

EXPLORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CULTURAL PROFICIENCY  
FRAMEWORK IN A SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

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by

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **EXPLORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CULTURAL PROFICIENCY FRAMEWORK IN A SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Krystle M. Hernandez

The purpose of the study was to explore a suburban school district with a homogenous staff and diverse student population that implemented a professional development program centered on the Cultural Proficiency Framework. Cultural Proficiency is a framework that guides the shifting of culture in schools from viewing diversity as a problem to overcome to seeing it as an asset to be celebrated (Lindsey et al., 2009). The data analysis focused on the application of the Essential Elements and Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency. The Essential Elements are the standards for individual values and behaviors and organizational policies and practices in a Culturally Proficient organization. The Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency provide a moral framework for conducting oneself and organization ethically (Lindsey et al., 2009). The researcher collected data on the knowledge and perceptions of the administrative and teaching staff and examined reports of the physical environment of the district's school buildings to observe evidence of Culturally Proficient practices. In this case study the researcher examined three different data sources: a) semi-structured interviews with building administrators, b) semi-structured interviews with teachers and c) analysis of district Equity Action Plans and Equity Walk Reports. The findings show that both the

positive foundation forming within the district and the struggles the district continues to face in their implementation.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, without whom I would not have had the strength and support necessary to complete this journey.

- To my Abuela and Pipo: You are no longer physically with us, but your spirit is always with me. Your strength and hard work have been the most amazing inspiration for me. I miss you every day.
- To my husband, Bill: I do not know what I would do without you. No one has been prouder or more encouraging throughout this process. I know it has not been easy for you to pick up extra work at home so that I could have the time I needed to write. Thank you for always believing in me.
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## CHAPTER 1

The United States has undergone tremendous shifts in the ethnic makeup of the students in the public school system. White students accounted for 47% of the student population in the United States in 2018, while students of color accounted for 53% of the student population. School districts in Suffolk County, New York are experiencing the same shifts in their student populations (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Although student populations are growing increasingly diverse, teachers in the United States are a homogenous group (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). In 2017–18, about 79 percent of public-school teachers were White, 9 percent were Hispanic, 7 percent were Black, 2 percent were Asian, 2 percent were of two or more races, and 1 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native; those who were Pacific Islander made up less than 1 percent of public-school teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

When teaching in a school district with a diverse student and community population, educators often hold deficit beliefs of the abilities and intentions of their students (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). The personal beliefs of educators override their professional knowledge (Pohan & Aguilar, 2001). Educators with personal beliefs that view differences as problem to overcome are reluctant to take responsibility for students' low achievement. They often view the cultural differences as problems that originate at home. When educators do not view themselves as part of the problem, it creates a disincentive for educators to engage in school reform efforts (García & Guerra, 2004).

Educators need tools to respond to these challenges from an asset-based mindset. In order to begin to be able to view students without a deficit mindset, educators need to

reflect on their biases and blind spots in order to be able to view understand and counteract inequity (Cooper, 2009). School leaders should start by creating integrated professional learning communities in the school centered on issues of equity and access (Cooper, 2009). These professional learning communities must facilitate staff members in hard dialogue about race, culture, class, and inequity. This leadership requires courage and the prioritization of the time needed for this kind of reflection (Cooper, 2009).

School district policies and procedures often promote a color-blind ideology. Lindsey (2009) defines color blindness as educators not noticing or acknowledging the cultures of others and treating everyone the same without identifying the specific needs of different cultural groups. In order to move past a color-blind ideology educators must acknowledge the impact of racism and recognize the dominance of white culture and the marginalization of black and brown students (Evans, 2016). School leaders must develop their own personal and professional belief system and align it with a school mission and vision that promote the tenets diversity, equity, and inclusivity (Evans, 2016).

Schools focus more on the achievement gaps in test scores and academic achievement areas but there are educational gaps prevalent throughout the system. There are gaps between racial and ethnic groups in the areas of dropout rate, participation in advanced courses and college admittance (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The gaps in educational achievement among students show the need for improvements in our educational system.

In many educational systems, the educational policy and decision makers are white. This creates an unawareness or denial of the reality that students of different cultural backgrounds do not have the access and opportunity as the students in the

dominant white culture (Lindsey et al., 2009). Teachers who lack knowledge and understanding of culture and its impact assume that students who do obey the norms and rules of the school lack intelligence or are ill behaved (García & Guerra, 2004). This creates a bias against students from different cultural backgrounds within schools. The bias present within schools is often seen in discipline and special education referral data (Gullo & Beachum, 2020). Data collected by the New York State Education Department shows racial disparities in the application of disciplinary action within schools.

According to data from the 2016–2017 Office of Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), approximately 15% of all K–12 New York public school students identified as African American or Black, but they experienced 33% of ISS, OSS, and expulsions (The New York Equity Coalition, 2018). Although equitable discipline remains a frequently cited goal throughout New York there has been little progress in reducing racial disparities in school discipline (The New York Equity Coalition, 2018). Educators need is a deeper knowledge of culture including the unobservable and unconscious parts of cultural identity (Guerra, 2011). To build cultural competence schools must develop professional development programs that will help the staff understand how cultural identity is embedded in all parts of teaching and learning (Nelson & Guerra, 2008).

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore a suburban school district with a homogenous staff and diverse student population that implemented a professional development program centered on the Cultural Proficiency Framework. The main phenomenon that was studied is the application of the Cultural Proficiency Framework. Cultural Proficiency is a framework that guides the shifting of culture in schools from



viewing diversity as problem to overcome to seeing it as an asset to be celebrated (Lindsey et al., 2009). This study is a qualitative exploratory case study. The researchers examined the application of the Cultural Proficiency Framework by looking at three separate subcategories: a) the views and attitudes of the building administrators, b) the views and attitudes of teachers and c) the artifacts present within the school building.

To meet the needs of the diverse public-school population educational leaders must look beyond a focus on improving test scores. Educational leaders must work to create transformative change that embraces cultural differences as an asset and something to be celebrated (Cooper, 2009). The Cultural Proficiency framework provides the tools, information, and strategies that educators need to respond effectively and support their students who are from an unfamiliar cultural, racial, or ethnic background effectively (Lindsey et al., 2009). Responding to these challenges using the Cultural Proficiency Framework promotes a positive school culture that will enhance a student's ability to learn and a teacher's ability to teach (Lindsey et al., 2009).

Teachers are often at a loss when engaging in multicultural or cross-cultural classroom settings. They often focus on deficit theories of student achievement and learning (García & Guerra, 2004). They can deem students difficult to teach or struggling because they do not fit into what is the mainstream culture in school or society (Neito, 2018). The Cultural Proficiency Framework provides tools for shifting the culture of a school district. Cultural Proficiency is a paradigm shift from a deficit mindset that views cultural differences as problems to solve, to viewing cultural diversity as an asset to be built upon (Lindsey et al., 2009).

Educators bring their own cultural lens and biases into their day-to-day practices (Gullo & Beachum, 2020). Educators in New York are a white dominated group while student populations (New York State Department of Education, 2018) are more diverse with a makeup from many racial and ethnic groups (New York State Department of Education, 2018). Due to this lack of cultural connection, educators are struggling to provide a high quality, rigorous and engaging curriculum that meets the needs of all their students.

To provide an education that will meet the needs and engage learners from different diverse backgrounds, educators must learn to engage with and educate students from unfamiliar cultural groups. The current study used the Cultural Proficiency Continuum and Schein's model of Organizational Culture as the theoretical framework to analyze evidence of Cultural Proficiency in the school district.

### **Cultural Proficiency**

Culture shapes people's behaviors and values. Culture also shapes institutions that create norms and expectations (Lindsey et al., 2009). A person's culture reflects their belief systems and behaviors, which are informed by race and ethnicity and other factors, such as sex, age, sexual orientation, and physical ability (Lindsey et al., 2009) Today, the work of researchers and practitioners has expanded our knowledge of culture and its influences. This requires us to embrace a more dynamic view of culture. Students are unique and may be a part of several distinct cultural groups. Culture is a powerful force, and it impacts human perception, behavior, and the learning process (Lindsey et al., 2009).

In his work, “Toward a Culturally Competent System of Care,” Terry Cross provided several tools for creating positive responses to diversity. This work laid the foundation for how many organizations respond to differences (Lindsey et al., 2009). In their book, “Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders,” Linsey, Robbins and Terrel (2009) use these tools to lay the groundwork for a Cultural Proficiency Professional development in schools. They adapted this work for schools by using Cultural Proficiency as the framework to address diversity in schools. Lindsey, Robbins, and Terrell (2009) define Cultural Proficiency as, “a mind-set, a worldview, a way a person or organization makes assumptions for effectively describing, reposing to and planning for issues that arise in diverse environments.” Their framework gives educators an initiative-taking set of tools that is focused on values and can apply to both organizational practices and individual behaviors. This creates a system where every individual in a school system can improve their own practice and apply their knowledge and skills to change the of the school district itself (Lindsey et al., 2009).

To educate our diverse students, educators must understand the definition and how culture influences all aspects of life. They must first assess their own culture as the first step in being able to manage the dynamics of difference in their classroom and all the school culture (Lindsey et al., 2009). Students from cultural groups that are not part of the dominant cultures are often disadvantaged in their education experience if adaptations are not made for them. School culture often will privilege some, but not others. Educational systems have a responsibility to learn about the cultures represented in its student body (Landa, 2011). Cultural Proficiency refers to the ability of educators to educate and engage students of all cultural backgrounds represented within school

populations with an emphasis on students from racially/ethnically, linguistically, or economically marginalized groups (Landa, 2011). Culturally proficient schools adapt to meet the needs of culturally divergent students and ensure that high and rigorous expectations are set for students of all cultures. The culturally proficient school ensures that parents of all cultural groups engage in school decision-making and are partners in decisions affecting their children (Landa, 2011).

To teach the students in front of them, teachers need to learn how to make connections with students to increase achievement in these diverse environments. Cultural Proficiency offers an initiative-taking approach for responding to diversity by offering a set of tools and values that educators can use to connect with students of diverse backgrounds. Cultural Proficiency Training offers a school district the opportunity to shift the culture of the district from viewing diversity as a problematic to view diversity as an asset (Lindsey et al., 2009). To meet this goal, Cultural Proficiency training uses a unique professional development model that does not offer a specific set of strategies for schools to use. Instead, it is an inside out approach that focuses first on the individual adult stakeholders in a school system. By starting with the belief systems of individuals, educators are encouraged to reflect on their own understandings, biases, and values. The training begins with learning about oneself instead of focusing on learning about other groups. This individual self-reflection allows for change without threatening people's feelings of worth. The focus then becomes the culture of the schools. All individuals join to align policies, practices, and procedures to achieve cultural proficiency.

The Cultural Proficiency Framework identifies the barriers that prevent shifting to a Cultural Proficiency mindset. The barriers to cultural proficiency are both organizational and individual. They may be systemic, based on values, or tied to past experiences. The barriers look at the parts of a school system that prevent individual and organizational change. The first barrier is the unawareness of the need to adapt and resistance to change. The presumption of entitlement and the existence of unearned privilege is another barrier. This occurs when stakeholders do not recognize that members of certain groups receive more privileges than others within schools. The unfair distribution of power and privilege to members of the dominant culture creates systems of oppression and privilege. These systems are the third and final barrier discussed by Lindsey, Robbins, and Terrell (Lindsey et al., 2009). Systems of institutionalized racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, and ableism exist in most organizations. Within schools there are policies, procedures and institutionalized expectations that reward members of the dominate culture groups and often oppress others (Lindsey et al., 2009).

In this study, the research focused on the application of the Guiding Principles and the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency. The Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency provide a moral framework for conducting oneself and organization ethically (Lindsey et al., 2009). In the Guiding Principles, culture is an asset. The principles serve as core values for inclusive schools. They help educators identify and overcome the barriers limit access and the achievement of certain student groups. These core values must be an intentional driving force in schools' culture (Lindsey et al., 2009). The Essential Elements are the standards for individual values and behaviors and organizational policies and practices in a Culturally Proficient organization. Valuing

culture and diversity through commitment to the essential elements prepares educators to manage change effectively (Lindsey et al., 2009).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Cultural Proficiency Continuum provides a common language for educators to describe both positive and counterproductive policies, practices, and individual behaviors of schools in their response to diversity. The Continuum provides individuals the ability to assess both their personal and the organization's progress in the journey of Cultural Proficiency (Lindsey et al., 2009). The points along the continuum can help educators identify the current state of a situation or practice. It can also provide educators with guidelines to model when instituting new practices, policies or procedures (Lindsey et al., 2009). The six points along the Cultural Proficiency Continuum present a series of descriptions defining how individuals see and respond to differences. The points on the left side of the continuum (Cultural Destructiveness, Cultural Incapacity Cultural Blindness) identify behaviors that view differences as a problem, while the three points on the right (Cultural Pre-Competence, Cultural Competence and Cultural Proficiency) describe behaviors that focus on transforming policy and practices to view diversity as an asset. People do not occupy a single space along the continuum. There is movement along the continuum in different interactions and situations (Lindsey et al., 2009). The Cultural Proficiency Continuum will provide standards and examples of behaviors that the current study will use to analyze the policies, practices, and values of the school district as a whole and individual administration and teachers.

Schools have their own organizational culture that reflect the social, cultural and political dynamics of the surrounding society (Evans, 2016). Edgar Schein (2017) states

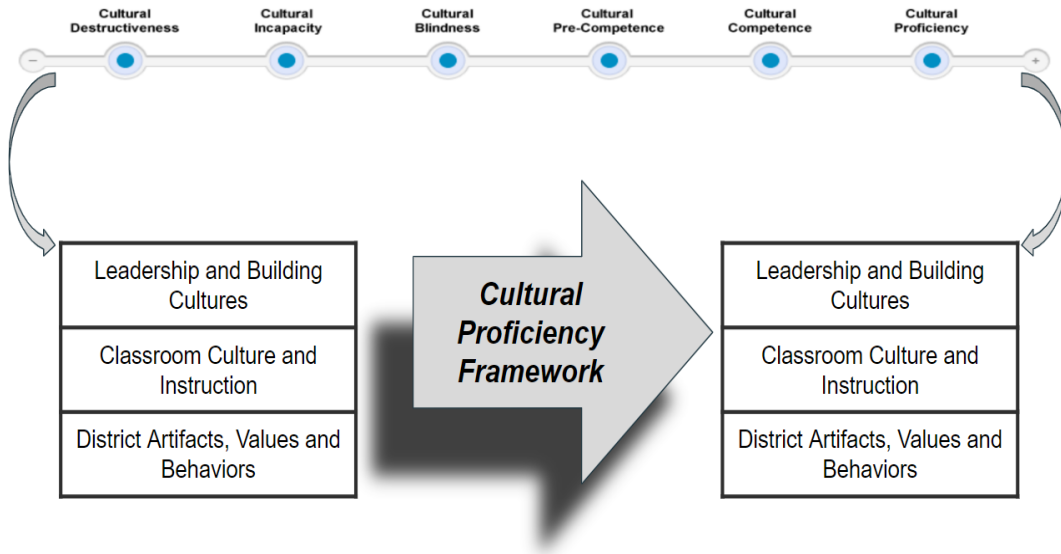
that to understand and evaluate the culture of an organization, it is important to know the learning that has taken place in the organization and the leadership leading the organization. Schein (2017) describes three levels of culture: artifacts, exposed beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. These levels of culture start at the visible (artifacts) and continue to the more deeply embedded values and underlying assumptions. Being able to shift a culture in an organization depends on understanding the three levels present in the organizations and having leadership that can guide this shift (Schein, 2017). The levels of culture will provide a lens for the analysis of the cultural artifacts, values, and assumptions present in the school district.

This study will use the Cultural Proficiency Continuum and Schien's levels of culture to explore how the district implemented the Cultural Proficiency framework throughout the school district. Using the descriptors in the continuum and the definitions of levels of culture, the researcher will assess the culture present in the school district to evaluate the effectiveness of the school district initiative.

## Conceptual Framework

Figure 1

*Conceptual Framework*



The culture of an organization in its artifacts, values, and assumptions (Schein, 2017). As a school district implements the Cultural Proficiency Framework, there should be changes and shifts in the organizational culture of the district. These shifts in the organizational culture will be evident in the building leadership, school culture, classroom culture and classroom instruction. The shifts will also cause changes to the artifacts, values and behaviors present within the school district. As the Essential Elements and Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency are applied the district will move towards the right of the Cultural Proficiency Continuum.

### Significance of Study

This study identified the changes made within a school district to address the needs of their diverse student populations. In New York state the teaching staff remain mostly white as the student population grows more diverse (National Center for



Education Statistics, n.d.). By examining the implementation of the Essential Elements and Guiding principles of Cultural Proficiency the researcher was able to provide guidance on the implementation of Cultural Proficiency. Teachers and Administrators shared examples of how implementing Cultural Proficiency allowed to make more connection across cultural differences with students. This study also identified obstacles that prevent the implementation of Cultural Proficiency.

This study investigated a suburban school district with mostly white staff and a diverse student population and their implementation of the Cultural Proficiency Framework. The researcher collected data on the knowledge and perceptions of the administrative and teaching staff and examined reports of the physical environment of the district's school buildings to observe evidence of Culturally Proficient practices. This study adds to the research already done on Cultural Proficiency by providing insights into the successes and failures the school district experienced in implementing Cultural Proficiency into the school culture. Research shows the effectiveness of the use of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Culturally Proficient practices by individual teachers in their classroom and individual administrators in their school buildings. There is also research on Cultural Proficiency and the benefits it can bring to education. This study addressed a gap in the research on implementing the Cultural Proficiency Framework in schools.

The New York State Education Department embraced the challenges of addressing the racial disparities present within the school systems in New York. They convened a group of stakeholders that created a framework that works to not only prevent the exclusion of marginalized voices but to elevate the races, cultures and languages that

have been devalued and neglected for years. This framework incorporates an equity and inclusion lens in every facet of teaching and learning. This framework provides guidance for school district stakeholders to create school environments that affirm cultural identities, empower positive academic outcomes, promote critical thinking, develop student action and advocacy, and highlight marginalized perspectives and voices. Four major principles are the guiding elements of the framework. The four principles are welcoming and affirming environments, high expectations and rigorous instruction, inclusive curriculum and assessments and ongoing professional development (NYS Department of Education, 2021). This framework provides tools and guidance for school districts to implement Culturally Responsive practices. The Cultural Proficiency Framework is aligned to the NYS Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education Framework. Implementation of the Cultural Proficiency framework assures that a district is meeting the expectations set within the NYS Framework. This study will help school districts working to implement NYS Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education Framework by provided insight on a school district that implemented a research-based framework.

This study adds to the field of Social Justice in education. The Cultural Proficiency framework is centered on providing a welcoming and affirming environment for all students through the implementation of the Essential Elements and Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency (Lindsey et al., 2009). This study identifies ways to value and highlight diverse cultures within a school district. An Essential Element of Cultural Proficiency is to Value and Adapt to diversity (Lindsey et al., 2009). In this study teachers and administrators shares the ways in which they have applied these

elements in their classroom cultures. The Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency assure that educators are ensuring that historically underrepresented groups, discriminated and disadvantaged groups are not only acknowledged but they are celebrated (Lindsey et al., 2009).

Issues of inequality and racial disparities present within the educational systems can be addressed through the implementation of Cultural Proficiency. These issues are heightened by a reliance on the colorblind perspective present in the education system (Sleeter, 2012). This practice applies a universal lens that automatically denies multiple perspectives and the experiences of members of marginalized races and cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The Cultural Proficiency framework provides educators with ways to respond to diversity effectively. When Cultural Proficiency is implemented, diversity is seen as a strength to build upon. Cultural Proficiency enhances student learning and teachers' ability to teach. It prepares students for a global community by promote positive community relations, active citizenship, and leadership (Lindsey et al., 2009). This study will provide insight to the opportunities gained by implementing Cultural Proficiency and the barriers and obstacles a district will need to overcome.

### **Research Design and Research Questions**

In this case study, the researcher examined three different data sources: a) semi-structured interviews with building administrators; b) semi-structured interviews with teachers; and c) analysis of district Equity Action Plans and Equity Walk Reports. The Equity Action Plans were created by teachers and administrators employed by the district that have completed Cultural Proficiency Training. The Equity Walk reports were written

by an outside consultant who visited the district on two separate occasions to walk around the buildings and look for evidence of the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do the administrators of the suburban school district apply the essential elements of Cultural Proficiency to their leadership practices and building cultures?
2. How have the teachers, who have completed Cultural Proficiency training, apply the essential elements and guiding principles to their classroom culture and instructional practices?
3. How do the district's levels of culture (artifacts, espoused beliefs and values and underlying assumptions) reflect the essential elements and guiding principles of Cultural Proficiency?

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study the following terms will be used:

#### ***Cultural Proficiency***

Cultural proficiency is the policies and practices in an organization or the values and behavior of an individual that enable the person or institution to engage with people and groups who differ from them (Lindsey et al., 2009).

#### ***Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency***

Provides a moral framework for conducting oneself and organization (Lindsey et al., 2009).

### ***Barriers to Cultural Proficiency***

The barriers serve as personal, professional, and institutional impediments to moral and just service to a diverse society (Lindsey et al., 2009).

### ***Cultural Proficiency Continuum***

Portrays people and organizations who possess the knowledge, skills, and moral bearing to distinguish among healthy and unhealthy practices as represented by different worldviews (Lindsey et al., 2009).

### ***Cultural Destructiveness***

Behaviors that seek to eliminate vestiges of others' cultures (Lindsey et al., 2009).

### ***Cultural Incapacity***

Behaviors that seek to make the culture of others appear to be wrong (Lindsey et al., 2009).

### ***Cultural Blindness***

Behaviors that are unable or refuse to acknowledge the culture of others (Lindsey et al., 2009).

### ***Cultural Pre-Competence***

Behaviors that illustrate being aware of what one does not know about working in diverse settings. Initial levels of awareness, after which a person/organization can move in a positive direction or they can falter, stop, and regress (Lindsey et al., 2009).

### ***Cultural Competence***

Behaviors that view one's personal and organizational work as an interactive arrangement in which the educator enters diverse settings in a manner that is additive to cultures that differ from the educator (Lindsey et al., 2009).

### ***Cultural Proficiency***

Behaviors that illustrate the commitment to lifelong learning to be effective in serving the educational needs of cultural groups (Lindsey et al., 2009).

### ***Culturally Responsive Teaching***

An approach that emphasizes using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them (Gay, 2010).

### ***Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education***

An educational philosophy that is grounded in a cultural view of learning and human development in which multiple expressions of diversity is regarded as an asset for teaching and learning (NYS Department of Education, 2021).

## CHAPTER 2

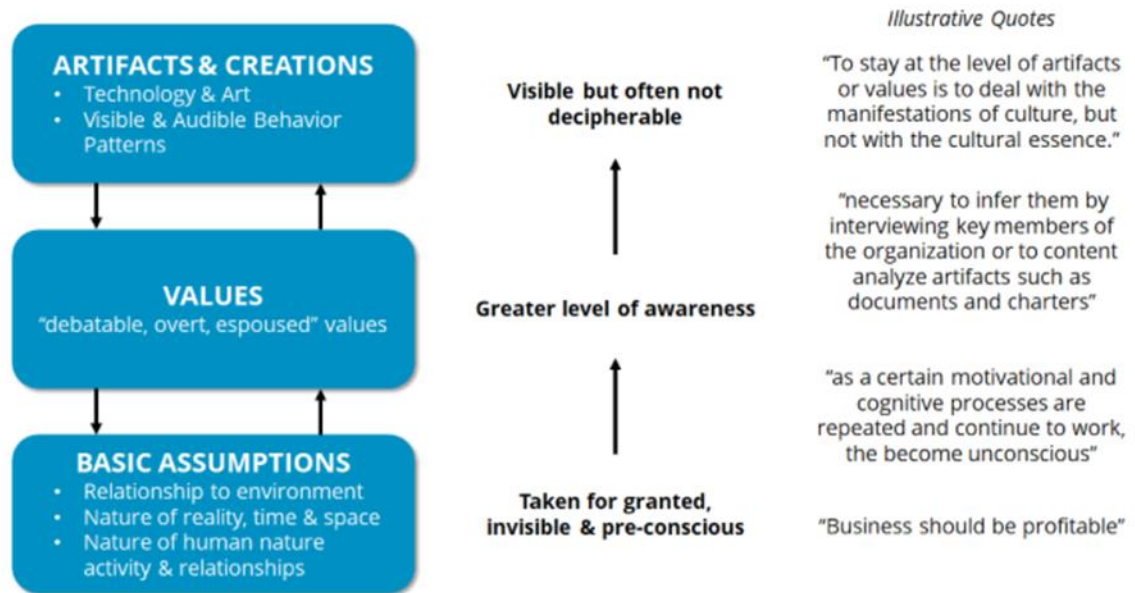
The literature review begins with an explanation of the theoretical and conceptual framework. The literature review is organized into four separate sections. The first section examines the characteristics of Culturally Proficient Educators. The second section focuses on Culturally Responsive Leadership. The third section explores Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. The fourth section examines current research on implementing and supporting change in schools. Throughout the literature review, recent research studies are embedded to analyze the impact of Cultural Proficiency Training on the educational system.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The researcher choose to create a conceptual framework grounded in the work of Edgar Schein (Schein, 2017) and the Cultural Proficiency Continuum from the Cultural Proficiency framework (Lindsey et al., 2009). Culture can be analyzed from different perspectives and at different levels. In Schein's model of Organizational Culture, he provides a framework for examining the culture of an organization (Schein, 2017). Schein defines three levels of culture, with the first level as artifacts. Artifacts are surface level and visible. Schien's next level is espoused values, which are the values that are shared with others. These are portrayed as the shared values of the group or organization. An example of espoused values is a school vision or mission statement. The last level is basic assumptions. These are beliefs that the individuals in the organization hold. A person's basic assumptions guide their daily decision making (Schein, 2017). Examining Cultural Proficiency requires a framework to organize and classify the cultural elements of the school district.

**Figure 2**

*Edgar Schein's Model of Organizational Culture (Schein, 2017).*



The Cultural Proficiency Continuum provides perspective and guidance when examining policies, practices, procedures, relationships, curriculums, and teaching resources. Points along the continuum describe ways that people see and respond to difference. The first three points, Cultural Destructiveness, Cultural Incapacity, and Cultural Blindness, describe behaviors and values that respond well to diversity. The last three points, Cultural Pre-competence, Cultural Competence and Cultural Proficiency, illustrate healthy and positive behaviors and values regarding diversity (Lindsey et al., 2009).



**Figure 3**

*The Cultural Proficiency Continuum* (Lindsey et al., 2009)

**Cultural Proficiency Continuum**

Reactive Change Mandated for Tolerance			Proactive Change Chosen for Transformation		
Destructiveness	Incapacity	Blindness	Precompetence	Competence	Proficiency
Eliminate differences.	Demean differences.	Dismiss differences.	Respond inadequately to the dynamics of difference.	Engage with differences.	Esteem and learn from differences as a lifelong practice.
The elimination of other people's cultures	Belief in the superiority of one's culture and behavior that disempowers another's culture	Acting as if the cultural differences you see do not matter or not recognizing that there are differences among and between cultures	Awareness of the limitations of one's skills or an organization's practices when interacting with other cultural groups	Assessing one's own culture and the culture of the organization, valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of difference, adapting to diversity, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge.	Knowing how to learn about and from individual and organizational culture; interacting effectively in a variety of cultural environments; advocating for others.

The work of the school district should focus on creating a school culture centered on right side of the continuum. Acknowledging the need for Cultural Proficiency framework in a school district is evidence of Cultural Pre-Competence. The openness to learning and implementing a Cultural Proficiency framework is the first step in transforming a school culture. To meet the needs of a diverse student body, school leader must lead their organizations towards behaviors, policies and practices that embody cultural competence and cultural proficiency (Lindsey et al., 2009).

Organizational culture is deeply embedded. To make changes and shifts in the culture, they must present the members of the organization with data that shows a need to for the changes. Members of an organization are resistant to change. They fear a loss of power, incompetence or punishment, and a loss of identity and group membership. Leaders must confront this resistance with an immense knowledge of the current

organizational culture and tools to enable them to shift the paradigm. The leader needs to identify the parts of the existing culture that will help in the transformation and identify which parts of the existing culture will prevent the transformation (Schein, 2017).

### **Culturally Proficient Educators**

Recent research has focused on the traits possessed by Culturally Proficient educators. A culturally proficient educator is defined by their pedagogical skills and connections with their students. These skills pertain to a teacher's ability to adapt to the cultural backgrounds of students into instruction. Teachers need to be able to scaffold between the academic curriculum and the cultural resources students bring to school. Teachers need to be cognizant of the dominant culture in the classroom and ensure that is not damaging the learning of the non-dominant culture groups in the classroom (Guiberson, 2009). García (2002) states that a major characteristic of teachers who have been successful with diverse students is that they have organized instruction in such a way that their students can focus first on what is meaningful to them. Student choice is an important instructional tool when instructing students from diverse backgrounds. Many of the characteristics that García (2002) attributes to effective teachers of diverse students are, in addition, consistent with the needs of all students. These skill areas include the use of learning activities or active learning strategies, personalized reading, writing for real audiences, communicating high expectations, awareness of the outcomes sought and of what students must do to achieve them, explicitly stating learning objectives to students, appropriate pacing, the use of formative assessment to monitor student progress, and providing timely and appropriate feedback (Garcia, 2002)

Culturally proficient educators need knowledge in a few distinct areas. They need knowledge of their own culture and awareness of how it affects their behavior, values, and perspectives. They also need knowledge of diverse cultures, how they are different and the experiences of people from non-dominant cultures. Another area of knowledge that enhances cultural proficiency is the social constructions of race and racism and their role in education. To fully understand the social constructs of race and racism, educators need the historical knowledge of the culture groups in their classroom (Landa, 2011). Guerra (2011) argues that educators need to understand that many dimensions and implications of culture. Educators must recognize that cultural identity is embedded in all aspects of schooling. Culturally Proficient educators understand that culture goes beyond the observable and includes “invisible culture” that are often unconscious explanations for why and how people react and interact (Guerra, 2011).

Sleeter (2001) states that although the colorblind perspective is reflected a educational research educators must move beyond the colorblind ideology. Garcia and Guerra (2004) contend that when color blind pedagogies do not work the student (often a student of color) is identified as the problem. Educators must critically examine curriculum and instructional practices to examine the whiteness embedded and the impact on students (García & Guerra, 2004).

Culturally proficient educators display certain beliefs about education. Major beliefs of the culturally proficient educators are high expectations of culturally non-dominant students, a willingness to adapt to cultural differences and the valuing of those cultural differences. They also understand the importance of student self-esteem and in the quality of relationships among students and between students and teachers (Landa,

2011). Spiess and Cooper (2020) examined the relationship between beliefs about mind-Set, beliefs about knowledge, and Cultural Proficiency Development for K-12 Public School Teachers. According to Dweck (2006), people fall into one of the two groups: a fixed mind-set (also known as an entity theory) or a growth mind-set (also known as an incremental theory), which group one is in can vary in different contexts. A fixed mind-set is the belief that abilities, talents, and intelligence are static. Conversely, growth mind-set is the belief that abilities, talents, and intelligence are malleable and can change.

Culturally Proficient Teachers have specific beliefs about knowledge. They believe that knowledge is not static; it is shared, recycled, and constructed, and that knowledge must be viewed critically (Spiess & Cooper, 2020). Regarding views about knowledge, Spiess and Cooper (2020) looked at teachers in two categories. Traditional teachers simply learning and present knowledge as static. Traditional teachers are the authority on knowledge in the room and the students are receivers of knowledge. A progressive teacher allows for student participation and curiosity. They view knowledge as ever changing based on perspective and encourage students to question people and systems of authority (Spiess & Cooper, 2020).

A relationship was found between beliefs on mind-set and knowledge and cultural proficiency. This study shows that Cultural proficiency training that focuses solely on cultural proficiency does not consider the background and realities of the participants of the training. The values and beliefs participants hold prior to cultural proficiency training can significantly influence the out-come of the training. (Spiess & Copper, 2020) Schools providing Cultural Proficiency training must not do so in a vacuum. Cultural Proficiency is related to beliefs on learning, knowledge, and student growth.

## **Culturally Responsive Leadership**

District and School leaders are an instrumental force in achieving a culturally proficient school environment. Culturally proficient school leaders value diversity and acknowledge it as an asset in education. They work collaboratively to create a school culture that has values and cultural expectations that are aligned with the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency. School leaders must continually evaluate and reflect on the school culture, values, and underlying assumptions. They collaborate with school staff to adapt school programs so that they are addressing the needs of all students and simply reflective of the dominant culture (Lindsey et al., 2009).

Culturally Proficient leaders use the Cultural Proficiency continuum to reflect and acknowledge the bias they hold that can cause them not to learn the ways to meet the needs of people who are culturally different from them (Lindsey et al., 2009). As the leader of a school or school district, it is imperative that they themselves reflect their own practices and beliefs. To lead with cultural proficiency, a leader must acknowledge that the paradigm in their school needs to shift. They must view that shift as not only beneficial to the students but also beneficial to all the school stakeholders. They must be leaders in the paradigm shift. School leaders must use the essential elements of cultural competence as standards to guide organizational change. Culturally proficient leaders understand that change begins with ending policies, practices, and assumptions that promote cultural destructiveness, cultural incapacity and/or cultural blindness (Lindsey et al., 2009)

Self- reflection is a necessary component of Culturally Responsive Leadership. Ezzani (2021) states that self- reflection enables school leaders to create strong

relationships within the school community and with the local community as well (Ezzani, 2021). The inside-out approach centered on self-reflection is essential in the Cultural Proficiency framework (Lindsey et al., 2009). According to Clark-Louque and Latunde (2019), self-reflection equips leaders with the skills to decide centered on equity and create school environments to increase student achievement for marginalized populations (Clark-Louque & Latunde, 2019). Evans (2014) argues the importance of school leaders creating clear and consistent professional missions and visions that promote and apply diversity, equity and inclusivity. Cooper (2009) states that a leader must have the courage to facilitate and engage in difficult conversations about race, culture, class, language and inequality with the staff and the community. Culturally Responsive leaders must look at cultural difference as being enriching and educational (Cooper, 2009).

Bustamante, Nelson, and Onwuegbuzie (2009) examined school leader preparation programs in their study. Their findings support the need for school leadership preparation programs to focus on the importance of school leaders examining their personal biases, privileges, and beliefs about other from different cultures. School leaders also need the skills necessary to assess school wide cultural competence (Bustamante Dr. et al., 2009). Without these key skills, school leaders are not equipped to create inclusive learning environments that promote the achievement of all student groups.

Culturally proficient change is systemic change, which requires that school leaders collaborate strategically with stakeholders throughout the system. When schools provide what students need and educators teach students and their families how to better access all that schools offer, achievement increases for all students. As school leaders address the issues and opportunities that arise from diverse and complex school

environments, they will approach diversity as an opportunity for inclusion and achievement, rather than a problem to be solved (Lindsey et al., 2009)

Angela Ford (2019) conducted a study on professional development models that converge critical self-reflection, cultural proficiency, and self-determination theory. The findings of the study show that self-reflection helped teachers experience empathy and create welcoming and affirming environments for students of diverse cultural backgrounds. To create positive changes in the classroom, teacher must reflect on their own experiences and the internal and external causes of their behaviors (Ford, 2019).

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Ladson- Billings states that culturally relevant pedagogy is contingent on three criteria; students must experience academic success, students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Students need literacy, numeracy, technological, social, and political skills to be active participants in a democracy. Culturally relevant teaching recognizes the importance of students maintaining their cultural integrity as well as achieving academic success. To ensure that learning is taking place and student's cultural backgrounds are being valued, teachers must use students' culture as a vehicle for learning. Culturally relevant teaching goes beyond individual student academic success to enabling students to a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Cultural competence is present in the classroom where the teacher understands culture and its role in education. A culturally proficient teacher must take responsibility for learning about their student's culture and community and uses that knowledge as the basis for learning. Culturally relevant pedagogy provides a way for students to achieve academic success, maintain their cultural integrity and recognize, understand, and critique current social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Teachers using culturally relevant pedagogy create student social interactions to help them meet academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Some of the instructional techniques and beliefs that are the center of culturally responsive teaching are maintaining fluid student-teacher relationships, demonstrating a connectedness with all the students, developing a community of learners, and encouraging students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for another (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Educators and school systems have of a lack of understanding of what Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is. They often associate Culturally Responsive Pedagogy with cultural celebrations that are additions to lessons and curriculum. Educators do not research the connections between Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and student achievement, so they often ignore the low academic expectations and the power relations that students from marginalized populations experience in school systems (Sleeter, 2012).

Gay (2010) defines culturally relevant teaching as “using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performative styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them” (p. 31). Culturally Responsive teaching sees diversity as an asset to be used in learning. This



created validating and affirming environments that acknowledge the cultures of the students and strengthen a home school connection that adds relevancy and legitimacy to learning. Learning environments that are grounded in culturally responsive teaching develop academic skills, social consciousness, cultural affirmation, and community building (Gay, 2010).

Culturally relevant teaching is a powerful method for increasing student achievement and engagement and for reducing achievement gaps. Bryd (2016) conducted research focused on the student perspective on culturally relevant teaching. Findings show positive student feedback and increase academic achievement. Teachers can improve academic outcomes by using methods that connect with students' real lives and interests. Byrd (2016) recommends that teachers get to know their students, including their cultural backgrounds, and personalize instruction. Teachers should also teach about cultural diversity even when the class is not diverse. Lastly, teachers should encourage appreciation for diversity and acknowledge current inequities (Byrd, 2016).

Griner and Stewart (2012) conducted a mixed method case study examining addressing the achievement gap using Culturally Responsive Teaching practices. The findings of the study show that providing professional development on culturally responsive teaching affected the practices of the educator but had little to no impact on the beliefs of the educator. They suggest that school systems do not implement culturally responsive teaching workshops as a "quick fix" to address the achievement gap, but to engage educators in reflective practices as a precursor to workshops on culturally responsive teaching (Griner & Stewart, 2012).

## Implementing Change in School Culture

For an organization to change, they must experience a disequilibrium to force changes to facilitate that change. This can take the form of negative results, drop in satisfaction, or a loss of morale (Schein, 2017). In school systems, achievement gaps, lack of student engagement or shifts in school demographics are examples of disequilibrium that can spark the need for change. Kurt Lewin (as cited in Schein, 2017) created a model for change that shows change as a series of stages. The stages are shown in Figure 4.

### Figure 4

*Stages and Cycles of Learning/Change* (Schein, 2017)

<p><b>Stage 1 Creating a Motivation to Change (Unfreezing)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Disconfirmation</li><li>• Creation of survival anxiety or guilt</li><li>• Learning anxiety produces resistance to change</li><li>• Creation of psychological safety to overcome learning anxiety</li></ul> <p><b>Stage 2 Learning New Concepts, New Meanings for Old Concepts and New Standards for Judgment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Imitation of and Identification with role models</li><li>• Scanning for solutions and trial and error learning</li></ul> <p><b>Stage 3 Internalizing New Concepts, Meanings and Standards</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Incorporation into self-concept and identity</li><li>• Incorporation into ongoing relationships</li></ul>
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Initial stages of change always require a time of unlearning cultural values and assumptions. This unlearning is psychologically painful for the members of the organization. To help with this struggle, planned change must specify the needs for the

specific changes being implemented. New cultural behavior is learned if they lead to success for the members of the organization (Schein, 2017).

Organizational change is “the movement of an organization away from its present state and toward some desired future state to increase its effectiveness” (Lunenburg, 2010). There will be resistance to change. Uncertainty, concern over personal loss, dependency, and a lack of trust in leadership create resistance to change. To overcome resistance, educational leaders should focus on transparent communication. This will help members of the organization see the need for the change. School leaders should also include teachers and staff planning and implementing change. During the process of initiation and implementation of change, school leaders need to ensure that they create supportive and collaborative environments for the teaching staff (Lunenburg, 2010).

Implementing a positive school culture is an integral facet of implementing new initiatives (Hollingworth et al., 2018). Principals that have successful changes in organizational culture build positive school culture that are conducive to change use specific strategies aimed at facilitating successful change. These strategies are cultivating trust from their staff, knowing their staff well and engaging in explicit and purposeful communication (Hollingworth et al., 2018). Higgs and Roland (2011) conducted a study on the behaviors of successful change leaders. Their findings show that changes in school systems are more successful when the change leaders view the change as complex. Successful change leaders are enabling and collaborative (Higgs & Rowland, 2011).

Professional development is an essential tool for implementing school wide initiatives. Professional Development is educational experiences that are aimed at improving educator practices and student outcomes (Patton et al., 2015). Effective

professional development allows teachers to have ownership of their learning and allows for collaboration among teachers. To foster change and growth in teachers, professional development should be ongoing and sustained over an extended period (Patton et al., 2015). It is the role of a school leader to encourage, support and facilitate the professional development of teachers to promote growth and improve student experience.

Instructional leaders create professional development experiences centered on trust and collective efficacy (Patton et al., 2015).

Kennedy (2016) states that the intellectual engagement of teachers is an important predictor of the success of the professional development. Another important indicator of success is ensuring that the professional development gives teachers specific tools to apply their new learning in their classrooms. A facilitator that has a connection with the teachers leads to successful professional development because they are familiar with the specific problems faced by the teachers and apply their own personal experience and expertise to the professional development sessions. This allows the facilitator to build trust with the teachers attending the workshop. This is even more important in workshops on sensitive topics, such as cultural responsiveness and inclusivity in schools (Kennedy, 2016).

Desimone (2011) describes the steps to successful professional development. In successful professional development teachers are active participants. The workshop will increase the knowledge and skills. Successful professional development could also change the beliefs and attitudes of teachers. It is important that time is given for teachers to apply their new knowledge, skills, or beliefs. The goal of successful professional development must be to increase student learning. Another core feature of effective

professional development is collective participation. Groups of teachers should collaborate and take part in professional development together. This will build learning communities (Desimone, 2011).

Fullan (2016) describes the difficulty in educational change. He states, “The difficulty is that educational change is not a single entity, even if we keep the analysis at the simplest level of an innovation in a classroom. Innovation is multidimensional” (Fullan, 2016, p. 28). Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) state the importance of knowing the staff and culture of the organization before attempting to implement educational change. The job of the educational leader is to locate and/or teacher leaders. School leader must help their staff help themselves help their students more effectively. It is important to not manipulate staff into compliance but to garner trust and support and promote a collaborative shared vision (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

For school leaders to start and implement change, they must focus on shifting the culture toward greater collaboration. School leaders must focus on building professional capital. Professional capital is the convergence of human, social, and decisional capital. Human capital is having a developing the required skills and knowledge. Social capital focus on the interactions and social relationships between people and how those relationships affect their access to knowledge and information. Decisional capital is the ability to make professional judgments (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). School leaders should always assume lack of capacity is the initial and focus on building that capacity as a springboard for change (Fullan, 2016).

Creating collaborative cultures in schools will develop the professional capital needed to initiate and implement change. A core component of educational change is

building individual and collective capacity at the same time. Successful strategies of education change are social. Instructional leaders must focus on relationships. Positive relationships with and among staff members are at the center of successful educational change because they are integral to the building of professional capacity (Fullan, 2016).

King and Bouchard (2011) examined the ability to build organizational capacity in schools. They define a school's capacity as the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of all teachers on staff. Successful school organizational capacity must have teaching staff knowledgeable in their curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and classroom management. There must also be high expectations for student learning. Their findings state the necessity for different teacher supports to build organization capacity within a school. Instructional leaders need to develop a schoolwide focus on shared goals that promote student learning and collective responsibility for those goals. School leaders must prioritize time for the meaningful collaboration of teachers. Successful professional development is flexible and allows time for teachers to learn alternative approaches and apply them in the classroom (Bruce King & Bouchard, 2011).

### **Relationship between Prior Research and Present Study**

This study is the examination of school and district leaders implementing educational change in the school district. The school district is implementing the Cultural Proficiency Framework to build a welcoming and affirming environment for the diverse student population. This study will build on the current research on implementing cultural proficiency and culturally responsive pedagogy to meet the needs of students from marginalized population. It also builds on the research on implementing educational change through professional development.

## CHAPTER 3

This chapter details the research methodology and procedures for this study. The chapter begins by restating the purpose of the research and the research questions. The chapter will also describe the following aspects of the study: (a) research design, (b) setting and participants, (c) data collection procedures, (d) trustworthiness and ethics of the study, and the (e) role of the researcher.

The purpose of this research was to investigate the impacts of long-term Cultural Proficiency training in a school district with a diverse student population and a homogeneous teacher population. In this study the researcher examined the Cultural Proficiency implementation of a suburban school district on Long Island. The researcher analyzed the views and attitudes of the building and district administrators, views and attitudes of the teachers, and the culture and values reflected in the district's school buildings, environments, and artifacts.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do the administrators of the suburban school district apply the essential elements of Cultural Proficiency to their leadership practices and building cultures?
2. How have the teachers that have completed Cultural Proficiency training apply the essential elements and guiding principles to their classroom culture and instructional practices?
3. How do the district's artifacts and values reflect the essential elements and guiding principles of Cultural Proficiency?

## **Research Design**

For the current study, the researcher used an exploratory case study design. Cresswell (2018) defines a case study as “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real life, contemporary bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time, through a detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96). This study examined the implementation of a Cultural Proficiency Framework in a suburban school district, meaning that the research focused on a single issue and used one case to illustrate it (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Specifically, this study looked at the issue of Cultural Proficiency implementation in a single bounded case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The single case is a suburban school district, with a diverse student body and a homogeneous staff, in the process of implementing a Cultural Proficiency framework through professional development. Cultural Proficiency, “enabled educators, schools, and districts to respond effectively to people who differ from one another” (Lindsey et al., 2009, p. 4). The researcher selected this single case to develop in depth knowledge, (Creswell & Poth, 2018), on the implementation of a Cultural Proficiency framework in a school district where the staff is mostly a white homogenous culture, and the students are a diverse representation of many cultural and ethnic groups. To gain a full picture, the researcher collected multiple forms of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design allowed the researcher to conduct a deep investigation of the implementation in this school district.

## **Setting**

This study was conducted in a suburban school district on Long Island. The school district is in their sixth year of the implementation of Cultural Proficiency. The



Superintendent and the Board of Education have adopted Cultural Proficiency as one of the district goals. The district partnered with an outside organization that offers professional development and guidance in Cultural Proficiency implementation. The implementation process is centered on a long-term professional development program. During the past five years the district has offered many professional development opportunities in Cultural Proficiency for faculty and staff. Teachers and other staff members are offered the opportunity to attend a three-day intensive workshop, called the Equity Institute, on the essential elements and guiding principles of Cultural Proficiency. The district also offers shorter one-hour workshops for teachers to offer opportunities for staff that have not completed the three-day equity institute.

As mentioned, the district has partnered with an outside consulting agency. The outside agency facilitates the training and guides the administrators in implementing culturally proficient policies and practices. Consultants from the outside organization have visited the district to conduct equity walks. The information from the equity walks have led to changes at the building level, the examination of curriculum, student resources and district policies. This study will investigate the efforts of the school district's implementation of the Cultural Proficiency framework.

The cultural divide between students and teachers is the reason the school district began implementing the cultural proficiency framework. Cultural Proficiency gives educators tools and resources that focus on shifting their mindset from seeing cultural difference as a problem to solving to seeing cultural difference as an asset (Lindsey et al., 2009). Educators are given a framework that teaches them to interact effectively with

other cultures (Lindsey et al., 2009). Demographic information for the teacher and student populations are found in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Information for Teacher Population of the Suburban School District*

Teacher Ethnicity	Number of Teachers	Percentage of Population
White	300	92%
Black	6	1.8%
Indian	2	.6%
Hispanic	16	5%
Two or More Races	2	.6%
Total Teachers	326	100%

**Table 2**

*Demographic Information for Student Population of the Suburban School District*

Student Ethnicity	Number of Students	Percentage of Population
White	1517	34%
Black	1053	23.5%
Hispanic	1435	32%
Asian	290	6.5%
Two or More Races	145	3.5%
American Indian	22	.5%
Total Students	4462	110%

The goal of this school district is that the Cultural Proficiency Framework will strengthen the ability of the staff to connect and strengthen relationships with the student. The superintendent of schools approved this research study

### **Participants**

The participants in the study were chosen from the population of teachers and administrators that have completed the three-day Equity Institute training on Cultural Proficiency. The participants were selected through a purposive and convenience sampling method (Miles et al., 2014). The researcher is a school administrator in the school district and have access to the list of staff members that completed the Equity Institute training. The researcher wanted to make sure that the sample had participants from different training cohorts and grade levels to see varied perspectives of the experience. All references to the teachers and building administrators that participated in the study will use their code name to ensure anonymity. Codes names and participants characteristics are found in Table 3.

**Table 3***Description of Participants*

Participant	Year Completed Training	Position	Gender	Ethnicity
Elementary Administrator #1	2017-2018	Elementary Principal	Male	White
Elementary Administrator #2	2018-2020	Elementary Principal	Female	Black
Secondary Administrator #1	2017-2018	High School Assistant Principal	Female	White
Secondary Administrator #2	2017-2018	Middle School Assistant Principal	Female	Black
Elementary Teacher #1	2019-2020	4 <sup>th</sup> grade Teacher	Female	White
Elementary Teacher #2	2017-2018	ENL Teacher	Female	White
Elementary Teacher #3	2018-2019	ENL Teacher	Female	White
Elementary Teacher #4	2019-2020	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher	Female	White
Elementary Teacher #5	2020-2021	Dual Language Teacher	Female	Hispanic
Middle School Teacher #1	2020-2021	Social Studies Teacher	Female	White
Middle School Teacher #2	2020-2021	Special Education Teacher	Female	White
Middle School Teacher #3	2019-2020	World Language Teacher	Female	Hispanic
Middle School Teacher #4	2019-2020	Special Education Teacher	Female	White
Middle School Teacher #5	2018-2019	Special Education Teacher	Female	White
High School Teacher #1	2017-2018	Special Education Teacher	Female	Black
High School Teacher #2	2020-2021	Social Studies Teacher	Male	White
High School Teacher #3	2020-2021	Music Teacher	Female	White

## Data Collection

The study employed two different data collection strategies. Collecting multiple forms of data allowed the research to gain information from different parts and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The two data collection strategies were individual interviews with teachers and building administrators and analysis of Equity Action Plans and Equity Walk Reports. The data collection strategies were focused on investigating the experience of the teachers, administrators and changes in school environment and culture during the past 5 years. The data collection method and the relationship to prior research for each research question is identified in the Table 4.

**Table 4**

### *Research Matrix*

Research Question	Relationship to Prior Research	Data Collection Method
Do the administrators of the suburban school district understand the essential elements of cultural proficiency and apply them to their leadership practices and building cultures?	(Bustamante Dr. et al., 2009) (Ezzani, 2021) (Clark-Louque & Latunde, 2019)	The data collection method is semi structured individual interviews of building Administrators
How have the teachers that have completed Cultural Proficiency training apply the essential elements and guiding principles to their classroom culture and instructional practices?	(Spiess & Cooper, 2020) (Byrd, 2016) (Ladson-Billings, 1995) (Christine Griner & Lue Stewart, 2012)	The data collection method is semi-structured individual interviews conducted with teachers that have completed the Cultural Proficiency
Do the district's school buildings and artifacts and values reflect the essential elements and guiding principles of Cultural Proficiency?	(Ford, 2019) (Hollingworth et al., 2018) (Higgs & Rowland, 2011) (Patton et al., 2015) (Bruce King & Bouchard, 2011)	Artifact Analysis of District Equity Walk Reports

The researcher received permission from the Superintendent of Schools and the Board of Education to conduct the study. The researcher conducted individual interviews with four building level administrators and thirteen teachers. The researcher emailed all teachers and administrators that had completed the Cultural Proficiency Equity Institute Training and asked if they were willing to participate in the study. The researcher emailed letters of consent to the 17 participants that replied via email that they were willing to participate in the study. Email was also used to communicate date, time of the interviews. The interviews were conducted virtually through the ZOOM platform. All interviews were conducted virtually to adhere to the Covid-19 protocols of the district.

### **Individual Semi- Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four building level administrators and thirteen teachers. Interviews allowed the researcher to ask open ended questions and record answers (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Advantages to interviews are that the researcher can collect data that cannot be observed, and participants can give detailed information (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Semi structured interviews allow the researcher to create broad questions but also allow the researcher to ask to follow up questions based on the responses (Thomas, 2016). This allows for more open communication and prevent the researcher from missing valuable data.

For this study, the interview environment was comfortable to allow participants to openly communicate(Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews ranged from 30-45 minutes. The researcher recorded all the sessions with the permission of the participants using the record feature of the Zoom Platform. The researcher downloaded the audio files

from each recording and uploaded them into Otter Voice Meeting Notes for transcription. The researcher read and removed any identifiable and extraneous content from the transcription. The transcripts were uploaded into Deduce, a computer program used for the coding and organization of research data.

The interview protocols for the building administrators were based on the Essential Elements and Guiding Principles of the Cultural Proficiency Framework (See Appendix A). For the interviews with the teachers the researcher created protocols that were centered on asking the participants how they have implemented what they learned in the Equity Institute into their practices in their classroom and how the school building as whole has incorporated Cultural Proficiency. The researcher also collected the following demographic information: a) gender b) ethnicity c) position within the district and d) what year did they complete the Equity Institute training. The researcher created codes that were used in the interview transcript analysis. The codes were based on the Cultural Proficiency Continuum, Essential Elements and Guiding Principles of the Cultural Proficiency framework and the Organizational Culture framework by Edgar Schein.

### **Document Analysis**

Documents are a valuable source of information that provide researchers understand the central phenomena being studied (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The most important use of documents is triangulation of evidence providing collaboration and adding additional context to other data collected (Yin, 2009). As part of the Cultural Proficiency implementation the district and each school building crated Equity Action Plans and have received Equity Walk reports from the outside consultant. These have

been created by district and building representatives with leadership and consultation of an outside agency. The researcher created codes that were used in the artifact analysis. The codes were based on the Cultural Proficiency Continuum, Essential Elements and Guiding Principles of the Cultural Proficiency framework and the Organizational Culture framework by Edgar Schein. The researcher received approval to use these documents in my research by the Superintendent of schools.

### **Data Analysis**

Each interview was done virtually, using Zoom Conference software. Each one of them was video and audio recorded with the permission of the participants. Raw field notes were taken during the interview and focus groups. The researcher watched the recordings to compile more detailed field notes. Audio recordings were downloaded from the Zoom Platform and downloaded onto Otter Voice Meeting Notes software for transcription. The researcher checked the transcription for accuracy and replaced any identifying information and uploaded the transcripts into Dedoose for coding and data analysis.

The researcher created a start list of codes using deductive coding. Start codes came from the research questions, the conceptual framework, theoretical framework, and key variables identified by the researcher (Milles, Huberman, & Saldana, 1994). During this first cycle of coding, the researcher categorized the data into chunks that matched the conceptual framework, the research questions, and the Cultural Proficiency Framework. The researcher completed multiple rounds of coding, adding additional codes as they read and analyzed the data. After the coding the researcher added created descriptor sets within Dedoose. The descriptor sets created were types of certification teacher or



administrators) and grade level taught (elementary, middle, or high school). The researcher used Dedoose to create a word cloud matrix, code co-occurrence, and code application matrix. These matrices allowed the researcher to see which codes appear the most often. Next, the researcher organized the data in themes. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (1994) suggest. “Investigators make preliminary counts of data codes and determine how frequently codes appear in the data” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 1994, p. 86). After identifying major themes using code counts the researcher created categories based on the themes discovered and organized the data categorically. Organizing the data categorically provides descriptive detail to each theme (Saldana, 2021). Once the researcher identified the themes present in the data, they were able to determine the findings of the study.

### **Trustworthiness**

It is important that qualitative researchers confirm that the story told is consistent with the data collected (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 1994). According to Creswell and Poth, “The naturalistic researcher looks for confirmability rather than objectivity in establishing the value of the data” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 256). It is necessary to evaluate the reliability, validity, and trustworthiness of the data. Golafshani (2003) states, “If the issues of reliability, validity, trustworthiness, quality and rigor are meant differentiating a 'good' from 'bad' research then testing and increasing the reliability, validity, trustworthiness, quality and rigor will be important to the research in any paradigm” (p. 603).

To ensure trustworthiness, the data was examined through a researcher’s lens. The researcher corroborated the evidence through multiple data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process is called triangulation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 1994). In this

study the researcher collected data from district artifacts and individual interviews with administrators and teachers. The researcher documented evidence in multiple sources to support the themes (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The data was also examined through the participant's lens. Participants also play a key role in ensuring the trustworthiness of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To seek feedback from the participants the researcher emailed them the transcription of their interviews and a summary of the emergent themes found in the data. The researcher asked them to certify if the notes and themes were a correct reflection of their experience. This strategy allowed participants to be involved in the data validation and is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261).

### **Research Ethics**

In this study, the researcher ensured that the human subjects that participated and the site that served as the instrumental single case were protected. The name of the school district and the participants were not used in the write up of the study. The researcher received written permission from the superintendent to conduct the study. Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher obtained written consent from all the interviews and participants. The written Letter of consent informed the participants that their identity would remain anonymous, participation was voluntary and that participants were able to choose to not answer any questions during the interview. Participants were also informed that there were no risks associated with participation in the study and that there was no direct benefits associated with participating in the study. Sample Letters of Consent are included in the appendix.

## **Role of the Researcher**

Banks (1998) states, “How individuals interpret their cultural experiences is mediated by the interaction of a complex set of status variables, such as gender, social class, age political affiliation, religion and region.” It is imperative that researchers understand their own status variables and the relationship they can have in their research. Researching and studying Cultural Proficiency has also emphasized and reinforced the importance of knowing one’s own privilege, status, and biases. The researcher sees the world through the lens of a woman raised in a patriarchal society. The researcher’s experiences growing up in a Hispanic household illustrated the power and central focus of the male in our family structures. They also understand and recognize the privilege they have experienced being White and a member of the upper middle class. The researcher brings the intersectionality of being White, middle class and Hispanic into their work researching Cultural Proficiency. These experiences have impacted the worldview of the researcher to one focused on the social justice and educational equity in our school systems.

According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (1994), it is important that research has a larger significance and real meaning to the researcher. The study must be a pursuit that will contribute in a significant way to a broader domain of research that aligns with the values of the researcher (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 1994). The current case study presents data and information on a school district pursuing Cultural Proficiency implementation district wide. In a society that is growing increasingly diverse with each coming year it is imperative that schools embrace their diversity as a strength and work to implement tools, strategies and information that will help teachers embrace an asset-

based methodology in their classrooms and create positive schoolwide culture were all students feel included and are engaged in high quality rigorous instruction. The researcher believes in the power of Cultural Proficiency training in helping educators teach and interact with cultures different than their own. This training really helped the researcher to understand how individual biases can teaching and learning. This knowledge has truly reformed the practices of the researcher as an educator. The journey of Cultural Proficiency is not a straight line to perfection. It is filled with celebrations and setbacks. A case study of a district that has been on in this journey for five years will provide valuable information for any district looking to create a welcoming and inclusive culture for all students.

Choosing a site for this case study was not an easy task. While many districts have recently began to pursue equity and inclusivity initiatives not many districts have been in their pursuit for more than a year or two. The researcher chose this district as the case in the current study because the district is in are in year six of the initiative. The Cultural Proficiency initiative has become a part of the district mission and district goals. Although the district is in year six and has a robust Professional Development plan with many different moving parts it has not made the advancements in their work that they originally anticipated. This is because to make genuine changes in school culture requires a shared vision of what school culture should be. Cultural Proficiency is “an inside-out approach that focuses first on those who are insiders to the school. Encouraging them to reflect on their own individual understandings and value.... The commitment to become culturally proficient results in a way of being that acknowledges and validates the current values and feelings of people, encouraging change without threatening people’s feelings

of worth” (Lindsey et al., 2009, p.10) The district has experienced both advancements and setbacks and has learned lessons along the way. This puts them in a position to provide other districts with insight in their own initiatives. In this district the researcher is currently an administrator. The researcher is the administrator that leads the implementation of the Cultural Proficiency initiative, Previously the researcher was a teacher in the district. The researcher is also a community member and parent member of the district. Creswell and Poth (2019) state that “A researcher’s own particular stance within a group may keep him or her from acknowledging all dimensions of experiences.” The researcher can research and report on the whole experience because they do not just play one role within the district, they are part of many different stakeholder groups.

The researcher is a member of the community in many ways. They are an educator, a parent member and a community member that was raised in the community. As a person who is native to the culture of the community and continues to be part of that culture, the researcher is an indigenous insider. Banks (1998) defines the researcher typology indigenous insider as” individual that endorses the unique values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs and knowledge of his or his indigenous community and culture and is perceived by the people within the community as a legitimate community member who can speak with authority about it” (Banks, 1998). Although the researcher is an administrator in the district, their years as a community member and a teacher in the school district gives them a legitimacy to members of the community. The researcher will work to balance these roles to ensure they get a clear and complete picture of the school district.

## **Conclusion**

This study seeks to expand the research on the effectiveness of the Cultural Proficiency framework in schools with diverse student populations and homogenous teacher populations. The study will look at multiple data points to create a case study that describes the implementation process and evaluates the effects of the implementation. This research is centered on the ability to create a paradigm shift within a school system. The study will gather information from teachers and administrators in the district to evaluate the culture along the Cultural Proficiency Continuum.

## CHAPTER 4

The purpose of this case study was to explore the implementation of the Cultural Proficiency Framework on a suburban school district. The findings show the both the positive foundation forming within the district and the struggles the district continues to face in their implementation. The findings are designed to address the following research questions:

1. How do administrators apply the Essential Elements and Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency in their leadership and building cultures?
2. How do teachers apply the Essential elements and Guiding principles of Cultural Proficiency into their classroom culture and instruction?
3. How do the district's artifacts, values and behaviors reflect the Essential Elements and Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency?

The researcher conducted individual interviews with administrators and teachers in the district. The interviews required the participants to be reflective within their own practice and the culture and environment within their school buildings. The researcher also analyzed the school district's equity action plans and equity walk reports. The equity action plans provided the researcher details regarding the specific implementation details and changes that each building made in their work towards Cultural Proficiency. The equity walks reports provided the researcher the observations and reflections regarding the district's implementation of Cultural Proficiency from an education consultant hired by the district to evaluate the effectiveness of their Cultural Proficiency implementation. The data collection took place January and February of 2022.

This study uses terms and definitions from Lindsey’s (2009) Cultural Proficiency Framework. Lindsey (2009) provides tools to enable institution to implement and evaluate Cultural Proficiency Framework. One tool from the Cultural Proficiency Framework is the Essential Elements. Essential Elements are defined as. “Standards for educator values that are exhibited in our behaviors and for organizational polices that inform school and district practices.” The table below show the number of instances a participant shared an example of Essential Elements.

**Table 5**

*Essential Elements Code Count Interview Transcripts*

	Assessing Cultural Knowledge	Valuing Diversity	Managing the Dynamics of Difference	Adapting to Diversity	Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge
Administrators	28	31	18	41	6
Teachers	29	39	21	47	18
Total	57	70	39	88	24

A second tool from the Cultural Proficiency Framework are the Guiding Principles. The guiding principles are from the work if Cross, Bazron, Dennis and Issacs (1989). They provide a moral framework for the Cultural Proficiency work within a school or district (Lindsey et al., 2009). The research used these tools to create interview protocols that would enable the participants to reflect on the work being done within their school and they work they are doing individually to contribute to the implementation of Cultural Proficiency. Table 6 identifies each guiding principle.



**Table 6***Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency*

Guiding Principle #	Definition of Guiding Principle
Guiding Principle #1	Culture is ever present
Guiding Principle #2	People are served in varying degrees by dominant culture
Guiding Principle #3	Diversity within cultures is important
Guiding Principle #4	People have group identities and personal identities
Guiding Principle #5	Cross Cultural Interactions must be acknowledged, adjusted to and accepted.
Guiding Principle #6	School system must incorporate cultural knowledge
Guiding Principle #7	Family is defined by each culture and it the primary system of support in the education of children
Guiding Principle #8	Each group has unique cultural needs
Guiding Principle #9	People who not part of dominant group must be bicultural

The table below shows the number of instances a participant shared an example of Guiding Principles.

**Table 7***Guiding Principles Code Count Interview Transcripts*

	Guiding Principle #1	Guiding Principle #2	Guiding Principle #3	Guiding Principle #4	Guiding Principle #5	Guiding Principle #6	Guiding Principle #7	Guiding Principle #8	Guiding Principle #9
Administrators	19	20	15	9	3	9	10	14	4
Teachers	42	38	13	1	8	36	11	8	8
Total	61	58	28	10	11	45	21	22	12

The researcher also looked for examples of barriers to Cultural Proficiency in the interview transcripts. According to Lindsey (2009) barriers to Cultural Proficiency are

identified as: a) Systems of Oppression and Privilege and b) Resistance to Change. The presumption of privilege and entitlement is defined as the beliefs that accomplishments and benefits are accrued solely through hard work and the quality of a person’s character. The presumption of privilege and entitlement often leads to the creation of systems of oppression within society (Lindsey et al., 2009). Systems of oppression are identified as forces in society that impact people based on their membership to a unique cultural group (Lindsey et al., 2009). Resistance to change is defined by Lindsey (2009), as the belief that only other people need to change and others need to adapt the dominant cultural group (Lindsey et al., 2009). The table below show the number of instances a participant shared an example of a barrier to Cultural Proficiency.

**Table 8**

*Barriers to Cultural Proficiency Code Count*

	Systems of Oppression and Privilege	Resistance to Change
Administrators	24	13
Teachers	43	23
Total	67	36

This study also used terms from Edgar Schien’s Organizational Culture. When analyzing the Equity Action Plans and Equity Walk Reports, the researcher identified artifacts, values, and behaviors. Schein (2017) defines artifacts as, “visible and feelable structures and processes.” The researcher identified 289 examples of artifacts in the Equity Action Plans and Equity Walk Reports. Although Schein (2017) classifies observed behaviors as an artifact for this study the researcher separated instances of

observed behaviors. The researcher identified 51 examples of observed behaviors identified in the Equity Walk Reports. The researcher also looked for examples of stated values in the Equity Plans and Equity Walk Reports. Schein (2027) defined espoused beliefs and values as, “ideas, goals, values and aspirations.” The researcher identified 110 examples of values in the Equity Plans and Equity Walk Reports. The researcher applied the Essential Elements and Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency as codes for analyzing the data. Table 9 shows the number of times an artifact, behavior or value was coded as an Essential Element of Cultural Proficiency.

**Table 9**

*Essential Elements Code Count Artifacts, Behaviors, and Values*

	Assessing Cultural Knowledge	Valuing Diversity	Managing the Dynamics of Difference	Adapting to Diversity	Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge
Artifacts	19	81	10	36	11
Behaviors	4	8	4	16	12
Values	0	12	2	27	3
Total	23	101	16	79	26

Table 10 shows the number of times an artifact, behavior or value was coded as a Guiding Principle. Guiding Principles are defined in Table 6.

**Table 10***Guiding Principles Code Count of Artifacts Behaviors, and Values*

	Guiding Principle #1	Guiding Principle #2	Guiding Principle #3	Guiding Principle #4	Guiding Principle #5	Guiding Principle #6	Guiding Principle #7	Guiding Principle #8	Guiding Principle #9
Artifacts	1	11	24	1	3	2	23	43	0
Behaviors	2	2	4	0	9	2	3	9	3
Values	0	8	0	0	0	0	15	13	0
Total	3	21	28	1	12	4	41	65	3

The data collected for this case study patterns and themes that are aligned with implementing a Cultural Proficiency Framework in a suburban school district. The data also illustrates barriers and setbacks of the implementation of Cultural Proficiency in the suburban school district. Through the collection of data from multiple perspectives the researcher was able to find connections between the data collected and the Cultural Proficiency Continuum.

The Cultural Proficiency Continuum is defined as a tool that provides language that describes positive and negative policies, practices, behaviors and values (Lindsey et al., 2009). The continuum provides examples of healthy and unhealthy ways of seeing and responding to differences. The points on the left side of the continuum illustrate behaviors that view differences negatively and problematic. These behaviors seek to eliminate or ignore differences. The points on the right side of continuum provide guidance and examples for changing views and behaviors to view differences as an asset (Lindsey et al., 2009). Figure 5 shows the Cultural Proficiency Continuum.

**Figure 5**

*The Cultural Proficiency Continuum* (Lindsey et al., 2009)

**Cultural Proficiency Continuum**

Reactive Change Mandated for Tolerance			Proactive Change Chosen for Transformation		
Destructiveness	Incapacity	Blindness	Precompetence	Competence	Proficiency
Eliminate differences.	Demean differences.	Dismiss differences.	Respond inadequately to the dynamics of difference.	Engage with differences.	Esteem and learn from differences as a lifelong practice.
The elimination of other people's cultures	Belief in the superiority of one's culture and behavior that disempowers another's culture	Acting as if the cultural differences you see do not matter or not recognizing that there are differences among and between cultures	Awareness of the limitations of one's skills or an organization's practices when interacting with other cultural groups	Assessing one's own culture and the culture of the organization, valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of difference, adapting to diversity, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge.	Knowing how to learn about and from individual and organizational culture; interacting effectively in a variety of cultural environments; advocating for others.

Table 11 shows the number of times the research coded a belief, value, policy, or action as an example of one of the points in the Cultural Proficiency Continuum.

**Table 11**

*Cultural Proficiency Continuum Code Count*

	Cultural Destructiveness	Cultural Incapacity	Cultural Blindness	Cultural Pre-competence	Cultural Competence	Cultural Proficiency
Administrators	4	13	2	34	15	9
Teachers	9	25	8	40	20	7
Total	13	38	10	74	35	16

**Findings Research Question 1: How do administrators apply the Essential Elements and Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency in their leadership and building cultures?**

Two major themes emerged in the analysis of the building administrators interview transcripts: a) Administrators are creating school climates where differences are celebrated and recognized as assets by changing the way things are done to acknowledge the differences that are present within the school communities and b) Administrators see resistance to change among faculty and systems of oppression present within education as the largest barriers to implementing a Cultural Proficiency Framework.

*Theme: Administrators are creating school climates where differences are celebrated and recognized as assets by changing the way things are done to acknowledge the differences that are present within the school communities.*

During the interviews, the administrators provided examples of changes and additions made within their school buildings to ensure that diversity is celebrated. Changes in classroom resources and decor were noted in the interviews. Changes in books and materials have been more reflective of the diverse student body within the district. The administrators have begun to look at curriculum resources and materials through the lens of Cultural Proficiency.

EA#1: I've seen teachers take workshops and really gravitate towards new books and resources and really try to bring them into the classrooms and they even comment that the ones we were using didn't connect with student's lives, that we weren't they weren't being as inclusive as we could have been. The books that teachers are now using for reading aloud or having students do independent work

are different. They saw the need to diversify the reading texts in the classroom. Teachers are posting more student work on bulletin boards instead of pre-purchased posters. This allows students to see themselves reflected in their classrooms.

EA#2: We're looking to have students see themselves throughout the building. We've done that relatively quickly through art. The children see their artwork, about everywhere I've had, the art teachers take over pretty much any available board space that wasn't dedicated to a classroom, so that they have an opportunity to share. And then most recently, our goal has been to try to put actual photographs of students engaged in different activities, whether it be Field Day, or our talent show night or after school groups and things like that.

SA #1: We're trying to make our bulletin boards in our building more inclusive and reflective of our students. Right now, we have a lot of quotes from Black History Month on our whiteboards when the kids come in. We are changing them throughout the year to honor different cultures and celebrations.

SA #2: Our library is choosing more diverse books and making sure that books really reflect the students that we currently serve. I've seen a shift recently, the librarian is now recognizing, Hispanic cultural month, or Black History Month and creating a section for different cultural celebrations. The bulletin boards throughout the building are different now, they are showing diversity and valuing different cultures.

The administrators have worked closely with teachers and librarians to ensure that diversity is celebrated throughout the school within the curriculum and the school décor. The administrators have prioritized the Essential Elements of Valuing Diversity and Adapting to Diversity when making decisions about purchases, curriculum, school décor and school celebrations.

The administrators also discussed changes in instructional practices to be more inclusive and connected with student cultures. Administrators have seen changes within teacher practices to promote student connections to curriculum and instruction.

EA#1: So, a lot of the classroom assignments have changed by what's going on. Instead of everybody having the same activity that makes us more reflective of the individual teachers have been differentiating assignments to be more inclusive of different cultures and learning needs.

SA#1: We are showing that we value diversity by highlighting and bringing accolades to different avenues of success for kids to meet success within our instruction. People are being more thoughtful of what they're doing in their classrooms.

SA #2: The teachers have now started to try to do a lot of projects and things like that in their in their instruction, and kind of try to create, like, kind of an extension of what is going on in student's lives and what they're learning.

Administrators are noticing more differentiation and student created projects in classroom instruction. These changes are aligned to the Essential Element Adapting to Diversity. Teachers are changing how they present material and instruction to be more inclusive of diverse cultures and learning needs.



Administrators are ensuring that materials and parent communication are translated to ensure inclusivity of speakers of other languages within the school community.

EA #1: The staff knows the expectation and importance of translating materials. It may be a process; but I we are all on the same page. We are getting it done.

EA #2: Our staff can quickly translate documents to make them more accessible for families. We adopted technology to help us in translation.

SA#1: I know that communicating with parents in their native language is something we are doing. The secretaries are super, like they look on the school management system and if it says a different home language, a letter is going home in that language. The staff is much more cognizant of those things. Now, the secretaries and teachers more apt to use available technology to call homes and set up meetings for parents who do not speak English and use technology to facilitate communication during the meeting with parents who do not speak English.

Administrators are leading their staff in ensuring that materials are translated in the necessary languages. This change in procedure is necessary to increasing family engagement and community participation within the school. Provided translation services and translating all school documents is an example of a Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency. The Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency state the importance of family connections and changing traditional approaches to education to increase parent participation (Lindsey et al., 2009).

Administrators are changing the discipline model within their schools. They are embracing and teaching restorative practices instead of relying on punitive punishments. Administrators are ensuring restorative practices are used to improve relationships and honor cultural differences.

EA #1: I know that when I first started the expectation was that students need to be suspended if the behaviors were deemed disruptive. The last few years I have changed the expectation among the staff. They know we are going to talk and communicate with students. We are here to provide support not automatic suspension.

EA#2: Understanding that behavior itself does not necessarily always have something to do with compliance, that sometimes there's underlying causes behind behavior that, and having teachers learn to recognize and take that into account, before making a judgment on a child and or assuming that a child's behavior is in some way disrespectful. The understanding that there could be other causal factors. Changing our behavior as the adults and our attitudes towards behavior.

SA #1: I am more sensitive and ask questions. When I'm calling homes, I ask about their home situation: who do you live with? Who am I calling? You know, what's grandma's last name? What's mom's last name? And for me, that's something that has come out of Cultural Proficiency training, because that's something where I specifically felt like I needed I needed to grow and just recognizing that families look different.

SA#2: As a staff we're having uncomfortable conversations, and it doesn't make any feel at ease, it is hard for veteran teachers specially to acknowledge that they have to be reflective and look at their own instructional practices. Staff is acknowledging that they must look at the way we I speak with kids and all the stakeholders in the community.

This is an example of Adapting to Divesity and Managing the Dynamics of Difference. Administrators are learning more effective strategies for resolving conflict that understand and prioritize cultural differences.

The changes being made by admistrtraors in the suburban school district provide positive examples of implementing the Cultural Proficiency Framework. They are aligned district practices to the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency and creating examples aligned with the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency. The researcher found evidence of all five Essential Elements with most of the evidence aligning to the Essential Elements Adapting to Diversity and Valuing Diversity. The researcher also found multiple examples aligned to the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency with a particular focus on Guiding Principles #2 and #7. Guiding Principle #2 is that people are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture. It emphasizes the importance of adjusting and changing behaviors to meet the needs of the diverse school community. Guiding Principles #7 is that the family is the primary systems of support for students and schools must change their practices to ensure that families are able to engage and participate in the educational system (Lindsey et al., 2009).

*Theme: Administrators see resistance to change among faculty and systems of oppression present with education as the largest barriers to implementing a cultural proficiency framework.*

Even though changes and dialogue are taking place within the buildings the lack of racial and ethnic diversity makes it harder for teachers and students to connect. Administrators see the lack of diversity within the staff as a symptom of oppression within the educational system.

EA #1: There's not a whole lot of exchanges of understanding different cultures going around and where the students see themselves and the person that's teaching. And I think that's important just to see representation.

EA #2: I don't have any genuine ethnic diversity on staff. So, there is no real dialogue. engaging in that sense

SA #1: I do think that there is, you know, having a staff that doesn't necessarily represent your entire population. I do believe that that impacts relationships between students and staff

SA #2: I think it's very hard for our students, because they don't really see themselves if that makes sense. I think that there's a disconnect, with our students really connecting to our teachers. I also think it affects the way that they our teachers interact with the students. When a kid says something, because they don't understand maybe the language or the culture of the population that we serve, they sometimes overreact.

Administrators believe that the lack of teacher diversity is an obstacle in implementing Cultural Proficiency. The lack of cultural, racial and/or ethnic connections can lead to miscommunication and negative interaction between teachers and their students. They also believe it is important for students to have role models that look like them in school.

Administrators feel that staff members are resistant to the changes that need to take place to truly implement Cultural Proficiency.

EA#1: I know that there are conversations that take place behind closed doors. In those conversations people feel a comfort level amongst colleagues they'll say, a statement or make a statement, which indicates a mindset that represents cultural incapacity or blindness.

EA #2: There are some staff members that we call energy vampires. They are constantly trying pull people from what they know to be a more appropriate way of engaging with students and engaging in their instructional practice.

SA #1: There are some people that are having a hard time addressing the students in front of them. Students in our district different than they were 10 years ago.

SA #2: I think where we are struggling to get people that are willing to be part of this work. And not just willing to be part of it, but willing to transform us from where we are

Implementing Cultural Proficiency is a change in mindset and resistance to change is a barrier to Cultural Proficiency (Lindsey et al., 2009). The researcher found multiple examples of staff members being resistant to the changes being made and unwilling to make changes themselves. Resistance to change is often centered on an

awareness of the need to change or an expectation that the other culture should be the one making the changes (Lindsey et al., 2009).

The administrators shared many examples of positive changes that have been made and examples of barriers to implementation. The changes made provide evidence into the implementation of the Essential Elements and the presence of the Guiding Principles. There is also the presence of the barriers to implementation with resistance to change being a primary barrier.

**Findings Research Question 2: How do teachers apply the Essential Elements and Guiding principles of Cultural Proficiency into their classroom culture and instruction?**

Three major themes emerged in the analysis of the teacher interview transcripts: a) teachers are celebrating the diversity within the school community and making changes to their own behaviors and classroom procedures b) teachers are understanding the need to learn about the different cultures of their students and taking action to learn about them and c) teachers are identifying systems of oppression within the school system.

***Theme: Teachers are celebrating the diversity within the school community and making changes to their own behaviors and classroom procedures***

Teachers described examples of ways that different cultures are being celebrated in their classrooms.

ET #1: We are teaching students about different cultural celebrations like Chinese New Year, Ramadan, and Diwali. We are thinking about students' cultural traditions when we create lessons.

ET #3: We honor and teach about different heritage months like Black History in our classes.

ET #4: The training has shown me the importance of making students aware of other cultures and teaching them different cultural and historical perspectives.

ET #5: I believe that if the student is very presented in the school, and is appreciated, and their work is being displayed, and they see that, oh, I'm valued, my culture is valued not only they have a pride of okay, I come from this, I come from this culture and it is it is acceptable is celebrated

MT #1: We have changed our bulletin boards to display different cultures, and many are now student created. We have prioritized highlighting different heritage months and have diversified the books in our classrooms and library.

MT #3: I have worked to be more inclusive in my classroom. I create lessons to teach Black History and Hispanic Heritage.

HT #1: The training has given me a framework to work to incorporate the celebration of different cultures within my instruction.

These examples are aligned to the Essential Element Valuing Diversity which is centered on making changes to celebrate differences (Lindsey et al., 2009). The teachers value these changes as necessary for students included within the school.

Teachers are making changes to their instruction to be more culturally responsive by beginning in new materials and adjusting instructional strategies and delivery of content.

ET #1: It is important to differentiate through the different cultures in the classroom. This allows for better relationships with students and a safe space for all students.

ET #2: We have a lot of tools we can use for translation. Translation tools help us communicate better with families.

ET #3: We have made changes in the Social Studies curriculum. We have created inquiry units Native American History, African American History and Women's History. We have worked to include different voices and histories that we have not spent time on in the past.

ET #4: The biggest change I have made is the incorporation of new mentor texts in ELA and Social Studies. It is important that the changes are not seen as a separate thing but as part of the instruction.

ET #5: We have been doing research projects for the different heritage months. That was also something that we have not done before. Students displayed their work on the walls of the hallway, on the hallways and pictures. There was some research, depending on the grade level; the teachers were able to differentiate

MT #1 We are incorporating more project-based instruction to allow for student choice and the ability to express their thoughts and cultures.

MT #2: I began to realize that I was not differentiating enough to meet individual needs of students. Now during planning, I ensure to have multiple points of access and connection.



HT #1: I had to tone things down. I realized I was not acknowledging where students were coming from and their backgrounds they have and the impact it has on learning.

HT #3: It has been exciting recreating lessons and bringing in different cultures into our music program. Recently I found a black composer that was a contemporary of Mozart. It has not been easy to find but I realized we need more representation to allow students to make connections.

Changes in curriculums and curriculum resources are aligned with examples stated by the administrators as well. These changes illustrate the staff implementing the Essential Element Adapting to Diversity. These examples also illustrate the presence of Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency present in the school. Teachers are making changes to include diverse cultural backgrounds and making adaptations to curriculum to ensure that all students have access and representation.

Teachers have also worked to create welcoming and safe environments in their classrooms and school buildings.

ET #1: In our building, we play different multicultural music in the mornings and morning greetings in different languages. The students decide on a theme for one day each month. In December, they picked holidays for all.

ET #2: With new books and more student work posted around the room students are seeing themselves more and feeling more connected. This has been a big step in creating a safe space for students to talk about their cultures.

ET #3: We are centered on what is best for the kids. That is what teachers like me are doing. The biggest part of Cultural Proficiency is making sure that we are there for our students and their families.

ET #4: The Equity Walks really opened our eyes. We began to ensure that we had signs in other languages and student work posted in the classroom. We all began to look at our classroom libraries and see the representation that was missing. It really made everyone more self-reflective.

ET #5: The classroom teachers take pictures of their students and put them up on bulletin boards to help student feel welcome. The kids get very excited.

MT #1: It is not just us talking about different cultures but more importantly creating safe spaces in our classrooms for students to talk about their own cultural differences with being criticized.

MT #4: We have after school clubs, even in our extra help, you know, we welcome all the students to come not only to learn, but kind of to have a safe place, you know, to come and even if they don't have anything particular to do that day, sometimes they want to come just to you know, just to have someone to talk to.

MT #5: Well, from the moment they walk in the door, you know, when school starts, it's always you know, such welcoming signs and everywhere you look, you know, it's, it's, it's geared towards having them feel at home, we decorate the bulletin boards, you know, and in the school and we try to change them frequently and have all kinds of messages and welcoming type things all year long.

HT #2: We have seen more collaboration across all levels: administrators, support staff and teachers to ensure that we have a welcoming environment for all students.

These changes are examples of Adapting to Diversity and representative of several Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency. Teachers provides evidence of changing the school environment to ensure that students feel welcomed from their entrance to school and in the classrooms.

***Theme: Teachers are understanding the need to learn about the different cultures of their students and taking action to learn about them.***

They are prioritizing learning the different aspects of cultures as part of their professional learning and the importance of getting to know their students in order to make social and emotional connections.

ET #1: Cultural proficiency is for me, is getting to, to not just learn about a culture but is to really understand it. And to understand their, their holidays, and their food, their religion, and their clothing.

ET #2: I think there's a lot more empathy. Not so much sympathy, but the empathy part of it. And really understanding these children.

ET #3: Being aware that there are many different cultures and perspectives that are that are around you, and there is no you know, correct culture or experience, you know, or language background or skin color that is that is more important than another and that it's a natural, especially in the United States

ET #4: We have a growing Muslim population. We have learned a lot of their cultures and traditions. We need to make sure we respect the traditions.

ET #5: We are constantly changing, and the community is changing. And we have to be able to, to meet those needs, the needs of the students, the needs of the family, it's the needs of, of the community as a whole. And if we are not being sensitive to all the cultures that are coming in, and all the different backgrounds, then we are not doing our job correctly, we need to be sensitive to them and be able to represent the kids, the students and the best way possible

MT #1: I have become more aware of diverse cultures. I have tried to work to build relationships with my students and showcase their diversity.

MT #2: I realized that I wanted to learn and be open to seeing the biases within me and you know, the privileges that just from like, who I was born as and where I grew up, you know, like and it just kind of like it created almost like this rabbit hole this tunnel. There's just so much going on in this country that previously I did not notice. I'm trying to, you know, keep understanding and keep learning.

MT #4: Understanding the differences between cultures is important as well.

There has been a growing Hispanic population, and from different areas as well, you can't just say they're all from one Hispanic area, so and they have different cultures within that.

MT #5: Our bulletin boards reflect diversity and display information about different cultures. I am looking around, seeing teachers, staff looking, and asking questions.

HT #1: It is important to have an open mind to learn and share of your students' culture, your culture. The understanding and acceptance of different cultures, for staff members, students, learning different cultures, of staff members and students, giving an opportunity for them to share as well.

HT #2: I have realized that it is necessary to develop your knowledge about all things related to culture, so you know, individually, and as a group, so individually; it would be your beliefs, language, and communication. And as a group, it would be race, politics, religion, different customs. So, it's the willingness to learn about those cultures, to develop skills on how to work with them, and acknowledging and celebrating the differences.

HT #3: A big takeaway from the training was the knowledge that culture was more than just race and ethnicity.

Teachers are applying the Essential Element Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge into their professional practice. They are incorporate their learned cultural knowledge of their students. They are also continuing to make changes to Adapt to Diversity (Essential Element). Teachers are learning about the cultures of their students and being provided with information about diverse cultures present in the school community. These are examples of Guiding Principle #3 (Diversity within cultures is important) and Guiding Principle #6 (The School System must incorporate cultural knowledge into practice and policy making).

*Theme: Teachers are identifying systems of oppression within the school system like school calendars, state assessments and adhering to scope and sequences.*

Teachers are concerned with academic responsibilities surrounding state testing and scope and sequence not learning them enough time to learn and incorporate student's cultures.

ET #1: You know, letting them stay off and make it you know, a religious holiday for them and not penalize them but we're penalizing them kind of in the classroom if they're falling behind in the classroom because maybe they need two or three days off.

ET #5: I don't know that all classroom teachers are doing, you know, you know, the pressure that teachers are under to meet, you know, the scope and sequence and making sure that all these topics are covered

MT #2: We have the ELA 's, and we have the, you know, the state assessments and all those. So, it, I think at that point, it becomes a little bit more difficult, we don't have as much freedom, because we're so worried about making sure that the kids have the content that they need to make sure that they're successful. That that makes it a little bit more difficult

Teachers cited these examples as items that they feel do not reflect the premises of Cultural Proficiency and prevent them from fully embracing Cultural Proficiency within their classrooms.

Teachers note that the lack of diversity in the staff can be a barrier to student relationships and does not provide the proper models for students to see themselves in.

ET #4: Color Blindness is definitely a barrier. The ideas that I don't see color in the room, I, you know, all my students are the same, I don't see color. That's kind of that that well, meanings. People mean, well, when they say that, but how destructive that can really be alright, saying something like that, but you should recognize them, you should know their culture.

MT #1: I would say that many of the teachers can't relate to the experiences of our diverse population of students, because they didn't have those experiences. Whether it's their background alone, where they grew up, a lot of them are not coming with the same culture, the same family dynamics, religion, holidays, traditions, that many of our students are coming with.

MT #3: I think the connections probably, you know, are not there fully, to the extent that they could be if we had a more diverse teaching population, then it you know, would open up that students could identify, you know, Oh, you look like me, okay, like you've come from the similar background, we can form a connection on our similarity is, I feel that that makes a big difference for some students

MT #4: If students do not see themselves in the staff, it is harder to make connections.

HT #1: we've got to diversify our staff. I think that is the major piece. And again, I'll stick with building site that is one of the major pieces when you hire a staff, and let's say you hire 15 people, and maybe one is a person of color.

HT #3: Not a very diverse staff. Definitely unbalanced. And I feel like a few, actually, black teachers have retired of recent years, and I'm not really seeing them hiring as much, you know, diverse, you know, applicants

Teachers and administrators held this barrier in common. Both groups cited the lack of staff diversity as a barrier to implementation. Teachers felt that the hiring procedures needed to be looked at.

**Findings Research Question 3: How do the districts artifacts, values and behaviors reflect the Essential Elements and Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency?**

The research analyzed 12 Equity Action Plans and 14 Equity Walk reports. The Equity Action plans were written by the building administrators and teachers in the school building. The Equity Walk Reports were written by an outside consultant after coming into each building and making observations based on a Cultural Proficiency Rubric. Three major themes emerged during the analysis of the plans and reports. The three themes are a) the district is recognizing differences as diversity and working to celebrate and encourage the presence of differences within their artifacts, values and behaviors; b) the district is making the necessary adaptations to their artifacts, values and behaviors to ensure that all members of the school communities have equitable access to benefits and opportunities; c) the district is working to implement a community centric approach to communication with families that meets the needs of community members from diverse backgrounds.

***Theme: The district is recognizing differences as diversity and working to celebrate and encourage the presences of differences within their artifacts, values, and behaviors.***



Individual schools within the district are ensuring that students feel welcome in the buildings and in the classrooms by decorating bulletin boards and hallways with student work and pictures of students.

Suburban Elementary #1 Equity Action Plan: Rebrand the building with students' photos on the wall so they can see themselves in their school.

Suburban Elementary #2 Equity Walk Report: Student work was posted on bulletin boards throughout the school. The majority of student writing displays opportunities for students to write from a personal perspective.

Suburban Elementary #4 Equity Walk Report: The campus has a positive environment. It's welcoming, projects "we're glad you're here" and is positive about who we believe the students are. There are many posters and the visuals of who the students are throughout the school, in both the hallway and the classrooms. The students have ownership in the space.

Suburban Elementary #5 Equity Walk Report: Student work is visible in every classroom and student demographics are evident within each of the classrooms.

Suburban High School Equity Walk Report: Positive motivational banners and posters can be found throughout the school halls and classrooms. The school's public space has improved in relation to reflecting its diverse school population and display of academic student work.

These changes are illustrative of the Essential Elements Valuing Diversity and Adapting to Diversity. They are also examples of adjusting behaviors to represent the diversity of the school population which is Guiding Principle #2.

School buildings promoted diversity by decorating and celebrating Heritage Months. The plans and reports show evince of the administrative staff taking a lead with changes in celebrating diversity within the buildings.

Suburban Elementary #2 Equity Walk Report: Hispanic Heritage Month was recognized with food in the cafeteria. The bulletin boards there also had Hispanic Heritage Themed displays.

Suburban Elementary #3 Equity Action Plan: Bulletin Boards will be decorated to celebrate Heritage Months. Annouements will be made to honor historical figures aligned with each Heritage Month.

Suburban Elementary #3 Equity Walk Report: The library is wonderful. Hispanic Heritage month was evident throughout displays and books. Learning target objectives were connected to Hispanic Heritage Month as well. It was evident that this work was not done to impress visitors, but because the librarian wants students to learn about other cultures, and specifically Hispanic/Latino culture.

Suburban Middle School Equity Action Plans: Bulletin Boards will be decorated according to Heritage Month Themes. During different Heritage Months students/faculty will share about the lives of those prominent people. This will be done during morning announcements

Suburban High School Equity Action Plan: Students will create presentations for heritage months and post them on school website.

These changes are indicative of the presence of Valuing Diversity within the school environment. They changes are also examples of Guiding Principle #8 which is: Each group has unique cultural needs that must be respected.

***Theme: The district is making the necessary adaptations to their artifacts, values and behaviors to ensure that all members of the school community have equitable access to benefits and opportunities.***

Schools are changing curriculum and curriculum materials to be inclusive of marginalized voices. They are ensuring that students have opportunities to see themselves within the curriculum and learn about other cultures.

Suburban Elementary #5 Equity Action Plan: Develop our own curriculum aligned with current cultural representation and needs

Suburban Middle School Equity Walk Report: Teachers understand and use students' cultural backgrounds to create meaningful, effective learning environments.

Suburban Elementary School #4 Equity Action Plan: Monthly school wide themed literature and activities to celebrate cultural and family diversity.

Suburban Elementary #3 Equity Action Plan: Include activities in our present scope and sequence to reflect the cultural diversity within our building

Suburban High School Equity Action Plan: Faith Forum Representatives from different religions will host a panel for 9th grade students. The panel speakers will share the major beliefs of their religion and address misconceptions that are commonly held. This will be run during Social Studies classes

Suburban Elementary #3 Equity Action Plan: Yearly Review classroom library collections & focus on books that celebrate cultural diversity

Suburban Elementary #1 Equity Action Plan: Use literature as an anchor to instruct knowledgeably about various cultures and various family dynamics

Suburban High School Equity Action Plan: Evaluate and reflect on our environment, make our environment more reflective of all of the cultures, and intentionally celebrate differences in various way

Suburban Middle School Equity Action Plan: Evaluating curriculums to ensure all voices and perspectives are represented

There is continued evidence of application of Essential Elements Adapting to Diversity and Valuing Diversity and several Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency. These examples also show the collaboration between teachers and administrators in making and implementing changes within the school buildings

Schools have looked at achievement and demographic data to ensure that they are providing access opportunities to all students.

Suburban High School Equity Action Plan: We will strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being by confronting and altering biases that lead to student marginalization and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status

Suburban High School Equity Walk Report: Advanced classrooms are serving a culturally diverse student population

Suburban School District Equity Action Plan: Examining data to look understand achievement gaps-- root cause analysis

Suburban Elementary School #2: The Cultural Proficiency Team shared the demographic data with staff, so all stakeholders understand which cultures make up the school community.

The focus on data to improve academic outcomes shows a commitment to the Essential Element Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge. The administrators are using a Cultural Proficiency lens when they examine academic data and using this data to identify gaps and provide support to groups that need it.

The school district is ensuring that all stakeholders have access and ability to complete training Cultural Proficiency Training.

Suburban Middle School Equity Action Plan: We need to develop a school wide approach and an ongoing professional development plan that engages all stakeholders meeting the social emotional wellness of each cultural group in our building.

Suburban Elementary #3 Equity Action Plan: Create a professional library of books on Cultural Proficiency and Culturally Responsive Teaching.

Suburban School District Equity Action Plan: Cultural Proficiency Professional Development for all teachers, paraprofessionals, security guards, clerical, deans and guidance counselors.

Suburban Elementary #2 Equity Walk Report: Improving the current awareness of staff through professional development during faculty and grade level meetings

Suburban High School Equity Action Plan: Developing a long-term ongoing professional development plan that builds capacity to provide tools to enact change that fosters an inclusive instructional environment.

Suburban Elementary School #1: Equity Action Plan Provide the support and resources necessary to continue training and the increase the participation of more stakeholders.

There is evidence of the district's long term professional development program in the Equity Plans and Equity Walk reports. This is additional evidence of the district Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge (Essential Element). It is also indicative of Guiding Principle #3 which centers on the importance of teaching about diversity and diversity within cultural to staff members (Lindsey et al., 2009).

***Theme: The district is working to implement a community centric approach to communication with families that meets the needs of community members from diverse backgrounds.***

School buildings are working to ensure that families are able access information and assistance in their preferred language.

Suburban High School Equity Action Plan: Every office will be prepared to communicate on different languages through the use of translation software such as Propio and Xerox Gateway.

Suburban Elementary School #1 Equity Action Plan: Main office will have signs in multiple languages. Communication home such as letters and supplies lists will be translated into preferred home language.

Suburban Elementary #2 Equity Action Plan: Preferred home language list will be shared to ensure teachers know what language to translate letters into.

Suburban Elementary School #4 Equity Action Plan: Teacher will use Talking Point App to ensure text message home are translated into preferred home language.

The main offices in buildings are working to create welcoming and affirming environments where parents and community members feel supported and safe asking questions.

Suburban Elementary School #1 Equity Walk Report: The personnel at the entrance of the school are warm and welcoming. The security guard was friendly, open, and approachable while still doing his job. The clerk was pleasant and asked what she could do for visitors.

Suburban Middle School Equity Walk Report: The school employs office staff who are friendly to visitors, provide needed information easily, and answer the phone in a way that makes the caller glad she/he has called.

Suburban Elementary School #3 Equity Walk Report: There are welcome signs throughout the school, including the main entrance, school hallways, classroom doors. The welcome signs are for visitors, parents, and students alike

Suburban Elementary #5 Equity Walk Report: The school has a strong Parent Involvement presence who actively engages in ensuring entrance bulletin boards are informative and welcoming to visitors

Suburban High School Equity Walk Report: School information is clearly written outside the office and available for parents and visitors explaining the school philosophy, programs, and how a person can be involved

Schools are working to engage parents and the community to ensure that as valued stakeholders their voices are heard.

Suburban High School Equity Action Plan: The Parent Equity Team will meet as a liaison between community and school to discuss issues of equity and social justice. They will plan events and activities to create community partnerships

Suburban Elementary School #2 Equity Action Plan: The various stakeholders (staff, students and community members) will have a voice in determining the activities, lessons, and school-wide events in order to celebrate the cultural diversity

Suburban School District Equity Action Plan: The district will create a District Cultural Proficiency Task Force to raise awareness in the community on issues of equity and social justice.

Suburban High School Equity Walk Report: The principal has developed partnerships with local community colleges and universities to create courses that offer students opportunities to earn college credit while still in high school.



Suburban Elementary #3 Equity Action Plan: We need to ensure the community has opportunities to gain experience about the school culture and climate and have input in its creation.

Suburban Elementary #1 Equity Action Plan: The various stakeholders (staff, students and community members) will have a voice in determining the activities, lessons, and school-wide events in order to celebrate the cultural diversity

Suburban Middle School Equity Action Plan: Creating community partnerships to highlight community diversity in school events

All the changes being made are to create welcoming and affirming environments for the school community are examples of Guiding Principle #7 which is: The Family as defined by each culture is the primary system of support in the education of children (Lindsey et al., 2009). In the school district administrators are shifting to community centric approach to community engagement through the inclusion of different stakeholders' groups and creation of parent and community partnerships.

Overall, the findings show that across the school district and from the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and an outside consultant (the Equity Walk Reports were written by an outside consultant) the school district is making gains in implementing the Cultural Proficiency Framework. There is also evidence from multiple data points of barriers like resistance to change and lack of diverse representation within the staff.

## CHAPTER 5

This study was a qualitative case study of a school district's implementation of the Cultural Proficiency Framework. The study was conducted in a suburban school district in Suffolk County, NY. The school district has a homogenous, mostly white teaching staff and a diverse student population. They have working on Cultural Proficiency Implementation for 6 years and have a long-term professional development plan and specific action plans for each building to guide the work of the Cultural Proficiency Implementation.

The study was centered around three research questions:

1. How do the administrators of the suburban school district apply the essential elements of Cultural Proficiency to their leadership practices and building cultures?
2. How have the teachers, who have completed Cultural Proficiency training, apply the essential elements and guiding principles to their classroom culture and instructional practices?
3. How do the district's levels of culture (artifacts, espoused beliefs and values and underlying assumptions) reflect the essential elements and guiding principles of Cultural Proficiency?

The researcher collected data from administrators and teachers through individual interviews with 4 administrators and 13 teachers. The researcher also analyzed the district's Equity Plans and Equity Walk Reports.

## **Implication of Findings**

The findings of this case study indicate practices that promote Cultural Proficiency and obstacles that impede the implementation of a Cultural Proficiency Framework. The researcher was able to ascertain three primary conclusions: a) School stakeholders must work together to create a welcoming and affirming environments for all students b) School artifacts and policies are easier to change than values and behaviors, and c) There are systems of oppression present within the educational system that impede the implementation of the Cultural Proficiency Framework. In this chapter the researcher will discuss these three primary conclusions and their connections to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. This chapter will also discuss the relationship between this research and prior research, the limitations of the study and recommendations for future practice and research.

## **Conclusions**

### ***All Stakeholder Groups Must Work Together To Create A Welcoming And Affirming Environments For All Students***

Cultural Proficiency is a model for shifting the culture of a school. There is no specific checklist provided for school systems. Instead tools like the Essential Elements and Guiding principles provide guidance and support (Lindsey et al., 2009). To achieve success stakeholders must work together. In this study, data was triangulated through the uses of multiple interviews from both administrators and teachers in the school district. Both administrators and teachers spoke of changes that have been made to school buildings and classrooms to create a welcoming and affirming environments for diverse cultural groups. Both groups spoke of changes to bulletin boards and curriculum to

ensure that students see themselves and are connected to the school and the learning. Administrators referenced the actions of teachers within their classrooms and teachers described the support of their administrators. Both groups identified examples of changes and additions that worked to ensure that all cultures are respected, and students feel safe within the school environment. The triangulation of data within the transcripts of both groups shows a collaborative model where teachers and administrators are working together to create a Cultural Proficient School Environment.

This conclusion shows growth within the Cultural Proficiency Continuum. Working together as collaborative stakeholders is proactive and focuses on transforming for equity. Administrators and teachers working together towards Cultural Proficiency aligns with the right side of the Cultural Proficiency Continuum. The right side of the Cultural Proficiency Continuum focus on finding ways in which school underserve students (Lindsey et al., 2009). The changes in school practices, curriculum and school environment align with Cultural Competence. Cultural Competence is defined as policies and practices being inclusive of cultures that are different from our own (Lindsey et al., 2009). This is clear through the examples of updated books and resources and changes to school environment and teaching methodology to ensure that students from diverse cultures see themselves in and are connected to the school environment and curriculum.

The interview transcripts did not show evidence of collaboration with the school board, parent groups, community groups and student groups. A Guiding Principle of Cultural Proficiency is the role of the family as the primary system of support for students in an educational system (Lindsey et al., 2009). The changes being made are within the school buildings between teachers and administrators. The Cultural

Proficiency Framework describes a different definitions of parent involvement. In a traditional school environment, it is the responsibility of the parent to participate and volunteer in the school environment. In a Culturally proficient school environment parents and community members are integral part of the school environment (Lindsey et al., 2009). The lack of parental and community stakeholders involved in the decisions making aligns with Cultural Pre- Competence. In the Cultural Pre-Competence step of the continuum a school system is making positive steps but also falters and can possibly regress (Lindsey et al., 2009).

### ***Artifacts Are Easier To Change Than Values And Behaviors***

Throughout the data there is evidence of changes in artifacts. For this study the research used Schien's definition of artifacts. Artifacts are visible structures and observed behaviors (Schein, 2017). Schools throughout the district have made changes to school artifacts like bulletin boards and curriculum materials. These are visible structures present in the hallways and classrooms. Changes made focused and connecting to student cultures through diverse displays and the additions of diverse books. Throughout the Equity Walk reports there was cited evidence of bulletin boards representing diverse cultures and displaying student work. There was also cited evidence of diverse books and curriculums being used in Social Studies and English classes. There have been changes to observable behaviors in both teachers and administrators. Both groups have taken steps to learn about different cultural groups and diverse curriculum materials. Another major change in observable behavior is the translating materials to the language spoken at home. Throughout the transcripts and Equity Walk reports many of the changes identified are easily seen and observable.

Administrators identified changes in discipline procedures and the implementation of restorative practices instead of punitive punishments. These changes have made at the leadership level. Administrators noted that they were changes their own behaviors and did not identify examples of teachers implementing restorative practices or participating in Restorative Justice professional development. Changes made by leadership in a vacuum will be perceived by other stakeholders has only what the leader wants. In order to shift the values of the system joint action must be taken (Schein, 2017). Shifting a mindset requires that all stakeholders believe it is a valid and necessary change.

Both administrators and teachers identified changes being made to instructional practices. There was evidence in both administrator and teacher transcripts of shifts to project-based learning and lessons that center on getting to know students. These shifts represent the incorporation of Culturally Responsive Teaching. These shifts in instruction are designed to create social interactions between students and teachers that demonstrate connectedness. Fluid student teacher relationships and a community of connectedness within classroom are tenets of Culturally Relevant Teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culture is at the center of all parts in an educational system (Gay, 2010). Instructional shifts towards lessons that provide opportunities for teachers and students to learn about each other and connect ensure that culture is at the center of instructional decision making (Gay, 2010). Making changes to incorporate Culturally Responsive Teaching is a positive step towards Cultural Proficiency (Lindsey et al., 2009).

To truly implement Culturally Responsive Teaching an educator must center their teaching around three broad propositions: a) conceptions of self and others that illustrate

the belief that all students were capable of academic success, b) create social relations in the classroom that are focused on creating a community of learners, and c) conceptions of knowledge that share an understanding knowledge is static and must be viewed critically (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In this case study the research saw evidence of teachers building community and connection in their classrooms but did not see evidence of instructional practices that illustrate that knowledge is static and provided opportunities for knowledge to be viewed critically. In the Equity Walk reports there was evidence of teacher centered instruction and lack of student collaboration.

The changes in artifacts and observable behaviors are aligned with Cultural Competence on the Cultural Proficiency but the views on instruction and discipline identified in the transcripts are aligned with Cultural Competence. It is important to note that the points in the Cultural Proficiency Continuum represent a range of behaviors and values. No organization or individual occupy solely one point in the continuum (Lindsey et al., 2009).

***There Are Systems of Oppression Present Within the Educational System That Impede The Implementation Of The Cultural Proficiency Framework***

The lack of diversity among the teaching staff is a barrier in teacher and student connection. Both administrators and teachers cited this as a barrier to the implementation of Cultural Proficiency. There was also concern among both administrators and teachers that many students find it difficult to find an adult in the school district that can truly empathize and connect due to the lack of diversity on the staff. Both groups stated the need to prioritize hiring a diverse staff to provide role models for the students within the educational setting.

Administrators stated that teacher resistance to change is a system of oppression within the school district. Cultural Proficiency is a change in mindset in the way differences are viewed (Lindsey et al., 2009). There are still many teachers who are struggling to connect with diverse student and make the necessary changes. Administrator identified that although there are many staff members actively involved in the work, they have reached the point where they are struggling to get more on board. Without the support of the entire staff, it will be difficult to shift the school culture.

This conclusion is connected to Cultural Blindness on the Cultural Proficiency Continuum. Cultural Blindness is on the left side of the continuum. Cultural Blindness occurs when people believe they are acting equitable but are in reality are viewing cultural differences as a deficiency (Lindsey et al., 2009).

### **Relationship to Prior Research**

Existing literature describes the characteristics and skills necessary to be culturally proficient educators. A characteristic of a culturally proficient educator is the ability to adapt to the cultural backgrounds of the students. Teachers need to use both the academic curriculum and cultural resources to ensure student learning (Guiberson, 2009). A theme present in this study is adapting to diversity. Teachers and administrators stated many examples of changes that were made to curriculum and school environment to include the cultural backgrounds of the student population. Both this study and current literature emphasize the importance of educators learning about the cultures of their students. Culturally proficient educators need knowledge of diverse cultures and how they differ from the dominant culture to provide an inclusive learning environment for diverse students (Landa, 2011). Culturally proficient teachers take responsibility for



learning about their students' cultures and the community in order to use this to drive instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Participants all discussed the work they are doing to learn about the cultures present within the school community.

Culturally Responsive Teaching uses cultural knowledge to make lessons and curriculums more relevant and effective for students (Gay, 2010). Teachers in the study shared lessons and experiences where they use the culture of their students to drive instruction. Current research shows that Culturally Responsive Teaching has a positive impact on academic outcomes by using methods that connect with students' real lives and interests (Byrd, 2016). It is recommended that teachers get to know their students and encourage an appreciation to diversity within their classroom (Byrd, 2016). Both teachers and administrators in the study shared experiences and examples of taking time to get to know their students on a more personal level. A major theme in this study was the prevalence of valuing diversity in the school district. This was present in the interview transcripts, equity plans and equity reports.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of this study is that it only looks at the experience of one suburban school district. Exploring multiple suburban school districts with diverse students and a homogeneous teacher population may lead to more comprehensive data. The results of this study cannot be transferred to larger populations due to its limited sample size (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This case study lacks transferability because it is limited to the specific experiences of the participants within the single case selected. A strategy to improve the transferability would be to include another decentralized school system as another case in the study. A researcher will include more than one case or multiple cases to

increase the generalizability of the study (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). In case studies the researcher is looks to generalize the findings to a broader theory (Yin, 2009). Adding more cases allows the researcher to test the theory in more than case and replicate the results (Yin, 2009)

Another limitation is the bias of the researcher. Researchers bring their own background and identity in their research (Maxwell, 2013). In this study the researcher lives and works within the school district. The researcher is involved in the implementation of Cultural Proficiency within the school district and has participated in the Cultural Proficiency training provided by the school district. The researcher has preexisting relationships with teachers and administrators interviewed in this study. The researcher's knowledge of the school district and bias could have had an impact on the themes and conclusions.

A third limitation of this study is the participants of the study. For this study the researcher asked for voluntary participation from the pool of teachers and administrators that had completed the Cultural Proficiency Training. The teachers and administrators who volunteered are leaders in the work within the district. They could have their own biases reading the effectiveness of the changes and programs they have implemented.

### **Recommendations for Future Practice**

#### ***Include Parents, Board Members And Students Throughout The Process***

#### ***Implementing Cultural Proficiency***

This recommendation is to ensure that all stakeholders are part of the process. A Guiding Principle of Cultral Proficiency is the family is the primary system of support for students. Implementing Cultural Proficiency needs to be about being inclusive of the

community. Parents and students should have input to the changes and shifts being made. To include all stakeholders school leaders must prioritize a community centric approach to community engagement. Parent involvement should be at the center of decision making not in the form of volunteerism for school events. When all stakeholders are a part of the process changes can be made that are inclusive of all cultures and backgrounds present within the community. School districts need to create systems for collecting the thoughts and views of the community and for allowing community members to be active participants in the process. This can be done through surveys, town hall meetings and creation of community task force groups. School districts being active and communicative about wanting community participation will encourage a stronger school community relationship. The communication of these events needs to be pushed through various channels and translation services need to be offered to ensure access for all community members.

***Educators Need To Be Given Time And Tools To Identify Their Biases And How They Impact Their Relationships With Students And Community Members***

School districts but prioritize time to allow educators to spend time examining their own biases. This needs to be more than a professional development workshops. Time in Professional Learning Communities or Collegial Circles needs to be devoted to this work. Educators need to be given information on the impact of implicit biases and they need time to reflect and process the information.

Cultural Proficiency professional development needs to be paired with professional development on growth mindset and culturally responsive teaching (Spiess & Cooper,

2020). Equal attention needs to be spent on all three areas. These three areas together give educators the tools necessary to make changes within their own behaviors and values.

***School Districts Need To Spend Time Evaluating Policy To Ensure Opportunity And Access For All Cultural Groups***

School leaders need to focus on school policy and the impact policies have on individual cultural groups. Policy items like school calendars, academic reporting and codes of conduct are often designed with the dominant culture in mind. These policies can have harmful impacts on marginalized groups present within the school community. School leaders need to collect data and examine the data through the lens of Cultural Proficiency. School leaders need to ask how policies further benefit the dominant cultural group and harm marginalized populations. School leaders also need to use the data to create and change policies to insure equity and inclusivity.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of the study indicate several areas of need for future research that would provide a better understanding of the impact of the Cultural Proficiency Framework on a school district. Further studies could include exploring the changes in teacher/student relationships or the changes in community engagement and parent involvement after implementing the Cultural Proficiency Framework. The purpose of the Cultural Proficiency Framework is to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all stakeholders. Research needs to be conducted on whether changes being made are having an impact on relationships with students and parents. This research needs to be conducted through the lens of students and parents in communities implementing Cultural Proficiency. Further research can obtain information directly from parents and

students on the impact of the Cultural Proficiency Framework on their relationship with school and school staff.

Further research is needed to explore the impact of Cultural Proficiency in various school systems. A larger sample size will include perspectives from various school districts to expand on the research in this study. Adding more cases allows the researcher to test the theory in more than case and replicate the results (Yin, 2009). This replication logic adds to the external validity and generalization of the findings in a case study (Yin, 2009). The inclusion of different size and types of school district will also add needed contextual ions to study of Cultural Proficiency.

### **Conclusion**

This study is connected to prior research and current educational trends with the field of Educational Equity, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and the Implementation of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives in school districts. As the state of New York looks to implement the New York State Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education Framework schools will be looking for guidance and professional development. The Cultural Proficiency Framework creates a coomon language and sets goals and expectations for school districts.

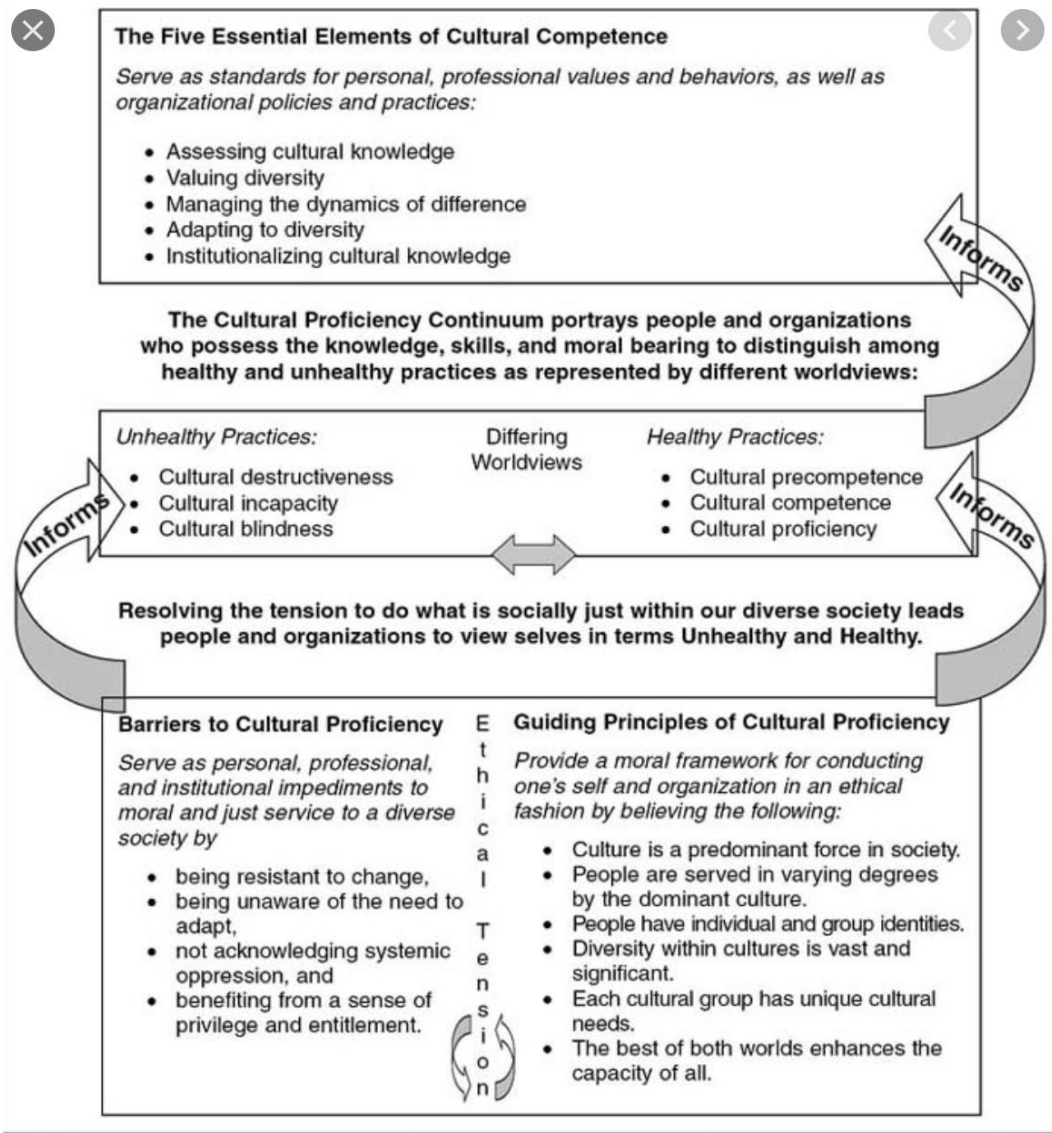
The findings in this study shows that long term professional development did lead to changes in school culture and environment. The changes that were made focused mostly on artifacts that can be seen. Changes were made to curriculum, celebrations and the physical environment of the school buildings and classrooms. Some changes were noted in the approaches to discipline and instructional delivery, but these were more limited changes that still required more buy I from staff members. The findings also show

that even after 6 years of the Cultural Proficiency initiative there is still barriers impacting changes to values and beliefs. The research found barriers in the form of staff resistance and school policies. Overall implementing the Cultural Proficiency framework is an avenue for initiating change within a school district. The changes required in implementing Cultural Proficiency will provide a welcoming and affirming environments for all students.

### **Epilogue**

The researcher is passionate about creating inclusive and affirming educational environments for students of all backgrounds. From this study, the researcher learned the importance of consistency in professional development and the inclusion of all stakeholders when initiating change within a school district. The researcher found many positives to share with other districts. The researcher also was able to reflect on the barriers and will continue to work to create welcoming and affirming environments for students.

## APPENDIX A CULTURAL PROFICIENCY FRAMEWORK



## APPENDIX B LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT ADMINISTRATORS



Topic of Research Project: Cultural Proficiency Training

Principal Investigator: Krystle Hernandez

You are invited to participate in a study on Cultural Proficiency Training in Public Schools conducted by Krystle Hernandez, doctoral student at St. John's University. As part of this study, I am interviewing administrators about their experience implementing the Cultural Proficiency Framework into their school buildings.

If you agree to participate in the interview, you will be asked to participate in one interview that will take place \_\_\_\_\_. The interview will consist of a series of short, open-ended questions and should take approximately 45-60 minutes. During each interview, I will be asking you questions about the Cultural Proficiency Training you received and your experience implementing Cultural Proficiency into your school buildings. The focus group will be conducted virtually using Zoom. It will be video recorded on the computer and audio recorded using a device.

There are no perceived risks associated with your participation beyond those of everyday life. While there is no direct benefit for your participation in the study, it is reasonable to expect that a result of your participation will provide school districts with information about the Cultural Proficiency Training. Your participation in this interview is voluntary, if you prefer not to answer a question, or if you want to end the interview for any reason – just let me know.

Your identity as a participant will remain confidential. Your name or the name of your school will not be included in any forms, transcription, data analysis, or summary reports; pseudonyms will be used. This consent form is the only document identifying you as a participant; it will be stored securely in the office of the Principal Investigator available only to the Principal Investigator. Data collected will be destroyed at the end of the legally prescribed time frame, which is three years. If you are interested in securing a copy of the results, you may contact the Principal Investigator. Aggregated results may be published in academic venues to inform educational researchers and practitioners.

If you have questions about the purpose of this investigation, you may contact the Principal Investigator Krystle Hernandez, 631-455-3887 or [khernandaz10@stjohns.edu](mailto:khernandaz10@stjohns.edu). If you have questions concerning your rights as a human participant, you may contact the University's Human Subjects Review Board at St. John's University, specifically Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, 718.990.1955, or [digiuser@stjohns.edu](mailto:digiuser@stjohns.edu).



Your signature acknowledges receipt of a copy of the consent form as well as your willingness to participate.

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Printed Name of Participant

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Signature of Participant

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Date

Krystle Hernandez  
Principal Investigator

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Signature of Investigator

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Date

## APPENDIX C LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT TEACHERS



Letter of Consent

Topic of Research Project: Cultural Proficiency Training

Principal Investigator: Krystle Hernandez

I am a doctoral student at St. John's University. I am doing research on Cultural Proficiency implementation in public schools. As part of this study, I am conducting interviews with teachers that have received Cultural Proficiency Training to learn about their experience during the training and their ways in which they have implemented Cultural Proficiency into their classrooms.

If you agree to participate in the interview, you will be asked to participate in one session that will take place \_\_\_\_\_ you received and the implementation of the Cultural Proficiency Framework. The interview should take approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be conducted virtually using Zoom. It will be video recorded on the computer and audio recorded using a device.

There are no perceived risks associated with your participation beyond those of everyday life. While there is no direct benefit for your participation in the study, your participation will provide school districts with information about to guide them in the implementation of Cultural Proficiency Training in their school district.

Your identity as a participant will remain confidential. Your name or the name of the school district will not be included in any forms, transcription, data analysis, or summary reports; pseudonyms will be used. All information shared during the session will kept confidential. The information collected during the interview will only be used to inform the research in this study. If you are interested in securing a copy of the transcript, you may contact me after the session.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate prefer to not answer a question during the session, you can let me know at any time during the session.

If you have questions about the purpose of this investigation, you may contact the Principal Investigator Krystle Hernandez, 631-455-3887 or khernandaz10@stjohns.edu. If you have questions concerning your rights as a human participant, you may contact the University's Human Subjects Review Board at St. John's University, specifically Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, 718.990.1955, or [digiuser@stjohns.edu](mailto:digiuser@stjohns.edu).

Your signature acknowledges receipt of a copy of the consent form as well as your willingness to participate.

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Printed Name of Participant

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Signature of Participant

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Date

Krystle Hernandez

Principal Investigator

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Signature of Investigator

---

Date

## **APPENDIX D SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS FOR ADMINISTRATORS**

1. Tell me your name and your position at North Babylon Schools
2. How has Cultural Proficiency training helped you to engage effectively with students from different cultural backgrounds than yourself?
3. How has Cultural Proficiency training helped the school meet the needs of the diverse student body?
4. How would you define Cultural Proficiency?
5. How would you describe the culture in your school?
  - a. Describe interaction among staff
  - b. Describe interactions among students
  - c. Describe interactions between the school community and the parents
6. How have you applied the essential elements of the Cultural Proficiency Framework into your building culture?
7. How do you as a leader assess the culture in your building?
8. What is your role in maintaining and/or changing the culture in your school?
9. How have you articulated a Culturally Proficient vision for your school?
10. Have you provided and/or encouraged Cultural Proficiency training to your staff?

Please state any examples
11. Can you identify examples of school initiatives or programs that have been implemented to illustrate the value of diversity and/or promote inclusivity in your building?
- 12.** Have had to change or modify any school policies or practices in order to align to the Cultural Proficiency Framework?

## **APPENDIX E SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS FOR TEACHERS**

1. How would you describe the diversity among the students in your school building?
2. How would you describe the diversity among the staff in your school building?
3. How has Cultural Proficiency training helped you to engage effectively with students from different cultural backgrounds than yourself?
4. How will Cultural Proficiency training help the school meet the needs of the diverse student body?
5. How do you encourage students discovering and sharing their cultural identities within your classroom and school building?
6. How do you initiate students' learning about each other's cultures in your classroom?
7. How have you adapted your classroom instruction and/or practices to meet the needs of your students after attending Cultural Proficiency Training?
8. How do your building principals promote Cultural Proficiency in your buildings?
9. A major tenet of Cultural Proficiency is a welcoming and affirming environment for students and parents. How does your school building accomplish this?
10. How are our current curriculums and school programs inclusive and representative of our diverse student body? Please give examples
11. What are some of the biggest challenges your school building is facing implementing Cultural Proficiency? How about the challenges faced by the district as a whole?

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