

Sankofa Principals' Principles: Exploring the Effects of a Principal Coaching Program Using a
Racial Affinity Model

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Title: Sankofa Principals' Principles: Exploring the Effects of a Principal Coaching Program Using a Racial Affinity Model

Sankofa Principals' Principles: Exploring the Effects of a Principal Coaching Program Using a Racial Affinity Model investigates how a racially affinity-based coaching program impacts the experiences, retention, and effectiveness of new school principals, particularly those from Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color. Grounded in sociocultural theory, white supremacy culture theory, and the theory of planned behavior, this study addresses persistent inequities in educational leadership by examining how targeted coaching can support leaders who often face unique challenges, including racial bias, isolation, and heightened scrutiny. Through a convergent mixed-methods approach—incorporating participant testimonials, self-reflection surveys, retention data, and cost analyses—this research seeks to uncover the nuanced ways in which affinity-based coaching influences both leaders of color and their white peers, as well as the broader school system.

This study responds to the urgent need for culturally responsive leadership development by analyzing the implementation of a racial affinity coaching model in Portland Public Schools, a large Pacific Northwest school district. It explores three primary research questions: the benefits of this affinity coaching program for leaders of various racial backgrounds, the systemic effects of such a model, and any unexpected outcomes arising from its use. By linking local equity audit findings with national scholarship, the study aims to illuminate how affinity-based coaching can disrupt entrenched patterns of exclusion, improve principal retention, and foster racially literate, equity-focused leadership. The findings will inform policy and practice, offering actionable insights for school districts seeking to support and sustain diverse educational leaders in the face of systemic barriers.

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Sankofa Principals' Principles: The Effects of a New Principal Coaching Program Using a Racial Affinity Model

CHAPTER I

"It is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind." -Akan tribe, Ghana

According to the cultural resource platform, *"From Girls to Women,"* the word "Sankofa" is derived from the Akan language, primarily spoken in Ghana and the Ivory coast. It contains two parts: 'san' (to return) and 'kofa' (to go.) When combined, Sankofa symbolizes "returning to go forward." The visual representation of Sankofa – a bird holding an egg in its beak, with its neck turned backward - delivers a powerful message. While the bird's body is facing forward, its head faces backward, symbolizing the importance of reflecting on one's history, culture, heritage, and experience. The egg in the beak holds the promise of opportunities that arise when one understands and appreciates the past (2023). It reminds us that our collective wisdom can guide us toward a better future – in this case, for the newest school administrators taking the helm of principalship.

The role of school principal is one of the most demanding, challenging, and complex jobs in education. Parents and community need you. Teachers need you. Your district needs you. But most importantly, the children need you. They need you to effectively support, train, and evaluate their teachers so they can get the most out of their time with you. They need you to effectively partner and communicate with their parents and families to maintain trust, especially when they need academic or socioemotional intervention, whether their parents like you or not. Students need you to know and follow local and state directives so that they get the maximum funding, staffing, and other resources due to them, especially in light of the diversity of their

learning and behavioral needs. The kids need you to master balancing a budget much bigger than a home grocery budget. Just like some of their parents find creative solutions for dinner when groceries get sparse, the students depend upon your creativity with staffing, programs, materials, and other resources needed to maximize their learning experiences.

With social media, artificial intelligence (AI), and information technology shaping their interactions, they rely on you to foster and safeguard a positive learning environment—bridging the gap between their in-person and online experiences. They need you for assemblies, initiatives, clubs, projects, conflict management, bullying prevention and response - all while paying attention to the neighborhood and adjusting safety procedures accordingly. Not only do the students need you to create this safety for them, but they also need you to do it for yourself. You work long hours and even have the alarm code to the school building so that you can go in on sleepless nights to catch up on work that keeps recycling itself like a treadmill. You have sports games, dances, community events, and school board meetings, and you regularly work at least one weekend day. The kids need you to figure out a work-life balance so that you maintain the physiological capacity to love them wholly and unconditionally. And they need you to hang the picture they drew for you on your office wall while giving them a band-aid.

Very few jobs require this degree of interpersonal, instructional, organizational, and strategic balance, for the pay received. Even if you are masterful at your job, if you drop the right ball at just the right time and place, or someone in your charge does, you become a running headline on the 6 o'clock news, the local newspaper, or nowadays viral on social media. Your mastery becomes mockery from one mistake until the public's attention turns to another small controversy elsewhere.

Now, consider adding to the magnitude of this work, the complexities of race and its impact. Being Black in educational leadership means contending with negative stereotypes that have been just as pervasive as they were centuries ago when Black people involuntarily inhabited this land (Vinzant, 2009). The Emancipation Proclamation, reconstruction, and *Brown v. Board of Education* decision were intended to advance equality. Instead, they served to further decimate Black people (Superville, 2021). Newly freed people were driven out of lands by lynching, rape, pillaging, and other terror tactics after the proclamation. How do you rebuild with nowhere to go? According to Amber (2018), over 90% of Black principals, who were seen as the champions and chancellors of their communities, lost their jobs in the south after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. White people did not want their schools led by a Black principal. White principals were hired in their places, with little opportunity for rehire elsewhere (Williams & Loeb, 2023). Although these overtly racist systemic practices are considered unethical today, the sentiments persist. Black principals still report harsher judgment, poorer treatment, and less support, camaraderie, and mentorship opportunities than their White counterparts (Williams & Loeb, 2023). Add daily instances of racial microaggressions in the workplace that contribute to diminished mental and emotional capacity (Reed, 2017) to the equation of principalship and you emerge with a radical and irrational expression, one that White principals do not have to calculate, as they are able to maneuver through life with a set of unearned, unseen, and intangible privileges (McIntosh, 1989).

While antiblackness is pervasive across various racial and cultural groups (Spanierman et al., 2021), experiences of racism in leadership are not exclusive to Black individuals of the African diaspora, nor is sexism exclusive to women. Principals of Asian, Latino/a, and Indigenous backgrounds often encounter inequitable treatment and expectations from those they

lead with dedication and compassion. Gay, Lesbian, Transgender, and Queer individuals, as well as those with hidden disabilities, face biases that intersect with their other identities. Stereotypes frequently shape beliefs, which subsequently influence the implicit or explicit actions that burden school leaders. These stereotypes can also negatively impact the performance of certain racial groups if their actions appear to confirm a stereotype (Thames et al., 2013). Stereotype threat, which is hypervigilance of a person to avoid confirming a negative stereotype about their identity group, heightens awareness and can lead people of color to perceive discrimination in performance-related issues, even when discrimination may not be the cause. The frequent referencing of Blackness in this study is reflective of my own identity and is meant to encompass the experiences of these other historically disenfranchised and oppressed groups.

Despite the many challenges, it is possible to be an effective and revered principal of color, achieving student milestones while maintaining your morals and your mind. All children benefit from a diversity of teachers and principals, but Black and Indigenous students fare better academically and socially with teachers and principals (Aldrich, 2019; Bartanen, 2019). They need leaders who look like them in more than a school sense. They need champions. But who are the champions for these BIPOC principals? Mentorship must move beyond the nuts and bolts of the job. This is where the Affinity Model for Principal Coaching steps in. As a Black principal coach, it has been my honor and responsibility to “go back and get” new Black and Indigenous school leaders so they can move beyond survival into thriving, and in turn, “go back to get” our Black and Indigenous children.

The purpose of this study is to explore the bridging of principal coaching with racial affinity, uncovering its effects on white new leaders, BIPOC new leaders, and the broader system of schools in the United States. It is my hope that this exploration will contribute to

potential solutions for support and retention of nonwhite principals while also cultivating effective, racially literate white principals – both of which have been shown to positively impact student achievement (Bartanen, 2019; Celoria & Roberson, 2015; Wang, 2023).

Principal Coaching: A Brief History and Challenges Principals Face

In the earliest days of American education, principals had both teaching and administrative duties. As education became more formal in the mid-20th century, so did the standards and responsibilities of the principalship – school leadership transitioned from a single teacher to head teacher, teacher-principal, and to the non-classroom role we know today (Superville, 2021). Hayes and Mafouz (2020) reported that principal coaching emerged into the educational sphere in the 1980s. University-based principal preparation programs and policymakers developed mentoring models to support novice principals. These models aimed to provide technical expertise, role clarification, and socialization in an authentic, real-time context. The early 2000s saw a push for principals to become instructional leaders, focusing more on improving teaching and learning within their schools. This shift was driven by research showing the significant impact of strong school leadership on student achievement (Hayes & Mafouz, 2020). Today, principal coaching is seen as a crucial element in developing effective school leaders who can foster positive educational outcomes (Celoria & Roberson, 2018). Modern principal coaching programs are more structured, with ongoing comprehensive support to help principals navigate their complex roles and lead their schools successfully. Coaching involves a combination of mentoring, professional development, and practical support (The Wallace Foundation, 2023). However, just as American education was built on Eurocentric norms and ideals, most studies conducted about principal coaching are framed from a white perspective. In addition to the common knowledge gaps new principals have, Black principals often face

another set of unique challenges, leading to an extended workload that may be invisible to their white counterparts. Some of the key issues principals face include racial bias and discrimination, isolation and lack of support, higher expectations and scrutiny, and socioeconomic challenges.

Black principals continue to encounter barriers in hiring and promotion even when more qualified and experienced. Studies have shown that, compared to their white colleagues, Black assistant principals are less likely to be promoted to principalship (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). And when Black school leaders are promoted to principalship or other higher position in educational leadership, they are likely to experience discrimination, bias, and microaggressions from colleagues, staff, and the wider community (Amber, 2018).

These negative repercussions of this bias are exacerbated by the working conditions Black principals face. With a significant majority of district leaders, principals, and teachers being white, Black principals can feel isolated and lack peer support. This isolation can be particularly pronounced for Black female principals (Aldrich, 2019). Access to mentorship and professional networks is often limited for Black principals, which can hinder their professional growth and development (The Leadership Academy, 2021; Vinzant, 2009). Even when veteran Black principals and leaders want to offer support, their own capacity is often also at its limit. This leaves Black principals on their own in terms of support, a finding prominent in Portland Public Schools' Equity Audit (The Leadership Academy, 2021.)

Despite the lack of peer support they receive; Black principals are faced with more stringent expectations (Spanierman et al., 2021) and are prone to greater scrutiny than their white colleagues. They may feel pressure to prove their competence and effectiveness more than their white peers (Brooks et al., 2020). In predominantly Black schools, principals may also face added pressure from the community to address broader social issues, such as poverty and

violence, which can add to their workload and stress (Brooks et al., 2020). It is worth noting that this inequity in expectation goes beyond the field of education. In corporate settings, Black women are often promoted into leadership roles when there is a crisis that needs to be fixed (Glass & Cook, 2020), stemming from the historic trope of Black women as fixers (Vinzant, 2009), and belief that Black women are expected to endure adversity, make do with what they have, and not show defense (Nelson et.al., 2016). The more stringent performance expectations can even come from other Black parents and community members, as Black principals become tasked with righting inequities beyond their capacity and control. In addition, Black principals, especially women, are more likely to be hired into schools that have been under-resourced. This can make it challenging to implement effective educational programs and support student achievement- (Brooks et al., 2020). Higher rates of poverty, trauma, and other socioeconomic challenges coincide, which can affect both their leadership and the overall school environment (Brooks et al., 2020).

The different negative aspects of their work life (bias in hiring, lack of peer support, high expectations with few resources) can lead to negative physiological impacts. When fear and threat are introduced to the brain, hormones are activated, thus increasing heart rate, stomach acidity, hypervigilance, and hyperfocus on getting away from the threat. The time that it takes for these hormones to dissipate can last from hours to days after the threat is gone (Harrell et al, 2003). This becomes compounded for Black people who often experience racism at such a rate that there is no time to return to baseline function from the earlier threat before the next threat is introduced. This compounding contributes to Black people becoming hyperaware, which can lead to stress, depression, high blood pressure, elevated cortisol, sleep problems, mental health issues, lack of concentration, metabolic syndromes, and unhealthy habits (Moreland-Capua et

al., 2021). Such hyperawareness and the negative physiological reactions that accompany it are often worse for Black people in school leadership roles, who both personally experience racism and witness its effect on Black children and families. I find myself wondering how many sick days could be attributed to this phenomenon?

Despite these many challenges, Black female leaders still rise, and students at their schools tend to have the highest academic and socioemotional gains – not just for Black students, but for students in any subgroup... until burnout takes hold, and they leave, citing lack of support (The Leadership Academy, 2021).

Need to Change Support for Black Principals

These challenges highlight the need for systemic changes to support Black principals. It is known that principal coaching improves retention, leader self-efficacy, instructional improvement, and climate improvement in schools (Wang et al., 2024). It is known that sociocultural learning among peers works well for adults in a coaching context (Barton, 2023). It is known that our schools are staffed by mostly white educators and central office leaders. It is known that the racial achievement gap persists in part because of white teachers' perspectives on Black children's abilities (Oates, et al., 2009). We know that Black educators make a difference in the lives of Black students, as well as students from other racial groups. We know that principal turnover deeply disrupts school communities, and that coaching decreases the likelihood of turnover (Bartanen, 2009), that turnover is costly, averaging \$75,000 per leader turnover and rehire in the United States (Superville, 2021), and that Black leaders face challenges that their white colleagues do not. The lesser explored question is, how does all of this knowledge converge?

As an educational leader tasked with supporting other educational leaders, I grapple with a variety of substantive questions on a daily basis. How do we coach Black and Indigenous principals in being instructional leaders and change agents of the community, while they are also made to carry an inequitable burden? And how can white coaches coach nonwhite administrators with strategies to stay healthy, effective, and employed in a mostly white district when they do not share the same racial experience? How do coaches of any race support Black and Indigenous leaders with strategies to dismantle systemic White Supremacy Culture while not succumbing to it? If Black students benefit from Black principals, and if Black students have the most persistent and pervasive achievement gap, it would be wise for school districts to recruit, keep, and support Black leaders in ways that are specific to their experiences and needs (Williams & Loeb, 2023). For the past 3 years, I have been part of bringing a racial affinity coaching model to a large school district in the Pacific Northwest. In this dissertation, I have studied the ways in which this racial affinity coaching model creates conditions for new BIPOC principals to thrive while also creating learning conditions for white new leaders to be steadfast in their commitment to equity.

Research Questions

More specifically, I address the following research questions:

1. How do Black, white, and non-Black new school leaders of color benefit from an affinity coaching model built on tenets of sociocultural and white supremacy culture critical theory?
2. What are the effects of an affinity coaching model on the broader school system?
3. What, if any, unexpected outcomes arise from implementation of this affinity coaching model?

Through testimonials of participants, coaches, principal supervisors, and directors, along with self-reflection surveys, retention data and cost analyses of hiring, I examine emergent themes from our principal coaching model which converges white supremacy culture theory (Okun, 2009) with sociocultural theory of learning. As a Black coach who thrived as a Black principal, my work to “go back and get” new BIPOC principals and give them tools to thrive, is the embodiment of the spirit of Sankofa.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE SYNTHESIS

The literature synthesis for this dissertation examines principal coaching through a racial affinity model, informed by both national research and the lived experiences of Portland Public Schools (PPS) administrators from 2021 to the present, as documented in the PPS Equity Audit. Comprehensive searches using Google Scholar, Elicit, Perplexity AI, and ProQuest-guided by keywords such as *racial affinity*, *principal coaching*, *effects of racism*, *achievement gap*, and *principal turnover* have shaped the scope and direction of this review. The PPS Equity Audit’s findings serve as a critical anchor, illuminating persistent patterns in which White Supremacy Culture continues to influence school leadership across diverse contexts and eras. These findings, alongside the audit’s recommendations, highlight the promise of culturally responsive leadership coaching as a lever for disrupting entrenched inequities. This review also situates the coaching program within key theoretical frameworks—sociocultural theory of learning, white supremacy culture theory, and the theory of planned behavior — providing a foundation for understanding both the challenges and transformative potential of principal coaching through a racial affinity lens.

Themes from Equity Audit and Connection to Literature

The 2021 equity audit conducted by The Leadership Academy and select administrators from Portland Public Schools (PPS) serves as a pivotal source for understanding the district’s equity landscape for school leaders and for informing actionable improvement strategies. The “*Portland Public Schools Equity Audit Findings Report*” provides a comprehensive analysis of the experiences and needs of administrators of color (AOC) within PPS. Drawing from a purposive sample of 123 invited administrators, the audit engaged 33 participants in focus groups and received 21 survey responses, generating a robust blend of quantitative and

qualitative data. Through this process, nine central themes and numerous subthemes surfaced, illuminating the complex and nuanced realities faced by AOC.

As I engaged with a broad spectrum of literature on topics such as principal turnover (Bartanen et al., 2019), retention (Superville, 2019), the effects of effective coaching (Celoria & Roberson, 2015; Hayes & Mafouz, 2020; Heston, 2013; Wang et al., 2024), student success, sociocultural learning theory, peer equity coaching (Bussman, 2018; Sanchez, 2023), the impact of Black leaders (Gershenson et al., 2022), the persistent achievement gap (Oates et al., 2009), the physiology of racism (Harrell et al., 2003; Thames et al., 2013; Moreland-Capuia, 2017; Mau, 2020), the principal pipeline (Williams & Loeb, n.d.; Superville, 2019), affinity spaces (Nelson et al., 2016; Vinzant, 2009), the underpromotion of Black people and women (Glass & Cook, 2013; Bailes & Guthery, 2020), accountability (McIntosh, 1989), and White Supremacy Culture (Okun, 2021), clear parallels emerged between these scholarly works and the audit's findings. These intersections further underscore the systemic challenges and opportunities for transformation within school leadership, reinforcing the urgency and relevance of culturally responsive coaching models. In this literature synthesis, I link the findings from the PPS equity audit to published literature, organized by salient themes.

Theme 1: Administrators of Color Are on Their Own for Support

Audit participants consistently described inequitable support structures as one of the biggest challenges they faced. Unlike their white colleagues, AOC are required to self-advocate, with mentorship from leaders of color often limited by the mentor's need to manage their own physiological responses to racism. The district's "one size fits all" approach fails to address the unique needs of AOC, echoing findings from Herman et al. (2022), who conceptualized "inclusive capital" as a merge of social, human, decisional, and diversity/equity/inclusion

capital, and highlighted the importance of this inclusive capital in BIPOC principal retention.

Williams and Loeb's (2023) research further highlights that minority teachers aspiring to administration often feel underrepresented, unsupported, and blocked from advancement, leading to higher attrition rates and a racial mismatch between students and school leaders, unless they are "tapped," or encouraged and supported to do so by other people of color in leadership.

This phenomenon is not unique to Portland; Glass and Cook (2013) found that women and people of color are more likely to be promoted to struggling organizations and then replaced by white males if rapid improvement is not achieved, perpetuating a "white savior complex." Aldrich (2019) notes that Black women leaders often lack access to traditional professional networks, necessitating the creation of supportive communities. Vinzant's work underscores the value and limitations of peer coaching among Black leaders, who often lack the bandwidth to support others due to their own burdens. One audit participant captured this reality, stating:

"I enjoy being an assistant principal, but I never, for the remainder of my career, want to be a principal. Not because I lack the skill, will, or knowledge, but because I've seen what the system does to my colleagues. Every one of them has wound up in the news."
(TLA, 2021)

This participant recounted how a Black principal was unjustly scrutinized and penalized compared to white peers, yet still encouraged others to aspire to leadership, embodying the Sankofa principle of lifting others despite personal setbacks. Such stories illustrate the enduring resilience and mutual support among AOC, even amid systemic inequities.

Theme 2: The Invisibility and Isolation of People of Color

Administrators of color frequently reported feeling unseen, unheard, and tokenized within PPS. Invitations to participate in decision-making often felt superficial, serving more as a “check-box” for inclusivity than genuine engagement. This audit finding aligns with Peggy McIntosh’s concept of white privilege as an “invisible knapsack” of unearned advantages, enabling white leaders to overlook the needs of POC. Bailes & Guthery (2020) found similar systemic barriers in Texas, where women and African American candidates faced slower promotion trajectories despite equal or greater qualifications. In other words, these patterns are neither new nor unique to the Pacific Northwest, but reflect a pervasive national issue.

Theme 3: Differences in Acceptance and Accountability

AOC reported stricter standards and more severe reprimands compared to their white counterparts, who often benefit from more lenient expectations. According to these reporting administrators, systems of accountability are inconsistently applied, rewarding white mediocrity while increasing pressure and stress on leaders of color (TLA, 2021). Vinzant (2009) found that Black principals leverage their racial and cultural identities to foster inclusive, equity-focused leadership, but face unique pressures and stereotypes. Bussman (2018) demonstrated that “peer equity coaching” can enhance cultural responsiveness and accountability among educators, while Aldrich (2019) highlighted the subtle, daily discrimination Black female principals encounter.

Theme 4: Unsupportive Leadership

Connections and influence within the district are often determined by personal networks, with central office leadership remaining predominantly white. The PPS Equity Audit documented the finding that district leaders were seen as gatekeepers, often performative in their

commitment to equity. This finding is reminiscent of the Thames (2023) study on stereotype threat, which introduced the concept of Examiner-Examinee Racial Discordance, showing that African Americans tested by examiners of a different race performed worse. The Thames study found that racial discordance exacerbates the effects of discrimination on cognitive outcomes (2023).

Theme 5: Variable or Limited Empowerment

Although research has long established the critical role of principals in student achievement (Superville, 2021), AOC in PPS do not feel consistently empowered to make decisions. Empowerment varies depending on team composition, and leaders often feel unsupported, fearing that their white colleagues will not back them when challenges arise. One participant said:

“I can’t count how many times I’ve conferred with my principal partner in the next neighborhood over, and we’ve gotten different responses to the exact same moves we made. I mean, we both get pinched for pushing back, because we’re all treated like middle-men, but mine is more harsh. Only difference is they’re white and I’m not, I guess.” (2021)

Bartanen and Grissom (2019) identified lack of decision-making authority as a top factor in principal turnover, a finding echoed by Celoria & Roberson (2015), Glass and Cook (2013), Bailes & Guthery (2020), Superville (2019), and Wallace (2013).

Theme 6: Environment Unsupportive of POC Self and Humanity

Emergent as another of the most major themes, the district’s culture often leads AOC to doubt their value, identity, and professionalism, forcing them to hide their authentic selves.

Herman et al. (2022) found that culturally responsive support networks improve principal retention, which in turn positively impacts student achievement for Black, Latino/a, and even white students (Gershenson et al., 2022). Oates et al. (2009) cited biased treatment as a primary explanation for Black-white high school test performance differentials.

Reed (2017) describes how racial microaggressions and discrimination contribute to poor mental and physical health outcomes. Studies have shown that Black students on college campuses experience increased depression, self-doubt, and isolation, which negatively affects educational outcomes. Physiological responses to racism can also manifest as stress and lifestyle incongruities, compelling administrators of color to “perform” their professionalism to be heard. Moreover, the physical health of BIPOC people can be attributed to the lack of reprieve from these physiological responses. Harrell et al. (2023), Nelson et al. (2016), and Thames et al. (2013) all explored the impact of encounters with racism on human physiology. They found overproduction of cortisol and adrenaline coupled with diminished reasoning due to perceived threat. When someone is constantly anticipating the next threat, their body and brain have no chance to dissipate the production of excess cortisol and adrenaline before the next threat actually comes. As a result, people who experience racism often experience chronic fatigue, insulin resistance, high blood pressure, and adrenal overload.

Theme 7: Feedback Not Productively Received

Feedback from AOC is often dismissed or met with defensiveness, paternalism, and fear of open conflict—all hallmarks of white supremacy culture (Okun, 2019). Leaders of color fear retaliation for giving feedback and sometimes rely on white allies to voice their concerns. The lack of transparency and receptiveness to feedback perpetuates exclusion and further stifles leadership effectiveness. One audit participant spoke of being labeled as “aggressive” and

reported to Human Resources when she asked a white district administrator to stop interrupting her. “I even said please,” they said.

Theme 8: Characteristics of White Dominant Culture

One of the audit’s most salient themes—the present Characteristics of White Dominant (supremacy) Culture — directly illuminates the systemic barriers faced by administrators of color within PPS. The audit identified several hallmarks of white supremacy culture as pervasive in the district, with *power hoarding* and a *sense of urgency* emerging as the most frequently cited by participants. As articulated by Okun (2021), power hoarding is characterized by a reluctance to share authority, while a sense of urgency often undermines thoughtful, inclusive decision-making processes.

Additional traits highlighted in the audit include a preference for quantity over quality, individualism over collaboration, perfectionism, and the “worship of the written word.” These characteristics not only reinforce exclusionary practices but also disproportionately impact administrators from oral traditions, such as those rooted in Black and Latino cultures. For these leaders, the dominance of written communication and individualistic norms can further alienate and inhibit authentic participation, echoing earlier findings that administrators of color often feel their sense of self and humanity is unsupported. This theme underscores the urgent need for culturally responsive coaching and leadership development that actively disrupts these entrenched patterns, reinforcing the connections between the audit’s findings and published research on equity, leadership, and organizational culture.

Theme 9: Factors Influencing Whether to Leave or Stay

The final theme emerging from the audit, "*Factors Influencing Whether to Leave or Stay*," further contextualizes the challenges faced by administrators of color (AOC) and their decisions regarding career longevity within the district. The audit revealed that while AOC often remain in their roles out of a deep commitment to students, families, and a sense of professional responsibility, many simultaneously contemplate leaving – and have since left - due to feeling undervalued and perceiving more promising opportunities elsewhere.

This local reality is echoed in national research. Bailes & Guthery (2020) highlight that, despite the increasing diversity of the teaching workforce, school leadership remains overwhelmingly white and male. Their analysis of career trajectories in Texas demonstrates that Black and female assistant principals experience systematic barriers to promotion, resulting in delayed advancement, lower lifetime earnings, and diminished retirement benefits. These patterns are mirrored in Portland, where the transition from assistant principal to principal could paradoxically result in a pay cut depending on the grade band, further discouraging advancement for AOC who already contend with microaggressions, diminished generational wealth, and insufficient institutional support. For instance, as shown in Figure 1, moving from being a Step 4 assistant principal to a Step 1 principal entails an annual pay reduction of \$260. There can be some negotiation based on additional experience, however, the negotiation is not consistent across all groups. Such structural disincentives, when coupled with the cultural and interpersonal challenges previously described, create significant barriers to leadership advancement for AOC, who are already paid less than their white counterparts, causing a “snowball effect” of missed wages, lower retirement investments, and returns on those investments (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1*PPS Licensed Administrator Salary Schedule, 2024-2025***Portland Public Schools
Licensed Administrator Salary Structure 2024/2025**

Effective July 1, 2024

Job Title	Work Days	Pay Level	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL [^]	233	Pay Level 4	\$ 162,085	\$ 166,137	\$ 170,291	\$ 174,549
MS/K-8 PRINCIPAL [^]	233	Pay Level 3	\$ 151,034	\$ 154,810	\$ 158,680	\$ 162,647
K-5 PRINCIPAL [^]	233	Pay Level 3	\$ 147,350	\$ 151,034	\$ 154,810	\$ 158,680
EARLY LEARNING ADMINISTRATOR	233	Pay Level 3	\$ 143,924	\$ 147,522	\$ 151,210	\$ 154,991
VICE PRINCIPAL [^]	233	Pay Level 2	\$ 140,497	\$ 144,009	\$ 147,610	\$ 151,300
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL [^]	233	Pay Level 2	\$ 137,070	\$ 140,497	\$ 144,009	\$ 147,610
DIRECTOR - ACADEMIC PROGRAMS	260	Pay Level 4	\$ 162,085	\$ 166,137	\$ 170,291	\$ 174,549
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR - ACADEMIC	260	Pay Level 3	\$ 151,777	\$ 155,571	\$ 159,461	\$ 163,448
ACADEMIC PROGRAMS	260	Pay Level 2	\$ 141,188	\$ 144,718	\$ 148,336	\$ 152,044
ACADEMIC PROGRAMS	233	Pay Level 2	\$ 137,070	\$ 140,497	\$ 144,009	\$ 147,610

[^] Includes Administrators of Special Programs
Additional \$2000 for Doctoral degree

Bartanen et al. (2019) emphasize that improving leader retention is not just a cost savings for already-stressed publicly funded schools, but is also essential for positive school outcomes — a need that PPS is beginning to address through its new leader induction program. This theme underscores the interconnectedness of systemic inequities, organizational culture, and leadership development, reinforcing the necessity of culturally responsive coaching models as discussed throughout this chapter.

Audit Recommendations and Program Alignment

The audit produced seven key recommendations, which have since shaped PPS's principal coaching and induction programs. Table 1 summarizes each recommendation, corresponding Induction program components, and aligned literature.

Table 1*Aligning Audit Recommendations, Induction Program Components, and Research*

Recommendation from Audit	Program Components Addressing this Need	Alignment with
Provide racial equity training across the system, focused on implicit bias and identifying white-dominant culture	The same content is used (White Supremacy Culture) in each affinity space to frame discussions and action steps toward antiracist leadership and racializing current problems of practice.	Bussman, 2018; McIntosh, 1989; Oates et al., 2009; Okun, 2021; Thames et al., 2013; Vinzant, 2009.
Provide affinity structures for administrators of color	Monthly hour-long racial affinity spaces within a full day New Leader Induction professional development New leaders have option of choosing a nonwhite coach (also choice of LGBTQ coach)	Barton, 2023; Glass & Cook, 2013; Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Hayes & Mafouz, 2020; Oates et al, 2009; Reed, 2017; Sanchez, 2023; Thames et al.,2013.
Cultivate a leadership pipeline that centers the needs of admins of color	New assistant/vice principals in new leader induction are prioritized for selection in Future Principals Program Coaches advocate for new leaders of color at the district level, whenever necessary	Bartanen et al., 2019; Barton, 2023; Celoria & Roberson, 2015; Glass & Cook, 2013; Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Mau, 2020; Nelson et al.; 2016; Reed, 2017; Sanchez, 2023; Superville, 2019; The Wallace Foundation, 2013; Williams and Loeb, n.d.
Focus on hiring and retaining administrators of color at every level of the system, (this requires training staff on implicit bias in hiring	1:1 coaching focuses on retention by assisting new leaders to create the conditions in their schools to enable them to do their work, rendering them more successful, supported, and likely to stay. 1:1 coaching also cultivates leader self-care, with emphasis for BIPOC leaders	Bartanen et al., 2019; Glass & Cook, 2013; Grissom & Bartanen, 2019; Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Hayes & Mafouz, 2020; Herman et al., 2022; Nelson et al., 2016; Superville, 2019.
Re-introduce the Courageous Conversations protocol for use throughout the system	White Supremacy Culture is the framework upon which race and racism are discussed and challenged, both within affinity spaces and cross-racial work with peers.	McIntosh, 1989; Nelson et al., 2016; Oates et al., 2009; Okun, 2021;Thames et al., 2013.

Recommendation from Audit	Program Components Addressing this Need	Alignment with
Institute regular equity audits throughout district departments	The Induction Program takes monthly feedback from participants and uses it to inform further refinement of delivery of professional development sessions and 1:1 coaching support, and race is at the forefront of this feedback. The Induction program also requires its new leaders to also conduct feedback surveys with their staff at least twice a year and works with leaders on refining their service delivery accordingly.	Glass & Cook, 2013; Reed, 2017; Thames et al.; 2013; Vinzant, 2009.
Create intentional supports for administrators of color who are serving in predominantly white schools	Opportunity to work with a white coach who understands the context and can utilize privilege and power to call out inequities to other white people, at a lower risk than if the leader of color were to call out the same inequities.	Celoria & Roberson, 2015; Reed, 2017; Sanchez, 2023; Superville, 2021; Thames et al., 2013; Williams & Loeb, n.d.

Theoretical Frameworks

The PPS New Leader Induction Program and its affinity structure is one direct response to the recommendations from the Equity Audit. A point worth noting is that the response to the audit did not come from central office leadership; rather, it came from leaders who participated in the audit and wanted change. The program is built on three critical theoretical frameworks: Sociocultural Theory of Learning, the concept of White Supremacy Culture, and the Theory of Planned Behavior. First, Sociocultural Theory provides a constructive foundation for fostering growth through social and cultural interactions. Also, dismantling White Supremacy Culture is essential to creating equitable and inclusive environments for students and staff. Lastly, the Theory of Planned Behavior explains how an individual's core values and peer support shape the behavior of the new leader.

Understanding White Supremacy Culture

White Supremacy Culture, as conceptualized by Tema Okun in the late 1990s, identifies behaviors and norms that disrupt organizational progress and perpetuate inequities. These behaviors, which Okun documented during consultations, are deeply rooted in history and systemic conditioning. They reinforce control, privilege, and exclusion, impacting all aspects of leadership, particularly for Black and Indigenous school leaders. Table 2 below outlines these characteristics, their interconnectedness, and how they manifest in school leadership roles, contributing to burnout among leaders of color.

Table 2

Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture in School Leadership

Characteristic	Description	Functions with	Manifestation in Black & Indigenous Leadership
Perfectionism	Criticism of mistakes as personal failure; lack of appreciation	Only one right way, right to comfort	Questioning decisions made by Black leaders while supporting similar decisions by white leaders
Sense of urgency	Rushed decisions prioritizing deadlines over collaboration	Defensiveness, either/or thinking	Pressuring Black leaders to act on white discomfort without inclusive dialogue
Defensiveness	Protecting the feelings of those in power; resistance to challenging ideas	Right to comfort	Crying, labeling Black leaders as "angry" or Latino/a leaders as "fiery" when they raise concerns
Individualism	Preference for solitary problem-solving over teamwork	I'm the only one	White colleagues claiming "unsafety" when receiving critical feedback from BIPOC colleagues or supervisors
Quantity over quality	Valuing measurable outcomes over meaningful processes	Progress is bigger	Prioritizing expansion at the expense of service quality
Fear of open conflict	Avoidance of difficult conversations; blaming those who raise issues	All characteristics	Characterizing Black leaders as "rude" or "loud" for addressing systemic problems

Characteristic	Description	Functions with	Manifestation in Black & Indigenous Leadership
Worship of the written word	Overvaluing written communication over other forms of expression	Individualism	Using ambiguous contract language as a tool to avoid addressing systemic issues
Only one right way	Insistence on a single method or perspective	Perfectionism	Dismissing alternative approaches suggested by BIPOC administrators
Paternalism	Decisions made for others without their input	Power hoarding	Debating Black administrators on culturally responsive teaching methods despite data showing inequities
Objectivity	Disregard for emotions in decision-making	Progress is bigger	Making decisions about Black students without consulting their communities
Right to comfort	Discomfort with challenge leads to fragility behaviors such as crying, leaving the room, argumentation, or scapegoating	All characteristics	Weaponization of the word “safety” when interacting with Black leaders,

These behaviors are not merely individual actions but systemic patterns that perpetuate inequity.

Recognizing and addressing them is crucial to fostering inclusive leadership.

Sociocultural Theory of Learning: A Framework for Growth

Developed by Lev Vygotsky in the 1930s, Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural context in learning. A key principle is Cultural Mediation which suggests that tools such as language shape higher orders of mental function. A second principle is the Zone of Proximal Development, or ZPD. It posits that learning occurs in the space between the thresholds of what individuals can do independently and what they can do with collective guidance. Anything outside of those zones is considered unachievable with that

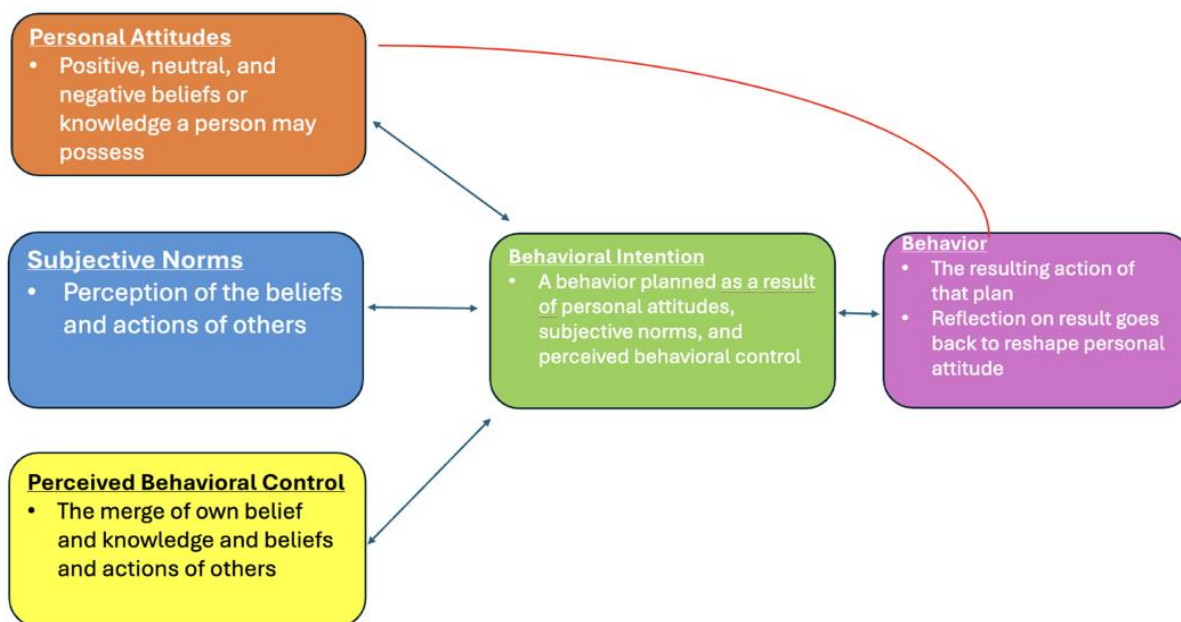
individual's specific cognitive level. Social Interaction is a third crucial principle, suggesting that collaboration fosters deeper understanding and development. Vygotsky's theory underscores the importance of community and mentorship in developing effective school leaders.

Theory of Planned Behavior

Personal attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control all combine to form an intention, and that intention leads to a behavior. This is the basic premise of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). This cognitive theory by Ajzen (1988), proposes that an individual's decision to engage in a specific behavior, such as gambling or stopping gambling, is influenced by their intention to engage in that behavior. As Figure 2 illustrates, TPB can be a framework to be used in practices such as healthcare, education, marketing, or social service, to plan interventions for a desired response from people.

Figure 2

Theory of Planned Behavior



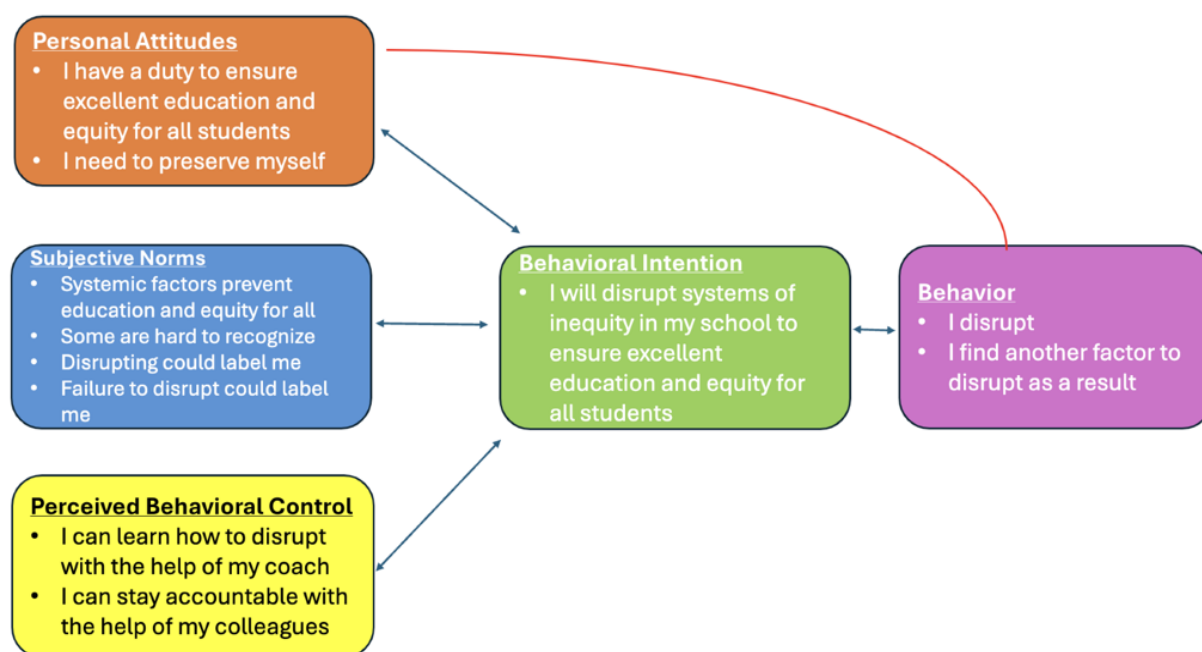
Adapted From: Ajzen, I. (1988).

Integrating Three Theories for Affinity Based Coaching

When White Supremacy Culture dominates school leadership norms, it isolates leaders—especially Black and Indigenous principals—pushing them out of their ZPD. Figure 3 shows the thought processes that the team aims to model for participants, so they may, in turn, plan their behavior.

Figure 3

Planned Behavior through Coaching Team Lens



The impacts of racism on the Black psyche in addition to the emotional dysregulation crafted by White Supremacy Culture can put leaders of all races in an unproductive “zone,” rendering them unable to lead at their fullest potential. The role of a school administrator is already inherently isolating. This isolation stifles growth, perpetuates inequity, and reinforces harmful systems.

To counter this, principal coaching grounded in a Racial Affinity Model provides tailored support through (a) one-on-one coaching sessions focused on race consciousness and self-reflection, (b) monthly professional development with affinity groups to foster peer learning, and (c) thoughtfully planned one-to-one sessions and professional development to maintain the leaders' focus on their core values, in turn, shaping their metacognition and planned behavior. By addressing systemic barriers while leveraging sociocultural principles, this approach empowers new leaders to thrive within equitable systems.

CHAPTER III METHODS

This chapter describes the methods used to examine the New Leader Induction Program, a racial affinity–based coaching model for first- through third-year principals and assistant/vice principals in Portland Public Schools (PPS). It explains the design of the affinity coaching model, the district context in which it operates, the study’s setting and participants, the mixed-methods case study design, data sources, analytic procedures, and the strategies used to strengthen validity and research integrity.

As outlined in Chapters I and II, PPS implemented the New Leader Induction Program as one strand of the Racial Equity Centered Pipeline Initiative (RECPI), a multi-component effort to recruit, support, and retain school leaders of color and to deepen the racial literacy of all leaders. The methods described in this chapter are therefore designed not only to document participants’ experiences of the racial affinity coaching model, but also to situate those experiences within the district’s historical and contemporary patterns of racial inequity in leadership and schooling.

Racial Affinity Model

The New Leader Induction Program was intentionally designed as a racial affinity–based coaching model, rooted in the belief that leaders’ social identities and racialized experiences have the power to shape both their practice and their support needs. The model operates along two key dimensions: (a) racial affinity structures embedded within monthly professional learning sessions, and (b) opportunities for new leaders to select a racially similar coach when desired and feasible. Figure 4 is a visual representation of that model.

Figure 4*Racial Affinity Model of Coaching*

The first feature of the model is affinity groups. Within the monthly induction sessions, leaders engage in whole-group learning focused on instructional leadership, organizational systems, and equity-centered practice, and then spend dedicated time in racial affinity groupings. One set of affinity groups is composed of Black, Indigenous, and other leaders of color; another set is composed of white leaders. These affinity spaces are not incidental; they are deliberately structured as places where leaders can process racialized experiences, practice racial literacy, and interrogate how white supremacy culture shows up in school leadership and in their own decisions.

For BIPOC leaders, the affinity spaces are designed to counteract the isolation, hyper-visibility, and racial battle fatigue documented in the PPS Equity Audit and in national

research on leaders of color. In these groups, BIPOC principals and assistant/vice principals can speak candidly about microaggressions, heightened scrutiny, differential expectations, and the emotional and physiological toll of racism, without needing to translate or minimize their experiences for white colleagues. The spaces also allow BIPOC leaders to share strategies for protecting their well-being while sustaining high expectations for students and staff, and to explore how to navigate systems that often position them as both advocates for students of color and enforcers of district policy.

For white leaders, racial affinity spaces provide a context for doing the internal and collective work that is often avoided in mixed-race settings. In these groups, white principals and assistant/vice principals examine how they benefit from and reproduce white supremacy culture, explore patterns such as perfectionism, defensiveness, and fear of conflict, and practice naming and interrupting these patterns in their own leadership. The groups emphasize self-implication—asking not only “What is happening?” but “How am I contributing to this?”—and they create room for white leaders to hold one another accountable without placing the burden of their learning on colleagues of color.

The second dimension of the model involves coach selection. New leaders are offered the option of requesting a coach whose racial or cultural background is similar to their own when the coaching team’s composition and caseloads allow. This option can be particularly important for BIPOC leaders who may never have had access to a same-race mentor in formal leadership roles. Having the choice to work with a coach who shares aspects of their racialized experience can deepen trust, reduce the need to justify or decode racial dynamics, and open space for coaching conversations that address both technical leadership challenges and the added

“invisible workload” of leading while being a Black, Indigenous, or a person of color in a predominantly white system.

At the same time, the model does not assume that racial match is always necessary or sufficient. White coaches are expected to bring a high level of racial literacy, to engage in their own continuous learning, and to use coaching moves that surface rather than sidestep issues of race, power, and privilege. Across both racially matched and cross-racial coaching relationships, the model emphasizes sociocultural learning—recognizing that leadership identity and practice are co-constructed in interaction—and draws on the theoretical frameworks described in Chapter II: sociocultural theory of learning, White Supremacy Culture theory (Okun, 2021), and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1988). Combined, the racial affinity group structures and coach choice options are intended to: (a) create conditions for BIPOC leaders to experience psychological safety, affirmation, and healing; (b) provide white leaders with spaces to build racial literacy and accountability; and (c) develop a cadre of principals and assistant/vice principals who are both effective instructional leaders and skilled at disrupting inequitable practices in their schools. The methods that follow are designed to examine how these design intentions play out in practice for leaders of different racial backgrounds and positions.

Feedback as a Key Iterative Design Component

Feedback is a foundational element of the New Leader Induction Program and of the racial affinity coaching model. At the level of individual practice, coaches work with new leaders to establish routines for seeking and using feedback from staff, students, and families. Leaders are encouraged to solicit input on school climate, communication, and instructional leadership, and to view feedback not as an evaluative judgment but as data for continuous

improvement. Coaching conversations frequently center on how leaders interpret feedback through the lenses of race and power, including how racial dynamics influence whose feedback is heard, believed, or acted upon.

Feedback also operates as a core design mechanism for the program itself. After each monthly professional learning session, induction participants are invited to provide written and verbal feedback about the relevance, pacing, and emotional tenor of the content; the usefulness of affinity spaces; and the ways in which sessions do or do not address the realities of their roles. Coaches and program leaders review this feedback together to identify needed adjustments in upcoming sessions, such as adding more time for problem-of-practice discussions, revising scenarios to reflect current district issues, or creating additional space to process traumatic events affecting school communities.

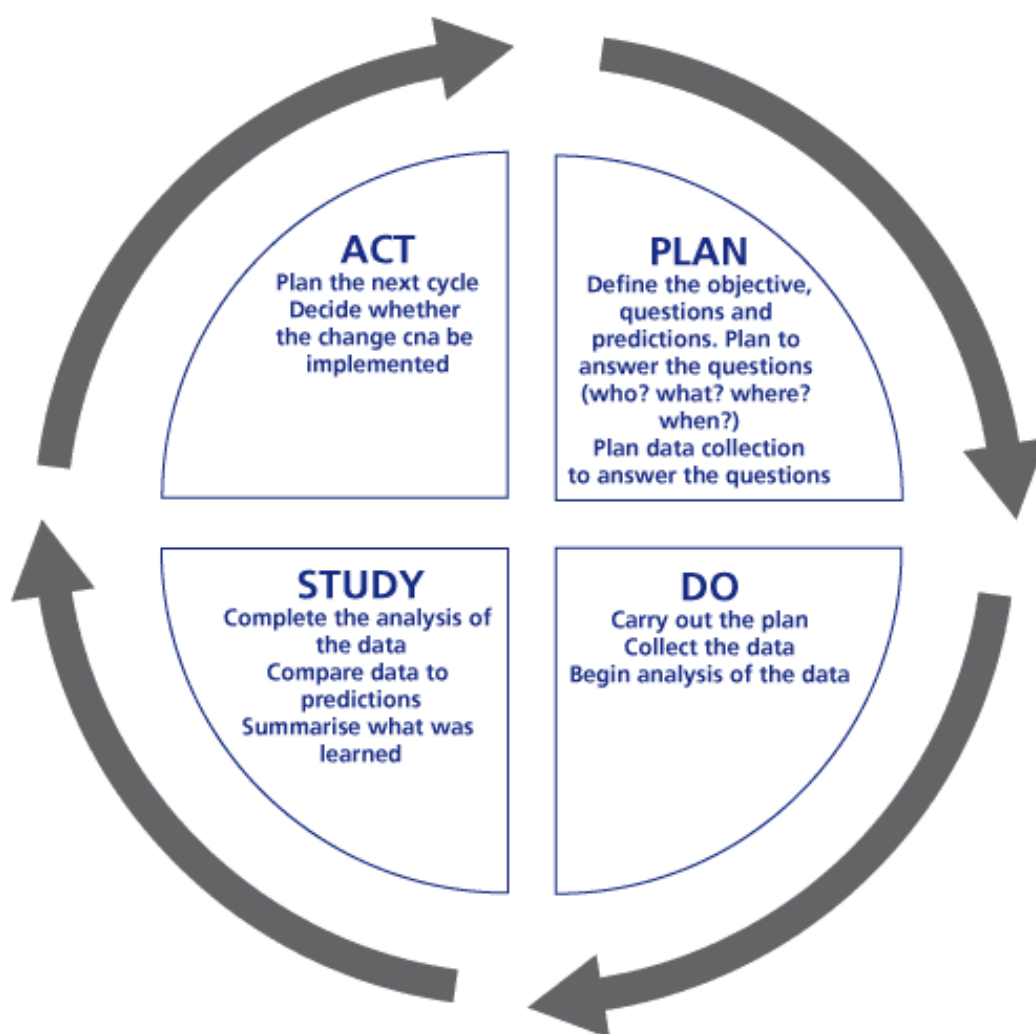
In addition, the induction coaching team and key district partners engage in their own feedback cycles. Senior Directors of Schools meet regularly with coaches to share what they are seeing in schools, including both strengths and areas of concern in new leaders' practice. When asked, Human Resources staff provide information about hiring trends, placement decisions, and emerging retention issues, particularly for BIPOC leaders. This reciprocal feedback informs not only day-to-day coaching priorities but also broader questions about how the induction program aligns with district expectations, policy shifts, and competing initiatives.

Within this study, these feedback loops played a direct role in shaping data collection. Feedback from coaches and Senior Directors helped inform the development of focus group and survey questions for induction participants, ensuring that instruments reflected the issues leaders were actually grappling with in their schools. In turn, data from induction participant focus

groups and surveys were used to refine subsequent focus group protocols for Senior Directors and the coaching team, allowing the study to probe areas of convergence and tension across stakeholder groups. This recursive use of feedback is consistent with Plan–Do–Study–Act (PDSA) cycles drawn from improvement science and with a practitioner-research stance that links inquiry and change (Bryk et al., 2015).

Figure 5

Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycle



Setting

Portland Public Schools (PPS), the largest district in Oregon, serves more than 44,000 students across 81 schools in an urban setting. Situated at the confluence of two major rivers leading to the Pacific Ocean, Portland has long been a hub for port, shipbuilding, transportation, and railway industries, which helped draw Black, Hispanic, and Asian communities to the region. Established in 1861, PPS's history reflects broader national patterns of racism and segregation, with local events and policies leaving lasting imprints on neighborhoods, enrollment patterns, and student experiences that are directly relevant to this study's focus on racial affinity coaching and principal retention.

Throughout its history, PPS has been marked by significant episodes of racial injustice that shaped where Black families lived and where their children attended school. In 1972, the City of Portland seized homes in the historically Black Albina neighborhood for hospital and freeway expansion, displacing families whose descendants remain affected today. The planned overpass was never completed, and the vacant lots visible from Harriet Tubman Middle School stand as ongoing reminders of this disruption. Tubman itself occupies the former site of Eliot School, which once served Black children from the surrounding community, underscoring how school facilities and Black communities have been repeatedly reconfigured through racially charged decisions.

In 1980, PPS implemented a busing policy that transported Black students from Albina, Boise, Sabin, King, and North Portland neighborhoods to schools farther away with whiter student and staff populations. The policy was justified in the language of integration but produced new forms of disconnection and burden for Black families. Community resistance,

including boycotts, strikes, and direct action at school board meetings, ultimately ended busing and led to the reopening of the neighborhood school, retrofitted and renamed as Harriet Tubman Middle School. These historical episodes highlight how district-level decisions have repeatedly asked Black communities to bear the costs of “reform,” while control over those reforms has remained largely with white decision-makers.

Subsequent leadership changes brought additional upheaval. In the early 2000s, Superintendent Vicki Phillips implemented cost-saving measures that closed more than a dozen schools, disproportionately affecting North Portland and the descendants of those impacted by the Vanport floods and urban renewal. These closures, along with later efforts to reconfigure attendance boundaries and programs, have contributed to uneven enrollment and persistent disparities in access to stable, well-resourced neighborhood schools. Despite more recent initiatives to advance racial equity in both schooling and employment, the racial composition of the student body remains misaligned with that of teachers and staff, and achievement gaps between white students and their Black and Indigenous peers continue.

In this context, PPS has intensified efforts to cultivate and sustain a more diverse pipeline of school leaders and to support them in confronting the legacy and ongoing manifestations of white supremacy culture in the district. Central to this work is the Racial Equity Centered Pipeline Initiative (RECPI), supported by an \$8.2 million grant from the Wallace Foundation. RECPI’s multi-pronged approach includes: (a) realigning leadership standards to reflect equity-centered practices; (b) establishing and sustaining partnerships with local universities to provide equity-grounded administrator preparation; (c) launching the Future Principals Program to develop assistant principals for future school leadership; (d) collaborating with Human

Resources and Senior Directors to maintain a robust, equity-minded leadership candidate pool; and (e) providing targeted support for administrators in their first through third years through the New Leader Induction Program.

These initiatives form the broader system context for the racial affinity coaching model examined in this dissertation. The New Leader Induction Program sits at the intersection of PPS's historical patterns of racialized inequity, its contemporary leadership demographics, and its grant-funded efforts to change how leaders are recruited, developed, coached, and retained. Understanding this context is essential for interpreting both participants' experiences of affinity-based coaching and the system-level outcomes the study explores.

Participants

Participants in this study included: (a) new principals and assistant/vice principals enrolled in the New Leader Induction Program, (b) members of the induction coaching team and selected district collaborators, and (c) Senior Directors of Schools (principal supervisors). These groups collectively represent those who directly receive, implement, or oversee the racial affinity-based coaching model within Portland Public Schools.

The New Leader Induction Program is available to all first- through third-year administrators in PPS, including principals, assistant principals, and vice principals. During the 2024–25 academic year, 65 leaders were eligible to participate. The cohort included 7 Black, 6 Asian/Pacific Islander, 8 Latino/a, and 38 white administrators; 30 served as assistant/vice principals and 31 as principals. In terms of experience, 19 leaders were in their first year, 22 in their second year, and 18 in their third year of school-level administration. Three additional

leaders, due to unique circumstances, were receiving an extended fourth year of coaching support. Four eligible leaders—all identifying as nonwhite—opted out of the coaching program, resulting in 61 active participants receiving regular coaching during the study period (see Table 3).

Table 3

Total Participants in New Leader Induction Program, 2024-2025

	BIPOC	White	Total
Eligible	27	38	65
Active	24	37	61
Inactive	3	1	4
Principals	8	23	31
Assistant/Vice Principals	14	16	30

Demographic patterns within the induction cohort reflect broader trends in both the district and the national literature. Of the 31 principals in the program, 23 were white and 8 were nonwhite; among the 30 assistant/vice principals, 16 were white and 14 were nonwhite. This distribution is consistent with research showing that people of color often encounter greater barriers to hiring and promotion into principalship and are more frequently placed in roles tasked with addressing organizational challenges, including schools with higher poverty, more complex student needs, or histories of under-resourcing. Such patterns are central to the rationale for examining a racial affinity-based coaching model. The coaching staff for the induction program includes three induction coaches—two white women and the researcher, a Black woman—who provide one-on-one coaching and design and facilitate monthly professional learning sessions. The Program Manager who supports the coaching team is a white woman, and the director responsible for the program is a Black woman. Supervision of principals and their veteran colleagues is provided by 10 Senior Directors of Schools, a racially and gender diverse group:

four are Black, one is Hispanic, three are white, and two are Native American. These positional and racial configurations matter because they shape how affinity, representation, and cross-racial coaching relationships are experienced by new leaders and by those who supervise them.

It was anticipated that at least 80% of induction participants, the coaching team, and the Senior Directors of Schools would participate in this study. To support this goal while minimizing additional burden, data collection activities (focus groups, surveys, and brief interviews) were integrated into regular professional routines—particularly the monthly induction professional learning days. Participation remained voluntary, and leaders were given the option to use scheduled time for independent work or an additional personalized coaching session instead of participating in the study; no one chose that option, but it was explicitly offered to reduce any sense of coercion.

Study Design

To address the three research questions, a convergent, embedded mixed-methods case study design was used, with an explicit action-research orientation, consistent with Creswell and Plano Clark's description of concurrently collected and integrated mixed methods designs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This design is well suited to the study for two primary reasons. First, Fabregues and Fetters (2019) note that case study approaches are appropriate for descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory research questions, all of which are reflected in this study's research questions. Second, although the study focuses on a single program, the questions require explanation of and inquiry into its embedded components, including program participants, their students, the participants' coaches, the coaches' colleagues, and records obtained from the district's chiefs.

The case is a single, large, urban school district implementing a racial affinity-based New Leader Induction Program as part of a broader Racial Equity Centered Pipeline Initiative. The design reflects the dual goals of understanding how the affinity coaching model functions for leaders of different racial backgrounds and roles, and informing ongoing program refinement in a real-world, non-experimental setting. The mixed-methods approach gave roughly equal weight to qualitative and quantitative strands. Qualitative data included semi-structured focus groups with induction participants (organized by racial affinity and role), a focus group with induction coaches, and a focus group with Senior Directors of Schools, as well as open-ended survey responses. Quantitative data included Likert-type survey responses from induction participants and Senior Directors, human resources records on leader retention and demographics, and student-reported climate data from the Panorama Successful Schools Survey (Sense of Belonging domain). These data sources were framed by the PPS Equity Audit themes and the theoretical perspectives outlined in Chapter II: sociocultural learning theory, White Supremacy Culture theory, and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1988; Okun, 2021).

Data collection was largely concurrent, occurring within the same school year, and was intentionally synchronized with the rhythm of the induction program. Focus groups with new leaders were conducted during regularly scheduled professional development days, followed by administration of participant surveys. The coach and Senior Director focus groups and surveys were scheduled closely to allow reflection on the same time period of program implementation. Extant HR and climate data were drawn from overlapping years to provide relevant context for the experiences participants described. The convergent design meant that qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed separately but interpreted together, with attention to areas of convergence, divergence, and complementarity across strands.

In the same way that iterative feedback continually evolves the induction program, the study was also grounded in a stance that aligns with Bryk and colleagues' (2015) improvement science approach to disciplined, iterative problem-solving. As a practitioner-researcher and member of the coaching team, I engaged in Plan–Do–Study–Act (PDSA) cycles that paralleled the formal research procedures. For example, feedback from early focus groups and surveys informed adjustments to subsequent professional learning sessions, such as allocating more time to affinity processing or revising problem-of-practice protocols. At the same time, I documented these adaptations and their rationales in a research journal and in an audit trail, so that the dynamic interplay between program development and data collection could be made transparent in later analysis and interpretation.

Initially, the study plan envisioned using four types of data to address the research questions: (a) induction participant focus groups and surveys, (b) coach and Senior Director focus groups and surveys, (c) human resources data on principal and assistant/vice principal retention, and (d) statewide student achievement and graduation rate data. During early stages of design and consultation with district partners, it became clear that statewide achievement and graduation data would be heavily confounded by concurrent initiatives, pandemic recovery efforts, and policy changes outside the scope of the induction program. To avoid overstating causal inferences, the study shifted away from using statewide outcome data as a primary indicator of program impact and instead focused more closely on patterns of leader retention, participation in induction over time, and student sense of belonging as measured by the Successful Schools Survey.

Table 4 provides a visual overview of the study design, summarizing the phases of work, methodological approaches, analytic techniques, data sources, and key methodological references that guided each stage. As the table indicates, the design is characterized by: (a) a single-district critical case framed by equity audit findings; (b) iterative qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis; (c) deliberate integration of findings across strands; and (d) ongoing PDSA cycles that connect research, practice, and program refinement.

Table 4*Study Design*

Phase/order	Methodological approach	Specific techniques and analyses	Data Sources and instruments	Key method references
Design & framing	Case study; mixed-methods frame	Defined single-district case; adopted Plan–Do–Study–Act cycles; aligned study with PPS Equity Audit themes and core frameworks (sociocultural theory, white supremacy culture, theory of planned behavior)	PPS Equity Audit (The Leadership Academy, 2021); program documents; coaching artifacts.	Okun (2021), Azjen (1988),
Qualitative data collection	Focus group methodology	Conducted semi-structured focus groups by racial affinity and role; used protocols to explore coaching, affinity spaces, and equity experiences.	Induction focus groups and protocols (e.g., Table 3, Chapter III)	Saldana (2021)
	Key-informant interviews, open ended surveys	Collected open ended responses from senior directors and coaches on observed leader practice, accountability, and equity leadership.	Senior director surveys, interviews, and coach team reflections.	Kvale & Brinkmann (2015).
Quantitative data collection	Descriptive survey research	Likert type surveys, calculated means, medians, and distributions by race and role for items on affinity spaces, coach choice, equity learning, and psychological safety.	Induction participant surveys, senior director surveys.	Fowler (2014).
	Archival/ document analysis	Compiled HR retention and resignation records; extracted sense-of-belonging scores and context variables from district climate survey.	HR retention data; Successful Schools Survey sense-of-belonging data	Bowen (2009)
Quantitative analysis	Categorical and proportion trends	Conducted binomial tests comparing 3-year retention rates by race to national benchmarks; used Fisher’s Exact or chi-square tests for action orientation and creation of affinity spaces.	HR retention data; national principal retention statistics.	Shadish et al. (2002).
	Logistic regression	Ran regression models on belonging scores; examined school context (Title, alternative status, grade band) as predictors; reported effect sizes (e.g., $\eta^2 \approx .19$)	Successful Schools Survey scores; school-level context data.	Cohen (1988).

Phase/order	Methodological approach	Specific techniques and analyses	Data sources and instruments	Key method references
Qualitative analysis	Thematic analysis / coding	Coded focus group and interview data; generated themes (e.g., “On Their Own for Support,” “Invisibility and Isolation,” “Variable Empowerment”) informed by PPS Equity Audit and theory.	Focus group transcripts; senior director data; PPS Equity Audit thematic framework.	Saldaña (2021)
	Theory anchored interpretation	Interpreted themes through sociocultural theory, white supremacy culture characteristics, and audit findings.	Same as above plus theoretical frameworks in Chapter II.	Okun (2021).
Interpretation of findings	Convergent mixed methods design, triangulation, crosswalks	Created crosswalk and joint-display tables linking research questions, audit themes, Okun’s tenets/antidotes, qualitative themes, and quantitative indicators (e.g., retention, survey means). Compared and contrasted qualitative and quantitative strands to build convergent evidence for each research question.	Integrated matrices and tables in Chapter IV (e.g., tables aligning RQs, audit themes, Okun tenets, and data).	Creswell & Plano Clark (2018)
Iterative program refinement	Improvement science cycle	Used findings to refine induction and affinity structures; engaged in ongoing Plan–Do–Study–Act cycles with the coaching team and district partners.	Coaching team reflections; revised coaching protocols; subsequent program adjustments.	Bryk et al. (2015)

Sources of Data

Consistent with the convergent mixed-methods case study design, data were collected from multiple participant groups and existing district records. This section describes the sources of data for the study: (a) induction participants, (b) induction coaches and district collaborators, (c) principal supervisors, and (d) extant human resources and student climate data. For each, the subsections below outline recruitment, instruments, and procedures.

Induction Participants

All actively enrolled principals and assistant/vice principals in the New Leader Induction Program were invited to participate in focus groups and surveys. To align with the program's design and to promote psychological safety, focus groups were organized by both racial affinity (BIPOC and white) and role (principal and assistant/vice principal), resulting in four primary groupings. Each group met during a regularly scheduled induction professional development day, which helped ensure strong participation while minimizing additional time demands on leaders. Focus group sessions were facilitated by induction team members who were familiar with the induction program but did not supervise the participants. Consistent with Kvale and Brinkmann's view of interviewing as a crafted, ethically attentive conversation, facilitation emphasized open-ended prompts, probing, and careful attention to power dynamics (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This arrangement balanced contextual knowledge with appropriate distance from evaluation and personnel decisions. Prior to each session, facilitators reviewed the purpose of the study, underscored that participation was voluntary, and explained that responses would be de-identified in reporting. Leaders were given the option to use the time for independent work

instead of participating in the focus group or survey; although no one chose this option, its availability was intended to reduce the perception of coercion.

The semi-structured focus group protocols were anchored in three core constructs introduced in Chapter II and central to the racial affinity coaching model: racial literacy, action orientation, and self-implication. Within each construct, questions were tailored to participants' racial affinity group and role (e.g., BIPOC principal, white assistant principal) to reflect their distinct positionalities, while still allowing for cross-group comparisons. For example, all groups were asked to describe how the induction program had affected their racial literacy, but prompts for BIPOC leaders foregrounded experiences of racism and isolation, whereas prompts for white leaders emphasized recognizing and interrupting white supremacy culture in their own practice.

At the conclusion of focus groups, all induction participants were invited to complete an anonymous survey administered via Google Forms. The survey included Likert-type items and open-ended questions. Likert-type items asked leaders to rate the extent to which the induction program and affinity coaching model influenced their sense of preparedness, racial literacy, action orientation, self-implication, and intentions to remain in their roles. The ratings ranged from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (To a great extent). A neutral response option (3) was deliberately included to distinguish clearly favorable responses from those that were less positive and to reinforce that the survey was not an evaluative instrument tied to performance or employment decisions. Open-ended questions provided opportunities for leaders to elaborate on how coaching and affinity spaces affected their day-to-day work, well-being, and future plans.

Induction Coaches and Collaborators

A semi-structured focus group was conducted with the three induction coaches (including myself as coach and researcher) to gather insights about the evolution, implementation, and perceived impact of the racial affinity coaching model. Questions probed how coaches interpreted their roles, how they experienced working in both racially matched and cross-racial coaching relationships, what patterns they observed in leaders' growth and challenges, and how they navigated tensions that arose within affinity spaces. The focus group also addressed how the coaching team used feedback and PDSA cycles to refine the program across the two-year implementation period.

In addition to the formal coach focus group, key district collaborators—including staff from Human Resources and the Office of School Performance—were consulted during the design and interpretation phases. Human Resources provided information on hiring, placement, and turnover patterns for school leaders, while the Office of School Performance contributed contextual details about concurrent initiatives, accountability expectations, and supervisory practices. Although these collaborators were not the focus of separate qualitative analyses, their input shaped the selection and use of extant data sources and helped situate participants' experiences in the broader system context.

Principal Supervisors

Senior Directors of Schools (SDS), who supervise principals and oversee school performance, participated in a focus group and completed a short survey. They were purposefully included because they occupy a key position between district leadership and

school-level administrators and thus offer a system-level perspective on the New Leader Induction Program. Their insights were especially important for addressing Research Question 2 (effects of the affinity coaching model on the broader school system) and Research Question 3 (unexpected outcomes). The Senior Director focus group explored how they perceived the goals and implementation of the induction program, how they saw it influencing new leaders' instructional leadership and racial equity work, and how it intersected with supervisory expectations and evaluation processes. The subsequent survey, administered electronically, included Likert-type items, also on a scale of 1 to 5, assessing their perceptions of the program's effectiveness. Additionally, the survey provided open-ended response opportunities, inviting commentary on strengths, limitations, and recommendations. As with the induction participant survey, responses were anonymous in collection, analysis and reporting.

Extant Data

To complement participant-generated data, the study used existing district records in two primary domains: (a) human resources data on leader retention and demographics and (b) student-reported climate data from the Panorama Successful Schools Survey. Following Bowen's guidance on document analysis as a qualitative method, these records were treated as texts to be systematically reviewed and interpreted alongside interview and survey data (Bowen, 2009). These data were not intended to support causal claims about the impact of the induction program; rather, they provided additional points of reference for understanding the context and potential system-level implications of the racial affinity coaching model.

Human resources data included multi-year records on principal and assistant/vice principal appointments and resignations, along with information on leaders' race, role, and

school assignments. These records were used to describe patterns in leader turnover and to examine whether leaders who participated in the induction program—and particularly BIPOC leaders—appeared to follow different retention trajectories than their peers. Given the relatively small numbers of leaders and the presence of multiple concurrent initiatives, these analyses were descriptive and exploratory, with careful attention to confidentiality in reporting.

How the Successful Schools Survey Works

The Panorama Successful Schools Survey (SSS) is a district-wide, student-administered survey that measures multiple dimensions of school climate and student experience. PPS administers the SSS annually to students in specified grade levels, and results are reported at the school and district levels. For this study, the primary domain of interest was Sense of Belonging, which captures the degree to which students feel accepted, respected, and connected to their school community—an outcome closely aligned with the study’s focus on racially literate, equity-centered leadership. The SSS uses Likert-type response options, typically on a 1–5 scale, and district reports summarize results as the percentage of students selecting favorable responses (commonly categories 3–5). PPS uses these data to monitor trends over time and to inform school improvement planning. For the purposes of this study, SSS data were extracted for schools led by principals who were active participants in the induction program during the study period, as well as for the district as a whole. Focusing on principals, rather than assistant/vice principals, maintained a clearer link between the leadership intervention and the school-level outcome being examined. Confidentiality protocols required aggregation in cases where student subgroup sizes were very small; these constraints were respected in all analyses and limit the granularity of reporting in some instances.

Collaborative Formation of Focus Group Questions

The development of the focus group questions was itself a collaborative and iterative process, consistent with the study's action-research orientation. Initial drafts of questions were created by the researcher, drawing on Creswell's guidance for qualitative question design, the PPS Equity Audit themes, and the three focal constructs of racial literacy, action orientation, and self-implication. These drafts were then reviewed and refined with the induction coaching team and the Chief of Schools to ensure that questions were open-ended, non-leading, and responsive to the lived realities of leaders and supervisors in the district.

For induction participants, the coaching team helped tailor questions to be both accessible and appropriately challenging, given leaders' workload and the emotional demands of discussing race and leadership. For example, the team recommended including explicit language that normalized the complexity of racial affinity spaces and invited leaders to share both benefits and tensions. For Senior Directors, the Chief of Schools emphasized the importance of questions that would elicit honest reflections about system-level barriers and supports, rather than only high-level descriptions of district initiatives.

These collaborative revisions resulted in the final protocols presented in Table 5, which provided a common structure across groups while honoring the distinct roles and positionalities of BIPOC and white leaders, coaches, and supervisors.

Table 5*Focus Group Questions by Participant Group*

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS	QUESTIONS		
PRINCIPAL COACHES	How has the affinity model evolved from the time you started this job until now? How have your philosophies and mindsets about affinity-based coaching evolved with it?	How do you/will you know that your execution of affinity-based coaching has made an impact on the leaders you serve? Describe both tangible and intangible pieces of evidence?	What do we expect a racially literate coach to know and be able to do? What does that look like in operation?
INDUCTION PARTICIPANTS (NEW PRINCIPALS AND NEW ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS)	How does having a racial affinity coaching model (1:1 coach options plus induction affinity space) help you to address issues that perpetuate the achievement gap and/or dismantle white supremacy culture?	When you consider other learning spaces where a racial affinity model is not present, how does this program's model help you to be resilient and healthy in your job?	Coaches are your colleagues. But what should <i>supervisors</i> keep in mind when coaching someone with a different racial identity than theirs?
SENIOR DIRECTORS OF SCHOOLS	For purposes of this study, racial literacy is defined as the demonstrated ability to consistently engage, sustain, and deepen conversations about race in spaces outside of affinity spaces. What differences, if any, are there in racial literacy between principals who participate in the Induction Program and those who do not?	For the purposes of this study, Action Orientation is defined as the leader's willingness to take action toward the dismantling of systems and beliefs that lead to disparate outcomes for Black and Indigenous students, staff, and families. What differences, if any, are there between the Action Orientation of principals who participate in the Induction Program and those who do not?	For purposes of this study, Self-Implication is defined as the ability and willingness of the new leader to identify themselves as key factors in school outcomes that either perpetuate or reduce disparities for Black and Indigenous students, staff, and families. What differences are there, if any, between self-implication between principals who participate in the Induction Program and those who do not?

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis followed the convergent mixed-methods design described earlier, with qualitative and quantitative strands analyzed in parallel and then integrated to address the three research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Analytic strategies were selected to align with the level of measurement, sample size, and distributional characteristics of the data, as well as with the study's critical theoretical frameworks and equity-focused aims.

The first phase of analysis focused on qualitative data from focus groups with induction participants, coaches, and Senior Directors of Schools. To protect confidentiality, each participant was assigned a code, and identifying information was removed from transcripts. Focus group sessions were video-recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were reviewed promptly after each session to support preliminary coding and to capture early impressions, including emotional tone and nonverbal dynamics noted in facilitator debriefs. An initial round of coding used a deductive framework based on the PPS Equity Audit themes and the three focal constructs of racial literacy, action orientation, and self-implication. Coding followed Saldaña's guidance on iterative, multi-cycle coding, with deductive and inductive codes refined over successive readings of the data (Saldaña, 2021). As coding progressed, inductive codes were added to capture emergent patterns related to affinity spaces, racialized experiences of leadership, coach–leader relationships, program design features, and perceived impacts on practice, well-being, and retention. Codes were then grouped into categories and themes, and analytic memos documented evolving interpretations, areas of tension, and connections across racial and role-based groups.

The second phase centered on survey data from induction participants and Senior Directors, collected through Google Forms. These data were exported to Google Sheets and then, when appropriate, into statistical software for analysis. Descriptive statistics—including frequencies, percentages, medians, and ranges—were calculated for all Likert-type items to characterize overall patterns in perceptions of the induction program and the racial affinity coaching model. Graphs generated by Google Sheets provided visual summaries of response distributions, particularly for items related to the perceived value of affinity spaces, the influence of coaching on racial literacy and action orientation, and intentions to remain in current roles.

Where the data structure allowed, inferential analyses were conducted to examine relationships between variables. For example, to determine whether race was associated with leaders' favorability toward having the option to select a coach who shared their racial or cultural background, a Fisher's Exact Test was used due to small cell sizes in some categories. For items where pre-post ratings or paired comparisons were available for the same individuals, nonparametric tests (such as the Wilcoxon signed-rank test) were planned given the ordinal nature of Likert-type data and the modest sample sizes. These tests were interpreted cautiously and used primarily to supplement the richer qualitative findings rather than to make strong causal claims. Selection and interpretation of these analyses were guided by Shadish, Cook, and Campbell's principles for working with quasi-experimental data and by Cohen's recommendations regarding effect sizes and statistical power (Cohen, 1988; Shadish et al., 2002).

The third phase involved analysis of extant quantitative data, including human resources records on principal and assistant/vice principal assignments and resignations, and student sense

of belonging scores from the Panorama Successful Schools Survey. HR data were used to calculate annual counts and proportions of leader resignations, disaggregated by role (principal vs. assistant/vice principal), race, and participation in the induction program. Descriptive statistics summarized patterns over time, and simple comparisons were made between induction participants and non-participants where data permitted. For the Successful Schools Survey, school-level sense of belonging scores for induction principals' schools were compared with district averages over the same period. Regression models were explored to examine whether induction participation predicted variation in school-level belonging scores, but given the small number of schools and the presence of numerous confounding factors (e.g., concurrent initiatives, boundary changes, pandemic recovery), these models are reported descriptively and interpreted with caution.

After qualitative and quantitative analyses were conducted, findings were brought into dialogue through integrative processes. Joint displays and analytic memos were used to compare themes from focus groups and open-ended survey responses with patterns observed in Likert-type survey data, HR retention data, and student sense of belonging scores. Particular attention was given to areas where data converged (for example, leaders' narratives of affinity as protective aligning with retention patterns) and where they diverged (for example, positive perceptions of support not always corresponding to improved climate indicators). This integrated interpretation allowed the study to address the research questions in a way that honored both the complexity of leaders' experiences and the constraints of working with observational, single-district data and with school contexts that are sometimes beyond a leader's sphere of control.

Threats to Validity and Research Integrity

As a single-district, practitioner-researcher study conducted within an ongoing initiative, this research faces several threats to validity and limitations in generalizability. At the same time, multiple strategies—such as triangulation, reflexive practice, member checking, and maintenance of an audit trail—were employed to enhance the credibility, trustworthiness, and transparency of the findings. This section addresses key threats, real or perceived, related to researcher positionality, potential reactivity, sampling and representation, use of extant data, and the dynamic nature of the program context.

Researcher Bias and Positionality

I, the researcher, am a Black woman and, at the time of this study, was a member of the leadership coaching team that designed and implemented the New Leader Induction Program. This trifold role presented significant strengths, including deep understanding of the program's theory of action, access to rich contextual information, and trust-based relationships with participants. These strengths supported nuanced interpretation of leaders' narratives, especially those of BIPOC leaders whose experiences may be misunderstood or minimized by outsiders. At the same time, this positionality could introduce perceived confirmation bias or over-identification with participants' experiences, particularly those of leaders of color. Participants could have also felt implicit pressure to present the program positively because the researcher is part of the coaching team. To mitigate these risks, several strategies were used. First, focus groups were facilitated by colleagues who were familiar with the context but did not coach or supervise participants and were not responsible for their evaluation. My coach colleagues and I went to the break room for coffee while the focus groups and surveys took

place. Second, at the start of each data collection activity, I explicitly stated that participation was voluntary, that responses would be de-identified, and that no individual-level data would be shared with supervisors or used for performance evaluation. Third, I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the study to document assumptions, decision points, and to surface moments where positionality might shape interpretation, in effort to maintain the benefit of this positionality. Finally, member checking was used: preliminary findings were shared with participants in aggregate form to assess whether interpretations resonated with their experiences and to correct misinterpretations. I shared findings with participants at every collection point.

Hawthorne Effect and Social Desirability

Because data collection was embedded within a new, grant-funded coaching initiative that participants knew was under study, there is a risk that some reported benefits or behavior changes reflect reactivity to being observed (Hawthorne effect) or a desire to support an initiative perceived as valuable, rather than solely the effects of the program itself. This concern is especially salient in a district context that emphasizes racial equity; leaders may feel compelled to demonstrate alignment with equity-oriented language and practices, even when implementation is still emerging. To mitigate this, several design choices were made. Focus groups and surveys were integrated into routine professional learning structures to make data collection feel like a natural extension of reflective practice rather than a separate evaluative event. Surveys were anonymous and clearly framed as distinct from any performance review or employment decision - especially given that coaches are contractually principals themselves, and therefore, lateral colleagues. Facilitators invited participants to share both strengths and tensions of the program, and protocols included explicit prompts about challenges and unintended

consequences. Finally, triangulation with HR retention data and student sense of belonging scores provided supplementary perspectives less likely to be influenced by short-term reactivity, even though those data are also shaped by multiple factors beyond the program.

Sampling, Representation, and Transferability

The study includes nearly the full population of new leaders enrolled in the induction program, along with the entire induction coaching team and all Senior Directors of Schools, which strengthens internal representation. However, there are important nuances. BIPOC leaders in the program were more likely to be assistant/vice principals than principals, and BIPOC assistant/vice principals were slightly over-represented in focus groups compared to BIPOC principals. As a result, some qualitative themes attributed to “BIPOC leaders” reflect more heavily the experiences of assistant/vice principals than of principals. Even more of a limitation was the fact that those who opted out did not do so voluntarily - there was a flu outbreak that kept some new leaders home. These voices, mostly BIPOC, were not captured. This imbalance should be considered when interpreting findings about role-specific experiences and when thinking about transferability to other districts where leadership demographics may differ.

Additionally, the study is situated in a single district with a distinctive racial history, policy context, and grant-funded pipeline initiative. While many of the dynamics described—such as racial isolation of leaders of color, the burden of racial battle fatigue, and the challenges of cross-racial coaching—are echoed in national literature, the specific structures of PPS (e.g., RECPI, local labor agreements, community advocacy histories) limit the extent to which findings can be directly generalized to other settings. Instead, the study aims for analytic

generalization: offering concepts and patterns that other districts can consider in light of their own contexts.

Use of Extant Data and System Complexity

Analyses of human resources data and Successful Schools Survey results are constrained by the non-experimental nature of the context and by system-level complexity. Leaders were not randomly assigned to participate in the induction program, nor were schools randomly assigned to principals; selection and placement processes were influenced simply by experience, as this program is for new leaders only. Similarly, changes in student sense of belonging may reflect the combined effects of multiple initiatives, leadership changes, staffing shifts, boundary adjustments, and external events (including the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and, more recently, ICE presence impacting feelings of community safety), not just the induction program. To avoid overstating causal claims, extant data were used primarily for descriptive and contextual purposes. Retention analyses were framed as patterns rather than as tests of program efficacy, and comparisons between induction participants and non-participants were interpreted cautiously. For the Successful Schools Survey, the focus on sense of belonging in schools led by induction principals was explicitly presented as exploratory, with attention to whether observed patterns were consistent with leaders' accounts of their work rather than as definitive evidence of program impact. Confidentiality protocols and aggregation requirements further limited the granularity of some analyses, particularly for small student subgroups.

Triangulation, Member Checking, and Audit Trail

To strengthen credibility and transparency, the study employed multiple complementary strategies. Triangulation across data sources—induction participant focus groups and surveys, coach and Senior Director perspectives, HR retention records, and student sense of belonging data—allowed key themes to be examined from different vantage points. In some cases, convergence across sources reinforced confidence in findings (for example, leaders' reports that affinity spaces were protective aligning with qualitative accounts from coaches and retention patterns for BIPOC leaders). In other cases, divergence prompted deeper analysis (for example, strong positive perceptions of coaching in some schools where climate indicators remained flat).

Member checking with participants provided an additional layer of validation. Summaries of preliminary findings were shared with leaders and coaches, who were invited to comment on whether interpretations resonated with their experience and to identify any major mischaracterizations. Their feedback was incorporated into refinements of themes and into how tensions and limitations were framed in later chapters. Finally, a detailed audit trail was maintained, documenting decisions about sampling, instrument design, coding frameworks, PDSA cycles, and analytic choices. This record allows readers to follow the progression from data collection to interpretation and to assess the coherence between the study's design, evidence, and claims.

In sum, this chapter has outlined the racial affinity-based New Leader Induction Program, the district context in which it operates, the mixed-methods case study design, and the data sources, analytic procedures, and safeguards used to examine its implementation and effects. Building on this methodological foundation, the next chapter presents the results of the

study, beginning with descriptive information about the participating leaders and then detailing findings from focus groups, surveys, human resources data, and student sense of belonging measures in relation to the three research questions.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In this chapter, I first present demographic information about the study sample, then provide information about the results of the focus groups, before finishing with results from the survey. Following the same order in which I collected data, I report results from the school leaders first, members of the coaching team second, and senior directors of schools (principal supervisors) last. In all cases, I present results for the sample, as well as delineating the results for BIPOC and white participants when sufficient numbers exist. Finally, I present the results related to external outcome measures: results from the School Success Survey, building administrator retention information, and demographics.

Demographics

At the time of this study, the Induction program had a total of 65 rostered participants, 4 of whom were inactive. Of the 61 active participants, 31 were assistant or vice principals, and 30 were principals. Five principals and four assistant/vice principals were absent on the day of the focus group, which was held during a regularly scheduled professional development day during flu season. In all, 24 of the 31 actively rostered principals and 21 of the 30 actively rostered assistant/vice principals took part in the focus groups (see Table 6).

Table 6

New Leaders in Program and Study

	Principals	Assistant/Vice Principals
Total in Program	31	30
BIPOC Participants in Program	4	12
White Participants in Program	15	9
Total Participated in Study	24	21
BIPOC Participants in Study	4	12
White Participants in Study	15	9

More BIPOC educational leaders in the Induction program were Assistant or Vice Principals ($n = 12$) than Principals ($n = 4$). In this study, BIPOC Assistant/Vice Principals were also slightly over-represented in the focus groups compared to BIPOC Principals (see Table 7).

Table 7

Percentages of BIPOC Participants

	<i>n</i>	% of Program Participants	% of all Focus Gr. Participants
BIPOC Principals	4	25.8	21
BIPOC Asst/Vice Principals	12	46.6	57

Focus Group Results: Similarities and Differences of Impact

Focus groups from all races of principals and vice principals showed common themes. One theme participants repeatedly mentioned was the feeling of safety and camaraderie they felt as a result of participating in the Induction program, especially affinity spaces. A BIPOC participant explained, “This is the only thing our district offers that is a bucket filler for me,” and another White leader called the affinity spaces “some of the most useful PD [professional development] time I have had as a building principal.” Murmurs of “yes” and hand gestures of agreement followed this comment, and this theme of appreciation for PD quality reappeared in each of the other focus groups with the same level of enthusiasm.

When the facilitator of this particular focus group asked the commenter to elaborate, they said:

“Race is only addressed at Leadership [the district’s monthly mandatory PD for all administrators] when referring to acknowledging data disparities, but rarely anything about real interrogations of our own values or how they shape the decisions that perpetuate the disparities. Here, we can count on it happening. Without fail.”

Another common theme was participants' overwhelming support and gratitude for the Induction program coaches. Participants explained that they know that coaches are always going to bring race into the conversation in a meaningful way. "I know exactly what my coach is going to say - 'how are you implicating yourself in perpetuating white supremacy culture?' So I have to stay ready to answer," a white participant said. A BIPOC leader said, "I feel like this space – and my coach - helps me refine my leadership practice and deepen my focus on equity in ways digestible to fragile whiteness." Another BIPOC leader added, "Having a culturally specific coach to connect with, especially as a leader of color, has made such a difference in making the work feel manageable."

A third common thread was the disappointment in district leadership affinity spaces, in contrast to the Induction program. Without any prompting from the facilitators or one another, and despite focus groups being held in separate spaces at separate times, participants in every subgroup used the words *fake*, *inauthentic*, *ingenuine*, *performative*, and an *ineffective use of time* when describing district leadership affinity spaces. A white participant explained:

"Our [district leadership affinity space] sessions are a big Kumbaya where we acknowledge white supremacy culture but don't hold ourselves or each other accountable to not perpetuating it. Can we integrate the model of induction into bigger leadership platforms?"

One BIPOC participant explained the tension of waiting on someone to take the lead on facilitating affinity spaces at District Leadership. "I once got an email the night before asking if I would lead. How am I supposed to just throw something together for people who desperately need meaningful connection?"

Another participant described how their affinity group took matters into their own hands. “Who they sent to lead our group was not giving what we needed, they did not know us or our context together. So we decided to lead our own, and now we have a monthly kind of spin-off where we meet up together outside of work hours.” Another BIPOC participant added, “They paid these outside people who don’t know us at all and some of whom are young enough to be our students, to lead our affinity spaces. When we pushed back and asked for them not to come back, they asked me to lead. Did they offer to pay me?” They hand-gestured as a referee calling a technical foul in basketball. “I would have done it for free, because of who I am, but assuming free labor isn’t respectful at all.”

Although there were several similarities across all groups, there were also notable differences in the way the different sub-groups of leaders discussed their experience with the Induction program.

Assistant/Vice Principals

Because the program spans three years and coaches’ caseloads can shift for various reasons, some administrators have experienced having both a BIPOC and white coach over time. Three participants who experienced this phenomenon, all in separate groups from each other, said that both coaches were able to help them navigate white supremacy culture in their schools with specific contexts – one being the target of white supremacy culture and one being the beneficiary. A white assistant principal described a racially charged incident at their school in which they were grateful to have the insight of a Black coach in processing how to mitigate, while a BIPOC assistant principal credited their white coach in “using their lived experience of white supremacy culture to help me challenge it.” Outside of these themes, all others were remarkably parallel to the sentiments of the participants in both principal groups.

BIPOC Principals

BIPOC principals led the focus group conversation with a tone of spirit and emotion. They cited affinity spaces as being a critical lifeline for their sustainability. One said, “If it weren’t for my coach, I would not even be here.” They credited the affinity model of coaching for them being able to be their unapologetic and authentic selves while it felt riskier to do so in other places. One participant said, “It’s exhausting to always have to represent and defend my identity. In this space, I don’t have to,” while another one said, “I get to be authentic and real without code switching all the time.”

White Principals

Although the tone was collegial and friendly in the focus group, it was also wordy and pragmatic. They all agreed that the white affinity group was a safe space not just for them, but to discuss real issues of racial understanding without inflicting further harm on BIPOC colleagues or expecting their BIPOC colleagues to educate them for free. They especially appreciated returning to the “knee-to-knee conversations” after affinity, a cross-racial conversation that is protocolled for equity of voice and harm reduction. In these conversations, both parties express what insights they gained from the day’s learnings about dismantling white supremacy culture. Participants recognized that their aforementioned pragmatic verbal processing could silence people of color and that BIPOC colleagues are not responsible for their feelings, words, or learning, so they approached with a level of humility, gratitude, and learning. One mentioned, “My [white] coach does not allow me to operate in privileged comfort just because we are both white,” describing the white affinity space as “an accountability space.”

Survey Results: Assessing Perceptions

The three statements for the 1 - 5, negative to positive scaled Likert responses on the survey were: a) Having affinity spaces at induction helps me to do my job better, b) Having the option to choose a coach that most closely matches my racial identity helps me to do my job better, and c) These program experiences and features have helped me to consider creating affinity spaces in my own school. Space was also given for open-ended responses after each question in case the new leader chose to further explain their ranking. Descriptive statistics for each question and group, as well as the results of the Wilcoxon test are shown in Table 8. Among all respondents ($n = 40$), the mean response for affinity spaces was 4.61 (Median = 5.0), and for coach choice, 3.79 (Median = 4.0). The Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated that responses overall were significantly greater than neutral for both of the program features (affinity spaces: $w = 703.0$, $p = <0.001$; coach choice: $w = 330.0$, $p = <0.001$).

Table 8

Wilcoxon Test Results for Participant Response to Induction Program Features

Group	Question	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	Median	<i>w</i>	<i>p</i>
All respondents	affinity space	40	4.61	5.0	703.0	<0.001
	coach choice	40	3.79	4.0	330.0	<0.001
BIPOC principals	affinity space	4	4.50	4.5	10.0	0.0625
	coach choice	4	4.25	4.0	10.0	0.0625
White principals	affinity space	15	4.73	5.0	120.0	0.000
	coach choice	15	3.67	4.0	38.0	0.037
BIPOC AP/VP	affinity space	12	4.67	5.0	54.0	0.000
	coach choice	12	4.25	5.0	31.0	0.090
White AP/VP	affinity space	9	4.44	5.0	31.0	0.012
	coach choice	9	3.78	4.0	10.5	0.258

Similar patterns were observed in most subgroup analyses, with the exception of BIPOC principals and white assistant principals for the coach choice item, where effects did not reach statistical significance, likely due to the small sample size. These results indicate that, across the entire new leader cohort, both affinity spaces and the option to select a culturally similar coach were regarded significantly more positively than neutral. Of most notable significance is that 97.5% of all survey participants had favorable responses to having affinity spaces, mirroring focus group commentary on the leaders' recognition of the effectiveness of the program's model in comparison to other affinity space models within the district.

BIPOC Principal and AP/VP Surveys

For BIPOC participants, survey comments described affinity spaces as not only supportive, but identity-affirming and sustaining. One principal explained that being in affinity “helps confirm my identity and supports my goal to operationalize the antidotes to white supremacy,” and described having an affinity group as “a gift that keeps me in my job.” An assistant principal similarly characterized affinity sessions as “safe space” that allows them to “heal, repair, rejuvenate and collaborate with other leaders of color,” emphasizing that this shared space makes it easier to return to their building and “LEAD the work forward” with students and families of color. The four BIPOC principals present were also fully favorable of having the option to choose a coach who is BIPOC themselves – with all four of them choosing a 4 or 5.

In the survey space for open ended elaborations, one principal wrote, “I learned that I could be my authentic self as a leader because it was modeled for me, and also talking with other leaders of color who are navigating similar situations in their building helps me understand my own leadership stance and style.” Another valued having “someone who understands the trauma

of arriving where I am under white public education.” Although not all were assigned to a culturally specific coach for caseload balancing reasons, all 12 BIPOC AP/VPs also chose in favor of at least having the option. One BIPOC assistant principal said that “in order to truly serve and center black and brown students, I myself need to be uplifted and in community with those who racially reflect the lived experiences of these Black and Brown students.”

White Principal/AP/VP Surveys

Open-ended survey responses from white principals and assistant principals reinforced the focus-group finding that white affinity functions as a site for vulnerability and accountability rather than comfort. One white principal described affinity as a “brave [and safe] space to be vulnerable and process how to lead in a diverse community as a white leader,” calling it “some of the most useful PD time I have had as a building Principal,” while another noted that meeting in white affinity “removes the idea that race isn’t the center of every situation and conversation” and “maintains a focus on race and implicates us in the work,” indicating that the space helps keep racial analysis central while reducing the burden on colleagues of color.

Across surveys, 100% of white principals and 88.9% of white assistant/vice principals responded favorably that having affinity spaces was essential to their job performance, echoing the strong endorsement patterns of their BIPOC colleagues. One principal wrote that affinity provided “an opportunity to reflect, plan, and learn from other leaders,” while another challenged the term “affinity” itself, arguing that it did not fully capture the work and contrasting it with “not using my privilege to disengage, ignore, or choose to ‘address things later,’” emphasizing accountability rather than retreat. Only one assistant principal responded neutrally, and none of the white participants selected 1 or 2 on this item. Views on racial matching with a coach were more varied in this group. An equal proportion (54%) of white principals and

assistant principals endorsed having a coach who matches their racial experience, while 40% of principals were neutral, and one principal stated that the race of their coach did not matter, explaining that they could “learn from all coaches they work with,” pointing again to a focus on stance and skill rather than identity alone.

Association between Race and Coach Choice Favorability

Across surveys, participants’ comments suggested that the racial identity of their coach matters in different ways depending on their own racial location and context, helping to explain the association between race and coach-choice favorability. Several BIPOC principals wrote that they “need a coach of color to feel authentically in a coaching session” and that working with a coach of color is “essential to keeping my focus on the goal of equity,” underscoring how racial matching supports psychological safety and sustained attention to racialized outcomes. At the same time, a BIPOC assistant principal highlighted the value of a white coach who is equity-centered, explaining that “having a white coach as a woman of color helps me navigate the whiteness” of the broader system. This matches the theme of an anecdote shared by a white assistant principal, describing a time where their BIPOC coach helped them handle a racially charged school incident with respect and fairness.

White leaders, in turn, often decoupled their own coach effectiveness from racial matching while affirming its importance for colleagues of color. One white principal, for example, rated the coach-choice item highly while noting that “I didn’t opt for this and I have an awesome coach,” and that although they did not personally “need” racial matching, it is “a very important piece” for leaders who do. Collectively, these comments suggest that the option to choose a white or nonwhite coach operates as a culturally responsive design feature: BIPOC leaders often link racial matching to authenticity and focus, while some also describe strategic

benefits of white coaches for navigating white-dominant systems, and white leaders emphasize the importance of choice to support their BIPOC peers.

Table 9 shows the results indicated that the association between race and coach choice favorability was not statistically significant, $p = .115$. Although a greater proportion of BIPOC leaders (75%) expressed high favorability compared to white leaders (48.1%), this difference did not reach the conventional level of statistical significance. The odds ratio (3.23) suggested a trend in which BIPOC leaders were more likely than white leaders to rate the importance of a culturally matched coach highly, though the sample size limited statistical power.

Table 9

Fisher's Exact Test for Association Between Race and Coach Choice Favorability

Race Group	Low–Moderate Favorability (1–3)	High Favorability (4–5)	Total
BIPOC Leaders	4	12	16
White Leaders	14	13	27
Total	18	25	43

Note. Results from Fisher’s Exact Test showed no statistically significant association between race and coach choice favorability ($p = .115$), although descriptive patterns suggested higher favorability among BIPOC leaders (Odds Ratio = 3.23).

One principal provided a deeper perspective on this topic with their survey commentary. “I’m white - I imagine I would easily be able to access a white coach even without a program that offered me the choice AND that having a coach of a different race would not have the same impact as it might for one of my colleagues of color.” Other white principals’ sentiments matched this, recognizing that though they did not need it, they understood why their BIPOC colleagues might. In all, 46% of white assistant principals were neutral, and none below neutral.

Creation of Affinity Spaces in Schools

Although overall participants' sentiments were in favor of affinity spaces and coach choice for Induction, I wanted to see if this sentiment translated to the creation of such spaces in the leaders' schools. The survey measured participants' (principals and assistant principals) self-reported consideration or creation of affinity spaces in their buildings using the following response categories: "No," "Yes, but I do not feel ready," "Yes, I have considered," "I have created spaces in my building," and "I already had spaces independent of induction learnings." Table 10 summarizes the frequency of responses by job title and race.

Table 10

Descriptive: Induction Participants' Affinity Space Creation

Response	White principals	BIPOC principals	White assistant principals	BIPOC assistant principals	Total
No	2	0	0	2	4
Yes/not ready	0	2	0	0	2
Yes, considered	12	2	7	8	29
Created spaces	1	0	0	1	2
Already spaces independent	0	0	2	1	3

To test whether affinity space consideration or creation was associated with race or job title, I conducted Fisher's Exact tests on collapsed categories: "No"/"Not ready" versus "Considered"/"Created"/"Already." Fisher's Exact was used due to the smaller numbers per response (see Table 11). No statistically significant differences were found based on job category (principal / assistant principal) or race (BIPOC / White).

Table 11*Fisher's Exact Test for Association Between Race, Title, and Response Patterns*

Group	Response category	White leaders	BIPOC leaders	Fisher's Exact <i>p</i>
Principals	No / Not Ready	2	2	.178
	Considered / Created / Already Have	13	2	
Assistant Principals	No / Not Ready	0	2	.486
	Considered / Created / Already Have	9	9	
Job Title (Combined Across Race)	No / Not Ready	2	—	.398
	Considered / Created / Already Have	32	—	

Note. Categories were collapsed to ensure adequate expected counts for analysis: *No/Not Ready* versus *Considered/Created/Already*.

Most respondents, regardless of job title or race, reported that they had considered implementing affinity spaces in their buildings. However, Fisher's exact tests revealed no significant differences in response patterns between racial groups within job titles, nor between job titles overall. This finding suggests that both principals and assistant principals, across racial lines, were similarly likely to report that they had considered or created affinity spaces as a result of induction program participation; however, more assistant principals than principals of both subgroups reported that they had already created spaces.

The structural and sociopolitical constraints became more evident through the open-ended responses to this prompt. BIPOC leaders described staff compositions that made racial affinity difficult, noting, for example, that "all of my PAT (licensed union-represented educator) staff identifies as white, so an affinity space would be tricky," or that they had "only 2 Black staff members," raising concerns about tokenism and sustainability. Another BIPOC principal said that they "do not have the leadership on their staff to entrust to affinity spaces," suggesting that the space requires more than one leader to facilitate, as well as a leader with the necessary

skills to hold and navigate the sensitive nature of the sacred space. Others referenced positional power, with one assistant principal explaining that they had not moved forward because they “do not have the positionality to make that decision,” or because school leadership was not yet supportive of creating staff affinity spaces. White leaders voiced similar concerns about having a fully white staff, which limits the feasibility of racial affinity design and pushes them to think instead about white accountability spaces. Taken together, these responses suggest that while induction is expanding leaders’ imagination and desire for adult affinity spaces, translating those aspirations into building-level structures is constrained by staffing demographics, power dynamics, and perceived risk. “That threat... [of public scrutiny and disapproval] increases for my colleagues of color,” a white principal said.

Results: Coach Team Focus Group

The conversation opened with Team Member 1 reflecting on the early days of affinity-based coaching. “It wasn’t as prioritized until Team Member 3 came on and said, ‘Why isn’t this in the morning?’” Moving the affinity-based coaching to take place during the morning hours marked a shift from *ad hoc* practices to an embedded, intentional Affinity Model. Team Member 2 recalled, “We weren’t as good at doing it [hosting affinity groups] every single time. And the couple times we did do it, we would do it at the end.”

Team Member 3 described the subsequent introduction of formal structure, noting, “Timing has changed... but structure too, because we do something totally different now in induction. There’s always a focused discussion; normally there’s an artifact, and there’s equity of voice too.” Several members discussed how the coaching team moved from theory into deeper application over time, often by collaborating across affinity groups and revising protocols to bring out more genuine engagement.

Philosophical shifts in the team's own understanding were a key point. Team Member 4 stated, "It takes white folks out of the thinking quadrant because it's always—we intellectualize everything. Yeah, we talk about it, but does that change anything for anyone?" Team Member 5 emphasized the impact of relational trust, saying, "I don't think we could have done the coming back together knee to knee the first year... there has to be trust before you can do the deep work."

Authentic racial dialogue, especially in cross-racial spaces, was repeatedly explored. Team Member 1 recalled their initial journey into cross-racial equity work being difficult some years ago, citing initial frustration with white colleagues' responses, "But to then see people's heart and their willingness and their experiences and their stories... like those became some of my best friends, and still are today." Team Member 2 shared, "If we never talk about stuff, how in the world do you get an understanding?" The team candidly discussed recurring challenges: some affinity spaces, notably for white participants, were described as superficially comfortable. Team Member 4 offered, "It's so low level—it's like a kumbaya, let's all feel good about ourselves, especially in the white space." Team Member 3 added, "*Inauthentic* was the word that was used by two of them—they're inauthentic... it's an easy way for them to skate by and not do the real work." Agency and choice emerged as critical for psychological safety and program effectiveness. Team Member 2 noted, "Having choice in coach selection increased comfort and perceived fairness." Across the conversation, the group affirmed that successful coaching was not just about affinity matching, but about each coach's commitment to equity.

Moving to evidence of impact, the coaches cited concrete improvements in leader discourse, school survey results, and anecdotes of personal growth. Team Member 5 observed, "When we saw a new leader not having great scores, they never came to induction." Team

Member 4 reflected, “There are things she has the will for, needed the skill for, and has grown into it and ready to take off.”

The conversation closed by reinforcing the importance of cross-racial coaching skills. Team Member 1 summarized, “You have to think about what white privilege is, how do I make space for their lived experience and validate it without being performative?” Team Member 3 balanced shared humanity and respect for difference, stating, “I always center human beings—we got that in common for sure. Figure out the similarities and use that as foundation for everything.” Throughout, the group leaned on humor, transparency, and a strong sense of collective accountability. Team Member 5 quipped, “We just want you to get the help you need,” while others described supporting each other through difficult coaching scenarios and celebrating their impact on new leaders. Through the conversation, many themes repeatedly emerged, starting with how the program and coaching model evolved with time and additional perspective. Table 12 outlines recurrent themes derived from the conversation.

Table 12

Themes, Discussion Depth, and Major Insights from Coach Team

Theme	Depth	Major Insights
Evidence of Impact on Leaders	High	Observable outcomes are vital; program success tied to lived results and feedback.
Evolution of Affinity Coaching Model	High	Growth from ad hoc to intentional and structured racial equity practice.
Mindset & Philosophical Shifts	High	Team’s own learning, trust, and relational depth as a mirror for leader change.
Challenges & Tensions	Medium	Recognize and critique surface-level engagement, especially in white spaces.
Choice, Agency, Team Culture	Medium	Leader agency and collective support ensure psychological safety and effectiveness.
Cross-Racial Coaching Competencies	Medium	Reflexivity, humility, interrogation of whiteness, and knowing community context.
Organizational Context	Medium	Need for district policy/practice alignment and cross-program data connection.
Team Culture & Community	Medium	Emotional support and informality boost equity work and engagement.

The themes that were most recurrent by number of speaker turns as well as the depth of discussion are listed in the table. Depth of discussion was determined by how frequently the theme repeated in the conversation.

Evolution of the Affinity Coaching Model

Across nearly all participants, there was a consistent reflection on how the Racial Affinity Model progressed from “the wild, wild west” of early implementation (Team Member 1) to a sophisticated and purpose-driven framework. Early interventions were described as inconsistent: “We weren’t as good at doing it [hosting affinity spaces] every single time. A couple times we did do it, we would do it at the end” (Team Member 2). The arrival of new leadership catalyzed a more systematic approach. Team Member 3 described, “Timing has changed... but structure too, because we do something totally different now in induction. There’s always a focused discussion, normally there’s an artifact, and there’s equity of voice too.” The group recognized that these advances allowed the entire team to embed racial equity practices in their everyday work.

Mindset and Philosophical Shifts

The second major theme to emerge from the coach focus group was the personal and collective transformation regarding race, equity, and leadership that coaches reported experiencing. Team Member 4’s commentary about white leaders’ tendencies to intellectualize and Team Member 5’s commentary about needing a cautious, thoughtful approach to cross racial conversations were two evident examples of mindset shift - the moves from technical to relational work, and making affinity spaces a forethought rather than an afterthought in planning. “I’d have never seen it that way if (Team Member 3) had not brought it up. Having affinity first makes race a priority right off the cuff,” Team Member 4 explained. “Focusing on the same tenet

of white supremacy culture in both affinity spaces at the same time in different ways keeps the groups' learnings congruent even in their own safer spaces," Team Member 3 said.

Evidence of Impact on Leaders

The coaching team described being keenly aware of the necessity for both tangible and intangible forms of evidence demonstrating the Affinity Model's impact. Data-driven improvements surfaced repeatedly. For instance, Team Member 4 shared, "When we saw a new leader not having great [achievement, attendance, student satisfaction] scores, they never came to induction". Others highlighted how leaders internalized equity principles . The group shared anecdotes of participants who transitioned from technical compliance to active engagement in equity-driven decisions, further substantiating their model's credibility. Some new leaders who were previously hesitant started speaking with more confidence in broader professional spaces – a signal of internalization and public commitment. Team Member 5 noted that, "...when I went to that breakfast with Kareem Weaver and the way that [induction participant] and [induction participant] spoke up and just the quality of their dialogue and their language. Neither one of them were afraid to talk to a very professional, very renowned Black man about race and equity—they did not shy away from it one bit, not one bit." Feeling seen and supported was seen as a contributor to new leaders' ability to step into this and other brave spaces. "... now that they're starting to do what they need to do and starting to, like, grow into themselves as that leader that needs to make hard decisions, I'm actually excited to see what it's going to be like next... she's right on the precipice and it took that space," Team Member 1 added. Participants were also seen by coaches to evolve from reliance on excuses to action orientation. They moved to hold themselves and others to higher expectations, as illustrated by Team Member 4:

“So seeing people make moves like that and getting their... butts into the classroom—I know I didn’t want them to feel alone—solidarity, but... that’s where it shows up, right? When you tolerate trash that’s what you’re going to get and you can’t complain about it in the end.”

Challenges and Tensions in Affinity Spaces

Throughout the focus group, coaches bluntly named challenges to authentic racial dialogue, particularly in district white affinity spaces outside of those built for the Induction affinity model. While the spaces were embedded and regular, coaches echoed induction participants’ sentiment of the spaces being ineffective. “It’s so low level—like it’s really like a kumbaya, let’s all feel really good about ourselves, especially in the white space,” one white team member said to illustrate the lack of depth in those district spaces. This statement is a clear echo of the same sentiments shared in the white induction focus group. Another white coach team member said, “...no deep self-reflection or implicating themselves in anything after they leave the room. I don’t remember what the topic was.” A BIPOC coach team member pointed out how induction participants leaned into deep and meaningful race conversations while others evaded them. “Inauthentic was the word that was used in all of them [focus groups]... and somebody from the white affinity group was saying how the people who were in induction were the ones who were the most comfortable talking about, you know, what we talk about [dismantling white supremacy culture]. And the rest of them... he said it’s an easy way for them to skate by and be inauthentic and not do the real work.” The absence of a unified racial framework throughout the district was also felt. “I do think... having that common framework around the characteristics of white culture and some of the different things that we have—there’s a lot of other reasons why our groups are much more effective, but there’s like no common

framework of any kind about what it means to talk about race or what to be in those in the leadership spaces,” said one of the white team members. Attempts at deeper work were often sidelined, fragmented, and presented with a lack of cohesion or scope. “What did y’all even DO last week?” was a comical chuckle shared by Team Member 2, while Team Member 1 lamented at “like 12 different approaches... I don’t know! But I do know we didn’t really talk about race in my group at all... and they start to try out things and it just gets sidelined or shut down...”

Choice, Agency, and Team Culture

Leader agency—in choosing coaches, topics, and methods—emerged as critical to psychological safety and professional growth. Team Member 2 reflected, “Having choice in coach selection increased comfort and perceived fairness.”. The coaching team described their cohesiveness. Both Team Member 2 and Team Member 5 shared, “We just want you to get the help you need,” underscoring a culture of transparency and mutual accountability. The collective model, with team members visiting sites together and sharing responsibility, was recognized as a key facilitator of sustained engagement.

Cross-Racial Coaching Competencies

A nuanced discussion unfolded about what it takes to coach across racial difference. Courage, humility, and the interrogation of whiteness were frequently cited. Team Member 1 shared, “You have to think about what white privilege is, how do I make space for their lived experience and validate it without being performative?”. Coaches described balancing shared humanity with respect for lived difference. Team Member 3 explained, “I always center human beings—we got that in common for sure. Figure out the similarities and use that as foundation for everything.”

Finally, coaches acknowledged the importance of district and organizational support, with references to alignment challenges and successes in leveraging data for systemic transformation. Team Member 3 explained, “We can’t assume, even in a district that talks about race as much as ours, that it’s happening in one-on-one coaching.” A challenge in leveraging data is that the factors influencing school and leader success are numerous. “Some start in schools where they can pick up the torch and run,” Team Member 2 said in reference to schools with less turnover, higher academic achievement, and lower behavior/SEL issues, “and some start in schools where they have to stop a hemorrhage, like xxxx,” referring to a Title 1 school that had 6 different principals over the span of 8 years.

Results of Senior Directors of Schools Focus Group

The focus group with principal supervisors, known as Senior Directors of Schools (SDS), explored perceptions of the district’s racial affinity coaching model—particularly its impact on leaders’ racial literacy, action orientation, and self-implication—along with broader system-level effects. From this discussion, 11 interrelated themes emerged that illustrate how the coaching model operates both individually and organizationally.

The session opened with a framing of purpose: understanding how coaching within racial affinity models supports racial equity leadership development. Grounded in district equity audit findings, I reaffirmed the study’s intent to deepen understanding of racial literacy and action orientation among new administrators, emphasizing the rarity of combining race-matched mentorship with coaching in educational leadership research. As context, I noted that leader retention at year three had improved for program alumni, suggesting possible links between equity-focused coaching and professional sustainability. These contextual remarks established the intersection of equity, development, and retention as the heart of the inquiry.

The group's responses affirmed this framing while immediately expanding it. SD1 noted that principals consistently apply "a racial equity lens as guiding practice," setting a tone that positioned racial literacy as both conceptual framework and evaluative tool. SD2 underscored this pattern by citing a principal who identifies racial equity as her "true north," displaying both courage and consistency in how she leads data conversations. SD3 added an example of a principal newly confident in naming Black and Native students explicitly and setting expectations for their success. In contrast, SD4 acknowledged variability across leaders: while some make equity central, others still treat it as secondary, sometimes missing biases in instruction unless prompted. This variability highlighted both progress and unevenness—echoing the **growth edge** where leaders' understanding and practice continue to evolve amid discomfort.

The **affinity spaces** embedded in the coaching model became a central thread. These spaces, created in response to the district's equity audit, were designed for identity-aligned support, enabling leaders to confront racialized experiences in psychologically safe contexts. I described how affinity spaces aim to dismantle white supremacy culture using the Tema Okun framework, providing differentiated forums for white leaders and leaders of color while holding shared accountability standards. SD5 illustrated this dynamic when describing a leader of color "learning to speak up but fearing being targeted," underscoring both the importance of skill development and vulnerability management. SD6 contributed that, in their supervisory cohort, assistant principals not only used racialized discipline data to design equity interventions but also developed cultural codes of practice for staff. The discussion reflected that affinity spaces promote **safe space**, courage, and mutual accountability—conditions essential for racialized conversations that propel both individual and organizational learning.

The **safe space** theme resonated throughout the dialogue. SD2 emphasized, “Vulnerability is necessary for changing culture; leaders must model openness to unlock trust and creativity.” SD5’s account of a hesitant leader of color further revealed how psychological protection enables authentic growth. The group collectively positioned safety not as comfort but as a prerequisite for candor, encouraging leaders to voice uncomfortable truths, take risks, and model equity-centered accountability. Still, as noted, translating this sense of safety beyond affinity groups remains inconsistent, particularly in broader district structures where fear of reprisal or misunderstanding persists.

As the conversation deepened, **action orientation** emerged as tangible evidence of coaching’s effectiveness. SD1 described a white principal who “put a teacher on a plan of assistance due to inadequate instruction and culture for Black/Brown students”—a decisive move reflecting translation of learning to practice. SD3 reported another leader’s intentional team selection based on commitment to Black and Native student outcomes. SD2 described aligning teacher-student matches through disaggregated data to improve instructional responsiveness. SD7 shared a poignant account of a principal who expanded course access to disrupt inequity, only to be overruled by central office—a “boomerang effect” that tested resolve. Despite institutional pushback, the principal persisted “with integrity and resilience,” exemplifying equity-driven perseverance amid **resistance**. These stories embodied leadership that refuses symbolic equity gestures in favor of structural shifts.

The dialogue then transitioned into **self-implication**—leaders’ willingness to claim responsibility for outcomes. I invited reflection by asking participants how often leaders examine their own roles in inequitable patterns. SD9 observed, “Self-implication is inconsistent; it often requires prompting to emerge.” This admission captured both honesty and developmental

opportunity. SD1 cited two induction principals who “consistently own their outcomes, ask reflective questions, and make course corrections,” modeling maturity in equity reflection. SD4 added that “personality affects ownership,” suggesting self-implication blends disposition with learned skill. I noted my own observations of leaders who, rather than reflecting inwardly, “lean toward scapegoating—externalizing blame on structures like the union.” SD8 agreed, emphasizing that some issues leaders attribute to the teachers’ association “are actually within their control.” Across these exchanges, self-implication surfaced as a delicate but essential practice of leadership accountability, often requiring guided coaching to replace deflection with ownership.

Data use emerged as a recurring theme that intertwined with racial literacy and action orientation. SD2 spoke of using “disaggregated data to persuade hesitant teachers” and repositioning instruction to serve marginalized groups more effectively. SD6 described assistant principals leveraging discipline data for targeted supports for Black and Native students and using findings to lead staff dialogues on cultural awareness and policy implementation. SD4 referenced the utility of staff surveys promoted through coaching, noting that such feedback “helps leaders plan concretely for improvement.” These insights positioned data as both an analytical and relational tool—instrumental in bridging conversations between conviction and evidence, while also revealing that data must be interpreted through an equity lens to generate transformative insight rather than compliance.

Building on these successes, discussion of **coach choice** emphasized the personalization of support as a matter of trust and accountability. I explained that allowing leaders to choose their coach, when feasible, helps with relational fit, productive dialogue, and openness in feedback. This choice, participants agreed, fosters ownership and honesty—conditions essential

for leaders to translate reflection into action. SDSs described how the right coach connection encourages deeper accountability; mismatched pairings risk guarded or performative engagement. As a result, coach choice was recognized as foundational to sustaining engagement within the racial affinity structure.

As conversation turned toward cross-level coherence, **system alignment** became a lens for considering replication and sustainability. I reminded the group that the model was “a direct response to equity audit findings” and was intended as both a corrective and a prototype. SD7 picked up this thread, asking how to “sustain induction and equity actions longitudinally” and what partnerships might sustain them. I acknowledged alignment work already underway—connecting supervisors and coaches to shared goals—while recognizing gaps. Participants affirmed that alignment requires common language, consistent expectations, and continued investment across departments. Achieving coherence across these layers, they agreed, would determine whether racial equity coaching becomes isolated practice or a normalized district expectation.

At this point, conversation turned explicitly to **cross-racial supervision**, which prompted rich reflection. SD2 advised leaders to “balance relationship-building and accountability, using vulnerability to strengthen connections,” and noted that cultural background “affects timing and method of addressing issues.” SD8 added that “identical actions by white leaders and leaders of color may be perceived differently,” urging heightened awareness of racialized perceptions. SD6 recommended co-planning strategies that consider both school context and leader identity to keep student goals central. SD3 reflected, “Lead with curiosity, listen before judging, and consider context before assuming incompetence,” embodying a coaching stance aligned with racial humility. SD7 described leveraging white privilege to “disrupt inequities and create space

for leaders of color,” while SD5 highlighted relational trust as the foundation for “building agency among new principals.” Together, these insights portrayed cross-racial supervision as a nuanced balancing act that demands empathy, power awareness, and adaptive coaching to foster equitable leadership development.

The notion of **growth edge** surfaced repeatedly—in leaders’ increasing comfort naming race, willingness to act despite discomfort, and capacity to sustain change amid challenge. SD8 observed that leaders who completed induction “show less fear and more courage” in calling out inequities, with feedback becoming “more concrete.” SD5’s depiction of a cautious leader of color learning to speak up, and SD7’s story of a principal holding course after central-office reversal, both illustrated growth as persistence at the limits of one’s skill and emotional readiness. As SD2 remarked, vulnerability is “necessary for changing culture,” suggesting that the very willingness to engage the edge, not perfect fluency, marks developmental success.

The **resistance** theme intertwined throughout these discussions—ranging from subtle tendencies to deprioritize equity to direct institutional pushback. SD4 noted that “some leaders treat equity as an afterthought,” while SD5 described structural “opt-out” habits where Black and Native students were funneled away from core instruction, only interrupted through targeted coaching. SD7’s “boomerang effect” and my own observations of scapegoating illustrated how both internal and systemic resistance can stall progress. Yet, participants also named persistence, relational trust, data grounding, and shared accountability as tools to counter these resistances, reinforcing that resilience and alignment are critical to sustaining gains.

Senior Director Survey: Corroborating Perceptions of Impact

Across the five respondents, ratings clustered in the mid-to-high range for all three constructs, indicating that each director perceived at least some difference favoring induction

principals. For racial literacy and action orientation, scores generally fell between 2 and 4, while self-implication ranged from 2 to 5, suggesting greater variability in how directors experienced leaders' willingness to claim responsibility for racialized outcomes.

The open-ended commentary deepened and complicated these numeric patterns in ways that closely aligned with focus group themes. One director, for example, cautioned that they were "only speaking for those I supervise," and explained that "the ones who are not participating are mostly principals of color and care about being anti-racist," pointing out that their non-induction principals already enter with strong commitments. Another similarly emphasized that "all but 2 of my non-induction principals are people of color who are committed anti-racist leaders," highlighting a high equity baseline that moderates the apparent size of differences on a 5-point scale.

Directors' descriptions of racial literacy and action orientation echoed focus group accounts of leaders applying a racial equity lens in concrete ways. One director observed that "racial literacy is pretty high with my folks who are in induction and those who are not," but still rated induction higher, in part because "induction serves as a practice ground for principals where they receive support from coaches and with their peers," whereas principals who do not participate "sometimes can only vet and practice ideas with their Admin team, who also may have never practiced or received coaching." Another director connected this practice space directly to racialized leadership, noting that principals who have participated in induction "have been indoctrinated into seeing their role as a leader to disrupt inequities and to serve underrepresented students/families/staff as racially conscious leaders."

Self-implication emerged in the survey data as both the most developmental and the most uneven construct. One director explicitly identified this as "the biggest difference that I can point

to for my principals who are and are not engaged in induction,” rating self-implication at the top of the scale. In contrast, another director rated self-implication lower and explained that “this is a hard thing to do for many of my folks consistently regardless of induction,” underscoring that taking ownership remains challenging even when leaders have been exposed to racial affinity coaching. A third director complicated any simple narrative by noting, “I have one (white) induction principal who is not strong in self-implication. Others in and out of induction do see themselves as key in dismantling systems of oppression,” reinforcing that individual variation exists within both groups.

Survey responses also highlighted how portfolio composition and district context shape directors’ perceptions of difference. One director described focusing “more towards my principals who have not engaged in the induction program,” because those in induction were already “more willing” to engage in equity-centered work, while another pointed out that the district has “a strong history...of having courageous conversations” such that “many older people...also have a strong ability to have racial literacy, even outside of induction.” A different respondent noted that “we attract a lot of great leaders into our district that want to dismantle racism and oppression,” so although induction “does a really good job,” there are also “non induction principals that are great,” again suggesting that induction enhances rather than singularly produces equity-oriented leadership.

Finally, the survey invited directors to reflect on whether affinity-based work in the induction model had changed how they support principals. One director answered “Yes, I have changed one or more of my own practices,” elaborating that they were “being more intentional about aligning my practices with those of the Principal Coach through induction,” because “many skills are taught/coached” in that space. Another director similarly indicated, “Yes, I have

changed one or more of my own practices,” describing a shift to “think about intent v impact as well as taking more of a coaching stance rather than [a] mentor stance.” A third noted that they had “already created structures of affinity support to my leaders independent of the Induction Program’s Affinity work,” and that for cohort professional development they “ensure a racial equity lens is clearly present” and “make sure to keep race visible” in their support. One director expressed a desire for additional tools, writing, “I would love to know more about affinity space work and how to support it as a senior director afterwards,” concluding that “this is moving in the right direction.”

In conclusion, the Senior Directors’ discussion and survey responses positioned the racial affinity coaching model as a catalyst for cultivating racial literacy, promoting decisive equity-oriented action, and developing self-implication among new leaders. Of additional consideration is prior racial equity professional development engagement by many of the district’s veterans – notably BIPOC – a testament to the lasting power of such professional development, as these particular veteran leaders are also seen by Senior Directors as racially literate and action oriented. Affinity spaces and coach choice were validated as essential mechanisms of safety, trust, and accountability, while data use and system alignment linked personal growth to systemic change. Yet the dialogue also revealed ongoing tension between progress and resistance—the continual **growth edge** of implementing racial equity in systems still shaped by inequitable norms. For these reasons, leadership coaching anchored in racial affinity and reflective practice, whether from coaches or supervisors, remains both a promising and an evolving strategy for building sustainable equity leadership capacity across the district.

Results: Successful Schools Survey

Table 13 depicts induction-participating schools and how their students responded to the survey domain, “Sense of Belonging.” For each school, we can see the researcher-assigned ID number, race of principal, grade band, total percent of favorable responses from students, percent point change from last year’s favorable responses, favorable response changes from last year for each racial subgroup, and the school’s context – Title 1 or Non-Title.

Table 13

Successful Schools Survey, Student Sense of Belonging

Schl ID	Principal Race	Grade Band	Total% Favorable	Change	<i>Student Races</i>						School Context
					Black	Latino/a	Native Am	Multi Racial	Asian	White	
Dist Av	all	1	38	4	-1	-2	-7	-2	0	0	all
1	White	1	28	3	-1	5	8	-1	-3	-1	Title
2	Latino/a	1	31	2	1	-4	-19	2	-5	1	Title
3	Latino/a	1	32	-11	0	-9	0	-4	0	3	Alt
4	Asian	1	33	4	-9	-3	18	-6	11	-1	Title
5	Latino/a	1	34	1	-4	2	0	-14	2	-5	Title
6	White	1	38	2	2	9	0	-5	-5	0	Alt
7	White	1	38	4	-2	4	0	-5	10	-1	Title
8	White	1	41	9	18	-3	-10	-3	8	-1	Non-title
9	White	1	43	13	0	-1	0	25	-9	-3	Non-title
10	White	1	44	9	0	6	0	-3	9	1	Alt
11	White	1	46	3	0	4	0	10	0	0	Alt
12	White	1	47	-2	0	0	0	0	0	0	Alt
Dist Av	all	0	66	5	-4	0	-2	-2	0	2	all
13	White	0	48	-9	0	0	0	12	0	-8	Alt
14	White	0	53	0	16	0	0	14	0	-2	Non-title
15	Latino/a	0	55	-2	-2	14	-5	-21	0	4	Title
16	White	0	60	1	-7	15	-16	-12	0	6	Non-title
17	Asian	0	61	7	9	0	0	2	-4	1	Non-title
18	White	0	62	9	2	-7	0	3	0	-1	Title
19	White	0	63	5	-16	3	0	-4	9	5	Title
20	Latino/a	0	63	7	1	12	0	-8	-10	-4	Title

Schl ID	Principal Race	Grade Band	Total% Favorable	Change	<i>Student Races</i>						School Context
					Black	Latino/a	Native Am	Multi Racial	Asian	White	
21	White	0	63	13	2	12	-9	6	0	-4	Non-title
22	White	0	64	3	-4	0	0	-14	-4	4	Non-title
23	White	0	64	10	0	4	0	6	19	-2	Title
24	White	0	66	4	19	-3	0	4	0	-6	Title
25	Multi	0	67	7	-7	0	0	6	0	0	Non-title
26	White	0	68	2	0	-12	0	6	-7	1	Non-title
27	Multi	0	69	8	0	0	0	2	0	4	Non-title
28	White	0	71	7	9	-6	0	-10	0	3	Non-title
29	White	0	75	9	-16	11	0	0	0	1	Non-title
30	White	0	78	4	0	0	0	7	0	2	Alt

Note. GradeBand – 0 = Elementary, 1 = secondary. For changes within subgroups scores, a positive number indicates an improvement from last year’s scores, a negative number indicates a decrease in percentage points from the previous year, and 0 could mean that either there was no change OR that the population was too small to represent in the survey while protecting confidentiality (<10).

When arranged from lowest to highest Total%Fav, a clear pattern emerged. The first 12 schools in this order were secondary (Grade band 1), and the remaining 18 participant schools were elementary (Grade band 0) illustrating that, across the district, average favorable percentages were notably higher in elementary schools than in secondary settings. Elementary schools reported a mean favorable response rate of 63.89% (range = 48%–78%), whereas secondary schools averaged 37.92% favorable (range = 28%–47%), suggesting a decline in reported belonging as students move into higher grade levels. Year-over-year shifts also indicated generally positive movement, with elementary schools demonstrating a mean increase of 4.72 percentage points (range = -9 to +13), and secondary schools showing a mean increase of 3.08 percentage points (range = -11 to +13).

Regression Analysis

To test whether school context (Title I, non-title, alternative) or grade band (elementary 3–5, secondary 6–12) truly did predict school-level growth in students’ sense of belonging (change in percent favorable from the prior year), beyond my simple noticing, a linear regression was conducted, as shown in Table 14.

Table 14

Predictors of Growth in Student Sense of Belonging

Predictor	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	-1.225	2.37	-0.517	.610
Gr. Band:				
6-12 - 3-5	0.915	2.05	0.447	.659
School Context:				
Non-Title - Alt	7.656	2.6	2.942	.007
Title - Alt	5.082	2.45	2.078	.048
Fit Measures:				
	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i>²	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	0.518	0.368	3.17	.041

The overall model was statistically significant, $F(3, 26) = 3.17, p = .041$, and accounted for approximately 37% of the variance in growth. In practical terms, the model’s effect size was in the medium range, with school context and grade band together explaining a meaningful but not dominant share of variance in growth in belonging scores ($R^2 \approx .37$). School context alone emerged as a significant predictor: relative to alternative schools, non-title schools demonstrated substantially greater growth ($b = 7.66, SE = 2.60, t = 2.94, p = .007$), and Title I schools also showed significantly higher growth than alternative schools ($b = 5.08, SE = 2.45, t = 0.45, p = .048$), controlling for grade band. In contrast, grade band was not a significant predictor of growth, with secondary schools showing an estimated 0.92 percentage point higher change than

elementary schools ($b = 0.92$, $SE = 2.05$, $p = .659$), a difference that was small and not statistically distinguishable from zero. Together, these findings suggest that, within this sample of schools led by principals participating in the induction program, differences in growth in students' sense of belonging are more strongly patterned by school context (Title I vs non-title vs alternative) than by grade band.

Sense of Belonging and School Affinity Spaces

Because the racially disaggregated growth scores of 0 in the master table could reflect either truly no change or results suppressed for confidentiality, it was neither feasible nor responsible to conduct regression analyses on subgroup-level growth. Instead, descriptive patterns suggested that 16 of the 30 cohort schools showed notable gains for at least one nonwhite student subgroup, with increases ranging from 9 to 25 percentage points compared to the prior year. Using the SchoolID column to trace them, I identified the principals of these schools and asked, “What do you think contributed to the increase in sense of belonging for this particular subgroup?” and each principal who responded reported having introduced affinity spaces for that racial subgroup. This pattern points to an important opportunity for future research on how affinity spaces may shape students' sense of belonging.

Results: Human Resources/Retention

Retention of school leaders is not just a financial savings for districts – it promotes school stability. Another measure of program success is to see if there is a relationship between program implementation, participation, and leader longevity by way of examining resignation data from another existing data source - Human Resources.

Costs of Turnover

In meeting with the human resources chief of PPS at the time of the study, I asked the question, “*What is the cost of onboarding a new administrator in this district?*” The chief reported that there were no real costs outside of new leader induction. The explanation was that onboarding only involved the new leader filling out the necessary paperwork and being added to all systems. What was then explored was the idea that time is worth money, and with every new leader comes someone who has to show them how to operate systems necessary for the most basic functions of an administrator: student safety, student records, student learning progress, staff attendance/substitutes, hiring, evaluation and development, family communication, and family collaboration. Even the school custodian – one of the most important drivers of a school - has to give the new leader a tour between floor waxings for the summer and help them with furniture moves. While this is a part of their job, these tasks are necessary with each new leader. Every hour spent teaching systems to a new administrator is also an hour that these professionals could be doing something else job-related and will not be getting back. The Chief then suggested that I tally up the higher-end salaries of those who would be responsible for this informal onboarding, because the professionals with the most tenure may be the ones most likely to tutor. I could then tally up the number of basic essential systems administrators need to know how to operate. Lastly, I could multiply that figure by the number of hours spent. It made sense. But what of that “lost hour?” Our conversation then went to what they called “the district’s most fundamental support for new leaders – the coaches. Really, our biggest cost for new leaders is your salaries.”

With this information, I proceeded to calculate as suggested. The higher end of the PPS Salary Schedule for Administrative Assistants, Tech Support, and Lead Custodians were similar

and came to an average of \$38.00 per hour. Next was the number of essential functions whose programs, systems, or technological applications may be brand new to a first-year administrator. At its core, the job of a principal is to keep students safe, keep them accountable and accounted for, monitor the learning progress of the student body, account for staff attendance, evaluate and develop staff, maintain a school budget, and communicate with families. The programs used for each of these basics are *Synergy* for recordkeeping, *Frontline* for staff absences, *PeopleSoft* and *Classroom Mosaic* for teacher evaluation and development, *PeopleSoft Finance* for budget, and *Remind* for family messages, for a total of six programs. If an administrator were to spend an hour learning how to operate each, and then another combined hour of troubleshooting until they could use them fully and independently, that equals two hours.

Based on these calculations, it would cost an average of \$460 for onboarding support for the most basic functions. But, again, what about the lost hours? Those two hours would not be spent onboarding a veteran administrator unless the entire system adopts new programs. This brings the total of onboarding new leaders to \$930 per person. At the time of this study, the New Leader Induction Program served 66 new leaders. A year before the study, and in prior years, the average number of new leaders has been 85 to 95. The program serves leaders through their third year, and they should only need this onboarding one time. If I added the number of new leaders in the program now to the number of new leaders who were in the program three years ago, the total would be 151 new leaders needing basic onboarding from their school secretary, custodian, and IT specialist. Multiply this by the cost of individual onboarding, and the estimated cost of employee time loss would be \$139,000.

Based on PPS's salary schedule, the cost to employ a principal coach is the same as the cost to employ a principal, and the higher end of the pay scale is approximately \$156,000 per

year. Benefits, on average, for public employees in Oregon are around 30% of their salary. Thus, an additional \$46,800 would be added to this principal coach salary, making the total cost of each principal coach around \$202,000. The coaches have a director and program manager whose combined salaries would average close to the coach salary. The five-person team costs the district \$1,014,000 annually.

Yearly Resignations

I received 9 years of districtwide administrator resignation data, for each year from 2016-2017 up until the end of year 2024-2025. Table 15 shows these numbers and the percentages of the total resignations by race yearly, while Table 16 shows the total populations of school administrators by race yearly.

Table 15

Resignations of Districtwide School-Based Administrators by School Year and Race

Schl Year	Native American	Asian	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Multi-Racial	Pacific Islander	White	Total
2016–2017	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	4 (21.10%)	2 (10.50%)	0 (0.00%)	0(0.00%)	13 (68.40%)	19
2017–2018	0 (0.00%)	1 (4.00%)	3 (12.00%)	7 (28.00%)	1 (4.00%)	0(0.00%)	13 (52.00%)	25
2018–2019	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	2 (8.70%)	3 (13.04%)	2 (8.70%)	0(0.00%)	16 (69.57%)	23
2019–2020	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	5 (25.00%)	1 (5.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0(0.00%)	14 (70.00%)	20
2020–2021	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	3 (13.64%)	1 (4.55%)	0 (0.00%)	2(9.09%)	16 (72.73%)	22
2021–2022	0 (0.00%)	1 (3.45%)	5 (17.24%)	1 (3.45%)	1 (3.45%)	0 (0.0%)	21 (72.41%)	29
2022–2023	0 (0.00%)	1 (4.55%)	3 (13.64%)	1 (4.55%)	1 (4.55%)	0 (0.0%)	16 (72.73%)	22
2023–2024	0 (0.00%)	1 (4.00%)	2 (8.00%)	4 (16.00%)	3 (12.0%)	0 (0.0%)	15 (60.00%)	25
2024–2025*	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	2 (22.22%)	0 (0.00%)	0(0.00%)	7 (77.78%)	9

Note. Values shown as n (% of year). Total row sums to number of resignations that year.

Table 16*Total Population of School-Based Administrators by School Year and Race*

School Year	Native American	Asian	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Multi-Racial	Pacific Islander	White	Total
2016–2017	1 (0.57%)	6 (3.41%)	24 (13.64%)	23 (13.07%)	6 (3.41%)	1 (0.57%)	115 (65.34%)	176
2017–2018	1 (0.58%)	5 (2.89%)	23 (13.29%)	22 (12.72%)	6 (3.47%)	1 (0.58%)	115 (66.47%)	173
2018–2019	1 (0.59%)	4 (2.37%)	20 (11.83%)	20 (11.83%)	5 (2.96%)	2 (1.18%)	117 (69.23%)	173
2019–2020	1 (0.57%)	4 (2.29%)	23 (13.14%)	21 (12.00%)	3 (1.71%)	2 (1.14%)	121 (69.14%)	169
2020–2021	1 (0.57%)	5 (2.86%)	21 (12.00%)	21 (12.00%)	4 (2.29%)	2 (1.14%)	121 (69.14%)	175
2021–2022	0 (0.00%)	5 (2.63%)	24 (12.63%)	25 (13.16%)	4 (2.11%)	0 (0.00%)	132 (69.47%)	190
2022–2023	0 (0.00%)	6 (3.08%)	18 (9.23%)	30 (15.38%)	7 (3.59%)	0 (0.00%)	134 (68.72%)	195
2023–2024	0 (0.00%)	8 (4.12%)	15 (7.73%)	38 (19.59%)	6 (3.09%)	1 (0.52%)	126 (64.95%)	194
2024–2025*	0 (0.00%)	8 (4.55%)	14 (7.95%)	34 (19.32%)	5 (2.84%)	1 (0.01%)	114 (64.77%)	176

Note. Values shown as *n* (% of year). Total row sums to total administrators present that year.

At the time of data collection, there were an average of 23 resignations per year up until 2024–2025, and in 24–25 there were 9 resignations. The year that had the highest number of resignations of administrators of color from this data set also corresponded with a year of receiving a new superintendent. There was no statistically significant difference between the rate of resignation of administrators of color and white administrators.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine whether the patterns of resignation among school-based administrators in the district differed across racial groups and school years from 2016–2017 through 2024–2025. The test compared counts for Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Multi-Racial, Pacific Islander, and White administrators over nine years. The analysis did not reveal a statistically significant association between resignation frequency and either racial group or school year, $\chi^2(40) = 45.60$, $p = .25$. Thus, administrator resignation rates were not meaningfully different across racial categories or years; observed patterns are likely

due to random variation rather than systematic group or time effects. These findings suggest no evidence of disproportionate resignation by race or year during the study period; however, the overall disproportionality of administrators by race should also be considered.

During this analysis, a prominent issue surfaced. The resignation data did not differentiate between those who resigned for another opportunity elsewhere, resigned in lieu of termination, those who resigned for a new position within the district, and those who simply retired. As the Equity Audit points out, many administrators of color have either been “pushed out” due to the unrelenting pressures or have taken that talent elsewhere. Without the means to measure reasons for resignation, there is no way of knowing if the district’s recruitment and retention initiatives are effective for the target population. As I asked for this data, I found that exit interviews were not a common practice and was informed that the district does not keep track of resignation reasons. I reminded the holder of this information that, indeed, the district is at least required to communicate retirement and resignation information to Oregon PERS (Public Employees Retirement System) for benefit purposes, so there should at least be information on the demographic of retirees from this time period. I was, again, told that there is no way of getting that data without “doing it by hand.”

As a Black district leader with some moderate positionality and a big voice, asking for information from white people that could look condemning if it were written in a report, I began to wonder if I would have received a different outcome if I were white. Even though I framed my asks in the name of exploratory research of program effectiveness and district cost savings, perhaps that was not enough to mitigate the learned tenets of White Supremacy Culture built into the very operational gears of the district. As a final resort, I reached out to a white cabinet member in hopes that they could solicit the needed extrapolated data for me. They said they were

happy to help; however, as the year went on, deadlines loomed, work compounded, and I got no response. This caveat is notable because not only does it illustrate the erasure of BIPOC experiences through lack of intentionality in data collection and analysis, it illustrates the positionality that tends to thwart some White people into the tenets of power hoarding, right to comfort, fear of open conflict, objectivity, and quantity over quality. A prominent tenet exposed by this situation was objectivity. Okun (2011) describes this tenet as connected to the belief in an objective "perfect" way of being and doing that is both attainable and desirable for everyone. Not collecting stories and assuming that a resignation is a resignation regardless of the circumstance illustrates that "one right way" of speaking for everyone. But the most prominent tenet exposed was fear. The literature that grounds this study explains what happens when fear is introduced to BIPOC leaders – it has a physiological effect that can hinder decision making. This response, however, is certainly not limited to BIPOC leaders. Every human responds to threat.

Program Participation Over Time

Running into roadblocks that impacted data transparency, I turned to analyzing induction program participation over time. The induction program serves new leaders in their first through third year of leadership, where they then "age out." Theoretically, an increase in participants on the roster could suggest higher turnover, a steady state of number of participants could suggest that turnover is still at its same rate, and a lower number of participants over time could suggest that leaders are staying in the profession. With this in mind, I conducted a comprehensive examination of the administrator resignation rates I was given for Portland Public Schools (PPS) from 2021–2025, focusing on both district-wide figures and participants in the induction program. The study uses unique identifiers (first + last name) to ensure each leader is counted

only once, regardless of multiple cohort appearances, and rigorously compared resignation rates by race and year, assessing statistical significance throughout.

I began with a spreadsheet that listed administrators over multiple years who participated in the Induction program. I used Perplexity AI to ensure that each administrator was only counted once to eliminate repeat appearances and ensure accurate cohort analysis, and there were a couple who had name changes that I subtracted by hand to ensure they, too, only counted once. After gathering those descriptive statistics, I brought in the spreadsheet that listed district-wide resignation counts, disaggregated by race and year. In comparing all district administrators, induction program administrators, and racial subgroups in both categories across the span of five years (the life of the induction program), a challenge arose – some racial subgroups were too small to confirm whether differences were statistically significant, especially by race and year. Therefore, I used the Fisher's Exact test due to the smaller subgroups (see Table 17.)

Table 17

Comparing Induction vs. Non-Induction Leader Resignations

	Resigned	Retained	Total
Induction Participant	27	66	93
Non-Induction Participant	53	154	207
Total	80	220	300

Note. $p = 0.573$.

Across the sample of 300 principals, there was no statistically significant association between induction participation and resignation status. Induction participants ($n = 80$) had a resignation rate of 33.8% (27 resigned, 53 retained), while non-induction principals ($n = 220$) had a resignation rate of 30.0% (66 resigned, 154 retained). The Fisher's exact test indicated that this difference was not statistically significant, $p = .573$.

A binomial logistic regression was then conducted to evaluate whether induction participation predicted resignation status when considered alongside principals' race (see Table 18).

Table 18

Induction as Predictor of Resignation, by Race

Model Fit Measures							
	R^2	x^2	df	p			
	0.066	22.8	6	<.001			
Model coefficients – Resigned vs. Retained							
Predictor	b	SE	Z	p	Odds Ratio	Lower CI	Upper CI
Intercept	0.85	0.22	3.93	<.001	2.34	1.53	3.59
Induction:							
Yes - No	-0.03	0.29	-0.09	0.93	0.97	0.55	1.73
Leader Race							
Latino - White	-0.43	0.33	0.20	0.19	0.65	0.35	1.24
Black - White	0.94	0.45	0.04	0.04	2.57	1.05	6.26
Asian - White	16.72	932.50	0.02	0.99	1.83e+7	0.00	Inf
Multiracial - White	0.76	0.58	1.32	0.19	2.14	0.69	6.67
Native - White	-0.44	0.93	-0.47	0.65	0.65	0.10	4.01

Note. Estimates represent the log odds of “Resigned” vs “Retained.”

The overall model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(6, N = 300) = 22.80$, $p < .001$, $R^{McF2} = .07$,

indicating that the combined set of predictors improved model fit relative to a null model.

Induction participation was not a significant predictor of resignation when controlling for race, $p = .927$, consistent with the Fisher's exact test. In addition, Black principals had significantly higher odds of resignation relative to White principals (odds ratio = 2.57, 95% *CI* [1.05, 6.26], $p = .038$), whereas odds of resignation for Latino/a, Asian, Multiracial, and Native principals did not differ significantly from those of White principals after adjusting for induction participation.

An additional binomial logistic regression was conducted to examine whether induction participation and race predicted principals' odds of being retained among just Black and White leaders ($N = 195$). Retention was coded as 1 (retained) and resignation as 0 (resigned), with non-induction and White principals serving as the reference categories.

Table 19

Predicting Retention among Black and White Principals

	<i>b</i>	<i>Odds Ratio</i>	<i>Lower CI</i>	<i>Upper CI</i>
Intercept	0.84	2.33	1.48	3.66
Induction (Yes/No)	-0.01	0.99	0.50	1.98
Race (Black/White)	0.95	2.58	1.05	6.33

Note. Outcome coded 1 = retained, 0 = resigned. White principals and non-induction principals serve as reference categories.

Odds ratios (OR) and confidence intervals are based on the model estimated from the provided dataset.

With this model, induction participation did not significantly predict retention (odds ratio = 0.99), indicating similar retention odds for induction and non-induction principals in this subgroup. In contrast, race was a significant predictor: Black principals had higher odds of retention overall compared to White principals (odds ratio = 2.58), controlling for induction participation.

Yearly Retention Trends for Induction Participants

Deepening the exploration of retention data, the next section examined yearly retention trends among induction participants to explore whether similar dynamics appear within the program cohort or whether new retention patterns emerge over time.

Data Source and Collection

This analysis utilized a master spreadsheet which contained five annual cohorts (2021-2026) of school administrators who participated in the district's induction program. Each cohort

sheet included leader names, role, school, self-identified race, year in role, and a status indicator ("Still with District?"). Data were prepared by merging all sheets into a single dataset. Individual leaders were deduplicated by combining last and first names, ensuring each participant was counted only once regardless of how many induction years appeared in the document. Then, each participant was de-identified using just initials.

Analysis Process

Table 20 shows the number of induction participants when the maximum experience allowance was 2 years, and when that allowance shifted to a maximum of three years and, conditionally, four years. For each year, the total number of new induction participants was tabulated. Years were segmented by induction program eligibility to assess the impact of the policy change that expanded eligibility beyond leaders in just their first two years of administration.

Table 20

Number of Induction Participants Before and After Policy Change

Year	Participants	Experience years allowed
21-22	59	1-2 only
22-23	89	1-4 allowed
23-24	92	1-4 allowed
24-25	65	1-4 allowed
25-26	48	1-4 allowed

A sharp increase in participation was observed with the move to the "1-4 allowed" model, peaking in 23-24 and trending downward in subsequent years. The sharp increase is easily explained by the expansion of eligible participants.

Unique Leader Retention

Table 21 shows the deduplication across all five years, yielding 168 unique participants. Retention was measured by the indicator "Still with District".

Table 21*Unique Leader Retention*

Category	Count	Formula
Total unique leaders	168	N – unique leader names
Still with district	102	$S = \text{'y'}$
No longer with district	66	$S = \text{neg 'y'}$
Retention rate (%)	60.7	$(102/168)*100$

Unique Leader Retention by Race

Table 22 shows how each unique leader's race was then used to generate a contingency table for retention, using the simple formula $\text{rate} = \text{retained}/\text{total}$.

Table 22*Unique Leader Retention by Race*

Race	Total	Retained	Resigned	Retention Rate (%)
Asian	11	10	1	90.9
Black	9	7	2	77.8
Latino/a	21	15	6	71.4
Multiracial	4	4	0	100.0
Native American	2	2	0	100.0
White	73	64	9	87.7

National Retention Rate Benchmarks

Next, three-year national principal retention rates were compiled from major national data sources (NCES, 2024; Penner et al., 2023), and retention rates for induction participants by race were compared to national averages to assess program impact (See Table 23).

Table 23*Induction Retention Rate vs National Retention Rate by Race*

Race	Induction retention rate (%)	National 3-year rate (%)
Asian	90.9	80–86
Black	77.8	45–55
Latino/a	71.4	42–52
White	87.7	55–62
Multiracial	100.0	65–70

The analysis demonstrated that leaders in the induction program, regardless of race, were retained at substantially higher rates than analogous national averages. Particularly, Black and Hispanic/Latino/a participants had retention rates exceeding national norms by more than 20 percentage points. White and Asian leaders in the program also exhibited higher-than-average retention. These results suggest that the induction program closes or reverses many of the persistent racial gaps in principal retention found nationwide.

Statistical Tests and Considerations

To demonstrate statistical significance, a binomial test for proportions or a chi-square test for independence could be used to compare induction group retention rates with national baselines, comparing sample retention rate of induction group, national rate for the same group, sample sizes, and pooled proportion. A significant p -value ($p < 0.05$) would indicate induction program retention is statistically greater than national benchmarks. This systematic process of integrating data organization, segmentation, descriptive and comparative statistics, clearly demonstrates the measurable impact of the induction program on leader retention and advances understanding of racial equity in educational leadership persistence.

Table 24 shows the statistical significance test of three-year retention rates by race, comparing induction program participants to national averages.

Table 24

Induction and National Retention Comparison

Race	Induction Rate (%)	National Rate (%)	<i>N</i>	Retained	Binomial <i>p</i>-value
Asian	90.9	83.0	11	10	0.419
Black	77.8	50.0	9	7	0.090
Latino/a	71.4	47.0	21	15	0.021
White	87.7	59.0	73	64	<0.001
Multiracial	100.0	67.5	10	10	0.020

The percentage of retention of Asian administrators was higher than national, but the difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.419$). Black leaders also had a higher retention percentage overall but showed no significance ($p = 0.0898$). Latino/a leaders showed statistically significant higher retention ($p = 0.021$). Multiracial leaders showed statistically significant improvement as well ($p = 0.020$), with the highest significant improvement in leader retention being shown by white new leaders in the cohort ($p < 0.001$). Both the binomial and an additional chi-square test confirm statistically significant retention advantages for White induction participants (and Latino/a via the binomial test). All other reported racial groups outperformed national benchmarks but did not achieve statistical significance, likely due to small sample sizes.

When working with small sample sizes such as those collected of the Black, Latino/a, Multiracial and Asian administrator groups, researchers commonly use a higher significance threshold (alpha), in this case 0.10, to reduce the risk of Type II error (false negatives). This adjustment is transparent and sometimes justified in equity research to avoid discounting meaningful trends due to limited subgroup sizes. To account for smaller samples, I employed this adjustment to the same binomial test, resulting in the following groups demonstrating statistically significant differences ($p < 0.10$; See Table 25).

Table 25

Retention Rates with Alpha Adjustment

Race	Induction retention rate (%)	National ret. rate (%)	<i>n</i>	Retained	Binomial <i>p</i> -value	Significant at $\alpha = 0.10$?
Asian	90.9	83.0	11	10	0.419	No
Black	77.8	50.0	9	7	0.0898	Yes
Latino/a	71.4	47.0	21	15	0.0209	Yes
White	87.7	59.0	73	64	<0.001	Yes
Multiracial	100.0	67.5	10	10	0.02	Yes

When applying an alpha level of 0.10, binomial tests revealed statistically higher retention rates among induction participants compared to national rates for Black ($p = .09$), Latino/a ($p = .02$), white ($p < .001$), and Multiracial ($p = .02$) administrators. No significant difference was found for Asian administrators ($p = .42$). At this threshold, four out of five demographic groups showed statistically significant results, suggesting stronger evidence for the effectiveness of the induction program across most groups.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

A primary goal of this exploratory mixed-methods study was to examine the effects of the racial affinity model of Induction coaching on participants as well as on the broader system of a large school district. Another goal was to highlight any unexpected outcomes of this model. Through focus groups, surveys, and statistical analyses, I have found – with caution and consideration of causal-claim limitations - that the induction coaching program of this district, more specifically the affinity coaching component, has had notable positive impacts on leader retention, leader professional growth, and the feelings of psychological safety of the leaders themselves. I have also found unexpected outcomes and trends that are directly related to the foundational text used by the program – *White Supremacy Culture* (Okun, 2018.) These effects and outcomes will be discussed through this frame, as well as the frame constructed with the nine themes of the Equity Audit mentioned in Chapter 2.

How Results Addresses Research Questions

At the confluence of participant feedback, survey data, focus group findings, and school outcome measures, I found strong multifaceted evidence in response to both research questions.

RQ1: Benefits of Affinity Coaching Model for All Leaders

Qualitatively, induction participants across all racial groups described affinity spaces as essential. They served as lifelines for BIPOC leaders while white leaders valued accountability and being able to learn from one another without placing undue pressure on colleagues of color.

All groups credited affinity coaching with deeper learning about equity. BIPOC leaders found culturally specific coaching vital (“Having a culturally specific coach has made such a difference”), while White leaders valued having accountability for addressing privilege honestly. In addition to valuing accountability, survey data from white principals and assistant principals reinforced that white affinity spaces and coach choice were operating as mechanisms for unlearning, not simply comfort. White leaders characterized their affinity group as a “brave (and safe) space to be vulnerable and process how to lead in a diverse community as a white leader,” and noted that it “maintains a focus on race and implicates us in the work,” indicating that the structure encourages them to center race and recognize their own responsibility. One assistant principal highlighted the role of a white coach who is explicitly anti-racist, describing this as “a safe space to learn and make mistakes” with someone who can help them identify and disrupt whiteness in their practice. These accounts align with the analysis of white supremacy culture by showing that the model creates spaces where white leaders can work through defensiveness, “right to comfort,” and fear of mistakes without placing additional emotional labor on colleagues of color. The space enabled authentic self-expression, peer support, and reflection on white supremacy culture tenets. BIPOC leaders echoed a sentiment from one leader “If it weren’t for my coach, I would not even be here,” and white leaders described their affinity groups as “safe space not just for them, but to discuss real issues of racial understanding without inflicting further harm on BIPOC colleagues.”

Quantitative findings revealed yet more benefits. Survey respondents rated affinity spaces (mean 4.61, median 5.0) and culturally matched coach choice (mean 3.79, median 4.0) significantly above neutral ($p = 0.001$), with strong favorability among both Black/BIPOC and white participants. Binomial tests show statistically significant increases in retention for Black (p

= 0.09), Latino/a ($p = 0.02$), White ($p = 0.001$), and Multiracial ($p = 0.02$) leaders compared to national averages, with the affinity model closing longstanding gaps in principal retention. However, no significant race-based difference in the likelihood of creating affinity spaces in participants' own buildings was found, suggesting model transferability across racial groups. As for the coaching model's applicability to sociocultural and white supremacy culture theory, findings show that coaching aligns with both by directly confronting dominant culture norms and fostering agency, choice, and community across racial lines.

RQ2: Effects of Affinity Coaching Model on the Broader School System

The results of this study provided both noteworthy, albeit limited evidence of impacts on the broader school system. Senior directors reported that leaders apply racial equity frameworks, model vulnerability, and hold themselves accountable for outcomes (self-implication). Affinity coaching moved leaders “from technical compliance to active engagement in equity-driven decisions.” Action orientation included using school data to drive equity interventions, holding staff accountable for student outcomes, and creating more inclusive school practices, but was inconsistent among all leaders, not just new ones. Retention of leaders in the induction program surpassed national averages for all racial groups—most markedly for leaders of color—mitigating a nationwide system challenge. Sense of belonging scores in cohort schools tracked closely with district averages; regression models showed school context as the strongest predictors, with grade band also factoring in mildly. Lastly, induction principals who developed racial affinity support for targeted subgroups in their schools saw the strongest increases in Student Sense of Belonging for those subgroups.

These effects come with some caveats. While affinity coaching produced marked benefits for participants, scaling and sustainability are challenges. The district still exhibits

uneven system-wide engagement, ongoing pushback, performative equity efforts, and variable support for leaders of color outside the induction sphere. Senior directors and the coach team cited “ongoing tension between progress and resistance” in spreading true equity culture across the system. Affinity practices have modeled potential best practices but remain partially isolated from larger policy and accountability efforts. Lastly, affinity coaching and induction programming alone were not significant factors in increases or decreases of student sense of belonging survey scores. However, broader system-level transformation remains in progress, both highlighted and limited by the successes seen within the affinity coaching model and induction program.

How Results Address Audit Themes

Table 26 is a combined table of evidence from the study that integrates the audit themes, how the results address the themes, how they fail to address themes, illustrative quotes from participants and district (coach team and senior directors), and quantitative measures and findings. This format provides a comprehensive, side by side summary of addresses, gaps, and links back to foundational research. All findings substantiated how the induction program responds to critical equity gaps but also emphasized the limits of its impact within the broader district context. Both the qualitative and quantitative results strengthen the argument for scaling such approaches as system-wide solutions.

Table 26
Study Results' Address of Equity Audit Themes

Audit Theme	Participant Feedback: Addresses Theme	Feedback Gaps (Fails to Address Theme)	Illustrative Quotes	Quantitative Measures & Findings
BIPOC leaders On Own for Support	Affinity spaces and coach choice praised as unique, same supports not found elsewhere in the District. BIPOC participants described these as lifelines.	Does not change district-level lack of formal supports; support still contingent on induction participation.	<i>BIPOC Participants:</i> “This is the only thing our district offers that is a bucket filler for me.” “If it weren’t for my coach, I would not even be here.”	97.5% preferred induction affinity spaces over district models; affinity spaces $M = 4.61$, $p = 0.001$; coach choice $M = 3.79$, $p = 0.001$. Higher student belonging in schools who started affinity spaces for targeted subgroups.
Invisibility and Isolation of BIPOC leaders	Induction program repeatedly described as restorative. Participants feel seen, validated, and connected.	Broader district spaces continue to leave BIPOC leaders feeling unseen and disconnected.	<i>BIPOC Participants:</i> “I get to be authentic and real without code switching all the time.” “In this space, I don’t have to defend my identity.”	Survey/retention data show improved belonging and retention for induction participants; however, little difference in total student sense of belonging scores than the district average..
Differing Acceptance and Accountability for BIPOC Leaders	Coaches facilitate direct, meaningful discussion about leader accountability in perpetuating/reducing inequity; affinity spaces support growth and self-reflection.	System-level disparity and harsher consequences for BIPOC leaders not eliminated; accountability remains uneven districtwide.	<i>White Participant:</i> “My coach will ask, ‘How are you implicating yourself?’ So I have to stay ready to answer.” <i>BIPOC Participant:</i> “My coach helps me deepen my focus on equity in ways digestible to fragile whiteness.”	Survey/qualitative: leaders report growth in action, but not all systemic barriers removed; Fisher’s Exact test shows action orientation spreading across subgroups.
Unsupportive Leadership	Participants and coaches highlight induction as authentic and effective compared to district leadership spaces, which they label as performative, fake, ineffective.	Participants report seeing little accountability or real support outside the induction program.	<i>White Participant:</i> “District affinity sessions are a big Kumbaya... don’t hold anyone accountable.” <i>BIPOC Participant:</i> “They paid outside people... to lead our affinity spaces. When we asked for them not to come back, they asked me to lead. Did they offer to pay me?”	Quantitative contrast: induction affinity model preferred nearly universally over district alternatives (97% favorability, survey).

Audit Theme	Participant Feedback: Addresses Theme	Feedback Gaps (Fails to Address Theme)	Illustrative Quotes	Quantitative Measures & Findings
Variable Empowerment	Majority feel empowered to try new equity strategies and, with support, act on data, often referencing coaching leadership; some have created their own affinity spaces.	Risk remains high for equity leadership outside induction spaces; pushback and lack of collective support still cited as barriers.	<i>SDS on Action Orientation of new leaders:</i> “This is the one area where I see difference – accountability.” <i>White Participant:</i> “I put a teacher on a plan of assistance for failing Black and Brown students, because I learned to act with accountability here.”	Majority consider/initiate affinity groups in schools; no significant differences by race/job title ($p > 0.10$); retention rates for BIPOC induction administrators are 25+ points above national averages.
Environment Unsupportive of POC Identity and Humanity	BIPOC leaders describe affinity spaces as allowing authenticity, safety, and relief from daily self-censorship.	Only possible within induction; broader PPS environment still unsafe, especially for leaders of color.	<i>BIPOC Participants:</i> “I get to be authentic and real without code-switching all the time.” “Having a culturally specific coach has made such a difference in making the work feel manageable.”	Belonging scores (regression): indicate cohort/context matter; program effect for cohort schools who launched affinity spaces, but not systemwide.
Feedback Not Productively Received	Feedback from participants and coaches consistently used to improve induction program; leaders say they feel heard in induction spaces.	Patterns of ignored or discounted feedback remain outside induction; accountability for feedback does not extend districtwide.	<i>BIPOC Participant on feedback falling flat:</i> “But if a white ally says the same thing... it is the best thing that has ever happened.” <i>Coach Team Member:</i> “Our feedback in induction shapes how PD is run.”	Focus group/survey: positive feedback processes in induction; ongoing systemwide deficiency noted.
White Dominant Culture/Power Hoarding	Induction spaces challenge white supremacy culture directly; coaches and affinity activities teach leaders to interrogate whiteness and deconstruct harmful norms.	District-wide change slow; participants see little common racial framework outside induction; district white affinity spaces sometimes superficial.	<i>Coach Team:</i> “Race is only addressed at Leadership when referring to data disparities, but rarely about real interrogations...” “Focusing on the same tenet of white supremacy culture in both affinity spaces at the same time in different ways keeps the groups’ learnings congruent.”	Leader growth/equity action supported by induction; variable change beyond program (survey/focus group).
Stay/Leave Factors	Retention higher for induction participants, especially leaders of color. Induction support cited as reasons for staying.	May not be enough to counter system issues; those not in induction remain vulnerable to burnout and resignation.	<i>BIPOC Participant:</i> “If it weren’t for my coach, I would not even be here.” <i>SDS:</i> “The resilience and alignment are critical, but ongoing tension between progress and resistance.”	Retention rates for induction participants: Black 77.8% ($p = 0.09$), Latino/a 71.4% ($p = 0.02$), White 87.7% ($p = 0.001$), all higher than the national averages.

How Results Address White Supremacy Culture

Table 27 shows each of Okun's core tenets of white supremacy culture and how the results of this dissertation addressed, confronted, or left gaps regarding these cultural norms, supported by specific participant or coach quotes and statistical/analytic summary where available.

Table 27

Results' Address of White Supremacy Culture Tenets

Okun Tenet	Okun's Antidote	Study Alignment & Implementation	Illustrative Quotes & Anecdotes	Gaps / Caveats
Perfectionism	Value learning/ growth, normalize mistakes	Coaching models encourage vulnerability and learning from error, not flawlessness.	"We intellectualize everything... but does that change anything for anyone?"	District spaces still reward "being right" and compliance over growth; messaging of perfection persists outside induction.
Sense of Urgency	Focus on realistic timelines, prioritize relationships	Affinity circles open space for sustained reflection and relationship before moving to action.	"Having affinity first makes race a priority right off the cuff, not rushed at the end."	District culture often prioritizes speed and technical fixes; deeper equity work "sidelined, fragmented"
Defensiveness	Normalize discomfort, feedback, and curiosity	Psychological safety and vulnerability foregrounded; honest feedback permitted and expected	"In this space, I don't have to defend my identity." "Vulnerability is necessary for changing culture—leaders must model openness to unlock trust and creativity."	"Superficial" spaces persist in district; defensiveness couples with performative leadership or lack of accountability for feedback
Quantity over Quality	Value depth/ meaning, not just metrics	Induction and coaching prioritize deep engagement and "brave space" for reflection over check-the-box PD	"Here we actually get to be vulnerable and go deep." "Race is only addressed at Leadership when referring to data disparities..."	Compliance orientation and metric focus still dominate district PD and accountability structures

Okun Tenet	Okun's Antidote	Study Alignment and implementation	Illustrative Quotes and Anecdotes	Gaps/Caveats
Worship of Written Word	Elevate storytelling, dialogue, oral tradition	Protocols value oral knowledge sharing, lived experience, dialogical meaning-making	"The knee-to-knee protocol makes sure everyone's story matters."	District policies still privilege documentation, technical plans, and written compliance—limited systemic shift
Paternalism	Share power, center impacted voices, participatory decision-making	Coach choice models power sharing; input from marginalized leaders drives content	"Choosing my coach made all the difference—I could trust the process and speak frankly." "They asked me to lead. Did they offer to pay me?"	Unpaid labor and tokenization of marginalized leaders remain unresolved system-level issues
Either/Or Thinking	Value nuance, complexity, ambiguity	Induction spaces welcome complexity, ambiguity, exploration, multiple frames for problem-solving	"Often the best learning came in the messiness..." "...we talk about it, but does that change anything for anyone?"	District structures revert to binary frames (compliance vs resistance, technical vs relational)
Power Hoarding	Share/redistribute power, increase transparency	Leadership roles, coach choice, feedback loops democratize power and invite participation	"When I wanted voice, I just asked—the induction space was open, not top-down." "District leadership is about making themselves look good, driven by hierarchy... and appeasement."	District structures remain hierarchical, with power and decision-making concentrated among senior leadership
Fear of Open Conflict	Normalize conflict, cultivate healthy engagement	Protocols for equity of voice and psychological safety encourage risk-taking, naming harm, and open truth-telling	"Leaders must model openness to unlock trust and creativity."	Outside induction, risk of retaliation and lack of safety still inhibit engagement on racial equity
Individualism	Value collaboration, teamwork and interdependence	Coaching and affinity groups foster mutual accountability, belonging, and "equity of voice"	"I need to be uplifted and in community with those who racially reflect my students' experiences."	Isolation for BIPOC leaders outside program remains a barrier; social capital unevenly distributed across the district

A Crosswalk of Findings

Table 28 provides a comprehensive crosswalk, integrating my research findings with both frameworks. This comprehensive crosswalk table is designed as an integrative analytical tool that enables us to more simply see how the study findings map onto the core equity concerns identified in the district's audit, the research questions driving the study's inquiry, and the critical theory of white supremacy culture and its antidotes. Each row demonstrates the intersection of systemic barriers (audit themes), the targeted intervention (affinity coaching model), and the broader theoretical framework (Tema Okun's tenets and antidotes), supported by both qualitative and quantitative evidence. The inclusion of direct participant quotes and quantitative results is meant to enhance understanding of impact and limitations, while the gaps/caveats column highlights remaining systemic challenges. This table is used not only to trace where the affinity model has produced meaningful progress, but also to identify where transformative work is still required across the district system, providing a clear roadmap for future research, policy recommendations, and programmatic scaling.

Table 28*Crosswalk Table of Audit, WSC, and Study Findings*

Audit Theme	Questions Addressed	Okun Tenets/Antidotes	Alignment in Results (Qual)	Evidence & Quotes	Quantitative Evidence	Gaps/Caveats
On Own for Support	RQ1, RQ2	Individualism → Teamwork/Agency	Affinity spaces and coach choice supported BIPOC/white leaders' sense of connection, belonging, and agency.	"This is the only thing our district offers that is a bucket filler for me." "If it weren't for my coach, I would not even be here."	Affinity space favorability: mean 4.61, median 5.0, $p = 0.001$ (all groups)	Still no formal, sustained system-wide support for BIPOC leaders outside induction.
Invisibility & Isolation	RQ1, RQ2	Fear of Open Conflict, Paternalism → Safety, Shared power	Induction/affinity reduced isolation and allowed authentic leadership expression.	"I get to be authentic and real without code switching all the time."	Consideration/initiation of affinity spaces present across all racial groups (no race diff., $p > 0.10$)	Isolation persists outside program for leaders not in induction.
Acceptance & Accountability	RQ1, RQ2	Defensiveness, Power Hoarding → Openness, Shared accountability	Racial affinity dialogue and coaching surfacing bias, promoting accountability, and developing equity leadership.	"How are you implicating yourself... in perpetuating white supremacy culture? So, I have to stay ready to answer."	Survey: high perceived improvement in personal and peer equity practice (qual and item analysis); supervisor ratings recognize leader growth	District policies still reinforce double standards/accountability for BIPOC leaders.
Unsupportive Leadership	RQ1, RQ2	Paternalism, Either/Or → Shared power, Complexity	Induction seen as authentic support; participants critique district leadership equity efforts as performative.	"District leadership affinity sessions are a big Kumbaya...don't hold ourselves or each other accountable."	97.5% preferred induction over district leadership supports; nearly universal program favorability	District spaces widely critiqued for lacking real accountability/support.
Variable Empowerment	RQ1, RQ2	Sense of Urgency, Perfectionism → Realism, Learning	Coaching enables empowered, equity-oriented action, but risk remains high.	"I learned to act with accountability here."	Higher retention rates for leaders: Black ($p = 0.09$), Latino/a ($p = 0.02$), White ($p = 0.001$)	Empowerment not guaranteed outside induction "bubble"; risk for equity work remains.

Audit Theme	Questions Addressed	Okun Tenets/ Antidotes	Alignment in Results (Qual)	Evidence & Quotes	Quantitative Evidence	Gaps/Caveats
Culture Unsupportive of Identity/ Humanity	RQ1, RQ2	Perfectionism, Worship of Written Word → Process, Story	Affinity/coaching create safety for identity, belonging, validation.	“Having a culturally specific coach made such a difference...made the work feel manageable.”	Sense of belonging for cohort schools tracks district mean (regression/ANOVA)	BIPOC leaders outside induction still pressured to suppress identity.
Feedback Not Productively Received	RQ1, RQ2	Defensiveness Power Hoarding → Openness, Transparency	Induction feedback acted on, valued; participants say their input shapes programming.	“Our feedback in induction shapes how PD is run.” - Coach Team Member	Survey/focus group: participants report feedback loops functioning for program improvement	System-wide, BIPOC leaders’ feedback not consistently solicited or valued. Broader district change remains slow, with superficial compliance dominating.
White Dominant Culture/Power Hoarding	RQ1, RQ2	Power Hoarding, Quantity>Quality → Power sharing, Depth	Coaching & affinity directly challenge and unpack white supremacy culture, model antidotes.	“Race is only addressed at Leadership when referring to data disparities...”	Participants reported increased confidence in racial equity advocacy and structural change (survey items/focus groups)	
Stay/Leave Factors	RQ1, RQ2	Paternalism, Individualism → Agency, Belonging	Significantly improved retention and sense of belonging for BIPOC leaders; induction credited for career sustainability.	“If it weren’t for my coach, I would not even be here.” Sense of belonging is the strongest impact from induction.	Retention rates for all groups exceed national norms (binomial test, e.g., Latino/a $p = 0.02$)	District climate still pushes many leaders of color out; program impact not universal.

RQ3: Unexpected Outcomes

Several outcomes that surfaced through this exploratory study were aligned with expectations, particularly the recognized value of coaching (Celoria & Roberson 2015; Hayes & Mafouz, 2020; Mau, 2020, Wang et al., 2024), peer support (Bussman, 2018), and affinity spaces for Black, Indigenous, and other leaders of color (Thames et al., 2013, The Leadership Academy, 2021; Vinzant, 2009; Williams & Loeb, n.d.). Foundational research and literature established these patterns, and both qualitative and quantitative data from this study affirmed them. However, the depth of their influence on new leaders' longevity—and the unexpected departure of a study participant—revealed dimensions of the work that were unforeseen.

An unanticipated theme emerged around the permeability of affinity boundaries and the transformative dynamics created by cross-racial coaching relationships. According to the induction participant focus groups and surveys, some participants preferred to work with a racially similar coach, others did not express a preference, and a few intentionally sought a coach of a different racial background. In those instances, participants highlighted the unique insights such pairings produced. One BIPOC participant described intentionally seeking the “perspective of a white coach,” while a white participant reflected that a racially charged incident might have been mishandled without guidance from a BIPOC coach. During two separate focus group discussions—one BIPOC and one with white —participants articulated a shared sentiment that transcended affinity lines: “It’s like all of y’all coach all of us.” In reviewing these interactions, synergy was evident. Participants affirmed one another’s reflections through nods, brief verbal responses, and a palpable collective energy across groups (Celoria & Roberson, 2015).

This finding suggests that while racial affinity remains an essential element of the program, it is only one layer of what makes the coaching model effective. The unanticipated

power resided in the coaches' ability to demonstrate strategic empathy, boldness, and deep knowledge of both organizational systems and the dismantling of white supremacy culture. The relational and human-centered nature of coaching became the greater unifying force, transcending race in moments where integrity, care, and shared accountability guided the work.

This finding is particularly significant given the scarcity of BIPOC mentorship opportunities (Aldrich, 2019; Thames et al., 2013; The Leadership Academy, 2021; Vinzant, 2009). Moreover, not all available mentorship for BIPOC leaders, in this particular case, embodies the skills, cultural consciousness, or relational trust necessary for truly transformative coaching. The belief among induction participants that every coach—regardless of race—embodied the principles of effective coaching underscores an essential truth. Integrity, humility, active listening, patience, critical questioning, and genuine humanity form the core of meaningful leadership support (Herman et al.; 2022; Nickerson, 2023; Okun, 2021; Sanchez, 2023; The Power of Sankofa, 2019).

Another unexpected theme emerged around accountability among white participants. One leader shared that they could almost anticipate their coach's question before each session: "Who is this serving?" This consistent framing became a moral compass, prompting them to confront personal biases and systemic privilege. Initially, this study positioned its primary focus on the experiences and advancement of BIPOC administrators, with a secondary assumption that white leaders would simply benefit from participation through the general effectiveness of coaching. Yet what surfaced was a more profound transformation.

White leaders reported developing a heightened moral awareness and personal responsibility for equity work. They actively questioned institutional norms, challenged their peers, and fostered accountability for dismantling white supremacy culture within their own

schools. Their engagement was less about compliance and more about conviction. These leaders modeled metacognition and courage, which mirrored subgroup increases in student-reported Sense of Belonging scores on the *Successful Schools Survey*. Follow-up conversations with these leaders revealed a consistent theme: they viewed their coaching not as an external support, but as an internal compass for leading with integrity and equity-minded intentionality. They did not remain in intellectual thinking and planning spaces – they took real actions, like creating affinity spaces for students and staff, and facilitating their own professional development and community teachings about the ramifications of White Supremacy Culture.

As a Black administrator observing this evolution, this outcome felt both affirming and vital. Sustainable change within education cannot rest solely on the labor of BIPOC leaders (Aldrich, 2019; Herman et al., 2022; The Leadership Academy, 2021; Vinzant, 2009; Williams & Loeb, 2023). The commitment of White colleagues as active allies and co-conspirators is imperative if schools are to meaningfully address systemic inequities (McIntosh, 1989; Okun, 1999). One particular story stood out as emblematic of this shift—the experience of Principal X, whose journey encapsulates this vital need for a systemwide stance of support for BIPOC leaders.

“If it weren’t for my coach, I would not even be here.”

The experiences of a leader I will call Principal X stand as a powerful testament to the complexities embedded within racially conscious leadership and coaching models. The conviction in their statement, “If it weren’t for my coach, I would not even be here,” echoes across every dimension of these findings. The literature is resoundingly clear: even in a district where the Racial Affinity Model of principal coaching finds success, popularity, and a tangible

impact on retention, the influence of a few deeply committed coaches cannot hope to buoy an entire system that remains beset by larger structural and cultural tides. Systemic forces rooted in national philosophies of schooling that have historically marginalized communities of color (e.g., Superville, 2021; Oates et al., 2009), local manifestations of social hierarchies and racialized power relations in PPS (The Leadership Academy, 2021; Bailes & Guthery, 2020), and district-level decision making shaped by white supremacy culture norms (Okun, 2021; McIntosh, 1989) converged not simply on Principal X as an individual, but on the very possibility of transformative leadership within a system that resists it at every turn.

From the outset, Principal X's pathway into school leadership was emblematic of the ways BIPOC leaders are often drafted into roles for which the deck is already stacked. Tapped for a challenging principalship rather than placed in their chosen central office position, X was assigned to a uniquely complex Title 1 school, hosting multiple specialty programs and spanning elementary and secondary grade bands. The school's chronic leader turnover, driven by initiative fatigue, the weight of neighborhood poverty, high teacher attrition, and adversarial labor relations, framed X's appointment as both opportunity and crucible. X's identity which was shared with most students, and their steadfast values became rationales for selection, reinforcing the persistent expectation that leaders of color are uniquely suited to "fix" schools burdened with decades of under-resourcing and marginalization (Glass & Cook, 2020).

Against this backdrop, coaching from the district's Induction Program initially gave the illusion of possibility and support. The "honeymoon phase" soon faded as Principal X was met with relentless resistance from staff, families, and the system itself. That mirrors the persistent challenges documented across the literature. Teachers undermined their authority; white parents scrutinized their decisions, and a combination of absenteeism, low morale, and union

entrenchment rendered school improvement an uphill struggle. Efforts to fulfill credentialed leadership responsibilities—whether coaching teachers, engaging stakeholders, or setting high expectations—were met with pushback and damaging labels, the latter reflecting the all-too-common experiences of BIPOC leaders who are pathologized for displaying standard professional assertiveness (Reed, 2017). Complicating the picture, district office interventions often failed to grapple with the school’s realities, instead prescribing generic solutions such as restorative conversations or professional development without adequate modeling, support, or attentiveness to local capacity or context.

Despite these headwinds, Principal X’s resilient leadership delivered measurable gains: incremental academic achievement, improved attendance, full staffing at the start of the year, and notable increases in student belonging for elementary grades, all achieved under circumstances that would drive most from the profession. Principal X was clear that the presence of a dedicated coach was critical, providing biweekly feedback, real-time support, and a lifeline in contentious moments; such relational fidelity is echoed in the emergent literature as both vital and too rare (The Leadership Academy, 2018). Yet, as with many leaders of color, even demonstrable progress proved insufficient to disrupt the ongoing deterioration of trust and partnership with staff, especially as relentless stressors took their toll on both professional efficacy and personal well-being.

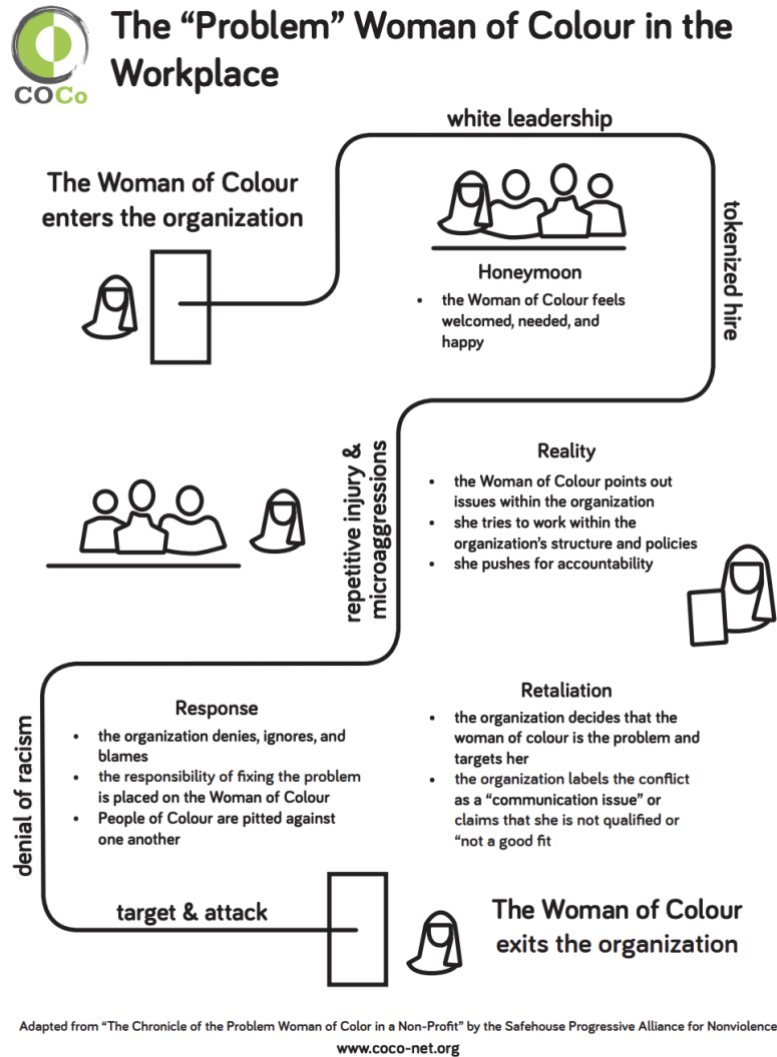
The sequential, overlapping injustices endured by Principal X: misplacement resulting from institutional need, opposition from staff and families, excessive scrutiny, racialized microaggressions, and the never-ending burden of proving competence, map exactly to the hurdles detailed in the review of literature: the uphill struggle for legitimacy since Brown (Superville, 2019); the psychological and physical toll of racial weathering (Moreland-Capua et

al., 2018 ; Reed, 2017); the persistent, invisible privilege structures that allow dissenting white staff to evade accountability (McIntosh, 1989); the empirical evidence of student benefit when paired with same-race leaders (Aldrich, 2019; Bartanen, 2019); the inequitable assignment of leaders of color to under-resourced schools (Brooks et al., 2020); and the relentless pressure to enact school change in contexts where systemic barriers go unaddressed. The coaching team itself recognized the limits of its power in the face of these realities: much of their work with Principal X was reactionary, triaging the aftermath of structural failure rather than building toward transformation.

Ultimately, Principal X opted to leave the profession. The support he found through the Affinity Coaching program was insufficient to overcome the many challenges he faced. Figure 6 (Page, 2018) gives a remarkably similar playbook of what has been known to happen to women of color in the workforce; however, this cycle can - and has - happened to BIPOC leaders of any gender, expression, or identity. The findings represented in this figure, in Principal X's narrative, and the literature at large, demonstrate that leadership retention of BIPOC principals cannot rest on the shoulders of a few coaches, no matter how dedicated or culturally attuned. Until school systems confront endemic issues such as systemic under-resourcing, the "typecasting" of BIPOC leaders, initiative overload, unclear or unsupported conceptions of central office support, loopholes protecting teacher misconduct, and the lack of robust frameworks for engaging race and racism collectively, even the strongest affinity-based coaching will fall short. Persistent inequities call for a reimagining of the systems and commitments that shape the daily work of school leadership.

Figure 6

The "Problem" Woman of Colour in the Workplace



Where the literature and these results align, they do so with urgent clarity: Coaching for retention and equity must be paired with meaningful, systemic change, or its impact will always be too little, too late.

Limitations to This Study

As with any study, limitations exist that should be taken into account for both interpretation of results and for potential of future study.

Retention Over Time

The findings in the area of leader retention over time have the most significant limitations. First, the district did not provide information on the resigned employees' reasons for resignation. As we are in an era where the "baby boom" generation is retiring at the same rate as they were born after World War II, some of our resigned could have simply retired. Sometimes, administrators are offered the option to resign if they have either performance or ethical concerns that could lead to termination. On a more positive note, sometimes administrators receive promotions to the district office, which, though honorable, still results in that school needing a new administrator. I personally know of administrators in the district who resigned for health or family reasons – a hint at confirmation of racism being connected to health disparities. Although the findings of the equity audit and this research suggest resignation can be a consequence of administrators' not having supportive leadership from the central office, not knowing why people resigned makes drawing connections between resignations and racial affinity far more difficult.

Second, a phenomenon was noticed in the year 2017, where the resignations of BIPOC administrators outpaced the resignations of white leaders per capita. Prior to 2017, the district had an Equity Team, consisting of a chief, a senior director, and Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs) responsible for the professional development and schoolwide implementation of Courageous Conversations about Race (CCAR). CCAR provided frameworks, definitions, and protocols, giving the entire district a common baseline from which to start when talking about race. With the hiring of a new superintendent also came the dissolution of this department, which, according to audit participants, removed "safety" for

administrators of color. An external event that coincides with an uptick in resignations makes the tracking of resigned administrators over time, and their reasons for resigning, more difficult.

A last unknown was the number of years each leader had spent in administration prior to their resignation. Nationally, administrators tend to leave their jobs after an average of four to five years. Knowing if the resigned was an experienced (4+ years) or novice (0 to 3 years) administrator would certainly paint a clearer picture of who is actually leaving. This unknown makes the analysis of whether race – and the treatment of BIPOC people – is a possible factor of early resignation, more difficult. Therefore, significant caution should be taken when considering these figures.

Small Sample Size

These findings suggest a practical but not statistically significant pattern suggesting that BIPOC school leaders may place greater value on having a racially or culturally similar coach than their white peers. Future studies with larger samples are needed to test this relationship more precisely across racial and professional subgroups. These findings also suggest that white and Latino/a (Hispanic) leaders in the induction program are statistically more likely to be retained at three years than the national average, with the likelihood that white leaders who participated in the induction program would be retained beyond three years showing extremely strong significance. Asian and Black leaders in my study had higher retention rates than national peers, but small sample sizes meant findings did not reach statistical significance, despite positive trends. Both statistical tests (binomial and chi-square) revealed robust retention outcomes and, particularly for white and Latino/a groups, a significant outperformance compared to national three-year averages. These findings corroborate the induction program's

efficacy in supporting above-average retention, especially in historically lower-retention racial groups. In all these cases, the small sample sizes of the groups receiving the targeted intervention impacted statistical significance findings by lowering the statistical power of the analyses. The possibility remains that some of the positive trends seen in smaller racial groups could be by chance. Therefore, there is a need for a study like this to include other districts – either nationally or statewide – who are receiving similar targeted interventions.

Affinity Space Consideration by Position

Assistant principals are typically more student facing and work with culture and climate more often than principals do, so with their unique view of the student and staff population, it is reasonable for more of them to feel ready for affinity groups than principals. Principals are also the face of the school, and since the threat of equity work resulting in loss of public funding under the federal administration in office in 2025 (US Department of Education, 2025) is daunting, the risk of public scrutiny is more of a reality for a principal than an assistant principal, which could explain the principals' added caution and care for creating such groups.

The Neutral Outliers

The one principal neutral response to affinity spaces being essential, and the other principal who said race of coach does not matter, could mean different things. It might illustrate the white supremacy culture tenet of objectivity – that everything is a level field – or it might indicate the coaching team created such an environment that these leaders feel loved and empowered by the entire team? The structure of the survey data with promises of anonymity will not allow following up with these outliers to get more insight. Further studies with larger

samples could explore reasonings behind neutral responses. And, of course, one cannot overlook the possibility that central tendency bias could explain the neutral response.

Likert Ratings and Central Tendency Bias

With a 5-point Likert scale comes some possible issues of collecting true responses, with Central Tendency Bias being the most likely for this study. Because race and white supremacy culture are such charged and sensitive topics, participants who are not comfortable with racial equity work could have chosen the neutral midpoint so as not to end up on either extreme end. This practice may also be related to participants responding due to social desirability, where participants could have chosen responses that were more socially acceptable rather than saying how they really felt. Even though their survey responses were confidential, and participants signed an agreement to not discuss anyone else's focus group responses outside of the group, it is easy in today's educational, social, and political landscape to face harsh repercussions for fully expressing feelings that can be seen as outlying. However, the fact that few participants chose option 3 (neutral) in the surveys overall, and the fact that individuals shared some opposing viewpoints in the focus groups, speaks to the level of psychological safety built among this team – the foundation being the affinity groups themselves.

Student Sense of Belonging as Program Effectiveness Measure

It is worth noting that instrumentation could be a threat to internal validity in this study, in that the measure used, the student sense of belonging score from the *Panorama Successful Schools Survey* was not designed to measure the impact of affinity coaching model for school leaders. It is possible that this particular source of data might not be sufficient for measuring

school leaders' impact on their schools. Despite this potential mis-match, however, the measure did offer some insights. Although not statistically significant at the .05 level, the effect size ($\eta^2 \approx .19$, medium) suggests that belonging outcomes tend to vary by school context, with Title and Alternative schools generally scoring lower than non-title schools. This trend aligns with the ANOVA findings, indicating that school context likely influences belonging scores. Bartanen et al. (2019); Grissom & Bartanen (2019), and Levin & Bradley (2019) all directly identified school context as having a significant effect on school climate, leadership outcomes, and even turnover. However, differences found in this study did not reach the threshold for statistical significance. In sum, this study suggests belonging outcomes are most strongly linked to overall improvement, racial subgroup scores can be influenced by the leader's willingness to create affinity spaces, and school context presents emerging but not yet significant differences in improved sense of belonging. With the additional factors that influence school performance beyond the control of a coach, caution should be taken when using a measure like this to evaluate the program's effectiveness. In addition, there were several racial, gender identity, subculture, and language subgroups whose responses were not represented whenever the n of their subgroup at their school was fewer than 10. This lack of representation within the study poses a tremendous concern that the voices of our students furthest away from justice are not being heard, and decisions could be made for them without adequate representation. This kind of survey should certainly not be used in isolation; rather, to supplement qualitative data.

Practical Implications of the Study

Despite its limitations, this study offers findings useful for practice. It provides evidence of the utility of the racial affinity coaching model and can guide recommendations, both for the

district and the possibility of future scholarly studies about the cross-racial impacts of affinity-based leadership coaching on individuals and systems.

Healing and Sustainability as Vital Components

The open-ended commentary from induction participant surveys underscores that racial affinity spaces function as a form of healing and sustainability for leaders of color, not merely as professional development. BIPOC principals described affinity as “a space that helps confirm my identity and supports my goal to operationalize the antidotes to white supremacy,” and one explicitly stated that having an affinity group is “a gift that keeps me in my job,” directly linking affinity to their willingness and ability to remain in the role. Assistant principals similarly emphasized that affinity time allows them to “HEAL, REPAIR, and REJUVENATE and COLLABORATE with other leaders of color,” and to return to their buildings with greater “confidence, empowerment, joy, and embracing of my identity.”

Read alongside literature from Brooks et al. (2020), Harell et al. (2003), Moreland-Capuia et al. (2016), and Thames et al. (2013) on the physiological and psychological impacts of racism on everyone – including educators, these perspectives position the racial affinity coaching model as a partial countermeasure to racialized stress and as a condition for retention rather than a peripheral support. These dynamics are made especially vivid in the experience of Principal X, whose narrative illustrates how sustained coaching and affinity support can quite literally make the difference between leaving and staying in school leadership, and also made evident by known administrators of color leaving for health reasons. However, the narrative also illuminates why leaders leave – in congruence with the Equity Audit (The Leadership Academy, 2021), and Bartanen (2019), both patterning the same constraints this principal experienced. Ultimately, this

study suggests several recommendations for future work, such as a more widespread systemization of equity supports, regular equity audits, and more longitudinal data upkeep and analysis.

Broaden Systemic Equity Supports

Coaching in this district was made possible, in part, through grant funding. One of the multi-year grant's requirements was to find a way to sustain programming beyond the grant's life. Currently, coaching positions are funded centrally. This speaks to the district's commitment to this work; however, the district cannot continue to rely solely on a small affinity-based coaching team to meaningfully champion equity work. The district should expand and institutionalize equity leadership by building a districtwide cadre of culturally responsive coaches, equity coordinators, and leadership pipelines at every level, in addition to professional development designed to strengthen all employees and stakeholders' knowledge and capacity for meaningful equity work beyond just acknowledging gaps.

Sustain and Resource Affinity Spaces

Continuing and expanding affinity spaces for BIPOC leaders, ensuring protected time, appropriate compensation, and system-level endorsement, is another imperative based on feedback and results. Such spaces have been shown, in this study's findings and in foundational literature on affinity groups and principal support, to improve retention, professional identity, and well-being for leaders and staff of color (Aldrich, 2019; The Leadership Academy, 2021; Vinzant, 2009).

Integrate Community Voice

Affinity and accountability should move beyond induction and be ever-present in other district spaces. To start, the district should develop and revise strategic equity plans with genuine input from principals, teachers, families, and community partners. Use of ongoing surveys, focus groups, and community forums to identify critical needs and evaluate progress is also critical, as the equity audit of 2018 revealed clear and potent feedback that, when responded to with intent, made a difference, not just for BIPOC leaders but for white leaders as well.

Regularly Conduct and Act on Equity Audits

This district, and others like it, should implement regular, rigorous equity audits that use both quantitative and qualitative tools to diagnose disparities in school resourcing, assignment of BIPOC leaders, staff practices, and student outcomes. Audit findings need to be made actionable priorities for district leadership, as they were for the members of the Coaching Team.

Enhance Professional Development

Another recommendation is that the district center antiracist principles in all leadership training, especially for White leaders and staff, to address microaggressions, implicit biases, and systemic inequities, moving beyond compliance to transformation. White induction participants highlighted this as a key component to helping them become more accountable to themselves, their colleagues, and the system to dismantle white supremacy culture for the benefit of students furthest from justice.

Scale to Veteran Leaders

Both prior research and current findings support the necessity of one of the key requests from leaders of color who participated in the equity audit, underscoring that meaningful affinity

spaces and coaching are needed for all to sustain and strengthen practice. The works of Aldrich (2019), Nelson et al. (2016) and Vinzant (2009) all discuss peer networks for leaders of color, the identity affirmation that mitigates isolation, and the consequences when these structures are absent. Additionally, the works of Bartanen et al. (2019), Herman (2022), The Leadership Academy (2021), and Superville (2019, 2021) all back the idea that retention, well-being, and effective practice are all strongly linked to the presence of such peer network structures. If leadership coaching is thought of in the same way as a sports coach, we would see that even every sport phenom – Michael Jordan, Serena Williams, Simone Biles, Muhammad Ali – had coaches. The role of the coach is to help hone the player’s thinking so they can perform better, not to play the game for the athlete. The same can be said about the complex and challenging work of school leadership, especially in specific racial, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts. The district should consider developing one branch of coaching for novices and another branch for veterans, both to provide the same meaningful affinity and accountability work, but tailored to the needs of the leaders they serve.

In addition to these practical suggestions for the district, this study also suggests recommendations for further research, both to deepen understanding of the intersection of principal coaching and racial affinity and to broaden the reach of this intersectional work in an effort to build resilient, anti-racist leaders of all identities.

Longitudinal Studies on Retention and Well-being

There is a lack of research that follows BIPOC leaders engaged in affinity-based programs over multiple years, as well as research simply documenting such programs. Further studies in this area, particularly those conducted longitudinally, can help clarify which program components most impact professional growth, resilience, and long-term retention outcomes. The

lack of attention paid to BIPOC leader retention and well-being most clearly connects to the white supremacy culture tenet of “worship of the written word.” Okun (1999) describes this as overvaluing certain kinds of “official” written knowledge and documentation while undervaluing lived experience and community-based knowing. In this context, the lack of longitudinal, formal research on affinity-based programs—even when leaders’ experiences and early evidence show their value—reflects how systems often withhold legitimacy until something is extensively documented in the “right” research formats, which is characteristic of this tenet. As formal research will continue to be upheld by rigor and stringent expectations to maintain legitimacy, it will be important to prioritize the study of these other ways of knowing until they become just as valued.

Examine Intersectionality, Systemic Barriers and Scalable Solutions

Future scholarly work should attend to the intersecting identities (race, gender, LGBTQ+, language, and socioeconomic status) of leaders and examine how these intersections shape both experiences and outcomes in affinity-based induction. Such exploration could uncover how multiple social positions compound or mediate the challenges faced by leaders navigating complex school systems. In addition, research that investigates how organizational structures, district policies, and resource allocation constrain or enable the success of BIPOC leader induction are needed. Practical research, to identify which models of support and shared accountability are most sustainable districtwide, would also provide meaningful insight for practice. By integrating both intersectional and systemic analyses, future research has the potential to inform leadership development frameworks that more effectively advance equity, belonging, and justice across educational contexts.

Expand the Evidence Base

There is a need for more robust, mixed-methods research that measures both quantitative (e.g., retention rates, achievement gains) and qualitative (e.g., leader, teacher, and student sense of belonging, professional identity) impacts of affinity-based and equity-focused coaching programs, addressing current gaps in the field. The lack of transparent and efficient data systems significantly limited my ability to examine more long-term effects of affinity-based coaching on leader retention in this study. By expanding the evidence base to include the study of more school districts, more school contexts, more leader tracks over longer time periods, and especially more racial and cultural identities, later research endeavors could provide even more refined strategies for overall school improvement. An investigation that focused on the true financial and time costs of leader turnover alone, especially given the financial and time constraints of today's public schools, is an example of a future study that has potential to underscore the importance of retention.

Diversify Leadership Preparation Pipelines

This district is currently engaged in more research and in piloting new models for recruiting, preparing, and supporting BIPOC school leaders, including targeted mentorship, community-driven fellowships, and national policy advocacy to address root causes of underrepresentation. These kinds of pipelines are showing traction and should be further studied, again, longitudinally. Advancing racial equity and retaining BIPOC leaders will require both broad strategic shifts and focused, persistent research efforts. These recommendations hold promise not just for this district, but for the field at large. Every school leader was once a school student. The launch of a Career & Technical Education (CTE) course and track for high school students to explore the field of Education as a career, with an emphasis on recruiting, retaining,

and supporting BIPOC students, is just one of many opportunities for diversifying leadership preparation. However, caution should be taken when hiring coaches or selecting mentors for the purpose of racial diversity and representation. Race, culture, and school success alone do not automatically translate to coach candidacy - some great school leaders still engage in consistent informal rumor-sharing, triangulation, breach confidentiality for their gain, engage in interpersonal incivility, rely on indirect conflict management, and engage in counterproductive work behaviors, rendering them instructionally effective yet relationally destabilizing. High Achievement/Low Morale leaders may not be the best coaches. To prioritize race, culture, and school success over morale is a gateway to tokenism of BIPOC mentorship, performative equity, and soured experiences for new administrators who are already trying to grapple with the demands of the job itself.

The Sankofa Principle: Looking Back to Move Forward in Coaching

The Sankofa Principle anchors and animates every step of this work, not only as an emblem of ancestral wisdom but as an enduring call to action for those of us navigating and transforming education's most contested terrain. As the principal coach who enables culturally responsive coach choice for new leaders in this district, the charge is both an honor and a weighty testament to the pathways opened by the generations before us. I myself have benefitted from the mentorship, advocacy, and encouragement from the Black teachers, principals, professors, supervisors, clergy, and public servants I have been blessed to know throughout my schooling and career. They all reached back into their lives' lessons to pull me forward. The lessons of Sankofa remind us to truly serve, we must look back, gather what is valuable, and move forward with both remembrance and resolve.

This study revealed that new leaders of every background, regardless of race, trust their coaches to be skillful, courageous partners in disrupting the culture of white supremacy that still permeates schools. Yet even as a facilitator of antiracist professional development, fully aware of how systemic racism erodes BIPOC educators from student to superintendent, the invisible knapsack described by McIntosh feels doubly weighted. For BIPOC coaches, that burden contains not only the dualities of pride and fear, boldness and restraint, joy, and exhaustion, but also the persistent knowledge that our own journeys are shadowed by the same obstacles we help others to overcome. To walk the path of Sankofa is to honor the resilience and sacrifices of past generations, even as the mantle of responsibility presses heavily on the present.

In practice, this means modeling what must be sustained: the twin acts of persevering and preserving. The stories shared by BIPOC principals in this study—and the lived reality of Principal X—are not abstractions; they are mirrored in the ongoing experiences of myself and those who coach, mentor, and support new leaders. Whether it is being strategically excluded from decision-making spaces, subjected to microaggressions, or finding one's feedback floundering in the larger system's inertia, the sting of marginalization remains acutely personal. The emotional toll of vicarious trauma, accumulated in bearing witness to and co-regulating the distress of BIPOC new leaders, only intensifies the challenge. Still, as coaches, we persist, delivering excellence, offering sanctuary, and encouraging new leaders to ignore the inner critic that insists our work must be “twice as good” just to be seen.

The paradox is ever-present. Even as I urge our leaders not to “dim their light,” the quiet voice of caution sometimes tells me to calibrate my own shine for fear of being read as “aggressive” or “intimidating.” The struggle is to illuminate the path for others while discerning when self-preservation requires strategic withdrawal or compromise. Through it all, the wisdom

of Sankofa provides leader clarity: Understanding human motivation, rooted in sociology, empathy, core values, joy, and decisive action, equips BIPOC leaders to navigate the entwined realities of race, power, and school leadership. This knowledge guides daily choices—how to deploy resources for equity, when to intervene or step back, how to sustain relationships across lines of difference, and, as in Principal X’s case, when to let go for the community’s greater good.

The reality is, the experiences of BIPOC new leaders are consistent with those of BIPOC leaders across fields, which brings both empathy and heightened responsibility to me and others who coach and champion their trajectories. Yet there is undeniable encouragement in what this work has produced. The increased retention of BIPOC leaders in this district—as well as the authentic cross-racial appreciation for affinity spaces, the mounting insistence on systemic equity action from new leaders, and the courageous climate cultivated by coaches across difference, all reflect the spirit of Sankofa. The body is the induction program; the head, each new leader; the neck, the collective wisdom of coaches; and the egg, the promise of the next generation, the students for whom all these efforts ultimately serve.

This, more than anything, is the promise and challenge of anti-racist school leadership. Even while bearing the burdens of history and the pains of the present, BIPOC coaches and leaders embody a forward-looking hope: that the journey, storied by Sankofa, is one of possibility, persistence, and profound impact—one school, one leader, one generation at a time.

Appendix 1: Induction Participant Survey Items

Principal/AP/VP Induction Participant Survey

1) I attended the focus group led by:

- a. Facilitator A
- b. Facilitator B

2) Having affinity group spaces during New Leader Induction helps me to do my job better.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				A great deal

3) Please elaborate on why you chose this number on the scale.

4) Having the choice of working with a white or nonwhite coach for 1:1 support helps me to do my job better.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				A great deal

5) Please elaborate on why you chose this number on the scale.

6) Having affinity groups and the option of a culturally specific coach has made me consider affinity spaces for the adults in my school.

- a. Yes, I have considered it.
- b. Yes, I have created spaces.
- c. No, I have considered it, but I don't feel ready.
- d. No, I have not considered it.
- e. I already had affinity spaces for the adults in my school, independent of the Induction Program.

7) Please elaborate on why you chose this response.

8) Is there anything else you would like to add about affinity groups and/or the option to have a 1:1 coach that closest matches your experience with race?

Appendix 2: Senior Director of Schools Survey

Principal Supervisor Survey

1. I identify as:
 - a. White
 - b. Nonwhite
 - c. Prefer not to say

2) For purposes of this study, Racial literacy is defined as the demonstrated ability to consistently engage, sustain, and deepen conversations about race in spaces outside of affinity spaces.

There are differences in the racial literacy between principals who participate in the Induction Program and those who do not.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				A great deal

3) Please elaborate on why you chose this number on the scale.

4) For the purposes of this study, Action Orientation is defined as the leader's willingness to take action toward the dismantling of systems and beliefs that lead to disparate outcomes for Black and Indigenous students, staff, and families.

There are differences in the Action Orientation of principals who participate in the Induction Program and those who do not.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				A great deal

5) Please elaborate on why you chose this number on the scale.

6) For purposes of this study, Self-Implication is defined as the ability and willingness of the new leader to identify themselves as key factors in school outcomes that either perpetuate or reduce disparities for Black and Indigenous students, staff, and families.

There are differences in self-implication between principals who participate in the Induction Program and those who do not.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				A great deal

7) Please elaborate on why you chose this number on the scale.

8) Affinity work at Induction, whether personally attended or referenced by another leader, has made me consider the ways in which I provide support to the leaders that I supervise.

- a. Yes, I have considered it.

- b. Yes, I have changed one or more of my own practices.
- c. No, I have considered it but need more time or learning.
- d. No, I have not considered it.
- e. I already had structures of affinity support to my leaders independent of the induction program.

9) Please elaborate on why you chose this number on the scale.

10) Is there anything else you would like to add regarding what you see - or do not see - in terms of racial literacy, action orientation, and self-implication, from leaders who receive induction coaching and those (of any tenure) who do not have coach support? Anything else about the program?

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