

**SPECIAL ISSUE**  
**Transforming School Systems**

education policy analysis  
archives

A peer-reviewed, independent,  
open access, multilingual journal



epaa | aape

Arizona State University

Volume 33 Number 10

January 28, 2025

ISSN 1068-2341

**Contextualizing Education Reform: How Urban School  
Districts Design Equity-Focused Leadership Pathways**

*April Peters*

University of Houston  
United States

*Joshua Childs*

University of Texas at Austin  
United States

*Ain Grooms*

University of Wisconsin-Madison  
United States



*Eligio Martinez Jr.*

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona  
United States

**Citation:** Peters, A., Childs, J., Grooms, A. A., & Martinez, E. (2025). Contextualizing education reform: How urban school districts design equity-focused leadership pathways. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 33(10). <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.33.8565> This article is part of the special issue **Transforming School Systems: Questions of Power, Resistance, Equity, and Community** guest edited by Caitlin Farrell and Vidya Shah.

**Abstract:** This paper explores the evolving landscape of K-12 education in the aftermath of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and the “racial awakening” following George Floyd’s murder. Despite the return to in-person learning, persistent pre-pandemic barriers hinder academic opportunities, particularly for minoritized students. The study focuses on equitable educator practices and leadership models to address educational and opportunity gaps. Three large urban school districts in the United States serve as a case study, investigating how they design and implement equity-centered leadership pathways post-COVID-19. Exploring how the sociopolitical and cultural contexts’ influence leadership pathway development and the experiences of principals of color are also examined. The paper uses organizational culture as a framework to analyze how leadership pathways function as levers for educational improvement. The findings underscore the importance of continued investment in initiatives that promote equity to combat persistent inequalities in education.

**Keywords:** leadership; organizational culture; pipelines

### **Contextualizando la reforma educativa: Cómo los distritos escolares urbanos diseñan trayectorias de liderazgo enfocadas en la equidad**

**Resumen:** Este artículo explora el panorama en evolución de la educación K-12 tras la pandemia de COVID-19 en 2020 y el “despertar racial” que siguió al asesinato de George Floyd. A pesar del regreso al aprendizaje presencial, las barreras persistentes previas a la pandemia continúan limitando las oportunidades académicas, particularmente para los estudiantes minorizados. El estudio se centra en prácticas equitativas de los educadores y modelos de liderazgo para abordar las brechas educativas y de oportunidades. Tres grandes distritos escolares urbanos en los Estados Unidos sirven como estudio de caso, investigando cómo diseñan e implementan trayectorias de liderazgo centradas en la equidad después de la COVID-19. También se examina cómo los contextos sociopolíticos y culturales influyen en el desarrollo de estas trayectorias de liderazgo y en las experiencias de los directores de color. El artículo utiliza la cultura organizacional como marco para analizar cómo las trayectorias de liderazgo funcionan como palancas para la mejora educativa. Los hallazgos destacan la importancia de seguir invirtiendo en iniciativas que promuevan la equidad para combatir las desigualdades persistentes en la educación.

**Palabras clave:** liderazgo; cultura organizacional; trayectorias

### **Contextualizando a reforma educacional: Como os distritos escolares urbanos projetam trajetórias de liderança com foco na equidade**

**Resumo:** Este artigo explora o cenário em evolução da educação K-12 no contexto pós-pandemia de COVID-19 em 2020 e do “despertar racial” que se seguiu ao assassinato de George Floyd. Apesar do retorno ao ensino presencial, barreiras persistentes anteriores à pandemia continuam dificultando as oportunidades acadêmicas, particularmente para estudantes minorizados. O estudo foca em práticas equitativas de educadores e modelos de liderança para abordar as lacunas educacionais e de oportunidades. Três grandes distritos escolares urbanos nos Estados Unidos servem como estudo de caso, investigando como projetam e implementam trajetórias de liderança centradas na equidade após a COVID-19. Também são analisados os contextos sociopolíticos e culturais que influenciam o desenvolvimento dessas trajetórias de liderança e as experiências de diretores racializados. O artigo utiliza a cultura organizacional como estrutura para analisar como as trajetórias de liderança funcionam como alavancas para a melhoria educacional. Os resultados ressaltam a importância de continuar investindo em iniciativas que promovam a equidade para combater as desigualdades persistentes na educação.

**Palavras-chave:** liderança; cultura organizacional; trajetórias

## Contextualizing Education Reform: How Urban School Districts Design Equity-Focused Leadership Pathways

Since 2020, researchers, policymakers, and educators have been grappling with the changing nature of school. The (ongoing) COVID-19 pandemic and “racial awakening” after the 2020 murder of George Floyd impacted the overall structure of school worldwide. Research has shown how schools have altered teaching and learning delivery models (Zhao, 2021), sped up the integration of educational technology in day-to-day practice (Childs et al., 2023a), and increasing responses to students’ physical and mental health (Schwartz et al., 2021). Despite the impact of these two significant world events, and the return to in-person learning once school buildings reopened, today’s educational environment still encompasses many pre-pandemic educational practices and policies that hinder students’ achieving academic opportunities and success. Minoritized students continue to face barriers around school attendance, academic performance, educational opportunities, and overall well-being (Grooms et al., 2023). Recent investment by foundations, private firms, and education philanthropists have indicated a desire to at least either wrestle with or change the current K-12 educational system.

To address the complexities that exist within the current K-12 educational system, educators must build engagement practices that invite students and families to be a part of the overall ethos of educational learning, including providing a variety of modalities that allow for flexible learning opportunities and experiences. Much of this attention has been shaped by addressing the “learning loss” that some perceive have plagued students since the school closures of 2020, and the need to implement policies that can support quick improvements in student outcomes.

Additionally, focus has been aimed at designing and implementing equitable educator practices that could close educational and opportunity gaps (Cabral-Gouveia et al., 2023). This includes rethinking school climate and culture to create learning spaces where students can excel socially and academically (de Silva Vieira et al., 2021) and creating systems and structures where schools and communities are connected to one another (Childs et al., 2023b). Simultaneously, a broader recognition that educational leadership significantly impacts in-school experiences for students has led to targeted supports and interventions. While leadership has always mattered in school improvement (Stosich et al., 2024), today’s current education policy landscape has challenged districts to adapt leadership models and practices that promote improved educational outcomes, particularly for the most marginalized (e.g. Diem & Welton, 2020; Khalifa, 2020; Theoharis, 2007). Furthermore, changing student demographics within public schools require an educator workforce that is not only more diverse, but properly equipped to support the evolving student needs, backgrounds, and experiences that influence academic outcomes. Thus, equity-centered leadership pipelines are a critical component of school districts efforts to advance educational opportunities for students.

The ongoing threats towards public schooling, particularly around organizational capacity and leadership capabilities (Dawer & Woulfin, 2024), calls for a study about how investment in equity-oriented approaches can create improved learning opportunities for all students. Through a case study of three urban school districts located in the United States, we provide examples of how districts can intentionally develop equity-centered leadership pathways designed to meet their own contextual needs. We use the term leadership *pathways* to denote various entry points into the principalship. This study is driven by two research questions:

- a. How are three, large, urban districts designing equity-centered leadership pathways following COVID-19?

- b. To what extent are districts' sociopolitical and cultural contexts influencing the development of these pathways?

The paper begins by providing a brief overview of the literature on equity-centered leadership that has emerged since COVID-19, and the social responses to the increased attention on diversity, equity, and inclusion. We discuss how leadership pathways emerged to foster district and school culture, while also cultivating leaders to tackle wicked problems (Grooms et al., 2023). Organizational culture theory (Zilber, 2012) offers a lens to examine how equity-centered pathways work as district levers to support educational improvement. The findings provide specific examples of how these three districts have used leadership to engage in equity-oriented educational practices that center community and student needs, including: intentionality in seeking community input; equity-focused programming that develops effective leaders; and attention to the influence of the broader context on developing equity-focused policies and practices. The paper concludes by offering insights on policy and practice, with a specific call for continuing investment for initiatives that promote equity and promote strategies that combat ongoing inequalities.

### **Equity-Centered Leadership in the Era of COVID-19**

Since the pandemic, many school districts have invested in creating and cultivating equity-centered leadership practices. Quickly responding to changes in school, community, and neighborhood caused by COVID-19, as well as further equipping educators on how to deal with the ongoing racial justice movement, many school districts have worked to foster an environment where equity-centered leadership opportunities could thrive (Grooms et al., 2023). This includes promoting school leaders to implement policies from a social justice approach (Mavrogordato & White, 2020), improving and offering multiple modalities of teacher professional development (Moorhouse et al., 2021), and supporting students and families (Alvarez Gutiérrez et al., 2022). Leaders need to be equipped with a theory of action that guides them through crises, like COVID-19, with an equity orientation (Virella, 2023).

#### **Leadership Pathways**

Research on the import of school leaders informed that the principal is second only to the classroom teacher in their influence over student outcomes (Harris & Jones, 2023; Leithwood et al., 2004). Educational leaders play a pivotal role within schools, thereby making the development and sustainability of leadership pipelines increasingly crucial. School leaders shape educational environments, influence instructional and organizational practices, and help to foster school culture (Welch & Hodge, 2018). From an organizational theory perspective, leadership development is often related to succession planning (Peters, 2011), where the former was seen as a way to train future leaders with necessary skills for success in leadership roles and the latter seen as the implementation of long-term plans around changes in leadership roles (Griffith et al., 2019). Within the K-12 literature, leadership pipelines have typically referred to the process of identifying, developing, and sustaining future educational leaders within various levels of the educational system (Anderson et al., 2022). We broaden the concept of leadership pipelines to instead imagine them as pathways that can cultivate leadership skills and professional growth opportunities in multiple ways and for multiple aspiring leaders (Perrone, 2022). Furthermore, leadership pathways can supply qualified leaders within a given district by working in partnership with local or regional institutes of higher education (IHEs) or through creating Grow Your Own programs to develop future leaders from within the district (Perrone, 2022). Each of these approaches focuses on leveraging resources and expertise to create a pipeline of leaders who can support overall goals within the district.

## Equity-Centered Pathways

Equity-centered pathways are designed to identify, develop, and support aspiring and current educational leaders to ensure a commitment to diversity and inclusivity. Equity-centered leadership recognizes the importance of addressing disparities in educational outcomes, access, and opportunities (Eslinger, 2023). Districts that promote equity-centered pathways intentionally recruit leaders who represent diverse backgrounds and can bring an array of perspectives to their educational leadership roles (Childs et al., 2023). Many leadership development programs that support or collaborate with equity-centered pathways promote training that extends beyond traditional leadership skills, and incorporates a deeper dive into issues around equity, cultural competence, and social justice principles (Rimmer, 2016). Equity-centered pathways focus on preparing leaders to address systemic barriers and create inclusive teaching and learning environments (Eslinger, 2023). Perrone (2022) found that leaders of color were more likely to recruit and retain teachers of color, support students of color in advanced academic learning pathways, and create a culture of inclusivity within schools.

## Theoretical Framework

Organizational culture directly impacts educators' performance and productivity (Adamy & Heinecke, 2005). Organizational culture is paramount for supporting educational policies, improving student achievement and opportunities, and signaling how resources will be directed to achieve desired outcomes. Shared beliefs, norms, and values all encompass the organizational culture that make up an educational environment (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988). Organizational culture, or a "pattern of basic shared assumptions that was learned by a group as it solves its problems...to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein, 2010, p. 17), is especially useful for targeting the growing opportunity gap (Carter & Welner, 2013) as well as navigating the increasing influence of accountability pressures and data-driven decision-making.

For educational leaders, recognizing the role that organizational culture plays in shaping learning environments can be influential for achieving desired outcomes and goals. Organizational culture influences the leadership style that is adopted by educational leaders, and shapes how leaders adopt different approaches to managing the organization (Lesinger et al, 2016). Giles and Yates (2014) argued that educational leaders should align their practices with the values that are embedded within an organization's culture. Therefore, *values* and *beliefs* not only shape an organization's identity, but also guide the actions and decisions that educational leaders make that help to reflect priorities and objectives. Within an organization's culture also exist *norms* and *behaviors* that dictate inter- and intrapersonal relationships, internal and external communication, and how educational leaders leverage networks to coordinate activities within the organization (Brown et al., 2024). Finally, *symbols* and *rituals* can assist in conveying the values and identity of an organization's culture. Educational leaders can leverage *symbols* and *rituals* to foster a community of practice that shapes student experiences within learning environments, and a sense of belonging that can lead to success (Evans, 2022).

Race and gender are critical dimensions that also influence organizational culture and how they are integrated within educational institutions can signal the value placed on inclusivity and promoting equity (Ray, 2019) to invested constituents, including students, families, and community members. The principalship remains largely white (Taie et al., 2020) and leadership preparation programs are gradually increasing their emphasis on race and cultural competence (Grooms et al., 2023) to better prepare leaders to lead from equity-focused and antiracist perspectives in diversifying

public schools. Importantly, women of color educational leaders have long held caring and justice-oriented perspectives that center the needs of students and families of color (Grooms et al., 2021). Thus, the racial and gender demographics of principals may directly shape the development of *values, beliefs, symbols, and rituals*.

Organizational culture can also be influenced by sociocultural contexts. We live in a political climate where some state legislatures are passing bills banning the teaching of “divisive content” and/or practices aimed at supporting the needs of students from minoritized backgrounds (Flannery, 2024; coRay & Gibbons, 2021). Additionally, communities of color are still reeling from the long-lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Grills et al., 2022). School-community partnerships are central to the work of school and district leaders, and thus, to a district’s organizational culture. Community equity audits are helpful to identify community concerns and co-construct solutions with local actors (Green, 2017; Teemant et al., 2020). Principals, then, can create organizational cultures in conjunction with community members that not only reflect the identities of their school communities, but, in some cases, reject broader oppressive practices. In these ways, a deeper understanding of districts’ organizational cultures viewed through the lens of their sociocultural contexts can support the development of equity-focused strategies designed to improve student outcomes and create inclusive school communities.

## Data and Methods

The three districts included in this study—Green Valley, Mitchell City, and Riverview (pseudonyms)—are members of a grant-funded, multiyear, nationwide initiative supporting large, urban districts as they construct principal pipelines specifically designed to advance equity-focused leadership practices. This initiative began in 2020 and will extend through at least 2027. As part of the initiative, districts agree to participate in various research activities conducted by university faculty and to allow university faculty to act as participant-observers (Yin, 2018) in district activities related to the initiative. COVID-19 safety protocols caused much of the early district participation, observation, and data collection activities to be conducted virtually.

### District Contexts

Each of the three districts enrolls a student body that is predominantly students of color. Green Valley School District serves over 72,000 students and is the third largest district in a large western state. The district enrolls majority Latina/o students, with student demographics consisting of 8% African American, 1% American Indian or Native Alaskan, 11% Asian, 0.5% Filipino, 0.5% Pacific Islander, 8% White and 3% multiracial. Twenty percent of Green Valley students identify as English learners and 12% as students with disabilities. Additionally, the district has a high concentration of students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, or 88% of students in the district. One of the major challenges for the district is its high number of chronically absent students, which stands at 51% and is 20% above the state average.

Mitchell City School District (MCSD) is the largest district in a large, midwestern state. There are over 100 schools in the district, serving nearly 50,000 students in Grades K-12. While student demographics include 53% Black, 20% White, 16% Hispanic/Latinx, 8% Multiracial, 3% Asian, and fewer than 1% American Indian/Pacific Islander, teacher demographics are not proportional. Teacher demographics are: 76% White, 20% Black, 2% Hispanic, 1% Multiracial, and fewer than 1% American Indian/Pacific Islander. In MCSD, 41% of families receive SNAP benefits.

Riverview School District is among the top 50 largest school districts in the country, serving almost 100,000 students in Grades K-12. Riverview is located in a large city in a Southern state. Student demographics are as follows: 35% Black, 35% White, and almost 20% Hispanic/Latinx with

the remaining 10% identifying as either Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, or Bi/Multiracial. Most students in the district qualify for free and/or reduced-price lunch. Almost 25% of Riverview students are chronically absent, meaning they miss at least 10% (or 18 days) of the school year.

### **Data Sources**

This multiple-case study (Yin, 2018) employs several different data sources to investigate the research questions, including: survey data; interviews; publicly available documents (e.g. district website documents, media articles), and field notes from district meetings. Including data from multiple sources allows the research team the opportunity to triangulate and understand the complexities these urban districts face in developing and sustaining equity centered leadership pathways. Additionally, multiple layers of data collection and analysis affords the researchers the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the social, historical, and cultural context of the districts.

Study participants were asked to complete an electronic survey—the Social Context Survey—in March 2021 during a virtual convening in which representatives from all three districts participated. The survey asked participants to share information about any historical, political, cultural, and social events that have happened in the district or community during the past 10 years and areas of concern or possibility. Each district had a dedicated survey link and all responses were anonymous. The survey consisted of only questions with open-ended responses. Respondents included district leaders, school leaders, university partners, and community members. These individuals serve on district teams that meet regularly during the course of this study.

Individual interviews were conducted with central office personnel, faculty from university partner preparation programs, and members of the respective states' education agencies across the three districts. Qualitative interviews are an important tool for eliciting discreet information from respondents about particulars of a phenomenon and about the context (Fakis et al., 2014). In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted across the districts with superintendents, chiefs of staff, leadership development directors, chief diversity officers, human resource directors, principal supervisors/coaches, and other district level leaders. The interviews were conducted between Spring 2022 and Spring 2023. Interview questions focused on respondents' backgrounds in leadership, their knowledge of the history of the district and the district context, and the equity-oriented approach the district employs. Interviews were also conducted with faculty from partner universities. These interviews focused on the evolution of the partnership between the district and the university. Researchers were interested in learning how the university partnership supported the equity orientation efforts.

A third source of data came from a document analysis of district strategies, policies, and programs focused on increasing equity within leadership pathways. Strong evidence of equity-oriented activity is reflected in publicly available documents that illuminate each district's approach to this commitment. Documents included for analysis in this study include equity policies, strategic plans, portraits of graduates, professional learning documents, other district-level documents, and media articles. Documents were collected and organized according to type and overarching theme.

Finally, we include data from field notes. As participant-observers, we joined events and district meetings to gain valuable insight on district decision making and leadership (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) notes that a benefit to participant-observations is “the ability to perceive reality from the viewpoint of someone ‘inside’ a case rather than external to it” (p. 191). Field notes come from numerous virtual and in-person events occurring between March 2021 and December 2023.

### **Analytic Strategies**

For this study, we employ an embedded multiple-case study analytic approach as embedded case studies include data collected from various levels from within each case (Yin, 2018). The three case studies presented here include a combination of qualitative data collected from interviews with participants at levels inside (superintendents, central office administrators, and other central office staff) and outside (university faculty and employees of state education agencies) of the district, publicly available documents, field notes, and data from the open-ended questions on the Social Context Survey.

Interviews were transcribed and coded utilizing MAXQDA software. Researchers developed a common codebook to code data. Similarly coded data across the corpus of data were grouped together to illuminate common themes (Deterding & Waters, 2021) related to equity and leadership pathways. Codes were reviewed a second time for alignment with the initial codes and research questions. Similar to the interview data, a codebook was developed to code documents and identify themes within and across districts and across the corpus of data. These themes were reviewed and analyzed for their alignment with the research questions.

### **Positionality**

Each of the four members of this research team identify as a person of color: two Black women (one assistant professor and one full professor), one Black man (associate professor) and one Chicano (associate professor). For our team, approaching research with an equity orientation is central to our personal lives, our research interests, and our roles as faculty members. In our work, collectively and individually, equity means challenging the persistent and harmful stereotypes placed on individual students (and leaders) of color and directing attention to the systemic inequities in school districts. We intentionally approach this study from an asset-based perspective, one that has not historically been afforded to districts serving high numbers of students of color.

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore how three large, urban districts from different geographical areas of the United States are designing their equity-centered leadership pathways following COVID-19. We also investigate whether and how the local cultural contexts of each of the districts is influencing (or has influenced) the development and implementation of these pathways. Findings from our three case studies highlight how districts leverage internal and external resources to create leadership pathways that advance districts' equity goals.

#### **Case Studies: Green Valley, Mitchell City, and Riverview Public School Districts**

The two research questions in this study ask how these three districts are developing their equity-focused principal pathways and the extent to which local sociopolitical and cultural contexts are influencing the design of these pathways. In the subsections that follow, we outline each district's process and progress toward creating its pathways.

#### ***Green Valley School District***

Green Valley has experienced several challenges in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder as it grappled with several racially charged incidents within schools. Despite recent efforts to improve outcomes for all students, the district is working on addressing equity gaps in school discipline, special education, homeless and foster youth, and English language learners. One of the groups that has been identified as having the largest equity gaps are Black students, who have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism, highest suspension rate, and the second lowest graduation rate

in the district. As a result, district leadership has made a concerted effort to address the equity gaps for Black students and have invested funding to create a program designed to offer targeted support. This, in part, has been a result of the superintendent pushing for decision-making that disrupts inequities for Black students:

You just have to be willing to stand in that gap and—I mean, leadership involves getting hated on for the right things. Somebody's going to hate on you for doing something. Like you want to do what you believe to be right and bring everybody along to the grace where you can. But when you set aside resources specifically to close gaps that exist in your system where you have done systemic harm to different groups of people, you're going to draw a lot of attention and ire. And you just got to be down with it. That's part of being a leader. You're not going to be beloved by everybody. (Green Valley Superintendent)

Despite Black students being less than 10% of the district enrollment, this was an area that the superintendent felt he needed to prioritize to begin to close some of the equity gaps.

One of the goals of Green Valley has been to increase the racial diversity of teachers and school leadership to be more reflective of the student population. Because of its location in the agricultural hub of the state, Green Valley has developed a “Grow Your Own” model for teachers and school leaders, and depends heavily on this model to develop its school personnel. Currently, 68% of teachers in the district come from the district’s teacher pipeline program. As part of the district's recent rewriting of its mission, vision, values, and goals, the district is being more intentional about their applicant pool:

We'd always been very aware of who was being selected for programs, but we're also now much more aware of who is applying. We've been good about, I think selecting from the applicant pool, but we've had to continually address who is actually applying because it goes beyond just that group. (Green Valley Initiative Director)

Reviewing their leadership applicant pool has led to an internal discussion of recruitment practices in how teachers are identified and encouraged to apply for leadership credential programs and subsequently for assistant/vice administrative positions. Additionally, this has also caused Green Valley to examine its teacher development pipeline. By beginning to prepare teacher candidates early on to enter the field, this ensures there is a more diverse group of teachers who can potentially enter the leadership pipeline.

Another step that Green Valley has implemented to support its leadership pipeline is to create specific supports for principals of color. The district has been more intentional about matching new school leaders with principal coaches with similar racial and gendered backgrounds that can assist them with their transition into the assistant principalship and help them understand the dynamics of their new schools. The district has also created affinity groups for its Black, Latina/o and Asian American principals, providing them with opportunities to engage with principals matching their own racial identities. These affinity groups encourage the building of support systems and mentoring opportunities for Green Valley principals. Finally, Green Valley has made a more concerted effort to connect equity issues identified by the district’s Leadership Development Department with schools through the work of its principal supervisors.

### ***Mitchell City Schools***

As part of their efforts toward an equity-orientation, MCSD officials are concerned with ensuring proportional representation among student demographic groups and teachers/administrators. This is especially true for students of color, and particularly so for

Hispanic/Latinx students, given that only 2% of the district teachers are Hispanic/Latinx compared to 15% of students. Most recent student outcome data indicates that the district's graduation rate is nearly 80% and the student attendance rate is 82%. The overall district mobility rate is 19%, with higher rates for American Indian/Alaskan Native (24%), Hispanic/Latinx (20%), English learners (21%), and students with disabilities (21%).

Like most districts across the country, Mitchell City Schools has been navigating the politicization of COVID-19, the murder of George Floyd, educator shortages, and most recently, a teacher strike. Several years ago, the district was rocked when a scandal gained national attention and led to the resignation of several prominent district employees. This led to increased involvement by the State Department of Education which almost resulted in a complete state takeover of the district. Despite the district avoiding state takeover, community distrust and tension continued to influence district decision making. Community mobilization efforts led to the removal of school resource officers in all district schools, and the district has been working towards improving overall school safety with community input. Additionally, Mitchell City Schools has engaged in deep partnership with local universities to strengthen the knowledge and skills of aspiring leaders.

MCSD is very diverse racially and geographically. There are some broad disparities across the six district regions, and accordingly, across schools in the district. Resultantly, MCSD has been engaged in a concerted effort to address equity issues in the district. In large part, these efforts were influenced by several national and community events that had an impact on students and families in the community. Particularly, during the period of racial reckoning in 2020, the district began engaging stakeholders in conversations about equity. Initially, the reaction to these efforts were that they were too infrequent and did little to influence necessary transformation. To that end, the Chief Diversity Officer position was created. Under the leadership of this Chief, the district developed and implemented a board approved equity definition. To begin addressing some of the systemic equity gaps, several practices and initiatives were strengthened or established. MCSD is committed to the purposeful development of diverse teacher and leader pipelines. As the Chief Equity Officer shared:

But one of the things that I think will connect closely is that we're creating these staff training modules...really trying to help all of our staff to be more culturally responsive. [As] we are looking...internally at the pipeline and how we're growing our folks, that they have that skill set and that it's not just hit or miss. [We are] trying to get it to that level where if you enter this pipeline, we know that you have gotten these sort of exposures and trainings.... (Dr. Royal, Chief Equity Officer)

The district is also intentional about increasing racial equity among school leaders across the district. One way it has done this is through focused recruitment at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). It has also worked to strengthen relationships with its university partners. As one university partner faculty member intimated:

When MCSD first approached us, there was some conversation already, like what they saw us doing was developing sitting principals. So...amongst the two higher ed institutions that they had reached out to, this is something that they specifically saw us having expertise in...very early on, I think they kind of had in mind, for us to have the role that we had.

To address some of the equity issues that affect specific student groups, the district has improved its partnership with the State Department of Education to expand resources for students receiving special education services. It has also established a key partnership with an attendance advocacy agency.

Additionally, MCSD is focused on strengthening the equity-orientation promulgated in the formal policy. Mitchell City's equity policy is focused on ensuring equitable outcomes for all students, focused on equitable allocation and distribution of resources aimed at ameliorating equity gaps. MCSD's policy is expansive in that the focus is not solely on students and student outcomes, but also on well-being and support of everyone (including faculty and staff), hiring practices, facilities, staffing, and professional development. Furthermore, the district is intentional about leadership recruitment. It has dedicated staff members to this responsibility. These staff visit with the schools and the communities to ascertain the qualities and strengths they need in a school leader. Then recruitment of leaders is deliberate in terms of matching leader strength with school/community need:

The decision to hire a principal for a particular school impacts the entire community.

When we are in the recruitment phase, we go to the schools and shadow the administrative team to understand the culture. (MCSD recruiter)

In this policy, the superintendent has the agency and responsibility to identify the equity gaps and implement strategies, programs, and policies to address these gaps. The district leadership and the school board have worked together to determine alignment between policies and equity initiatives.

### **Riverview School District**

Although Riverview counts equity, excellence, diversity, and opportunity among its many stated districtwide core values, the district still struggles with disproportionate academic and disciplinary outcomes between its white students and students of color and/or students from other historically marginalized backgrounds. In recent years, Riverview has instituted several important policy initiatives designed to tackle these equity concerns. Responses from the district's Social Context Survey outlined how, in 2020, the district avoided state takeover by addressing several issues that arose in a 2018 audit related to special education, discipline disproportionality, the organization and structure of its central office, and achievement/opportunity gaps. First, the school board approved a racial equity policy, which resulted in the creation of the district's formalized Racial Equity Plan. This plan outlines objectives in instruction and assessment, school culture and climate, staffing, and educational and social programming. Second, the district created an analysis protocol tool that must be completed before the implementation of any school or district-level policy or practice. Included in the tool are questions asking whether any racially minoritized groups can be inequitably affected by implementation, whether any of those groups will have concerns with the proposal, and what the possible unintended consequences may be. Lastly, the district created an administrative division specifically designed to support the diverse needs of its students as well as to support training and professional development opportunities about race, diversity, and equity for Riverview faculty and staff.

The district has also implemented new practices related to discipline and student assignment. Black students in the district have long been receiving disproportionate discipline referrals, including to the city's alternative schools, as compared to the district's White students. As a result, the Riverview district has removed the suspension policies for students in the younger grades and is removing school resource officers (SROs) in its schools. Changes to the student assignment plan present additional opportunities for the district's Black student population. During interviews, district officials described how students living in predominantly Black neighborhoods in West Riverview can now attend school closer to home, rather than being bused across town to meet racial balance enrollment efforts that had not been revised in decades. This new plan may improve academic outcomes, family engagement, and a sense of belonging in schools for the Black and Latinx students who have long felt disenfranchised.

Riverview's definition of equity specifically revolves around fairness and justice, rather than equality. The revision of the student assignment plan to better support Black families, the removal of SROs and lower grades' suspension policies, the new Racial Equity Plan and analysis protocol tool, and the new division addressing equity suggest Riverview's historical contexts have contributed to the creation of the district's new equity definition and related equity-focused policies.

The sociocultural and political contexts of the city of Riverview also inform the district's equity-focused efforts. Like many cities across the country, residents in Riverview protested the 2020 murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd while also trying to manage the response to COVID-19. The city's response to Ms. Taylor's murder contributed to the local resurgence of conversations about race and racism and how to teach these topics in Riverview public schools. However, the state in which Riverview is located passed legislation similar to other states banning the teaching of "divisive concepts" and critical race theory. Local politics have also shaped district responses. Multiple local news articles highlight how, in 2022, thousands of Riverview residents signed a petition opposing a property tax increase that would have raised tens of millions of dollars to fund school construction efforts, racial equity initiatives, and resources for underserved schools. The property tax increase was ultimately upheld by the state Supreme Court. Despite these state and local political obstacles, the Riverview School District remains committed to its equity initiatives.

The policies and practices center equity in their design, implementation, and anticipated outcomes. To support these continuous improvement efforts, Riverview is committed to training and hiring equity-focused school leaders. The district defines equity-centered leaders as those who "make equity-centered decisions that drive continuous improvement efforts" and has taken two important steps toward creating its principal pathways. First, in 2021, it created its own leadership academy, designed to give aspiring school leaders necessary programming and professional development opportunities about the responsibilities of both principals and assistant principals. Importantly, because the school board had already passed the Racial Equity Plan, any subsequent policies—including the development of the leadership academy—would need to be in alignment with the district's plan. In this way, Riverview's leadership academy differs from other traditional "Grow Your Own" programs due to its explicit equity focus. Furthermore, district officials describe how Riverview is considering developing a system that can identify high-performing teachers and encourage them to enter the leadership academy. Riverview also partners with two local universities that offer principal certification programs through cohort-based programming to employees interested in earning licensure.

Second, the district created an equity screener tool to be used during the leadership hiring process. This screener asks candidates to demonstrate how they lead with equity based on dispositions related to data-informed decision-making, cultural competence and responsiveness, disruptions of inequity, and self-reflection. Furthermore, central office administrators report that the equity screener "can be used to monitor and evaluate district leaders' capacity to implement the Racial Equity Plan." Incorporating the leadership academy and the equity screener tool into the district's staff development and hiring practices indicate a concerted effort to systemize equity-centered leadership pathways and practices.

## **Discussion and Implications**

School and district leaders are working in contested educational spaces. Today's educational climate is fraught with challenges related to what is taught, learned, and discussed in classrooms. Threats to equity have been met with book bans, removing support for minoritized students, and decentering race within educational policies and practices. Responding to these ongoing challenges—while still supporting quality teaching and learning opportunities for all students—remains an

ongoing charge for educators. Organizational culture in many school districts is typically influenced by dominant, white, middle-class lens, often a result of the overrepresentation of white educators in the workforce (Taie et al., 2020). This can create barriers for both minoritized students and educators, thus the need for active district and school-based leadership structures that actively work to reshape organizational culture(s) towards racial equity and addressing historical disparities is evident.

The descriptions of the three-school district provide valuable insight into the proactive efforts needed to address equity issues in the wake of community and national events that have influenced educational opportunities. First, community-driven equity initiatives are vital to ensure community buy-in and that community members feel a part of the day-to-day policies and practitioner decisions that are impacting students. Community input is valuable to sustaining equity-based leadership practice, and scaling quality programs, leadership practices, and policy-designs that can positively impact student opportunities and outcomes. Districts, schools, and communities' culture should align for leaders to understand and respond to the unique needs of the communities they serve. This could assist in fostering effective educational environments that can support quality instruction and learning opportunities.

Second, investing in leadership development with an equity focus can yield diverse teacher and leadership pipelines that can create an environment that fosters equity and student engagement. For example, the deliberate recruitment of HBCU students and graduates was a proactive measure that has the potential to sustain a diverse pipeline of educators into the district that can lead to leadership development and positions. Districts should consider creating or broadening policies that address the multifaceted aspects of equity that exist within an educational ecosystem. This includes how professional development is delivered, leadership training, and investing in systems that support expanding student learning opportunities. This empowers district leadership to not only identify equity gaps, but also implement strategies that align policy initiatives with actionable steps that impact classroom teaching and learning.

Third, as leaders seek to create and sustain equity-oriented schools, developing an awareness of what can be learned from the broader racial and political context can inform policies and practices in schools. In response to larger community concerns, both Mitchell City and Riverview deliberately revisited their policies on discipline and the presence of school resource officers in schools. These adjustments were made after a critical review of discipline data and reflecting on the relationship between law enforcement personnel and segments of the district population.

Finally, the inclusion of participant-observation data offers implications for research related to equity in educational leadership. Our research team spent two years building trust with district leaders, regarding them as *partners in* the research rather than considering them *subjects of* the research. This type of “prolonged engagement” (Creswell, 2014) supported collaborative learning with district leaders and allowed us to observe and engage with district leaders in a variety of modes and contexts and at their pace and direction. Furthermore, because each of the researchers is a faculty member of color that centers equity in our work, we also began to view ourselves as “insider-outsiders” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). This perspective helped us structure our participation in this research as a complement to what educational leaders in urban districts—who know their districts best—were already doing to advance equity in their schools. Although participant-observation data collection takes ample time and resources, it can offer researchers a necessary and informed asset-based understanding of urban districts.

## Conclusion

The findings from the research study shed light on the efforts of three large, urban school districts—Green Valley, Mitchell City, and Riverview—in designing equity-centered leadership

pathways following the impact of COVID-19. The study aimed to explore the influence of local cultural contexts on the development of these pathways and the multi-faceted approaches in each of the three districts highlight how important addressing equity issues has been in the aftermath of COVID-19.

## References

- Adamy, P., & Heinecke, W. (2005). The influence of organizational culture on technology integration in teacher education. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 13(2), 233-255.
- Alvarez Gutiérrez, L., Kim, T., Partola, S., Kuttner, P. J., Niang, A., Yanagui, A., Hernández, L., López, G. R., & Mayer-Glenn, J. (2022). Community-centered school leadership: Radical care and *aperturas* during COVID-19. *AERA Open*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584221096465>
- Anderson, E., Budhwani, S., & Perrone, F. (2022). State of states: Landscape of university-based pathways to the principalship. *Journal of School Leadership*, 32(2), 103-125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052684620980360>
- Brown, C., Luzmore, R., O'Donovan, R., Ji, G., & Patnaik, S. (2024). How educational leaders can maximize the social capital benefits of inter-school networks: findings from a systematic review. *International Journal of Educational Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-09-2023-0447>
- Cabral-Gouveia, C., Menezes, I., & Neves, T. (2023). Educational strategies to reduce the achievement gap: a systematic review. *Frontiers in Education*, 8(May). <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1155741>
- Carpenter, B. W., Bukoski, B. E., Berry, M., & Mitchell, A. M. (2017). Examining the social justice identity of assistant principals in persistently low-achieving schools. *Urban Education*, 52(3), 287-315. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915574529>
- Carter, P. L., & Welner, K. G. (Eds.). (2013). *Closing the opportunity gap: What America must do to give every child an even chance*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199982981.001.0001>
- Childs, J., Grooms, A., & Mozley, M. P. (2023a). Hidden in (virtual) plain sight: A charter district's focus on attendance during COVID-19. *Education and Urban Society*, 55(7), 876-893. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00131245211065414>
- Childs, J., Farrell, C., Grooms, A. A., Peters-Hawkins, A., Martinez, E., White, T., Fox Resnick, A., Arce-Trigatti, P., Duran, S. (2023b). Educational equity and the logics of COVID-19: Informing school leadership practices in a new period of democratic education. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 98(5), 577-589. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2023.2265774>
- Coleman, S., & Stevenson, H. C. (2013). The racial stress of membership: Development of the faculty inventory of racialized experiences in schools. *Psychology in the Schools*, 50(6), 548-566. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21693>
- Cooke, R. A., & Rousseau, D. M. (1988). Behavioral norms and expectations: A quantitative approach to the assessment of organizational culture. *Group & Organization Studies*, 13(3), 245-273. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105960118801300302>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.
- da Silva Vieira, M. M., & Barbosa, S. M. (2021). School culture and innovation: Does the post-pandemic world COVID-19 invite to transition or to rupture? *European Journal of Social Science Education and Research*, 8(1), 112-125.

- Dawer, D. I., & Woulfin, S. L. (2024). From oyster reefs to turnaround schools: An educational restoration model for the COVID-19 era. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2024.2303678>
- Deterding, N. M., & Waters, M. C. (2021). Flexible coding of in-depth interviews: A twenty-first-century approach. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 50(2), 708-739. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124118799377>
- Diem, S., & Welton, A. D. (2020). *Anti-racist educational leadership and policy: Addressing racism in public education*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429487224>
- Dwyer, S. C., & Buckle, J. L. (2009). The space between: On being an insider-outsider in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), 54-63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800105>
- Eslinger, J. C. (2023). Equity-centered school leaders. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 105(4), 20-25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00317217231219400>
- Evans, L. (2022). Is educational leadership (still) worth studying? An epistemic worthiness-informed analysis. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 50(2), 325-348. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432211066273>
- Fakis, A., Hilliam, R., Stoneley, H., & Townend, M. (2014). Quantitative analysis of qualitative information from interviews: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 8(2), 139-161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689813495111>
- Flannery, M. E. (2024, February, 24). *Anti-DEI laws take aim at students of color and LGBTQ+ students*. National Education Association. <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/anti-dei-laws-take-aim-students-color-and-lgbtq-students>
- Giles, D., & Yates, R. (2014). Enabling educational leaders: Qualitatively surveying an organization's culture. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 22(1), 94-106. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-11-2011-0526>
- Goldring, E., Rubin, M., & Hermann, M. (2021). *The role of assistant principals: Evidence and insights for advancing school leadership*. Wallace Foundation. <https://doi.org/10.59656/EL-SB1829.001>
- Green, T. L. (2017). Community-based equity audits: A practical approach for educational leaders to support equitable community-school improvements. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 53(1), 3-39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X16672513>
- Grooms, A. A., Mahatmya, D., & Johnson, E. T. (2021). The retention of educators of color amidst institutionalized racism. *Educational Policy*, 35(2), 180-212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904820986765>
- Grooms, A. A., White, T., Peters, A. L., Childs, J., Farrell, C., Martinez, E., Resnick, A., Arce-Trigatti, P., & Duran, S. (2023). Equity as a crucial component of leadership preparation and practice. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 97(1), 8-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2023.2286373>
- Griffith, J. A., Baur, J. E., & Buckley, M. R. (2019). Creating comprehensive leadership pipelines: Applying the real options approach to organizational leadership development. *Human Resource Management Review*, 29(3), 305-315. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2018.07.001>
- Grills, C., Carlos Chavez, F. L., Saw, A., Walters, K. L., Burlew, K., Randolph Cunningham, S. M., ... & Jackson-Lowman, H. (2023). Applying culturalist methodologies to discern COVID-19's impact on communities of color. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 51(6), 2331-2354. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22802>
- Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2023). The importance of school leadership? What we know. *School Leadership & Management*, 43(5), 449-453. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2023.2287806>
- Khalifa, M. 2020. *Culturally responsive school leadership*. Harvard Education Press.

- Kohli, R. (2018). Behind school doors: The impact of hostile racial climates on urban teachers of color. *Urban Education, 53*(3), 307-333. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916636653>
- Lesinger, F., Dagli, G., Gazi, Z. A., Yusoff, S. B., & Aksal, F. A. (2016). Investigating the relationship between organizational culture, educational leadership and trust in schools. *International Journal of Educational Sciences, 15*(1-2), 178-185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09751122.2016.11890527>
- Leithwood, K., Seashore, K., Anderson, S., Wahlstrom, K., & Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement. (2004). *Review of research: How leadership influences student learning*. University Digital Conservancy. <https://doi.org/10.59656/EL-SB5787.001>
- Levinson, B. A. U., Sutton, M., & Winstead, T. (2009). Education policy as a practice of power: Theoretical tools, ethnographic methods, democratic options. *Educational Policy, 23*, 767-795. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904808320676>
- Mavrogordato, M., & White, R. S. (2020). Leveraging policy implementation for social justice: How school leaders shape educational opportunity when implementing policy for English learners. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 56*(1), 3-45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X18821364>
- Moorhouse, B. L., Lee, J., & Herd, S. (2021). Providing remote school-based professional support to teachers during school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. *Learning: Research and Practice, 7*(1), 5-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23735082.2020.1825777>
- Perrone, F. (2022). Why a diverse leadership pipeline matters: The empirical evidence. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 21*(1), 5-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2021.2022707>
- Peters, A. L. (2011). (Un)planned failure: Unsuccessful succession planning in an urban district. *Journal of School Leadership, 21*(1), 64-86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105268461102100104>
- Phinney, J. S., & Ong, A. D. (2007). Conceptualization and measurement of ethnic identity: Current status and future directions. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 54*(3), 271. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.54.3.271>
- Ray, R., & Gibbons, A. (2021). *Why are states banning critical race theory?* Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/why-are-states-banning-critical-race-theory/>
- Ray, V. (2019). A theory of racialized organizations. *American Sociological Review, 84*(1), 26-53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122418822335>
- Rimmer, J. (2016). *Developing principals as equity-centered instructional leaders*. Equity-Centered Capacity Building Network (ECCBN). <https://capacitybuildingnetwork.org/article9>
- Santoro, D. A., Hazel, J., & Morales, A. (2022). Cultivating anti-racist professional cultures that support educators of color. *Phi Delta Kappan, 104*(1), 22-27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00317217221123645>
- Schein, E. H. (2010). *Organizational culture and leadership* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Schwartz, K. D., Exner-Cortens, D., McMorris, C. A., Makarenko, E., Arnold, P., Van Bavel, M., ... & Canfield, R. (2021). COVID-19 and student well-being: Stress and mental health during return-to-school. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology, 36*(2), 166-185. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08295735211001653>
- Smith, B. W., Dalen, J., Wiggins, K., Tooley, E., Christopher, P., & Bernard, J. (2008). The brief resilience scale: Assessing the ability to bounce back. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 15*(3), 194-200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705500802222972>
- Stosich, E. L., Thessin, R. A., & Meyers, C. V. (2024). Learning together to lead together: Designing professional learning to strengthen principal and district leadership for school improvement. *American Journal of Education, 130*(2), 000-000. <https://doi.org/10.1086/728266>
- Taie, S., & Goldring, R. (2020). *Characteristics of public and private elementary and secondary school teachers in the United States: Results from the 2017-18 National Teacher and Principal Survey. First Look*. NCES

- 2020-142. National Center for Education Statistics.  
<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020142.pdf>
- Teemant, A., Borgioli Yoder, G., Sherman, B.J., & Santamaría Graff, C. (2020). An equity framework for family, community, and school partnerships. *Theory Into Practice*, 60, 28-38.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2020.1827905>
- Theoharis, G. (2007). Social justice educational leaders and resistance: Toward a theory of social justice leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(2), 221–58.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X06293717>
- Virella, P. M. (2023). Introducing the pillars of equity-oriented crisis leadership: A conceptual framework. *School Leadership & Management*, 43(4), 390–410.  
<https://doi-org/10.1080/13632434.2023.2186848>
- Welch, J., & Hodge, M. (2018). Assessing impact: The role of leadership competency models in developing effective school leaders. *School Leadership & Management*, 38(4), 355-377.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2017.1411900>
- Williams III, J. A., Davis, A., Richardson, S. C., & Lewis, C. W. (2022). Can assistant principals' years of experience make a difference in school suspensions? A state-wide analysis of North Carolina assistant principals. *Journal of School Leadership*, 32(3), 246-266.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1052684620969931>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and application: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage.
- Zhao, Y., & Watterston, J. (2021). The changes we need: Education post COVID-19. *Journal of Educational Change*, 22(1), 3-12. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-021-09417-3>
- Zilber, T. B. (2012). The relevance of institutional theory for the study of organizational culture. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 21(1), 88-93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492611419792>

### Disclosure Statement

This publication is based on research commissioned and funded by The Wallace Foundation as part of its mission to support and share effective ideas and practices. The research reported here was also supported by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development through grant P2CHD042849 (Population Research Center) awarded to the Population Research Center at The University of Texas at Austin.

### Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank Sarah Duran, Kait Ogden, Estela Lopez, and Kenzalia Bryant-Scott for their assistance with the project.

### About the Authors

#### April Peters

University of Houston

[apetersh@Central.UH.EDU](mailto:apetersh@Central.UH.EDU)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2448-5893>

April Peters is professor and associate chair of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in the College of Education at the University of Houston. She is a past president of the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA), a consortium of higher education institutions. April's research interests include: (a) mentoring and support for early career administrators; (b) women in school leadership; (c) leadership and urban small school reform; and

(d) effective university and district partnerships. Her research has been published in academic periodicals such as *Journal of School Leadership*; *Teachers College Record*; *Leadership and Policy in Schools*; *Educational Administration Quarterly*; *Journal of Educational Administration*; *Urban Education*; and *The International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*.

### **Joshua Childs**

University of Texas at Austin

[joshuachilds@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:joshuachilds@austin.utexas.edu)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4181-0360>

Joshua Childs is an associate professor in the Educational Policy and Planning Program in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy. His research examines the role of interorganizational networks and cross-sector collaborations to address complex educational issues. He also investigates collaborative approaches involving organizations (local, state, and national) that have the potential to improve academic achievement and opportunities for students in urban and rural schools. This includes ways to improve student engagement and attendance in school, interscholastic athletics, and expanding educational opportunities through concentrated policy design and implementation.

### **Ain Grooms**

University of Wisconsin-Madison

[agrooms2@wisc.edu](mailto:agrooms2@wisc.edu)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6039-7044>

Ain Grooms is an assistant professor in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She studies K-12 educational equity, with a particular focus on equity and access for students of color and students from traditionally disenfranchised communities. She uses the intersection of race and place to examine the impact of educational policy on student achievement and associated outcomes. Her current research projects focus on whether and how educational leaders and related stakeholders in schools, districts, and states design and sustain equity-focused policies and practices, with emphasis on the retention of educators of color, the development of principal pipelines, and the implementation of computer science education policy.

### **Eligio Martinez Jr.**

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

[eligiom@cpp.edu](mailto:eligiom@cpp.edu)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3773-1371>

Eligio Martinez is an associate professor in the Educational Leadership Department at Cal Poly Pomona. His research examines the experiences of boys and men of color throughout the educational pipeline. His research explores the transitions into higher education and experiences within the community college context.

## **About the Editors**

### **Vidya Shah**

York University

[vidshah@edu.yorku.ca](mailto: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](mailto: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.

## SPECIAL ISSUE

### Transforming School Systems

# education policy analysis archives

Volume 32 Number 10

January 28, 2025

ISSN 1068-2341



Readers are free to copy, display, distribute, and adapt this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and **Education Policy Analysis Archives**, the changes are identified, and the same license applies to the derivative work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>. **EPAA** is published by the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. Articles are indexed in CIRC (Clasificación Integrada de Revistas Científicas, Spain), DIALNET (Spain), [Directory of Open Access Journals](#), EBSCO Education Research Complete, ERIC, Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson), QUALIS A1 (Brazil), SCImago Journal Rank, SCOPUS, SOCOLAR (China).

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](mailto:jeanne.powers@asu.edu)