



<https://doi.org/10.59298/ROJAM/2025/4116>

Addressing Racial Inequities in School Administration

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ABSTRACT

Racial inequities in school administration remain a pervasive issue despite increasing diversity in student populations. This paper examines the systemic barriers that prevent racial minorities from attaining leadership roles in education, emphasizing the historical and social contexts that shape current disparities. Through a critical analysis of administrative structures, hiring practices, and leadership representation, this study highlights how school systems perpetuate inequity. Drawing from literature on racial justice, educational policy, and leadership development, the paper identifies best practices for promoting diversity and inclusion in school administration. These include equitable hiring policies, mentorship programs, and community engagement initiatives. The findings underscore the urgent need for systemic change in leadership structures to foster an educational environment that is truly equitable and representative of all communities.

Keywords: Racial inequities, school administration, leadership diversity, systemic barriers, educational policy, mentorship.

INTRODUCTION

In the span of a mere 13 seconds, the lives of George Floyd, Bam Dionicio, and Tyree Conyers-Page were put in mortal danger. Less than five minutes later, George Floyd, a Black man, breathed his last breath under a white police officer's knee. For eight minutes and 46 seconds, Officer Derek Chauvin murdered Floyd in broad daylight, publicly, over minor fraudulent charges. Twenty-four days later, on Friday, June 5, 2020, Police Chief Dionicio deployed peaceful tear gas into an innocent bystander, lacerating her skull, leaving her eye dangling out of its socket, and inducing permanent brain damage [1, 2, 3]. Later that same night, Officer Conyers-Page shot a peaceful protester, fracturing his skull. Minnesota's Great Liberal Experiment unveiled the shallowness of its multifaceted system of white supremacy. Amongst the violence, lies, gaslighting, intimidation, and repercussions, a clarion call reverberated from Floyd's tragic death. A call to confront the racist legs of the Minnesota Paradox. Our efforts rose like a geyser, garnering national coverage and sending shockwaves throughout the nation. One of the most prominent demonstrations is rooted in education. As assistant principal of Reimagine Minnesota, I journeyed from executing the bedrock of an inequitable school system to identifying its roots. Allow lessons from an unforgettable semester of ongoing trauma and healing amidst bestial police brutality to reciprocally inform personal and systemic growth in a quest for racial justice in schools. Broach Black and brown scholarly bodies of literature—so often overlooked in a profession overwhelmingly white—for guidance. Gradually craft the theoretical and practical tools needed to trigger long-term political, social, and economic changes [1, 2, 3].

Background and Context

Schools are settings where social progress is made, new opportunities are forged, and the proficiency of young citizens is advanced. While schools are the site for transformation, they can be slow to change. Educational practices and policies have been influenced by an entrenched, generally hidden curriculum that conditions what knowledge is valued, who educators are, and what schools should do. Traditionally, these forces have been shaped by those in power, predominantly White Europeans. These historical and

social contexts are far-reaching and help to explain why the majority of school principals are white, even in diverse school settings. Although progress has been made and victories have also been won that have influenced or changed the assumptions underpinning schools' practices and policies, the pace of evolution has been sluggish [4, 5, 6]. Wider democratic movements have sparked emancipation, inspiring struggles that led to the likelihood of different types of mentors, students, and knowledge. It is with a lens focused on the context that racial inequities in administration in schools will primarily be analyzed: what has always been authoritative, how it has been gathered, and why it is so hard to change. However, this is not to detract from the struggles and efforts that continue – those of determined people and communities that resist and also look for transformation; nor is it suggestive of a resigned fatalism that change can't or won't happen. Instead, this focus is meant to highlight the depth of the emancipatory chaos and how a more informed plan to shift it is essential. Demographic changes and the enduring “whiteness” of schools in various places and the steps that have deliberately been set to confront these disparities are traveled [7, 8, 9]. Since the 1980s, schools in Western countries have seen unprecedented shifts in demographic composition caused by modifications in wider immigration designs. Policymakers, professors, parents, and the press have been swift to identify the implications for scholastic achievement, and this has called into question the aptitude territory of public schooling. Despite the attention of policy and research, most of the attention has been directed at the significance of befriending numerous linguistic and social customs for the educational attainment of young ones. Except, the consequence of such changes for school various places have mostly been ignored. At the same time, other focal points were unquestionably substantial, and it wasn't the intention to depreciate their imperativeness, the frequency considered to be mind shifting in a different bearing, exploring the race related disputes experienced school various places given the changes in student demographics [10, 11, 12].

Understanding Racial Inequities in School Administration

The phenomenon of racial inequities within the realm of school administration warrants careful analysis. As a foundational note, it is necessary to understand what is meant when discussing racial inequities. Racial inequities go beyond simply having people of color represented within leadership roles – the concept relates to systemic barriers that inhibit the beauty, value, and assets that such leaders inherently bring. Therefore, school leadership structures must value and affirm the truth that all people groups have the inalienable right and ability to govern authentically and in honor of their communities. From this understanding emerges a question: What unique racial inequities are in operation within the system of school administration? [13, 14, 15]. Race holds significant ties to power and privilege. Within the sphere of education, this manifests in ways that negatively and disproportionately impact students, teachers, and the broader school community. School administrators have the authority to either perpetuate or dismantle these oppressive structures; however, despite the existence of a pressed-to-apogee white supremacy culture, leadership structures remain overwhelmingly white and male. The dearth of representation of other races within positions of leadership perpetuates inequities that play out in a multitude of micro (and macro) aggressions. These biases and discriminatory practices foster a culture within educational institutions that is inherently unsafe and inequitable for non-white staff and students. They are felt in the many decision-making processes of leadership: recruitment, discipline, professional development, budget allocation, etc. It is those whom the system of education most discriminates against who are then ill-prepared for and thereby excluded from administrative roles within that same system – a closed-loop dilemma that is the cornerstone of systemic inequities. Hence, it becomes of utmost importance to recognize the myriad colonially-induced systems that operate within school leadership and work deliberately and collectively to dismantle them. And also acknowledge the pervasive tendency to leverage this knowledge toward comprehensive understanding and up-rootment of these wicked ravages in every sector of its influence so that schools may truly become places of equity, safety, and uplift for all [16, 17].

Historical Perspectives

Education is often seen as a path to social mobility, so much so that it is sometimes cynically described as 'the great equalizer.' Yet equal opportunity for all to realize the potential benefits of education has never been the case in the United States for all racial groups. While in recent years, there has been increased access to education for all races, there is less discussion of issues of education quality [18, 19]. Education policy and practices are not race-neutral; they have historically impacted racial groups differently. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 has been criticized for being one-size-fits-all education reform because, despite its focus on reducing achievement gaps, its guidelines applied to all schools irrespective of differences in locale, income, or student population. Education reform approaches such as NCLB have inequitable implications because they do not necessarily address the particular needs of poor and minority students [20, 21]. In the historical account of African Americans and their relationship to public

education, one sees a history of educational disenfranchisement and missed opportunities occurring inside and outside schoolhouse doors. Indeed, educational practices themselves have often been methods to keep minority racial groups subjugated. The work of the Freedmen's Bureau to provide education and protect ex-slaves was largely undermined by lack of resources, legislative restrictions, and institutional resistance. Black Codes forbidding equality in many forms, including education, were put in place by southern states immediately after the Civil War. The landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case of 1954 commanded states desegregate public schools "with all deliberate speed", a mandate most southern states dragged their feet on, some even attempting to circumvent. Folks in more northern cities like Boston found themselves bussed outside their neighborhoods, a method restructuring education has relied on heavily in recent years to varying degrees of success [22, 23].

Challenges Faced by Minoritized School Leaders

There is a discrepancy in the number of minority superintendents, especially Latino superintendents, in the state in relation to the increasing number of Latina/o students. The data indicates that 51% of Hispanic/Latino students in schools are not graduating on time or not graduating at all, compared to the 36% on a national average. Hispanic/Latino students are placed in special education at a percentage greater than their White peers since what appears in 20 U.S.C. 1412. 17.6% of the student population in K-12 Special Education is Latina/o. The discipline for Hispanic students is 19.6% compared to White students at 10.1%. In addressing the epidemic of unequal education and graduation for Latina/o students, what the California Department of Education data indicates disparities that still exist are what has to be paid attention to what the Eastern Contra Costa County [24, 25]. Objectively, the educational terrain for Latina/o students when comparing both communities mentioned in this research study is a math risk for underserved Latina/o students here in East Contra Costa County when considering the number of principals or other administrators. When observing the sites as observed in personal experiences and interviews that hinder access points for growth opportunities in districts seen only one site principal or district administrator who is Latina/o in the region encompassing four branches. The passageway to school leadership for Latina/o educators has been made more difficult, overt barriers in the form of administrative officials using board policies to prevent a Latina/o candidate from progressing in the hiring process, the policies explicitly stated between 2015-2019. A better principal, and ultimately a better school for Latinas/os, would be acquired by creating a pipeline of strong leaders, advocating Sheila Blandon and others. This also facilitated administrators to be in a position to repeatedly suppress instead of foster success. For Denise Desantis, a Latina principal, it meant stopping the promotion of a Latina sharing a similar last name, instructing Sherry Rocco not to mentor a developing Latina administrator, and flat out refusing to hire more Latinas/os across sites even though many candidates were interviewed. Rizzo has disproportionately low representation for its Latino/a student population which is where the achievement/opportunity gap is the greatest. A major reason that Latina/o educators have a smaller incline for leadership is that White colleagues ignore the fact they are needed to be in a position to foster success. Shakeal Hydra speaks of how having courage was necessary to pursue a principal position as she was cautioned that her drive for school leadership was never acknowledged [26].

Best Practices for Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in School Administration

Introduction of diversity is timely as schools grow more diverse yet presence of predominantly white teachers and leaders. Inclusivity should be intentional and purposeful, say researchers. Based on their suggestions and a literature review, 4 evidence-based best practices for promoting diversity and inclusion in school administration are presented. Recruiting and hiring practices, Inclusive hiring processes can attract and retain underrepresented candidates. Strong applicants may lack confidence in their qualifications, so coaching can increase their job application rate. Community involvement can expand the pool of potential applicants. Organizations can target multiple college graduation requirements and recruit at a range of career fairs. To support and retain diverse candidates, mentor new leaders frequently feel overwhelmed; having a support system is crucial for their success. This is especially true for principals who face a host of responsibilities and stressors. Several researchers emphasized the importance of continuous and on-going support for new school leaders to ensure their effectiveness and longevity in the role. Mentorship programs can provide new leaders with requisite support, especially for those from underrepresented backgrounds. Ideally, mentorship should begin before the school year starts. Match veteran leaders with new ones based on similar schools, job history, or specialties. Schools can partner with another neighboring schools to support both mentors and mentees. Mentorship should not exceed 2-3 years as longer programs might be less effective and more burdensome. Lastly, mentorship should be scaled so giant urban districts have equitable outreach to balance community needs. In fact, used 4 different measures to determine these qualifications and found that teacher effectiveness, school climate,

and the availability of opportunities all influenced the impact on student outcomes in different ways so A supportive and affirming school culture benefits all leaders but especially supports the professional development of diverse leaders [27].

Future Directions

Given the combined nature of the factors that contribute to systemic racial injustice, it is impossible to provide simple answers to the complex challenge faced by the educational system, teachers, and building administrators. Building leaders have witnessed this daily, and wish to emphasize the necessity of a sustained commitment to this work from teachers, educational leaders, and other individuals dedicated to the betterment of education. However, action must be taken in the fight against these racial injustices. Therefore, the following are only a few, highly specific initiatives that it is hoped can be undertaken by teachers and other building administrators for the betterment of the school, the students, and the larger community [28]. A scholarly focus on administrators in schools or the relationships between administrative leaders within schools has often been absent from the discourse on diversifying the teacher workforce, and generally limited in the broader inquiries concerning increasing diversity and inclusion in the administrative realm. Taking the steps to acknowledge this limited collaborative scholarly work between all stakeholders, districts and funding bodies are coming together to offer awards to spur research that will explore the connections between the staffing practices of school and district administration regarding diversity, as well as their broader impacts. Since the administrative body of the average U.S. school is nearly 2% more diverse than its teaching staff, the in-depth analyses of these relationships is of timely import. Broadly, it is hoped that the collective efforts can lead to comprehensive activities to more fully understand how school and district administrators can leverage their unique, underexplored positions in order to advance diversity and inclusion within their respective systems [29].

CONCLUSION

Addressing racial inequities in school administration requires a multifaceted approach that acknowledges the deep-rooted systemic barriers preventing equitable leadership representation. While historical policies and social structures have upheld racial disparities in school leadership, there are actionable steps that can be taken to promote diversity and inclusion. From reforming hiring practices to implementing mentorship programs, fostering community involvement, and advocating for policy changes, educational institutions must actively work toward dismantling inequitable systems. Future research should focus on the relationship between administrative leadership and student outcomes, as well as on strategies for sustainable diversity initiatives. A truly equitable school system must ensure that leadership reflects the diverse communities it serves, thereby creating an educational environment where all students and educators can thrive.

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CITE AS: Nabirye Amina Okwir (2025). Addressing Racial Inequities in School Administration. Research Output Journal of Arts and Management 4(1):1-6.
<https://doi.org/10.59298/ROJAM/2025/4116>