My Ambitionz Az a 'Rida': Leading for Equity & Social Justice in the Atlanta Public Schools

My Ambitionz Az a 'Rida': Leading for Equity & Social Justice in the Atlanta Public Schools

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)
Capstone

Submitted by

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Dedication page

For my mother, Alfreda Stokes-Dunson, who modeled for me the importance of education, encourages me to speak my mind, and who is my constant ‘ride or die’. For my dad, Edgar L. Harris who taught me to accept people as they are, to be reflective of my own actions and have the passion to live out my convictions. To my village, too many to name and who are both her with me in presence and in spirit, who inspire me to reach higher, be an example of what is possible, and for their love.

For my husband, Demond D. Jones, who taught me the true power of love and forgiveness, and who challenges me to be the best version of myself that I can possibly be. And for my children, Timothy, Sayer and Enoca Jones, who taught me what compassion and unconditional love looks like, and who are my biggest cheerleaders, may you continue to lean into your purpose and live in a way that very existence is the revolution.

This is also in memory of my beloved stepmother, Cynthia Harris, who is looking down on me from heaven, and who taught me the value of a village in raising a child, I love you!

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For my support system of Assistant & Associate Superintendents, Administrative Managers, #APSTeamEquity and my communications colleagues. I consider myself incredibly blessed to have the privilege to work with such an excellent group of talented, equity-driven and passionate colleagues. Overall, I have become a stronger executive leader because of the time, trust and runway that this diverse group of leaders afforded to me. To my encouraging and supportive husband, Demond and to my children Timothy, Sayer and Enoca who all pitched in to make meals, offer words of encouragement and who gladly made sacrifices along the way.

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Abstract

The Atlanta Public Schools is among the 100 largest school districts in the country. Its 51,600 students attend 87 schools spread throughout the city: 40 elementary schools, 9 middle, 11 high schools, 2 multi-grade alternative schools, and 25 charter schools. The student breakdown includes: 75% African American, 15% white, 7% Latino, and .2% Native American. In addition, 3% of the students are English Language Learners.

There are deep-seeded inequities that exist amongst all student groups. A 2014 audit revealed substantial variations across schools in all areas where equity was examined. Most notable were the differences between facilities and funding in the more affluent, predominantly white schools in the north of the district and the poorer, predominantly Black schools in the south. The district has since taken steps to address these inequities. However, inequities continue in teacher quality, academic programming, student achievement, and discipline. As a result, in 2019, the Board of Education passed the district's first equity policy, and the administration developed a five-year strategic plan outlining eleven equity commitments that will guide the district's efforts from 2020-2025.

As a resident, I worked with the Superintendent and senior leaders to support the implementation of the Board's equity policy and district strategic plan. This included supporting the development of the district's first equity office, which will be charged with leading the district's efforts to disrupt the reproduction of racialized outcomes My strategic project entailed developing the plans and structures necessary to build the office, as well as assessing the opportunities and challenges inherent in cultivating the internal conditions necessary for the office to tackle the inequities that exist within the system, uncover their root causes, and address barriers to progress.

This Capstone examines this work and discusses the steps I took to build the organizational capacity needed to implement the district's equity policy and strategic plan in a systemic and sustainable manner. It concludes with recommendations for systems leaders on how to successfully develop an organizational equity change strategy that is coherent and ensures all organizational elements—culture, systems, structures, resources, and stakeholders—are being used to enact a theory of change that is grounded in equity and aligned to a robust vision of excellent and culturally-responsive teaching.

Introduction

External Context

Atlanta is located in the northwest region of Georgia. It is the state capital and home to over 500,000 residents, making it the 37th most populous city in the United States.[1] Atlanta is also the financial, commercial, and transportation hub of the Peach State, with aerospace and telecommunications leading as the city's major industries. It is a thriving cultural hub and is said to be one of two cities in the nation, next to Washington, D.C., where middle-class African Americans are economically performing.[2]

With all that Atlanta has to offer, it also has its share of challenges. Legally sanctioned redlining in the 1930s has created today's residential demographic patterns, with more affluent majority-white communities living in the north above Interstate 20 (I-20) and poorer, majority African American communities living in the south and west of the I-20.[3] Atlanta also leads the nation in income inequality and is home to one of the nation's largest wealth and income gaps.[4]

Inequitable access to education and job training are key factors in creating income disparities within the city. In fact, the unemployment rate for African Americans is approximately five times higher than their white counterparts, and African American incomes are one-third that of white residents.[5] Moreover, only 55% of Black and 69% of Latino

[1] Schott Foundation for Public Education (July 2020). Loving Cities Index: Atlanta, GA. Quincy, MA. Retrieved from https://lovingcities.schottfoundation.org.
[2] The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2019). Changing the Odds: Progress and Promise in Atlanta. Baltimore, MD: Dr. Rubye Sullivan. Retrieved from www.aecf.org.
[3] Schott Foundation for Public Education (July 2020). Loving Cities Index: Atlanta, GA. Quincy, MA. Retrieved from https://lovingcities.schottfoundation.org.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

households earn enough income to live above subsistence, compared to 95% of white households.[6] These economic disparities have had a tremendous impact on schools.

Organizational Context

Atlanta Public Schools is the 92nd largest school district in the nation, and the 6th largest school district in the state of Georgia. It has 51,600 students enrolled in 87 schools spread throughout the city of Atlanta: 40 elementary schools, 9 middle, 11 high schools, 2 multi-grade alternative schools, and 25 charter schools. The student demographic breakdown includes: 75% African American, 15% white, 7% Latino, and 0.2% Native American. In addition, 3% of the students are English Language Learners.

The wealth disparity within the city is mirrored in the school district with white students in Atlanta Public Schools having a median household income of $167,074, compared to $23,803 for African American students. In addition, 77% of APS students live in poverty, compared to 35% of children in the city.[7] This figure is alarming, considering that a child living in poverty within the city of Atlanta has only a 4.5% chance of achieving upward economic mobility.[8]

Despite these challenges, the district has made progress. For example, since 2014, the high school graduation rate for African Americans rose 21 percentage points, while the graduation rate for Latinx students rose by 20 percentage points. Graduation rates for each group now exceed 70% (see Figure 1).[9]

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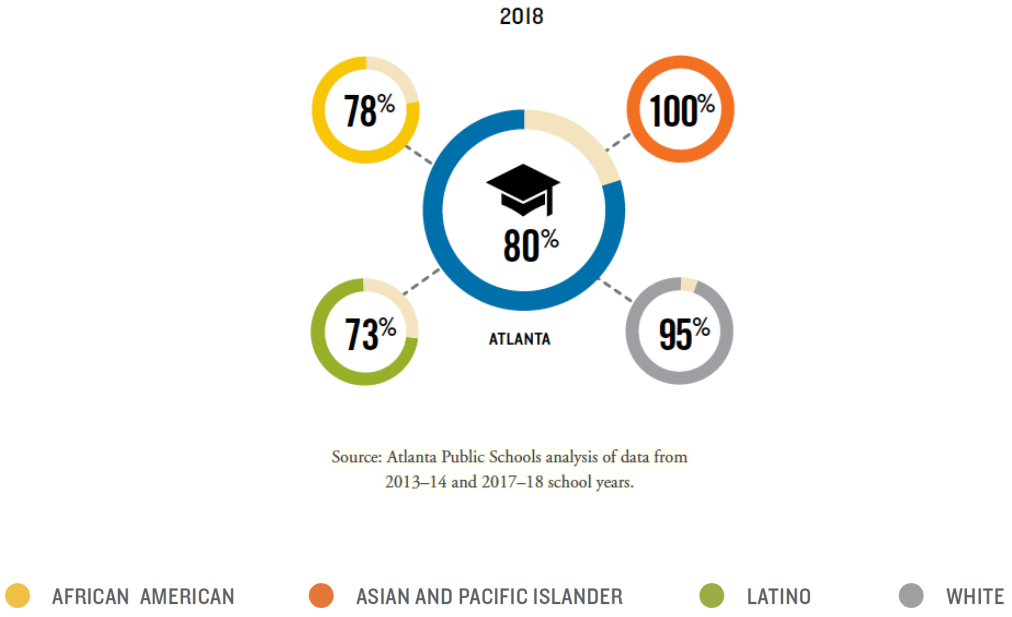
[6] Schott Foundation for Public Education (July 2020). Loving Cities Index: Atlanta, GA. Quincy, MA. Retrieved from https://lovingcities.schottfoundation.org.
[7] Schott Foundation for Public Education (July 2020). Loving Cities Index: Atlanta, GA. Quincy, MA. Retrieved from https://lovingcities.schottfoundation.org.
[8] Atlanta Public Schools, *2014-2020 Superintendent's Report*.
[9] The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2019). Changing the Odds: Progress and Promise in Atlanta. Baltimore, MD: Dr. Rubye Sullivan. Retrieved from www.aecf.org.

Figure 1



Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2019). Changing the Odds: Progress and Promise in Atlanta.

The district has also made several revisions to its code of conduct, which has resulted in a 25-percent decrease in the number of students receiving out-of-school suspensions, with the largest declines within the African American student population. This reduction allowed the district to be removed from the list of districts identified by the state as having disproportionate discipline rates between Black students and other student subgroups in 2017.[10]

During FY 2015, Atlanta Public Schools instituted a Student Success Formula (SSF) to ensure parity funding for schools. For FY 2021, a new poverty weight was added to the SSF to provide additional support for schools experiencing concentrated poverty. This weight allocated an additional $2.9 million to schools based on the level of concentrated poverty within the building.[11] In 2019, the Atlanta Board of Education passed its' first ever equity policy and

[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

district administration crafted a new five-year strategic plan shortly thereafter that outlined several equity commitments, including:

- examining and modifying criteria for gifted programs and advanced coursework to ensure more students of color are represented;
- expanding access to extracurricular activities and opportunities to learn outside of normal classroom settings to historically disadvantaged groups of students;
- ensuring that schools that have higher levels of poverty continue to receive additional funding and access to experienced leaders and teachers; reviewing the school system's disciplinary measures to ensure that fewer students of color are suspended or face other harsh punishments; and
- building a comprehensive approach to addressing the social, emotional and academic development of students, particularly those of color.

Even with these successes, the district continues to have deep-seated inequities and its share of challenges. In 2009, administrators and teachers within the Atlanta Public Schools were accused of cheating on the Georgia state Criterion-Referenced Competency Test. In 2015, several district personnel, including the former superintendent, were found guilty of racketeering in connection with what became known as "the cheating scandal." The cheating scandal and subsequent convictions fractured the community's confidence and trust in the district. District administrators have since worked to rebuild that trust, while also working to strengthen the district's academic programming.

In addition, a 2014 equity audit revealed that there were substantial variations across schools within the district in all areas examined.[12] Inequities continue to exist in the areas of

[12] Atlanta Public Schools, *2014-2020 Superintendent's Report*.

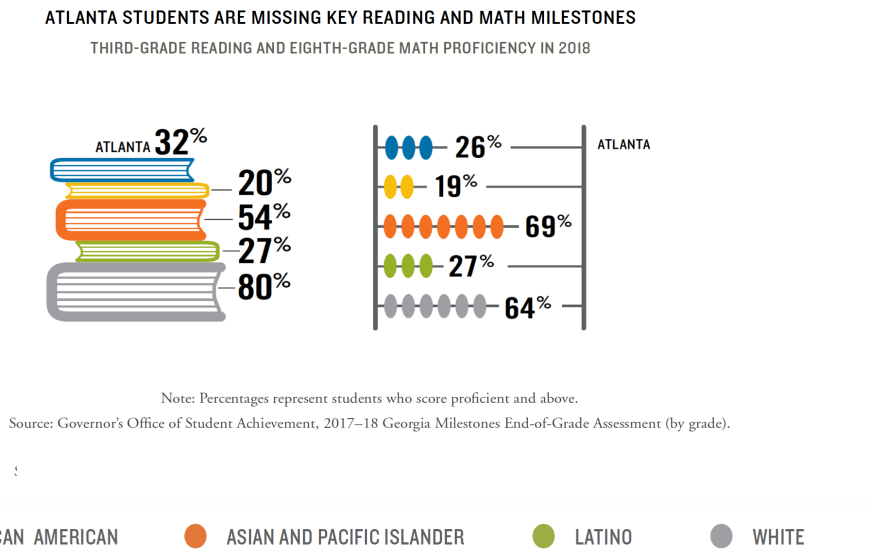
teacher quality, academic programming, student achievement, discipline, and financial resource distribution which is exacerbated by PTA and foundation funds.[13]

Regarding teacher quality, students, in the predominantly white communities of the North spend approximately 26% of their instructional time with inexperienced teachers, while students in the predominately African American communities in the South, spend approximately 34%. In the North, 12% of economically disadvantaged students have inexperienced teachers, compared to 22% of the South.[14]

Academic programming and instruction reflect similar disparities. In the latest Georgia Milestones administration, almost half of the district's students did not meet proficiency in one or more subject areas.[15] The lack of proficiency is spread disproportionately amongst student groups with 80% of white students performing on grade level by third grade, compared to 20% of African American students, 27% of Latinx students and 54% of Asian and Pacific Islander (see Figure 2).

[13] Sullivan, Rubye. *Atlanta Public Schools Equity Audit*, 2014.
[14] Ibid.
[15] The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2019). Changing the Odds: Progress and Promise in Atlanta. Baltimore, MD: Dr. Rubye Sullivan. Retrieved from www.aecf.org.

Figure 2



Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2019). Changing the Odds: Progress and Promise in Atlanta.

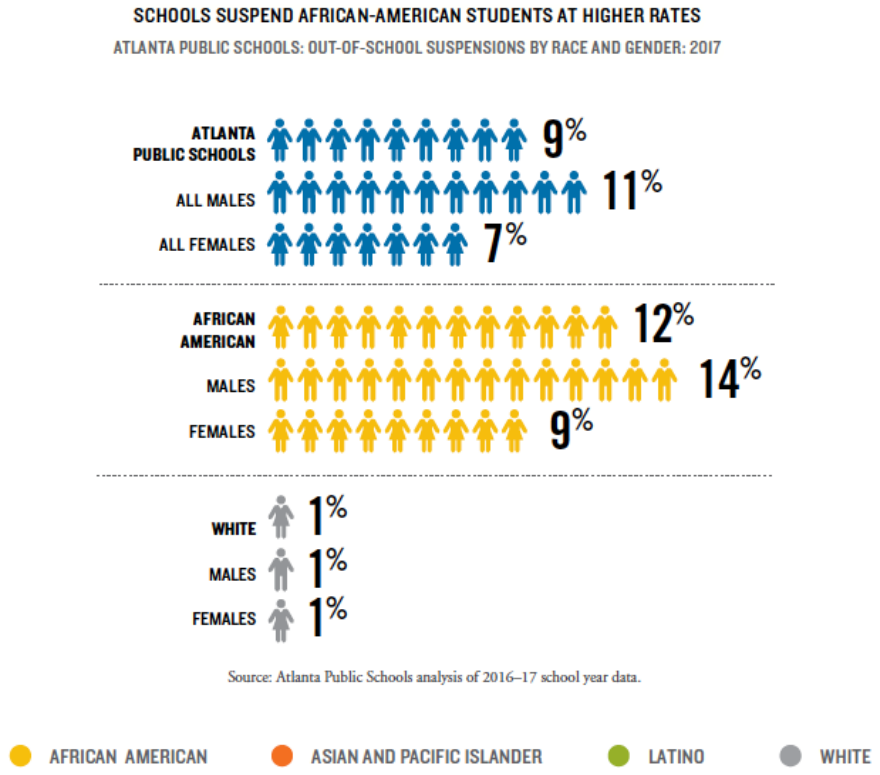
In fact, African American students in APS are four times less likely to be reading, writing and doing math on grade level than their white peers.[16] At the current rate of growth, it will take roughly 128 years to close the gap between white and Black fourth graders within APS.[17] Additionally, white students are enrolled in gifted and talented programs in grades K-12, at a rate six times that of their African American peers and four times that of their Latinx peers. By high school, 75% of white students are enrolled in at least one Advanced Placement class compared to 16% and 25% of African American and Latino students respectively.[18]

APS was also in disproportionate status from 2008-2016 due to the over-suspension of African American students and students with disabilities. Since 2017, the district has remained off disproportionate status. However, African Americans continue to be suspended at rates

[16] Georgia CAN. (December 2019). Pockets of Promise Amidst Widespread Inequities: The State of Atlanta Public Schools in 2019. Atlanta, GA: Latino Association for Parents of Public Schools. Retrieved from https://gacan.org.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Schott Foundation for Public Education (July 2020). Loving Cities Index: Atlanta, GA. Quincy, MA. Retrieved from https://lovingcities.schottfoundation.org.

substantially higher than their white peers, making up 94% of all suspensions during the 2017-2019 school years, despite the fact that they only make up 75% of the total student enrollment. In addition, approximately 20% of African American students have received at least one in-school or out-of-school suspension, compared to 2% of their white peers (see Figure 3).[19]

Figure 3



Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2019). Changing the Odds: Progress and Promise in Atlanta.

COVID-19 has also presented challenges, including learning loss due to the abrupt transition to virtual learning and increased food and housing insecurities. To address some of the inequities posed by the COVID-19 crisis, the district established the "Get Our Kids Connected" Campaign with Comcast to provide digital devices and internet service for students in need. The

[19] Ibid.

campaign raised over $1.7 million. The district also brokered partnerships with the Atlanta Community Food Bank, GOODR, Hands on Atlanta, I'm a Father First, Chris 180 and other organizations in order to launch a massive food distribution effort in response to pandemic.[20]

Furthermore, school segregation remains an issue in Atlanta Public Schools, with the majority of white students attending schools in the north and the majority of African American students attending schools in the south. Moreover, district enrollment practices have led to most of the district's African American students being enrolled in schools where over 75% of the student body is experiencing poverty, while 92% of white students are enrolled in schools with rates far lower.[21] In 1953, three years before *Brown v. Board*, the Atlanta Public Schools had 18,664 students spread across 600 schools.[22] The sheer volume of schools was due to the legal mandate to segregate the races. Sixty-six years after *Brown,* the Atlanta Public Schools is made up of 91 larger schools, serving 51,600 students of all races. However, several of these schools were created to appease white families and keep the races segregated. More than three quarters of schools in the district have a student demographic where one race makes up at approximately 90% of the total student population.[23]

To address these challenges, the Board passed a comprehensive equity policy in April 2019. In it, the board *"*directs the Superintendent to factor equity into all the district does, including, but not limited to practices, procedures, programs, assessments, evaluations, school governance, professional development, resource allocations, sites, facilities, operations, budgets,

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] "Atlanta's Segregated Schools -- in 2004." *Cato Institute*, 3 Apr. 2020, www.cato.org/publications/commentary/atlantas-segregated-schools-2004.
[23] Ibid.

spending, services, contracts, partnerships, and all strategic planning (ABOE Policy BBBB pg. 1)."

District senior leadership worked aggressively during the 2019-2020 academic year to develop a five-year strategic plan aligned to the policy. The 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, entitled *We Are APS: Building on Our Legacy*, articulates a vision for the Atlanta Public Schools to become "a high-performing school district where students love to learn, educators inspire, families engage, and the community trusts the system." The Strategic Plan also sets as its mission to achieve this vision "through a caring culture of equity, trust, and collaboration that will allow every student to graduate ready for college, career, and life" and articulates eleven equity commitments that will guide the district's work with regard to equity. These eleven commitments are:

1. Leverage School Improvement to Advance Equity
2. Ensure Equitable Funding
3. Increase Access to Effective Leaders and Teachers
4. Partner with Families and Communities
5. Support Special Populations
6. Increase Access to Advanced Coursework
7. Address Disproportionate Discipline Practices
8. Integrate Social, Emotional, and Academic Practices
9. Improve Access to High-Quality Instructional Programming and Materials
10. Expand Access to Co-Curricular and Extra-Curricular Activities
11. Ensure Equitable Learning Environments

Implementation of the new strategic plan became the responsibility of the district's new Superintendent Dr. Lisa Herring. In the fall of SY 2019-2020, the Board voted 9-1 not to renew the contract of the then superintendent, Dr. Meria Carstarphen. During the 2020-2021 academic year, while also addressing the educational priorities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Board appointed Dr. Lisa Herring as the district's new superintendent. A core component of her leadership agenda is the institutionalization of the Board's equity policy. The shift in leadership, coupled with the pandemic, presented challenges in leading the district's equity work. Moreover, given the context of the district aforementioned, achieving educational equity will require fundamental changes in how the Atlanta Public Schools operates.

This Capstone examines my efforts to support the Atlanta Public Schools in building its capacity to implement a racial equity change strategy across the district in a systemic and sustained way. Throughout this Capstone, I present research on the systems and structures necessary for implementing a coherent racial equity-focused strategy within a school system. I also introduce the Wheatley and Damau *6 Circle Model* and the Harvard University Public Education Leadership Project's *Note on Racial Equity*. This research illuminated the adaptive and transformative components necessary to shift behaviors and mindsets, as well as practices, programs, and processes toward a racial equity agenda. These frameworks also guided my analysis of the district's readiness to lead a large-scale equity change strategy and my responses to organizational gaps that were uncovered. Mid-way into the Capstone, I describe how I translated this research into tangible work product to guide the district's efforts in building its first Equity Office. Applying Ronald Heifetz's *Adaptive Leadership Framework*, I also analyze the enablers and constraints of building organizational capacity, as well as individual acumen, to put an explicit racial equity change strategy into practice within the Atlanta Public Schools. For

the purposes of this Capstone, a racial equity change strategy is one that is focused on proactively counteracting race-based inequities inside and outside of an organization. Finally, I conclude by describing the ensuing implications for my leadership development, for the Atlanta Public Schools, and for the education sector as a whole.

It should also be noted that during my residency, I transitioned to the role of becoming the first Chief Equity and Social Justice Officer for the Atlanta Public Schools. The transition allowed me to execute and act on the recommendations and data that I gathered as part of my strategic project. Because I had already begun laying the foundation for this work, my transition also allowed the district to move forward expeditiously with launching its new Equity Office, now known as the Center for Equity and Social Justice. The Center for Equity and Social Justice (*CESJ*) is the district's first office dedicated solely to advancing equity in education. The systems and structures that I designed as part of my strategic project will enable The CESJ to examine current policies and practices, work to interrupt and eliminate inequitable practices, and create inclusive and just conditions for all students, in particular ensuring that our most vulnerable and marginalized students receive a quality education, including the necessary social-emotional supports, to be ready for college, career and life.

Review of Knowledge for Action

A racial equity change initiative requires both an adaptive and a transformative approach. This is because racial equity work requires shifts in behavior and mindsets, as well as changes in structures, practices, and processes. Considering this, I realized that rooting my work in the best practices in equity-focused adaptive and transformative change would increase the likelihood of success for Atlanta Public Schools racial equity change initiative. Therefore, I chose to rely on the Wheatley and Dalmau *6 Circle Model* and the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP)

at Harvard University *Note on Racial Equity in School Systems* as the theoretical foundations for my strategic project.

6 Circle Model

According to Wheatley and Dalmau, equity change initiatives are inhibited by the following factors[24]:

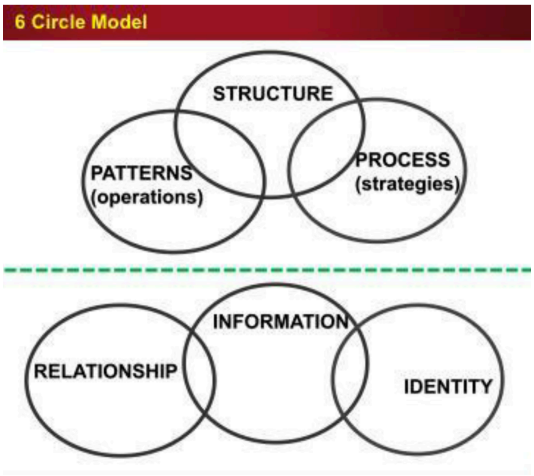
1. Structures
2. Patterns (Operations)
3. Processes (Strategies)
4. Relationships
5. Information
6. Identity

These six components make up their *6 Circle Model*. The *6 Circle Model* situates Structure, Patterns, and Processes above the green line, meaning they are organizational systems that can readily be changed via technical solutions. When driving equity work above the green line common language is developed and plans are modified to align to the values and vision of an organization's policies, structures, and process. Relationships, Information, and Identity are situated below the green line. This means that they are harder to shift and require more adaptive solutions. Below the "Green Line," individual and organizational beliefs and values are situated. These beliefs and values evolve from assumptions, feelings and emotions The also develop from individual roles, ambitions and aspirations, as well as organizational visions and the psychological histories of individuals and organizations.

[24] National Equity Project. (2019). *Leading for Equity: The Art of Navigating and Leading in Complex Systems* (Rep.). Oakland, CA: WWW.NationalEquityProject.Org.

In the past, most equity work centered on the three circles above the green line. However, all six circles are essential for creating organizational success in a racial equity change effort. The circles below the green line allow us to see the critical and interdependent impacts of individual actions (i.e., how bias, conscious and unconscious, impact outcomes at the individual, institutional and structural levels). Therefore, conversations about racial equity change initiatives are inhibited by both what is above and what is below the green line. The challenge for organizations is to create a culture that values the work "below the green line," so that they can begin to identify and implement strategies and infrastructure above the green line to achieve powerful change and results.[25]

Figure 4



Source: National Equity Project (2019). *Leading for Equity: Navigating and Leading in Complex Systems*.

Each element of Wheatley's *6 Circle Model* shows up within an organization in different ways. Below is an articulation of each element and how it manifests within an organization.

According to Wheatley, the structure of a system can be described as how the parts of an organization are organized and situated in relation to one another. "It can include the frameworks

[25] Ibid

and ‘containers’ within which the work of the system is done (pg. 3).” Examples of organizational structures include: Organizational charts and reporting structures, master schedules, meeting schedules, strategic plans. Patterns are described as “recurring results, messages and phenomena, both intended and unintended (pg. 3).” These show up in the organization as employee turnover, student absenteeism, or student achievement data. Processes are “the ways in which things get done within the system (pg. 3).” Processes can include the elements of a strategic plan; or how hiring, evaluation and promotion happen, or the process for decision making within the organization.[26]

Information is crucial for an organization’s successful functioning. Without it, the people within the organization will “make it up” in an effort to keep moving forward. Access to information greatly diminishes the negative narratives that can be created within organizations. Information can look like multiple forms of two-way communication, repeating messages more than once, through multiple modes and languages, allowing opportunity to co-construct understanding and meaning, rather than employing top-down communication approaches. The people within an organization need to have fluid relationships with one another. These relationships should be built on trust, and lead to commitment and powerful work getting done. Relationships can occur between people, programs, departments, and with other organizations. To facilitate this, organizational leaders must set aside intentional time that is dedicated to establishing, growing, and repairing trust. They must also invest in the skills and capacities for honest and productive conversations and model the way by extending trust first. Our identity shows up as we seek meaning in the work that we are doing. It also shows up in our actions because they are driven by our values, beliefs and sense of identity. Therefore, people are

[26] National Equity Project. (2019). *Leading for Equity: The Art of Navigating and Leading in Complex Systems* (Rep.). Oakland, CA: WWW.NationalEquityProject.Org.

motivated to work together in organizations in they find meaning and value in their work, both of which are grounded in their identity. Systems leaders can accelerate meaning and value by fostering repeated opportunities for self-reflection and connecting personal beliefs and values to the mission and vision of the organization. Members of an organization must be reminded frequently of their 'why' for coming to work each day, what's of greatest importance to them in their work, and have ways to stay true to themselves in the midst of competing commitments. This is the adaptive component of any equity change work.[27]

PELP Note on Racial Equity

The Harvard Public Education Leadership Project's *Note on Racial Equity in Schools Systems (*henceforth PELP *Note on Racial Equity)* proposes that in order to increase student achievement, districts must ensure that all of their organizational elements -- culture, systems, structures, resources, and stakeholders -- are being utilized to enact a theory of change that is grounded in racial equity and that is aligned to a strategic vision of excellent teaching that is both robust and culturally responsive.[28] Educators must also use data to illuminate the imperative for racial equity work. They need to ground the data in history and bring it to life through stories, because disparities are not simply "gaps" that educators can close but are instead evidence of systemic racism and oppression at work. Without it, leaders cannot substantiate that inequities exist, or even that things are changing.

The PELP *Note on Racial Equity* is designed to fill the gaps inherent in the PELP Coherence Framework as leaders sought to apply the framework to address matters of racial equity.

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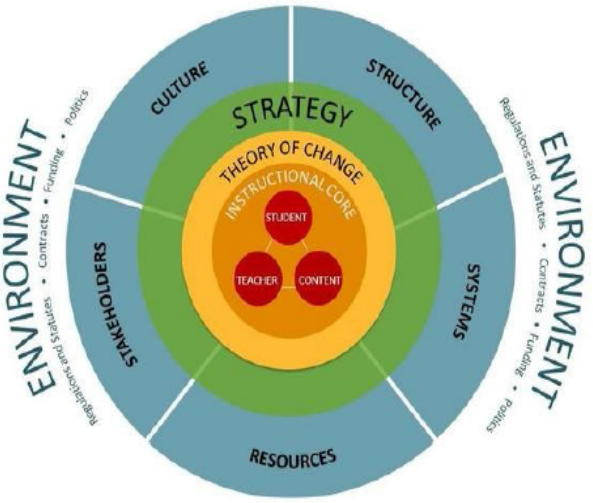
[27] National Equity Project. (2019). *Leading for Equity: The Art of Navigating and Leading in Complex Systems* (Rep.). Oakland, CA: WWW.NationalEquityProject.Org.

[28] Baker-Jones, Tauheedah, Jennifer Cheatham and Erica Jordan Thomas, Note on Racial Equity in School Systems, PEL-096, (Public Education Leadership Project (PELP), published 2020), https://pelp.fas.harvard.edu/files/pelp/files/pel096p2.pdf.

Therefore, in order to understand the PELP *Note on Racial Equity's* relevance to my strategic project, one must develop a firm understanding of the inner workings of the PELP Coherence Framework.

The PELP Coherence Framework was designed to support district leaders in diagnosing the current workings of their organization, articulate an implicit or explicit theory of change, and understand how the theory of change influences and shapes what occurs in the classroom. Applied in conjunction with PELP's *Problem Solving Approach to Designing and Implementing a Strategy to Improve Performance*,[29] the PELP Coherence Framework supports districts in (1) identifying the key elements that support a district-wide improvement strategy, (2) bringing those elements into a coherent relationship and (3) guiding the actions of people throughout the district in the pursuit of high levels of achievement for all students (See Figure 4).[30]

Figure 4



Source: Public Education Leadership Project (PELP), *PEL-010 Note on the PELP Coherence Framework*, revised 2011.

[29] Childress, Stacey and Geoff Marietta, A Problem-Solving Approach to Designing and Implementing a Strategy to Improve Performance, PEL-083, (Public Education Leadership Project (PELP), published 2008 & revised in 2011 & 2017), https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/pelp/files/pel083p2.pdf.
[30] Ibid.

At the center of the *PELP Coherence Framework* is the instructional core, which represents the interdependent relationship between the teachers' knowledge and skill, students' engagement in their own learning, and the level of academic rigor and challenge of content.[31] Surrounding the instructional core is the theory of change. A theory of change is a statement of an organization's beliefs about the causal relationships between focus areas for action and desired outcomes. It is generally written as an *if…then…* statement.[32] Surrounding the theory of change are a set of strategic actions that a district must deliberately undertake to strengthen the instructional core and execute on its theory of change with fidelity. These strategic actions are anchored in five organizational elements: culture, structures, systems, resources, and stakeholders.

Culture is defined in the *Note on the PELP Coherence Framework* as "the norms and behaviors in the organization; in other words, everyone's shared understanding of "how things work around here (pg. 6)." Structures are defined as "how the work of the district gets done (pg. 7)." It is inclusive of the organization of personnel, who is responsible and accountable for results, and who makes or influences decisions. Systems "are the processes and procedures through which work gets done (pg. 8)." Systems and structures are interdependent and can be both formal and informal in nature. Resources include the people, financial, and technological possessions of the district, and stakeholders are the authorizers of the district's work, the people and groups, both inside and outside of the organization, who have a vested interest in the outcomes.[33]

When planning its strategy, a district must include the deliberate actions it will take in each of the aforementioned areas of culture, structures, systems, resources, and stakeholders, in order for

[31] Childress, Stacey, Richard Elmore, Allen S. Grossman, and Caroline King, Note on the PELP Coherence Framework, PEL-010, (Public Education Leadership Project (PELP), published 2007 & revised 2011), https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/pelp/files/pel010p2.pdf.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Childress, Stacey, Richard Elmore, Allen S. Grossman, and Caroline King, Note on the PELP Coherence Framework, PEL-010, (Public Education Leadership Project (PELP), published 2007 & revised 2011), https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/pelp/files/pel010p2.pdf.

its strategy to be sustainable and coherent. Moreover, according to the PELP Coherence Framework, no strategy and change effort is sustainable without careful attention to the external environment with which the organization sits. This is why environment surrounds the strategic elements within the PELP Coherence Framework. The environment includes the federal and state statutes, contracts, funding, and political dynamics that may constrain or influence strategy development and its execution.

PELP *Note on Racial Equity* complements the *Note on the PELP Coherence Framework*[34] by helping district leaders analyze their change initiative and strategies through a racial equity lens. The PELP *Note on Racial Equity* begins with an articulation of key terms and vocabulary, and it defines seven key terms that are relevant to leading racial equity work and critical to establishing shared vocabulary in this regard: *Racism*, *Anti-Racism*, *Equity*, *Racial Equity*, *Power,* and *Equity Lens*. It defines racism as "involving one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices. (pg. 4)." In contrast, anti-racism is defined as, "the act of opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life." The PELP *Note on Racial Equity* asserts that "one can only be an anti-racist if one is supporting anti-racist policies and expressing anti-racist ideas; there is no 'neutral.' (pg.4)" Equity is defined as "each individual receiving what they need to achieve their full potential. (pg. 4)," while racial equity is defined as "the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. (pg. 4)"

According to the PELP *Note on Racial Equity*, a thorough understanding of power is needed in order to move a racial equity agenda. Power is defined as "1) the "ability to do something or

[34] Ibid.

act in a particular way" or 2) "the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events. (pg. 4)." A key component of power is that it can often be wielded in ways that are hard to see, "activated out of public view, by parties or interests who, while influencing community values and manipulating political processes, keep more fundamental issues and resource distributions intentionally out of such public debate. (pg.4)." This is why it is critical that one come to view systems, structures, and behaviors through an equity lens. An equity lens "means taking on an intentional disposition so as to see the invisible structures, policies, and behaviors that sustain unequal outcomes and interrupt the ways of working that serve, implicitly or explicitly, to perpetuate gaps in opportunity for vulnerable communities. (pg. 5)." A racial equity strategy cannot be successful unless leaders within the system develop a racial equity lens (i.e., an equity lens grounded in anti-racism).

In addition to the PELP Coherence Framework, leading for racial equity requires much more than understanding and responding to the external environment. It also entails having a firm understanding of personal identity, local history, and change.[35] The PELP *Note on Racial Equity* maintains that personal identity is critical to leading for racial equity and developing a racial equity strategy because strategy is developed and implemented by people, and people have biases and blind spots. District leaders must recognize how their racial identities, in particular, influence the way they see and make meaning of the world because this has a profound impact on one's understanding of inequality and therefore one's own decision making.[36]

Local history also plays an important role as well when implementing a racial equity strategy. District leaders must "know the history of oppression within their community because

[35] Baker-Jones, Tauheedah, Jennifer Cheatham and Erica Jordan Thomas, Note on Racial Equity in School Systems, PEL-096, (Public Education Leadership Project (PELP), published 2020), https://pelp.fas.harvard.edu/files/pelp/files/pel096p2.pdf.
[36] Ibid.

uncovering a community's history of oppression helps highlight the historic wounds that need healing, wounds that continue to hurt (pg. 5)."[37] Learning the local history should also be inclusive of an understanding of the history of both opportunity and racial justice leadership in their community because this history provides insight into where the greatest need for change exists, and allows one to identify individuals who are allies and guides in the work. Finally, the PELP *Note on Racial Equity* asserts that leading for racial equity means leading change through complexity because change in and of itself is unpredictable. Therefore, when leading a racial equity change strategy, one must employ a probe-sense-respond approach, and practice patience and reflection.[38]

Pivotal to any change strategy is a solid theory of change, and a racial equity change strategy is no different. The caveat with a racial equity change strategy is that, in order for the strategy to take hold and permeate the organization, an organization's theory of change must be grounded in racial equity and make explicit its racial equity stance, outcomes and the levers it will pull to achieve its goals. When determining a focus area for action, a school district should ground itself in a rich, evolving, vision for excellent equitable instruction and articulate this vision in its *if* statement. The levers for change are determined by the context and the results of an analysis of the systemic problems or barriers that stand in the way of achieving the vision. In order to create a theory of action grounded in racial equity, district leaders must also be able to see the system in which they are functioning and determine how the system is reproducing racialized outcomes. To do so, the PELP *Note on Racial Equity* suggests that district leaders conduct a systems analysis, which includes a comprehensive assessment of root causes of the problem.

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[37] Baker-Jones, Tauheedah, Jennifer Cheatham and Erica Jordan Thomas, Note on Racial Equity in School Systems, PEL-096, (Public Education Leadership Project (PELP), published 2020), https://pelp.fas.harvard.edu/files/pelp/files/pel096p2.pdf.
[38] Ibid.

After district leaders have conducted a thorough analysis of the conditions necessary for excellent teaching and learning, and have identified its root causes, the district will be well poised to develop a solid Theory of Change. The PELP *Note on Racial Equity* recommends John Powell's Targeted Universalism Framework as a broad-based approach for doing so. Targeted Universalism is an inclusive approach for leading racial equity-based change efforts because the strategy is inclusive of the needs of both the dominant and the groups who have been marginalized within a system. In the framework, there is a particular focus on the "situatedness of the marginal group," with regard to structures, culture, and geographies to ensure that they too are able to obtain the universal goal.[39] While addressing the needs of more marginalized groups, you also are working to address targeted gaps in services that are manifested in the "racialized other" group, thus widening the circle of concern.[40] Because the approach focuses on all students, while prioritizing the needs of the most marginal, it has a greater chance of decreasing the perceived losses and racialized critique that often accompanies racially explicit equity initiatives. Targeted Universalism also necessitates a level of granular analysis of the systems and structures in place within institutions that enable or hinder all groups from achieving universal goals. This is why it is a befitting complement to the more granular analysis of the system.

When developing strategy, the PELP *Note on Racial Equity* articulates how the six strategic elements of the PELP Coherence Framework should be approached using an equity lens. When analyzing an organization's culture through an equity lens, one must examine who benefits from the norms and standards of the organization and who is excluded. One should also

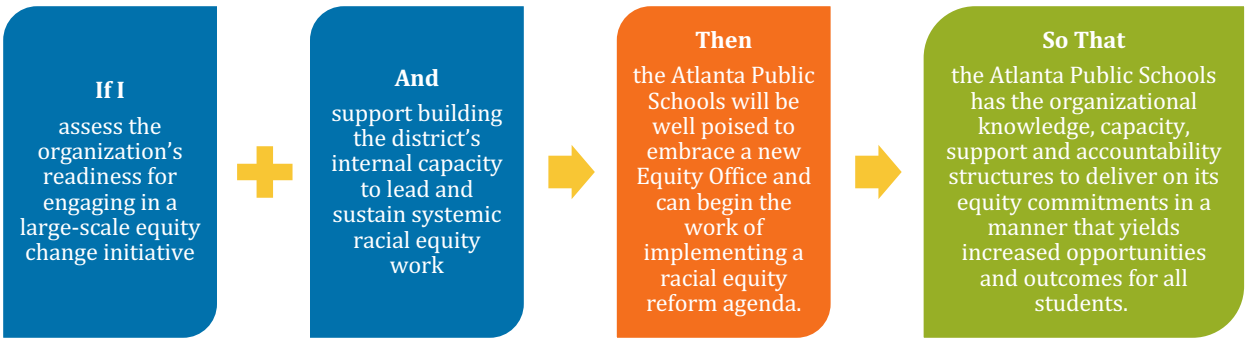
[39] Powell, J. A. (2012). Poverty and race through a belongingness lens. *Policy Matters, 1(5).* St. Paul, MN: Northwest Foundation. 30 pages. (E-Resource)
[40] Ibid.

examine if the organization excludes a white-dominant way of working (i.e., paternalism, individualism, fear of conflict, sense of urgency. etc.). When looking at structures, one should analyze both the formal and informal power dynamics within the organization. Formal power structures are created as a result of organizational charts, job descriptions and positionality within the organization. Informal power structures can be examined by looking at who is, and who is not, involved in decision making, how information gets shared, who has influence and who does not. Systems should be analyzed to determine the extent to which they are culturally responsive to the diverse constituents within the organization.

A racial equity change strategy must center stakeholder engagement as a key lever for change. It also requires that the voices of marginalized communities become centered in the change effort, and that the district critically examine the ways in which these voices have been silenced in the past. When it comes to resources, a district's racial equity strategy must be intentional about allocating the resources based on the changing needs of individual students, organizational goals, and its vision for culturally responsive teaching.[41] All of these strategic elements: culture, systems, structures, stakeholders, and resources work together in tandem to enact the organization's racial equity theory of change, and the district is intentional about working simultaneously across all of these dimensions.[42] The PELP *Note on Racial Equity* further asserts that by implementing a coherent racial equity change strategy that is grounded in an equity-focused mission, district leaders can build high-performing school districts that improve educational outcomes for every student, in every classroom, every day.

[41] Baker-Jones, Tauheedah, Jennifer Cheatham and Erica Jordan Thomas, Note on Racial Equity in School Systems, PEL-096, (Public Education Leadership Project (PELP), published 2020), https://pelp.fas.harvard.edu/files/pelp/files/pel096p2.pdf.
[42] Ibid.

The Wheatley and Dalmau *6 Circle Model* and The *PELP Note on Racial Equity* informed my work with the Atlanta Public Schools and guided the implementation of my Theory of Action. The Theory of Action that drove my efforts within the Atlanta Public Schools was as follows:



To execute on my Theory of Action, I explored how to embed and develop a racial equity culture that aligns with, and ensures the success of, the district's equity goals. More specifically, I was charged with supporting the Atlanta Public Schools in building the capacity to implement the Board's Equity Policy and the district's five-year strategic plan across the district in a systemic and sustainable manner. The end result was the development of the blueprints and collateral for the district's new Equity Office and the creation of tools and a framework to support the district in shifting its culture to one that is equity focused.

Strategic Project Description

My residency entry was plagued by twin pandemics in our nation's history—that of COVID-19 and systemic racism. The former, a more recent occurrence, altered the way we educate our children. The latter has historical roots and has plagued our nation, and our school systems, for hundreds of years. It is infectious, in that it is passed down from generation to

generation and serves as the single most barrier to building effective coalitions across lines of difference. The purpose of my strategic project was to support the Atlanta Public Schools in addressing the centuries-long inequities that have existed within the district since its inception. These inequities were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent uprisings in protest against the systemic oppression and violence against African Americans. The onset of the pandemic and subsequent racial unrest heightened the sense of urgency for my work.

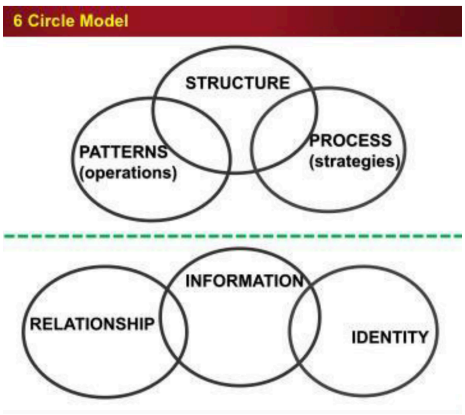
Over the years, the Atlanta Public Schools has taken a number of approaches to address pockets of inequities within the system. However, prior to my arrival, there was no one in the organization solely responsible for leading and driving the work of equity. Given the sense of urgency around this work, from the moment I arrived at the Atlanta Public Schools, I began working to advance racial equity within the district. My work included assessing organizational capacity as well as individual leader acumen to lead a racial equity change strategy within the organization. The assessment results were used to determine the factors that would support or impede the district's ability to put an explicit racial equity agenda and culture into practice within the Atlanta Public Schools. In addition, the results were also used to make recommendations for the systemic elements that would be necessary to embed and develop an equity focused change strategy that aligns to, and supports, the district equity goals.

To support district leadership in the development of these systems, my key responsibilities included developing plans and structures for the implementation of an equity office and team. This included developing a draft organization chart for the new equity office, creating job descriptions for key roles to occupy the new office, and drafting grant proposals that supported the implementation of the new equity office. I also conducted research and developed

an assessment rubric and communications framework to guide the district's effort to implement the strategic plan and equity policy with fidelity.

I began my strategic project by assessing the conditions of the district according to Wheatley and Damau's *6 Circle Model*. The Wheatley and Damau *6 Circle Model* is a framework recommended by the PELP *Note on Racial Equity* for system leaders to use in pursuit of understanding how their system works (See Figure 5).

Figure 5



Source: National Equity Project (2019). *Leading for Equity: Navigating and Leading in Complex Systems*.

Thus, the *6 Circle Model* supported me in assessing both the adaptive and transformative elements required to lead for racial equity within the Atlanta Public Schools.

APS Above & Below the Green Line

To analyze where the district stands regarding the work that must be done above and below the green line in Wheatley and Damau's *6 Circle Model*, I developed a rubric (Appendix A) to support district leaders in assessing the factors that enable or constrain the organization's ability to be equitable and inclusive. The Green Line System & Culture Assessment Rubric was developed in collaboration with my cohort colleague, Crystel Harris, and is based on best practices in creating diverse and inclusive organizations. Before finalizing the rubric, we also

secured feedback from Ebony Bridwell-Mitchell, Kathy Boudett, and Jennifer Cheatham at the Harvard University GSE, Travis Bristol at the University of California, Berkeley GSE, and several distinguished practitioners in the field. The premise of the rubric is that if a district's systems and culture are equitable and inclusive, this will generate positive outcomes for students.

The rubric assesses a district in two domains: Systems and Culture. The Systems Analysis assesses the interplay between the components 'above the green line' (i.e., structures, patterns and processes) and the organization's ability to be reflective through the lens of metrics-driven improvement & transparency. Using the rubric, I assessed district systems in five areas:

1. Equity-Focused Strategic Planning,
2. Racial Diversity Data Systems,
3. Learning-and-Effectiveness Paradigm,
4. Accountability, Measurement, and Evaluation, and
5. Robust & Continuous Training Around DEI.[43]

The Culture Analysis domain assesses the interplay of the elements 'below the green line' (i.e., relationships, qualitative information, and identity). This domain was made up of four indicators that assessed the personal comfort and values of persons within the organization as it relates to the equity work to be done. It also assessed the organization's culture with regard to fairness and inclusion.[44] Figure 6 shows the key elements of the rubric is greater detail.

[43] Roberson, Q. M. (2004). Disentangling the meanings of diversity and inclusion (CAHRS Working Paper #04-05). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies. http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cahrswp/12
[44] Ibid.

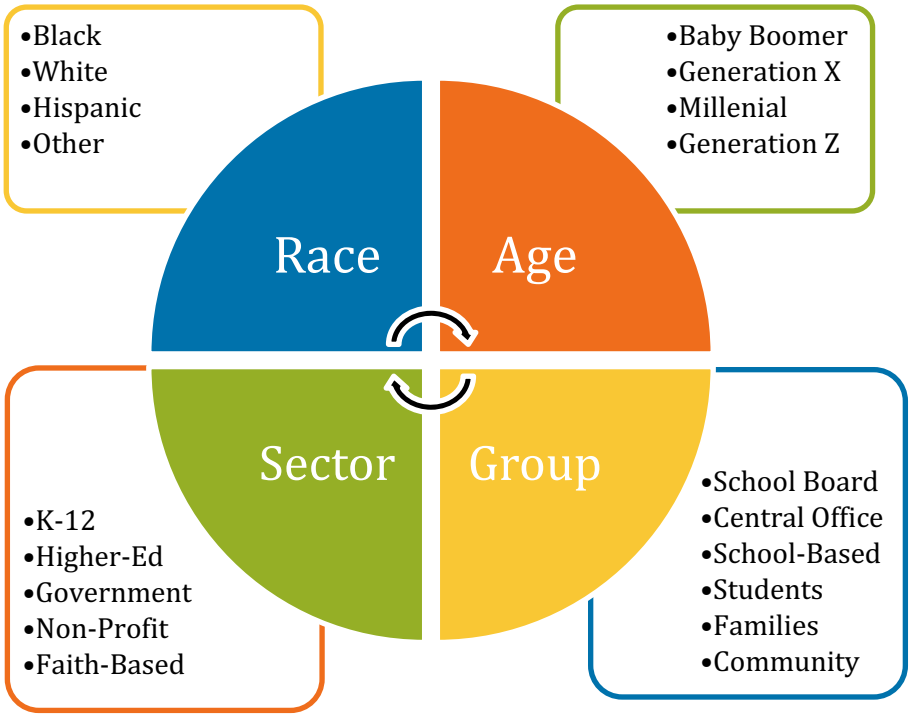
Figure 6

Critical Components	Indicators	
Systems Analysis: Patterns, Structures, Processes		
It is important for education organizations to have clear and effective policies, systems, structures, and procedures that support equity. Practices should be developed with a collaborative of cross-sector community stakeholders to develop a data-informed action plan and implement a continuous review cycles.	1	**Long-Term Equity-Focused Strategic Planning:** This indicator assesses the organization's use of an Equity-Focused Strategic Plan that addresses equity-related gaps in the organization, the processing of stakeholder complaints, addressing data collection and analysis needs, and incorporates equity management skills in performance evaluation. It also calls for a need for an institutionalized equity goals and tracking.
	2	**Racial Diversity Data Systems:** This indicator assesses where an organization is with regard to developing systems that measure its performance toward achieving stated equity goals and objectives by examining how data is used to analyze, plan, and change structures and systems that support equity in targeted areas.
	3	**Learning-and-Effectiveness Paradigm:** This indicator assesses the organization's commitment to learning through seeking and incorporating perspectives from diverse stakeholders. With the organization's Equity Framework, managers should be empowered to develop Equity Learning and Action Plans.
	4	**Accountability, Measurement, and Evaluation:** This indicator assesses the accountability component of a organization's Equity-Focused Strategic Plan, as well as, how success is measured and evaluated.
	5	**Robust & Continuous Training Around DEI:** This indicator assesses organizational training provided for staff and the community regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion and the use of feedback data to inform training content and improvement.
Culture Analysis: Relationships, Information and Identity		
Education organizations should foster a safe and welcoming environment, embracing the diversity of race, ethnicity and religion, gender, and sexual orientations among students and staff.	1	**Personal Comfort:** This indicator assesses the level at which members of the organization are comfortable engaging all stakeholders, regardless of race, and the level of comfortability within the organization with engaging in critical dialogue on topics related to diversity.
	2	**Personal Value:** This indicator assesses the level at which leadership and key members of the organization institutionalize their commitment to equity and leverages the benefits of diversity to enhance organizational learning and growth.
	3	**Organizational Fairness:** This indicator assesses the organization's efforts to build trust and ensure ownership over the organization's vision for equity to ensure that all staff are treated fairly and equitably within the organization.
	4	**Organizational Inclusion:** This indicator assesses the institutionalization of inclusive systems by examining the level at which diverse stakeholder perspectives and approaches are incorporated into organizational processes, and how well the organization builds on the interests, strengths and cultures of diverse stakeholders.

Empathy Interviews & Artifact Review

To conduct my assessment, I gathered qualitative and quantitative data from two main sources: Empathy Interviews and Artifact Reviews. My Empathy Interviews consisted of listening to and learning from students, staff, families and community members. As part of my Empathy Interviews, I conducted a total of 115 community touchpoints. The community touchpoints consisted of 80 stakeholder interviews with central office staff, principals, teachers, parents, civic and community leaders, 2 teacher advisory group meetings, 6 student and parent group meetings, and 27 school site visits at multiple schools across every district cluster. I also made certain to cover a cross-section of stakeholder demographics in terms of race, age, gender, socio-economic status, community station, etc. Figure 7 is a graphic illustration of the various stakeholder groups and intersections that I engaged with during my strategic project.

Figure 7



The Artifact Reviews consisted of collecting and reviewing district data to gain a clearer understanding of how the district and its students were performing. They also entailed collecting and analyzing data in key areas such as: programs, curriculum, teaching quality, achievement, facilities, and finance. In addition, I examined artifacts such as organizational charts, student achievement data, staff demographic data and took copious observation notes during team meetings and after exchanges with colleagues. My data review also consisted of reviewing studies and reports written on, or by, the Atlanta Public Schools. This included a review of the 2014-2020 Superintendent's Reports, the 2020 Schott Foundation for Public Education Loving Cities Index on Atlanta, the 2019 Annie E. Casey Foundation: Changing the Odds: Progress and Promise in Atlanta Report, the Georgia CAN: Pockets of Promise Amidst Widespread Inequities:

The State of Atlanta Public Schools in 2019, and the 2014 Atlanta's Segregated Schools Report from the Cato Institute.

I evaluated the data gathered from my Empathy Interviews and Artifact Review to assess the organization according to the Green Line System & Culture Assessment Rubric. The analyses allowed me to determine the degree of equity or inequity that was present within the Atlanta Public Schools. It also allowed me to detect the default processes and mindsets (i.e., routine processes of problem solving and ways of thinking and acting) that will enable or constrain the organization's ability to implement the adaptive and technical changes inherent in large-scale racial equity reform strategy.

There were several themes that emerged from my Empathy Interviews and Artifact Review. Key among these themes were: Performance/Empowerment Imbalance, Leadership & Staff Support, Performance Gaps, Organizational Culture, Equity and Collective Action. With regard to Performance/Empowerment Imbalance, stakeholders reported that schools have a great deal of autonomy and that what they are missing is performance accountability, specifically around equity in student outcomes. A review of budgets and programming data also revealed that allocation of resources is not linked to return on investment for student success. Figure 8 provides examples of some of the commentary that I heard in this regard.

Figure 8

Performance/Empowerment Imbalance: What I heard
"Everybody gets to choose their curriculum and how they want to teach kids to read. We need stronger measures of accountability because there is no consistency across schools when it comes to curricula choices and interventions." **-Central Office Administrator** "...we could use more guidance from the district around curriculum resources... It's hard for me as a high school principal, with over a dozen math courses, to select curriculum resources for

every subject area. Maybe it's better for elementary school where Eureka Math gives you everything you need. But we don't have a Eureka Math for high school." – **Principal**

The Artifact Review also revealed a great deal of leadership and staff support for the work to be done. When examining district artifacts, it was evident that the Board of Education and district leadership have articulated, and have taken actions demonstrating, a commitment to equity. This can be seen when examining the Board's Equity Policy and Equity Commitments in the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan. There is also commitment and buy-in for the work at all levels of the organization, and most staff expressed enthusiasm and buy-in for the work.

The Artifact Review further revealed that performance should be the primary area of focus for the district's equity efforts. A review of the 2020 graduation data revealed that the 4-year graduation rate for white students in the class of 2020 is 96.7%, almost 20-percentage points higher than their Black classmates. Furthermore, state assessment data showed that by fourth grade, 76% of white students are performing on grade level, while only 23% of Hispanic students and 16% of Black students are meeting that same bar.

Organizational culture also surfaced as a central theme in many of my stakeholder discussions, with voice being the key concern throughout these discussions. The primary sentiment was that there has been a historic culture within the district that centered the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions (i.e., voice) of white stakeholders as superior to that of people of color. This premise is substantiated when evaluating the organizational structure of the district under Dr. Carstarphen's administration, which showed that concentrated power and ultimate decision-making rested in the hands of a senior cabinet and Board that was heavily white, in a district that is overwhelmingly majority African American. There is also a lack of Latinx individuals and other people of color on the senior leadership team, which causes blind spots as

it relates to matters concern other communities of color. There is also no established practice for intentionally sharing experiences around identity and how identity impacts the work and intentions. This results in conflict aversion and equity work avoidance in the organization.

Geographic inequities also surfaced as a key theme throughout my conversations with families and external stakeholders about the organizational culture of the Atlanta Public Schools. The premise being that there are inequities between the more white, more affluent communities in the North compared to predominantly black, lower SES communities in the South. However, there was a common enthusiasm shared across all geographic regions to engage in and support the work of equity within the district. Spanish-speaking stakeholders expressed difficulties interacting with teachers, leaders, and school personnel due to a lack of bilingual personnel and often feel more isolated than other stakeholder groups. Parents of lower socio-economic status expressed feeling as though there is a culture of assimilation and elitism, and that when interacting with educators and leaders they oftentimes feel judged, particularly with educators and leaders of color. When examining data of historic academic and school culture interventions, decision-making reflected an unconscious belief within district culture that Black children and their families, regardless of class, were at a deficit and therefore needed to be changed and fixed, while white children and their families deserve to be accommodated and comforted. Figure 8 provides some examples of the commentary that I heard.

Figure 8

Organizational Culture: What I heard
"Certain principals have a certain voice because of how they look or the kids that they serve. If they are white or if they have a school that services mostly white families, then they get their way. That is how it is here." **– Principal**

"The culture was very hierarchical. It was a culture of white is considered very right. If you are not young, white or privileged, your opinions or thoughts about what should really happen are not valued." – **Central Office Administrator**

"Traditionally, we don't talk about race. Race was not something the previous administration was interested in discussing and, in my opinion, they were not interested in addressing equity and leading for equity. [We] attempted to lead a conversation on how tragically far from excellence the Black students were. The discussion created such a rift in the conversations of the team, and the leadership was like 'Ok we are not going to talk about race anymore,' and that was the end of it." **– Central Office Administrator**

Given the nature of my strategic project, equity also surfaced as a major theme. Central office administrators, teachers, and school leaders all expressed a lack of equity-focused resources and tools, shared language and vocabulary as it relates to equity. The Artifact Review revealed that the strategic plan lacks a theory of change grounded in equity and does not make explicit the organization's equity stance. The district also lacks a clear vision for excellent teaching that is grounded in culturally and linguistically responsive practices. The data also revealed that the Board has adopted policy requiring that all critical district correspondence be translated into the top five languages within the district; however, the policy is not consistently implemented. Moreover, although the district has been removed from state-designated disproportionate status due to its percentages of out-of-school suspensions for Black students, the district's suspension data continues to show significantly higher suspensions for Black students and indicates a need for further review of discipline policies and implementation. Figure 9 provides some examples of the commentary in this regard.

Figure 9

Equity: What I heard
"There is a lot of work needed in schools like [deleted to maintain anonymity], there is a need to establish a curriculum and services responsive to the community. We need culturally and community responsive mental health and wrap around services."

– Teacher

"I would say the primary equity challenge is changing the mentality of how our educators see and treat Black children, particularly Black children from low-income communities"**- Parent**

"As a white female leading a predominantly African American team, I have more strain and stress as a result of the recent events like George Floyd. I am trying to humanize the department, but it's been hard without the resources and supports."-
– Central Office Administrator

The last major theme that surfaced was around collective action. Community members throughout the city, as well as civic leaders and community organizations expressed excitement and enthusiasm about supporting APS's equity efforts and are looking forward to greater opportunities to engage in meaningful ways. Community leaders also expressed the need for the district to engage in more collective impact work across sectors. The only barrier to collective action that surfaced during my community stakeholder engagements was that intra-racial class differences among Black community members, as well as anti-Black and anti-immigrant sentiments, remained the single-most barriers to forging effective coalitions amongst people of color. These biases will serve to constrain the district's efforts to build coalitions across lines of difference. Figure 10 provides some examples.

Figure 10

Collective Impact: What I heard

"The one flaw of the equity committee was that there was no one on the committee that was disadvantaged. Yes, it was diverse with white and black people, but we were all for the most part from similar backgrounds with regard to income. So, I always wondered 'did anyone ask the people who live in Thomasville what they need and what they want' I don't know what it's like to live in their community. None of us do."- **Board Community Advisory Task Force Member**

"The district has board and superintendent leadership support for this equity work. They have the political will to dig in. This tells us they are serious, so we are willing to support."
– Community Partner

"APS has a lot of support, and it is in a much better place that it was. The changes have been tremendous, and this equity work will take the district exactly in the direction it needs to go from here. There are a lot of good things going on. The fact that this office [Equity] has been established is very promising. I am impressed."**- Community Partner**

Assessment Results

Based on my assessment, I determined that the Atlanta Public Schools was an emerging organization in relation to where it stood in having the systems and culture (i.e., capacity) it needed to successfully execute on its racial equity change strategy. APS ranked "Emerging" in five of the nine indicators on the rubric. The other four indicators were "Not Evident". The district received a "Not Evident" rating in only one area of the Systems domain: the Accountability, Measurement, and Evaluation indicators. The majority of the "Not Evident" ratings were primarily in the Culture domain of the rubric, which suggested that the organization did not have the cultural capacity it needed to support its racial equity reform strategy. Therefore, the primary focus of my work moving forward was to support the district in building the cultural capacity to effect change. Figure 11provides a snapshot of the district's assessment rubric.

Figure 11

Critical Component: Systems (Patterns, Structures, Processes)		
Indicator	**Rating**	**Evidence**
Equity-Focused Strategic Planning	Emerging	The district has a system-wide diversity statement that has been publicly shared. There are also pockets of staff who share, discuss, or collaborate on these statements and actions. However, there is limited alignment between diversity approaches and the system-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion language
Racial Diversity Data System	Emerging	There is a focus on organizational demography and the organization collects and disaggregates data (by race/ethnicity) on staff recruitment, hiring, and retention, student achievement, and discipline. The

		district does not currently disaggregate their data for well-being and family engagement. The district has also not established long-range equity goals and plans and a criterion for success. Diversity climate surveys are also not used to determine areas of success and areas in need of improvement.
Learning-and-Effectiveness Paradigm	Emerging	The organization demonstrates a commitment to learning by soliciting input from a diverse group of stakeholders and attempts are made to incorporate various perspectives into decision making.
Accountability, Measurement, and Evaluation	Not Evident	The organization has not established timelines and benchmarks with regard to achieving its equity goals and objectives.
Robust & Continuous Training Around DEI	Emerging	Staff diversity, equity, and inclusion training has been provided. However, there is no team responsible for coordinating and creating these trainings. There may be an expectation for staff to participate in a core training or engage with designated material.
Critical Component: Culture (Relationships, Information, Identity)		
Indicator	**Rating**	**Evidence**
Personal Comfort	Not Evident	District leaders are working to create an overall environment where they empower and invest in stakeholders from historically marginalized populations. Leaders consistently foster a collaborative team environment; however, interdepartmental collaboration is not always evident.
Personal Value	Not Evident	Although there is a sense of urgency in addressing gaps in opportunity and access, the organization has not articulated its equity stance and why they would like to focus on equity, and organizational staff members are inconsistent in articulating a personal value for equity. The organization also does not have a plan in place to ensure that faculty & administration of color

		mirror the population of students of color. There are also no mechanisms in place that allow stakeholders of color to provide feedback on important diversity and equity related issues. Moreover, stakeholders of color report that they are greeted with warmth, acceptance and interest.
Organizational Fairness	Emerging	There is a board adopted and organization implemented equity policy and there is a clear fair treatment policy. However, district and school policies and procedures are clearly accessible for all staff, students and families. Also, the collaborative conflict resolution process that is in place within the organization, is not transparent. The district also lacks an equity framework for setting the vision and strategy of the equity work.
Organizational Inclusion	Not Evident	There is currently no systems-wide protocol for ongoing review and adoption of policies and practices to ensure that they are not causing unintended disparate impact on diverse student and stakeholder groups. Leaders and managers promote agency and autonomy, but do not balance that with performance accountability. The organization does not review all literature to ensure that it is inclusive and responsive in language and presentation.

After assessing where the district stood on the Green Line System & Culture Assessment Rubric, I worked to implement the technical changes that needed to be put in place to build the district's capacity "above the green line." To do this, I worked to develop the new Equity Division in a manner that would support the district in developing the accountability, measurement, and evaluation capacity it needed to successfully execute on its vision for equity. I drafted and proposed an Equity Office scope of work and outlined a suggested vision for the office in line with the new office servicing primarily as a thought partner, support system and accountability buddy for the other divisions and departments within the system.

The suggested vision for the office was based on the structure of the Chicago Public Schools Equity Office, under the leadership of Dr. Maurice Swinney. Using the CPS Equity Office as an exemplar, it was recommended that the Atlanta Public Schools' Center for Equity and Social Justice (APS-CESJ) be an initiative-driven and capacity building office, meaning that the office should facilitate and coordinate equity-focused learning and efforts for, and with, other divisions, departments, and entities. The division should then work to measure the return on investment and impact on outcomes for the respective initiatives. The APS-CESJ should also be the owner of the district's equity vision and bring coherence across the entire organization around that vision. Lastly, the APS-CESJ should also convene and partner with cross functional groups of community stakeholders to create inclusive and just conditions for all staff and students to perform at high levels. The APS-CESJ would do this by interrupting and eliminating inequitable practices.

In terms of the culture capacity building that needed to be done, I began to think through how to shift an organization's culture that was mostly invisible to me during my residency. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all of the district's staff was working remotely. Therefore, people's way of working, transferring information and developing relationships had been altered because of switching the modes of production to virtual platforms. This prompted me to think about leveraging communications as a vehicle for cultural change. This seemed ideal given APS's robust communication machine and what I witnessed during the season of COVID which demonstrated the power of mass media to shift culture and influence mindsets. In addition, given the brevity of residency, and the fact that organizational culture shifts take time, I knew that I needed a high-leverage strategy that would have longevity after my residency. Communications, therefore, seemed to be the perfect option.

Equity Office Organization Chart

To ensure that the new APS Center for Equity and Social Justice is successful in carrying out its vision, coherence-driven mission, and capacity-building scope of work, I drafted a division organizational structure based on the framework articulated in the PELP *Note on Racial Equity.* The recommended structure was designed to ensure that the organization had the structural capacity and accountability structure it needed for equity work to be done with fidelity throughout every division, department and school within the organization.

The office is divided into two departments, both charged with building capacity within the organization. The first is the Federal Programs Department. This department was previously housed in the Schools and Academics Division, and provides leadership, direction, and guidance over the federally funded grants and programs. It also oversees the development of comprehensive program plans, implementation of planned programs, and monitoring of budgets in accordance with established federal, state, and local policies.

The Equity Strategy and Coherence (or ESAC) Department is the accountability arm which ensures that all of the district's organizational elements --its culture, systems, structures, resources, and stakeholders-- are being utilized to enact a theory of change that is grounded in racial equity and a strategy aligned to a robust vision of excellent teaching that is culturally responsive. In total, I recommended the addition of ten new positions each tasked with ensuring coherence in some facet of district operations. The key roles and scopes of work for the new positions are outlined in Figure 12.

Figure 12

Role	Key Responsibilities
Chief Equity & Social Justice Officer	A visionary and strategist, who defines the overarching vision, identity, and strategy for the Atlanta Public Schools to become

	a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization. Ensures the district's long-term (5-year) and near-term (annual and 2020-2021) plans are fully reflective of and inspired by an equity lens and reflect the district's equity identity.
Executive Director of Equitable Learning Environments	Promotes a cooperative, collaborative, and inclusive culture within the organization by gathering, synthesizing and making recommendations based on stakeholder (internal and external) survey data, feedback, and concerns to ensure that we are delivering the best service possible.
Coordinator of Equitable Schools and Academics	Provides technical assistance to district and school staff in the areas of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and supports district staff in ensuring that every child in APS has access to high-quality curriculum & instructional resources and whole child supports.
Coordinator of Equitable Student Supports	Works to remove barriers to learning by advancing access to an equitable learning environment for all learners through the codification of a rigorous and equitable (K-12) SEL curriculum, as well as developing SEL coordinators and school-based specialists, and building partnerships with families and community members.
Coordinator of Equity-Focused Professional Learning	Develops and implements a comprehensive leader, teacher, and staff development plan that includes new hire onboarding, internal and external development opportunities, geared toward ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion training throughout the organization.
Executive Director of Equitable Resource Strategy	Provides strategic leadership to assure a high performing, engaged, diverse, and inclusive organizational environment by ensuring equity and transparency in the areas of finance, operations, and talent management.
Coordinator of Supplier Diversity	Reviews the current procurement process, identifying and reaching out to vendors who historically have not worked with Atlanta Public Schools, and ensuring the district has a robust pool of diverse vendors.
Coordinator of Workforce Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	Supports HR in cultivating a diverse educator and leadership pipeline. Track and report the metrics needed to ensure solid talent management decision making, at all levels within the organization, with regard to diversity.
Ombuds	Assists the district and schools in resolving educational equity

	and diversity issues impacting educators, students, families, and the community by serving as an independent, confidential resource, and by assisting stakeholders in resolving concerns, problems, complaints.
Latinx Community Specialist	Facilitates the implementation of community outreach to culturally specific groups by focusing on increasing parental engagement and involvement. Also responsible for supporting building and developing the capacity of internal and external stakeholders to understand and more effectively work with limited English and immigrant parents and families.
Policy Analyst	Ensures equity and transparency into people-related strategies, review policies, procedures, and processes with an equity lens, develop strategies that assure diversity, equity and inclusion are embraced by the organization in spirit and process.
Program Director of Equity Strategy	Guides and informs strategy owners, serves as the subject matter expert on strategic initiatives related to equity, tracks equity-focused strategy execution and provides direction and support for program functions and manages program teams.
Data Strategist	Responsible for collecting, producing, and disaggregating quantitative and qualitative data sets based on categorizations such as race, class, and gender. Also, assists in developing, monitoring, managing, and presenting the district strategic priorities and progress with regard to equity.

DNA Equity Communications Framework

To rebuild community trust after the cheating scandal, APS developed a comprehensive communications team. The team possessed capacity in scriptwriting, broadcast and videography, branding and multimedia design, public relations, and social media. In addition, there were also Communications Public Relations Officers for each cluster of the district. To support me in building the district's cultural capacity, I was given full access to the district's communications team and resources. I leveraged this access to develop a robust equity-centered messaging

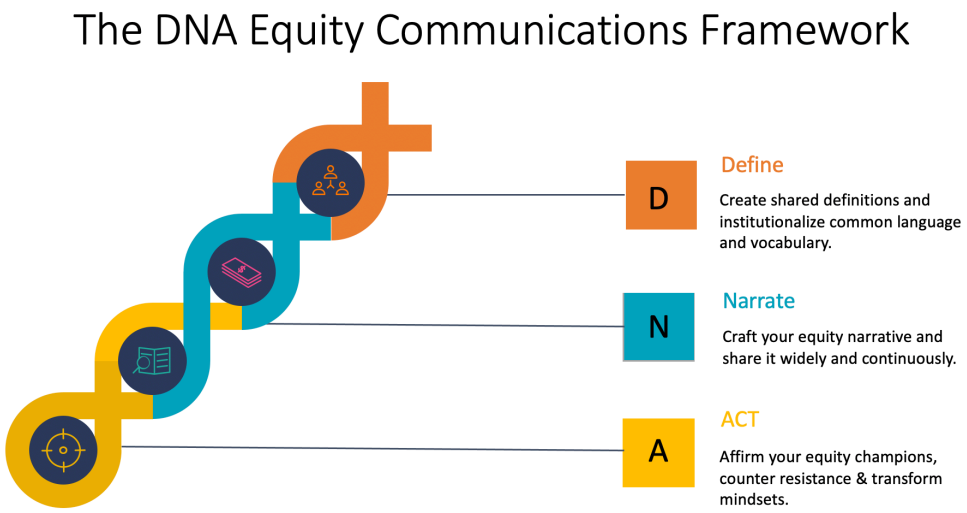
strategy grounded in the theory of Targeted Universalism, as recommended by the PELP *Note on Racial Equity*.

An organization's messaging strategy plays a pivotal role in leading a successful equity change strategy because it unites all of an organization's communications on racial equity work using a similar tone, feel and message.[45] An effective messaging strategy ensures that every stakeholder, internal and external, is on the same page with regard to the organization's equity-focused goals and objectives. The messaging strategy can also be used to garner buy-in, neutralize resistance and shift mindsets and beliefs. To support the Atlanta Public Schools in developing its messaging strategy, I developed a communications framework based on best practices in communicating racial equity change initiatives. The framework is called the DNA Equity Communications Framework and is based on the recommendations in the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) Communications Guide.[46] Figure 12 shows the DNA Equity Communications Framework at a glance.

[45] *GARE Communications Guide* (Government Alliance on Race and Equity). (2018, May 18). Retrieved December 17, 2020, from Government Alliance on Race and Equity website: https://www.racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/1-052018-GARE-Comms-Guide-v1-1.pdf

[46] *Ibid.*

Figure 12



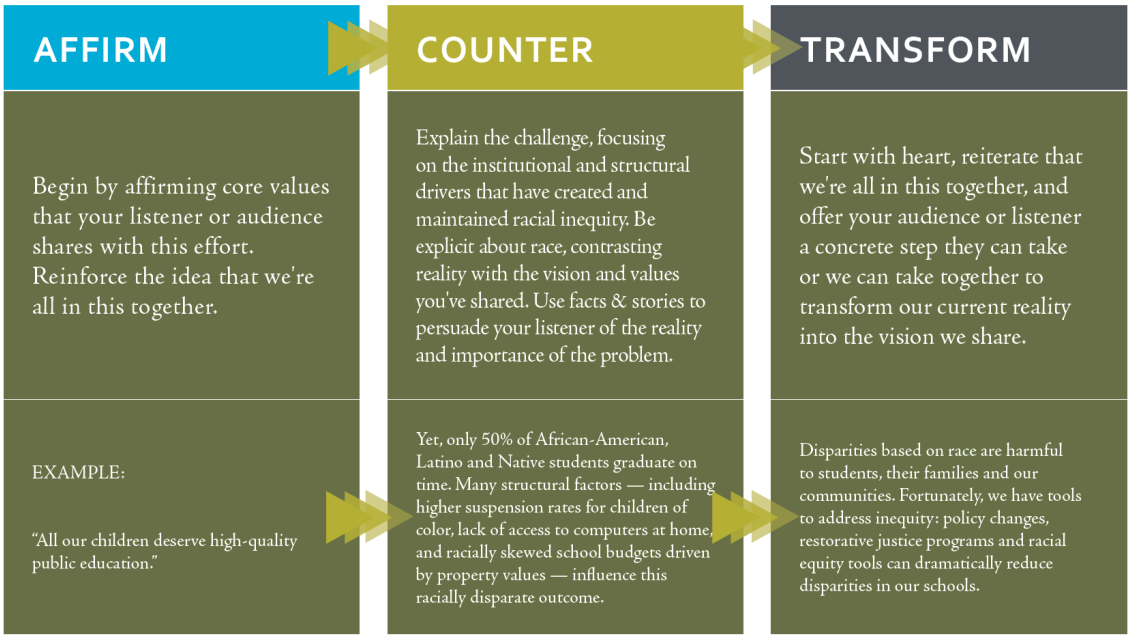
DNA stands for Define, Narrate, and ACT (Affirm, Counter, and Transform). To implement the DNA Equity Communications Framework with fidelity, district leaders must begin their equity work by defining key terms and institutionalizing shared vocabulary and common language. This work is necessary to ensure consistency of message. The district must also articulate its equity narrative, or why for doing racial equity work, and ensure that the narrative is widely and continuously circulated. The PELP *Note on Racial Equity* calls this a district's 'equity stance.' An equity narrative, or equity stance, should be contextually situated and should be free from language that would alienate or offend different constituent demographics. The narrative should also be shared in a manner that affirms the district's existing equity champions, transform mindsets of your cautious allies, or counter resistance from your 'party of no' or individuals opposed to the work.

The basic premise of the DNA Equity Communications Framework is that a district's communications strategy needs to be leveraged in a manner that ensures that equity is woven

into the DNA of the entire organization. The framework is non-linear. District leaders should continuously Define, Narrate and ACT as deemed appropriate given stakeholder needs.

To support the Atlanta Public Schools in this regard, during my empathy interviews, I asked stakeholders: *What does equity mean to you? What does social justice mean for APS? How does the organization reflect, or not reflect, the work it wants to do with regard to equity? Why does this work, related to equity, make sense for APS at this time?* The information that I gathered was used to create a district messaging strategy, based on the DNA Equity Communications Framework. The Communications Team and I met each week to review the superintendent's upcoming communications collateral (i.e., draft speeches, staff & parent memos, blog/social media posts, op-eds, etc.) and edited these documents for consistency in terminology usage and alignment with the district equity narrative. Collateral was also drafted to shift district culture using the Affirm, Counter, Transform (ACT) component of our messaging strategy. The ACT objective of each communications artifact was determined based on audience needs as determined by the data collected during my Empathy Interviews. Figure 13 illustrates ACT in action. The DNA Equity Communications Framework is also discussed in the *Evidence* section.

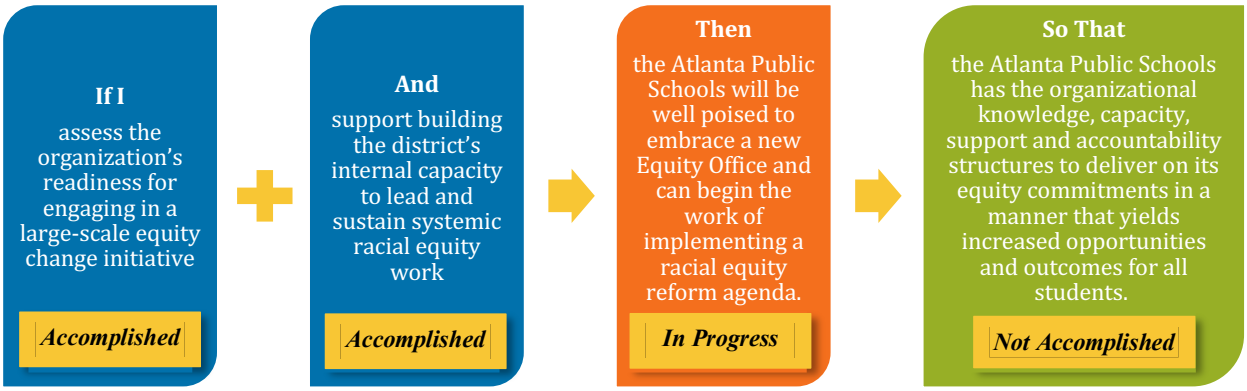
Figure 13



Source: *GARE* (Government Alliance on Race and Equity) *Communications Guide* (2018, May 18).

Evidence

Throughout my strategic project, I created artifacts that helped me execute and deliver on my theory of action. As articulated above, the theory of action that guided my strategic project was as follows:



To execute on my 'if' statements, I developed the Green Line System & Culture Assessment Rubric. This tool allowed me to assess the district's readiness for engaging in a large-scale equity change strategy and illuminated for district leaders the adaptive and technical

work that needed to be done in order for them to be successful in their efforts. I also conducted quantitative and qualitative data analysis through my Empathy Interviews and Artifact Reviews and used this data to inform the aforementioned. This data was also used to inform the district's messaging strategy.

To further support the district in building its internal cultural capacity to lead and sustain systemic racial equity work, developed the organizational structure of the new Equity Office and created the DNA Equity Communications Framework. The framework built the capacity of internal and external stakeholders by providing them with a strategy for communicating their equity work in a manner that garnered stakeholder buy-in, transform mindsets, and neutralized resistance to the work. It also created shared vocabulary and common language, which supported consistency of messaging. A Top Line Messaging Toolkit was also developed for Board members, senior leadership, school leaders and educators to further support the consistency of messaging throughout the organization.

The 'then' statement of my theory of action is currently in progress and is fully underway given several actions that I took which allowed the district to begin the work of implementing a racial equity reform agenda. For example, the development of the vision, scope of work, organizational structure and new position job descriptions allowed district stakeholders to successfully embrace the new Equity Office because they were able to see how the new division would fit into the pre-existing organizational structure of the district. I also supported the writing of several grant proposals, which allowed the district to receive full funding for the new Chief Equity and Social Justice Officer position and provided year one initiative funding for the new office. This was vitally important because the 2020-2021 district budget was set the year prior to my residency. Therefore, there was no funding allocated for the creation of a new chief position

or new division. Securing grant funding allowed the district to develop its financial capacity to support this work.

With the full establishment of the new Equity Office the district can begin to take steps to fully realize the vision articulated in my 'so that' statement, and the Atlanta Public Schools will have the organizational knowledge, capacity, support and accountability structures to deliver on its equity commitments in a manner that yields increased opportunities and outcomes for all students. In the sections to follow, I will go into further detail about two pieces of evidence that most readily demonstrate my project's success.

Green Line System & Culture Assessment Rubric

Possibly the most useful piece of evidence that was created as part of my strategic project was the Green Line Systems & Culture Assessment Rubric. This tool laid the foundation for the work product that I was to produce as part of my strategic project. As aforementioned, the rubric was used to assess the district in two domains: Systems and Culture. The Systems Analysis assessed the district in five areas: Long-Term Equity-Focused Strategic Planning, Racial Diversity Data Systems, Learning-and-Effectiveness Paradigm, Accountability, Measurement, and Evaluation, Robust & Continuous Training Around DEI.

The Long-Term Equity-Focused Strategic Planning indicator assessed the organization's use of an Equity-Focused Strategic Plan that addresses equity-related gaps in the organization, the processing of stakeholder complaints, addressing data collection and analysis needs, and incorporates equity management skills in performance evaluation. It also calls for a need to institutionalize equity goals and tracking.

The Racial Diversity Data Systems indicator assessed where the organization was with regard to developing systems that measure its performance toward achieving stated equity goals

and objectives by examining how data is used to analyze, plan, and change structures and systems that support equity in targeted areas. This indicator is closely tied to the Learning-and-Effectiveness Paradigm, Accountability, Measurement, and Evaluation, and the Robust & Continuous Training indicators. The Learning-and-Effectiveness Paradigm indicator assessed the organization's commitment to learning through seeking and incorporating perspectives from diverse stakeholders. The Accountability, Measurement, and Evaluation indicator assesses the accountability component of an organization's Equity-Focused Strategic Plan, as well as how success is measured and evaluated. Lastly, the Robust & Continuous Training Around DEI indicator assessed organizational training provided for staff and the community regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion and the use of feedback data to inform training content and improvement.

The Culture Analysis domain assessed the internal stakeholder attitudes and organizational culture around four indicators: Personal Comfort, Personal Values, Organizational Fairness and Organizational Inclusion. The Personal Comfort indicator assessed the level at which members of the district were comfortable engaging all stakeholders, regardless of race, and the level of comfortability within the organization with engaging in critical dialogue on topics related to diversity. The Personal Value indicator assessed the level at which leadership and key members of the organization institutionalize their commitment to equity and leverages the benefits of diversity to enhance organizational learning and growth. The Organizational Fairness indicator assessed the district's efforts to build trust and ensure ownership over the organization's vision for equity to ensure that all staff are treated fairly and equitably within the organization. Finally, the Organizational Inclusion indicator assessed the institutionalization of inclusive systems by examining the level at which diverse stakeholder perspectives and approaches are incorporated

into organizational processes, and how well the organization builds on the interests, strengths and cultures of diverse stakeholders.

An organization can be rated as either Not Evident, Emerging, Performing or Transforming against the rubric in its ability to successfully engage in a racial equity change strategy that successfully incorporates the elements 'above and below' the green line (See Appendix A). The two domains taken together, allowed me to gain a holistic view of the district's capacity to engage in racial equity change work and allowed me to determine the systems, structures, and practices that needed to change or be put in place to successfully implement the district's racial equity strategy.

DNA Equity Communications Framework

Another piece of evidence that was instrumental in the success of my strategic project was the DNA Equity Communications Framework. This tool allowed me to shift district culture at scale and support the district in ensuring that equity became an integral part of the DNA of the organization. According to the PELP *Note on Racial Equity*, equity should drive district goal setting, inform instructional and academic decision-making, anchor the district's vision for excellent teaching, and inform resource allocation and stakeholder engagement. However, for this to occur, every stakeholder needs to be on the same page with regard to the work to be done, the why behind the work and the anticipated outcomes. Prior to my arrival at APS, there were conflicting definitions, narratives, and expectations around the district's equity work. This diminished buy-in, generated unwarranted resistance, and caused the work to take a secondary role within the day-to-day operations of the district. After working through the DNA Framework, the communications team and I supported the district in articulating and widely sharing the following definition of equity:

"The Atlanta Board of Education recognizes equity means the quality or ideal of being just and fair, regardless of economic, social, cultural, and human differences among and between persons. Equity is different than equality, which treats everyone the same without recognizing the reality that each child is different."

The district also defined the term "equity champion," which is another term that is widely used:

"All of our students deserve the highest quality instruction each and every day. To achieve this level of excellence, we must work to ensure that each member of our community is an equity champion. Meaning that they champion the individual cultures, identities, talents, abilities, languages, and interests of every student by ensuring they receive the necessary opportunities and resources to meet their unique needs and aspirations."

We further worked to solidify the following equity narrative, which was used in our messaging strategy to counter resistance and transform mindsets. To effectively counter opposition, a narrative must explain the challenge facing the organization, ensuring a focus on the institutional and structural factors that contribute to the inequity. The narrative must also be explicit about race and use data to illuminate for stakeholders that a phenomenon is occurring.[47] To be transformative, a narrative must "start with heart," and "reiterate that we're all in this together."[48] The narrative should also offer stakeholders concrete steps that the organization, and collective group of stakeholders, must take to transform the current reality into the vision the organization seeks to create. For the district's narrative, the communications team and I crafted the following:

"We are committed to equity because leading for equity is the ethical thing to do. Looking at our most recent achievement data, 76% of our white students are performing

[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

on grade level by fourth grade, compared to 16% of African American students and 23% of Hispanic students. At the current rate of growth, it will take us roughly 128 years to close the gap between our students. Many structural elements — including higher suspension rates for children of color, lack of access to high quality educators and curricula materials, and culturally and linguistically exclusive learning environments— influence this racially disparate outcome.

Equity requires that we lean into the hard work of eliminating barriers, providing the right resources and ensuring that all students, particularly African American and Latinx students, have the support that they need to reach their full potential. Equity also requires that our schools are places where every student is affirmed for who they are, while being challenged to excel.

The aim of equity is to provide students with additional and differentiated resources based on their educational needs. We must also break the historical patterns of inequity that have resulted in far too few black, brown and low-income children succeeding at high levels. We can do this if we focus our resources, energy and talent on leveling the playing field for our most vulnerable students.

To reach this ideal, we must invite our stakeholders (internal and external) into authentic conversations about how to achieve equity. Achieving equity across the district requires attention from every member of our staff, schools, and communities. The new Center for Equity and Social Justice will work hand-in-hand with every district office, as well as community stakeholders, to ensure that each undertaking is pursued with equity as a goal."

In addition, we created common language that affirmed our equity champions because it affirmed our shared equity-focused core value with the development of the district's new tagline "*Equity at the Forefront*", and we reinforced the idea that we are all in this together.[49]

> *"Equitable stakeholder engagement is being intentional and inclusive in our leadership practices. This means that our stakeholders (teachers, school leaders, students & families, etc.)- have a voice in the problem-solving and decision-making process."*

Our narrative was used to counter and transform mindsets of potential opponents to the district's equity work. However, we also created the following statement to counter statements that engaging in the work of equity meant taking from one group of students to give to another.

> *"Equity is not a zero-sum game. When all of our students are seen, valued, and supported, our entire city will succeed. For the Atlanta Public Schools, All Means All."*

Language was also created to transform stakeholder expectations around what equity looks like in the classroom. The Empathy Interviews revealed that there was mixed understanding around what equitable instruction looks like, some stakeholder feared that equity meant a lessening of academic rigor. The following statement attempted to country and transform this thinking:

> *"Equitable instruction is learning that is grounded in students' experiences because it is engaging, affirming, meaningful, and grade level appropriate."*

These statements were used when communicating the district's equity strategy both internally and externally. They also were included in a Topline Messaging Toolkit that was developed for board members, senior leaders, and school-based personnel. We also collected stakeholder feedback on the messaging during superintendent cluster meetings. Overall, stakeholder response

[49] *GARE Communications Guide* (Government Alliance on Race and Equity). (2018, May 18). Retrieved December 17, 2020, from Government Alliance on Race and Equity website: https://www.racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/1-052018-GARE-Comms-Guide-v1-1.pdf

was overwhelmingly positive. This was irrespective of the geographic location, or cluster, where the stakeholders worked or resided.

Strategic Project Analysis

During my residency, I employed multiple strategies to build the knowledge base and capacity of district leadership. I used the Wheatley and Damau *6 Circle Model* and the PELP *Note on Racial Equity* to guide my efforts, and these theoretical frameworks enabled me to develop robust tools and make the most appropriate recommendations for solid next steps that would allow the district to move forward with its large-scale racial equity change strategy with fidelity. The results of my efforts were steadily consistent and for the most part, successful. Despite numerous constraints, I was able to lean heavily on my enablers to achieve the following short-term and long-term successes:

Short/Medium-term Outcomes

- Conducted 80 empathy and stakeholder interviews
- Developed Green Line Systems & Culture Assessment Rubric
- Developed Equity Office Organization Chart
- Drafted Equity Office Job Descriptions
- Assisted with the drafting of grant proposals to fund Chief Equity Officer role
- Drafted initial Center for Equity & Social Justice vision and scope of work

Long-term Outcomes

- Supported School Reopening and Pandemic Response Efforts
- Provided Leadership for COVID-19 Equity Related Challenges
- Developed DNA Equity Communication Framework

- Developed a messaging strategy for communicating the identification of equity context, enablers & constraints to cabinet, board, & community
- Engaged the philanthropic community in providing additional financial support and strategic advice on the district's equity efforts.
- Supported stakeholder buy-in outreach efforts and campaign
- Coordinated and lead systems-wide roll-out of the Equity Messaging Strategy

With these outcomes, I was able to successfully provide the district with the foundational capacity it needed to move forward in its racial equity change initiative with fidelity.

Enablers

Historical Groundwork

There were historical enablers that provided an environment conducive to supporting the success of my strategic project. Some of the historical enablers to my success included that there was legitimacy and support of my project from the Board and leadership team prior to my arrival in the Atlanta Public Schools. The Board Equity Policy and Resolution on Racial Equity sent a strong message that the political will was there to do the work, and the recent hiring of an equity-minded superintendent, Dr. Lisa Herring provided a leadership mandate. Moreover, there was a national call for action on racial equity which provided a national imperative for the work of this strategic project. Another enabler was the fact that I was building on previous work. The strategic plan and equity policy articulated clear commitments and identified key areas of focus for the district's racial equity efforts. The district also had strong external support and resources from a local government equity office at Atlanta's City Hall to the philanthropic support that was provided to cover the expenses incurred as a result of my recommendations to the district administration.

Adaptive Leadership

Another enabler for the work of my strategic project was my ability to exercise adaptive leadership throughout the course of my strategic project. In his book, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Dr. Ronald Heifetz defines Adaptive Leadership as "the practice of people to tackle tough challenges and thrive."[50] What is unique about adaptive challenges versus technical challenges is that adaptive challenges "can only be addressed through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties."[51] They cannot be solved through technical expertise or solutions. Thus, to successfully address an adaptive challenge, leadership must coordinate multiple stakeholder priorities in an effort to create a new vision for what is possible in order for the organization to thrive. They must then work with stakeholders to realize the vision.[52]

For an adaptive change to be successful, it must build on the best of the organization's past and present. Therefore, the challenge when exercising adaptive leadership is to engage stakeholders in a process of distinguishing between what is essential to preserve from their organization's history, as well as current state, and what is expendable. To this point, Heifetz asserts that successful adaptations are both conservative and progressive because change is anchored in the "values, competencies, and strategic orientations that should endure within the organization."[53]

Throughout my strategic project, I worked with stakeholders to realize the district's vision of equity by leveraging the stated values, existing competencies and strategic orientations within the organization. The most notable example of this would be the decision to leverage the district's

[50] Heifetz, R. A., Linsky, M., & Grashow, A. (2017). *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Heifetz, R. A., Linsky, M., & Grashow, A. (2017). *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.

communications apparatus as a tool to change people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties. When I first arrived at APS, equity was not a priority. For the most part, people within the organization were in the habit of thinking of equity as an afterthought. Over the course of my residency, the culture began to shift. The shift started with senior cabinet and began to filter into the expanded cabinet. With the implementation of the communications plan, you also began to see more decision-making conversations being had within divisions and departments through an equity lens. The fact that we were intentional about anchoring the equity messaging in the district's core values of ethics, equity, excellence and engagement facilitated greater buy-in among staff and enabled consistency of language. However, as my assessment of my Theory of Action contends, there remains more work to be done in this regard if the culture is to be solidified and grow to scale.

Constraints

Pandemic & Leadership Transition

In terms of constraints, the largest was the COVID-19 pandemic, which frequently presented conflicting priorities for an administrative team unaccustomed to seeing that all of their work is equity related. Given the sense of urgency, and heightened anxieties that the pandemic brought, it was often difficult to focus stakeholders' attention on doing work for the long-term, when most people we focused on the here and now. In addition, COVID-19 hindered participation in more authentic in-depth community engagements and stifled more extensive data collection given the virtual nature with which I conducted my residency.

There were also some constraints as a result of the leadership transition because the change in leadership exacerbated already heightened anxieties as leaders worried, not only about the pandemic, but job security as well. Moreover, the hierarchal and siloed administrative

structure within the organization oftentimes stifled the vertical, horizontal and cross-functional communication necessary for a large-scale racial-equity project such as this to take place.

Newark Native

There were also some constraints as a result of the identity markers that I hold. I discuss these constraints in more detail in the *Implications for Self* section of this Capstone. Nonetheless, my most explicit constraint was my Newark nativity. Southerners, in general, tend to be leery of Northerners. In addition, I had to check my Northern biases and ways of being. Particularly, having lived a large portion of my life in the New York City tri-state area, I picked up a very direct way of giving feedback. This type of feedback is in stark contrast to the type of indirect feedback expected in Atlanta. As a result, there were times when I gave feedback to my peers that did not land well. Moreover, because of Atlanta's insular culture, I had to work harder to build trust within the community. This, coupled with the virtual nature of my residency, presented changes with building the authentic relationships necessary to be successful in this work, and made it take substantially longer for me to grow my knowledge about the complexity of politics and practices within the district. However, I found that having multiple touch points with key stakeholders allowed me to compensate for this. Yet, even after building the requisite relationships and understanding the inner workings of the district, my lack of familiarity with the city of Atlanta-at-large prolonged my learning curve for understanding the context of the geographic and economic diversity of the city.

Wheatley 6 Circle Model

Both the Heifetz *Adaptive Leadership Framework* and the *PELP Note on Racial Equity* require, as a pivotal first step in any change initiative, a diagnosis system and culture. According to Heifetz, in order to effectively diagnose the system and culture, you must determine "the

underlying beliefs, expectations, assumptions, values and ways of interacting that contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of an organization (48)."[54] The PELP *Note on Racial Equity* recommends using the Wheatley and Damau *6 Circle Model* as a framework for assessing organizational dynamics through the lens of equity. However, the constraint of the Wheatley and Damau framework is that it does not provide explicit indicators or evidence that leaders should look out for when assessing where an organization stands within the *6 Circle Model*. This is what prompted me to create a research-based assessment rubric because I needed a tool for determining where the district stood with regard to its capacity for implementing a racial-equity change strategy.

Organizational Adaptability

Although my ability to exercise adaptive leadership served as an enabler to the success of my strategic project, the organization's ability to be adaptive proved to be a constraint. According to Ronald Heifetz, an organization is adaptive if it possesses five key characteristics:

1. Elephants in the room are named.
2. Responsibility for the organization's future is shared.
3. Independent judgment is expected.
4. Leadership capacity is developed.
5. Reflection and continuous learning are institutionalized.

In assessing the Atlanta Public Schools' adaptability, I reviewed the data gathered in the structure and culture analysis, reviewed external stakeholder interview data, examined evidence of internal and external stakeholder support, and examined the Board's equity policy and district

[54] Heifetz, R. A., Linsky, M., & Grashow, A. (2017). *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.

strategic plan. These documents were evaluated against Heifetz's Adaptive Leadership Framework to determine the extent with which the organization possesses the five key characteristics of organizational adaptability.

Are elephants in the room named?

When asserting that "elephants in the room are not named," Heifetz is referencing the metaphoric idiom that there is an obvious problem, important question, or conversation to be had that people within an organization would rather avoid or not talk about because it is uncomfortable, controversial, or professionally risky in nature.[55] During my residency, I witnessed, or was advised of, instances where important elephants were not named within the Atlanta Public School. This lack of naming often stifled and hindered the district's efforts to effectively lead its racial equity work.

For example, in January 2019, the Atlanta Board of Education met, in absence of the former superintendent and district personnel, to discuss what they believed to be the growing inequities within the Atlanta Public Schools. They were concerned about inequities with regard to academics, resource allocation, stakeholder engagement, and talent management across the district. What emerged from the meeting was a plan for action, which included assembling a board-constructed task force to investigate and make recommendations on the matter. The task force, with the assistance of the National Equity Project, developed a comprehensive Equity Policy that passed the Board in April of 2019. What was unique about this policy, is that it was developed with very little, to no, input from the superintendent and/or district personnel. Once the policy was passed, it was handed to the superintendent for immediate implementation. Over

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[55] Elephant in the room. (2021, May 04). Retrieved April 30, 2021, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elephant_in_the_room

the course of the following school year (2019-2020), the central office staff began constructing a 2020-2025 Strategic Plan centered on equity. The Strategic Plan, entitled, *We Are APS: Building on Our Legacy*, articulates a vision for the Atlanta Public Schools to become "a high-performing school district where students love to learn, educators inspire, families engage, and the community trusts the system." The Strategic Plan sets as its mission to achieve this vision "through a caring culture of equity, trust, and collaboration that will allow every student to graduate ready for college, career, and life." It also outlines eleven equity commitments that will drive the district's work.

As its Theory of Action, the Atlanta Public Schools states that "***If*** we provide clear information and data on student, school, district performance to support transparent and equitable decision-making, **and** empower and equip schools to set goals and priorities to continually improve performance, **and** engage stakeholders, identify success, commit to timelines and effective support strategies, **and** assess progress and act with urgency to adjust strategies when schools are chronically under-performing, ***Then*** every student will attain the skills, knowledge, and tools to succeed in college, career, and life.

What is interesting about the strategic plan is that it fails to use the explicit language used in the Board policy that names barriers to racial equity within the district. This omission is in line with the comments that I heard during my stakeholder engagements regarding the previous administration's resistance to engaging in explicit conversations about race due the uncomfortable and controversial nature of the dialogue. By contrast, the Board's equity policy is very explicit, and states:

The Board acknowledges the historic and current inequity, bias, and oppression existing at all levels of our society, including our schools…We seek to understand, disrupt, and dismantle

patterns and structures of institutional bias (conscious or unconscious) creating disparities and perpetuating achievement gaps among students.

The history of Atlanta and Atlanta Public Schools demands that the primary focus of our equity policy must be race. In APS, data shows our greatest opportunity gaps exist among our African American and Hispanic students across all neighborhoods, and further that race is closely correlated with income.

Nowhere in the subsequent strategic plan that was developed by central office staff is there an explicit mention of examining bias (conscious or unconscious) and/or oppression due to race, and their Theory of Action fails to mention any actions to be taken to ensure the equitable execution of practices, programs, assessments, evaluations, school governance, professional development, resource allocations, etc. It is clear from the differences in how the issue of equity is framed by the Atlanta Board of Education and the Atlanta Public Schools, that there is not only a gap with regard to their beliefs and priorities, but that there is an aversion within the school district to explicitly calling out the elephants in the room. The Board is very explicit in expressing their beliefs about the root causes of the inequities in the district. They also explicitly state bold steps they would like the district to take to remedy them. By contrast, the district is circumspect and inexplicit. It can also be argued, however, that the district is simply mirroring the actions of the Board when it comes to explicitly naming and addressing the barrier to equity within the district. Although the Board explicitly addresses the matter in writing, the fact that the Board met absent the superintendent and district personnel to craft arguably one of the most pivotal policies in the district's history, is demonstrative of a type of work avoidance and an aversion to explicitly naming elephants as well. The discussion that would be prompted through drafting the Equity

policy may have allowed the Board and former administration to address the frustrations they had around the perceived inaction in this regard.

Nonetheless, the district administration's aversion to naming elephants was further noted by actions observed and comments noted during organizational meetings. During a meeting that I had with a senior cabinet member regarding the contents of my Progress Memo, I was advised to remove the mention of the white supremist culture out of concern for how this would portray colleagues on the cabinet. On another occasion, during a meeting to discuss school reopening, it was clear that there was tension within the team around the decision to transition to in-person instruction, and no one commented that the community's support of in-person instruction was split along racial lines. Instead, cabinet members talked around that matter without explicitly calling out the concerns they had. This continued until I intervened and shared an interaction that I had with a Black student, Jasmine, from North Atlanta High School, who expressed fears about returning to in-person instruction. I also noted that many Black families will perceive our pivot as a move to appease white families and that is something we should address. This opened up the window for a more honest dialogue and allowed us to move forward more transparently. Racial equity work requires elephant naming. And as a leader for equity, you are shining a flashlight on things people would rather not see.

Is the responsibility for the organization's future shared?

There is an overall enthusiasm and investment across the organization to dig in and do the work of racial equity. Several departments have begun doing implicit bias and culturally responsiveness training and a large percentage of schools have launched initiatives aimed at improving school culture and achievement of at-risk student populations. There is also a common enthusiasm shared amongst stakeholders in all geographic regions of the city to engage

in and support the work of racial equity within the district. Moreover, community leaders and organizations are passionate about supporting APS's equity efforts and are reaching out to discuss opportunities to engage in meaningful ways. One can also ascertain from the generous philanthropic support that was received to launch its' new Equity Division, the Equity Policy and the equity commitments in the strategic plan, that the administration and its stakeholders are dedicated to undertaking of racial equity work and that the responsibility is shared within the district. This is very important because ensuring that the workplace and schools are joyful places that are equitable and inclusive, and that create excellence for all students, especially for our students of color, is not the responsibility of one individual or division. It requires leadership from everyone. Every stakeholder plays a vital role in moving toward a more equitable district and more equitable outcomes for students.

Is independent judgment is expected and leadership capacity developed?

Given the hierarchical structure of the organization, independent judgement is dissuaded. Of the 80 internal stakeholders that I interviewed, 52% of interviewees suggested some concern around the organization's hierarchy adversely affecting them in matters of work, including their ability to be decisive decision-makers, form cross-functional teams, and/or be fully productive and creative. For example, one internal stakeholder commented during our 1:1 that "*APS leans very heavily on hierarchy. So much so. that if you are not a Director you cannot even email someone above your pay grade*." Another commented that, "*In APS, the word Specialist is not highly respected. If you are not a Coordinator or Director and above, no one listens to anything you have to say.*" Members of the senior leadership team also echoed a sentiment of feeling silenced, even though they had more senior titles within the organization. During a 1:1 with a senior leadership team member, it was iterated that, "*Under the old regime, you didn't speak up*

if you weren't a member in a senior level position, particularly cabinet. I hope Dr. Herring changes that."

With regard to the hierarchy's impact on stifling independent judgment and decision-making, one person commented, "*The leaders in departments are not able to make decisions. They have to bring things to another level, and they have to get some sort of approval or nod that it is ok. They also need to prepare three or four justifications for why something needs to be done. Because of this, many people don't even bother. This happens even at the school level where principals operate in an autonomous space, they still stick to the norm and are afraid to think outside the box and risk take because of the reactions from leadership. So many ideas are missed because of this*." Comments such as these prompted me to dig deeper into understanding the implications of the organization's hierarchical culture on its ability to be equitable, inclusive and social justice oriented. This investigation was vitally important because according to Heifetz, organizations are better equipped to tackle adaptive challenges if stakeholders within the organization are allowed to exercise decisive leadership.[56] Change is further stifled when individuals are waiting to be told by the senior leadership what next steps to take to address a problem.

Are reflection and continuous learning institutionalized?

The Atlanta Public Schools is not at the point where reflection and continuous learning are institutionalized. Accountability structures are loose to non-existent in certain areas and the culture overall is not data-driven and informed. Most internal stakeholders attribute this to the cheating scandal where the pressure for accountability led to cheating and misconduct on the part of some educators. It seems in repentance of this past indiscretion the district has chosen to swing the

[56] Heifetz, R. A., Linsky, M., & Grashow, A. (2017). *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.

pendulums in the opposite direction and remove all guidance and guardrails. Accountability is a core component of any equity-based change initiative, and metrics are a necessary requisite of accountability because they allow you to measure success. Without them an organization may be investing time, money and energy in initiatives and programs that are not improving student outcomes. Because the district lacks a data-informed culture, departments and schools often commit to strategies that they cannot assess are providing a return on investment. The lack of a data-informed culture has also caused people within the organization to become protective of initiatives and strategies that are not producing results, and you find that the initiatives of individuals who have the most power and influence are the ones that are preserved, even though they may not be generating outcomes for all kids. An excellent example of this would be the current autonomy structure for schools. To correct the culture of distrust resulting from the cheating scandal, the former administration implemented a Performance/Empowerment school management system based on the premise that empowering school leaders would restore trust and enable school leaders to feel supported rather than constrained by central office. However, the Performance/Empowerment theory was not implemented with fidelity in that the theory necessitates that autonomy is balanced with accountability. In return for empowerment, schools are to be held accountable for results in areas such as, demonstrating improvement in student learning, operational and financial effectiveness, student safety, and stakeholder satisfaction.[57] Leaders at all levels expressed a desire for greater accountability or a managed performance-empowerment system structure. Accountability is important if equity change initiatives are to have teeth, and data allows for accountability and accountability is the preamble for reflection. Data

[57] McAdams, D. R., & Katzir, D. (2013). *The redesign of urban school systems: Case studies in district governance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

also shows us how an organization is faring with regard meeting its equity goals and objectives and illuminates what is actually happening. Data breaks down the ground of having to persuade stakeholders that a phenomenon is happening, and instead focuses the discussion on reflection and solutions. Therefore, the district should aim to create a system of accountability that is data informed and equity guided.

As aforementioned, although the Heifetz framework allows for us to solidly navigate the adaptive components of a racial equity change initiative as a leader, the organization itself must also prove to be adaptive. I underestimated the adaptive challenges inherent in building the district's capacity to implement its racial equity strategy. This is what prompted me to create the DNA Equity Communications Framework. I sought to shift organizational adaptability and mindsets by leveraging the organization's robust communications machine in an effort to have the organization as an entity model naming the elephants, reflection and continuous improvement. Working with district leaders to craft an organizational equity narrative provided a way for the equity work to solicit buy-in and to be owned by every stakeholder. Once stakeholders saw that the organization was modeling these expectations, you began to see leaders within the organization pivot accordingly.

Implications for Self

According to my former advisor and professor, Dr. Jeff Duncan-Andrade, in the milieu of urban school reform, there exist three types of educators: Gangstas, Wankstas, and Ridas.[58] The presence of these educator archetypes is what maintains the status-quo in most urban school districts. The interplay between this paradigmatic triad, within an urban educational context, can best be described by viewing them through the lens of a balance scale. On one side of the scale

[58] Duncan-Andrade, J. (2007) *Gangstas, Wankstas, and Ridas: defining, developing, and supporting effective teachers in urban schools*, International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 20:6, 617-638

sit the Gangstas. These educators possess a deficit view of most parents, students, and the community. According to Duncan-Andrade, these educators "aggressively advocate for ineffective and repressive school policies such as sweeping remediation, zero-tolerance discipline policies, and tracking," and do not represent most urban educators.

The Wankstas make-up the vast majority of the urban educator population. The term *Wanksta* was popularized by hip-hop artist 50 Cent and is used to describe a person who is always talking about what he or she will do, but never does. Wankstas act from the human instinct of self-protection. Like most urban educators, the Wanksta comes to the profession with the intent of being a change-agent; however, the unrelenting challenges and ill-managed bureaucracies that they find themselves in cause them lose faith in their ability to effectuate change. As a result, they go into survival mode and begin finding reasons to disinvest.[59] Unlike Gangstas, Wankstas talk about wanting equity and better outcomes for marginalized student populations, and they recognize that there are systemic barriers that impede both. Yet, they remain centered on the balance scale and will not rock the boat. They avoid taking risks out of self-preservation, but they hold promise because they can be galvanized for change efforts if the conditions for protection are there and are presented in a way that compels them.

A Rida, as defined in an urban context, is someone you can depend on no matter the risks involved. The term is often referenced in hip-hop in connection with the phrase, 'ride or die', which means that someone would rather die than not support their comrade. Duncan-Andrade asserts that there are very few Ridas in urban education. However, Ridas are successful across a broad range of contexts and with a broad range of students. They are avid risk-takers and often remain in urban districts because they view their work in these contexts as the only logical path

[59] Ibid.

to effectuate change in the lives of the young people they care deeply about. Given the right conditions, Ridas hold the most promise for improving the conditions of urban schools because their passion and conviction can pull the Wankstas off the fence and tip the balance of power within a district.[60]

Duncan-Andrade's Wankstas, Gangstas and Ridas paradigm has guided my actions as an educator for the past eighteen years. It was "My Ambitionz Az a Rida," so titled after one of Tupac Shakur's more famous songs, that led me to apply to the Ed.L.D. program. Throughout my career, I leaned into the identity of a Rida. My experiences growing up in Newark, NJ, during the height of the crack epidemic bred in me a 'Ride or Die' spirit. A "Ride or Die' spirit was a requisite for demonstrating to myself and others that demography was not destiny for me. This ride or die inheritance fueled my 'why' for becoming an educator. After being professionally trained by Jeff Duncan-Andrade, and other social justice-oriented academics, at UCLA's Center X, I stepped into the profession as a Rida—ready to 'Ride or Die' for the communities and children that I served. These communities typically looked like me, or had similar socio-economic upbringings, or shared a common struggle of marginalization. After dying many times over these past eighteen years, I began to question the effectiveness of an equity-champion that rides to the point of "professionally dying". When reflecting on my more recent role and the subsequent "professional death," I realized that possessing a "Ride or Die' mentality, at least as I interpreted it, oftentimes caused me to get in my own way. As a result, my students, families, and staff suffered.

After taking Ronald Heifetz's course, *Leadership from the Inside Out: The Personal Capacity to Lead and Stay Alive,* I learned that there is a way to be a Rida without leaning into

[60] Ibid

the "ride or die" trope. The key lies in how one negotiates and manages the identities that are activated, pinched, or triggered when exercising leadership. Thus, as I went into my residency experience, I went about leading my work within the Atlanta Public Schools taking note of, and managing, the key identities that were activated, as I sought to be a 'Rida' for the children of the Atlanta Public Schools.

Identities and Loyalties at Play

Thinking through my challenges and missteps during residency, I can see how certain identities and loyalties played a major role in my decision-making at times. I sorted these identities into Level I and Level II. Level I identities are the professional identities that are on full display for everyone to see. They are how colleagues in your professional space view you and oftentimes loyalties you feel inclined to live up to professionally. Level II identities are ancestral and social identities, these are identities ascribed to you by society, family, friends or other social circles. These too often come with loyalties and expectations that you often feel obligated to meet. I have come to learn that the following identities were frequently activated as I attempt to 'ride' for all kids in the city of Atlanta

Level I (Professional Identities)

Social Justice Educator

In addition to my Newark Native identity, my identity as a social justice educator also created blind spots in appropriately assessing the challenges that I was facing during my residency. This identity was frequently used as a means of "work avoidance" for colleagues who preferred that I serve as the main advocate for their equity concerns or who did not understand the necessity of building their own stamina for leading racial equity work. Trying to convince others that initiating courageous conversations on race and racial equity was a shared

responsibility often proved challenging. Because of this, I was frequently triggered within meetings and worked diligently to balance my "ride or die" tendencies while avoiding becoming a professional martyr.

This identity was also activated when my white colleagues engaged in behaviors that would be deemed entitled or privileged when viewed through a racial equity lens. At times, I caught myself viewing these situations as either-or scenarios, which meant that challenging the behavior was equivalent to challenging the status-quo. This outlook made the situation personal and hindered me from engaging effectively with my peers. To be effective, I needed to approach these situations from a position of humble inquiry and non-judgment. However, when my social justice educator identity was activated, my 'ride or die' instincts turned on, and I failed to remain in a place of inquiry and non-judgement. I also failed to appreciate the complexity of the matter and to consider the impact that these 'ride or die' interactions would have on my relationship with co-workers. Managing my social justice educator identity and the tendency to 'ride or die' was hard at times, especially in moments when conversations of racial equity arose. However, as my residency progressed, I learned to employ the tools I was given in various courses throughout my Ed.L.D. experience and became much more proficient in navigating these difficult times and conversations. As a result, I found myself more consistently remaining in a space of humble inquiry and non-judgment, which allowed for more constructive and authentic dialogue.

Level II (Social Identities)

Given the racially charged climate in which I entered my residency, my social identities were activated the most throughout my residency. Some of the most poignant identities that played into my ability to exercise leadership throughout my strategic project include:

Ancestral Legacy Carrier

As I reflected on my ancestral connection to this identity, I was reminded of an important fact in my family history. The history is attached to this photo:

My paternal origins are in Georgia not too far from Atlanta in Washington County. Washington County, GA is the birthplace of my oldest known relatives who were born slaves: Charles Sheppard (b. 1817), his daughter, Saddie Sheppard-Harris (b. 1855), and her husband, Charles Harris (b. 1849). Charles Sheppard & Saddie Sheppard-Harris were slaves of one of the original settlers of Washington County, the family of John Sheppard. Charles Harris and Saddie were the parents of Hill Harris, the father of my great-great grandfather Lodrick Harris, Sr. Loderick Harris, Sr. and Pearl Dixon-Harris are the parents of my great grandfather, Lodrick Harris, Jr.

Lodrick Harris, Sr and Pearl-Dixon Harris left Washington County, GA in 1919 and eventually landed in West Virginia. We were told that they contemplated moving their family to Atlanta, where my great-uncle Harry and his family were. However, given the events of the time they migrated to West Virginia because they felt they could provide a better educational future for their children there. What is interesting is that around the time they opted to leave Georgia there was a major race riot in Atlanta and Atlanta was also implementing massive Jim Crow legislation. The events of the time undoubtedly influenced their decision to opt for moving North

to West Virginia. So, my family's history is intimately intertwined with the history of Atlanta. Seeing these events unfold before them, Lodrick and Pearl left Georgia to protect their family from the emergent realities of their time and to provide them with greater opportunities, only to find that the same bigotry and race-based violence was prevalent everywhere. Little did Lodrick Sr. and Pearl know, sixteen years after they moved to West Virginia, Pearl would be killed in a house fire set by the Klu Klux Klan. The only memento we have left of her existence is this photo.

This story has been told to every member of my family. Until recently, I did not understand how this story, and many others like it from other Black families, made me passionate about fighting for civil rights for marginalized communities. Events such as this are what made wealth accumulation in our community so difficult and are why this work is so important to me. My ancestors died and sacrificed their lives for me to be treated humanely, and I have been carrying this water with me throughout my adult life.

African American/Black American

My identity as an African American is probably what shaped my judgment the most during this residency. My ancestral allegiance to the plight of Black people in this country, and to my family, gave me an elevated sense of duty toward advancing the district's racial equity agenda. At times, it made me a lone crusader of sorts. This, coupled with the recent events of racial and civil unrest, created a communal sense of urgency around my work. Being the only person within the organization whose title and role explicitly called for leading racial equity, placed internal pressure on me to be the voice of Black and historically marginalized communities. Thus, I frequently assumed the role of shedding light on the racial equity "elephants in the room" that were talked around or illuminating the unpleasant truths of

inequities that people resisted seeing. In doing so, I was not allowing others to develop their stamina for leading racial equity work.

To manage this identity, I would ask myself a series of questions: "What assumptions – attitudes, beliefs, values, or sensitivities – have I internalized about what it means to be Black in this situation? How might these help me in this situation? How might they be limiting me in the situation?" The internal dialogue that followed gave me the freedom I needed to respond appropriately to the situation at hand and empowered me to give the work back to others where it often belonged. Holding my race as object also allowed me to renegotiate what it meant to be a 'Rida', and I developed the flexibility I needed to intervene appropriately and move the work forward.

What I learned from this work

When reflecting on my leadership during residency, I was able to see in hindsight unconscious behaviors and blind spots that were grounded in my identity markers and that went largely unnoticed at other times in my career. I took three major lessons away from this experience about how to move forward successfully as an equity leader, and about how to be a 'Rida' without "dying." What I learned is that equity work is human centered. It is human centered because we are dealing with people and their mindset, values and beliefs. We are asking people to be willing to be moved, to sit in discomfort, to experience loss, use curiosity and think deeply. This is a big ask. So, we have to be willing to meet people where they are in order to do this work successfully. Given the identity waters I carry, and the imperative to meet people where they are, I have learned that the best way to facilitate difficult and emotional conversations is to first recognize the humanity in the person that I am approaching the conversation with. In doing so, I am not approaching the conversation to change the person's mind or resolve the

issues of the past. Rather, I am approaching the conversation to understand the person's perspective and share my own. As I brought my strategic project to a close, I modeled this outlook by keeping three things at the forefront of my mind when engaging in this work on a personal level:

1. Our opinions are the result of our lived experiences. So, I must work to understand the experiences of people because their experiences shape how they see the world.
2. You have to meet people where they are, not where you want them to be.
3. Extend to people grace to grow. If you believe there is redemption for people, then you always have the opportunity to see people in a different light
4. Remember that labels become limitations.
5. You are not your worst mistake.

These five lessons that I came to understand some time prior joining the Atlanta Public Schools as a resident, but that this residency experience allowed me to hone and perfect. Heifetz's Adaptive Leadership framework was instrumental in the mastery thereof because the framework not only provided me with a lens by which to analyze the Atlanta Public Schools, but it also provided me with a solid foundation for analyzing how I show up as a leader. As a result, I feel more confident in my ability to exercise leadership accordingly moving forward. I also believe that this skill set will allow me to successfully move forward with my life's mission of being a Rida for children, while at the same time exercising this leadership in a manner that allows me to stay alive professionally while doing so. After all, children need their equity champions to not ride so hard that they die. They need us to remain 'alive' and in the game if we are truly to effectuate change.

Implications for Site

Identify Equity Challenges and their Root Causes

Equity in decision-making was a core tenet of the district's 2015-2020 strategic plan, while there was some traction in this regard (SSF, SPLOST renovations, incremental gains in student achievement), there remain major inequities across the district and many stakeholders believe that there was little effort and progress being made. The last time the district conducted a comprehensive equity assessment was in 2014. Given the span of time that has passed since the audit, and the fact that COVID-19 has undoubtedly exacerbated inequities, I recommend that the district take a step back and conduct a comprehensive equity assessment to determine the degree of equity or inequity that is currently present within the system. The equity assessment should also analyze data in key areas such as: programmatic, curriculum, teaching quality, achievement, facilities, and finance, and be conducted in conjunction with an equity committee representing a cross-section of internal and external stakeholders. Conducting this assessment is imperative because district leaders must be able to see the system in which they are functioning and determine how the system is reproducing its' current racialized outcomes. This systems analysis will surface the real equity problems and challenges that will inform the development and continual refinement of a theory of change for racial equity within the Atlanta Public Schools.

Create a Unified Equity Framework

I also recommend that the Atlanta Public Schools create a Unified Equity Framework to supplement and fill the gaps inherent in its strategic plan. The APS Unified Equity Framework should lay out the dimensions that will support driving equity in the district's work (i.e., inform its equity lens), lay the foundation for the district's understanding of the work to be done, and provide a theoretical framework for internal stakeholders as they build out equity-focused change

ideas. The framework should also be developed in conjunction with a cross-functional group of internal and external stakeholders, and the goal of the framework would be to create shared language, tools, and accountability on what equity means within the district. A Unified Equity Framework will also guide APS toward its universal goal of closing gaps and increasing academic outcomes across the district, so that every child succeeds regardless of where they live or who they are. If done correctly, the framework will liberate the community at large from the false thinking that education is a zero-sum game because when all of our students are valued, affirmed and highly educated, the entire city succeeds.

Create a Vision for Equitable Instruction that is Culturally & Linguistically Responsive

When reviewing research to determine the types of targeted strategies that will yield the greatest impact, I turned to the research on best practices for increasing the academic achievement of African American and Latinx youth. APS has already begun the work of researching best practices in educational equity. They commissioned Hanover Research to develop a comprehensive report detailing the steps that the district should take in this regard. The report outlines three primary steps that the district should take to address their equity concerns: Create Equitable Learning Environments; Engage Families; and Support Highly Mobile Students.

To create equitable learning environments, Hanover recommends that the district focus on equitable instruction strategies at the classroom and district levels, ensure equitable access to advanced courses, and ensure that school culture facilitates positive and equitable discipline practices. Family engagement plans should focus on engaging culturally diverse families, creating welcoming environments for diverse families, and motivating staff support. Hanover also asserts that there needs to be district, school, and classroom level practices that support high mobility students.

Hanover's report provides a roadmap for the systems that need to be restructured to address this challenge. However, the question still remains as to what specific strategic actions should be taken to ensure that these objectives are met. After consulting research on best practice for educating African American and Latinx youth, I proposed the following five strategies as anchors in the Atlanta Public Schools Equity Framework:

1. Ensure that every school delivers a curriculum that is relevant to, and affirming of, the diverse student body within the district.
2. Ensure that every school has a culture that is caring, nurturing, and high achieving.
3. Ensure that classroom instruction is student-centered.
4. Develop the cultural competency of all staff.
5. Ensuring that every school has an environment that is welcoming to and inclusive of diverse families.

Establish Coherence Across the System

The lack of a theory of change grounded in racial equity, coupled with the lack of an articulation of vision of excellent culturally responsive and equitable teaching, demonstrate a lack of coherence. According to the PELP *Note on Racial Equity*, coherence is of the utmost importance for the implementation of the strategic plan. Coherence requires that all of the elements of the district's work together in an integrated way to implement an articulated strategy. However, a solid theory of change and vision for excellent instruction are the lynch pins for a solid racial equity change strategy. Absent this, ensuring that racial equity is embedded within each of the critical elements of a successful strategy implementation: culture, structures and systems, resources, and stakeholders will be a challenge for the Atlanta Public Schools.

Institute Systems-Wide Accountability Structures

It is important to note that the district's 2020-2025 strategic plan was developed in haste at the directive of the Board. It was also developed under the tenure of an outgoing superintendent who was fully aware that the responsibility for implementation would rest on her successor. Given the sense of urgency, the strategic plan was not developed in line with best practice in DEI because it was developed without the guidance of a DEI expert. Moreover, the lack of ownership by the previous administration created an imperative to use vague language and refrain from building in concrete measures of success to allow the new superintendent flexibility in this regard. As a result, the strategic plan, as written, is insufficient to successfully guide the large-scale equity efforts of the district.

As previously mentioned, accountability is key if the district's equity change initiative is to be successful. Therefore, it is recommended that the district re-evaluate its Performance/Empowerment theory for managing its schools. Ideally, the district is encouraged to move toward a Managed Performance/Empowerment theory of operations. As is the case with a Performance/Empowerment theory, the Managed Performance/Empowerment theory allows schools to continue having autonomy, and autonomy is balanced with accountability. However, what is unique to Managed Performance/Empowerment theory is that schools are not given the freedom and flexibility to make instructional, operational and financial decisions until they demonstrate performance and/or improved outcomes.[61] What is also important to note is that with this system of school management, schools are not left to themselves to achieve high performance, rather they are provided with a prescriptive instructional system that is managed by central office. As schools demonstrate improved student outcomes, school are provided with

[61] McAdams, D. R., & Katzir, D. (2013). *The redesign of urban school systems: Case studies in district governance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

more autonomy.[62] A Managed Performance/Empowerment system is challenging to develop and manage because it requires a solid infrastructure to be in place to move schools from one tier of autonomy to another. Regardless of the theory APS selects to manage its schools, data will be key to implementing it with fidelity. Therefore, it is recommended that the district create an equity data dashboard and use data in ways that humanizes the community in which it serves.

Implications for Sector

COVID-19 has unearthed and exacerbated all of the historical inequities for us to see. Not only in our healthcare system, but in our education system as well. The digital divide that already existed within our communities, coupled with the already disparate outcomes between white, Black and Latinx students, have been inordinately widened as a result of COVID-19. This, coupled with the events following the death of George Floyd, and the insurrection at our nation's capital, has created a situation where district leaders are seeking, now more than ever, ways to develop and strengthen a critical lens for seeing the inequities that exist within their organizations. As a result, districts are in need of solutions on how they can address barriers to progress and their root causes more directly. This strategic project has shown me that the work of equity should not be relegated to one office or division. Rather, it should be work that is owned by the entire system and community. In addition, there must be an understanding that the work is context driven and specific, and that there is no blueprint for systemically leading equity work. That said, there are frameworks that can serve as a guide.

Another important lesson gleaned from this strategic project is that there are six generally nonlinear phases involved in any large-scale equity change initiative: taking stock, establishing shared language and understanding, announcing symbolic change, building relational trust, setting

[62] Ibid.

explicit equity goals, and establishing ongoing equity practice.[63] What I learned from this strategic project is that as an organization cycles through each phase, there will be turbulence and setbacks. Additionally, understanding which stage an organization is experiencing at any given time, positions district leaders to establish the necessary conditions to guide the organization's change effort successfully.[64]

Given the events of recent, it is impossible for post-COVID district leaders to effectively lead change without addressing the need for racial equity. This is perhaps the single most important opportunity yielded from the most recent pandemic in leading racial equity work. However, attempting to address inequities without first addressing the imbalance of power resulting from racial injustice perpetuates systemic inequities. This is because racism is indeed the single most critical barrier to building effective coalitions for change. Therefore, in order to do this work effectively, today's systems leaders must develop a racial equity lens that allows them to accurately see the system(s) that produce(s) their current results. Moreover, an equity-focused mission, grounded in racial justice, is no longer a lofty ideal or an optional add-on given today's environment; it is simply at the core of the job public school districts must be expected to perform.

Historian and education philosopher, Carter G. Woodson, stated in his 1934 book, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, "There would be no lynching, if it did not start in the schoolroom." Woodson's assertion that racist acts of violence begin in the classroom echoes an essential truth that is often overlooked when determining the root cause of racist acts of violence. That is, that the key to ending racism, and race-based violence within our society, is to examine what is taking place within our classrooms. Woodson understood that violence against African

[63] "Predictable Phases of Equity Work," dismantling Racism Analysis Tools, accessed at https://www.dismantlingracism.org/analysis-tools.html.
[64] Michael Fullan, Leading in a Culture of Change (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 31-49.

Americans began at the base level of ideas. I postulate that violence against all marginalized groups begins at this level, and that violence and power are encapsulated in the funds of knowledge that exists within our classrooms. Because of this, as educators, we must critically examine our systems, structures and practices to ensure that they are bias-free. We must also work to ensure that every decision we make is through the lens of equity.

This work is vitally important because as educators we help to construct a child's definition of what it means to be fully human. We also help children understand the true meaning of our nation's democratic and pluralistic ideals. The decisions we make every day: what we choose to teach, how we treat students, how we engage, and interact with families, all of it, plays a crucial role in how children come to see the world and engage with it. Therefore, we must leverage the power that we have as educators to shape a more perfect union. If we want to end racism, stop racist acts of violence, or create a more equitable and just society, educators and systems leaders must teach and lead to change the world.

Conclusion

We only have to look at Atlanta – the most income-disparate city in the United States – as evidence of the vast gaps and inequities that exist within our society. According to the most current census data, the median household income within Atlanta Public Schools is $167,087 for white students and $23,803 for black students. Closely associated with this inequity gap is the academic achievement gap where white students are nearly 4.5 grade levels ahead of their black peers within Atlanta Public Schools. Looking at academic achievement, 76% of white students in APS are performing on grade level by fourth grade, compared to 16% of African American students and 23% of Hispanic students. At the current rate of growth, it will take roughly 128 years to close the gap between white and Black fourth graders within APS. About 75 percent of

APS's children are considered low income. But what is disheartening is that Stanford University research found that a child born in poverty in Atlanta has only a 4.5% chance of achieving upward economic mobility.

That is why equity stands at the core of the district's 2020- 2025 strategic plan and will guide all of their work as a school system. When the Atlanta Board of Education approved a district equity policy, it recognized: "Equity means the quality or ideal of being just and fair, regardless of economic, social, cultural, and human differences among and between persons. We believe that achieving equity requires strategic decision-making to remedy opportunity and learning gaps and create a barrier-free environment, which enables all students to graduate ready for college, career, and life." To that end, the Board approved the creation of the position I now hold: Chief Equity and Social Justice Officer. They and Superintendent, Dr. Lisa Herring, further supported the launch of the APS Center for Equity and Social Justice as the district's first office devoted solely to advancing equity in education.

As part of APS's mission to graduate every child ready for college, career, and life, we must ensure that student's experience both meaningful rigor and culturally responsive supports from teachers, support providers and leaders. It is critical that the district works to build intentional ways of working that centers the voices of those who have been traditionally underserved, use data in ways that humanize, and ultimately make decisions in collaboration with the community it serves. This will allow the Atlanta Public Schools to achieve the vision for equity it has for its schools. With *Equity at the Forefront*, the Atlanta Public Schools can ensure equity and excellence for everyone, something it can truly celebrate in years to come.

I frequently think about how my great-great grandparents left Georgia so that I can have the opportunities and life that I have today, the greatest of which was access to a quality

education. It was 100 since the time Lodrick, Sr and Pearl left Georgia that I began my journey to come to APS as a Harvard Resident. I find it serendipitous that I returned to Georgia, more specifically Atlanta, to support the Atlanta Public Schools in breaking the historical patterns of inequity that have resulted in far too few black, brown and low-income children succeeding at high levels. I am honored to serve at a time such as this, especially considering the recent events of racial unrest and the insurrection at our nation's capital. These events have shown us that the time is now, and I get to take a part in shaping our future.

As the first Chief Equity and Social Justice Officer for the Atlanta Public Schools, and as the first female district-level Chief Equity Officer in the State of Georgia, I look forward to doing my part to undo centuries of systems and structures that have served as barriers for far too many of our children, for far too long. Collectively, I know that the City of Atlanta can do this because we stand on the shoulders of giants – not only of the city's Civil Rights legends, but also of our familial ancestors. Their tenacity, and will, show us that we can. We can ensure that whether a child lives above the 20 or below it, or whether they live in the Northeast or the Southwest, that they have access to excellent, equitable and engaging educational experiences in every APS classroom, every day. We have it in our power to make this a reality for our 54,946 students in our 89 learning sites, 6 partner schools, and 18 charter schools throughout the district. This is not to say that the Atlanta Public Schools owns all of the work to be done, nor does it suggest that APS can fix all of our societal problems. What this Capstone displays, is that on our watch, we are going to do our best to own what is ours because the future of our children, our city, and nation demands it!

Appendices

Appendix A:

Critical Components	Indicators	
Systems Analysis: Patterns, Structures, Processes		
It is important for education organizations to have clear and effective policies, systems, structures, and procedures that support equity. Practices should be developed with a collaborative of cross-sector community stakeholders to develop a data-informed action plan and implement a continuous review cycles.	1	**Long-Term Equity-Focused Strategic Planning:** This indicator assesses the organization's use of an Equity-Focused Strategic Plan that addresses equity-related gaps in the organization, the processing of stakeholder complaints, addressing data collection and analysis needs, and incorporates equity management skills in performance evaluation. It also calls for a need for an institutionalized equity goals and tracking.
	2	**Racial Diversity Data Systems:** This indicator assesses where an organization is with regard to developing systems that measure its performance toward achieving stated equity goals and objectives by examining how data is used to analyze, plan, and change structures and systems that support equity in targeted areas.
	3	**Learning-and-Effectiveness Paradigm:** This indicator assesses the organization's commitment to learning through seeking and incorporating perspectives from diverse stakeholders. With the organization's Equity Framework, managers should be empowered to develop Equity Learning and Action Plans.
	4	**Accountability, Measurement, and Evaluation:** This indicator assesses the accountability component of a organization's Equity-Focused Strategic Plan, as well as, how success is measured and evaluated.
	5	**Robust & Continuous Training Around DEI:** This indicator assesses organizational training provided for staff and the community regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion and the use of feedback data to inform training content and improvement.
Culture Analysis: Relationships, Information and Identity		
Education organizations should foster a safe and welcoming environment, embracing the diversity of race, ethnicity and religion, gender, and sexual orientations among students and staff.	1	**Personal Comfort:** This indicator assesses the level at which members of the organization are comfortable engaging all stakeholders, regardless of race, and the level of comfortability within the organization with engaging in critical dialogue on topics related to diversity.
	2	**Personal Value:** This indicator assesses the level at which leadership and key members of the organization institutionalize their commitment to equity and leverages the benefits of diversity to enhance organizational learning and growth.
	3	**Organizational Fairness:** This indicator assesses the organization's efforts to build trust and ensure ownership over the organization's vision for equity to ensure that all staff are treated fairly and equitably within the organization.
	4	**Organizational Inclusion:** This indicator assesses the institutionalization of inclusive systems by examining the level at which diverse stakeholder perspectives and approaches are incorporated into organizational processes, and how well the organization builds on the interests, strengths and cultures of diverse stakeholders and holds itself accountable for meeting stakeholder expectations in this regard.

Critical Compontent 1: Systems Analysis (Patterns, Structures, Processes)		
Indicator 1: Long-Term Equity-Focused Strategic Planning		
Emerging	**Performing**	**Transforming**
There is a system-wide diversity statement that has been publicly shared. There is a clear process for concerns regarding Equal Opportunity to be collected and addressed in a timely manner and staff are able to state and execute upon their commitment to equity. There are pockets of staff who share, discuss, or collaborate on these statements and actions. There is limited alignment between diversity approaches and the system-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion language.	A commitment to diversity and inclusion is imbedded within the insitution's fabric and includes a Equity-Focused Strategic Plan. Staff, community, and stakeholders play a role in defining the goals and identify what is necessay for this work to happen and in co-creating diagnostic tools. All staff articulate and uphold these comittments as it is embedded in employee onborading, training, and review cycles. Operations, budgets, transportation, security, and facility plans are developed with equity in mind. There is particular attention on reducing disparities (racial, gender, etc.) and there is intentional planning regarding managing operational and budgetary shifts at the systemic level.	Organizational strategy, systems and processes all serve the goal of increasing diversity and inclusion. Staff, community, and stakeholders collaborate to define the goals and identifying what is necessay for this work to happen. Diagnostic tools are co-created and successfully utlized. Reviews the district's & individual school's mission statement and its long-range plans and consider the criteria it's using to judge its success. Fiscal and operational decision-making is not predictable by race, gender or socio-economic status.

Critical Compontent 1: Systems Analysis (Patterns, Structures, Processes)		
Indicator 2: Racial Diversity Data Systems		
Emerging	**Performing**	**Transforming**
There is a focus on organizational demography and the organization collects and disaggregates data (by race/ethnicity) on staff recruitment, hiring, and retention, student achievement, discipline, and well-being and family engagement. There is also a periodic review of the organization mission statement to ensure that it is equity focused and diversity centered, and the organization has established long-range equity goals and plans and a criteria for success. Diversity climate surveys are also used to determine areas of success and areas in need of improvement.	The organization has a system in place to track and review data related to stakeholder satisfaction; reviews policie for unintended disparate impact, looks at retention; discipline; programmatic and achievement data; and % of POC in teaching and senior level positions, special education and high level courses. Data is publicly available and is user-friendly. A data collection and review process (surveys, exit interviews, assessment data, etc.) is conducted to take the pulse of the organization and provide candid assessments of the culture and climate. The results form the basis upon which process improvements are made.	The organization has a consistent and urgent focus on organizational demography and has high ratings in the four dimensions of diversity climate. The organization also conducts an annual equity internal audit, or develops an annual equity scorecard, to assess each unit's progress in achieving equity goals. Schools & departments develop an equity plan with three to five goals, qualitative and quantitative measures, beginning and end dates, and designation of a lead individual. Further initiatives are developed based on the stage the unit has achieved.

Critical Compontent 1: Systems Analysis (Patterns, Structures, Processes)		
Indicator 3: Learning-and-Effectiveness Paradigm		
Emerging	**Performing**	**Transforming**
The organization demonstrates a commitment to learning by soliciting input from a diverse group of stakeholders and attempts are made to incorporate various perspectives into decision making.	The organization utilizes diverse stakeholder feedback and publicly shares where this feedback has been taken into consideration and incorportated into actions. The organization has developed an Equity Framework which provides stakeholders with a template of suggested action items to enabling organization and school managers to develop their Equity Action Plans. All action items are weighted for clarity on components that are considered most critical.	The organization demonstrates felxibility, agility, and responsiveness by soliciting diverse stakeholder perspectives and approaches and incorporating it into the business processes to enhance organizational learning and growth through a continuous improvement process. Organization learning is frequently shared with the organization and the community.

Critical Compontent 1: Systems Analysis (Patterns, Structures, Processes)		
Indicator 4: Accountability, Measurement, and Evaluation		
Emerging	**Performing**	**Transforming**
The organization has established timelines and benchmarks with regard to achieving its equity goals and objectives. Owners are listed for each and there is a baseline accountability system in place to ensure that progress is being made.	The organization conducts continuious diversity, equity, and inclusion review cycles that are aligned to stated mission and goals. These cycles are seamlessly imbedded within existing review cycles and its purpose is understood and valued. The information gathered is used to determine ways to renew, adapt, and change at a quick yet sensible pace and inter-departmental collabortive teams are established to execute the new plans.	Leaders consistenly promote a culture of accountability, measurement, and evaluation by integrating elements of diversity, equity, and inclusion into management and employee performance reviews, professional development, and compensation plans. Department and school leaders also conduct an annual equity review and performance appraisal. Officers present progress reports on goals and equity initiatives to create a more balanced and inclusive culture and climate. The organization publishes the accountability component of their Equity-Focused Strategic Plan.

Critical Compontent 1: Systems Analysis (Patterns, Structures, Processes)		
Indicator 5: Robust & Continuous Training Around DEI		
Emerging	**Performing**	**Transforming**
Staff diversity, equity, and inclusion training has been provided. However, there is no team responsible for coordinating and creating these trainings. There may be an expectation for staff to participate in a core training or engage with designated material.	Staff diversity, equity, and inclusion training is robust, relevant, and continuous. Trainings are aligned to organization and school goals and are differentiated to meet the various needs and styles of the trainees. Feedback from these trainings are used to inform future development sessions and there are clear indications of teacher and staff progress.	Staff diversity, equity, and inclusion training is robust, relevant, and principles and practices are embeded within the existing training. Data systems are used to assess and acknowledge participant progress in implementing key components of the trainings; this data is used to inform future development sessions. These trainings are designed and executed collaboratively, with internal and external stakeholders and community members.

Critical Compontent 2: Culture Analysis (Relationships, Information and Identity)		
Indicator 3: Personal Comfort		
Emerging	**Performing**	**Transforming**
District leaders have created an overall environment where they empower and invest in stakeholders from historically marginalized populations. Leaders consistently foster a collaborative team environment and interdepartmental collaboration is evident.	Leaders create an environment where diverse stakeholder feel comfortable engaging with all staff, regardless of race, in discussions about how racism and systemic oppression show up in language choices and practices. Affinity Groups are provided with a forum to articulate their varied needs and interests and leaders and educators works to understand the varied needs and interests of these stakeholders.	Leaders consistently seek input from diverse groups to determine their perception of progress achieved with regard to equity. The organization is a place that culturally affirms people of color and the goals and values of the organization match up with the goals and values of stakeholders of color. Leaders place a premium on building a organization-wide community where it's easy to build relationships and hold each other accountable on issues related to race and inclusion.

Critical Compontent 2: Culture Analysis (Relationships, Information and Identity)		
Indicator 2: Value		
Emerging	**Performing**	**Transforming**
Stakeholders of color are greeted with warmth and acceptance and interest. The organization has clearly articulated their equity stance and why they would like to focus on equity, and organizational staff members articulate a personal value for equity. The organization has a plan in place to ensure that faculty & administration of color mirror the population of students of color, and there is a sense of urgency in addressing gaps in opportunity and access. There are mechanisms in place that allow stakeholders of color to provide feedback on important diversity and equity related issues.	Organizational staff demonstrate an understanding that equity initiatives create fairer systems and benefits for everyone, improves stakeholder satisfaction, and contributes to increased productivity and better student outcomes. Staff of color within the organization are able to initiate on ideas they have related to the experiences of students/people of color. The organization also has a organization-wide curriculum that draws from the contributions of various races, ethnicities, cultures, and gender.	Leadership consistently demonstrates in word and deed a commitment to diversity. Staff of color are contributing to the community in ways that are valued, and staff of color have the freedom to tailor teaching and work to the population of students in the classroom. In addition, curriculum is co-created with students and families and is adaptive to remain relevant to the demograhics of the student population.

Critical Compontent 2: Culture Analysis (Relationships, Information and Identity)		
Indicator 4: Organizational Fairness		
Emerging	**Performing**	**Transforming**
There is a board adopted and organization implemented equity policy and framework, there is a clear fair treatment policy, and district and school policies and procedures are clearly accessible for all staff, students and families. There is also a collaborative conflict resolution process in place within the organization.	Organizational leaders are responsible for ensuring equity and for the success and effectiveness of equity related policies. Policies and practices are implemented fairly and consistently across the organization. There is a sense of urgency in addressing opportunity and achievement gaps. Effective strategies for managing diversity are robust and functioning effectively.	Staff consistently work to build relationships with their stakeholders by being responsive, transparent, and communicating effectively. There is an apointee who handles diversity-related complaints and acts decisively and consistently when an injustice has been identified by stakeholders. Internal stakeholders (which includes families) feel that they are being responded to in a fair and just manner and that their complaints are enacted on with a sense of urgency.

Critical Compontent 2: Culture Analysis (Relationships, Information and Identity)		
Indicator 5: Organizational Inclusion		
Emerging	**Performing**	**Transforming**
There is a continual review and adoption of policies and practices to ensure that they are not causing unintended disparate impact on diverse student and stakeholder groups. Leaders and managers consistently promote agency and autonomy and balance that with performance accountability. The organization reviews all literature to ensure that it is inclusive and responsive in language and presentation.	The organization has established methods of compensation for additional diversity, inclusion and culture work that staff may take on outside of their normal job descriptions (e.g. translating, facilitating workshops, etc.). The organization embraces full inclusion by removing obstacles to the full participation and contribution of all stakeholders within the organization. Affinity Spaces are created (e.g. diversity councils, affinity councils, networking groups, etc.), and leaders create an environment where they empower and invest in staff from diverse backgrounds by providing pathways to leadership and informal/formal opportunities for mentorship.	There is representation of diversity at all levels within the organization that is representative of demographics and proportionate to the student population. Stakeholders from marginalized groups feel they have a voice in decision-making and are key participants and collaborators in shaping the organizational culture and strategy. They also take an active role in co-creating an anti-bias and anti-racist culture.