School-Based Racial Equity Collaborations: White Principals Implementing an Active Anti-Racist Stance

Lindsey J. Kaiser
University of Maine

David Goldenkranz
Technology Access Foundation

Heather K. Lechner
University of Washington-Tacoma

Patricia Burgess
Technology Access Foundation

&

Trish Millines Dziko
Technology Access Foundation
United States

Abstract: This study explores how White principals in the Seattle metropolitan area implemented an active anti-racist stance through school-based racial equity collaborations. Using participatory action research, the study follows three White principals in the Ally Engagement program, a community-based racial affinity leadership intervention, during the 2022-23 academic year. Our research-practice partnership asked: *How do White school leaders implement their developing understanding of an active anti-racist stance?* Findings reveal that principals used school-based racial equity collaborations to begin to ensure the influential presence of Black and Brown individuals in decision-making processes, foster race-specific conversations among predominantly White staff, and integrate anti-racist ideas and tools into daily school routines. By applying a racialized lens and engaging in critical self-reflection, these principals sought to navigate challenges, including institutional resistance, to address systemic racism. The study underscores the complexities and opportunities in leading for racial justice, emphasizing the need for meaningful action over performative commitments. We argue that school-based racial equity collaborations can help create a system of accountability for White principals to redistribute power, educate White folks, and work toward system-level change.
Keywords: anti-racist educational leadership; White principals; school-based racial equity collaborations; racialized lens; system-level change

Colaboraciones escolares para la equidad racial: Directores blancos implementando una postura activa antirracista

Resumen: Este estudio explora cómo los directores blancos en el área metropolitana de Seattle implementaron una postura activa antirracista a través de colaboraciones escolares para la equidad racial. Utilizando investigación-acción participativa, el estudio sigue a tres directores blancos del programa *Ally Engagement*, una intervención comunitaria de liderazgo basada en afinidades raciales, durante el año académico 2022-23. Nuestra asociación de investigación y práctica planteó la pregunta: ¿Cómo los líderes escolares blancos implementan su comprensión en desarrollo de una postura activa antirracista? Los hallazgos revelan que los directores utilizaron colaboraciones escolares para la equidad racial con el objetivo de garantizar la presencia influyente de personas negras y morenas en los procesos de toma de decisiones, fomentar conversaciones específicas sobre raza entre un personal predominantemente blanco e integrar ideas y herramientas antirracistas en las rutinas diarias de la escuela. Al aplicar una perspectiva racializada y participar en una autorreflexión crítica, estos directores buscaron enfrentar desafíos, incluida la resistencia institucional, para abordar el racismo sistémico. El estudio destaca las complejidades y oportunidades de liderar para la justicia racial, enfatizando la necesidad de acciones significativas en lugar de compromisos performativos. Argumentamos que las colaboraciones escolares para la equidad racial pueden ayudar a crear un sistema de rendición de cuentas para que los directores blancos redistribuyan el poder, eduquen a personas blancas y trabajen hacia un cambio a nivel sistémico.
Palabras clave: liderazgo educativo antirracista; directores blancos; colaboraciones escolares para la equidad racial; perspectiva racializada; cambio a nivel sistémico

Colaborações escolares para equidade racial: Diretores brancos implementando uma postura ativa antirracista

Resumo: Este estudo explora como diretores brancos na área metropolitana de Seattle implementaram uma postura ativa antirracista por meio de colaborações escolares para a equidade racial. Utilizando pesquisa-ação participativa, o estudo acompanhou três diretores brancos do programa *Ally Engagement*, uma intervenção comunitária de liderança baseada em afinidades raciais, durante o ano letivo de 2022-23. Nossa parceria de pesquisa e prática fez a seguinte pergunta: Como os líderes escolares brancos implementam sua compreensão em desenvolvimento de uma postura

ativa antirracista? Os resultados revelam que os diretores utilizaram colaborações escolares para equidade racial com o objetivo de garantir a presença influente de pessoas negras e pardas nos processos de tomada de decisão, fomentar conversas específicas sobre raça entre uma equipe predominantemente branca e integrar ideias e ferramentas antirracistas nas rotinas diárias da escola. Ao aplicar uma perspectiva racializada e engajar-se em autorreflexão crítica, esses diretores buscaram enfrentar desafios, incluindo resistência institucional, para abordar o racismo sistêmico. O estudo destaca as complexidades e oportunidades de liderar em prol da justiça racial, enfatizando a necessidade de ações significativas em vez de compromissos performativos. Argumentamos que as colaborações escolares para a equidade racial podem ajudar a criar um sistema de responsabilização para que diretores brancos redistribuam poder, eduquem pessoas brancas e trabalhem em direção a mudanças sistêmicas.

Palavras-chave: liderança educacional antirracista; diretores brancos; colaborações escolares para equidade racial; perspectiva racializada; mudança sistêmica

School-Based Racial Equity Collaborations: White Principals Implementing an Active Anti-Racist Stance

Many school leaders in the Seattle metropolitan area recognize the prevalence of racism in education and face pressure to address color-evasive structures that perpetuate it. Seattle has a history of publicly espousing visions of racial equity, often positioning itself as a progressive leader. Over the years, numerous initiatives, policies, and statements have been made by leaders proclaiming a commitment to dismantling systemic racism in schools (Seattle Public Schools, 2023). However, despite these commitments, power asymmetries often remain unchanged (Riley, 2016).

Irby (2021) contends that White educators struggle to fully commit to and understand what it means to "stop the violence of school-based racism" (p. 1), resulting in the maintenance of color-evasive practices that uphold the status quo rather than challenge it. Irby (2021) argues that "most White educators' racial knowledge and their schools' capacities are insufficient and thus not able to enact racial equity change" (p. 2). He highlights that White educational leaders grapple with their racialized identity and how Whiteness obstructs their efforts to create system-level change without reproducing the very problem they aim to dismantle.

This study builds on anti-racist leadership literature and explores the question: *How do White school leaders implement their developing understanding of an active anti-racist stance?* The findings reveal that White principals used school-based racial equity collaborations to implement an active anti-racist stance to ensure Black and Brown people's influential presence in decision-making (Irby, 2021), facilitate race-specific conversations among staff, and integrate anti-racist ideas into school routines, structures, and practices. We argue that such collaborations can help White principals take action, foster accountability, and build leadership capacity. The study broadens our understanding of how schools can be organized to address the needs of students, families, and communities most underserved by schooling. It also considers the implications of Whiteness and power in educational leadership, providing a broad systems perspective on how these dynamics shape education.

Whiteness Studies

Whiteness transcends racial identity; it is a system, a global framework of socioeconomic and political power structures, and an epistemology (Mills, 1997). It refers to structural arrangements and ideologies that maintain racial dominance by legitimizing mainstream and institutionalized norms while proclaiming race neutrality, equality, and meritocracy (Castagno, 2014). Whiteness operates by

declaring anti-racist commitments without disrupting White supremacy culture, thus preserving color-evasive structures and ensuring the racial order remains unchallenged (Leonardo, 2013). Cabrera (2014) characterizes a feature of Whiteness as White privilege, defined as benefits and advantages given to individuals due to their White identity, stemming from historical contexts and beliefs of superiority. Historical examples include schools erasing Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic cultures while forcing assimilation of White norms. Another feature of Whiteness is color-evasiveness, a racial ideology that perpetuates systemic racism and denies the significance of race and the privileges associated with Whiteness (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Many White individuals contend that they do not to see race or recognize their privileges (Rodriguez & Lewis, 2022). Color-evasiveness generates a contradiction of "claiming not to see race while being conscious of it, as well as constituted by it" (Rosenberg, 2004, p. 261).

Race, Racism, and Anti-Racism

Race, a social construct, functions as a system of categories continuously reshaped through social interactions and dynamics rather than fixed genetic differences (Gillborn, 1995). Racism, linked with overt bias, hatred, and systemic actions that disadvantage people of Color, operates alongside privilege and other forms of oppression, such as sexism and classism, rooted in various social markers (Gillborn, 1995; Paradies, 2006). Paradies (2006) defines racism as a system where power is unevenly distributed based on racial classifications. Anti-racism opposes racism by reducing power imbalances and confronting and eradicating the ideologies and practices that sustain systems of privilege and oppression, working toward systemic change and equality across racial and ethnic groups (Diem & Welton, 2021; O'Brien, 2009). In this way, anti-racism involves the active process of opposing and dismantling racism in all its forms, working toward system-level changes that distribute and produce power evenly.

Anti-Racist Educational Leadership and White Principals

This study focuses on how White principals implement anti-racist educational leadership, emphasizing the importance of collaborating with communities of Color to disrupt racialized power structures. Anti-racist leadership is a non-linear and iterative process that requires dismantling entrenched racial inequities and promoting systemic transformation. It involves challenging neoliberal policies and ideologies, deconstructing Whiteness, and educating White folks while ensuring that people of Color have influential roles in decision-making and agenda-setting, particularly around the allocation of school resources (Diem & Welton, 2021; Irby, 2021).

White principals often face significant challenges in adopting an active anti-racist stance due to a racial knowledge gap, internalized beliefs of racial superiority, and resistance from staff (Irby, 2021). Barriers, such as fear, fragility, denial, and loss of power, can hinder meaningful engagement in anti-racist educational leadership (DiAngelo, 2018; Matias, 2016). Educational leaders, particularly White folks, must constantly unveil Whiteness before they can confront it (Brooks, 2022). López (2003) states, "Many times, we miss opportunities to identify and name racism, largely because we do not see it in the work we do and/or because our respective lenses are not attuned to recognizing it in our daily lives" (p. 86). Recognizing the often-invisible nature of systemic racism in schools, as López (2003) highlights, serves as a critical precursor to taking action against it. However, studies show that when White school leaders critically reflect, actively confront their biases, work in solidarity with communities of Color, and foster trust, they can work toward racial equity (Rivera-McCutchen, 2021).

Despite these efforts, many White principals struggle to implement anti-racist practices, particularly when met with resistance from staff. Research highlights that even well-intentioned leaders retreat from conversations about race, prioritizing harmony over necessary discomfort (Swanson & Welton, 2019). Tanner and Welton (2021) highlight another critical issue: even when White principals make efforts to address racism, they do so through a White gaze – which inadvertently perpetuates and upholds systems of Whiteness. We argue that one way to counter the paradoxical nature of White principals leading for racial justice is for them to engage in equitable collaborations that ensure nondominant families, youth, and community members have an influential role in decision-making and shaping agendas (Irby, 2021; Ishimaru, 2020).

Whiteness, Power, and Educational Leadership

The relationship between Whiteness, power, and educational leadership across the globe is deeply intertwined, with Whiteness invisibly shaping norms and values within educational systems in ways that maintain racial dominance. Whiteness grants socio-economic and racial privileges to White individuals, which in turn influence power dynamics in educational leadership (Leonardo, 2013). Educational leaders operate within these structures, often reinforcing the racial status quo through policies and practices that align with dominant racial norms. Therefore, educational leadership is not neutral or apolitical; it is a conduit through which Whiteness is maintained or challenged. To adopt an active anti-racist stance, leaders must critically examine and disrupt these entrenched power systems, acknowledging their racial positionality and the structures that influence their actions (Brooks, 2022).

Racialized patterns observed in educational leadership and school systems in the United States are deeply influenced by local, state, and national contexts. Locally, school districts reflect the demographic and socio-economic disparities present in their communities, often resulting in resource disparities and curricula that reflect a White gaze. At the state level, education policies, funding formulas, and curriculum standards play a significant role in maintaining racial inequities. Nationally, federal policies and historical legacies, such as segregation, including redlining, shape the broader landscape of racial inequality in education (Diem & Welton, 2021). Globally, Whiteness maintains power imbalances and racial hierarchies, influenced by colonialism and historical dynamics in countries like South Africa, Brazil, and Australia (Christian, 2019). Understanding Whiteness globally requires acknowledging its adaptability and manifestations in diverse contexts, highlighting the need for anti-racist leadership that reflects local histories and global power structures. Understanding these global patterns provides insights into local and international pursuits of transforming school systems.

This study frames racial disparities from a systems perspective, analyzing how schools contribute to systemic racism through policies, practices, and institutional norms like behavior policies, curriculum design, class placements, and teacher professional development (Rigby & Forman, 2023). Students, families, and communities most underserved by schooling and educators can develop strategies to dismantle systemic educational barriers and power asymmetries by considering broader institutional factors.
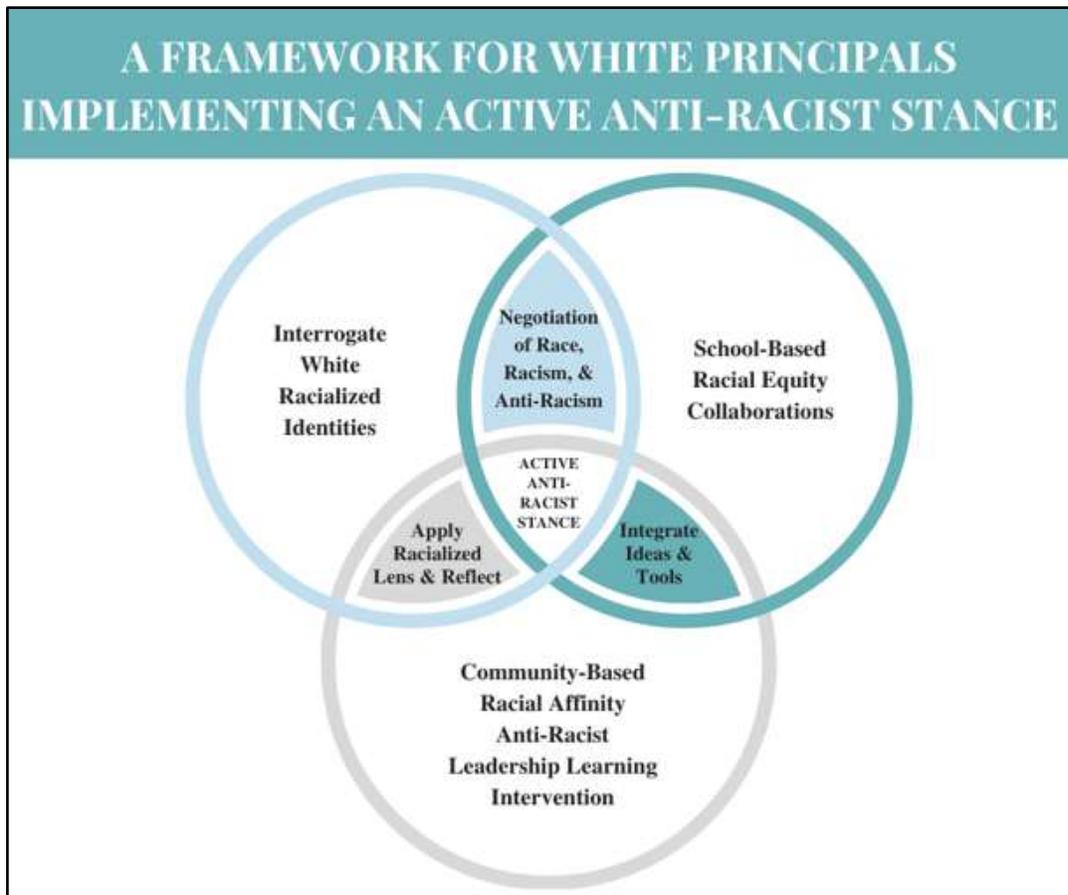
Conceptualizing White Principals' Implementation of an Active Anti-Racist Stance

Drawing on Wenger's (1998) and Nasir's (2012) work, we argue that a critical component to support White principals in implementing an active anti-racist stance and working toward system-level changes requires an inter-connected pursuit of school-based racial equity collaborations. The framework for implementing an active anti-racist stance for White principals highlights a circuitous

process. It integrates three components: the application of a racialized lens and critical self-reflection, negotiation of race, racism, and anti-racism, and the integration of anti-racist ideas and tools into school routines (see Figure 1). While the framework emphasizes three dimensions, we will focus on unpacking a single dimension of this framework: school-based racial equity collaborations, as it allows for a more detailed and thorough exploration.

Figure 1

A Framework for White Principals Implementing an Active Anti-Racist Stance

Implementation of an Active Anti-Racist Stance

Implementation is a key stage in the learning process (Nasir, 2012). We examine how White principals try to take up ideas and concepts from a learning intervention, *Ally Engagement,* and implement anti-racist ideas and tools into school routines. While conversations and trainings about anti-racist educational leadership are important, they are only a starting point. Active participation delves deeper. An active anti-racist stance is marked by transitioning from acknowledgment of racialized structures to engaging in collaborations with Black and Brown families, youth, and community members. It entails applying anti-racist principles in everyday routines, curriculum design, hiring, and discipline practices. Key components include: 1) a racialized lens and introspection, 2) negotiation of race, racism, and anti-racism, and 3) the integration of anti-racist ideas and tools into school routines. These practices can help White principals transition from talk to action, a shift Irby (2021) describes as a formidable challenge for White educational leaders.

Application of a Racialized Lens and Critical Self-Reflection

White principals must develop new ways of seeing to reveal racialized structures and confront color-evasiveness (Rivera-McCutchen, 2021; Welton et al., 2015). This entails interrogating systems of White privilege within color-evasive structures and questioning institutional practices and ideologies that maintain racial inequities (Brooks & Theoharis, 2018; Rivera-McCutchen, 2021). It can allow White folks to connect race and organizational routines to unveil how institutional practices reproduce racial inequities. White school leaders can begin to recognize and deconstruct how policies and organizational routines, such as discipline protocols or course offerings, systemically privilege White students and marginalize students of Color (Lewis & Diamond, 2015). By making the invisible visible, White school leaders can work toward dismantling systemic racism.

Negotiation of Race, Racism, and Anti-Racism

From a sociocultural learning perspective, the term negotiation is used; however, other scholars refer to this process as sensemaking, understanding, or grappling (e.g., Irby & Clark, 2018). Negotiation involves engaging in race-specific conversations, confronting new information, and challenging internalized racial beliefs (Curnow, 2016). Negotiation is informed by historical context and prior knowledge and involves continuous dialogue and re-evaluating practices to confront racialized power dynamics (Hand, 2006). Through race-specific dialogue in school-based racial equity collaborations, White folks can learn and make sense of race, racism, and anti-racism and work toward deconstructing entrenched beliefs and practices (Irby & Clark, 2018).

Integration of Anti-Racist Ideas and Tools

Embedding anti-racist practices into school routines requires collaboration and the influential presence of Black and Brown people in decision-making and agenda-setting (Irby, 2021). Through school-based racial equity collaborations, integrating anti-racist tools into school systems marks a shift from passive engagement to active participation in anti-racist educational leadership. This framework provides a roadmap for White educational leaders to implement an active anti-racist stance. This non-linear process entails applying a racialized lens and critically self-reflecting to reveal racialized structures (Rivera-McCutchen, 2021; Welton et al., 2015). It involves the negotiation of new information. And requires incorporating anti-racist ideas and tools from school-based racial equity collaborations into school routines.

Study Context and Methodology

Collaborative efforts depart from the traditional, unidirectional flow of knowledge from research to practice (Penuel et al., 2020) and instead focus on advancing racial equity, fostering trust, and challenging power dynamics and politicized identities (Farrell et al., 2023). By encouraging researchers, community members, and practitioners to disrupt traditional power structures, redefine roles, and value diverse perspectives, these approaches aim to shape a more equitable future for students, families, and communities (Penuel et al., 2020).

Participatory Action Research

In the context of collaborative education research, this study was guided by participatory action research (PAR) and a community-based learning intervention. The lead author, alongside the Technology Access Foundation, co-designed and co-facilitated a six-part anti-racist leadership learning intervention for White educational leaders called *Ally Engagement*. PAR approaches foster collaboration between researchers, community partners, and practitioners to understand social

problems and enact change by addressing power dynamics embedded in traditional research approaches (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). Our partnership emphasized the importance of reciprocal learning and prioritized trust-building and active listening and reflecting (Teeters & Jurow, 2022). Together, we collectively examined *if* and *how* White principal participants actively participated in anti-racist educational leadership in their schools.

Community-Based Racial Affinity Anti-Racist Leadership Learning Intervention

This study resulted from a research-practice partnership between the Technology Access Foundation (TAF), a Black-women-led community-based organization, and the lead author, a White researcher who partnered with TAF for more than four years. Together, a White TAF program manager and the lead author co-designed and co-facilitated the *Ally Engagement* learning intervention series. Ally Engagement aimed to support White educational leaders in interrogating their racialized identity and applying a racialized lens to challenge color-evasive structures and work toward equitable system-level change in the Seattle metropolitan area. This six-part, 6-hour session learning series focused on racial equity, including the work of Black and Brown scholars, community-based equity audits, shared leadership, building trust, listening interventions, understanding White supremacy culture, and developing anti-racist identities (e.g., Green, 2017; Irby, 2021; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Rivera-McCutchen, 2021; Teeters & Jurow, 2022). The series was responsive to the needs of participants, allowing for modifications based on feedback and observations (Penuel et al., 2011).

Lead Researcher Role and Racial Positionality

As a White researcher co-designing and co-facilitating *Ally Engagement*, my racialized identity inevitably influenced both the design and the interpretation of the research. My racialized identity shaped how I engaged with and was perceived by participants in this study. I continuously engaged in reflexivity, which involved critically reflecting on how Whiteness might constrain and inform the design and implementation of Ally Engagement, when to stand up and when to listen, and how my White identity and the associated power dynamics might affect interactions with participants and the overall collaboration. Partnering with TAF required an ongoing effort to align the research with the goals of historically marginalized communities while actively seeking feedback from Black leaders at TAF to address and counterbalance systemic power imbalances (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016).

Principal Selection

The selection of White principals from the Ally Engagement learning series was a strategic decision. Each principal was selected due to their active work in diverse school environments – urban settings with existing racial diversity or suburban areas with increasing racial diversity. Additionally, the principals had some prior experience with anti-racist educational leadership, which supported a growing understanding of the concepts and practices, facilitating deep engagement and reflection. Lastly, each principal expressed a strong desire to partner and critically reflect on issues of race, racism, and anti-racism. Their willingness to interrogate their racialized beliefs of superiority and inferiority and practices was essential for understanding how White principals engaged in anti-racist educational leadership in their schools. Participants included Ashley, a principal of eight years at a K-8 school; James, a high school principal of 10 years; and Jackie, a third-year principal at a K-6 elementary school (see Table 1). Data for this paper stem from observations, collaborations, and racialized debrief and reflection sessions from participating principals and Ally Engagement.

Table 1

Focal White Principal Participants

Principal	School	Selection	Student Demographics, %		
Ashley	K-8	Principal for 8 years in an urban setting and engaged in racial identity work. Her school-community created anti-racist school goals.	Urban:	B=13	
			I=1	L=6	
			A=17	W=44	
			Two or more=19		
James	High School	Principal for 10 years in a predominantly White school-community, that had a growing Black and Brown population. He had engaged in racial equity-centered leadership learning.	Suburban:	B=2	
			I=1	L=14	
			A=2	W=72	
			Two or more=9		
Jackie	K-6	Principal for 3 years and was concurrently engaged in another racial equity-centered leadership cohort.	Suburban:	B=18	
			H=4	L=29	
			A=18	W=18	
			Two or more=8		

Note: B=Black, L= Latinx, A=Asian, H=Hawaiian, I=Indigenous, W=White. All participant names are pseudonyms.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection for this study encompassed over 90 hours of school-based principal observations, equitable school collaborations, and racialized debrief and reflection sessions between July 2022 and June 2023. As lead author, I conducted 27 school-based principal observations totaling 41 hours. I observed principals planning and facilitating racial equity team meetings, multi-tiered systems of support meetings, and staff meetings focused on restorative justice practices and culturally responsive teaching. The data collected from these observations included transcribed audio recordings, artifacts, and field notes detailing principal interactions, decisions, and strategies. I engaged in 15 school visits where I collaborated with principals and their equity-centered teams, which included teachers, families, and, in some instances, students. Collaborations served as a place to learn from one another (teachers, families, youth, principals), strategize ways to navigate resistance, and intentionally plan for racial equity initiatives. They focused on restorative justice practices, culturally responsive teaching, family partnerships, and listening to students to foster a culturally affirming school environment. Data from equitable school collaborations were gathered through field notes, artifacts, and audio recordings were transcribed using Otter.ai.

As lead author, I facilitated 45 racialized debrief and reflection sessions, totaling 44 hours. Each session was audio recorded, and detailed field notes were taken. These sessions occurred after nearly every observation and collaboration and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. I prioritized humility by foregrounding my own learning journey and acknowledging the mistakes I continue to make. I encouraged the use of race-specific language, promoted critical reflection, interrogated racialized beliefs, and encouraged principals to ensure Black and Brown people's influential presence in decision-making. Discussions focused on how race was addressed – or overlooked – in professional development, team meetings, student discipline, student-led summits, and community conversations. I routinely posed race-specific questions to principals, such as "If/where did you see

evidence of anti-racist educational leadership showing up?" "Did you see evidence of color-evasiveness?" "How do you make sense of this incident or position yourself given your White racialized identity and your role as a school leader?" "Did you feel like you made any moves to counter Whiteness? "How might you ensure Black and Brown people's influential presence?" These sessions allowed principals to unearth Whiteness, critically self-reflect and interrogate beliefs and practices, and explore ways to challenge resistance and systemic racism.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted iteratively after each observation, collaboration, and racialized debrief and reflection session. Analysis involved deductive and inductive coding based on our racialized sociocultural learning framework. As lead author, I completed event summary forms (Miles et al., 2014) to examine emerging themes, summarize obtained and missing information, and assess how principals navigated internal and external resistance. All recordings were transcribed using Otter.ai, and transcripts were uploaded to ATLAS.ti data analysis software. Initial coding was guided by a priori codes derived from our conceptual framework, focusing on how White principals applied a racialized lens, negotiated race, racism, and anti-racism, and integrated anti-racist ideas into school routines. Examples of deductive codes included *negotiation of race*, *anti-racist ideas*, and *applying a racialized lens*, while inductive analysis revealed emerging themes, such as *internal resistance* and *racialized decision-making*. This process included multiple rounds of analysis using ATLAS.ti software, where data were organized by theory and themes. Weekly and quarterly memos were written to track emerging patterns and questions, and a within-case and cross-case analysis approach was used to identify points of convergence and divergence across the data (Miles et al., 2014). The analysis of transcripts, audio recordings, field notes, memos, and artifacts focused on how White principal participants used school-based racial equity collaborations to implement an active anti-racist stance. I analyzed internal and external resistance principals encountered. For example, James debated the use of the term culturally responsive teaching due to concerns about potential resistance from teachers who associated the acronym with critical race theory. After listening to Black community liaisons who encouraged using the term to reinforce racial equity efforts, James agreed to continue using it.

I examined the integration of anti-racist ideas and tools into school routines. This involved a deductive analysis of how principals sought to integrate concepts and tools from Ally Engagement, such as community-asset mapping (Green, 2017), low and high-capacity racial equity actions and racial equity resources (Irby, 2021), and active listening (Teeters & Jurow, 2022). Inductive analysis examined how principals integrated ideas and tools from Black and Brown families, students, educators, and community liaisons, such as student racial affinity groups, a racial incident response form, and racially diverse representation in one school's daily news.

Community and practice partner data analysis sessions were integral to ensure the findings' validity, reliability, and relevance. These sessions were conducted five times throughout the study, involving TAF community partners, principal participants, and the lead author. This collaborative approach allowed for member checking, theme identification, and review of findings to gain valuable insights and knowledge from partners and aimed to challenge traditional power structures (Farrell et al., 2023). Data analysis sessions focused on how principals navigated resistance and made sense of anti-racist leadership. We examined convergent and divergent themes related to racialized learning and the implementation of anti-racist efforts. Analysis revealed systemic challenges, internal resistance, and opportunities for promoting anti-racist systemic change. See Table 2 for hours of data gathered.

Table 2

Hours of Data Gathered for Principal Participants

White Principal Participant	Racial Affinity Learning Intervention (Ally Engagement)	School Observations & Collaborations	Semi-Structured Interviews/Racialized Debrief & Reflection Sessions	Total Hours/Participant
Ashley	42	22	22	86
James	42	21	12	75
Jackie	33	9	9	51

Using the conceptual framework, I selected and coded specific datasets from interviews, audio recordings, and artifacts to analyze how principals applied a racialized lens within their schools. This analysis revealed that principals began to incorporate a racialized perspective into their daily routines, including student discipline, intervention services, and curriculum, helping them recognize and address blind spots. I identified instances of negotiation around race, racism, and anti-racism, which highlighted points of convergence and divergence across the data.

Descriptive coding revealed the types of school-based racial equity collaborations that principals engaged in to understand race, racism, and anti-racism (e.g., racial equity teams, school-based leadership teams, multi-tiered systems of support, town halls). These codes captured the critical examination of racialized beliefs and internal resistance – manifesting as fear, denial, and color-evasiveness. The influential presence of Black and Brown individuals in decision-making processes was also analyzed. The findings offer a deeper understanding of how White educational leaders can begin to operationalize and foster anti-racist systemic change.

Findings: Using Racial Equity Collaborations to Implement an Active Anti-Racist Stance

In what follows, we illustrate, through a series of vignettes, how Ashley, James, and Jackie implemented an active anti-racist stance using school-based racial equity collaborations. We contend that schools can be organized to address the needs of students, families, and communities most underserved by schooling through these collaborations. And we elaborate on how White principals used school-based racial equity collaborations to implement an active anti-racist stance in three non-linear ways: 1) to ensure Black and Brown people's influential presence, 2) to engage in race-specific conversations with predominantly White staff, and 3) to integrate anti-racist concepts and tools into school routines.

Black and Brown People's Influential Presence

Leadership for racial justice requires the influential presence of Black and Brown people in decision-making processes and in shaping the agenda (Irby, 2021). Irby frames this as a racial equity resource and notes that it is effectively leveraged when "many Black and Brown people actively inform decision-making. [And educators] recruit input and use it to reshape their practices" (p. 206). All three principals began to ensure the influential presence of Black and Brown individuals in school-based racial equity collaborations and decision-making. In what follows, we explore how

Ashley sought to actively ensure Black and Brown families' influential presence in designing a racial incident response system, even while expressing concerns about her own self-efficacy. She made a concerted effort to listen to Black and Brown families and collaborated with them to integrate anti-racist ideas into the school's discipline routines.

Ashley collaborated with her racial equity team, which included staff members, as well as the Coalition of Families of Color (CFC) and Anti-Racist Parent Allies (ARPA), to co-design a racial discipline response protocol and the adoption of restorative justice practices. She was in an urban school-community where families had voiced to her over the past few years that they wanted to see racial equity action. This was one of the reasons Ashley joined Ally Engagement – she shared that she had done a lot of reading centered on equity in the past and now wanted support in helping her take an active anti-racist stance. Families voiced concerns about how racialized incidents were not addressed. Parents wanted Ashley to adopt restorative justice practices and clearly communicate with families on racialized incident responses.

Over the year, Ashley met with racial equity team members and a parent from the community's Anti-Racist Parent Allies group to address parent concerns about equitable approaches to racialized incidents. In February 2023, she scheduled a community collaboration with Black and Brown families and allies to collectively redesign the school's discipline response system in ways that would promote restorative justice practices. In preparing for the community collaboration, Ashley shared how she intentionally thought about ways to invite Black and Brown families and allies into decision-making spaces.

> I'll reach out to our CFC and our ARPA group and ask them what role they want to play in talking about the [racial incident response] documents. And then, if we have enough people, we could do breakout sessions where people give feedback in a smaller setting.

Like James and Jackie, Ashley's approach toward fostering racial equity demonstrated the planning involved in ensuring Black and Brown families' influential presence. She actively sought the participation of families of Color in redesigning the school's disciplinary response system. Her strategy emphasized the importance of using school-based racial equity collaborations to ensure Black and Brown families' influential presence in decision-making spaces – inviting families directly impacted by racialized incidents to contribute to the development of restorative justice practices.

In February, during the community collaboration, Ashley welcomed families and was transparent about why they all came together to collaborate.

> So, the big question for some people might be, why are we here? We landed here because we had multiple racial incidences last year that were not handled well and that were not communicated. People felt like we were not partnering with our families. And our families said, "Hey, you're not doing things well. And here's what we need from you [Ashley]." And one of those requests from our Coalition of Families of Color wrote a great letter saying, "Hey, here's what we need. One of those was the process and protocols for when incidents of racism and bias happen at school. How is it handled? How do we know it's being handled? We need more clarity and transparency around the process and communication."

Ashley's opening remarks during the school-based racial equity collaboration highlight her acknowledgment of past missteps and efforts to be more transparent. During the meeting, Ashley, teachers, and families talked about past racialized incidents and collectively negotiated and made

sense of how a restorative justice response system would address racialized incidents and what it would look like when implemented.

Ashley asked families of Color for their input, ideas, and feedback for the racial discipline response system:

> What educational responses might we implement for students harmed and the students who did the harm? What might those look like? What are the consequences? What are the restorative practices we might implement? As a school, we'll record the incident and the actions taken and follow up with families. The racial incident response protocol will be a living document, and we'll continue to get feedback from you all and refine it.

Ashley openly invited families of Color into decision-making spaces. She sought families' ideas and input and the co-creation of restorative justice solutions that value the voices of those most impacted by racism (Benjamin, 2022). Her actions reflect the ongoing work of implementation, getting feedback and making revisions, and a readiness to implement changes that align with the needs and requests of Black and Brown families. A move from acknowledgment of racialized incidents to collaborative problem-solving with Black and Brown families characterizes this active anti-racist stance. Upon reflection of the school-based racial equity collaboration, Ashley shared,

> I think it went well. This is the second time a group of people [families and teachers] have worked on this document [racial incident protocol] together. It's nice having a group. …There are more people here to help with this process. It's a longer process, for sure. However, it was definitely nice to have more voices. It's nice when you have more adults in the room having a conversation because it makes you think differently about the situation and future conversations. I want to make sure that we start building community [with families of Color and allies] to trust each other.

While Ashley's reflection did not directly state the importance of ensuring Black and Brown families' influential presence in decision-making, the majority of families that participated in the school-based racial equity collaboration were families of Color. Her actions demonstrate that she valued ideas and feedback from Black and Brown families in helping reshape racialized disciplinary practices.

Weeks later, Ashley commented on the challenges of implementing the racial incident protocol. Even though the plan was designed to promote restorative justice, there were still gray areas that were hard for Ashley to navigate. Ashley explained, "We've had a few racial incidents come up. And the hard part is when I have a Black student using the N-word at school. I don't consider that a racist incident." Ashley shared that based on historical injustices, White folks don't have the right to tell Black students that they can't use this word. This gray area highlights the challenges of implementing an active anti-racist stance. Similarly, Ashley faced challenges when implementing the restorative justice plan, as there was tension when some families shared that they felt a retributive approach to student discipline was necessary. While Ashley stood by the restorative justice plan, navigating the gray space entailed a process of reflection, dialogue, and negotiation.

Ashley also revealed her own challenges and internal resistance to engaging in school-based racial equity collaborations.

> There were moments when I had a really visceral reaction to us communicating [all racial incidents] out [to families]. ...But then, as we started to talk about it more, I was like, okay, this is what you're saying. And okay, we can lean into that. Okay, I get that. And so, while it was hard, right? Because I also like to be very efficient. I felt

like building trust and community with families requires transparency and communication.

Ashley's reflection unearthed the nuanced challenges White principals face in their commitment to ensuring Black and Brown people's influential presence, especially regarding the transparent communication of racial incidents to families. Her initial visceral reaction to the idea of openly sharing details about racial incidents suggests a concern regarding the time it would take Ashley to communicate with families and the consequences of such transparency. However, through deeper reflection and discussion with families of Color, Ashley began to recognize the value of this approach. She began to understand that while efficiency can be important, it can come at the cost of building trust with families. Principals like Ashley began to develop an understanding that a school can't truly progress in serving Black and Brown students or enrich the learning experiences of White students without increasing Black and Brown people's influential presence (Irby, 2021).

At the beginning of the 2022-23 school year, Ashley wondered, "How am I going to lead this work?" She noted, "I'm not an expert. This work is hard." At the end of the year, once Ally Engagement had ended, she shared, "This work is still hard, but the more I think about the learning process and the work, I feel equipped to engage in anti-racist leadership." Ashley's reflection signals a shift in her self-efficacy in leading for racial justice. She initially questioned her ability to lead anti-racist work. Her comments also reveal how difficult anti-racist leadership is, particularly for White folks. Ally Engagement, however, provided Ashley with the learning experiences necessary to build her confidence, equipping her with an understanding that Black and Brown people bring distinct racial experiential knowledge and must provide an influential presence in decision-making.

Similarly, at the end of May, Principal Jackie reflected on what she learned from Ally Engagement:

> I used to think that this work mostly needed to be done by me, by me reimagining and thinking about the school, the systems, the schedule, the policies, and the procedures. Now, I've thought so much more about the need to involve the community. And I'm kind of embarrassed to say that, but that has been one of my biggest learnings.

Ally Engagement supported White principals' understanding of Black and Brown people's influential presence in collaborative efforts. Ashley, Jackie, and James took their developing understanding of anti-racist leadership and used racial equity collaborations to begin to ensure Black and Brown people's influential presence in reshaping practices and routines. Ally Engagement helped principals recognize the importance of Black and Brown people's influential presence and encouraged principals to move beyond a top-down approach to leadership. As noted above, Jackie's acknowledgment of her oversight points to a shift in her understanding of anti-racist leadership and the impact of Ally Engagement in her learning process. White principals began to learn that school practices should not be made solely by them but rather a collective endeavor involving community knowledge and participation of those furthest away from justice (Benjamin, 2022).

In Ally Engagement, principals learned the need to ensure Black and Brown people's influential presence in decision-making (Irby, 2021). Ashley, James, and Jackie used racial equity collaborations to take an active anti-racist stance and invite folks of Color to help inform the agenda. Ashley collaborated with Black and Brown families to reshape discipline practices. James invited racially diverse educators, community liaisons, and students of Color to help reimagine a culturally responsive school environment and create short and long-term school goals. And Jackie invited teachers of Color and a practicum principal of Color to be partners in co-designing restorative

justice professional learning for teachers, and rethinking traditional forms of community engagement.

School-based racial equity collaborations helped principals navigate resistance and build their capacity. The integration of Black and Brown individuals' influential presence in decision-making illustrates a critical shift in traditional leadership approaches by working to embed racially diverse epistemologies into practices and challenge power structures. It highlights the interplay between individual actions and systemic factors to implement an active anti-racist stance.

Race-Specific Conversations and Reflection with White Staff

Anti-racist educational leadership for White folks necessitates critical introspection and the application of a racialized lens. For White principal participants, the introduction to the concept of a racialized lens marked the beginning of a new way of seeing. Unfamiliar with terms like "race-neutral" and "color-evasive" prior to their involvement in Ally Engagement, these principals discovered the power of a racialized lens as an essential tool for identifying and dismantling systemic inequities often concealed under the guise of neutrality, meritocracy, and White privilege. In what follows, we explore how Jackie collaborated with her leadership and equity team, which included three educators of Color and three White educators, to engage predominantly White staff in race-specific conversations and guided reflection. Jackie found that by applying a racialized lens, she could better understand the performative aspects of school routines. This realization led her to confront unjust systems and biases. She shared,

> There's a gap between what we say and what we actually do. I feel like what we're actually doing and what we're trying to do are two separate things. One of the equity team members shared, 'I think we need to continue to think about how bias shows up in how we're disciplining students.' I brought up what we are learning in Ally Engagement: things are seemingly race-neutral but become racialized. We need to start thinking about how classroom routines or behavior expectations become racialized. I was approached by an older White [male staff member], and he was like, 'Well, you know, sometimes our African-American students, they're just like, out of their seats more, but that's just like how they are.' And I said, 'No, that is a stereotype.' For me, it's been a big learning process. I'm thinking about, as a [White] leader, how I need to examine every interaction, policy, and procedure with a racialized lens when things are seemingly race-neutral, but they're never race-neutral.

Jackie's acknowledgment of the "there's a gap between what we say and what we actually do" highlights the performative aspect of racial equity work – schools espouse a commitment to equity but often fail to enact it in sustainable ways. By applying a racialized lens, Jackie saw how school routines were racialized when played out, and she began to identify and confront biases and challenge color-evasive ideologies and practices with staff by facilitating race-specific conversations with teachers. She alluded to the constraint and challenge of being a White leader and having to search for racialized structures. White principal participants implemented an active anti-racist stance by using racial equity collaborations to plan for and engage in race-specific conversations with their majority White staff members to unearth implicit bias and disrupt retributive discipline practices that disproportionately impacted Black and Brown students.

Moreover, Jackie collaborated with team members to design race-specific professional learning to unveil and confront deficit-based views and build teacher capacity to understand race, racism, and anti-racism to address the racial discipline gap. We illustrate how Jackie and her

teammates realized they needed to go beyond disaggregating data by student race and curate race-specific questions to promote critical self-reflection and unveil implicit racial biases.

Like Ashley and James, Jackie discovered that she and her team needed to intentionally plan for and address teacher resistance. It was not uncommon for teachers to say things like, "Race doesn't matter. It's one's character that counts." For instance, Jackie noticed instances of teachers' bias when she shared evidence of their school's racial discipline gap with staff. She asked staff to reflect on why their school had a racial discipline gap. Jackie shared incidents of teachers' racist ideologies and noted that one White teacher said, "They [Black and Brown students] lacked stamina." Another White teacher shared, "Their rules from home and school are different." Both are evidence of racist ideologies and illustrate Jackie's understanding of racism in her school. While both White teachers avoided race-specific language, it was understood by Jackie and her team that teachers saw Black and Brown students as the problem, not the system or their beliefs of racial superiority and inferiority.

To address White teachers' color-evasive ideologies and the myth of superiority, Jackie used racial equity collaborations to co-plan and promote anti-racist dialogue and negotiation of race, racism, and anti-racism with her staff. Jackie and her team curated questions for the upcoming school-wide staff meeting to support teachers in interrogating their racialized identities and beliefs. They asked teachers:

> Where are you on the compass regarding courageous conversations around racial bias and disproportionality in school discipline data? How does your racial identity influence your work in the classroom? What does it mean to be a White teacher in a predominantly Black and Brown school? What does it mean to be a teacher or staff member of Color in a school with predominantly White staff? (See Appendix A.)

Jackie and her team shared student discipline referral data by race/ethnicity (see Appendix B). The data illustrated how Black students, specifically Black boys, were drastically over-represented with office referrals. In addition to promoting critical self-reflection among the majority White teachers, Jackie and her teammates showed a video clip titled, "Widen the Screen" to reveal implicit bias and deepen White teachers' understanding of Black joy. Jackie and her team had teachers watch a Ted Talk about understanding White racialized identities. Principals like Jackie took an active anti-racist stance by using racial equity collaborations to engage in race-specific conversations with staff to help White educators make sense of race, racism, and anti-racism and support them in critical self-reflection.

Jackie encountered foreseeable challenges when she and her team engaged in race-specific dialogue and reflection. She shared that towards the end of this staff meeting, she and her team facilitated an activity that prompted White teachers to interrogate their racialized identities and their beliefs about families and students, and she was left feeling "shocked, appalled, and disappointed" by her staff's blatant racial bias and deficit-based views. Jackie asked staff members to engage in a continuum of beliefs activity. Staff were asked to walk to the side of the room that aligned with their beliefs (one side of the room was 'agree' and the other side 'disagree') around the following three statements: 1) "Families in our school are motivated to help their children achieve in school; 2) Educators have high expectations for all students; 3) All students can learn" (see Appendix C). Jackie shared teachers' responses and her disbelief in response to the first statement – "Families in our school are motivated to help their children achieve in school":

> There were several people more towards disagree. One person looked at me and said, "You're talking about our school, right?" And I said, "Yes, I'm talking about our school. Do you feel families in our school are motivated to help their students

achieve in school?" Then that person went to the disagree side. I asked a few people who felt comfortable to share why they were where they were. And this is the problem that, as a leader, I continue to perseverate over – how do I challenge with care in these types of situations? Because I'm asking people to be brave. I want them to feel safe to share. I also want it clear to the community where I stand. What happened is a person on the disagree side felt comfortable to share. And the statements were rooted in deficit thinking. They shared, "Well, you know, sometimes they come from another country, and they just don't know how to be supportive.: Another person shared, "Being in-person in your child's life and volunteering in the school is how families show that they are motivated to help their students."

Through an activity designed to unveil and confront staff beliefs about Black and Brown communities, Jackie faced startling revelations about her staff that were rooted in Whiteness. The resistance Jackie faced from White educators reveals entrenched racial bias and her own challenges of fostering a "brave space" and simultaneously confronting racial ideologies. Jackie grappled with how she wanted teachers to be brave and feel open to sharing their beliefs, and at the same time, she wanted to confront deficit-based views without teachers shutting down. White teachers' reactions signaled to Jackie teachers' beliefs in racial superiority and inferiority and the challenges of unveiling and confronting Whiteness.

Jackie shared how she, in the moment, processed and addressed White teachers' resistance: Both of these statements were problematic for me. You have to think so quickly in these kinds of situations because, first of all, this was not what I had expected. I did not expect that people would go all the way over to [the disagree] side of the room. I should have, but I didn't. And so, I didn't really have a planned response. I was thinking on my feet. I stopped the conversation and said, 'So what it sounds like to me is that we may have a difference in what we view as how parents are able to engage and want to engage and the assets they provide to our school. And so maybe we have a mismatch here of what we think it should look like, or how we perceive our parents think it looks like because I'm not even sure we have an accurate perception of our parents and whether they feel invited to our school.' And then people just kind of stopped and got really quiet.

Jackie's reflection on teacher resistance to confronting racial ideologies through reflection and racial discourse illustrates the need to be prepared to navigate unexpected teacher responses. It also illuminates the problematic nature of a majority White staff in predominantly Black and Brown communities. During the activity, Jackie grappled with how to respond to deficit-based beliefs. She paused the activity and noted a mismatch. She questioned teachers' understanding of parents' willingness to engage or if families felt invited into their school, which resulted in teachers opting out of the conversation.

As evidenced by Jackie, engaging in race-specific conversations requires courage and the need to curate White racial unease (Irby, 2021; Welton & Diem, 2021). Similarly, James also acknowledged this critical understanding. At the end of the year, James confided, "I used to think that having a vast majority of our staff happy was really, really important. I wanted to appease people, be popular, and be well-liked. Now, I think that [line of thinking] can be incongruent with anti-racist change. ...We are going to do stuff that may make [White teachers] uncomfortable. Happy [White] teachers mean status quo" and the maintenance of traditional power structures. Recognizing that for White educators, race-specific conversations and critical self-reflection may prompt

resistance, promote discomfort, and serve as a necessary catalyst for growth (Irby, 2021). Jackie, James, and Ashley began to understand that to implement an active anti-racist stance they had to be willing to step out of their comfort zone, engage in race-specific conversations, and challenge the status quo of White educators' comfort, which, as illustrated in Jackie's vignette, can be met with deeply ingrained resistance.

The principals' efforts to engage in race-specific conversations with predominantly White staff members underscored the systemic challenge of confronting entrenched racial biases within schools. This engagement was pivotal to fostering critical consciousness among White staff, a necessary process to dismantle color-evasive ideologies and practices and promote interrogation of White racialized identities. By incorporating these conversations into routine school practices, the school leaders worked to embed anti-racist principles into school systems.

Integration of Anti-Racist Ideas and Tools

Across all three schools, the data illustrates that the integration of anti-racist ideas and tools into school routines was a pivotal process when implementing an active anti-racist stance. Ashley, James, and Jackie began to use school-based racial equity collaborations to co-design and integrate anti-racist ideas and tools from *Ally Engagement* and their team members into practices, thereby taking an active anti-racist stance. Ashley collaborated with Black and Brown families and allies to integrate restorative justice practices into discipline systems. Jackie collaborated with Black and Brown educators and allies to build teacher capacity around restorative justice practices and explore ways to integrate and embed concepts from community asset-mapping (Green, 2017) into their curriculum night. And James collaborated with Black and Brown educators, community liaisons, youth, and allies to create goals to foster a culturally responsive school environment. In what follows, we elaborate on how James partnered with racially diverse equity team members to integrate anti-racist ideas and listen to historically marginalized students to begin to reshape school norms to be more culturally responsive.

James, a principal in a predominantly White suburban school-community, had recently begun to see an increase in racial diversity at his school. He collaborated with the equity team, which included White and Black staff members and two Black community liaisons to support teachers in adopting culturally responsive teaching. James and the equity team learned through a student school climate survey (see Appendix D) that nondominant students, especially Black students, did not feel a sense of belonging. To attend to Black students who did not feel a sense of belonging, he brought the idea of creating a Student Summit to his equity team. The Student Summit would be a way to hear firsthand from nondominant students what they needed at their school to feel a sense of belonging.

While James and his team did not make any transformational changes to the school culture during the academic 2022-23 school year, he, the equity team, and students began to lay the foundation for meaningful discourse, fostering trust, and attending to short-term student-led goals. One White equity team member shared reservations about not wanting to take a performative approach to the Student Summit and shared in a team meeting,

> Educators often say they are going to listen to students of Color, and then nothing ever happens. I want to make sure we don't do this and that we act. We should ask students to create short-term goals that we can accomplish within a month.

James and the team agreed that they wanted to disrupt this narrative. The team developed reflective questions that would reveal students' experiences at school, if/where students felt a sense of

belonging, and curated questions that would help paint a path forward to fostering a more culturally responsive school environment.

On the day of the Student Summit, more than 40 historically underserved students showed up to the event. James and the equity team asked students the following questions:

What are the spaces where you feel the greatest sense of belonging? What was that experience like? How did you feel? Who were you with? What are important parts of your identity? Do you see parts of your identity reflected in our school? If so, how? When do you feel most connected or feel a sense of belonging in school, if at all? When do you feel disconnected at school? What can we do as a school to create a school culture of belonging?

Many students shared that they felt the greatest sense of belonging at home in the community with family and friends. They shared that they wanted "issues of racism to be addressed." They didn't want "popular kids to be glorified in school." Students expressed that they wanted "diverse representation on their school's daily news channel," "diverse representation in the curriculum and the hallways," and "affinity spaces." They wanted to be seen and valued for their authentic selves.

The questions posed by James and the equity team elicited introspective responses that revealed the systemic issues within the school's culture and exposed the need for substantial system-level changes students wanted to see and a desire for a school environment that addressed racism. The call for diverse representation in the school's daily news channel and curriculum, along with the creation of affinity spaces, underscores the desire for a racially just school and the deep-rooted systems of Whiteness.

After the Student Summit, James shared that "students brought their full selves to the space. Many students felt comfortable sharing with the whole group their trauma and pain that they experienced at school." He asked the equity team, "What do we commit to over the course of this month, and what do we commit to for long-term goals? How will we share this with teachers?" James grappled with how to prioritize and address students' concerns – figuring out where to take immediate action and plan for long-term change, especially regarding teachers' practices.

Based on what they heard from students, James and the team identified short-term goals that could be implemented and addressed within a month. James and the team created racial affinity spaces (BIPOC club, Black Student Union, Latino Student Union); an online harassment form to report incidents of racism and hate speech that were accessible via a QR code (see Appendix E); they began integrating racially diverse representation on the school's daily news channel and started having 'teach-ins' on their news channel focused on building cultural awareness and educating folks on using students' pronouns. While James and the equity team sought to disrupt performative approaches to anti-racist leadership by implementing students' short-term goals, their proactive approach can be relegated to symbolic measures if educators' practices don't change. Thus, it illustrates the challenges and limitations of integrating anti-racist ideas and tools into school routines without addressing educators' hearts and minds. James' own racial identity adds to the limitations and challenges of being a White principal, leading toward racial equity. He noted that he "had a limited perspective." James referred to his blind spots or hidden biases as a constraint and emphasized why it was so important for him to work in partnership with Black educators, youth, and community liaisons. This acknowledgment signifies that James began to understand that Black and Brown folks hold a distinct capacity to recognize and confront racism, and this racial knowledge is a critical resource for creating organizational change (Irby, 2021).

For example, James had to navigate internal resistance to taking a race-specific approach while planning for the Student Summit. At first, James was hesitant to specifically bring up race at

the Student Summit. He noted that his "original thought was far more broad and not as race-explicit." He said he wanted to create space "for all students to enter into the conversation because there would be White students in the group too" and wondered what it meant for students to "belong" at their school. He noted that he was "puzzled on how to thread the needle" of discussing racism and making it open to all students. A Black equity team member told James and the group, "We need to and will talk about race." Another Black team member shared, "It's hard to make it about everybody because then it's about nobody." James wondered, "How specific should we be so it does not pigeonhole the conversation where some students aren't like, 'this is not for me.'" Another Black team member shared with James, "You should obviously address race and let students know that we understand that our school is not perfect; we have issues." James agreed, "I'm with you. If we don't name race, sometimes it won't ever get spoken. You guys are awesome. I appreciate this and the messiness of all this."

James' comments reveal internal resistance to taking a race-specific approach. His comments reflect an understanding that issues of race only concern Black and Brown students, and he neglected to confront how White individuals are complicit in maintaining racialized structures. Input from multiple Black colleagues was pivotal. Black educators pressed the need to address race as Black students were the largest racial group in the student survey that noted they did not feel a sense of belonging. The team's insights guided James to a more race-specific dialogue with students. By ensuring Black people's influential presence in decision-making (Irby, 2021), James integrated equity team members' anti-racist ideas into the Student Summit, taking a race-specific approach.

Toward the end of the year, James and the equity team used student data from the Student Summit to build educators' racial knowledge by sharing students' experiences with staff. James, Ashley, and Jackie used school-based racial equity collaborations that included racially diverse epistemologies to take an active anti-racist stance and integrate anti-racist ideas and tools into school routines. Their journey was met with challenges and internal conflict, which their teams helped them navigate. Ultimately, their actions reflect an understanding that as White leaders working toward racially just schools, anti-racist work involves Black and Brown people's influential presence in decision-making and integrating anti-racist ideas into school routines.

Discussion

The active anti-racist stance undertaken by Ashley, James, and Jackie signifies a shift from traditional leadership to collaborative, anti-racist educational leadership. School-based racial equity collaborations helped these White principals transition from talk to meaningful action and played a crucial role in creating a system of accountability. Through collaborations, White principals implemented an active step to lead toward system-level change and began to redistribute power and build White folks' racial knowledge. Collaborations helped White principals resist capitulation, the temptation to give in to fear, and internal resistance. Collaborations were instrumental in working to challenge power asymmetries and color-evasiveness, leading toward system-level change in instruction and behavior policies. They supported White principals in their efforts to educate White teachers through professional learning. Furthermore, collaborations facilitated a redistribution of power in decision-making, challenging traditional power-hoarding practices.

Principals collaborated with Black and Brown families, community liaisons, youth, educators, and allies through shared decision-making processes to co-design racially just tools and practices. However, these processes were neither straightforward nor immediately effective. They involved navigating resistance, required sustained efforts, and strategic co-planning. Our conceptual framework highlights the complexity and non-linear nature of this work. Applying a racialized lens required significant introspection, coaching, and continuous learning. Negotiating race, racism, and

anti-racism was not just an intellectual endeavor; it also involved emotional and relational work, which surfaced tensions. Integration of anti-racist ideas into school routines highlighted ways that principals can redistribute power through decision-making and revealed institutional resistance.

Varying levels of understanding and color-evasiveness among White team members presented challenges that slowed progress, which required intentional planning to address racial knowledge gaps. While school-based racial equity collaborations expanded leadership capacity and fostered accountability, they also exposed limitations. Collaborations alone were not always enough to overcome entrenched institutional resistance or fully transform school culture. They reflect the messy, iterative, ongoing work to decompose racialized structures and traditional power dynamics. Collaborations reveal the broader collective effort required among local, national, and international educational policy contexts rather than a quick fix. While collaborations catalyzed White principals to implement an active anti-racist stance, school-based racial equity collaborations are part of a larger, continuous process toward racial justice, not a silver bullet.

The Emergence of Anti-Racist Educational Leadership

The field of anti-racist educational leadership has emerged relatively recently, reflecting a broader evolution within educational research and practice. Early anti-racism research in education was largely subjugated to social justice and equity efforts. However, as the field of research expanded, race emerged as a more prominent topic, increasingly discussed, explored, and advocated for in schools. Anti-racism research originated in the field of teaching and has only recently been explicitly addressed within educational leadership.

Leading education scholars, such as Ladson-Billings (1995) and Banks (1993), led the way; however, they were situated in teaching, not leadership. Scholars like Sleeter (1996), Milner (2006), Howard (2001), and Picower (2009) also advanced the field. Their scholarship examined race and emphasized cultural competence, critical consciousness, multicultural education, and challenging the status quo. These works were crucial in bringing race into the conversation.

Over time, the ideas of social justice teaching were adopted by social justice leadership (e.g., Brooks et al., 2007; Ryan, 2006; Theoharis, 2007). Social justice leadership was not mainstream until recently, and much more recently, anti-racism has been more widely centered in the educational leadership field. While social justice leadership has long sought to promote equity, anti-racist leadership places a deliberate emphasis on dismantling racist structures. Scholars like Ann Lopez (2020) have examined partnerships between White and Black leaders, emphasizing how these relationships influence anti-racist practices. Similarly, Diem and Welton (2021), Irby (2021), and Rivera-McCutchen (2021) have been instrumental in bringing anti-racist perspectives to the forefront, advocating for leadership that acknowledges racist structures and actively seeks to eradicate them. This study builds on anti-racist leadership literature and adds depth to our understanding of how White principals can implement an active anti-racist stance.

Implications for Global Research on Power Asymmetries

Our findings have broader implications for researchers globally examining racism and other power asymmetries. The conceptual framework and insights can be applied to explore how similar processes of introspection, negotiation, and integration of equity-centered principles – supported by collaborations and affinity learning spaces – might challenge power structures in diverse contexts. Our study emphasized the importance of understanding local histories and cultural contexts when addressing power imbalances. Whether examining the caste system in India, race and socioeconomic privileges in Europe, or patriarchal systems globally, a nuanced approach that considers the local histories of each context is necessary. By examining these parallels, researchers and partners can

deepen their understanding of how power and privilege operate across different contexts and contribute to a global discourse. Leadership action underscores the need for school-based racial equity collaborations and system-level approaches to work toward racial justice, offering a framework for understanding how White educational leaders can challenge entrenched systems of discrimination and privilege in education. This study broadens our understanding of how schools can be organized to address the needs of students, families, and communities most underserved by schooling by illustrating how school-based racial equity collaborations can begin to transform school systems and redistribute power.

Acknowledgements

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About the Authors

Lindsey J. Kaiser
University of Maine
Lindsey.kaiser@maine.edu
https://orcid.org/0009-0009-7516-0328
Lindsey J. Kaiser is an assistant professor of educational leadership at the College of Education and Human Development, University of Maine. Her research focuses on race, racism, and anti-racism, emphasizing educational leadership and system-level change. She uses participatory action and community-engaged research methodologies to collaborate with communities of Color and partner with White educational leaders, fostering racial learning and anti-racist practices to disrupt racial inequities. Prior to academia, Lindsey spent a decade in public education as an assistant principal, instructional coach, special education teacher, and elementary teacher.

David Goldenkranz
Technology Access Foundation
davidg@techaccess.org
https://orcid.org/0009-0002-8480-0242
David Goldenkranz spent a decade in education working with underserved youth and BIPOC communities, before he transitioned into a full-time career as a DEI facilitator, coach, and consultant, working to eliminate structural, institutional, and systemic barriers within organizations. David currently serves as the Ally Engagement Program Manager at the Technology Access Foundation (TAF) where he is responsible for facilitating learning opportunities for leaders in education to embrace antiracist and culturally responsive practices in their school environments. David believes in supporting others to explore the subtle and insidious ways in which structural racism, toxic patriarchy, and colonial culture impact our ability to experience compassion, empathy, and humility – ultimately stunting our growth, as well as hindering our ability to be a part of a more collective society.

Heather K. Lechner
University of Washington-Tacoma
gnoheatherl@gmail.com
Heather K. Lechner is a teaching associate of Equitable and Inclusive Teaching: Grounded in Social Justice in the School of Education at The University of Washington-Tacoma. Her scholarship explores the intersection of executive functioning, learning disabilities, race, racism, and anti-racism, with a focus on Dis/ability critical race studies (DisCrit). Additionally, she works as an administrator of special education in California. Heather has 30 years of experience in public education, serving as a founding school leader, assistant principal, instructional coach, special education teacher, and a middle school drama teacher. She is committed to using, culturally grounding techniques, art, multiple modalities and structures to foster inclusive and anti-racist environments.

Patricia Burgess
Technology Access Foundation
patriciaw@techaccess.org
Patricia Burgess, a Seattle native, serves as the chief of staff for the Technology Access Foundation, where she specializes in operational development with a focus on policy and process creation, workplace culture enhancement, and leadership professional development. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Sociology from Florida A&M University and is currently pursuing a Master's in

Public Administration at Seattle University. Driven by her passion for public service, Patricia aspires to uplift Black and Brown communities by crafting equitable policies that dismantle systemic barriers and expand access to transformative public services. Her vision is to create meaningful solutions that promote equity, empowerment, and lasting change.

Trish Millines Dziko
Technology Access Foundation
trishmi@techaccess.org
Trish Millines Dziko is a change agent, mentor, and advocate for children of color. In 1996, she left her successful 17-year career in the tech industry to ensure students of color had the same opportunities she had. Trish is the cofounder, executive director, visionary and strategist behind the Technology Access Foundation (TAF) — one of the leading education non-profits educating children of color to their full potential. Through Trish's leadership, TAF transitioned from out-of-school programs to become a statewide leader in public education, operating TAF Academy (a 6th to 12th grade, award-winning public school co-managed with the Federal Way Public School District), created TransformED that partners with public schools to transform them into healthy and safe learning environments that center student voice and cultivate students into socially conscious and self-aware critical thinkers, problem solvers, ideators, creators, and leaders. In addition, Trish led TAF through the creation of the Network for EdWork designed to recruit, retain and develop teachers of color for our Washington State public schools. Trish is a committed, proactive leader serving on boards of organizations that focus on children and education.

About the Editors

Vidya Shah
York University
vidshah@edu.yorku.ca
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3413-9994
Dr. Vidya Shah is an educator, scholar and activist committed to equity and racial justice in the service of liberatory education. She is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at York University, and her research explores anti-racist and decolonial approaches to leadership in schools, communities, and school districts.

Caitlin C. Farrell
University of Colorado Boulder
caitlin.farrell@colorado.edu
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7589-4921
Caitlin C. Farrell is an associate research professor at the University of Colorado Boulder School of Education. Her work focuses on the dynamics of school district policymaking and the relationship between research and practice for school improvement and transformation.

Appendix A

Jackie. Community Building Questions for Staff Members at Professional Learning

Round 1 Opener:

Where are you at on the compass regarding conversations around racial bias and disproportionality in school discipline data? (no explaining just name the quadrant)

Round 2 Content:

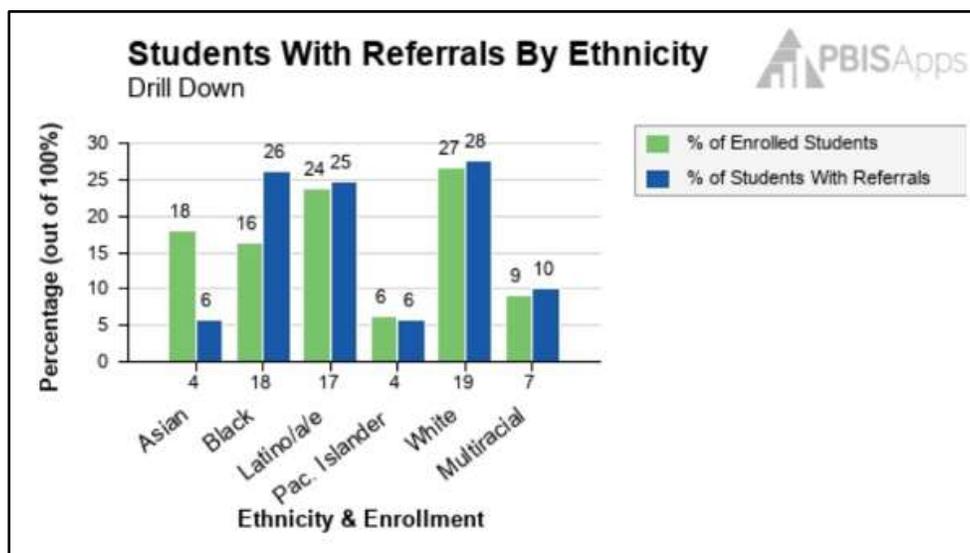How does your racial identity influence your work in the classroom?

> What does it mean to be a white teacher in a predominantly black and brown school?

> What does it mean to be a teacher or staff member of color in a school with predominantly white staff?

Round 3 Closing:

What is one word to describe how you are feeling after this conversation today?

The Courageous Conversation Compass

Appendix B

Jackie. Racially Disparate Student Discipline Data

Students With Referrals By Ethnicity — Drill Down (PBISApps)

Appendix C

Jackie. Agree and Disagree Continuum Activity for Staff Members at Professional Learning

Agree..Disagree
Families in our school are motivated to help their children achieve in school.

Educators have high expectations for all students.

All students can learn.

Appendix D

James. Student Sense of Belonging Survey Data – Disaggregated by Race/Ethnicity

Appendix E

James. Example of One of the Short-term Goals from the Student Summit

About the Editorial Team: https://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/epaa/about/editorialTeam

Please send errata notes to Jeanne M. Powers at jeanne.powers@asu.edu