse schools, identifies CRSL practices utilized by assistant principals, and identifies professional development needs. The research questions driving this study were:

1. To what extent do assistant principals perceive they are prepared to lead in diverse school settings?
2. What components of the CRSL framework do assistant principals currently utilize in their leadership practice?
3. What are self-reported professional development needs for assistant principals to lead in diverse schools?

### Summary of Findings

According to the data presented in Chapter Four, this study's significant findings indicate that assistant principals perceive that they are prepared to lead diverse schools and utilize the CRSL framework components in their current leadership practice. This chapter will detail

findings derived from descriptive statistics obtained from the researcher developed survey distributed to assistant principals in the selected school division. Data analysis from the completed surveys revealed six findings that are emphasized in this chapter. Implications for practice based upon the findings are also discussed in this chapter.

**Findings**

*Finding One*

   **Assistant principals perceive they are prepared to lead in diverse school settings as the building principal.** Based on the survey data, when participants were asked *how prepared do you feel you are to lead in a diverse school setting as the building principal?* The majority of study participants indicated that they were either very prepared or prepared to lead in a diverse school setting as the building principal (88%). None of the assistant principals reported being poorly or very poorly prepared. This finding contradicts prior research that has found that assistant principals are not prepared to lead in diverse schools as the principal.

   Busch et al. (2010) and Barnett et al. (2012) concluded that assistant principals do not feel prepared for the principal's role. Furthermore, Young et al. (2010) indicated that principals in their study were not prepared to lead diverse schools. Additionally, Young et al. (2010) noted that the principals could not articulate meaningful discourses around diversity.

*Finding Two*

   **Assistant principals perceive their current duties and responsibilities prepare them to be culturally responsive leaders who can lead diverse schools.** Study participants were asked, *how well do you feel your current duties and responsibilities as assistant principal has prepared you to be a culturally responsive school leader?* The data revealed that 60% of the assistant principals perceive their current duties and responsibilities have either very well prepared or prepared them to be culturally responsive school leaders. Only one assistant principal reported they felt their duties and responsibilities have poorly prepared them to be a culturally responsive school leader.

   While this finding may indicate that the duties and responsibilities carried out by assistant principals are preparing them to lead in diverse schools, it contradicts prior research conducted by Gaymon (2017) and other scholars. Scholars argue that assistant principals' daily functions and responsibilities do not allow sufficient preparation for the principalship (Gaymon, 2017;

Harris, 2020; Kwan, 2009). Gaymon (2017) found that the duties principals had assigned to the assistant principals in her study were not supportive of their development as culturally responsive leaders.

Additionally, a study conducted by Harris (2020) revealed that the study's assistant principals reported that their roles and responsibilities did not fully prepare them for leadership in diverse schools. Specifically, Harris (2020) contended, "Current capacities and professional development opportunities do not prepare assistant principals for leadership in diverse schools as culturally responsive school leaders" (p. 89). However, the study participants shared that their lived experiences had best prepared them. Assistant principals are the primary source for replacing principals and should be the position that provides a training ground for the principalship (Oleszewski et al., 2012).

*Finding Three*

**Assistant principals utilize the components of the CRSL framework in their leadership practice.** The survey consisted of 12 statements that demonstrate specific CRSL behaviors outlined in the CRSL framework. Study participants were asked to read each statement and rate the level to which they agreed with each statement using a scale of 1-5. The statements from the survey were: (1) I self-reflect on my leadership to be more responsive to the needs of diverse students, families, and the community I serve; (2) I am committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts; (3) I consider myself to be a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion; (4) I help teachers develop and implement instructional practices, skills, and behaviors to meet the needs of diverse students; (5) I model CRT for my teachers; (6) I use school data to identify and address cultural gaps in achievement and discipline to inform the professional development needs of teachers; (7) I challenge exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors; (8) I promote a vision for inclusive instructional and behavioral practices; (9) I acknowledge and value the cultural and social capital of students in my school; (10) I develop meaningful relationships with students, parents, and my school community; (11) I honor and celebrate diversity in my school; and (12) I serve as an advocate and social activist for community-based causes in both my school and the neighborhood community.

Analysis of the data revealed that over 50% of the assistant principals reported they currently utilize all of the CRSL behaviors outlined in the four components of the CRSL framework referenced in this study's survey in their leadership practice. Of the 12 CRSL

behaviors identified in the survey, 80% or more of the assistant principals agreed or strongly agreed that they utilize 11 of the 12 components in their leadership. The remaining component's responses revealed fewer assistant principals (60%) agreed or strongly agreed that they serve as advocates and social activists for community-based causes in their school and the neighborhood community.

All of the assistant principals in this study reported that they strongly agree or agree that they utilized three of the components in their leadership practice. The components were self-reflecting on my leadership to be more responsive to the needs of diverse students, families, and the community I serve; I am committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts; I develop meaningful relationships with students and parents, and my school community.

Khalifa et al. (2016a) argued that other forms of leadership to include instructional, transactional, and transformational, alone would not address the needs of traditionally marginalized student populations. In response, they proposed the CRSL framework to address the "issues associated with the educational improvements for minoritized students" (p. 1280). In their theoretical framework, Khalifa et al. (2016a) identified four strands of specific behaviors that culturally responsive school leaders should exhibit to meet the needs of diverse student populations and school communities.

*Finding Four*

**Assistant principals indicated a need for professional growth opportunities focused on supporting the development of culturally responsive teachers in their schools.** Study participants were asked, *based on your self-assessment, what professional development do you need to prepare you for leadership in diverse schools?* An analysis of assistant principal responses to the open-ended question found that five of 15 assistant principals expressed a need for professional development aligned to the second strand of the CRSL framework, developing culturally responsive teachers. One study participant responded that they needed *professional development for teachers to assist them with the diversity in our building, community, county, and world.* Another study participant responded that *I would like additional training on conducting PD within my building that helps teachers transform their beliefs and practices to better support our students and families*. A study participant also indicated a need for

professional development to *lead teachers to examine their practices and implicit biases in their curriculum, classroom materials, etc*.

The school leaders' responsibility is to identify culturally responsive strategies for developing teachers who are not or maybe apprehensive about becoming culturally responsive (Khalifa et al., 2016a). Culturally responsive school leaders support professional development to increase teacher capacity in culturally responsive practices (Khalifa et al., 2016a). School leaders are tasked with promoting cultural competence among teachers and staff and fostering school climates where all students are given equitable opportunities to access high-quality education (Lindsey et al., 2009).

### Finding Five

**Assistant principals indicated a need for professional growth opportunities focused on engaging students, parents, and Indigenous contexts.** Study participants were asked, *based on your self-assessment, what professional development do you need to prepare you for leadership in diverse schools?* An analysis of assistant principal responses to the open-ended question also revealed that four of 15 assistant principals indicated professional development needs that align to the fourth strand of the CRSL framework, which Khalifa et al. (2016a) described as a school leader's responsibility to engage students, parents, and Indigenous contexts. One assistant principal's response revealed the need for professional development on *addressing injustices and supporting the community*. Another assistant principal reported a need for professional development on *working with high socioeconomic status communities and how to create awareness of diverse families within the community and create an understanding*.

Culturally responsive leaders must recognize the value of community partnerships (Harris, 2020). Culturally responsive leadership calls for school leaders to emphasize community relations and be sensitive to the unique roles in which their diverse school community plays in their students' lives (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Khalifa et al., 2016a; Taliaferro, 2011). Culturally responsive school leaders develop meaningful, positive relationships with the community (Khalifa et al., 2016a). Additionally, the literature review revealed the importance of culturally responsive school leaders connecting with students and families in quest of opportunities to allow the school and the community to partner to enhance student achievement (Johnson, 2006; Khalifa et al., 2016a). Lomotey (1993) asserted that strong leaders also make a concerted effort to become involved in the community and the parents' and students' lives.

*Finding Six*

**Assistant principals feel that leadership preparation programs are not preparing school leaders to lead in diverse school settings.** Study participants were asked, *how well do you feel your leadership preparation program prepared you to lead in a diverse school setting?* The data revealed that fewer than half of the assistant principals perceive their leadership preparation program prepared them to lead diverse school settings. Specifically, only 36% of the assistant principals felt their leadership preparation program had prepared or very well prepared them to lead in a diverse school. Additionally, 12% of assistant principals perceive their leadership preparation program poorly prepared them to lead in a diverse school setting.

This finding is consistent with researchers' assertion that school leaders are not fully prepared to address the needs of diverse student populations and communities after completing their preservice programs (Gaymon, 2017; Harris, 2020; Khalifa et al., 2016a; Touré, 2009; Vogel, 2011). Prior research has highlighted the imperative necessity for preparation programs to ascertain and develop educators' readiness to support diverse student populations (Goodwin, 2017; Johnston & Young, 2019; Sleeter & Owour, 2011). In Gaymon's (2017) study, assistant principals reported that they did not feel that they had received adequate formal preparation toward being a culturally responsive leader through their university's leadership preparation program.

Taliaferro (2011) argued, "The rapidly changing demographic landscape of American schools requires that school leadership preparatory programs reconceptualize their role in the preparation of successful school leaders" (p. 15). Furthermore, this finding aligns with the literature review, which revealed an absence of course curriculum related to CRSL (Black et al., 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016a). The research revealed the need to improve school leaders' preparation for diverse school settings amidst changing demographics in the United States (Gaymon, 2017; Harris, 2020; Taliaferro, 2011). Brown and Williams (2015) asserted, "Culturally responsive leadership preparation programs influence culturally responsive principal practices that, in turn, produce successful student outcomes" (p. 153). Suggesting that leadership preparation "programs committed to preparing culturally responsive school leaders should provide a necessary prerequisite in building cultural proficiency for educational leaders" (Brown & William, 2015, p.151).

**Implications for Practice**

       This study's findings reflect assistant principals' perceptions of their preparedness level to serve as culturally responsive school leaders in diverse schools resulting in implications related to CRSL and preparing assistant principals and aspiring principals to lead in diverse schools. The subsequent five implications derive from the findings of this study.

*Implication One*

       **Principals need to be intentional about the duties and responsibilities they assign to their assistant principals to provide job-embedded relevant learning experiences related to leading in diverse school settings.** Finding One of this study indicates that assistant principals perceive they are prepared to lead in diverse school settings as the building principal. Finding Two from this study indicates that assistant principals' current duties and responsibilities prepare them to be culturally responsive leaders who can lead diverse schools. Research has suggested that principals play a crucial role in assistant principals' development, making it essential to assign them responsibilities that aid in growing the assistant principals as leaders, precisely culturally responsive leaders skilled in leading diverse schools (Barnett et al., 2012; Oleszewski et al., 2012). School divisions can support this by ensuring the experiences afforded to assistant principals are creating a strong pipeline to the principalship in diverse school settings.

*Implication Two*

       **School divisions should provide ongoing training, and professional growth opportunities for school leaders focused on CRSL and teaching.** In this study, assistant principals reported a need for professional development focused on engaging students, parents, and Indigenous contexts and professional development focused on supporting the development of culturally responsive teachers in their schools. Associated with Findings Four and Five, school divisions are responsible for ensuring that every school is led by a culturally responsive leader who can provide an equitable education for all students. School divisions can accomplish this by providing ongoing training and professional growth opportunities for school leaders focused on CRSL and teaching. Those school divisions focused on fostering culturally responsive learning environments in their division should continue to provide ongoing training and professional growth opportunities to support leaders in this work. For school leaders to build cultural

responsiveness within their teachers and staff, they must continue to grow as culturally responsive leaders who can confidently model CRT and classroom management strategies.

Additionally, school divisions should help school leaders develop expertise that will permit them to create and maintain authentic spaces that overlap the school and community and partnerships in the diverse schools and communities they serve. Therefore, school divisions should provide robust professional development opportunities focused on cultural competence, cultural responsiveness, and CRT so that school leaders can better support their teachers, students, and communities in improving achievement for every student. The CRSL theoretical framework (Khalifa et al., 2016a) identified four specific strands of CRSL behaviors that school divisions could embed in their professional development to offer specific practices conducive to leading diverse schools.

### *Implication Three*

**Federal and State Departments of Education should consider encouraging the development of partnerships between higher education principal preparation programs and school divisions.** Finding Six of this study revealed that assistant principals feel leadership preparation programs do not prepare school leaders to lead diverse school settings. The study's data revealed that fewer than half of the assistant principals perceive their leadership preparation program prepared them to lead diverse school settings. Specifically, only 36% of the assistant principals felt their leadership preparation program had prepared or very well prepared them to lead in a diverse school. Additionally, 12% of assistant principals perceive their leadership preparation program poorly prepared them to lead in a diverse school setting.

Intentional partnerships between higher education principal preparation programs and school divisions will allow school divisions and preservice leadership programs to discuss any concerns or needs in the field to better prepare leaders to serve in diverse schools and communities. This partnership between the school division and colleges and universities will allow the latter to better prepare students for their first leadership position. A partnership will create a direct link between what schools need and what leadership preparation programs provide. Research has shown that leadership preparation programs focus heavily on theory, having little connection to practice, often offering disjointed and illogical courses that lack a clear connection to present-day leadership practices. On a day-to-day basis, school divisions guide new principals and assistant principals and realize their limitations. Suppose school

divisions were engaged in continual conversation with colleges and universities. In that case, they could collaborate to update the leadership preparation programs to ensure that aspiring school leaders are ready for their careers after graduation. After teachers, school leaders have a significant influence on student achievement; to capitalize on that impact, they need to be set up for success at the commencement of their careers.

*Implication Four*

**Principal preparation programs should integrate CRSL training and curriculum into their programs.** The literature review revealed the significance of educational leadership preparation programs providing aspiring leaders with culturally responsive leadership training during their preservice programs (Gaymon, 2017; Harris, 2020; Khalifa et al., 2016a). This study's data revealed that fewer than 50% of the assistant principals perceive their leadership preparation program prepared them to lead diverse school settings. Finding Six implies that school leadership preparation programs should consider utilizing the four strands and associated behaviors identified in the CRSL framework created by Khalifa et al. (2016a) to develop coursework to integrate CRSL practices. The CRSL framework provides universities with pertinent practices of CRSL that can seamlessly be integrated and evaluated within the program's coursework and preservice field experiences to better prepare aspiring leaders to lead amidst changing demographics in the nation's schools. Before becoming an assistant principal or principal, many school divisions require school leaders to earn degrees or certifications in educational leadership. Harris (2020) asserted, "In light of this requirement, it is incumbent upon universities to provide theory and practice that provide appropriate learning experiences that address culturally responsive leadership in preparation to meet the needs of today's students, families, and communities" (p. 86). This implication is associated with Finding Six.

*Implication Five*

**Universities should provide clinical experiences that offer leadership candidates placements in diverse school settings**. Finding Six from this study revealed that assistant principals feel that leadership preparation programs do not prepare school leaders to lead diverse school settings. Universities should partner with school divisions to strategically identify internship placements for preservice leaders to expose them to diverse student populations and school communities. These experiences could allow aspiring leaders to learn from successful,

culturally responsive leaders. A significant advantage of clinical experience is that it could afford leaders in preservice opportunities to engage with students who have had different educational experiences and with different racial and ethnic composition than theirs (Anderson & Stillman, 2013).

**Suggestions for Future Studies**

Khalifa et al. (2016a) acknowledged that CRSL is undertheorized; therefore, future research possibilities concerning school leaders and CRSL could be wide-ranging. One limitation of this study was the sample size and that it was limited to elementary assistant principals. Future research studies could increase the sample size to include assistant principals at the secondary level. Increasing the sample size and adding middle and high school assistant principals would provide more of a range of perspectives than presented in this study. Additionally, this study focused solely on assistant principals. Future research studies could consider including principals and assistant principals to compare their preparedness level perspectives to lead diverse schools based on the CRSL framework. Given this was a quantitative study, future researchers could conduct a qualitative study to identify specific examples of how assistant principals demonstrate the CRSL framework's behaviors in their leadership.

**Summary**

Society's changing racial and cultural demographics are reflected in schools and requires a focus on the cultural responsiveness of school leaders (Brown & Williams, 2015). Research has shown that a school leaders' approach to leadership can impact their ability to foster a culturally responsive learning environment (Khalifa et al., 2016a). Brown and Williams (2015) asserted, "Leaders should not only understand how to perform as effective instructional leaders but to be effective, they need training that prepares them to become culturally responsive leaders" (p.150). As Kwan (2009) stated, "[t]he competence of [assistant principals] is of prime concern not only because they are part of the school leadership team but also because, in many school systems, they are often appointed to the position of school principal" (p. 191).

The purpose of this study was to investigate elementary assistant principals' perceptions of their preparedness to lead in diverse school settings through the lens of the CRSL framework. Additionally, this study sought to identify specific professional development assistant principals perceived they needed to lead diverse schools. The data from this study revealed that assistant

principals perceive that they are prepared to lead diverse schools. Additionally, the findings revealed that assistant principals utilize the CRSL framework components in their current leadership practice. This study's findings contradict existing research on assistant principals' preparation to lead diverse schools as culturally responsive leaders.

**Personal Reflections**

As a former principal, I believe assistant principals are the pipeline to the principalship. They deserve more attention to ensure that they are prepared to move into the principalship and meet the growing demands of leading diverse school settings. Assistant principals play a critical role in supporting school success and student achievement. Based on my personal experiences and observations as a school leader, I was pleased but surprised to find that so many assistant principals perceived they were prepared to serve as the principal in a diverse school. The complexity of the principal's role and the impact the principal can have on a school and its stakeholders create a sense of urgency to examine how aspiring principals are being prepared to assume the principalship amid shifting demographics in the U.S. population, persistent disparities in achievement and student discipline.

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# APPENDIX A

# SELF-PERCEIVED CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP
# PREPAREDNESS SURVEY ITEMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS ALIGNMENT
# MATRIX

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative study is to explore elementary assistant principals' perceptions of their preparedness to lead in diverse school settings through the lens of the culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) framework.

## Research Questions

1.  To what extent do assistant principals perceive they are prepared to lead in diverse school settings?

2.  What components of the CRSL framework do assistant principals currently utilize in their leadership practice?

3.  What are self-reported professional development needs for assistant principals to lead in diverse schools?

## Part I: School Demographic Information

Percentage of Minority Students (Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, or two or more races)

    0%-5%
    6%-10%
    11%-20%
    21%-30%
    31%-40%
    50%+

**Part II. Survey Items and Aligned Research Questions**

| Research Question (s) | Survey Item(s) |
|---|---|
| To what extent do assistant principals perceive they are prepared to lead in diverse school settings? | *Response Options: Very Well Prepared (5), Prepared (4), Somewhat Prepared (3), Poorly prepared (2), Very Poorly Prepared (1)*<br><br>1. How prepared do you feel you are to lead in a diverse school setting as the building principal?<br><br>2. How well do you feel your current duties and responsibilities as assistant principal has prepared you to be a culturally responsive school leader?<br><br>3. How well do you feel your leadership preparation program prepared you to lead in a diverse school setting? |
| What components of the culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) framework do assistant principals currently utilize in their leadership practice? | *Response Options: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Somewhat Agree (3), Disagree (2), or Strongly Disagree (1)*<br><br>***Domain I: Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors***<br><br>4. I self-reflect on my leadership to be more responsive to the needs of the diverse students, families, and the community I serve.<br><br>5. I am committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts.<br><br>6. I consider myself to be a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion. |

| | *Domain II: Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers* |
|---|---|
| | 7. I help teachers develop and implement instructional practices, skills, and behaviors to meet the needs of diverse students. |
| | 8. I model culturally responsive teaching for my teachers. |
| | 9. I use school data to identify and address cultural gaps in achievement and discipline to inform the professional development needs of teachers. |
| | *Domain II:  Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment* |
| | 10. I challenge exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors. |
| | 11. I promote a vision for inclusive instructional and behavioral practices. |
| | 12. I acknowledge and value the cultural and social capital of students in my school. |
| | *Domain IV:  Engages Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts* |
| | 13. I develop meaningful and positive relationships with students, parents, and my school community. |
| | 14. I honor and celebrate diversity in my school. |
| | 15. I serve as an advocate and social activist for community-based causes in both my school and the neighborhood community. |

**Part III. Open-Ended Question**

| Research Question | Open-Ended Question |
|---|---|
| What are self-reported professional development needs for assistant principals to lead in diverse schools? | 16. Based on your self-assessment, what professional development do you need to prepare you for leadership in diverse schools? |

**APPENDIX B**

**SELF-PERCEIVED CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

**PREPAREDNESS SURVEY**

---

**Part I**

Percentage of Minority Students in Your School (to include Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, or two or more races)

- ⭕ 0-5%
- ⭕ 6-10%
- ⭕ 11-20%
- ⭕ 21-30%
- ⭕ 31-40%
- ⭕ 41-50%
- ⭕ 50+%

**Part II**

Please read each of the questions below and rate your level of preparedness using a scale of 1-5.

| | 1-Very Poorly Prepared | 2-Poorly Prepared | 3-Somewhat Prepared | 4-Prepared | 5-Very Well Prepared |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How prepared do you feel you are to lead in a diverse school setting as the building principal? | ⭕ | ⭕ | ⭕ | ⭕ | ⭕ |

| | 1-Very Poorly Prepared | 2-Poorly Prepared | 3-Somewhat Prepared | 4-Prepared | 5-Very Well Prepared |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How well do you feel your current duties and responsibilities as assistant principal has prepared you to be a culturally responsive school leader? | O | O | O | O | O |
| How well do you feel your leadership preparation program prepared you to lead in a diverse school setting? | O | O | O | O | O |

**Part III**

Please read each of the statements below and rate the level to which you agree with each statement using a scale of 1-5.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Behaviors

| | 1-Strongly Disagree | 2-Disagree | 3-Somewhat Agree | 4-Agree | 5-Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I self-reflect on my leadership to be more responsive to the needs of diverse students, families, and the community I serve. | O | O | O | O | O |

## Culturally Responsive School Leadership Behaviors

| | 1-Strongly Disagree | 2-Disagree | 3-Somewhat Agree | 4-Agree | 5-Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts. | O | O | O | O | O |
| I consider myself to be a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion. | O | O | O | O | O |
| I help teachers develop and implement instructional practices, skills, and behaviors to meet the needs of diverse students. | O | O | O | O | O |

| | 1-Strongly Disagree | 2-Disagree | 3-Somewhat Agree | 4-Agree | 5-Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I model culturally responsive teaching for my teachers. | O | O | O | O | O |
| I use school data to identify and address cultural gaps in achievement and discipline to inform the professional development needs of teachers. | O | O | O | O | O |
| I challenge exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors. | O | O | O | O | O |

## Culturally Responsive School Leadership Behaviors

| | 1-Strongly Disagree | 2-Disagree | 3-Somewhat Agree | 4-Agree | 5-Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I promote a vision for inclusive instructional and behavioral practices. | O | O | O | O | O |

| | 1-Strongly Disagree | 2-Disagree | 3-Somewhat Agree | 4-Agree | 5-Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I acknowledge and value the cultural and social capital of students in my school. | O | O | O | O | O |
| I develop meaningful relationships with students, parents, and my school community. | O | O | O | O | O |
| I honor and celebrate diversity in my school. | O | O | O | O | O |
| I serve as an advocate and social activist for community-based causes in both my school and the neighborhood community. | O | O | O | O | O |

**Part IV**

Based on your self-assessment, what professional development do you need to prepare you for leadership in diverse schools?

# APPENDIX C
## CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION OF THE COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)



**CITI PROGRAM**

Completion Date 03-Aug-2019
Expiration Date 02-Aug-2022
Record ID 32440045

This is to certify that:

**Monique Booth**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

| Social & Behavioral Research | (Curriculum Group) |
| Social & Behavioral Research | (Course Learner Group) |
| 1 - Basic Course | (Stage) |

Under requirements set by:

**Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)**

**CITI**
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w6490fb14-6156-44d5-8d09-b50a7d8c4aff-32440045

# APPENDIX D

## VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL
## BOARD REVIEW PERMISSION TO CONDUCT STUDY

**VIRGINIA TECH.**

Division of Scholarly Integrity and
Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-3732
irb@vt.edu
http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** September 16, 2020

**TO:** Ted S Price, Carol S Cash, Jodie Lynn Brinkmann, Monique Latoya Booth

**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires October 29, 2024)

**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Elementary Assistant Principals&rsquo; Self-Perceived Preparedness to Lead Diverse Schools through the Lens of the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework (CRSLF)

**IRB NUMBER:** 20-679

Effective September 16, 2020, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104 (d) category(ies) 2(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

**PROTOCOL INFORMATION:**

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii)**
Protocol Determination Date: **September 16, 2020**

**ASSOCIATED FUNDING:**

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

*Invent the Future*

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
*An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution*

| Date* | OSP Number | Sponsor | Grant Comparison Conducted? |
|---|---|---|---|
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\* Date this proposal number was compared, assessed as not requiring comparison, or comparison information was revised.

**If this protocol is to cover any other grant proposals, please contact the HRPP office (irb@vt.edu) immediately.**

# APPENDIX E

# APPROVAL FROM SCHOOL DIVISION TO CONDUCT STUDY

Antionette Stroter, Ph.D.
Research & Evaluation Specialist
Department of School Improvement

Phone 804.639.8717 ext. 1104
Fax 804.739.6239
antionette_stroter@ccpsnet.net

Chesterfield County Public Schools
Innovative. Engaging. Relevant.

Delivered via email on December 17, 2020

September 15, 2020 Approval Date
Monique Booth
Ed.D. Candidate
Department of Educational Leadership
Virginia Polytechnical Institute & State University

Dear Ms. Monique Booth,

I am pleased to inform you that the Review Committee has approved your proposed research study entitled *Elementary Assistant Principals' Self-Perceived Preparedness to Lead in Diverse Schools through the Lens of the Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) Framework.* We are pleased to work with you on this project and appreciate the opportunity to work together for the benefit of our teachers and students. The study has been approved for all CCPS Elementary Schools.

As a reminder, by summiting your application, you understood and agreed that:
· acceptance of this request for approval of a research proposal in no way obligates Chesterfield
    County Public Schools to participate in this research,
· approval does not constitute commitment of resources or endorsement of the study or its findings by the
    school system or by the School Board,
· participation in research studies by students, parents, and school staff is unluntary  - the
anonymity of all participants including individuals, schools and the school system will be
protected by not revealing the identity or including identifiable characteristics without
written permission, and
· research shall be conducted within the policies and regulations of CCPS and any stipulations
    accompanying this letter of approval, and
· upon completion of the study, a copy of the written report will be shared with CCPS.

If you have any questions regarding this approval or if I may assist you in any way, please contact me at antionette_stroter@ccpsnet.net or (804) 639-8717 ext. 1104

|

Sincerely,

Antionette Stroter, Ph.D.
Research & Evaluation Specialist

CC: Patricia Fox, Coordinator of Research & Evaluation, & Tinkhani White, Director of the Department of School Improvement

# PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Greetings,

You are invited to participate in an anonymous research study. Please read this email and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.  The Office of Research and Evaluation and the Research Review Committee approved of this research study being conducted at CCPS. Our office will serve as the point of contact for this research study.  If you have any questions please reach out to our office at 804-639-8717.

Background Information: The purpose of this research study is to explore further elementary assistant principals' perceptions of their preparedness to lead in diverse school settings through the lens of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL).

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, complete the anonymous survey. The survey may take approximately 15 minutes to complete. No school, participant names, or other identifying information will be collected in the survey. Your choice not to participate in this study will not harm your status with your school division.

This survey will close at the end of the day on Friday October 23, 2020.

Click the link to begin the survey:
https://virginiatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bE2yHJj6FrqVynz

Thank you for your time.

Antionette D. Stroter, Ph.D.
Research & Evaluation Specialist
Department of School Improvement
Chesterfield County Public Schools
13900 Hull Street Road
Midlothian, VA 23112
804.639.8717 ext. 1104

# APPENDIX G

# IMPLIED CONSENT AGREEMENT

Research Title: Elementary Assistant Principals' Self-Perceived Preparedness to Lead Diverse Schools through the Lens of the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework (CRSLF)

Researcher: Monique L. Booth                    Contact Email: mbooth@vt.edu

IRB# 20-679

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to explore elementary assistant principals' perceptions of their preparedness to lead in diverse school settings through the lens of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL).

Participation in the study: The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. All survey responses will be collected electronically using the Virginia Tech Qualtrics platform.

Anticipated Risks: There are no anticipated risks to persons who participate in the study.

Time Period: The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to participants in this study.

Confidentiality: All information collected in this survey will be handled with strict confidentiality. The data generated from the survey and that which will be included in the dissertation will contain no identifying information regarding the participants, the participants' school, or the school division. The survey results will only be available to the researcher and dissertation committee chair. The data collected in the survey will be held for approximately one year following the defense of this dissertation. During this year, the results will only be accessible to the researcher.

Participation: Your participation in this study is anonymous and voluntary.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for their participation in this study.

Right to withdrawal from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Your survey responses will be deleted and destroyed at the time of withdrawal. The data will not be included in the final dissertation.

Process for withdrawal from the study: If you wish to withdraw from this study, please notify the researcher either by phone or via email using the contact information provided in this Implied Consent Agreement.

Questions or Concerns: At any point, if you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact the dissertation committee chair at the contact information listed below. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Virginia Tech HRPP at irb@vt.edu or 540-231-3732

Dissertation Committee Chair:

Dr. Ted S. Price
Virginia Tech Richmond Center
2810 Parham Road, Suite 300
Richmond, VA 23294
Telephone: (804) 869-2015
Email: pted7@vt.edu

**Participation Agreement:** Consent is implied by completing and submitting the survey.