

Essential Practices of District Leaders in Advancing Equity Through School Integration

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By

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Dedication

I believe

The greatest gift

I can conceive of having

from anyone

is to be seen by them,

heard by them,

to be understood

and touched by them.

The greatest gift

I can give

is to see, hear, understand

and to touch

another person.

When this is done,

I feel

contact has been made.

- Virginia Satir

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Executive Summary

Schools in the US reached their height of integration in 1988 and since then, segregation by socioeconomic status has increased by 47% in US schools (Johnson & Nazaryan, 2019; Stanford University, 2022). This is even though studies of integrated K-12 schools show that there are short and long-term benefits to students from all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds who attend racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse schools. Social benefits include a reduction in racial and ethnic prejudice, a greater number of cross-race peer friendships and an acceptance of differences, a decline in engagement with the criminal justice system, higher civic engagement, and a higher likelihood of living in an integrated neighborhood as an adult (Diem & Pinto, 2017; Mickelson, 2016; Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012; Orfield, 2014). The academic benefits of attending integrated schools include higher achievement levels and graduation rates, increased participation in post-secondary education, and higher educational attainment levels, as well as lower dropout rates (Mickelson, 2016).

Research also exists to explain the varying models that can be used to integrate schools (Diem & Pinto, 2017; Siegel-Hawley, 2016), but there is little existing research that delves into how district leaders have initiated, implemented, and sustained school integration programs (Diem et al., 2014). The purpose of this study then was to examine the leadership practices and organizational structures that leaders in four districts engaged in to initiate, implement, and sustain integration programs in their districts for a minimum of ten years. Interviews with two leaders from each district and document reviews of relevant policies, research, district publications, and new articles were conducted, and these findings were then used to make recommendations to district leaders in DC Public Schools on how to expand and sustain a district-wide socioeconomic integration program that expands beyond the current pilot program.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Context for School Segregation and Integration in the US

In the United States, a relationship exists between the socioeconomic composition of a school and the racial composition of a school; more specifically, the higher the percentage of students living in poverty, the higher the percentage of students of color are in the school (Orfield & Lee, 2005; Siegel-Hawley, 2016, 2020). In other words, schools in the US that are socioeconomically segregated are also racially segregated; this segregation in US schools can in large part be linked to residential segregation (Hilbert, 2018).

Residential segregation by race and income continues to remain high in most communities in the US and most students in the US attend neighborhood schools (Loh et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Public schools are largely funded by local and state taxes, and after the passage of No Child Left Behind, high stakes accountability test scores became predictive of housing prices in communities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022; Siegel-Hawley, 2016). This means that the better the test scores, the higher the property values in a community, and the higher the tax base to fund those schools. Therefore, there is a significant link between housing and school segregation in the US and inequitable resource distribution in schools (Siegel-Hawley, 2016; Sohoni & Saporito, 2009; Tegeler, 2011).

With fewer resources at their disposal, socioeconomically segregated schools, i.e., those schools with high levels of concentrated poverty, can contribute to opportunity gaps that often lead to inequitable academic and social outcomes for students. Since the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, school districts have a legal responsibility to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all the students they serve (Orfield et al., 2016). While some districts have spent

tremendous resources attempting to address these opportunity and achievement gaps, NAEP data from 2004 to 2008, arguably the height of the standards and accountability reform era, shows that neither racial achievement gaps nor the socioeconomic status (SES) gap narrowed (Diem & Pinto, 2017; Huntington-Klein & Ackert, 2018; Siegel-Hawley, 2016). In fact, these racial and SES gaps have widened since the 1980s, alongside an increasing number of schools across the US segregated by race and SES, with some schools more segregated now than they were before their districts were ordered by courts to desegregate (Cardona & Rodríguez, 2023; Carter, 2018; Huntington-Klein & Ackert, 2018; Rosiek, 2019).

To understand how districts across the US have implemented and sustained school integration programs, it is important to dive deeper into the history of segregation and integration of schools. One of the first Supreme Court decisions on this issue came with *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, which upheld racial segregation under the idea of the separate but equal doctrine (Pitre, 2009). This decision drove school as well as residential segregation for decades to come in the US and even led to some school districts like Raleigh and Houston that intentionally attempted to isolate African-American students in schools in less than desirable neighborhoods far away from where these students actually lived in middle-class communities (Rothstein, 2017). Nearly 60 years later, the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 ruled that even if separate schools were equal, they were unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause (Orfield et al., 2016). On the same day that the *Brown* decision was handed down, a lesser-known decision was also issued in the *Bolling v. Sharpe* case. *Bolling v. Sharpe* prohibited segregation in DC schools (Foner & Kennedy, 2004).

In 1955, the Supreme Court issued what became known as the *Brown II* decision, which stated that district courts would determine if school districts were implementing desegregation

orders and that school districts should implement these orders with expediency. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided the US government with the authority to further dismantle segregation and unequal opportunities in schools, for example through the creation of the Head Start program and funding of preschool education (Orfield, 2014). In the years following *Brown*, many school districts attempted to desegregate their schools, while in Virginia and other southern states the massive resistance movement, a coordinated and sometimes violent opposition to school desegregation, gained traction (Bloch Rubin & Elinson, 2018). Other districts took less aggressive steps to delay desegregation, withholding the funds necessary to do so or creating choice policies that further segregated schools (Orfield, 2014). By 1968, of all the districts that would eventually be subject to court-ordered desegregation plans, only 6% had implemented plans to move their district schools toward integration (Johnson & Nazaryan, 2019).

In 1968, *Green v. County School Board* gave the federal government the ability to enforce desegregation orders and established specific criteria for doing so; although many scholars argue that the election of Nixon subsequently led to a lack of federal enforcement of desegregation orders (Davies, 2007; Rosiek, 2019). Despite Nixon's election, the *Green v. County School Board* decision did help accelerate desegregation efforts, and in 1972, 56% of the districts that would eventually be under court-ordered integration were implementing integration plans (Johnson & Nazaryan, 2019).

In more recent years, the Supreme Court has issued two landmark decisions, *Milliken v. Bradley* in 1974 and *Parents Involved v. Seattle School District No. 1* in 2007, that have impacted school desegregation efforts. In *Milliken v. Bradley*, the court determined that a Detroit plan to integrate schools across the predominantly Black city center and predominantly White suburbs could not move forward because the school district lines were not created with the

intention of segregating schools (Siegel-Hawley, 2020). The *Parents Involved* decision ruled that the race of students could not be the only determining factor used in school assignments when attempting to create diverse schools, leading many districts to consider students' socioeconomic status as a factor in school assignments (Frankenberg et al., 2017).

Outside of the courts, Congress and the US Department of Education have also played significant roles in the history of school integration policy, particularly as it relates to funding. A barrier to school integration was created in the 1974 General Education Provisions Act, later repealed in 2021, which prohibited federal funding from being used to pay for transportation for school integration purposes (Cardona & Rodríguez, 2023; Kahlenberg et al., 2019). However, the US Department of Education also allocates funding to districts through the Title I program, specifically to mitigate the effects of concentrated high-poverty schools on students (*Title I - Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged*, 2005). Title I and Title IV funds can currently be used in some cases to provide transportation that promotes school integration in districts (Cardona & Rodríguez, 2023).

Additionally, the US Department of Education has created three federal grants; the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP); the Opening Doors, Expanding Opportunities grant; and the Fostering Diverse Schools Demonstration Grant to provide districts with financial incentives to create or further integrate schools. The MSAP grant awards funds to districts that are establishing and operating magnet schools as part of a voluntary federally-approved desegregation plan or a court-ordered desegregation plan (Siegel-Hawley, 2020). The Opening Doors, Expanding Opportunities grant was established in 2016 by the Obama administration with the intention of awarding grants to districts to support the creation and implementation of socioeconomic integration plans (Siegel-Hawley, 2020). While the MSAP program continues,

the Opening Doors, Expanding Opportunities grant program was dismantled by the Trump administration shortly after taking office (Brown, 2017). The Fostering Diverse Schools Demonstration Grant awards funds to districts that they can use to create socioeconomic diversity in their schools, with the first round of funding being announced in the fall of 2023 (Cardona & Rodríguez, 2023).

In December 2020, The Century Foundation published a report identifying 907 local education agencies, public school districts, charter schools, or charter school networks that are actively working to create racially and socioeconomically integrated schools, noting that these schools enroll nearly 13 million students in the US or one quarter of all public school students (Potter & Burris, 2020). Of these 907 schools, 722 districts or charters are under a voluntary or court-ordered desegregation agreement and nearly all these federal desegregation orders have been in place since before 1990. The remaining 185 districts or charters consider SES and/or race as part of their admissions or student assignment policy and of these schools, 45 have implemented this policy since 2017.

Despite the growing number of districts around the country that are creating and implementing integration policies, it should also be noted that there are school districts where the opposite is occurring. From 2000 to 2016, 73 school communities seceded from their previous districts, in the process creating new school districts that are resegregated along racial and socioeconomic lines (Felton, 2019). These new school districts tend to be wealthier and Whiter than the districts from which they seceded; although school segregation is often linked anecdotally to the American south, these schools are located throughout the United States (Fractured: The accelerating breakdown of America's school districts, 2019).

Since the *Brown* decision, few districts have attempted to address the opportunity gaps created by inequitable resource distribution and racial and socioeconomic segregation in schools (Bishop & Noguera, 2019). This is despite the fact that integrating schools can reduce the opportunity gaps associated with inequitable access to resources such as qualified teachers, well-maintained facilities, high-quality instruction, and funding (Kahlenberg et al., 2019). As districts have begun to examine the impact of redistributing resources and attempting to reduce segregation in schools, one study from Montgomery County, MD found that low-income student achievement benefited more from attending a socioeconomically diverse school outside of their assigned neighborhood school than from increasing funds for their high-poverty assigned schools (Schwartz, 2010; Siegel-Hawley, 2016).

Problem of Practice

Across the border from Montgomery County, MD, is Washington, DC, a city where the racial and socioeconomic segregation of schools in DC in large part mirrors the residential segregation in the city (Shoenfeld, 2019). This residential segregation, in combination with the expansion of charter schools in DC, has led to two competing school systems, DC Public Schools (DCPS) and a network of public charter schools, both serving nearly equal numbers of students and both sectors of schools less diverse on average than the school-age population in DC (Coffin, 2019; Toch, 2020). In other words, most DCPS schools and DC public charter schools replicate the residential segregation in DC. In the DC public charter schools, this segregated state is despite their ability to draw students from around the city, given that these schools do not have neighborhood catchment boundaries. The majority of schools in DCPS are neighborhood schools and residential segregation in DC neighborhoods means most DCPS schools are racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically homogenous (Coffin, 2018). These DCPS

schools are also where at-risk students, defined as students who are living in poverty, in foster care, are homeless, or are over-aged and under-credited, tend to be clustered in schools that see some of the lowest student achievement rates in the city (Coffin, 2019).

After years of implementing a series of high-profile assessment and accountability reforms to improve student outcomes in the wake of No Child Left Behind, DCPS leaders have shifted their focus and recently undertaken two initiatives to address opportunity gaps in the district that have led to persistent achievement gaps (Brown & Strauss, 2018; Toch, 2020). First, DCPS leaders have revised the district's budget model for the 2022-2023 school year to one that would provide a more equitable funding distribution across schools based on the demographics of the student body at each school (DC Public Schools, 2019). This ostensibly means that schools with a higher percentage of at-risk students will receive a larger per pupil school budget allocation than schools with a lower percentage of at-risk students.

The second equity initiative is focused on intentionally creating socioeconomically diverse schools. In order to accomplish this, DCPS leaders piloted an at-risk lottery preference at one school in the 2020-2021 school year, setting aside 40% of the pre-kindergarten lottery seats for students designated as at-risk (Austermuhle, 2019). In the 2022-2023 school year, this pilot was expanded to nine schools that are in rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods, and in the 2023-2024 school year, the pilot expanded to eleven schools, including one high school (*DCPS Equitable Access Designated Seats* | DCPS, 2022). The expansion of the program is planned to continue in the 2024-2025 school year, with 27 schools participating in the program and offering designated seats in the lottery for at-risk students (Coffin & Mason, 2024; *DCPS Equitable Access Program for SY24-25* | DCPS, 2023).

With all pre-kindergarten seats in DCPS awarded through the lottery, the lottery preference is one mechanism DCPS leaders can and are using to create diverse, socioeconomically integrated schools in the district. Although not publicly stated, district leaders have shared that the eventual goal of the Equitable Access Program is to expand it to all DCPS schools in the future, particularly given that the literature shows that diverse, socioeconomically integrated schools have been shown to benefit students in a myriad of ways, for example higher performance on assessments, more diverse friend groups, higher educational attainment, and greater civic participation (Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

Existing research clearly indicates that diverse schools benefit all children who attend them (Diem & Pinto, 2017; Mickelson, 2016; Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012; Orfield, 2014). Additional research exists to explain varying methods that can be used to integrate schools (Diem & Pinto, 2017; Siegel-Hawley, 2016), but there is little existing research that delves into how urban district leaders have initiated, implemented, and sustained school integration programs in their districts (Diem et al., 2014). The purpose of this study then was to examine the leadership practices and organizational structures that four districts and their leaders engaged in to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their districts for a minimum of ten years. These are all large, urban public school districts with a diverse student body, all of which share characteristics with DCPS. Ultimately, I used what I learned from the four districts to make recommendations to DCPS leaders on how to implement and sustain a district-wide school integration program that expands beyond the current pilot program.

Research Questions

In this study, I explored three primary questions:

1. What are key leadership practices and organizational structures urban district leaders have used to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their school districts?
2. How have state and local contexts shaped leadership practices and organizational structures urban district leaders have used to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their school districts?
3. In what ways do the patterns of leadership practices and organizational structures vary across districts with sustained integration programs?

The first research question allowed me to understand the leadership practices and organizational structures put in place by district leaders to support the integration programs before they launched. This question also illuminated the steps district leaders took to implement the integration programs in their district and allowed for the examination of how district leaders have been able to sustain integration programs over time. For the purpose of this study, the implementation period is considered to be the first nine years of the program's existence and sustained integration programs are programs that have been in place for ten or more years.

The second research question allowed me to gain an understanding of the socioecological context in which school district leaders started their integration programs, as well as how district leaders have maintained or expanded integration programs despite potential challenges to the programs. These challenges may include but are not limited to changing political and financial realities in their districts since the inception of the integration programs.

The focus of my study is four districts with integration programs that have been in place for at least ten years and the third research question allows for a comparative examination of leadership practices and organizational structures of district leaders across these four districts. Taken together, understanding the leadership practices and organizational structures used in and across the contexts of other traditional urban school districts over time provided me the opportunity to make recommendations for next steps for DCPS leaders in their journey to create intentionally integrated schools.

Methods

To answer the research questions above, I conducted a qualitative case study based primarily on semi-structured interviews with two district leaders in each of four urban school districts in the Southeast, Midwest and Western US. All of these districts have sustained integration programs unique to their districts and their district contexts over a period of ten years or more. In interviewing current district leaders, my goal was to gain an understanding of the state and local context in which their integration programs were initiated and continue to exist. In these interviews, I uncovered the key leadership practices and organizational structures district leaders used to initiate, implement, and sustain their integration programs. As Jacob and Furgerson (2012) state, “interviewers can gain insight into lived experiences, learn the perspectives of individuals participating in a study, and discover the nuances in stories” (p. 1) and these perspectives and nuances are critical to understanding the practices and structures district leaders used in support of the integration programs in their districts.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, I also conducted a document analysis of publicly available documents from the four districts to gain a deeper understanding of the socioecological context surrounding the leadership processes undergirding successful and

sustained integration programs, as well as leadership practices and organizational structures that supported these programs. Knowing that semi-structured interviews represent one person's perspective, the document review served to support, contradict, and/or broaden this researcher's analysis while also guarding against bias (Frey, 2018).

Information gathered from these district leader interviews and document reviews allowed me to discover themes among the approaches district leaders used to initiate, implement, and sustain integration programs, and these themes were then analyzed through the lens of the conceptual framework described in the next section. Conclusions from this analysis will also be shared with district leaders in DCPS as they move to implement and sustain an integration program in their district.

Preview of Conceptual Framework

To better understand how to initiate, implement, and sustain an equity-based reform like school integration, it is crucial to situate school districts as institutional actors within the larger social, political, and economic context in which they operate. This conceptual framework allows for a detailed analysis of how the context in which urban district leaders in the four districts under study shaped and continue to shape the leadership practices and structures they used to design and initiate, implement, and sustain integration programs in their districts. The conceptual framework guiding this study is primarily based on Rorrer et al.'s (2008) four essential roles of districts in reform. Elements of Vang's (2012) research on implementation of equity legislation in California are also included, as are elements of Carter (2018) and Siegel-Hawley's (2020) research on external/hard and internal/soft structures to support the creation and sustainability of integrated schools and districts.

Rorrer et al. (2008) describe districts as institutional actors in education reforms aimed at increasing achievement and advancing equity, stating that districts have four main roles: provide instructional leadership, reorient the organization, establish policy coherence, and maintain an equity focus. Taken together, Rorrer et al. (2008) state that these interdependent roles suggest that districts must create and adapt their own district-level policies to align internal goals and strategies with external (federal, state, and local) policy demands. They also suggest that districts reorient and align organizational structures and processes to support reforms, including creating economies of scale and using human and capital resources efficiently. Additionally, they suggest that districts must generate will and build capacity to enact reforms; provide differentiated support for implementing the reform; and monitor the reform's implementation.

In their discussion of building capacity, Rorrer et al. (2008) focus primarily on building the internal capacity of district and school leaders and staff. Rorrer et al. (2008) note that little is known about how districts as institutional actors implementing equity-based reforms are influenced by their external environment and how districts initiate support for reform efforts among internal and external stakeholders. Vang (2012) however, highlights the importance of these external stakeholders, especially that of families as change agents in district reform. Thus, the conceptual framework used in this study will examine how district leaders build capacity and will in other district leaders, staff, and families in the districts as the four districts initiated, implemented, and are sustaining their integration programs.

Additionally, Vang (2012), discusses the importance of ensuring that equity reforms have accountability structures in place that are clear to all stakeholders. The purpose of these accountability structures is measuring the program's success, something that is not specifically discussed by Rorrer et al. (2008). Given the current era of accountability in which schools and

districts operate, creating accountability structures aligned to school integration program goals is an area that is included in my expanded conceptual framework.

Finally, Rorrer et al. (2008) state that districts have the responsibility to name inequities that exist in the district, whether they be in student achievement, resource distribution, practices, structures, or policies, and then take responsibility for these inequities and seek solutions to address these inequities. All of these actions must be taken knowing that disrupting inequities can potentially be contentious and political, particularly in today's climate. In the face of these potential challenges and the change process inherent in implementing and sustaining a school integration program, it is also imperative that districts maintain internal and external support for their equity focus, as this is critical to achieving equity goals. This is where the capacity building and inclusion of district leaders, school staff, and families in the district again becomes important.

Rorrer et al. (2008) also warn against districts attempting to enact a single solution to an issue, instead suggesting districts innovate to create and sustain large-scale organizational change in advancement of equity. Rorrer et al. (2008) also state that districts can and should create what Carter (2018) and Siegel-Hawley (2020) call external/hard and internal/soft structures to support the creation and sustainability of integrated schools and districts. Examples of external/hard structures include such things as redrawing attendance boundaries and ensuring transportation for students who attend integrated schools. Examples of internal/soft structures include mitigating the implicit bias of educators in integrated schools and in doing so, ensuring that integrated schools do not segregate students once they are inside the walls of those schools. District leaders must create the structural changes required to integrate schools while simultaneously engaging in leadership practices that support increasing student achievement and

social harmony among and across students of all demographics within the integrated schools (Carter, 2018; Domina et al., 2021; Siegel-Hawley, 2020). Finally, Rorrer et al. (2008) acknowledge that district leaders are uniquely positioned to focus on directing professional development and human capital in alignment with district equity-based reform efforts, such as integrating schools, and also have extensive experience doing so in ways that take into consideration their local context. The conceptual framework in Chapter Three, which follows the literature review in Chapter Two, provides additional details and will serve as the guide for analyzing data from the districts studied.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

There is a growing body of research on school integration since the *Parents Involved v. Seattle* decision in 2007, a decision that prevented districts from creating race-based integration programs (Pitre, 2009). However, much of this research focuses on school integration programs at newly opened charter schools or within new schools in charter networks. Because this study focuses on integration programs in four traditional public school districts, research examining school integration and diverse by design public charter schools or charter networks will not be included in this study.

Additional delimitations include the focus on integration programs in urban areas and the focus on four districts in which integration programs have been sustained for at least ten years. In the wake of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, many school districts across the US attempted or were forced to create and implement desegregation programs (Orfield, 2014; Siegel-Hawley, 2020). However, many of the programs failed for a variety of social, political, and contextual reasons and while there is much that can be learned from examining the

leadership practices and organizational structures of these failed integration programs, these programs will not be examined in detail in this study.

Finally, given that the ultimate goal of this paper is to provide recommendations to DCPS, examining one model for school integration found in the literature, interdistrict integration plans, in detail is not warranted. This is because any interdistrict plan that DCPS were to adopt would mean partnering with districts in neighboring states, Maryland or Virginia, and the studying interdistrict/interstate integration plans is well beyond the scope of this paper.

Limitations

Research was conducted in four existing traditional public school districts. While the size of the districts and geographic regions in which the districts are located are different, the demographics of these four urban districts have some similarities to DCPS which allows for an examination of themes surrounding leadership practices and organizational structures used to initiate, implement, and sustain their integration programs. My role as an outsider to these districts may have impacted the amount and quality of information interviewees share during interviews, as well as the documents to which I had access during the document review (Hellowell, 2006).

Additionally, the interviews conducted in this study focused solely on current district leaders and their perspectives. The perceived perspectives of students, school-based staff, families, and other community leaders were sometimes surfaced in district-leader interviews and via the document review, and the perspectives of these stakeholders may have provided additional important context and information relevant to the study. However, these stakeholders' perspectives are not the focus of this study and therefore were not included except in instances

where these perceived perspectives impacted the decisions made by district leaders as they sought to initiate, implement, and sustain integration programs in their districts.

Finally, this study examined school integration programs in four traditional urban public school districts in the US. The leadership practices and organizational structures used to initiate, implement, and sustain integration programs in these districts were examined, analyzed, and ultimately used to make recommendations to DCPS leaders, another traditional urban public school district in the US. While the findings of this study may inform other leaders in school districts as they initiate, implement, and sustain integration programs, it is likely that the unique socioecological environment of those districts will limit the generalizability of this study's findings.

Key Vocabulary

One term found in this study that warrants clarification is *socioecological context*, which refers to the state and local contexts in which a district operates. Included in the consideration of a district's socioecological context are stakeholder groups such as students, educators, and families, as well as public, private, and governmental organizations and institutions and elected officials. Also included are the physical size of the district and demographic characteristics such as the number of students, the percentage of students receiving free and reduced meals, and the total population of the city in which the district is located, among other characteristics.

Another term found in this study is *diverse by design schools*, which are schools that intentionally bring together a diverse student body. Several models for creating diverse by design schools exist and these will be explored in depth in Chapter Two.

As discussed briefly above, one way to create diverse by design schools is by using an at-risk lottery set aside, a route that DCPS has piloted in ten schools. In DC, the term *at-risk* has a

specific definition and specifically is a student who is homeless, in foster care, whose family qualifies for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or a high school student that is one or more years older than the expected age for the grade in which the student is enrolled (DC Council, 2021). Further, in DC, all pre-school (3-year-old) and pre-kindergarten (4-year-old) seats are determined through a centralized lottery system operated by the city. An at-risk lottery set aside, therefore, sets aside a specific number of these early childhood lottery seats for students who are at-risk.

Balance goals is another term found in this study that merits explanation. Several districts with sustained integration programs have created balance goals that fit their specific district context. As an example, one district with a balance goal aims for every school in the district to be plus or minus 10% of the district's disadvantaged student average and has revised school boundaries and used magnet schools to achieve this balance.

Another note about the use of the terms *segregation* and *integration* in this paper is warranted. Dr. Martin Luther King stated the following about the two terms, “Desegregation is eliminative and negative, for it simply removes legal and social prohibitions. Integration is creative, and is therefore more profound and far-reaching than desegregation. Integration is the positive acceptance of desegregation...Desegregation then, rightly, is only a short-range goal. Integration is the ultimate goal of our national community” (King, 1991). With this in mind, rather than focusing on countering patterns of segregation in schools, this study will focus on implementing and sustaining school integration as the latter phrasing speaks to deep organizational change and full inclusion of previously excluded or marginalized groups and individuals in schools.

Summary

This study sought to determine the leadership practices and organizational structures that district leaders in four urban districts used to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their districts. These leadership practices and organizational structures were examined, classified, and categorized in alignment with a conceptual framework that primarily draws on the work of Rorrer et al. (2008), as well as Vang (2012), Carter (2018), and Siegel-Hawley (2020), and focuses on the four roles of district leaders in implementing equity-based reforms. Specifically, these roles are building systemic capacity, reorienting the organization, establishing policy coherence, and maintaining an equity focus (Rorrer et al., 2008). I conducted document reviews and interviews with district leaders in four districts to understand the context in which the districts initiated, implemented, and are sustaining their integration programs, as well as the leadership practices and organizational structures used. Lessons learned from these four districts have been used to make recommendations to DCPS leaders as they seek to initiate, implement, and sustain a district-wide school integration program.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This study seeks to examine the leadership practices and organizational structures that urban districts have used to initiate, implement, and sustain integration programs. As such, it is important to understand the benefits and negative impacts of integrating schools, the models of school integration most commonly used in urban areas in the US, and the leadership practices and organizational structures that have supported and undermined the initiation, implementation, and sustainability of integration programs over the last sixty-plus years since the *Brown* decision.

Search Methodology

The literature search was conducted using a variety of search terms and methods. In addition to conducting EBSCO and Google Scholar broad searches on terms such as ‘school integration,’ searches were conducted combining ‘school integration’ and the names of urban districts in the US. Broad searches on ‘school desegregation,’ ‘diverse by design schools,’ ‘benefits of school integration,’ ‘negative impacts of school integration,’ ‘school district leadership practices equity reform,’ and ‘district leadership practices equity’ were also conducted for literature on school integration post-2001, the year that the No Child Left Behind Act was passed and districts faced greater accountability for the learning of all students (Diem et al., 2014).

While there are a growing number of scholars conducting research on school integration, there are several authors who were often cited in the research on school integration and thus, author searches were also conducted on many of these prominent researchers in the field, e.g. Orfield, Diem, Siegel-Hawley, Carter, Frankenberg, Kahlenberg, etc. Finally, because the study

of school integration is a relatively new area of scholarship, it should be noted that both empirical and non-empirical studies are included in the literature review below.

Why Integrate Schools?

Schools that are highly segregated by race and socioeconomic status have been shown to have negative impacts on students while research has shown that integrated schools have social and academic benefits for students from all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, integrated schools have economic benefits associated with them as well.

The negative impacts of schools highly segregated by race and socioeconomic status include lower quality instruction, facilities, and resources; lower expectations for student achievement; higher teacher turnover; higher drop-out rates; higher student mobility rates; and larger achievement gaps by race and SES (Cross et al., 2018; Kahlenberg et al., 2019; Orfield & Lee, 2005; Pitre, 2009; Siegel-Hawley, 2016). Conversely, studies of integrated K-12 schools show that there are both short and long-term benefits to students from all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds who attend racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse schools. Social benefits include a reduction in racial and ethnic prejudice, a greater number of cross-race peer friendships and an acceptance of differences, a decline in engagement with the criminal justice system, higher civic engagement, and a higher likelihood of living in an integrated neighborhood as an adult (Diem & Pinto, 2017; Mickelson, 2016; Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012; Orfield, 2014).

The academic benefits of attending integrated schools include higher achievement levels and graduation rates, increased participation in post-secondary education, and higher educational attainment levels, as well as lower dropout rates (Mickelson, 2016). One large-scale study in 2017 found that low-income preschool students enrolled in socioeconomically diverse schools

showed significantly more growth on achievement tests than low-income preschoolers attending socioeconomically segregated preschools (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Other research has shown that academic benefits are greatest in secondary schools, which suggests that these benefits may accrue over time the longer students attend diverse schools (Mickelson, 2016). More specifically, Black and Latino students attending racially and socioeconomically diverse schools have shown significant math and reading gains with White students showing gains in math and science scores (Siegel-Hawley, 2016). These benefits have also been found to have a generational impact. Having a Black parent who attended an integrated school led to higher academic achievement, education attainment, and social mobility for at least the following two generations (Mickelson, 2016; Siegel-Hawley, 2020).

The literature also reveals the economic benefits associated with integrated schools. As noted previously, integrating schools can reduce opportunity gaps created by inequitable access to resources such as qualified teachers, well-maintained facilities, high quality instruction, and funding (Kahlenberg et al., 2019). One study conducted in Montgomery County, Maryland, found that it was more cost effective for students from a low socioeconomic background to attend a socioeconomically diverse school than to increase funding for low SES schools (Schwartz, 2010). While this was only one study, the results seem to run counter to the purpose of the Title I program, which allocates billions of dollars to high-poverty schools annually (*Title I - Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged*, 2005).

Basile (2012) estimates that socioeconomic integration programs are likely more cost-effective than private school voucher programs and reducing class sizes. Additionally, he estimates that the cumulative positive lifetime academic and social benefits of integrated schools outcomes exceed the costs of creating such schools, stating that “every one dollar spent today to

promote socioeconomic integration might be expected to yield, through public saving and private earnings, more than five dollars in the future at present value” (Basile, 2012, p. 105).

Although Mickelson (2016) found no evidence that attending integrated schools harms any demographic group of any age academically, it is important to note that at-risk, Black, and Latino students historically have faced higher discipline referrals and less access to gifted programs in diverse schools (Bishop & Noguera, 2019; Ford et al., 2020). Despite these disparities, after reviewing existing research on school integration, Kahlenberg et al. (2019) conclude that school integration is one of the most cost-effective ways to improve student outcomes while also promoting social cohesion and economic mobility.

Models of School Integration

Whether district leaders have attempted to integrate schools voluntarily or because of a court-order, they have historically used a variety of models to do so and some of these models have been more successful than others. An examination of the literature suggests these models can be broadly categorized in three ways: magnet schools, controlled-choice programs, and interdistrict programs (Diem & Pinto, 2017; Siegel-Hawley, 2016). Some districts choose to initiate and implement integration programs that are some combination of magnet schools, controlled-choice programs, and/or interdistrict programs and for the purposes of this study, these hybrid programs will be considered a fourth model of school integration.

It should also be noted that some districts like Baltimore County Schools and Howard County Schools in Maryland, as well as the city of Chicago, have attempted to integrate schools using models that do not fit into the categories described above. In the case of Baltimore and Howard County Schools, district leaders sought to redraw neighborhood school boundaries to mitigate overcrowding in some schools while also creating fewer racially and socioeconomically

isolated schools. However, because district leaders framed the boundary discussion primarily on overcrowding and not integration, this gave families in those districts cover to oppose redistricting on capacity grounds and the integration plan did not move forward as anticipated by district leaders (Bierbaum & Sunderman, 2021). As in the case of Baltimore and Howard County Schools, because a single solution like redrawing neighborhood school boundaries alone does not typically create integrated schools in a district, further research on this model will not be examined in this paper.

In the case of Chicago, because of discriminatory public housing practices, the city was under court order from 1976-1990 to provide housing vouchers for approximately 7000 families to move to mostly less segregated suburban communities (Rothstein, 2017). Researchers found that after moving to less racially and socioeconomically segregated communities, children went to schools that were more rigorous as measured by performance on national assessments; they received higher grades than in their previous schools; and they were more likely to attend college than peers that remained in their original neighborhoods of origin (DeLuca & Dayton, 2009). Because this court-ordered program was primarily a housing integration program that also led to school integration rather than being a school integration program initiated and implemented by school district leaders, further discussion of this model is beyond the scope of this paper.

Magnet School Programs

Magnet schools were originally created in the 1960s as a way to integrate individual schools around a specific learning theme, such as Montessori, Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM), or Arts Integration (Swanson, 2017). For example, district leaders in Philadelphia and San Diego, California have used the magnet school model as a way to integrate

or attempt to integrate individual schools or multiple schools within one district, with varying degrees of success in doing so (Diem & Pinto, 2017; Siegel-Hawley, 2016; Swanson, 2017).

In Philadelphia, magnet schools draw students from across the city to their particular programs and since 2010, district leaders have been updating the admissions process for these schools (Graham, 2021). Most recently, in 2021, district leaders updated the admissions policy at some of the highest-performing magnet middle and high schools to give preference to students from specific zip codes in an attempt to increase the enrollment of underrepresented students of color (Mancini, 2021). Based on publicly available data, it is unclear whether or not district leaders have specific integration targets or goals for their magnet schools, for example ensuring that 30% of the students admitted are from racially or socioeconomically marginalized groups; thus, it is also unclear if integration is the primary goal of the magnet program.

In San Diego, the stated purpose of magnet schools is to “reduce minority group isolation and to close the achievement gap” (San Diego Unified School District, 2024). The magnet schools came about as a result of a court desegregation order in 1977, which the district was released from in 1996 and while race was initially considered as a factor during the admissions process, race was removed as a criteria in the early 2000s (Richardson, 1996). Currently, the school district’s website names magnet schools as a vehicle for creating diverse schools and bringing students to schools outside their traditional neighborhood attendance boundaries, a subtle nod to disrupting the housing segregation to school segregation connection in the city (San Diego Unified School District, 2024). Additionally, in the fall of 2023, the district was awarded nearly \$3 million from the MSAP grant via the US Department of Education (US Department of Education, 2023).

Controlled-choice Programs

Controlled-choice programs, also sometimes referred to in the literature as open enrollment or intradistrict programs, are programs in which students can attend a set of schools within a specific part of a district or sometimes throughout the district. Families rank their preferences for schools within a choice set and then students are assigned to schools, typically via a lottery system, to create a diverse student population at each school in the choice set. Prior to the *Parents Involved* decision, race was often used as a factor in determining student assignments, and since the 2007 *Parents Involved* decision, students' socioeconomic status has become the primary factor district leaders use to determine assignments while also attempting to align with indicated family preferences (Diem & Pinto, 2017; Swanson, 2017). Controlled-choice programs have been established by district leaders in Charlotte, North Carolina, Richmond, Virginia, and Cambridge, Massachusetts, among other districts and these programs have had varying success in terms of creating and sustaining integrated schools (Diem & Pinto, 2017; Swanson, 2017).

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public School (NC) district was formed in the 1970s when the previously separate city and county schools were made to merge as part of a court ordered desegregation plan (Wells et al., 2011). In the early years after the merger, district leaders focused on implementing a controlled-choice integration program in which student assignment by race was used to ensure that schools were racially balanced across the district (Siegel-Hawley, 2016). In 2002, the court order was dissolved and the district, facing pressure from local businesses and the community to dismantle the desegregation plan, moved toward a neighborhood school based policy. Given the housing segregation in the district, under a

neighborhood school based policy, schools in the district have since become more racially segregated (Siegel-Hawley, 2016; Wells et al., 2011).

Richmond, Virginia is another urban district where district leaders tried to implement an integration program but ultimately failed to sustain integration in the district in a meaningful way. In the late 1960s and early 1970s a plan was created to merge Richmond city schools with two suburban districts to desegregate the city schools. Ultimately the Supreme Court determined that Richmond alone was responsible for desegregating its schools and would not force a merger with the suburban districts (Siegel-Hawley, 2016). After this decision, district leaders opened magnet schools in the city in order to desegregate the experiences of some students and most recently created open enrollment schools, however school integration is not listed as a priority or a goal of the open enrollment lottery process and thus most schools in the district remain racially and/or socioeconomically segregated (Richmond Public Schools, n.d.).

In Cambridge Public Schools (MA), all of their public schools are designated as magnet schools and families rank their school preferences among these schools, with the district determining where students are ultimately assigned (Kahlenberg, 2012). While their integration plan has changed and evolved since it was first created in 1980, the most recent plan created in 2013 uses students' SES as a priority with the goal of creating socioeconomic balance across the district's nineteen schools (Cambridge Public Schools, 2013). As a result of this, in 2011-2012, 67% of students in the district attended schools that were balanced by SES and 84% of students in the district attended schools that were racially balanced (Cambridge Public Schools, 2013).

Interdistrict Programs

The third integration model found in the literature, interdistrict integration programs, are variations on controlled-choice programs. Interdistrict programs have been implemented by

district leaders in metropolitan areas in several states, for example in and around Omaha, Nebraska, and bring together several school districts for the purposes of integrating the schools across those districts.

In 2007, eleven school districts in metropolitan Omaha merged to create an interdistrict program called the Learning Community, with the goal of having no more than 40% of students in each school within the Learning Community coming from a low socioeconomic status (SES) background. This forty percent target was drawn from the average number of students from low SES backgrounds in the metropolitan area (Jellison Holme et al., 2011). The district used an open enrollment process, preference was given based on students' socioeconomic status, free transportation was given to the students who qualified for free and reduced lunch (FRL), and the funding for the plan came through a tax-base sharing plan among the participating districts (Jellison Holme et al., 2011). This plan remained intact until 2016 when new legislation was passed that eliminated open enrollment and made school district participation an option rather than required (LB1067 - Change Provisions Relating to Learning Communities and Funding for Education, 2016). This legislation also eliminated a common levy that all eleven districts paid to support the Learning Community, a levy that was not supported by all the suburban districts in the Learning Community (Jellison Holme et al., 2011; Papillion La Vista Community Schools, n.d.).

The number of interdistrict plans such as the one in Omaha has been limited for two reasons. First, the *Milliken* decision in 1974 gave districts the ability to opt out of these programs (Siegel-Hawley, 2014). Later, No Child Left Behind included provisions that allowed districts to create cooperative transfer agreements between them, but because there was no funding provided to support transportation, these agreements were rarely established (Mantil et al., 2012; Potter &

Burris, 2020). Mantil et al. (2012) state that to sustain school integration, interdistrict programs must incorporate preferential admissions for students, include transportation for those students, and also include outreach to the families of students.

Hybrid Integration Programs

The literature reveals several hybrid models of school integration of note to examine including districts in and around Hartford, Connecticut, Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Kentucky, and Dallas Independent School District in Dallas, Texas.

The Connecticut interdistrict program is considered a hybrid program in that it is an interdistrict program in the Greater Hartford area that created as many as 54 interdistrict magnet schools in the 2006-2007 school year and participation by districts and families within the districts is entirely voluntary (Bifulco et al., 2009). Bifulco et al. (2009) found that the interdistrict magnet program does indeed lead to schools that are more socioeconomically and racially integrated than the neighborhood schools of the students who attend them. Their study also concluded that attending an interdistrict magnet school has a positive effect on student achievement (Bifulco et al., 2009). The interdistrict program remains in place currently and has expanded from magnet schools to also include open enrollment schools (Regional School Choice Office, 2021). As of 2020, the program has a goal of racial and socioeconomic integration at participating schools with no more than 60% of students at participating schools being from a low SES background (Potter & Burris, 2020).

One example of a long-standing controlled-choice interdistrict program can be found in Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Kentucky. The district was formed in 1974 as part of a court order to desegregate the two formerly separate districts in Louisville and Jefferson County (Diem et al., 2014). Jefferson County Public Schools has changed its diversity policy

several times since 1974 but remains a district with integrated schools. In the most recent iteration of the plan, the district is divided into thirteen demographic clusters based on race, average household income, average adult education level and number of kindergarten and EL students (Diem et al., 2014). Clusters are then grouped into diverse census block groups and families within each census block group are able to rank which schools they want their children to attend, thus the controlled-choice aspect of the program (Diem et al., 2014).

In the Dallas model, district leaders created magnet schools in response to a court-ordered desegregation plan in the 1970s and magnet schools continue to be an option for students in the district. In 2015, Dallas Independent School District (ISD) also created choice schools that are open to all students in the district (Learned-Miller, 2016). These choice schools are subdivided into transformation schools and innovation schools (Dallas Independent School District, 2022b). Transformation schools are newly created schools with no attendance boundaries and while they have a theme like existing magnet schools in the district, they do not have the entrance requirements of those magnet schools. Innovation schools are existing Dallas ISD schools that redesigned their schools around a magnet theme, have an attendance boundary, and also enroll students from around the district through a transfer process (Dallas Independent School District, 2022b).

The current Dallas ISD website explicitly states that they have a focus on creating schools with ethnic diversity and that magnet schools have traditionally served underrepresented students (Dallas Independent School District, 2022a). SES status is a primary consideration for assignment to Transformation Schools in Dallas ISD and although district leaders initially tried to use FRL data to support assignment, they found that the data were not nuanced enough to support their integration plan. Instead, district leaders decided to use four factors in combination

to map poverty levels in Dallas across geographic zones. Those factors are median household income, parents level of education, single parent status and home ownership (Learned-Miller, 2016).

As the above examples illustrate, over the past seventy years since the *Brown* decision district leaders have attempted to integrate their schools in a variety of ways. It is clear that some have been able to initiate, implement, and sustain their integration programs for longer periods of time while others have not been able to sustain their integration programs for various reasons. A question about how some district leaders have sustained integration programs while others have not emerged, and I submit that how long districts are able to sustain their integration programs lies in the leadership practices district leaders enact and organizational structures that district leadership create when initiating and implementing their programs. Therefore, it then becomes important to look at the literature about district leadership in advancing equity reforms through school integration.

Roles of District Leaders in Implementing and Sustaining School Integration

The literature points to the several key roles district leaders have in enacting equity-based reforms. Rorrer et al.'s 2008 research found that district leaders play in equity-based education reforms: to establish policy coherence; reorient the organization; maintain an equity focus; and provide instructional leadership. The findings of other researchers focused on school integration, for example Carter (2018), Diem et al. (2014), Frankenberg (2017), Orfield et al. (2010), Orfield and Lee (2005) Siegel-Hawley (2011, 2016, 2017, 2022), and Vang (2012), broadly align with the four roles. Although presented below in what might be interpreted as a sequential order, research indicated that all four roles are important during all phases of initiating, implementing, and sustaining school integration programs in a variety of urban school district contexts.

Establishing Policy Coherence

Under the umbrella of establishing policy coherence, Rorrer et al. (2008) discuss how district leaders must mediate federal, state, and local policy and more specifically, align external government policies to district needs and intended outcomes in a coherent manner. Given the numerous ways that federal, state, and local agencies as well as courts have played a role in the creation and demise of school integration programs, this work of mediating policy at all levels is important through the initiation and implementation phases of school integration programs. In order to sustain school integration programs, mediating continually changing government policy also becomes important, as is evident by the changes some districts made when race-based integration programs were deemed illegal after *Parents Involved* (Frankenberg, 2017).

While Rorrer et al. (2008) do not specifically mention creating goals and accountability structures under the framework of establishing policy coherence, Vang (2012) and Siegel-Hawley (2016) highlight this work as important policy work district leaders should undertake when creating equity-based reforms like school integration programs. According to the research, the goals that district leaders set for school integration programs are crucial because they drive district policies and organizational structures that will be used to implement and sustain the integration programs. Examples of goals that districts have set include ensuring that every school in a district has a student body that is within ten percent of the overall district's average for students who come from a low SES background (Siegel-Hawley, 2011). Other districts set goals around schools being racially balanced rather than segregated by race (Cambridge Public Schools, 2013). Still other districts set goals around creating schools that meet a certain balance of students from various SES backgrounds in addition to meeting academic achievement and performance goals (Diem et al., 2014).

When thinking about equity goals, it is important to note that the *Milliken* and *Parents Involved* decisions have placed additional constraints on the policies districts use to integrate schools across the US. As Siegel-Hawley et al. (2017) note, the *Parents Involved* decision in 2007 pushed many districts to move toward using SES rather than race as the primary factor in integration plans and because of this, research on the impact of these plans and their ability to create and sustain integration is still emerging. Leading up to the *Parents Involved* decision, Reardon et al. (2006) conducted a simulation using data from multiple urban districts to determine if SES-based integration strategies alone would also lead to schools that were racially integrated within a district. Their analysis showed that policies that only considered the SES status of students and not race were unlikely to create modest levels of racial integration within districts given residential segregation patterns in districts (Reardon et al., 2006). They go on to state, “In the absence of strong transportation and choice or lottery mechanisms to counter residential segregation patterns, however, an income integration regime is likely to result in many students attending schools relatively near their homes in racially segregated neighborhoods” (Reardon et al., 2006, p. 68).

Similarly, in their analysis of existing research on districts that have implemented integration plans, Siegel-Hawley et al. (2017) found that for integration plans to create and sustain SES and racial integration, including a number of factors when determining student assignments in a controlled-choice program is crucial. These factors look beyond free and reduced lunch eligibility and could include both racial and SES factors of a neighborhood, the education attainment of parents, whether families receive income-based public assistance, English proficiency, and/or special education status. When taken together, these factors tend to be more highly correlated with race and income together and thus including multiple factors is

likely to lead to schools that are integrated by both race and SES, as is the case in Dallas ISD (Reardon et al., 2006; Siegel-Hawley et al., 2017).

Once district leaders determine equity goals for their integration programs and what considerations will factor into student assignments, accountability structures play a role in helping district leaders examine whether the policies they have created are helping them meet their stated goals. If established policies are not supporting progress toward stated goals, district leaders can and should re-examine the implementation of the integration program to determine changes that can be made to bring the district closer to meeting its equity goals (Vang, 2012). It is important to note here that in their research on intradistrict programs, Mantil et al. (2012) remind us that if districts have a goal of eliminating all high-poverty schools in their districts, one intradistrict policy or program, such as a controlled-choice program or a magnet program, cannot be the only method of integrating schools if more than 50% of students in the district come from a low SES background. In these instances, district leaders can either focus on reducing the number and concentration of high-poverty schools in the district or attempt to create hybrid programs that bring together, for example, intradistrict and interdistrict programs, in order to serve students from a greater range of socioeconomic backgrounds.

There is a final component of mediating federal, state, and local policy that Rorrer et al. (2008) do not include in their discussion of district equity reforms but that permeates the literature on school integration. The research on school integration states the importance of district leaders working in conjunction with other leaders to align or attempt to align education and housing policy (Diem et al., 2014; Orfield, 2011; Schwartz, 2012; Siegel-Hawley, 2016). There are several reasons for this including that residential or housing segregation drives school segregation in many cities (Hilbert, 2018). Additionally, researchers have found that some

district integration programs can be negatively impacted by the creation of new housing developments and population growth in the district as these factors can impact the stability of student assignments or controlled-choice options (Diem et al., 2014).

Managing Operations and Logistics

District leaders can play an outsize role in countering patterns of segregation within their districts by providing organizational structures, financial resources, and physical infrastructure elements that are key to a reform such as school desegregation (Frankenberg, 2017; Frankenberg et al., 2017; Orfield et al., 2010; Orfield & Lee, 2005; Siegel-Hawley, 2016). Rorrer et al. (2008) include aligning organizational structures under the umbrella of reorienting the organization and aligning resources under the umbrella of establishing policy coherence. However, research has shown that when district leaders do not place an emphasis on the operations and logistics involved in implementing and sustaining an integration program, the likelihood of that program being sustained is lessened (Jellison Holme et al., 2011; Siegel-Hawley, 2016). Because of this, it is important to distinguish the practices for district leaders that focus on managing operations and logistics.

To sustain a school integration program in a district, researchers recommend district leaders create controlled-choice programs that provide families with the opportunity to rank their preferences within a set of schools, as controlled-choice programs seem to have more support among parents than other types of integration programs (Diem et al., 2014; Siegel-Hawley, 2016). As indicated previously, researchers have found that the schools within these choice sets must have diversity goals for enrollment and also note that admission to the schools should be lottery-based as well as based on interest rather than test scores, grade point averages, or other academic factors (Siegel-Hawley, 2016).

To implement and sustain an integration program with a controlled-choice model, district leaders must provide families with the ability to rank their preferences within a set of schools, something that is often done through some sort of online lottery system. For districts striving to reach a goal of, for example, balancing SES across schools in the district, the lottery system will also include features to ensure that students are matched according to their preferences while also creating a SES balance in each school.

In addition to creating the lottery infrastructure, school district leaders must ensure that the physical infrastructure in the district supports the integration program. To entice families to participate in the integration program, it is helpful for the schools to be in convenient locations and Diem et al. (2014) noted that district leaders should ensure that all schools participating in the integration program are equally equipped and have the same resources, for example science labs, well-resourced libraries, safe playgrounds, etc. (Carter, 2018). Not only is this equitable but ensuring all schools have the same physical resources is an additional strategy to support buy-in to the program from families.

A final component of physical infrastructure that researchers strongly recommend district leaders integrate into their integration programs is providing free and accessible transportation options for students (Debray & Frankenberg, 2011; Diem et al., 2014; Frankenberg et al., 2017; Siegel-Hawley, 2016; Siegel-Hawley et al., 2017). If districts truly want to disrupt the connection between housing and school segregation, providing transportation is particularly important for younger students and in areas without a strong and reliable public transportation system, as is ensuring that the length of students' bus rides is perceived as reasonable by families (Diem et al., 2014; Siegel-Hawley, 2016).

The above recommendations are not without expense and therefore researchers recommend district leaders also seek financial assistance from federal and state agencies in order to diversify their schools and break the links between housing and school segregation (Ayscue & Siegel-Hawley, 2019; Frankenberg, 2017; Siegel-Hawley, 2014, 2020). This recommendation directly connects to the first role of district leaders focused on policy implementation in the sense of ensuring they understand the requirements for seeking and using government financial assistance or grants for integration programs.

When discussing the allocation of resources to implement and sustain school integration programs, school budgets must also be taken into consideration. Districts often allocate funds to schools through a per pupil expenditure that can be increased based on student needs (Basile, 2012; Houck, 2011). For example, if a student is an English learner or from a low SES background, additional Title III funds and/or Title I funds could be allocated to a school to support that student's learning through a weighted-student formula budget model. If a district's budget model includes such a per pupil expenditure, Debray and Frankenberg (2011), recommend that any additional funds such as Title funds follow the student to their new or chosen school, thus ensuring that students have the necessary resources to support their learning.

Generating Will

Rorrer et al. (2008) highlight the importance of district leaders in building will for equity reforms, changing the district culture, owning past inequities in the district, and foregrounding equity. This leadership practice is important because as Frankenberg et al. (2017) state, "Desegregation efforts are also harmed by the fact that desegregation advocates have neglected to talk about the rationale for desegregation because they got bogged down in trying to understand the mechanics of how to accomplish racial integration (Wells et al., 2011), which

then makes it harder to maintain support for desegregation” (p.178). While Rorrer et al. categorize these leadership actions in three different components of their framework, for the purposes of this study, they will be grouped into one category as they all speak to district leaders’ role in generating will to support equity reforms and telling the story of why these reforms are important.

Rorrer et al. (2008) describe a number of studies of districts that were transparent about historical and existing inequities in their districts, for example, gaps in opportunities and student achievement. Because district leaders were transparent in discussing these inequities with stakeholders, ranging from district staff to families and community members, these stakeholders understood the rationale for equity reforms and had greater buy-in to the reform initiatives. By placing attention on past inequities and foregrounding the value of equity as the driver of reform, district leaders were also able to align resources to support and eventually meet the goals they had created for their reform programs (Rorrer et al., 2008).

Other researchers have also written about the importance of district leaders generating buy-in from families and communities when initiating and implementing school integration programs. “Given that the courts and legislatures have done very little to eradicate residential segregation, the onus is on local school boards and community activists to address issues of student assignment. This, in turn, depends on the political will of local communities to integrate,” (Williams, 2012, p. 261). Williams (2012) goes on to state that the connection between neighborhood school quality serves as a driver for homebuyers and the connection between school quality, property values, and property taxes to fund schools is a challenge for district leaders who are attempting to create, implement, and sustain school integration programs (Williams, 2012). One way district leaders can counter the importance stakeholders may place

on local, neighborhood schools is to remind families and community members that school boundaries are, as Siegel-Hawley (2016) states, “malleable rather than immutable, evolving rather than permanent - in service of the broad-minded ideals of educational equity and opportunity,” (p. 139).

District leaders may face a challenge when it comes to getting buy in and support from a broad range of stakeholders. A 2019 Pew Research study of a national representative sample of adults found that the majority of Americans, 54%, believe students should go to their local schools, even if these schools are less diverse (Horowitz, 2019). The results of this survey vary by respondent race, with 62% of White respondents favoring local schools and 68% of Black respondents favoring students attending integrated schools, even if it means students go to school outside their neighborhood. Hispanic and Asian respondents were nearly evenly split on this topic and there was also a divide among respondents based on their political affiliation with 24% Republican/Republican leaning respondents and 57% of Democratic/Democratic leaning respondents preferring students attend integrated schools even if those schools are outside students' neighborhood. Given these survey results, when integration plans are voluntarily adopted by districts in racially and politically diverse communities, researchers recommend tapping into families' desire for their children to attend diverse schools, even if these schools are not close to families' homes, in order to build support and political will for the plan (Orfield et al., 2010; Siegel-Hawley, 2020).

While simultaneously generating will among families and foregrounding equity as the purpose of school integration, Diem et al. (2014) and Siegel-Hawley (2016) also highlight that outreach to families cannot be a one-time occurrence. Diem et al. (2014) wrote about the importance of families' perceptions of the quality of the neighborhood a school was located in as

a factor in their participation in controlled-choice integration programs. Countering potentially negative and long-standing beliefs about a neighborhood or even a specific school is an ongoing process and therefore conducting continual outreach to families to provide them with information about the schools participating in the integration program is an important leadership practice.

Additionally, Siegel-Hawley (2016) also writes that district leaders must conduct outreach to a diverse population in multiple formats and multiple languages to ensure that all families in the district are knowledgeable about the choices being offered via the integration program. Thus, continual outreach and marketing of the purpose of the integration program, as well as of the schools and neighborhoods of those participating schools, is an action that district leaders can take to support the implementation and sustainability of integration programs in their districts, especially if a feature of the program is assigning students to schools outside their neighborhoods.

This continual outreach and marketing is also important to provide context for any new families who may move into the district. In their analysis of the Jefferson County integration program, Diem et al. (2014) found that if families new to the district did not understand the rationale and purpose of the integration program, they may not support it or may even go so far as to actively work to dismantle it because they want their children to attend schools in their own neighborhoods. Similarly, if a district sees significant growth in the school-age population, this may cause district leaders to reassign students to new schools multiple times during a student's K-12 education career to ensure that integration goals continue to be met. In this case, the continual outreach and marketing of the integration program goals may also support the mitigation of criticism of the stability or lack thereof in the program (Diem et al., 2014).

The recommendations in the preceding paragraphs focus on policies and programs that research has suggested district leaders can and should put in place to create and sustain racial and socioeconomic integration in schools within a district. Research on school integration has shown that either singularly or in combination, a lack of outreach, failure to provide free and accessible transportation, and selective admissions policies rather than interest-based admissions through a lottery system result in school student bodies that are higher-performing, advantaged, or White. Therefore, plans that do not encompass these recommendations tend to exacerbate segregation (Orfield, 2014; Siegel-Hawley & Frankenberg, 2016).

Building Systemic Capacity

Finally, implementing the mechanisms to create integrated schools is only one part of the work of integration, what some researchers call external integration policies and practices and others call hard structures (Carter, 2018; Siegel-Hawley, 2020). Once students are attending integrated schools, it is incumbent upon district and school leaders and stakeholders to create a culture within the school that allows all students and adults to truly belong within that school community. This is where building systemic capacity, what Rorrer et al. (2008) call providing instructional leadership in their study of district leaders undertaking equity reforms, comes into play. In addition to the previously discussed role of generating will, Rorrer et al. (2008) include the function of building capacity to implement equity reform under the umbrella of providing instructional leadership. Rorrer et al. (2008) define capacity building for implementing equity reforms as communicating, planning, and coordinating work across the district, improving instruction, and supporting human and fiscal resources. These roles of district leaders are also detailed in other research focused on school integration (Carter, 2018; Freidus & Noguera, 2017; Houck, 2011; Whitaker, 2022).

At the intersection of district leader and school leader actions to support the implementation and sustainability of school integration programs, Houck (2011) in his research on resource allocation and school integration, writes about the importance of ensuring that integrated schools are staffed by qualified teachers, as defined by years of experience and advanced degrees, and that teacher turnover is mitigated given the impact that teacher turnover and mobility has on schools and instructional quality.

Another leadership practice that supports school integration programs and has roots at both the district and school level is establishing equitable school level policies. These policies impact school level climate and focus on such topics as discipline, grading, curriculum, schedules, and advanced course enrollment. When policies either as written and/or as implemented negatively and disproportionately impact racially minoritized students and students from a low SES background, as is often the case in the US (Whitaker, 2022), student and family perceptions of belonging in a school are negatively impacted and may lead to families withdrawing their children from integrated schools, therefore impacting the sustainability of the integration program.

At the classroom level, Freidus and Noguera (2017) and Carter (2018) write about the importance of educator beliefs, biases, stereotypes, and expectations and how those may impact students from diverse backgrounds who attend integrated schools. As Freidus and Noguera (2017) state, “Differentiated expectations often lead to differential treatment within the classroom, which is likely to become apparent in the ways teachers sort students into ability groups, allocate their time and attention to individual students, and develop (or fail to develop) nurturing relationships with individual students,” (p. 101). Freidus and Noguera (2017) also highlight the importance of equipping teachers with the understanding of how to implement

instructional strategies that support diverse learners, specifically naming differentiation of instruction and creating opportunities for students to collaborate across differences as being crucial in an integrated classroom.

All of the above facets of building systemic capacity are crucial to sustaining true integration within a school (Carter, 2018; Siegel-Hawley, 2020). If districts create schools that meet enrollment diversity targets but are not truly integrated, schools and districts run the risks highlighted above of replicating existing patterns of segregation and disparities found in some diverse schools, therefore implementing and sustaining an integration program in name only rather than in actuality (Bishop & Noguera, 2019; Ford et al., 2020).

Synthesis and Implications

Integrated schools positively impact students' academic and social emotional outcomes and emerging research indicates that school integration leads to better academic outcomes for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds as opposed to pouring additional funding into socioeconomically and racially segregated schools that serve a majority of students from a low socioeconomic background (Basile, 2012; Mickelson, 2016; Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012; Siegel-Hawley, 2016).

Existing research on several types of integration programs tells us that district leaders can take specific actions when initiating and implementing integration programs and that these actions lead to the sustainability of the program over time. These leadership practices range from using controlled-choice programs that include diversity goals for enrollment targets, including transportation in the program, using an interest-based lottery admission system, and generating will and support from staff, families, and community members to ensuring that physical and

fiscal resources are provided equitably to participating schools (Debray & Frankenberg, 2011; Diem et al., 2014; Siegel-Hawley, 2016).

Amongst the existing research on school integration, there are few studies that examine how the state and local contexts of an urban school district influence the initiation, implementation, and sustainability of integrated schools within that district over an extended period. Thus, the next section proposes a framework and methodology for examining how the context of four districts has impacted the organizational structures created by district leaders and the leadership practices used by those district leaders as they initiated, implemented, and continue to sustain integration programs in their districts.

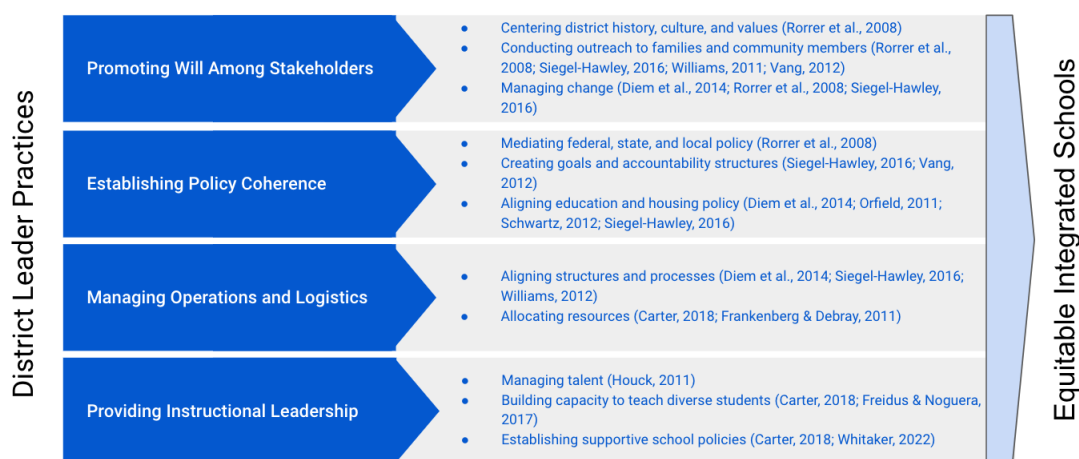
Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework and Methodology

The conceptual framework underpinning this research study (see Figure 1) relies heavily on the work of Rorrer et al. (2008), while also bringing together the work of several other researchers as discussed in Chapter Two. Using this research as a foundation, the conceptual framework identifies four key leadership practices urban district leaders can undertake when designing and implementing school integration programs that will lead to their sustainability over time (See Figure 1). These practices are establishing policy coherence, managing operations and logistics, generating will among stakeholders, and building systemic capacity. As noted below and is further discussed in Chapter Five, in the initial draft of the conceptual framework, building systemic capacity was originally identified as providing instructional leadership.

Figure 1.

Initial Conceptual Framework

Essential Practices of District Leaders in Advancing Equity Through School Integration



This framework rests on the assumption that the social, political, and economic context of each district is different and vitally important to understand when creating integration programs, yet at the same time the four practices identified in this framework can be applied to integration programs many district leaders undertake regardless of the context of the district. This framework also rests on the assumption that all four practices are critical to the sustainability of a school integration program, are interconnected and iterative in nature, and occur simultaneously.

Role of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework has an essential role in this study as it guided the development of the research questions, research design, and methodology. Questions aligned to the conceptual framework were asked of district leaders in the four districts studied to better understand the leadership actions they took and the context for taking those actions when initiating and implementing their school integration programs. After data were collected, coding and analysis was aligned to the four overarching leadership practices, illuminating trends in practices that had a greater impact on a program's longevity than others. This information was then used to provide recommendations to DCPS leaders on leadership practices and organizational structures they can implement to ensure their school integration program is sustainable over time.

Research Questions

As described in Chapter One, the goal of this study was to examine the leadership practices and organizational structures urban school district leaders used to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their districts. As described in Chapter Two, the literature reveals that while many districts have undertaken the initiation and implementation of school integration programs, only a limited number have sustained their integration programs in

the long term. The districts chosen for this study are among this limited number. Thus, the research questions driving this study are as follows:

1. What are key leadership practices and organizational structures urban district leaders have used to an, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their school districts?
2. How have state and local contexts shaped leadership practices and organizational structures urban district leaders have used to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their districts?
3. In what ways do the patterns of leadership practices and organizational structures vary across districts with sustained integration programs?

The first question is designed to help identify the factors that led each district to initiate and implement their integration program and the leadership practices and organizational structures put in place before and as the program launched. Understanding these leadership practices and organizational structures that district leaders put in place at the outset of the program is also important for establishing a baseline from which the evolution of the integration program over time can be examined as well as how, if at all, the integration programs have changed since their inception, what factors brought about these changes, and how these changes have impacted the sustainability of the program moving forward.

The second research question allows for an examination of how the socioecological context of the school districts shaped the leadership practices and organizational structures during the development, implementation, and sustainability of the integration program. According to the American Association of School Administrators, the mean tenure of superintendents in the US is five to six years (*AASA | American Association of School*

Administrators, n.d.), and with this in mind, the second research question allows me to examine how possible changes in district leadership, as well as how shifting federal, state, and local policies and laws, politics, and funding sources impacted the integration programs over time.

The aim of the third research question is to identify themes and patterns in leadership practices and organizational structures across the four districts that are aligned to the four key roles of district leaders. A cross-district comparison of how district leaders across the four urban districts establish policy coherence, manage operations and logistics, generate will among stakeholders, and provide instructional leadership illuminated best practices for DCPS leaders to implement as they expand the school integration program in their district.

Research Design

Given the importance of the district's context in driving the leadership practices and organizational structures district leaders use as they initiate, implement, and sustain integration programs, the decision was made to conduct a qualitative case study of four urban school districts with long-standing school integration programs. As Hancock and Algozzine (2011) write, case studies "allow researchers to capture multiple realities that are not easily quantifiable" (p. 78), and while the leadership decisions of district leaders are often driven by quantifiable data, there are often multiple reasons, rationales, and stakeholders that influence the leadership practices and organizational structures used by district leaders to implement change, making a comparative case study a logical approach for this study. A comparative case study will allow for the within-case and cross-case examination of leadership practices and organizational structures used to initiate, implement, and sustain integration programs (Goodrick, 2020).

Setting and Participants

The study examined the leadership practices and organizational structures used by district leaders in four traditional urban public school districts in the US to integrate their schools. To protect the confidentiality of the districts and the district leaders interviewed, these districts are referred to as Carter Public Schools, Shawley Public Schools, Kahlenberg Public Schools, and Orfield Public Schools. As seen in Table 1, these school districts are in four different regions of the US; all districts are in cities of varying sizes; and all were named in a 2020 report by The Century Foundation as having active integration programs (Potter & Burris, 2020). The districts range in size with the smallest district at just over 14,000 students in 30 schools and the largest at over 160,000 students across nearly 200 schools. In all four districts, the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced meals (FARMS), often a proxy for the percentage of low-income students, ranges from 35% to 60%. The programs also vary in terms of when their integration programs were implemented, whether they use an interest-based lottery, and the stated goals of the program.

All four of the districts share some characteristics with DC Public Schools that led to the selection of their site for inclusion in this study. Carter Public Schools is the smallest school district studied with just over 14,000 students and 30 schools (*U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts*, 2024). Like DC, the metro area and city in which Carter Public Schools is located are very liberal and both localities are home to large universities (*Politics & Voting*, 2024). Carter Public Schools started their integration program in 2013, making it the most recent program of the four districts studied. The liberal and diverse setting in which Carter Public Schools is located as well as its more recent creation of an integration program offered contextual comparisons for implementing an integration program in DC Public Schools.

In the fall of 2023, Shawley Public Schools won a Fostering Diverse Schools Demonstration Grant from the US Department of Education. Shawley Public Schools has a similar student body size despite the total population of the county in which it is located being almost half the population of DC (*U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts*, 2024; US Department of Education, 2023). Politically, the county, metro area, and state in which Shawley Public Schools is located tend to be more conservative than the very liberal DC area (*Politics & Voting*, 2024). Despite the difference in political leanings, both Shawley Public Schools and DC Public Schools are located in areas with significant housing segregation by race and socioeconomic status (Shawley Public Schools, 2018; Shoenfeld, 2019). Both the district features and the state and local context of the city in which Shawley Public Schools is located provide comparisons for DC Public Schools that impacted the leadership practices and organizational structures leaders in Shawley Public Schools have used in initiating, implementing, and sustaining their integration program.

Kahlenberg Public Schools is the largest school district in the study with over three times the number of students as DC Public Schools and the land area of the district is significantly larger than in DC (*U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts*, 2024). Like DC, the county in which Kahlenberg Public Schools is located is a seat of government and includes several universities and colleges and the county and metro area are liberal despite being in a state that leans conservative (*Politics & Voting*, 2024). Additionally, the population of the county in which Kahlenberg Public Schools is located is growing as is the number of schools in the district. While the population and number of students in DC are not growing at the same rate, because both districts are growing and expanding, this offers points of comparison relevant to this study (*U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts*, 2024).

Finally, the contexts in which Orfield Public Schools and DC Public Schools are situated are closely aligned in terms of the total population of the city, the population of those under 18 in the city, and the percent of the population 25 and older with high school and bachelor's degrees (*U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts*, 2023). The land area of Orfield Public Schools, a critical factor when determining transportation support, is the most similar to the land area of DC of all the districts studied, although it is double the size of DC. Additionally, as a more recently implemented integration program, the political and social context in which district leaders in Orfield Public Schools initiated and implemented their integration program may be more similar to the current context in which DC Public Schools is implementing their pilot integration program.

Despite the varying contexts and features of the four districts, all the programs are hybrid programs that combine multiple integration efforts into one program. These hybrid programs across the four districts include magnet schools, controlled-choice lotteries, neighborhood schools, specialty schools, and school assignment policies tied to enrollment zones. Lessons learned from these varying districts allowed for comparison of leadership practices and organizational structures used by district leaders in their differing contexts and revealed various themes in the practices and structures district leaders used to initiate, implement, and sustain their integration programs through establishing policy coherence, managing operations and logistics, generating will among stakeholders, and building systemic capacity.

Table 1.
Districts Studied in Comparison to DC Public Schools

	Carter Public Schools	Shawley Public Schools	Kahlenberg Public Schools	Orfield Public Schools	DC Public Schools
Geographic Location	Midwest	Southeast	Southeast	West	Mid-Atlantic
Political Context	County-very liberal; Metro area-very liberal; State-leans conservation	County-somewhat conservative; Metro area - strongly conservative. State-moderately conservative	County-strongly liberal; Metro area-moderately liberal; State-leans conservative	County-very liberal; Metro area-very liberal; State-somewhat liberal leaning	DC-very liberal; Metro area-very liberal
Year Integration Program Started	2013	1962	1982	1973	2020 (pilot)
Total Number of Students	14,440	44,500	160,099	90,250	50,131
Total Number of Schools	30	79	198	207	116
Percentage of students eligible for FARMS	40.4%	44%	34.9%	59%	75%
2021 Total Population Estimate of City	75,233	374,602	1,175,778	711,252	670,949
Persons in Poverty	26.7%	11.8%	7.5%	11.7%	13.3%
Persons under 18 years	14.4%	20.7%	22.7%	18.7%	18.5%
Persons age 25+ who are high school graduates or higher	96.8%	90.7%	94%	90.5%	92.7%
Persons age 25+ with bachelor's degree or higher	59.8%	35.5%	55.7%	54.2%	62.6%
Land area in square miles (2020)	25.6	542.16	834.59	153.08	61.13
Population per square mile (2020)	2923.3	675.5	1353.3	4,674.3	11,280.7

Data Collection Plan and Rationale

The data for this comparative case study were collected in two ways: a document review of publicly available information about the district's school integration plan and semi-structured interviews with two current district leaders in each of the four identified urban school districts. I identified current district leaders whose primary responsibility is supporting or leading the integration program in the district and, where possible, have been in the district for an extended period (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Descriptive Information about District Leaders Interviewed

District	Name	Role	Length of Time in Current Role	Length of Time in District	Total Length of Time in Education
Carter Public Schools	District Leader 1	Executive Director	2 years	9 years	20 years
Carter Public Schools	District Leader 2	Chief Officer	2 years	8 years	22 years
Shawley Public Schools	District Leader 1	Senior Director	2 years	31 years	31 years
Shawley Public Schools	District Leader 2	Director	2 years	28 years	28 years
Kahlenberg Public Schools	District Leader 1	Director	4 years	4 years	27 years
Kahlenberg Public Schools	District Leader 2	Coordinator	22 years	26 years	28 years
Orfield Public Schools	District Leader 1	Executive Director,	7 months	7 months	18 years
Orfield Public Schools	District Leader 2	Director	5 years	9 years	20 years

Prior to conducting interviews with district leaders, publicly available documents were reviewed to gather as much background information about the districts' integration programs as possible using the document review protocol found in Appendix C. If the district leaders interviewed did not have a significant understanding of the historical and socioecological context for the initiation and implementation of the integration program, I conducted additional research about the district to understand the context in which the integration program began. During the document review for each district I reviewed multiple documents including state policies, school board policies pertaining to the districts' integration programs, each district's strategic plan, school choice and transportation information found on each district's website, and news media articles about the districts' integration programs (see Table 3).

Descriptive information about documents was collected and noted on the document review form and included descriptors such as title, author, date produced, document source, and as feasible, audience, purpose, context, and related documents. Tracking this descriptive information for the documents reviewed allowed me to later analyze the documents in relation to one another, as well as ensure that there was not an overrepresentation of any one demographic feature of the documents (Gross, 2018). Direct and inferred patterns in district leadership practices and organizational structures during the initiation of the integration program, initial implementation of the program, and sustained implementation of the program were identified and noted using the document review protocol (Bretschneider et al., 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). More specifically and in alignment with the conceptual framework driving this study, documents were reviewed to determine how district leaders establish policy coherence, manage operations and logistics, generate will among stakeholders, and provide instructional leadership.

Table 3.
Overview of Documents Reviewed

District	Documents Reviewed
Carter Public Schools	Blog Posts District Reports District School Board Policies District Strategic Plans District Website Journal Articles Newspaper Articles State Code
Shawley Public Schools	District Reports District School Board Policies District Strategic Plans District Website Journal Articles Newspaper Articles State Code
Kahlenberg Public Schools	Court Rulings District School Board Policies District Strategic Plan District Website Journal Articles Newspaper Articles State Code TV Broadcast
Orfield Public Schools	District Reports District School Board Policies District Strategic Plan District Website Journal Articles Newspaper Articles Podcast State Code

The information learned from the document review was then used to support, supplement, and/or follow up on the interview questions detailed in Appendix D. The semi-structured interviews helped to build a more complete understanding of the leadership practices

and organizational structures that district leaders used to initiate, implement, and sustain their integration programs in the context of their district. Open-ended questions were created and asked to provide current district leaders the opportunity to explain the rationale behind their leadership practices and decision-making given the context of their specific school district, as this is information the document review was not always able to provide (Hatch, 2002). Patterns and themes in district leadership practices and organizational structures were identified through inductive and deductive coding, just as with the document review. Interview transcripts were coded in alignment with this study's conceptual framework and after all transcripts were coded, patterns that show common themes in each district and across districts were identified. Interview responses were also used to confirm and contrast patterns and themes in district leadership practices and organizational structures identified during the document review.

As part of the interview process, several district leaders also pointed me to and in some cases shared additional internal documents relevant to the examination of the leadership practices and organizational structures used to initiate, implement, and sustain their integration programs. Using the document review protocol described in Appendix C, patterns and themes in district leadership practices and organizational structures were also examined.

Data Analysis

Goodrick (2020) states, "The analytic processes used in comparative case studies are based on an appreciation that there is no straightforward, linear relationship between causes and outcomes" (p. 7). Thus, identifying patterns and themes in the leadership practices and organizational structures used by different district leaders when initiating, implementing, and sustaining integration programs in their districts was crucial to developing substantive thematic findings and recommendations. Understanding these patterns within and across cases and

establishing plausible explanations for these patterns aligned to the conceptual framework for this study assisted this researcher in providing recommendations to DCPS leaders about best practices their district can use to further initiate, implement, and sustain its burgeoning integration program.

Data from both the document review and district leader interviews were analyzed and coded in alignment with the code book in Appendix E. The codes used to analyze the data reference the four essential practices of district leaders detailed in the conceptual framework: establishing policy coherence, managing operations and logistics, generating will among stakeholders, and building systemic capacity. The codes also reference the subcategories within each of the four essential practices; for example, under the umbrella of establishing policy coherence, there are three unique codes: policy, goals and accountability, and cross-sector alignment. This coding was conducted after analyzing the documents according to the protocol listed in Appendix C and transcribing the interviews with district leaders. Given that the volume of data received from the document review and interviews was often significant, memo writing was used to synthesize patterns found during the data review and coding process. The data were further synthesized in narrative and in a table to explain the patterns in the data and establish explanations for the data (Goodrick, 2020).

To ensure that the data collected from the interviews accurately represented the ideas of district leaders interviewed for the study, a member check was also conducted after the initial drafts of Chapter Four and Five were written. More specifically, each interviewee was emailed text from Chapters Four and Five in which their district was mentioned, and the district leaders were asked to review the sections of these chapters with the following questions from McKim (2023) in mind:

1. After reading through the findings, what are your general thoughts?
2. How accurately do you feel the findings captured your thoughts/experiences?
3. What could be added to the findings to capture your experiences better?
4. If there is anything you would like removed, what would that be and why? (p. 46)

As a result of the member check, the feedback interviewees provided was incorporated into the study, as were additional details that were provided by interviewees. Additionally, corrections were made to more accurately reflect dates important to the integration programs as well as nuances to program structures and processes.

Methodological Limitations

The results of the within-case and cross case studies of integration programs of four different urban school districts may ultimately not be generalizable to other urban districts given the unique contexts of each district studied (Goodrick, 2020). However, the districts studied are a representative sample of urban school districts that have sustained integration programs for at least ten years and the demographics and location of each district allow for conclusions about district leadership practices that may apply to a variety of other school districts. Additionally, comparing the findings from the semi-structured interviews with district leaders with document reviews increases the validity and trustworthiness of this study and led to a naturalistic generalization in the sense that the themes and patterns identified in the research will be used to inform school integration practices and policies in DCPS (Goodrick, 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Role of the Researcher

As a former elementary school principal in an urban district that is currently piloting a school integration model in multiple schools and expanding this pilot in the coming years to the

school I previously led, I have an interest in understanding the leadership practices and organizational structures that district leaders use when initiating, implementing, and sustaining integration programs.

My role as both a former school leader and researcher also impacted this comparative case study as I am an insider in all the districts being studied in the sense that I am a fellow educator. However, I am an outsider to all the districts being examined in this study and this outside stance may have impacted the quantity and quality of information I was able to collect in the interviews and during the document review process (Hellowell, 2006).

To mitigate the potential for bias, I used data gathered during interviews and document reviews to inform the analysis of study findings. Additionally, I used a semi-structured interview protocol which established a clear protocol that was used with all interviewees. Finally, each interviewee was emailed text from Chapters Four and Five in which their district was mentioned, and the district leaders were asked to review the sections of these chapters to confirm accuracy and check for misconceptions.

Conclusion

This chapter describes the methodological approach that was used in this comparative case study and includes details about the document review process, interview protocols, and data analysis process. By examining the data gathered through the document analysis and interview process, patterns in the leadership practices and organizational structures district leaders used when initiating, implementing, and sustaining their integration programs were uncovered. After establishing explanations for the leadership practices and organizational structures used by district leaders, lessons learned and best practices will be shared with DCPS leaders as they seek to expand their school integration program in the coming years.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

The research questions that guided this study sought to understand the leadership practices and organizational structures district leaders in four urban traditional public school districts used to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their districts. To answer these research questions, I conducted participant interviews with two district leaders within each of the four districts who have oversight of district integration and equity programs, as well as reviewed publicly available documents about each of the districts and their integration programs, policies, and structures. The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What are key leadership practices and organizational structures urban district leaders have used to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their school districts?
2. How have state and local contexts shaped leadership practices and organizational structures urban district leaders have used to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their school districts?
3. In what ways do the patterns of leadership practices and organizational structures vary across districts with sustained integration programs?

During the interviews with district leaders, it became apparent that the unique state and local contexts of each of the four districts have shaped the evolution of each of the districts' integration programs over time. District leaders have had to navigate such varied challenges as generating and sustaining political and social will for integration in their districts, mediating federal, state, and local laws and policies, shifting resource allocations, and the transportation of students since the inception of the integration programs in their districts and in each district. These factors have had varying impacts on the integration programs as they currently exist.

Because state and local contexts have impacted how the integration programs in each district have been sustained over time (RQ2), as well as the unique leadership practices and organizational structures within each district that have developed in response to their different contexts (RQ1), I have combined the findings for RQ1 and RQ2 into one section.

To provide a preview for readers, a summary of my findings appears in Table 4. To provide context for these findings, I begin by reviewing descriptive information about the districts and the participants interviewed. I then discuss the factors of the state and local context that led to the initiation and implementation of the original integration programs in each district (RQ2), as well as the leadership practices and organizational structures implemented by district leaders over time in response to the changing contexts within each district (RQ1). Finally, using my conceptual framework as a guide, I identify similarities and variations in leadership practices and organizational structures across the four districts studied, highlighting themes that have emerged from interviews and document reviews (RQ3).

Table 4.
Overview of Study Findings

	Carter Public Schools	Shawley Public Schools	Kahlenberg Public Schools	Orfield Public Schools
Origin of Integration Program	School board voluntarily adopted SES balance policy in 2013	Initiated by court order in 1962	School board voluntarily created magnet schools in 1982	Initiated by court order in 1973
Promoting Will Among Stakeholders	District leaders knowledgeable about history, culture, values and impact of segregation on students in district Ongoing outreach efforts to board, families, staff	District leaders knowledgeable about history, culture, values and impact of segregation on students in district Ongoing outreach efforts to board, families, school leaders Require family volunteer hours at magnet schools to support family engagement	District leaders knowledgeable about history, culture, values and impact of segregation on students in district Ongoing outreach efforts to board, families, staff, business leaders about purpose of magnet schools and school assignment policy	District leaders knowledgeable about history, culture, values and impact of segregation on students in district Ongoing outreach efforts to board and families
Establishing Policy Coherence	SES balance goal in policy Redrew boundaries to support integration efforts in 2014 & 2016	Created magnet schools beginning in 1986 in central city Redrew boundaries and created additional magnet schools in 1997 District-controlled charter schools created to serve low income and/or academically low performing students (2002) Open-enrollment state (2021) No specific integration policy or goals in district	Adopted race-based balance goal in 1981 Adopted SES and achievement-based balance goal in 2000 (since abandoned) Magnet schools and school assignment policy supports integration efforts; SES priority at magnet schools No specific integration goals in district	District-controlled charter schools (1993) Open-enrollment state (1994) Enrollment zones created in fast-growing areas of city (2000s) Unified lottery (2012) Draft school board policy committing to maintaining socioeconomically integrated schools (2023) No specific integration policy or goals in district
Managing Operations & Logistics	Hybrid program (magnet schools & attendance boundary changes) Resource allocation model aligned to school and student needs with input from principals Attendance support buses; students ride public transportation for free	Hybrid program (magnet, charter, zoned magnet, open-enrollment schools, career institutes) Legacy wait lists, lottery weighted by school board district for some schools Awarded federal MSAP and FDSO grants Transportation provided for magnet and career institutes, not charter and open-enrollment schools	Hybrid program (magnet schools, school assignments) Magnet schools created in more economically distressed areas of district Awarded multiple federal MSAP grants to fund expansion of magnet schools Transportation provided to assigned schools and some magnet schools; express stops for magnets without door-to-door buses	Hybrid program (magnet schools, enrollment zones, specialty schools) In absence of integration policy, district leaders use school planning and lottery to support integration of schools (prioritizing specific neighborhoods/census blocks in lottery, reserving lottery seats for late-arriving students, year-round backfilling of open lottery seats) Transportation provided to boundary and enrollment zone schools; students ride public transportation for free
Building Systemic Capacity	District-wide DEI initiative to build staff capacity to create schools in which all students feel safe, welcome, and included	District-wide focus on equitable learning experiences for students	District leaders provide PD to school leaders and staff focused on equity, reducing disproportionality, as well as magnet themes	District-wide culture and equity initiative to build staff capacity, ensure equitable policies, and partner with families

Evolution of School Integration Programs Within Unique State and Local Contexts

Interviews with the two district leaders in each of the four districts focused on how and when the integration programs started, as well as how the programs evolved over time given the state and local context of the district (RQ 1 & RQ2), and which leadership practices and organizational structures have helped sustain the program over time given their unique state and local context (RQ1 & RQ2). Information from district leader interviews was cross-referenced with publicly available documents as well as relevant federal, state, and local laws and policies to also identify how these laws and policies impacted the integration programs in each district over time. In this section, I will use components of the conceptual framework for this study to explore the impact of state and local context on past, current, and possible future leadership practices and organizational structures in each district.

Carter Public Schools

Carter Public Schools is a Midwestern district of 30 schools, serving approximately 14,000 students (Carter Public Schools, 2024). As of 2023, just over 40 percent of students were eligible for free and reduced meals, a proxy often used to indicate socioeconomic status (Carter Public Schools, 2023). Carter Public Schools is located in a small city that also houses a large university and hospital. Both district leaders interviewed have been in education for over 20 years, with the district for at least 8 years, and in their current roles for approximately two years. These district leaders worked in two different departments within the central office and given the small size of the district, oversaw multiple responsibilities within the district.

State and Local Context. Carter Public Schools is one of two districts studied that have a specific policy grounding their integration program and the only district studied that has a specific a numerical balance goal driving the integration program in the district. The district was

never under a court desegregation order and first attempted to voluntarily balance school demographics along socioeconomic status lines in 2013 when the school board adopted a policy to ensure that all schools fell within 10 or 15 percentage points of the district's free and reduced lunch average (Carter Public Schools, 2013). According to one interviewee, the school board had a commitment to neighborhood schools but acknowledged that residential segregation in the district led to neighborhood schools being segregated by socioeconomic status and race. Thus, in 2014 district leaders redrew school boundaries in an attempt to align policy and district resources and move each school closer toward the goal of balancing schools according to free and reduced lunch rates.

District leaders' identification of free and reduced lunch rates by neighborhood ran afoul of the USDA policy for use of free and reduced lunch data in student assignment policies and because of this, in January 2015, the school board rescinded the diversity policy (Carter Public Schools, 2015). Instead of solely relying on free and reduced lunch rates as a proxy for socioeconomic status, district leaders then adopted a more encompassing definition of low socioeconomic status to include migrant and homeless designations and also included numbers of students who are identified as English learners or students with disabilities as factors when attempting to balance demographics, a definition that is still in use today according to one district leader interviewed for this study.

This broader definition of low socioeconomic status was then used by district leaders to redraw boundaries in 2016, a redistricting plan that was in part driven by the opening of a new high school in the city at the start of the 2017-2018 school year. According to one district leader, if the new high school drew solely from its surrounding neighborhoods, the demographics of the student body would not have been representative of the demographics of the larger city and

would thus be out of alignment with the goal of balancing socioeconomic status across district schools.

In 2017, the school board also adopted a resource allocation model for elementary schools in the district, which has allowed district leaders to further ensure alignment between policy goals around integration and district resources. The resource allocation model allows the district to allocate more teachers to the buildings with more need as determined by the socioeconomic status of the students, as well as other factors such as the number of students with disabilities and the hours within their individual education plans. The resource allocation model continues to be used today and while it has undergone refinement since its initial implementation in the district, according to one district leader interviewed, it continues to be one of the primary drivers of class size expectations across the district and at one time drove support staff allocation in the district.

A district leader shared that, for example, if a school had a higher level of need as determined by the resource allocation model, more staff would be allocated to support students in that school and building principals would have the autonomy to determine the actual positions needed in the building to support student needs. With budget cuts in the last few years since the pandemic, the district leader said that the number of resource allocation model levels has been condensed, which in some cases has led to increased class sizes and/or shifting students' homerooms and teachers. While the impact on students was not well received by some members of the community, district leaders were transparent with stakeholders about the impact of the budget cuts, which allowed them to manage the impact of the budgetary challenges without losing stakeholder support for the integration program.

While the resource allocation model may have shifted over the last few years, the district's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion including the continued use of the resource allocation model was codified in its diversity, equity and inclusion plan in 2019. In the plan, district leaders commit to equitably allocating resources to "align to school and student needs" as well as to have "transparent and equitable" school assignment policies and "evaluate school boundary changes" (Carter Public Schools, 2019). As recently as 2023, the school board reiterated in its educational philosophy of the school district that "The school district strongly believes that diversity, equity, and inclusion are fundamental to a successful educational experience for students. Creating an environment where differences are appreciated, valued, respected, and understood is critical to student success" (Carter Public Schools, 2023). In the 2024 board policy focused on school facilities planning, the school board lists a number of charges including balancing socioeconomic demographics, not allowing schools to become too large or too small, and ensuring transportation is reasonable in terms of time on buses and cost for transportation (Carter Public Schools, 2024). The ways in which district leaders have aligned these policy goals, operations, and logistics, while also maintaining community support for the integration program and building systemic capacity within district schools will be explored in the next section.

Promoting Will Among Stakeholders and Establishing Policy Coherence. While the state in which Carter Public Schools is located leans more conservative, according to district leaders, the school district's stakeholders are typically more liberal than the state context. District leaders acknowledge that local support is key for navigating the changing policy and political climate at the state level, especially given the state context which currently does not ostensibly support the district's integration efforts. Leaders shared that while district residents are generally

publicly supportive, there have been proposed school board policies that a vocal minority of families opposed, which led to the school board not adopting those more progressive integration policies. For example, when the school board was first discussing possible boundary changes, both district leaders interviewed said there was an outcry from families who were predominantly from a higher SES background and predominantly White neighborhoods to maintain the current boundaries and minimize disruption to their children's schools and boundaries. Thus, while boundaries were redrawn, they were not radically changed across the district. Because of this, district leaders acknowledge there are still schools in the district with a disproportionately high SES population in comparison to the district average, as well as a disproportionately low SES population in comparison to the district average and also acknowledge the importance of ongoing collaborative efforts by the school board and school district leaders to maintain and sustain the district's integration program.

Managing Operations and Logistics. Both district leaders interviewed discussed the importance of transportation to their integration program, and Carter Public Schools has two means to support students in getting to and from school. In addition to running regular bus routes for students outside a walkable distance to their schools, district leaders also examined attendance patterns and discovered that students from specific neighborhoods in the district that are either lower SES and/or where safe walking paths to school are not available had lower attendance rates than others. To address this equity issue, district leaders run attendance support buses, primarily at the elementary school level, to serve these neighborhoods. Additionally, city buses are free for all district students which also supports student attendance, which one district leader acknowledged helped offset some of the costs of transportation in the district.

This district relies on state funding allocations as its primary source of school funding, with local taxes making up the remainder of the funding sources. The state's current governor has a focus on vouchers for private schools and the state legislature recently voted to cut funding for some state-funded diversity, equity, and inclusion positions. Given this state context, the district's funding model has become critical to supporting the district's integration goals. The funding model seeks to ensure that resources are equitably distributed across the district, with schools with the highest need receiving the highest levels of funding. One district leader interviewed said that the district is very intentional about including principal voices in discussions when looking at weights and funding within the funding model based on students' demographic characteristics. By asking principals to weigh in on how and for which student categories additional funding should be allocated in schools, district leaders are ensuring that schools have the resources they need to support the needs of the students in their schools and provide the staffing to support students.

Building Systemic Capacity. Regardless of the level of socioeconomic integration within a school, district leaders have also prioritized ensuring students feel a sense of belonging in every school in the district, as indicated in their strategic plan. One district leader interviewed reported that when the new integrated high school opened in 2018, there were unintended consequences for students such as lower participation rates in after school programming, and these unintended consequences predominantly impacted students of color who often traveled to the school from further distances. Additionally, one district leader reported that student survey data has indicated students of color were feeling less safe, welcome, and included at district schools and academic data also showed that lower SES White students were outperforming affluent Black students. To address these disparities, district and school administrators undertook

a five-year effort to provide instructional leadership and build staff capacity by training all staff on implicit bias, equity, cultural proficiency, courageous conversations, and social emotional learning, an effort that is ongoing and part of the district's strategic plan.

Leadership Practices and Organizational Structures that May Shape the Future of the Integration Program. District leaders from Carter Public Schools indicated that despite aligning the SES balance policy, transportation routes, and resources via the WRAM funding allocations in the district, as well as building systemic capacity through DEI training for staff and maintaining community will for the integration program, the district continues to have achievement and opportunity gaps among its students. In terms of future changes to the integration program, one district leader mentioned that there are some schools in the district that are much smaller or larger than others and while there is predicted stability in terms of the number of students served by the school district, stable or reduced school funding allocations from the state may push district leaders to examine consolidating schools and/or balancing the size of schools to use resources more efficiently. If such a consolidation or school size adjustment occurs, both district leaders interviewed acknowledged that this would present the district with another opportunity to examine and change school boundary lines in the district to further support implementation of the SES balance policy.

Shawley Public Schools

Shawley Public Schools is a Southeastern district of nearly 80 schools, serving approximately 44,500 students (Shawley Public Schools, 2024). As of 2023, 44 percent of students were eligible for free and reduced meals, a proxy often used to indicate socioeconomic status (Shawley Public Schools, 2023). Shawley Public Schools is in a midsize city that has a large manufacturing and service industry and, according to one district leader, has a significant

portion of families with inherited wealth, as well as many private schools that draw students who might otherwise enroll in Shawley Public Schools. Both district leaders interviewed have been in education for over 25 years, with all of that time having been spent in their current districts. They have both been in their current roles for approximately two years. These district leaders work in the same department within the central office.

State and Local Context. Shawley Public Schools' history with desegregation began shortly after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, when the elected school board issued a statement acknowledging they would comply with the law (Shawley Public Schools, 1964). It took a judgment in another lawsuit in 1962 for a racially-based desegregation plan to be put into place by the board of education in the district. Given this history, the school integration program in this district can be classified as court-ordered and, unlike the previous district studied, not a program that was voluntarily initiated by district leaders.

While district leaders did not initiate the desegregation and integration of schools within the district, they were responsible for the implementation of the court order. The superintendent and team, with input from scholars, civic leaders, school district personnel, and personnel of other districts that had integrated schools, created multiple integration plan options before ultimately determining, with input from the court, the plan that would be implemented starting in the fall of 1962 (Shawley Public Schools, 1964). In the school year leading up to the implementation of the plan, district leaders generated will among stakeholders by meeting with small groups of principals, teachers, community members, and students to discuss the plan and each person's responsibility to implement it, as well as answer questions and address concerns that groups had about integration in general (Shawley Public Schools, 1964). As the start of the school year approached, district leaders provided instructional leadership by leading teacher

training sessions; a committee of business and clergy leaders worked to galvanize community support, including the support of the local media; and school leaders met with parent leaders and groups of parents to continue to generate will for the plan. It is important to note that the integration plan was also a phased plan, which integrated entry grades at a specific number of schools rather than all grades at all schools (Shawley Public Schools, 1964).

To further support school integration in Shawley Public Schools in the decades following the initial court order, district leaders created two magnet schools, one in 1986, coinciding with a federal judge ending the desegregation order in the district in 1986, and another in 1991. These magnet schools initially were application-based, which, one district leader recalled, for years resulted in families camping outside the schools, sometimes for months, to be the first in line to submit their paper application forms for these highly sought-after schools. In 1997, the city school district merged with the suburban county school district surrounding it to create one large district. As part of the merger, district leaders redrew school boundaries to promote diversity within schools in the new district. At the same time, district leaders also expanded the magnet school program and, in an effort to promote integration across the district, district leaders intentionally created these new magnet schools in the central city area of the district. As one district leader stated, the hope was that in addition to enrolling neighborhood students, families in the more suburban areas who worked in the central city might enroll their children, therefore creating diverse integrated schools in the central city.

Despite this system of zoned magnet schools that have both an attendance zone and accept magnet students, and even with the later addition of charter schools in the district, a 2013 study found that schools in the district were resegregating along racial lines with poverty rates highest in schools that enrolled virtually all Black students (Shawley Public Schools, 2018). In

2019, a local education advocacy group released a proposal to re-integrate schools in the district and this plan was met by some resistance in the local community as well as by some school board members (Shawley Public Schools, 2018). Currently, there is no stated school board or district policy that names an explicit goal around school integration within the district. Despite this, district leaders continue to leverage magnet schools as a way to integrate schools in the district along socioeconomic lines.

Promoting Will Among Stakeholders and Establishing Policy Coherence. Similar to Carter Public Schools, district leaders in Shawley Public Schools have navigated various changes in federal, state, and local policy over the years to ensure magnet programming continues to promote socioeconomic integration in the district. As an example, to comply with evolving federal law and grant funding guidelines, one district leader described the process of moving from collecting paper applications for magnets on a first-come, first-enrolled basis to a weighted lottery that considered race as a factor in the lottery to promote diversity in the magnet schools. Following the *Parents Involved* decision in 2007, district leaders rewrote their policy of considering race as a factor to instead consider socioeconomic status as a factor in the magnet school lottery. It is interesting to note that district leaders continue to honor legacy wait lists at two magnet schools in the district, which means that seats at those popular magnet schools are offered first from the legacy wait lists. These legacy wait lists are not wait lists for children of alumni of the schools but instead are wait lists from when the district used the paper application process at these magnet schools. As an example of how the legacy waitlist works, a district leader described that a student who was waitlisted when they applied to the school in fourth grade may be able to fill a seat years later in tenth grade; however, once the legacy waitlist has been exhausted at a particular grade, seats are then offered from the lottery. When the legacy

wait lists at all grades are fully exhausted, which could be as late as the 2031 school year, district leaders indicated they will then move to a lottery-only system at their choice schools, including these magnet schools.

New and changing state laws have also impacted the district's efforts to integrate their schools, including a state law passed in 2002 that created charter schools (Shawley Public Schools, 2022). According to state law provisions, school district leaders have approving authority and oversight of the charter schools. District leaders have approved several charter schools to operate within the district, with the purpose of serving students identified as low-income based on their qualification for free and reduced lunch and/or students from schools deemed to be failing because they missed state testing benchmarks. According to one district leader, these charter schools have expanded over the years and nearly all of them continue to serve students according to their original purpose.

Further impacting the school district's integration effort was a state law passed in 2021 creating open enrollment in all schools across the state. A school becomes an open enrollment school if that school is determined by the district to be below 95% capacity and have open seats (Shawley Public Schools, 2021). When this determination is made, district leaders will then add the school to the choice lottery for the next year. According to one district leader this means that in recent years, almost 75% of schools have been added to the open enrollment list and therefore the choice lottery in the district. However, because a school's capacity can vary from year to year, schools can ostensibly be part of the open enrollment lottery one year and not the next, which one district leader noted prevents them from being able to create policies or implement integration efforts in a concerted manner in these schools.

Managing Operations and Logistics. The evolution of federal, state, and local law and policy over the years as described above has led to an integration program that can be characterized as a hybrid program, given its combination of magnet, charter, zoned magnet schools and open-enrollment programs. There are several factors that influence the impact of the lottery in terms of creating socioeconomically integrated schools across the district. A district leader shared, for example, that the district has several schools that are considered highly sought after by families and use a balanced lottery system. Rather than balancing school enrollment by socioeconomic status, the balance in this case provides for equal representation from each school board district in the lottery for the schools' entry grades of kindergarten, sixth grade, and ninth grade. Given housing segregation in the district, the equal representation balance likely creates some level of socioeconomic integration without specifically naming socioeconomic integration as the goal, a goal that would be politically difficult for some members of the school board.

It is important to note here that the district lottery no longer gives priority to students from low SES backgrounds; however, in 2023, one district leader explained that the state passed a law allowing charter schools to use a weighted lottery that does prioritize socioeconomic status. Despite the school district having authority over the authorization of charter schools in the district, only a handful of charter schools in the district take part in the district choice lottery program, with the other charter schools operating their own individual school lottery. Thus, according to this district leader, it remains unclear how this new law will impact integration efforts in the district. According to the same district leader, statewide advocacy could potentially amend the socioeconomic priority law to include traditional public schools, thereby positively impacting the district's integration efforts.

To support the plethora of choice schools in the district, district leaders have applied for and been awarded MSAP grants multiple times since the early 2000s. One district leader interviewed said that in the past, those grants were used for the expansion of magnet programs in the district, to fund marketing and outreach to families in the district, and to create magnet coordinators at schools to support professional learning and equitable academic experiences for students. District leaders continue to implement marketing plans to inform families about choice programs using social media and communication platforms such as their district website, email blasts, etc.; however, they both also acknowledge the importance of word of mouth in driving lottery applications to specific programs and schools.

While current school board policies and the current district strategic plan do include goals focused on equitable learning experiences for students, they do not specifically address school integration nor do they include language around diversity goals for magnet schools or other choice programming within the district (Shawley Public Schools, 2017; Shawley Public Schools, 2021). Despite this, district leaders applied for and were awarded a Fostering Diverse Schools Planning Grant in 2023 under the premise of “...increasing socioeconomic diversity for students attending schools with high levels of economically disadvantaged students” (Shawley Public Schools, 2023). The project will also support district leaders in building staff capacity to teach students “from disadvantaged backgrounds who face multiple obstacles to success” (Shawley Public Schools, 2023). One district leader said that the most recent federal grant will likely be used to expand magnet schools across the district, which is particularly important for their integration efforts in the district given that currently they consider only four to five schools in the district to be truly integrated schools of choice.

Federal grants are one source of funding that district leaders rely on to continue supporting magnet programs. Unlike in other districts researched for this study, a district leader explained that state law mandates that student counts are conducted multiple times each school year, which then results in funding following students if they change schools within a school year. This unique funding distribution model impacts the district's resources throughout the school year, including funding for transportation to some district schools.

The district currently does provide transportation options for students in magnet and specialty career institutes within neighborhood schools and neighborhood schools, but not to charter schools and open enrollment schools. This is a matter of school district policy rather than school board policy and both district leaders interviewed said that transportation options do impact the levels of socioeconomic integration at schools within their district, particularly given the limited public transportation options within the school district and the large land area that the district encompasses. On a related note, it is also important to note that the accrual of a significant number of absences and tardies by a student can lead to that student's exclusion from their choice school at the end of a school year. District leaders indicate that while this policy exists, they do work with families to provide attendance support, including discussing transportation options with families, in hopes of keeping students in their choice schools rather than forcing them to return to their neighborhood school after the school year has started.

Building Systemic Capacity. In Shawley Public Schools, there is also a unique requirement for families with children in magnet schools to complete a prescribed number of volunteer hours at their child's school in a school year. According to both district leaders, approximately 90-95% of families complete these volunteer hours each year and they believe that the volunteer requirement is an important factor in building family engagement and creating

a sense of belonging for students and families within these magnet schools, both of which can support positive word of mouth in the community about those schools and the student experience within them. As with families facing transportation barriers, principals and district leaders often work with families who may struggle to meet the volunteer hour requirement, for example, by expanding which adults in an extended family can meet the requirement and expanding the types of volunteer activities that count toward meeting the requirement.

Leadership Practices and Organizational Structures that May Shape the Future of the Integration Program. As district leaders consider the future of their integration program given the unique context of their district, they see several potential changes on the horizon. Given that state law allows charter schools to consider SES as a factor in weighted enrollment lotteries, one district leader believes this provision may eventually apply to all public schools in the state. The idea of a unified lottery for all schools in the district was also discussed by one district leader as a possible future change, with hope that a unified lottery in the district, coupled with additional outreach to families, would increase lottery participation from families who are classified as low SES. As with other district leaders interviewed for this study, district leaders in Shawley Public Schools acknowledge that families from a low SES background have lower participation rates in the first round of the choice lottery and typically fill seats in the second round of the lottery which occurs a few weeks before the start of the school year.

Kahlenberg Public Schools

Kahlenberg Public Schools is a Southeastern district of nearly 200 schools, serving approximately 160,000 students (Kahlenberg Public Schools, 2024). As of 2023, approximately 35 percent of students were eligible for free and reduced meals, a proxy often used to indicate socioeconomic status (Kahlenberg Public Schools, 2023). Kahlenberg Public Schools is in a

large city that, according to district leaders, has a large research and technology industry and is home to several universities and colleges. Both district leaders interviewed have been in education for over 25 years, with one leader having served in multiple districts before coming to Kahlenberg Public Schools four years ago to join the district in their current role. The second leader has been in the district for nearly the entirety of their career and in their current role for over 20 years.

State and Local Context. Kahlenberg Public Schools was formed in 1976 with the voluntary merger of a majority Black city school district with its neighboring majority White suburban county school district. It is the second district studied that was never under a court desegregation order. Current district leaders recall that while many voters opposed the merger, business and community leaders advocated for the state legislature to approve the merger on the grounds that the merger would support the business and economic health of the area. These same district leaders mentioned that the support of business and community leaders continues to remain important to the district's ability to currently sustain an integration program primarily through magnet schools and the district's student assignment policy.

In 1981, the school board established a student assignment policy that stated no district school should have a student enrollment of fewer than 15% Black students or more than 45% Black students. The following year, district leaders converted 27 of the district's schools to magnet schools with the purpose of promoting school integration across the district. In order to ensure that school integration did not rest primarily on the bussing of Black students to more suburban, predominately White schools, both district leaders interviewed stated that district leaders at the time intentionally created many of these magnet schools in predominantly Black neighborhoods, attracting White students in the county to these schools by offering bussing.

Despite the efforts of district leaders to integrate schools, from 1998-2017, the district had the highest rate of within-school segregation among the five largest districts in the state (Kahlenberg Public Schools, 2023). During this same time period, two cases were brought to the circuit court of appeals with jurisdiction over the state in which the district is located, and in 1999, eight years before *Parents Involved*, the circuit court ruled that race could not be used to determine school assignment (Kahlenberg Public Schools, 2023). This ruling pushed district leaders to adopt a new, race-neutral student assignment policy in 2000 and between 2000 and 2010, district leaders sought to assign students to schools with the goal of creating schools that have no more than 40% of students from low SES backgrounds and fewer than 25% low-achieving students.

During this same period of 2000-2010, the number of students in the district nearly doubled and district leaders built approximately 30 new schools to accommodate this growth, as well as adopted year-round schooling. In an attempt to meet the goals of the balance policy while also opening multiple schools, more than 20 percent of students in the district were reassigned schools at least once during the 2000-2010 period, which led to diminished community support for the student assignment policy (Kahlenberg Public Schools, 2021). The number of reassignments became a political issue and the 2009 school board election campaign focused on the student assignment policy, leading to the election of a school board with a conservative Republican majority opposed to the student assignment plan. In 2010, the school board voted to stop bussing students in order to meet diversity goals in the previously adopted balance policy and this plan was set to go into effect in 2012, when the board planned to move to a neighborhood school model (Kahlenberg Public Schools, 2010).

However, elections in 2011 led to Democrats regaining control of the board and a renewed de-emphasis on a neighborhood school model. While the assignment plan at the elementary level continued to focus on proximity and neighborhood schools, at the same time, district leaders also expanded the number of magnet schools in the district (Kahlenberg Public Schools, 2023). In 2013, the board refocused on minimizing high concentrations of low-performing and low-income students but did not establish specific targets or goals as had been in place in the district in the past (Kahlenberg Public Schools, 2023). As mentioned previously, despite district leaders' efforts to prioritize integration, district schools began to resegregate significantly during the 1998-2017 time period and in 2019, the school board resolved to pursue integration. The board began discussions on creating an integration policy with specific targets or goals in 2019, but the pandemic in 2020 prompted the board to focus on pandemic response rather than the integration policy. Despite not having specific goals for the integration program in the district, district leaders continue to use magnet schools and the school assignment policy to socioeconomically balance schools as much as possible across the district. District leaders interviewed for this study said that continuing to generate community buy-in and support while managing the logistics of this process is a complex process. They also stated that while all of their schools are not integrated, the majority are, and they are proud of their ability to hold true to integrating schools in the district despite the changing political climate in the district over the years.

Promoting Will Among Stakeholders and Establishing Policy Coherence. As the district with the longest-running integration program of the districts studied, district leaders both cited the importance of frequent and ongoing discourse with families and community members to share the rationale for magnets and student assignment policy in Kahlenberg Public Schools.

Particularly with the growth in the district, both district leaders interviewed feel that this transparency has created an understanding and appreciation among new families for the district, particularly for why the policies exist and why these policies may lead to students being reassigned more frequently than in other school districts. This understanding and buy-in is critical to the continuation of the district's integration efforts from district leaders' perspectives, so much so that the magnet school office has a marketing specialist that works with families in the district to support school choice and therefore integration efforts.

Additionally, district leaders also acknowledge that the business community has been integral to the district's integration efforts since the creation of the district in 1976, noting that they believe the district's integration efforts would have failed were they attempting those efforts without the vocal support of the business community in the area. Given the somewhat conservative political climate of the state and the more liberal context of the local area, district leaders also acknowledge that continuing to stress the economic benefits of having students prepared with academic and social skills that support their future success is important for some constituents within the district who may push back against language around integration and equity.

As detailed above, shifting local political tides in the area have impacted Kahlenberg Public Schools over the last decade in ways different from other districts researched for this study. With the current school board supportive of the district's integration plan but not yet having established goals for the program, district leaders indicated they are currently working with the school board to define which current board policy takes priority in the district: proximity in student assignments or the creation of equitable learning environments through socioeconomic integration via magnet schools. One district leader interviewed said that having

an established board policy will be helpful to the district's integration program moving forward and thus the leader's emphasis on working with the current board to define the priorities of the policies.

While working to establish policy coherence, district leaders are simultaneously also trying to work more closely in coordination with the nine municipalities within their school district around residential housing and transportation. The municipalities have different policies around residential developments and the requirements of developers to build schools to serve those developments, as well as different transportation policies. Varying transportation policies across the municipalities means there is currently a lack of cross-sector policy coordination focused on creating a seamless public transportation infrastructure that serves the entire school district and all municipalities within it.

Managing Operations and Logistics. Since the inception of magnet schools in the district, previous and current district leaders have intentionally and strategically created magnet schools in more economically distressed areas of the district. Historically and currently, district leaders target the marketing of magnet schools to more affluent areas, typically nearer to the suburban edges of the district, and then provide transportation from these areas to the magnet schools, which are typically located more toward the city center. One district leader emphasized that magnet programs in the district have contributed to lifting up communities and schools in areas that were once considered distressed or marginalized.

While district leaders are intentional about where they place magnet schools, district leaders noted that given current resource allocations, they are currently unable to equitably provide the same level of transportation to all of their magnet programs and without door-to-door transportation, they are seeing an impact in enrollment at some of their magnet programs. To

address this challenge, one district leader mentioned that the district is considering enlisting the assistance of transportation consultants to identify how they can better use school district buses to equitably support student attendance at all district schools.

Transportation is critical in Kahlenberg Public Schools because of the integration program's unique design. District leaders do not use a lottery system but instead use a SES priority at magnet schools and the school assignment policy in coordination to reduce high concentrations of poverty in schools in the district. All students are assigned to zones based on their home address, and within each zone, they are assigned a base school. As one district leader explained, students from medium and high SES backgrounds receive priority at magnet schools located in areas with high concentrations of poverty, and when any student in the district leaves their base school for a magnet school, this opens up seats that can then be used to place students in that base school via the student assignment policy. Because of the district's growth since 2000, some students were reassigned to base schools every year, as mentioned previously. However, in interviews, both district leaders said they currently only revise the school assignment policy every two years, typically in conjunction with the opening of new schools in the district. Additionally, once students enter a magnet program, they have the option to remain in magnets aligned to that theme for the duration of the K-12 educational experience, a policy that both district leaders acknowledge also creates stability and continuity for families in the district.

Another state and local issue impacting the integration program in the district is that in 1996, the state passed a law allowing charter schools in the state. Any student in the state can enroll in a charter school in Kahlenberg Public Schools as students do not need to be residents of the school district to attend charter schools within the district. Unlike in Shawley Public Schools,

district leaders said that Kahlenberg Public Schools does their official student count once at the beginning of the school year and if a Kahlenberg Public Schools district student is enrolled on count day but subsequently returns to Kahlenberg Public Schools that school year, the charter school keeps the funding allocation for the student. Additionally, this district leader said charter schools in the district attempt to market themselves as attractive alternatives to traditional district schools. This leader reported that charter schools are often newer buildings, situated in affluent neighborhoods and therefore do not require long bus rides for students in those neighborhoods to attend. Additionally, some charter schools are K-12, therefore mitigating the need for students to switch schools multiple times over the course of their educational career in the district.

Building Systemic Capacity. Within Kahlenberg Public Schools, the publicly stated goal is for magnets to socioeconomically integrate schools and classrooms. Ideally, this means that there is not a school within a school model but rather a whole school magnet given that whole school magnets contribute to the diversity of the student body, integration, and academic achievement of students. The Kahlenberg Public Schools magnet school office therefore reportedly takes on two roles in the district, the first is to provide logistical and operational support for the magnet school program's role in integrating district schools, and the second is to provide instructional leadership to magnet schools, according to one district leader interviewed. In an effort to reduce disproportionality and close opportunity and performance gaps among student groups, district-level magnet school staff have led professional learning for school leaders and staff around school integration and its benefits, alongside professional learning aligned to the specific themes of the magnet schools in the district. One district leader also credits much of the success and longevity of the district's magnet school program to the understanding that senior district leaders have of magnet schools as a critical component to the

student assignment plan, while also understanding that one of the only ways for magnet schools to impact student assignment is to ensure there is high-quality teaching and learning occurring in the magnet schools.

Leadership Practices and Organizational Structures that May Shape the Future of the Integration Program. Both district leaders interviewed acknowledged that the current integration program is not perfect and that there are still schools within the district that are predominantly high SES and those that are predominantly low SES, but many more schools have a socioeconomic balance than they would if the district reverted to all neighborhood schools. Both district leaders also foresee changes to the integration program in the district, in particular ensuring that all programs are accessible to all families, which may mean changes to the way district leaders assign students based on priorities. One district leader hypothesized that this may mean the school board develops specific socioeconomic integration goals, prioritizing magnet selection and placement over the student assignment policy moving forward.

Orfield Public Schools

Orfield Public Schools is a school district in the Western US and is a district of just over 200 schools, serving approximately 90,000 students (Orfield Public Schools, 2024). As of 2023, approximately 60 percent of students were eligible for free and reduced meals, a proxy often used to indicate socioeconomic status (Orfield Public Schools, 2023). Orfield Public Schools is in a mid-large sized city that, according to district leaders, is home to several large universities and colleges as well as many major industries and federal agencies. Both district leaders interviewed have been in education for over fifteen years, with one leader having served in multiple districts before coming to Orfield Public Schools last year to join the district in their

current role. The second leader has been in the district for close to 10 years, and in their current role for five years.

State and Local Context. Orfield Public Schools, like Shawley Public Schools, was once under court order to desegregate its schools. Although school segregation was illegal in the state and thus there was no *de jure* segregation or segregation codified in law, there was *de facto* segregation. The case that led to the court order to desegregate schools in Orfield Public Schools was the first Supreme Court case that came from a large non-southern city (Johnson & Nazaryan, 2019). The resulting court order in this case lasted from 1973-1995 and when the order and accompanying bussing ended, the district saw increased segregation in schools across the district (Orfield Public Schools, 2018). During this same time, two state laws were passed that impacted the district's school integration program. First, in 1993, a state law allowing charter schools passed and then in 1994, an open enrollment law passed which allows non-district residents to enroll in district schools without having to pay tuition or a fee. In response to the charter school law, district leaders took on the role of authorizing and renewing all charter schools in the district, as well as providing charter schools with buildings in the district. However, district leaders acknowledged that during this growth phase there was no real strategy on where and when charters were opening across the district and whether a charter opening would support integration in the district.

From 2002 to 2012, as enrollment in the district grew, district leaders opened more than 60 new schools, including many charter schools, as well as the closed approximately 30 schools in the district. During this same period, in lieu of creating neighborhood catchment areas for some new schools that opened, district leaders also began to create enrollment zones in several areas in the city that were growing. Enrollment zones encompass multiple schools, and rather

than being guaranteed a seat at one specific school based on home address, families in enrollment zones are guaranteed a seat at one of the schools within the zone, but not one specific school.

With the growth in the number of schools in the district, families had to participate in multiple enrollment lotteries for different schools or groups of schools. To streamline the enrollment process for families and make it more equitable to access district schools, in 2012, district leaders introduced a unified lottery. This lottery now includes all district-managed traditional public schools, innovation and magnet schools, and charter schools. It is interesting to note that when the universal controlled-choice lottery started, one of the district leaders interviewed said that school leaders were able to identify the lottery priorities for their buildings and many of these priorities remain in place and unchanged today. Priorities such as sibling preference, child of staff, district resident, and non-district resident are typical priorities at most schools, but the district leader said that these may be prioritized in different orders at schools across the district, making the current lottery matching process unusually complex. In some cases, the district leader said that school leaders prioritized a specific zip code within the district or even non-district siblings over district students, and those priorities are still in place today, adding to the complexity of the current lottery system.

The period from 2015-2019 saw multiple changes in the school board and interviewees said this also impacted the district's integration program. In 2015, the school board was characterized by district leaders interviewed as reform-minded and the board was focused on the use of a performance framework centered on academic outcomes as the main driver of choice in the district. This framework drove school board decisions to close low-performing schools and open new charter, magnet, and innovation schools. School board elections in 2017 and 2019

shifted the makeup of the board and in 2019, the board began to move away from using school performance as the main driver of reforms and choice in the district. The most recent board election in 2023 saw the pendulum shift again, and according to district leaders interviewed, the impact of the new board and any policies they may enact that impact integration in the district is yet to be seen. However, current draft board policies explicitly state the board's commitment to maintaining high-quality socioeconomically integrated schools in the district. Despite a lack of specific integration policy or goals written into adopted board policy, this year, district leaders used mechanisms within the lottery process to attempt to socioeconomically balance schools across the district that were below the district free and reduced lunch average and had not previously opted into using this preference at their schools, which will be discussed further in the next section.

As detailed above, each district's school integration journey is unique in terms of how the integration program started and evolved over time. Whether the integration program started because of a court order or was voluntarily started by district leaders, district leaders across all four districts were challenged in various ways to promote will for the integration program among stakeholders, mediate various federal, state, and local policies, manage program operations and logistics, as well as provide instructional leadership for the integrated schools. The social, political, and historical contexts of each of the districts impacted the leadership practices they enacted and the organizational structures they put in place to support their integration programs, and this will be explored in further detail in the next section.

Establishing Policy Coherence and Promoting Will Among Stakeholders. As discussed in the previous section, the choice program in Orfield Public Schools has evolved over time to be a very complex program that currently has a larger program staff size than any of the

other districts studied. The large number of staff is needed both to help district families navigate the school lottery and enrollment process, as well as to support the complex lottery in the district.

Despite the complexity of the choice program in Orfield Public Schools, it is a popular program with district families. According to one district leader, nearly half of the students go to school outside their neighborhood or enrollment zone school, and that percentage has been stable since the late 1990s. Additionally, approximately 80% of students in sixth and ninth grades transitioning to middle and high school respectively, get their first choice school in the lottery according to that same district leader. District leaders in Orfield Public Schools spend a considerable amount of time and resources on outreach to families about the plethora of choices in the district, perhaps more so than any of the other districts in this study. One district leader indicated that the district's choice office has a staff of more than 25, many of whom are multilingual, as well as choice centers located in the different parts of the school district where families can have their questions answered and enroll in the district. Given the high participation rates in the choice lottery, both district leaders believe that the idea of choice is widely accepted in the district, as is the idea that different families want different and equitable educational experiences for their kids. District leaders also believe it is generally accepted by the community at large that integrated schools provide academic benefit to all, but acknowledge that there have not been explicit studies of the academic benefit to students who participate in the choice process in the district.

Managing Operations and Logistics. Both district leaders interviewed acknowledged that school integration in their district is a multi-layered, complex issue that has gotten more complex over time as charter schools, enrollment zones, magnet schools, and lottery priorities were layered into the choice process. To illustrate the complexity of the lottery system, one

district leader mentioned that some charter schools in the district have catchment zones and are open to enrollment by anyone in and out of the district while other charter schools had the ability to choose whether to be considered part of an enrollment zone and therefore be required to enroll kids within that zone. Both district leaders interviewed said that in the absence of a coherent, intentional school board policy around integration, their work at the district level can only move school integration forward marginally through school planning and levers within the choice lottery process. That being said, these leaders also acknowledge that while schools in the district are still segregated given the housing segregation in the district, they are less segregated than the neighborhoods in which they sit.

As an example of this, one district leader recalled that when a new school opened a few years ago, district leaders prioritized 65% of lottery seats for students who live in the school's neighborhood boundary and 35% of seats for students who live outside but adjacent to the boundary, in historically impoverished areas. As the number of in-boundary students enrolling in the school has grown, the in-boundary enrollment priority has therefore reduced the number of seats available for students who live in proximity to the school, therefore moving the school away from being more socioeconomically integrated, according to this district leader. Thus, while the intent to integrate the school along socioeconomic lines was established, the impact of growth inside the catchment zone for the school likely means that without a specific balance policy in the district, students who live in historically impoverished areas adjacent to the school's boundary may eventually find there are no available lottery seats for them.

As another example of district leaders using operational and logistical levers to move integration forward in the district in the absence of specific school board policy, prior to this year's choice lottery, schools had the option of adding a lottery priority for students who live in

census blocks that have high concentrations of poverty. In the 2024 school choice lottery, the district's superintendent added this priority for schools that had not yet opted in and had a lower free and reduced lunch rate than the district average. Additionally, since approximately 2017, district leaders have reserved 5% of lottery seats across all schools in the district for late-arriving students enrolling closer to the start of the school year, who, like in all districts studied, disproportionately come from low-income families. When evaluating charter school requests to use district building, district leaders with facilities oversight within the district also reportedly consider the potential for socioeconomic integration.

A third example of an integration lever within the choice program is that it operates year round, according to both district leaders interviewed. This means that if a student moves into the district mid-year, they do not automatically default to enrolling in their neighborhood school, as they would in most other districts. District leaders can backfill seats at any school that participates in the choice lottery at any time in the school year, another small but important tool district leaders noted they have in pushing socioeconomic integration in district schools forward.

With so many students participating in the choice program, ensuring students have a means to get to their schools becomes important. One district leader explained that in Orfield Public Schools, students who attend their boundary schools, whether neighborhood or enrollment zone, have transportation provided, and students who attend a school that is not their boundary or enrollment zone school are not provided transportation by the district. Additionally, this leader said that the district does not provide transportation to non-district residents who participate in the open enrollment program.

District leaders, in an attempt to support school integration efforts in the district, have partnered with other agencies in the city in two ways. First, all students in the district are

provided with free passes they can use on area transportation to help them get to school.

Additionally, district leaders have a strong working relationship with the city planning department, which means the school planning team sees housing proposals that come before the city planning department. One district leader interviewed said that this cross-sector coordination and partnership allows for greater accuracy of long-term school planning projections, which are created annually by district leaders and shared with city leaders.

Leadership Practices and Organizational Structures that May Shape the Future of the Integration Program. Both district leaders interviewed cited a number of factors they believe will likely influence the district's choice/integration program over the coming years, including declining enrollment in the district. District leaders cited gentrification of city neighborhoods that were once historically lower SES Black and Latino neighborhoods as one reason for declining enrollment, as families who can no longer afford to live in gentrifying neighborhoods are being pushed further out within the city and sometimes out of the city entirely. If enrollment declines continue, one district leader posited that schools will likely need to be consolidated or closed, given the expense that comes with operating under-enrolled schools. This is a particularly acute issue in the district given the unique funding model in the state, which, according to one interviewee, ranks near the bottom in the US in terms of per pupil funding allocations. Consolidations and closures could also prompt a school boundary review, which has not occurred in nearly 30 years according to district leaders. While consolidations, closures, and boundary reviews are never easy in any district, both district leaders indicated that such changes could potentially be used to further socioeconomic integration in the district.

State and local context play an integral part in how each district's integration program has evolved over time and is predicted by district leaders to continue to evolve. State and local

contexts also influence the leadership practices and organizational structures district leaders enact in their districts to sustain their integration programs. In the next section, I will examine the similarities and differences in these leadership practices and organizational structures across the four districts studied.

Similarities and Variations

The historical, social, and political factors that led to the initiation of school integration programs in the four districts studied are varied and these factors impact the leadership practices and organizational structures of the integration programs in each district to this day. In the following paragraphs, I will use the conceptual framework for this study to examine how district leaders across the districts attempt to promote stakeholder will for the integration programs in their districts, establish policy coherence, manage operations and logistics, and provide instructional leadership in support of their integration programs (RQ3).

Promoting Will Among Stakeholders

Given the variety of choice options each district uses to support school integration, generating will through continuous outreach to stakeholders, including families, school board members, community organizations, and the business community, is an area that all district leaders believe is important. Managing changes to their integration programs and building stakeholder understanding of the rationale for those changes over the history of their integration programs was a theme that surfaced in every interview with district leaders. This is an area where two of the districts studied have full-time integration program staff in place to market and communicate to stakeholders about their programs, while the two districts use established communication departments or teams within their central office for this purpose.

In all districts studied, district leaders interviewed displayed a deep knowledge of how the history, culture, and values of stakeholders in their local areas shaped their school district, as well as discussed the impact of residential segregation on school segregation and the resulting access, opportunity, and outcome gaps that segregation historically created among students in their districts. District leaders across all four districts also acknowledged that generating and sustaining community will for integration programs in their districts is an ongoing process that is impacted by school board elections, and when school board priorities shift as a result of elections, the impact of these shifting priorities on their districts integration programs can sometimes take years to undo.

District leaders interviewed also understand the importance of context in shaping messaging to stakeholders around school integration goals and strategies and while they do not vary in the importance they place on creating and maintaining integrated schools in their districts, their local political and social contexts do impact the amount of transparency with which district leaders do their work. For example, district leaders from Carter Public Schools and Orfield Public Schools spoke about how the superintendents of their districts can only push the school board so hard around creating and implementing integration policies and structures in the district if they want their contracts to be renewed by those same school boards. Because of this and their own understanding of the historical and current context of their districts, as well as their personal investment and belief in integrated schools, many of the district leaders interviewed also placed importance on their relationships with members of their local school boards and through their outreach and advocacy, ensuring that board members understand the importance of the integration program in the district.

It is interesting to note that seven of the eight leaders interviewed are former teachers and school administrators, with more than half of them having taught and/or been a school leader in the district in which they currently serve. Nearly all of the district leaders cited their experience as a teacher and school leader, and for some, also their experience as a parent in the district, as critical to the work they do in their current roles. This first-hand experience working in integrated schools and seeing the benefits of integration for students informs how they collaborate and engage with families, other community members, other school district leaders, school board members, and instructional staff in schools.

Policy Coherence

While district leaders in all four districts align their leadership practices and organizational structures to follow established federal, state, and local policies, there is only one district, Carter Public Schools, with an integration goal or target named in local school board policy. It is important to note here, as will be discussed in the following chapter, that while Carter Public Schools does have a balance goal, there is not an accountability structure in place if the district does not meet the balance goal. An example of an accountability structure would be that if all schools in the district do not meet the balance goal, the school board is then required to redraw school boundaries to bring schools closer in alignment with the goal. In contrast to Carter Public Schools, two districts, Shawley Public Schools and Kahlenberg Public Schools have had specific integration goals enumerated in school board policy in the past. While Kahlenberg Public Schools does have a board policy that discusses school integration through magnet schools, there are no specific balance goals enumerated in board policy and Shawley Public Schools does not currently have a specific integration policy or goals in their district. Orfield Public Schools has never had a specific board integration policy or goals and as a result, as in

Shawley Public Schools and Kahlenberg Public Schools, district leaders in Orfield Public Schools use school assignment/school lottery practices to attempt to create socioeconomic balance across district schools.

The level of cross-sector policy coordination between district leaders and their local counterparts in the housing and transportation sectors varies by district. In Kahlenberg Public Schools and Orfield Public Schools, district leaders collaborate with regional housing planning organizations as part of the school planning process so that district leaders are typically aware of where and when new residential housing stock is coming online and thus where and when new schools may need to be opened. In both Carter Public Schools and Orfield Public Schools, district leaders and area transportation leaders have worked together to ensure that district students are able to use public transportation for free to get to and from school, which supports integration efforts in the district.

Managing Operations and Logistics

Having a school board policy with specific integration balance goals seemingly plays a role in how each of the districts uses operations and logistics to support integration efforts in their districts. With a specific board integration policy and goal, Carter Public Schools has primarily focused on shifting school boundaries to create more integrated schools while also opening magnet schools. Like Carter Public Schools, Shawley Public Schools, Kahlenberg Public Schools, and Orfield Public Schools all also have hybrid programs and each of their program models uses some combination of magnet schools, district-controlled charter schools, open-enrollment schools, school assignment, or attendance zones (see Table 4). It is important to note that neither Carter Public Schools nor Kahlenberg Public Schools use a lottery system as part of their integration program while Shawley Public Schools and Orfield Public Schools have

some combination of controlled-choice lotteries, balanced lotteries, and lottery priorities (see Table 2).

Resource allocation is another component of managing operations and logistics related to integration programs. Two of the districts studied, Shawley Public Schools and Kahlenberg Public Schools, have applied for and received federal grants to expand magnet school programming and resources in their district that support school integration. While grant funding supports some aspects of magnet programs in two districts, in all four districts, student enrollment is correlated to state and local funding for schools, and school funding allocations have impacts on school facilities, school transportation, instructional programming, and staffing, both at the school and district level. While Shawley Public Schools has stable student enrollment, Orfield Public Schools has declining enrollment, and Carter Public Schools and Kahlenberg Public Schools have growing enrollments. How the shifting enrollment landscape in three of the districts will impact the future of their integration programs remains to be seen, but district leaders have noted that both enrollment decreases and increases will potentially provide them with opportunities to expand their integration programs as schools are consolidated or opened, respectively.

Transportation is another area directly impacted by school funding. In discussing school choice and integration, all district leaders interviewed discussed the critical importance of transportation in getting students to and from schools outside their neighborhoods, neighborhoods which are typically segregated to varying extents by socioeconomic status and race within and across each district studied. Each district is unique in how and to whom they provide transportation in their districts, in most cases providing transportation to

assigned/neighborhood as well as providing additional transportation options for magnet and/or most choice schools (see Table 2).

Building Systemic Capacity

There are varying levels of support district leaders interviewed provide to schools as they become or are integrated, thereby serving a variety of students with potentially vastly different backgrounds and needs. In Carter Public Schools, Shawley Public Schools, and Orfield Public Schools, district leaders who primarily support opportunity, access, and equity work are housed in separate departments from the district leaders who primarily lead school integration work. However, only in Shawley Public Schools, despite this separation, district leaders of school integration work do provide instructional leadership and support capacity building and policy development at the school level in an attempt to ensure there is no disproportionality and that the climate and culture within integrated schools in the district support equitable instruction and educational experiences for all students.

It is important to note that in the three districts that separate integration program staff from opportunity, access, and equity staff, the district leaders with primary responsibility for or oversight of integration policies and practices are housed within departments responsible for operations-oriented tasks such as school planning, facilities, and student enrollment/assignment. District leaders interviewed did note that embedding school integration leadership into the district organizational structure in this way does allow for a more coherent and systematic approach to ensuring school integration is considered as a primary factor in planning for the future of the district and how each of the districts approaches school integration moving forward.

Each district's integration program has evolved in varied ways since it first began and all district leaders indicated that changes to their integration programs are likely on the horizon,

although those changes may be for different reasons. In two school districts, school consolidations and closures due to underutilization of buildings are likely in the coming years. In another district, changing state law may impact choice lotteries in the district and in doing so, provide district leaders with the opportunity to create a unified lottery for all district-managed schools. Continued growth in another district may have an impact on the mechanisms district leaders use for school integration. In the three districts without specific school board policy focused on integration or integration goals, district leaders are hopeful that the changes within their district noted above may push their respective school boards to codify integration policy and goals, even with the impact doing so may potentially have on their tenure as school board members.

Summary

Analysis of interview data, school board and school district documents, and news articles yielded the results found in this chapter, with additional historical context being provided by research articles about the district. An overview of these findings is compiled in Table 2 and while these findings are specific to the four districts researched in this study, in the next chapter, themes from the findings and broader recommendations for practice, policy, and research will be provided. These findings and recommendations will be discussed using the conceptual framework for this study and will also be situated within the context of current research on school integration.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implication

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership practices and organizational structures district leaders across four varying school districts used to initiate, implement, and sustain integration programs in their district. The study focused on districts with integration programs that range from twelve to forty years old, and the goal of this cross-case study is to provide recommendations to DC Public Schools as the district attempts to further expand the school integration program in that district. I used semi-structured interviews with eight current district leaders from the four districts and conducted a document review of artifacts from those districts to cross-reference information provided by the district leaders interviewed. My study was structured around the following research questions:

1. What are key leadership practices and organizational structures urban district leaders have used to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their school districts?
2. How have state and local contexts shaped leadership practices and organizational structures urban district leaders have used to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their school districts?
3. In what ways do the patterns of leadership practices and organizational structures vary across districts with sustained integration programs?

In several ways, the findings of this study support and add to existing literature on socioeconomic integration programs in traditional public school districts. First, I discuss the impact in the section below, the impact of the sociopolitical context in which districts are located and how this context then impacts the ways in which district leaders have initiated, implemented, and sustained school integration programs. Next, I identify several sub-themes from my findings

discussed in Chapter Four and align them to the components within the conceptual framework, as well as with the relevant research that supports these themes and findings. After sharing these sub-themes, I discuss implications and recommendations for practice, education leadership programs, and further study. As a preview, a summary of these themes and recommendations can be found in Table 5.

Table 5.
Major Themes and Recommendations

Major Themes	Recommendations for Practice
Origin of integration program (voluntary vs. court ordered) seems to impact evolution of program over time	District leaders at all levels should be able to explain the why and purpose of the integration program to generate and promote will with a wide variety of stakeholders, including the school board, families of children in the district, and school staff
Promoting will for integration among school board is integral for sustaining integration in a district	District leaders should explain and promote the rationale for integration program and its associated structures, procedure, and processes, as well as the benefits to children of learning in integrated schools
Promoting will for integration among families is important to sustaining integration efforts in a district, as is marketing options and school choices that support integration	District leaders in charge of the integration program should have backgrounds as teachers and school leaders with experience teaching in and/or leading integrated schools
School board policy prioritizing integration can sustain integration efforts; policy with specific balance goals is even better	District leaders should work with stakeholders to create integration goals and accountability structures. Once goals are in place, district leaders should be transparent about progress toward the goals
Aligning school, housing, and transportation policy to support long-range school integration planning efforts is critical	District leaders should leverage school planning (when and where new schools open or are closed or consolidated) to support integration efforts in the district
School planning and choice lottery structures can support integration efforts in districts where integration policy does not exist	District leaders with oversight of integration efforts should be housed in same central office department as school planning leaders District leaders should leverage lottery logistics in the district to move integration forward and must ensure lottery process and priorities are clear to all stakeholders District leaders should reserve/hold lottery seats prioritized for lower-SES families year round
Federal grants can be used to initiate and expand integration efforts in absence of local funds	District leaders should apply for Fostering Diverse School Grants and/or Magnet School Assistance Program Grants
Ensuring students feel welcomed, supported, and have equitable and strong academic opportunities within integrated schools supports integration efforts	District leaders should provide training to staff of integrated schools to ensure excellent equitable educational experiences for all students

Interrelatedness of Essential Practices Within a System and Influence of Context

Rorrer et al. (2008) discuss that the four essential practices of district leaders in advancing equity are interrelated and interdependent and that systems-level change is complex and non-linear. This idea is supported by the findings of this study, given that while each district has been able to sustain their integration program for at least ten years, the leadership practices and organizational structures used by district leaders have all been connected to and dependent on another and enacted in response to the unique context of the district. Taken a step further, the results of this study indicate that there is no one single leadership practice or organizational structure that, if enacted in a specific way or at a specific time by district leaders in a variety of districts across the US, would ensure schools in those districts would be integrated.

As an illustrative example, imagine every school district across the country enacting the operations and logistics practice of creating a common enrollment lottery that could be used to attend any school within their district. For families to sign up for the lottery, district leaders must promote will for the lottery with families and will likely need to work with the district school board to create a lottery policy as well as priorities within the lottery that lead to integrating the schools in the district. The sociopolitical context of each district will impact the outreach to both the school board and families within the district, as well as the amount of time and resources that district leaders will need to spend working with the board to create policies that integrate district schools. The context of the district will likely also impact how district leaders build systemic capacity to ensure local school staff have the capacity to teach diverse students, as well as policies that support equitable educational experiences in every school for every student. Given the link between housing and school segregation discussed in earlier chapters, district leaders

also need to consider how students will get to their new schools outside of their neighborhoods, fund any related changes to bus routes, and ensure that all schools have enough resources and materials for every student.

In the example above, one district leadership decision to create a common lottery to integrate schools was reliant upon and relied upon each of the four essential practices of leaders in advancing equity, namely managing operations and logistics, promoting will among stakeholders, establishing policy coherence, and building systemic capacity. The example also illustrates the complex and non-linear nature of enacting leadership practices and organizational structures to advance equity through integration. It is with this lens of interrelated, interdependent, complex, and non-linear understanding that the themes and recommendations below are discussed.

Essential Practices of District Leaders in Advancing Equity Through School Integration

Theme One: Origin Impacts Evolution

One theme that has emerged from the findings of this study is that the history, and more specifically, the origin of the integration programs seems to have a systemic impact on both the evolution of the program over time and the integration programs in their current forms. This impact extends to the existence or lack thereof of policies to define programs, the design and structures of the program, and the intentionality or opportunity for district leaders charged with oversight of integration programs to provide instructional leadership to and in schools that are integrated.

In the two districts where district leaders voluntarily integrated their schools, Kahlenberg Public Schools and Carter Public Schools, there are specific school board policies that speak to the integration programs. Additionally, both districts at one time had specific balance goals for

their integration programs and one district continues to have such a goal. The policies and goals have helped shape and define changes to each district's integration program over time and while neither program has fully integrated schools in their districts, district leaders have been able to publicly discuss and prioritize equity and integration in ways that district leaders in the other two districts studied have not.

Both Shawley Public Schools and Orfield Public Schools' integration programs originated from court desegregation orders rather than voluntary decisions by district leaders to integrate schools in their districts. Whereas Shawley Public Schools is located in the former south where "Jim Crow" laws that enforced the segregation that led to the desegregation order was state-sponsored, Orfield Public Schools is located in the north, where segregation was de facto (Anstreicher et al., 2022). A deeper discussion of how the racial animus that prompted the desegregation orders in both districts translates into current racial and socioeconomic inequities in these districts and localities is beyond the scope of this Capstone, but these inequities continue to exist in both districts, according to district leaders interviewed for this study. Additionally, in both districts, there is currently no established integration policy adopted by the board, which has resulted in integration programs that lack a coherent vision and structure and are driven primarily by district leaders with purview over the operational and logistical functions related to integration programs in these districts.

Theme Two: Promoting Will is Paramount

The initial drafts of the conceptual framework for this study focused on promoting the will for integration programs specifically among families, as they are directly impacted by the structures and processes, for example, controlled-choice lotteries, that district leaders use as tools for integrating schools in their districts. This is perhaps because for most of my career, I have

worked in a district with mayoral control where there is no local school board, only a state school board with limited policy-making abilities. However, during the course of interviewing district leaders, the importance of the role and will of local school board members as district leaders in implementing and sustaining integration programs became apparent.

Linney & Seidman, in their 1978 report titled “Court-ordered Desegregation: Shuffling the Deck or Playing a Different Game” discuss the idea of first and second order change as it relates to school integration efforts. They describe first order change as ‘apparent’ change and second order change as ‘real’ change and argue that the kind of change undertaken can determine the outcomes of desegregation orders. Their argument applied to this study means that the type of change and change processes that district leaders and school board members engage in can determine the outcomes of their integration programs and efforts. Put another way, many education improvement ideas and innovations have not endured and this may possibly stem from the idea that the innovations did not attend to the ‘real’ change necessary for second order change to occur (Marzano et al., 1995). If district leaders, including school board members, do not address “the existing framework of perceptions and beliefs, or paradigm, as part of the change process” (Marzano et al., 1995, p. 162) it then follows that the changes they are attempting to implement will be apparent changes and not real or long-lasting changes.

Another possible explanation for the lack of coherence and cohesion around integration policies and programs in Shawley Public Schools and Orfield Public Schools is that there can sometimes be a collective impatience that leads district leaders to abandon initiatives that do not show immediate results for students. Particularly in a district like Orfield Public Schools, where reforms were focused on academic performance, this hypothesis could explain why previous school boards did not work to create an overarching policy and integration goal for the district. If

integration efforts did not lead to an immediate positive impact on student achievement scores as measured by statewide tests, perhaps the will to further support these efforts in an intentional way was not created. It should be noted here that while integration programs may not lead to immediate impacts on student scores on state accountability assessments, multiple researchers have shown that integrated schools can break cycles of intergenerational poverty in one generation and have lasting positive impacts for three generations (Johnson & Nazaryan, 2019).

A third and final hypothesis for the current state of the integration programs in Shawley Public Schools and Orfield Public Schools could also potentially be traced to the concept of education as a public or private good, as posed by Labaree (2010). An exploration of the philosophical beliefs of district leaders might ascertain whether or not they believe education is a public good with the goal of democratic equality versus a private good to promote an individual's social mobility (Carter, 2018; Labaree, 2010). Based on my interviews with these leaders, I would argue that they would believe both to be true: that education can provide democratic equality and increase social mobility. However, if those elected to the school board to make the policies that support school integration do not share the same beliefs, district leaders are left to creatively use the mechanisms available to them through school planning and choice initiatives to attempt to integrate schools.

Mucerino (2023) and Bridges et al. (2019) argue that district leaders, specifically superintendents, do have a responsibility to influence effective governance by school boards. As Mucerino (2023) wrote,

There are no school board policies, education code statutes or Constitutional assurances that protect kids from the forces of hateful rhetoric, exclusion and societal mistreatment at the hands of a few. Superintendents, distinguished by place, are finding we are caught

between contradictory expectations - between the formal conception of the duty-bound superintendent stressing values that prioritize students' well-being and promote their moral and social agency, and the post-truth America concept of the superintendent as lengthened shadows of their board majorities. (p.33)

This connects with Rorrer et al. (2008), who argue that in the case of district leaders, “their role in improving achievement and advancing equity, in this instance, is connected to their collective identity and their ability to create change by altering institutional scripts that tacitly and explicitly govern behavior of organizational members” (p.332).

How district leaders alter institutional scripts within their districts and among their peers on the school board falls under the category of promoting will and has three major components: centering district history, culture, and values; conducting outreach to families and community members; and managing change (Diem et al., 2014; Rorrer et al., 2008; Siegel-Hawley, 2016; Vang, 2012; Williams, 2012). While district leaders interviewed for this study do take on all three components within their roles in their districts, it is not clear to what extent elected school board members engage in these three areas, particularly learning the history of their localities and districts that necessitated the creation of integration programs in their districts, and do so alongside leaders who serve in district leadership roles.

Vang (2012) notes the pivotal role parents have in driving equity initiatives in school districts, particularly given their dual role as parents of children attending district schools and as voters electing school boards who create policies district leaders are required to enact. In districts like Shawley Public Schools and Orfield Public Schools, where district leaders are committed to school integration but lack coherent school board policies to support integration programs, it may be advantageous for district leaders to continue to invest in public relations and marketing

campaigns for families to generate additional support for integration in their districts and use families' power as voters to make integration a board priority. If school board members with political and social values that do not align with their constituents continue to be elected, voters and district leaders might examine if school board elections are occurring on-cycle, and in conjunction with presidential races, or off-cycle. Hartney & Hayes (2021) found that "board members are more likely to hold political preferences that are aligned with their constituents when boards are elected in on-versus off-cycle races" (p. 335).

District leaders interviewed also noted that the dual role of families is also impacted by many parents holding competing viewpoints, wanting their children to attend schools close to home while valuing a diverse school, and understanding that their neighborhood schools are only as integrated as their neighborhoods. How district leaders support families in navigating these competing viewpoints appears to have impacted the integration programs in the districts studied in the sense that in districts with full-time staff members devoted to parent outreach and support, parent buy-in and support of the integration program is high and there is less outcry about, for example, potentially long bus rides attending integrated schools of choice. Diem et al. (2014), in their study of an integration program in one district that evolved and changed over time noted "Although there were opponents to the diversity policy early on, people were more likely to buy into the system because they were kept in the loop about the issues the district was facing." (p. 376). One district leader also mentioned that as staff perceptions about equity, diversity, and integration evolve based on the training they receive, these staff members have a dual role as community members who can also help influence others and embrace the changes that strengthen school integration in the district.

Theme Three: Integration Policy and Goals Matter

One of the four districts studied, Carter Public Schools, has established board policy and goals to support integration efforts in the district. A second district, Kahlenberg Public Schools, had specific numerical goals in previous years, but there are none currently in place and currently the board has two competing policies in place that speak to integration. The first is a policy about magnet schools as a vehicle for socioeconomic integration and the second is a school assignment policy to integrate schools. One leader interviewed from Kahlenberg Public Schools said that having the policies in place is helpful, and now the advocacy work this leader is engaging with the board is focused on determining which policy takes priority or preference when they come into conflict. As mentioned above, neither Shawley Public Schools nor Orfield Public Schools have board policy around their integration program and this may be in part due to historical reasons, current political dynamics in the locality in which the district is situated, or some other combination of factors. A district leader from Orfield Public Schools indicated that having specific policy around school integration would “provide cover for things that are more risqué and less technocratic,” acknowledging that the integration levers district leaders have available to them in the district are technocratic and marginal.

In all districts studied, district leaders mediated federal policy and programs, for example the MSAP grant guidelines, as well as state and local policies, procedures, and systems to further the integration programs in their districts. Vang (2012) and Siegel-Hawley (2016) suggest that creating goals and accountability structures is an essential practice for district leaders to advance equity in their districts and while only one district has specific balance goals, none of the districts have accountability structures for their integration programs. Accountability structures in this instance might mean that when districts have specific balance goals and do not meet them, the

district then takes decisive action to meet those balance goals by, for example, redrawing school boundaries or prioritizing students in the lottery who come from a low SES background. The first example of redrawing school boundaries would be a school board action, while the second likely falls on district leaders to do within their lottery system processes and procedures with the school board holding the superintendent and these district leaders accountable for enacting this change (Villegas, 2003).

Theme Four: Aligning Local Policy Supports Integration

Another aspect of establishing policy coherence focuses on aligning cross-sector policies, specifically housing, transportation, and education policies. Much has been written about the impacts of government-sponsored and sanctioned red-lining in urban areas, and the impact of this discriminatory government housing policy has ramifications today in terms of the segregation of residential housing across the US. Two of the districts studied do have working relationships with their peers in local government housing agencies and use information shared by their housing counterparts to support short and long-range school planning efforts in the district. This type of relationship is a start for aligning housing and education policies and local officials supportive of school integration might also consider supporting inclusionary zoning practices in residential areas to further the agenda of school integration (Siegel-Hawley, 2020).

Inclusionary zoning practices and integrated housing mean that all students might be able to attend integrated neighborhood schools in the future, but until that becomes a reality, district leaders are faced with the hurdle of funding transportation and coordinating moving students throughout their districts each day so that these students can attend integrated schools. In other words, the lack of alignment between housing and education policy means that district leaders are forced to create and pay for reactive transportation policies to support integration within their

districts (Schwartz, 2010; Siegel-Hawley, 2020). In two of the districts, district leaders have partnered with area transportation agencies to ensure that students ride public transportation for free, and this has offset some of the expense of running district transportation programs to support integration programs.

Theme Five: Leverage School Planning and Choice Lottery Structures

Villegas (2003) argues that a school board is the leader of a school district and should focus on determining policies for the district while the superintendent's role is to oversee the implementation of these policies. In the absence of specific school integration policy goals in the Shawley Public Schools, Kahlenberg Public Schools, and Orfield Public Schools, managing operations and logistics around school choice is the primary tool district leaders have used to sustain integration programs in these districts, whether this be through school planning or lottery mechanisms, structures, and processes.

School planning is used as a lever by three of the districts, Shawley Public Schools, Kahlenberg Public Schools, and Orfield Public Schools, to further integration efforts in those districts. As new schools are opened, district leaders in charge of school planning determine where to locate these schools and, in some districts, determine the type of programming, for example magnet programming, to place in the schools to attract diverse families to enroll their children. In two of the districts, Carter Public Schools and Orfield Public Schools, district leaders interviewed predicted that there would likely be school closures and consolidations in the coming years in their districts and said they saw consolidating campuses as an opportunity to potentially further integration efforts in their districts.

Two districts, Shawley Public Schools and Orfield Public Schools, have school choice lotteries in their districts and use their lottery structures as a tool to support school integration in

the absence of school board policy focused on integration. In Orfield Public Schools, district leaders noted that this year, the superintendent expanded the lottery priority for students from a low SES background in the district-wide lottery, demonstrating a district commitment to integration that the school board has not yet codified into policy. The lottery structures, participants, and priorities vary between Shawley Public Schools and Orfield Public Schools and given this, it is difficult to draw comparisons between them. However, district leaders in both districts acknowledge that while their lottery structures and processes do support school integration in their districts, the lotteries are not sufficient to ensure that every district school is integrated. Leaders in Orfield Public Schools also noted that having a unified lottery with clear structures and timelines that the overwhelming majority of district schools participate in has increased participation in the lottery process, which likely impacts school integration in a positive way.

Theme Six: Districts Must Allocate Funds to Support Integration

Resource allocation is a leadership practice that district leaders use to support integration programs in their districts. Diverse program structures in each district have evolved over time driven in part by state and local contexts and in part by funding resources, facilities, and transportation. In Carter Public Schools, which does have an integration policy and goal, resource allocation is one way for district leaders to ensure school funding is equitable and meets students' needs. This is especially important given that all schools do not yet meet the balance goal set out by the school board, which gives district leaders the opportunity to provide compensatory spending to attempt to offset the negative effects of high-poverty schools (Houck, 2011). In Shawley Public Schools and Kahlenberg Public Schools, federal grant monies support the continued growth of magnet schools in those districts and magnet schools are one of the

primary levers for integration in both districts. Both districts have used these federal funds to open magnet schools in the central city areas of their districts and draw students from all over their district to the city core, creating integrated magnet schools and in some cases in Kahlenberg Public Schools, revitalizing neighborhoods in the city core in the process. The importance of this impact in building will for sustaining the integration program in Kahlenberg Public Schools was not mentioned by their district leaders but might be an area for future consideration by other district leaders.

As mentioned previously, transportation and its associated costs are key components of the integration programs in all districts studied. Each district's leaders have developed unique transportation routes and schedules that are able to support integration in the district. In one district, this means school buses run three routes, first for elementary students, then secondary students, and then magnet school students. In the three geographically larger districts, district leaders have created circulator or shuttle buses in addition to regular bus routes and these shuttle buses move students around the district, providing students a second option for getting to and from schools of choice in their districts. Siegel-Hawley noted that "Without transportation to sever ties between school and residential segregation, schools will simply reproduce neighborhood demographics" (p. 175), and given the priority that all district leaders placed on transportation, it is clear they understand the importance of transportation to support integration in their districts.

Theme Seven: Within School Integration is Crucial for Sustaining Integration Programs

Carter (2018) argues that "a resource-rich academic environment, though necessary, is not sufficient to enhance the educational well-being of all groups of students. We have to address the social and cultural dimensions of schooling, too" (p. 9). In alignment with this, building

systemic capacity considers two leadership practices: building capacity to teach diverse groups of students and establishing supportive school policies.

During their interviews, Carter Public Schools and Kahlenberg Public Schools leaders indicated that getting students integrated into a school is only one step and once students are in integrated schools, one of their responsibilities as district leaders is to ensure that students both feel welcomed and have strong educational opportunities. In these districts, leaders work together across departments to provide instructional leadership to building leaders and staff. In Carter Public Schools, district leaders have a multi-year plan in place to build educators capacity to teach and lead students who may not come from the same socioeconomic and racial backgrounds as them. In Kahlenberg Public Schools, this means ensuring that the magnet schools provide exceptional academic opportunities for students.

In interviews with leaders from Orfield Public Schools and Shawley Public Schools, it was clear that the district leaders are committed to equity for students and particularly students from historically marginalized or disenfranchised communities. That being said, in both districts, there seems to be a lack of coordination with equity teams/departments in the central office to ensure that the district is building systemic capacity resources at the most diverse/integrated schools in the district. This is not to say that these districts do not undertake efforts to build educators capacity to teach diverse students, and it could simply be because of the division of roles and responsibilities within the central offices of each district.

The leadership practices and organizational structures that each district has undertaken in support of its integration program vary widely, likely due to the historical, social, and political context within each district (see Table 4). Despite this, all of the district leaders interviewed spoke to the four components identified within the conceptual framework for this study, namely

promoting will among stakeholders, establishing policy coherence, managing operations and logistics, and building systemic capacity. These themes and the inherent leadership practices and organizational structures within each of them will be discussed further in the next section.

Revision of Conceptual Framework

Based on my findings, I offer a revised conceptual framework below (see Figure 2) as a starting point for future research and practice in this area. In the initial conceptual framework for this study, the essential practice of promoting will among stakeholders was the final of the four practices listed. Given the importance of the practice of promoting will among stakeholders in the findings and recommendations for this study, this section has been moved from the bottom of the conceptual framework to the top. While the original conceptual framework was not organized from most important to least important leadership practice or organizational structure, I moved promoting will to the top given that within each of the four districts support of the program by local school boards, business leaders, and families significantly impacted the other three leadership practices and organizational structures found within the conceptual framework, again illustrating the interdependence and interrelatedness of each of the practices.

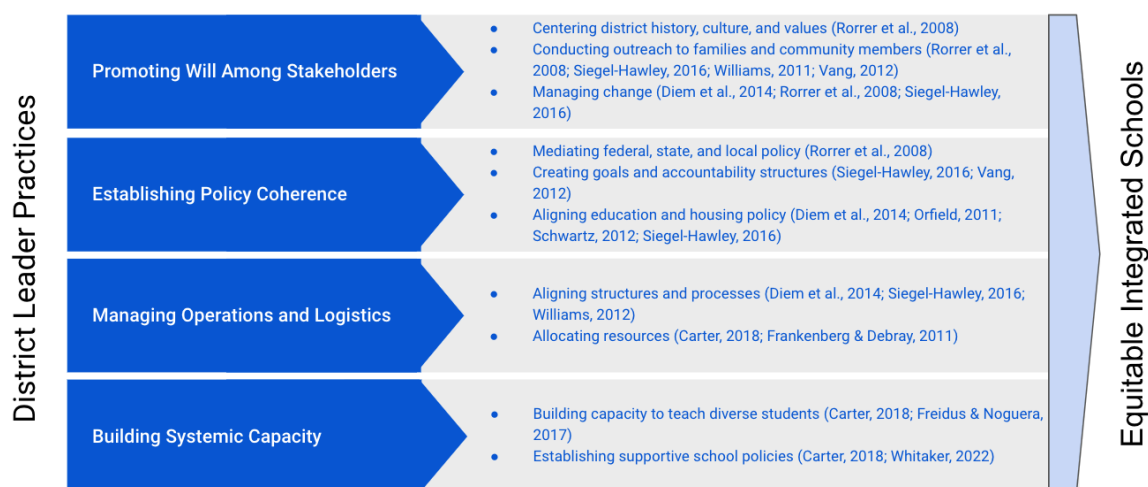
Additionally, in the original conceptual framework, providing instructional leadership was identified as one of the four essential practices of district leaders in advancing equity through integration. Within that practice, managing talent, building capacity to teach diverse students, and establishing supportive school policies were named as focus areas. During interviews, none of the district leaders discussed managing talent as an area of focus for their work. Ensuring integrated schools are staffed by qualified teachers and teacher turnover within these schools is mitigated was not part of the responsibilities of any of the district leaders

responsible for the integration programs in their district and thus, my conceptual framework has been revised to remove this leadership practice.

Finally, I updated the name of the essential practice from providing instructional leadership to building systemic capacity. While providing instructional leadership can encompass building staff capacity and establishing supportive policies in some school districts, providing instructional leadership often refers to improving the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom and across a school to improve student outcomes. Building systemic capacity, however, is a more accurate title for the leadership practice that district leaders undertake to build staff capacity across the district to support diverse students and ensure that district and local school policies do not lead to the underrepresentation or overrepresentation of students in, for example, advanced courses and discipline and special education referrals.

Figure 2.
Revised Conceptual Framework

Essential Practices of District Leaders in Advancing Equity Through School Integration



Recommendations for Practice

Schools in the US reached their height of integration in 1988 and since then, segregation by socioeconomic status has increased by 47% in US schools (Johnson & Nazaryan, 2019; Stanford University, 2022). The results of this study are generated from four districts with different types of integration programs that have been in place for various lengths of time, and thus the recommendations in the following paragraphs may not be generalizable to all districts. Despite this, for district leaders in traditional urban public school districts that are at any stage of developing, implementing, or sustaining integration programs in their districts, there are several recommendations generated by this study. Specific recommendations for DC Public Schools follow the general recommendations for any district attempting to integrate schools in their district.

Leadership Practices

It is critical to promote will for the integration program among all stakeholders in the district. Given the results of this study, promoting will seems particularly important if there is a history of segregation in the district that resulted in a court order to desegregate schools. When district leaders are able to contrast the history of marginalization of students within the district to the stated culture and values of the district and the goals of the integration program, as was done in Carter Public Schools and Kahlenberg Public Schools, this resulted in school boards creating policies and sometimes goals that drove the implementation and ability to sustain the integration program in their districts. District leaders at all levels should be able to explain the why and purpose of the integration program to generate and promote will with a wide variety of stakeholders, including the school board, families of children in the district, and school staff.

As Vang (2012) and Siegel Hawley (2016) remind us, district leaders should be transparent about the balance goals of the program and the progress the district is making toward those goals, as well as ensure there are accountability measures in place if the district is not making progress toward the balance goals. “Without accountability, whether it comes from the local, state, or federal level, it’s too easy for competing forces to undermine stated diversity goals” (Siegel-Hawley, 2016, p. 169). Siegel-Hawley named such competing forces as funding pressures, unequal and/or misinformation about the integration program, and public opinion about schools within the district as some of the competing forces districts may face, and these competing forces have all played a role in shaping the integration programs in each of the four districts studied.

The importance of generating will for the integration program among families cannot be overstated. Families are the core consumers of integration programs and districts must be willing to spend time and energy explaining and promoting the integration program and its associated structures, procedures, and processes, whether those be changing school boundaries, a controlled-choice lottery, or school assignments. When families understand the benefits to their children of learning in integrated schools, district leaders ensure high-quality instruction for all students in those integrated schools, while also promoting parent involvement, this helps build support for sustaining and possibly expanding the integration program where applicable. District leaders interviewed spoke about the power of public opinion about what constitutes a ‘good’ school and district leaders must fight the idea that “children can only realize their potential in educational environments that lack ‘struggling’ students” (Johnson & Nazaryan, 2019, p. 52).

Another leadership practice for district leaders to consider is ensuring that the district leaders in charge of the integration program have backgrounds as teachers and school leaders

with experience teaching in and/or leading integrated schools. Multiple district leaders interviewed for this study said that their backgrounds as teachers and leaders of integrated schools have helped them tremendously in their role as leaders of their district's integration program. Interviewees said their professional backgrounds and experiences give them credibility when talking with school leaders, staff, and families, in large part because they have a vision for and understanding of the power of integrated schools in terms of student academics and outcomes. If district leaders with oversight of integration programs also have personal experience as parents of students who went to integrated schools, this also helps them relate to and navigate conversations with families who may be unsure of sending their children to integrated schools in the district. Having district leaders with experience teaching in or leading integrated schools lead integration efforts in their districts is a powerful tool all districts in this study used to sustain momentum for integration efforts.

A final leadership practice for district leaders is to reach out to colleagues in other districts who have integration programs with features that might be replicated in their own districts. District leaders interviewed for this study were eager to share their insights about how and why their integration programs have been sustained for at least ten years. These same leaders were also happy to provide recommendations for other district leaders. As an example, when thinking about using magnet schools as a vehicle for integration one leader from Kahlenberg Public Schools provided the following recommendations: start small with only a few programs, use magnet grant funding where available, and build on successes over time as an impetus for expanding integrated schools in the district. A district leader from Orfield Public Schools, which uses the lottery as its primary vehicle for integration, recommended that other districts focused on creating integrated schools have appealing schools in every neighborhood, be intentional with

how school boundaries are drawn, ensure facilities are updated, and that schools have a baseline enrollment number that supports a full slate of academic and socioemotional programming.

Insights from district leaders who have been engaged in the work of school integration can offer important points of view that inform or influence how other districts move forward with this work.

Organizational Structures

Based on the results of this study, there are also several recommendations for organizational structures that district leaders interested in sustaining or expanding integration programs in their districts may want to put in place to support these efforts. First, in lieu of specific board policies and goals around integration in the district, district leaders might consider how to leverage their control over operations and logistics in the district to move integration forward. For example, as was discussed by leaders in all districts in this study, leveraging where and when new schools open, are closed, or are consolidated can support integration efforts in the district. Additionally, school funding, including grants for magnet programs, can be used to support not only the creation of integrated schools, but also ensure that these schools have programming that ensures high demand for these schools among families.

In districts that use or are considering using a lottery system to support integration in their districts, district leaders must ensure lottery systems are clear to all stakeholders, particularly school leaders and staff who are often on the front lines explaining them to families, as well as to families. Outreach efforts about the lottery must be ongoing and these outreach efforts must be in the home languages of families and targeted to lower SES communities, which, as noted by multiple district leaders interviewed, tend to enroll closer to the start of the school year and often do not take part in the earlier lottery rounds. District leaders who want to

make more progressive integration efforts might also consider creating a controlled-choice lottery for all schools in the district, rather than a targeted few, ensuring that all schools use the same ranking/priority categories, and that SES status is one of the top priorities in the lottery.

A characteristic of central offices in districts across the country is that departments and offices often operate in silos and there is sometimes a lack of coordination and communication across the varying departments, particularly in large school districts. Thus, in terms of organizational structures within the central office, ensuring that district leaders in charge of a district's integration efforts are part of the same office as district leaders in charge of school planning means there is ongoing discussion about how to coordinate and align the responsibilities of both teams with the ultimate goal of integrating schools in the district.

Recommendations for DC Public Schools

By applying the lessons learned from the district leaders that were part of this study, DCPS leaders have the ability to expand the Equitable Access Program to all schools in DCPS and create true socioeconomic integration in district schools. Mayoral control of the schools in DC eliminates many of the struggles found in the districts studied around promoting will for the integration program with the local school board, given that there is not a DCPS school board. The challenge, then, for promoting will is getting buy-in and support for the program from DCPS families.

When the program was first piloted at one school, district leaders found that families for whom the program was designed, were either not aware of the program or could not take advantage of the lottery priority preference given that they tended to enroll closer to the start of the school year, therefore missing the May 1 deadline to accept an Equitable Access Program seat at the pilot school (personal communication, June 2, 2020). For the upcoming 2024-2025

Equitable Access Program lottery, at-risk lottery seats were only matched in the first round of the lottery and if no students were matched in the first round, the seats were opened up to students who do not qualify as at-risk (personal communication, May 7, 2024). Given this, a marketing campaign in the home languages of all families eligible for Equitable Access seats would be beneficial to raise awareness about the program. To be eligible for an Equitable Access seat a student must meet one of the at-risk criteria in DC, that is be homeless, in foster care, and/or their family must be receiving SNAP or TANF benefits. Thus, district leaders may want to partner with other district agencies that oversee supports for students and families who are at-risk as this would likely increase families' awareness of the integration program.

The Equitable Access Program is in place at many schools in gentrifying neighborhoods in DC and/or in schools whose demographics are gentrifying, even if the surrounding neighborhood is not. For families of privilege who may not understand the need for the program and/or who claim to value neighborhood schools so long as those schools primarily serve children like their own, it may also be helpful to build support for the program by providing a detailed rationale for the program, including the history of housing segregation and marginalization of at-risk students in DC. Both marketing campaigns described above should also include any goals and accountability measures DCPS puts in place for the Equitable Access Program. While these goals and accountability measures currently do not exist, ensuring they are developed and shared broadly is another recommendation.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for district leaders in DCPS around establishing integration goals for the Equitable Access Program is that with 75% of DCPS students qualifying for free and reduced meals, establishing schools across the district that are balanced based on this metric will be difficult (Coffin & Mason, 2024). Mantil et al. (2012) found that if district leaders have a

goal of eliminating all high-poverty schools in their districts, one intradistrict policy or program, such as a controlled-choice program or a magnet program, cannot be the only method of integrating schools if more than 50% of students in the district come from a low SES background. They recommend that district leaders focus on reducing the number and concentration of high-poverty schools in the district or attempt to create hybrid programs to serve students from a greater range of socioeconomic backgrounds. With 47% of students in DCPS designated at-risk, district leaders could establish an at-risk balance goal across all DCPS schools and use the Equitable Access Program's PK lottery to meet this goal (Coffin & Mason, 2024). The balance goal would mean that 47% of all PK lottery seats at every DC school participating in the Equitable Access Program would be reserved for students designated at-risk. In the 2022-2023 school year, DCPS schools participating in the Equitable Access Program reserved 11%-21% of their PK seats for students designated as at-risk. Dramatically increasing the percentage of PK seats for students designated as at-risk requires courageous leadership from the mayor and DCPS leaders, as well as buy-in from families across DCPS, highlighting the importance of the marketing campaign mentioned previously.

With the balance goal established and the marketing campaign promoting will for the integration program, the next area of focus is managing the operations and logistics of the program. One recommendation coming from this study is to ensure that there is a lottery process used to support integration programs, with a controlled-choice lottery being the type of lottery that has led to integration programs being sustained in other districts. DCPS leaders and the MySchoolDC Lottery team have established a clear lottery process for DCPS schools, including for schools that are part of the Equitable Access Program, and this is a foundational step in implementing and sustaining the Equitable Access Program in every school in DCPS.

However, as discussed above, DCPS does not hold Equitable Access Program seats open after the first round of the lottery, meaning that these lottery seats designated for at-risk students might be matched in the second round of the lottery to students who are not at-risk. For the Equitable Access Program to meet its goal of providing access to PK for students who are furthest from opportunity, a strong recommendation is for DCPS to hold the Equitable Access seats open until they are filled at each school. As leaders in Orfield Public Schools mentioned, families with at-risk students move into and enroll in district schools throughout the school year, and in their district, holding seats open throughout the year means that at-risk students have seats in their designated neighborhood school or within their enrollment zone regardless of when they move into the district. Implementing a similar structure in DCPS would ensure that students furthest from opportunity do not miss the opportunity to attend PK because their family moved into the city after May 1 of the year their child was eligible to attend PK or because their family registered them for PK in August rather than applying for the lottery in January.

There is precedent for holding PK seats in DCPS as each school is currently required to hold PK seats for students receiving special education services through the DCPS Early Stages program. These PK Early Stages seats are not released until well after the school year starts, and a similar process could be used to hold Equitable Access PK seats open until they are filled. Leaders in Orfield Public Schools noted that the lottery-based mechanisms they currently use to support socioeconomic integration in their district are technical and marginal and DCPS leaders reserving a low percentage of seats for students designated at-risk and only in the first round of the lottery is similarly a technical and marginal solution to addressing socioeconomic segregation in DCPS.

To sustain and expand the Equitable Access Program over time, DPCS leaders might also consider how other integration options can create further socioeconomic integration in DCPS schools. Drawing on program features from districts in this study as well as other research, DCPS leaders could examine the impact of redrawing school boundaries, creating attendance zones for clusters of schools, creating school assignment policies, and creating citywide magnet schools to further expand integration efforts in DCPS.

Another recommendation coming from this study for DCPS district leaders is to ensure that the Equitable Access Program is led by the school planning team. Currently, the Equitable Access Program is spearheaded by the early childhood department within DCPS, ostensibly because the program is specifically designed for PK students. The early childhood department works in coordination with the school planning team, given their knowledge of school enrollment trends and facilities planning. Housing the Equitable Access Program solely with the school planning department means their knowledge can be capitalized upon to expand the program as new facilities open or enrollment declines at particular schools mean additional at-risk seats can be offered in the PK lottery.

Additionally, it is recommended that district leaders in charge of the Equitable Access Program have backgrounds as teachers and school leaders with experience teaching in and/or leading integrated schools. This gives them credibility when talking with school leaders, staff, and families, in large part because they have a vision for and understanding of the power of integrated schools in terms of student academic and social outcomes. If district leaders with oversight of integration programs also have personal experience as parents of students who went to integrated schools, this also helps them relate to and navigate conversations with families who may be unsure of sending their children to integrated schools in the district.

To bolster funding for schools that are part of the Equitable Access Program and support these schools in meeting the needs of their students, DCPS leaders might also consider applying for federal or other grants to support the Equitable Access Program. The Fostering Diverse Schools Demonstration Grant is one such grant that DCPS could apply for and if awarded, could use the funds to expand the program to other schools in DCPS or all schools in DCPS. Additionally, federal funds could be used to support expanded transportation options for families who qualify for the Equitable Access Program. Currently, DCPS only provides transportation to students with full-time Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) who are in self-contained special education programs. While PK students in DCPS are eligible to use regional transportation for free, their caregivers are not. This, combined with the socioeconomic housing segregation in DC, means that funding transportation for students who are designated as at-risk and enroll in schools outside their neighborhood is something DCPS leaders are strongly encouraged to consider.

Given that DCPS leaders already provide instructional leadership that supports staff serving in integrated schools, a final recommendation for DCPS leaders coming from this study is to connect with other district leaders and organizations leading integration work around the country. In addition to learning from and with colleagues with sustained integration programs in other districts across the US, district leaders in DCPS might consider, for example, applying for the MIT Blueprint Lab fellowship focused on school access and quality and/or partnering with The Century Foundation, The National Coalition on School Diversity, Brown's Promise, and the researchers with the American Institute for Research's Equity Initiative, all organizations headquartered in DC.

DCPS leaders have a unique opportunity to move forward by expanding the Equitable Access Program to all schools in the district over the coming years and providing access to PK to

students who are the youngest and furthest from opportunity in the district. Expanding and sustaining the Equitable Access Program is possible, so long as the mayor of DC and DCPS leaders truly believe in and support educational equity for all DCPS students.

Recommendations for Education Leadership Programs

Though this study did not delve into the education leadership training and preparedness of the district leaders interviewed, the findings of this study do lend themselves to recommendations for those who are responsible for preparing future district leaders. While many education leadership programs focus on preparing instructional leaders of campuses and districts, one recommendation from this study is to also ensure that leaders receive training and mentorship in generating and promoting will for change, establishing policy coherence, managing operations and logistics, and instructional leadership.

As Mucerino also wrote “Place shapes leaders, but leaders can shape place too” (Mucerino, 2023, p. 35). Understanding how to build relationships with all stakeholders is important, and as this study demonstrated, generating will for an initiative among school board members charged with creating district policy, is crucial. Building relationships in this case means district leaders working in collaboration with the school board and, when and where possible, setting the vision for the district and supporting the board through the change process, particularly the more difficult work around second order change.

Mucerino (2023) also wrote about the importance of superintendents knowing the full history of the districts that they are chosen to lead, as well as the 360-degree story of the community in which the district is situated. Education leadership programs can play a role in preparing superintendents and other district leaders for this type of study by requiring students to incorporate a social, political, historical, and cultural ethnography of a district into their

coursework. Having a deep understanding of these important aspects of school districts in which district leaders work provides context for district leaders that can impact the way they approach and manage change in the district. The context of the district drives the values of the district and the values in conjunction with data can provide a strong rationale for district leaders to share with stakeholders at all stages of the change management process.

Establishing policy coherence and mediating federal, state, and local policies is also an important leadership practice for education leadership programs to ensure future district leaders receive training. Training in how to advocate for programs, funding, policy creation, or change would serve district leaders well, as would an understanding of how to use policy at the federal level to influence local policy, for example ensuring MSAP grant funding guidelines are followed, thereby creating a renewed focus on integration in Shawley Public Schools that might not otherwise exist.

Education leadership programs might also want to support district leaders in understanding how to leverage operations and logistics to support initiatives in their districts, using the example of school planning decisions to drive increased school integration, as in Orfield Public Schools. Resource allocation is another component of operations and logistics that education leadership programs may want to explore with district leaders including ensuring equitable funding aligned to student needs, as well as exposure to grant writing processes that could generate additional funding for the districts they lead.

Recommendations for Further Research

This comparative case study of four districts is by no means an exhaustive examination of the leadership practices that all district leaders across the US use to develop, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their districts. This study also did not examine the impact

of the school integration programs in these districts on student achievement outcomes, one of the primary measures used to assess the impact of any initiative in schools. Therefore, one recommendation for further research is for longitudinal studies of districts to see which integration program model has the greatest short- and long-term academic and social impact on students and is sustainable and cost-effective over time. Taking this a step further, understanding if integration programs alone or in combination with other reforms such as universal Head Start/PK and school funding reforms, as suggested by Johnson and Nazaryan (2019), do more to further academic and social outcomes for students is another area of potential research. Researchers like sean riordan at Stanford have done impressive work in this area and translating this research into actionable steps for district leaders developing, implementing, or maintaining integration programs is important.

Other recommendations for potential further research include the impact of school board politics and policies on equity initiatives in districts and relationships between school boards and superintendents, particularly given the growing number of school boards around the country banning books and eliminating teaching about race, the racial history of the US, and references to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Examining the impact on students after school boards adopt these restrictive and more conservative policies is also an area for further study.

One final recommendation for research is delving into whether any municipalities have successfully broken the housing-school segregation pipeline and if so, how they did this. This would likely be of interest to district leaders across the US.

Summary

Johnson and Nazaryan (2019) stated “the *how* of school reform matters as much as or more than the *what*. In other words, beyond identifying which policies work on their own...one

must thoroughly investigate the inner workings of *how* the policy was implemented and determine *why* it did or did not work” (p. 139). It has been established that socioeconomic integration of schools benefits all students academically and socially, and this study examined how district leaders in four districts across the US have sustained school integration programs in their varying local contexts and more specifically, the leadership practices and organizational structures they have used to sustain their unique programs. Hypotheses about why integration programs have evolved over time into the current iteration in each district were also discussed, as were recommendations that other district leaders, education leadership programs, and other researchers might take from this study. Understanding the what, how, and why of these four integration programs is crucial to advancing equity through school integration. Equally important is the courageous leadership of determined district leaders who are dedicated to developing sustainable integration solutions and policies that support equitable, excellent academic and social outcomes for all students.

Action Communication One: Briefing Memo to DCPS Leaders

From: Jennifer Geoffroy
 Doctoral Candidate
 University of Virginia
 School of Education and Human Development
 405 Emmet St. S
 Charlottesville, VA 22903

Dear DCPS Equitable Access Program Leaders,

I am writing to report the findings and recommendations based on a case study of four urban school districts across the US that have sustained socioeconomic integration programs for at least ten years. I interviewed two district leaders in each of the four districts and conducted a document review to uncover the leadership practices and organizational structures the district leaders used to initiate, implement, and sustain integration programs in their local contexts. As district leaders with oversight of the DCPS Equitable Access Program, the results of this study could be beneficial to you in your planning for future expansion of the program in DC.

Significant findings of the study applied to the DCPS context are:

- Promoting Will:
 - Mayoral control of the schools in DC eliminates many of the struggles found in the districts studied around promoting will for the integration program with the local school board, given that there is not a DCPS school board.
 - Generating buy-in and support for the program among all stakeholder groups, particularly families is critical for the Equitable Access Program to expand
 - Creating a marketing campaign targeting families eligible for Equitable Access seats would be beneficial to raise awareness about the program. District leaders may also want to partner with other district agencies that oversee support for students and families who are at-risk as this would likely increase families' awareness of the integration program.
 - For families of privilege who may not understand the need for the Equitable Access Program and/or who claim to value neighborhood schools so long as those schools primarily serve children like their own, it may also be helpful to build support for the program by providing a detailed rationale for the program, including the history of housing segregation and marginalization of at-risk students in DC
- Establish Policy Coherence:
 - DCPS does not currently have specific goals or accountability measures for the Equitable Access Program. DCPS schools participating in the 2022-2023 Equitable Access Program reserved 11%-21% of their PK seats for students designated as at-risk. With 47% of students in DCPS designated at-risk, district

leaders could establish an at-risk balance goal across all DCPS schools and use the Equitable Access Program's PK lottery to meet this goal and bring about true socioeconomic integration in DCPS.

- Hold Equitable Access Program seats open after the first round of the lottery, closing them when Early Stages seats are closed, if they must be closed. If the seats can be held open all year, this is advisable so that families who move to DC or enroll students after the lottery deadline have the opportunity to participate in the Equitable Access Program.
- To further expand socioeconomic integration in DCPS above and beyond the limitations of the Equitable Access Program, DCPS leaders could redraw school boundaries, create attendance zones for clusters of schools, create school assignment policies, and/or create citywide magnet schools.
- Central Office Structures:
 - House the Equitable Access Program within the school planning department, allowing the knowledge of the school planning department to be capitalized upon to expand the program as new facilities open or enrollment declines at particular schools mean additional at-risk seats can be offered in the PK lottery.
 - It is recommended that district leaders in charge of the Equitable Access Program have backgrounds as teachers and school leaders with experience teaching in and/or leading integrated schools.
- Managing Operations and Logistics:
 - DCPS leaders might also consider applying for federal or other grants to support the Equitable Access Program. use the funds to expand the program to other schools in DCPS or all schools in DCPS. Additionally, federal funds could be used to support expanded transportation options for families who qualify for the Equitable Access Program.
- Building Systemic Capacity
 - Connect with other district leaders and organizations leading integration work around the country to establish a community of practice with other district leaders (e.g. MIT Blueprint Lab Fellowship, The Century Foundation, The National Coalition on School Diversity, Brown's Promise, American Institute for Research's Equity Initiative, all organizations headquartered in DC.)

I welcome any questions or dialogue about the above recommendations and can be reached at jgt6uk@virginia.edu

Respectfully,
Jen Geoffroy

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Appendix A: Initial Email Communication to District Leaders

Subject Line: University of Virginia Research Study Opportunity

Content:

Dear X,

As part of my dissertation at the University of Virginia, I am conducting a research study to examine the leadership practices and organizational structures that district leaders engaged in to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their districts for a minimum of ten years.

As someone who works with the integration program in your district, I would like to interview you about your district's integration program over the course of its development and implementation. Interviews will be conducted over Zoom and last one hour. More details about the study can be found in the attached consent form.

If you would like to participate in this study, please confirm your interest by emailing me a jgt6uk@virginia.edu and I will send you a link to sign the consent form for the study. Once that is received, I will follow up to schedule a date and time for the interview. If you have any questions about the study itself, please let me know.

My best,

Jen

Jennifer Geoffroy
School of Education and Human Development
University of Virginia
405 Emmet Street S
Charlottesville, VA 22903
Telephone: (202) 321-1393
Email address: jgt6uk@virginia.edu

Study Title: Essential Practices of District Leaders in Advancing Equity Through School Integration
IRB-SBS#: 5658

Appendix B: Informed Consent Agreement for District Leader Interviews

Study Title: Essential Practices of District Leaders in Advancing Equity Through School Integration

Protocol #: 5658

Please read this consent agreement carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of the study is to examine the leadership practices and organizational structures that district leaders engaged in to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their districts for a minimum of ten years.

What you will do in the study: You will participate in a one-hour interview about your district's integration program. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed to allow for analysis of the leadership practices and organizational structures used to develop, implement, and sustain the integration program. You can skip any interview question that makes you uncomfortable and can stop the interview at any time. You will have the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy.

Time required: The study will require one hour of your time for the interview, as well time to review the transcript if you choose to do so.

Risks: There are no anticipated risks in this study.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. The study may help us understand key leadership practices and organizational structures urban public school leaders have used to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their districts for ten or more years. This information will then be used to provide recommendations to other district's leaders to ensure their school integration programs are sustainable over time.

Confidentiality:

Information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a secure server. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed.

Any audio/video recording of the interview will also be destroyed. Your name, title, or any personally identifying information will not be used in any report. Any direct quotes will be attributed to a district leader with no personally identifiable information shared.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw your participation in the study, the audio recording of your interview will be destroyed.

How to withdraw from the study: If you want to withdraw from the study, tell the interviewer to stop the interview. There is no penalty for withdrawing.

Payment: You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

Using data beyond this study: The researcher would like to make the information collected in this study available to other researchers after the study is completed. The researcher will remove any identifying information (such as your name, contact information, etc.) connected to the information you provide. The researcher will share all of the information collected in this study (not just your individual file) with other researchers for future research studies, including but not limited to studies of school integration programs in the US. Researchers of future studies will not ask your permission for each new study. The other researcher will not have access to your name and other information that could potentially identify you nor will they attempt to identify you.

If you have questions about the study, contact:

Jennifer Geoffroy
School of Education and Human Development
Ridley Hall
405 Emmet Street S
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22903.
Telephone: (202) 321-1393
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Telephone: (703)303-7660
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To obtain more information about the study, ask questions about the research procedures, express concerns about your participation, or report illness, injury or other problems, please contact:

Tonya R. Moon, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences

One Morton Dr Suite 400
University of Virginia, P.O. Box 800392
Charlottesville, VA 22908-0392
Telephone: (434) 924-5999
Email: irbsbshelp@virginia.edu
Website: <https://research.virginia.edu/irb-sbs>
Website for Research Participants: <https://research.virginia.edu/research-participants>

UVA IRB-SBS # 5658

Electronic Signature Agreement:

Study Agreement:

I agree to participate in the research study described above.

Signature

Date

You may print a copy of this consent for your records.

Appendix C: Document Review Protocol

Document Name and Source	Date	Establishing Policy Coherence	Managing Operations & Logistics	Generating Will	Building Systemic Capacity	Demographics & Context

Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Date of Interview:

Role of Interviewee:

Interviewed by: Jen Geoffroy

Place:

Start Time:

End Time:

Duration:

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to examine the key leadership practices and organizational structures urban district leaders have used to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their districts. My goal is to look for patterns and best practices from districts with sustained integration programs in order to make recommendations to DC Public Schools as it seeks to implement a school integration program.

Purpose of Interview: I have reviewed publicly available documents about the initiation and sustained implementation of your district's integration program. As someone who previously or currently works to support your district's integration program, I would like to interview you to build a more complete understanding of the leadership practices and organizational structures you as a district leader have used to initiate, implement, and sustain the integration programs in the specific context of your district. My hope is that this interview will give more context to the why behind the district leadership practices and organizational structures district leaders like yourself used/are using to sustain the integration program in your district.

Logistics of Interview: I would like to record our conversation so that I can represent your words and ideas accurately in my study. Recording the interview will help me do this and know that should you allow me to record the interview, I will be the only one reviewing the recording. I would also like to take notes during the interview so that I can make sure to capture any other information or ideas that come up during the interview and also make sure that I ask you all of the interview questions.

Can I record the interview?

Do I have your permission to take notes during the interview?

Confidentiality: Please know that unless you give me permission to identify you by name and/or title, neither will appear in my study. Additionally, I will not directly quote you in my study without first getting your permission to do so and if you do give permission, the quote will be attributed to a district leader with no personally identifiable information shared.

Consent Reminder: As a reminder, you can withdraw your consent for this interview at any time and have the right to not answer any question I ask. Additionally, you can stop the interview at any time for any reason.

Primary Question: What are the essential practices of district leaders in advancing equity in their district through school integration?

Research Questions:

1. What are key leadership practices and organizational structures urban district leaders have used to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their school districts?
2. How have state and local contexts shaped leadership practices and organizational structures urban district leaders have used to initiate, implement, and sustain school integration programs in their school districts?
3. In what ways do the patterns of leadership practices and organizational structures vary across districts with sustained integration programs?

Interview Questions:

1. Please tell me about your background and experiences before you took on your current role.
2. What were the factors that led your district to initiate an integration program?
3. How would you characterize your district's integration program when it was first conceived and initiated (controlled-choice, interdistrict, intradistrict, magnet schools, etc.-terms can be clarified for interviewee)
4. What were the goals of the integration program when it was initiated?
5. Describe the steps district leaders took when initiating the integration program in your school district?

Possible Probes

- a. *Impact of federal, state, and local policy?*
- b. *Aligning government policies with district needs and intended integration program outcomes?*
- c. *Accountability structures to measure progress toward the program goals?*
- d. *Operational and logistical considerations (organizational structures, financial resources, physical infrastructure)?*
 - i. *Lottery system?*
 - ii. *Physical infrastructure (condition and location of facilities) impact the initiation of the integration program?*
 - iii. *Transportation?*

- iv. *General funding the integration program? Impact to or alteration of school budget model?*
 - e. *Level of collaboration was there between the school district and other municipal agencies during the initiation of the integration program (housing, transportation, etc.)?*
 - f. *Formal and informal processes were used to support information sharing and planning among key district personnel?*
 - g. *How were stakeholders (students, families, teachers, school leaders, community members, etc.) informed and/or consulted during the initiation of the integration program?*
 - i. *What was the initial messaging about the program? Was the 'why' of the program mentioned and did it impact buy-in to the program?*
 - ii. *Who was supportive of the program? Why do you think this was the case?*
 - iii. *Who wasn't? Why do you think this was the case?*
 - iv. *Who wasn't reached in the initial outreach about the program during its initiation phase?*
6. Once the integration program began, how did it go in terms of implementation?

Possible Probes

- a. *Major challenges that impacted the program after implementation?*
 - i. *Impact of policies (equity, funding, etc.)?*
 - ii. *Turnover of district/school level staff?*
 - b. *How were school staff supported after implementation (additional staff or different staff hired at the school level? Did staff participate in DEI training or training on differentiating instruction for diverse learners?)*
7. Your district was chosen for this study because you've been able to sustain your integration program for at least 10 years. What leadership practices and structures have helped you sustain the program for this long?

Possible Probes

- a. *Has the integration program changed in any way since it was first initiated?*
 - i. *Expanded models/options, grown, shrunk, etc.*
 - ii. *District and/or school level changes around discipline, grading, curriculum, or scheduling*
 - iii. *Information sharing among key district/school level personnel*
 - iv. *How have the program's goals changed since they were created?*
 - v. *Role of all district families vs targeted families?*
 - vi. *Role of community stakeholders?*
8. How has the district changed since the integration program was initiated and how have those changes impacted the integration program?

9. Who is responsible for the continued implementation of the integration program in your district?

Possible Probes

- a. *Who should be responsible? (district leaders, school level leaders, school board, etc.)*
 - b. *Who else's opinion should be taken to the account? (from Zepeda et. al, 2012)*
10. How have students been impacted by your district's integration program?

Probes

- a. *Is it benefitting them (academically, socioemotionally)?*
 - b. *Do you see inequities persisting in terms of student outcomes?*
 - c. *Why do you think this is/isn't the case?*
11. If you could change one thing about your district's integration program what would it be? (from Zepeda et. al, 2012)
12. Do you see the program changing in the future? What will drive these changes? (from Zepeda et. al, 2012)
13. Is there anything I haven't asked that would allow me to better understand the leadership practices and/or organizational structures that your district used to initiate, implement, and maintain its school integration program over time?

Thank you for participating in this interview. I very much appreciate your time today and throughout the process of setting up this interview. If you would like, I will follow up with you to provide you with a copy of my notes from this interview as well as the final draft of my study. I ask that if I misrepresent anything you've said in any way or include information that you feel would personally identify you, you please let me know so that I can correct that.

Appendix E: Code Book

Code Name	Abbreviation	Description
Generating Will: History, Culture, Values	GW: HCV	The rationale for initiating, implementing, and sustaining the school integration program (e.g. opportunity gaps, gaps in student achievement, equity reforms, etc.)
Generating Will: Outreach	GW:O	The ways in which district leaders used initial outreach efforts to generate the political and social will among stakeholders to support initial school integration efforts.
Generating Will: Managing Change	GW:MC	The ways in which district leaders used ongoing outreach efforts to generate the political and social will among stakeholders to support continued school integration implementation.
Establishing Policy Coherence: Policy	EPC: P	How district leaders mediate federal, state, and local policy and align external government policies to district needs and intended outcomes in a coherent manner
Establishing Policy Coherence: Goals & Accountability	EPC: GA	Goals district leaders set for school integration programs and the accountability measures established to determine if the district is on track for meeting those goals
Establishing Policy Coherence: Cross- Sector Alignment	EPC: CSA	Description of ways in which district leaders work with leaders in the housing sector in support of the integration program
Managing Operations & Logistics: Structure & Processes	MOL: SP	The design and structure of the program (controlled-choice, lottery-based, ranked preference, interdistrict, intradistrict, etc.) as well as the physical infrastructure in place to support the integration program (building facilities, transportation, etc.)
Managing Operations & Logistics: Resources	MOL: R	Funding sources that support the integration program

Building Systemic Capacity: Managing Talent	PIL: MT	Schools are staffed by qualified teachers and teacher turnover is mitigated
Building Systemic Capacity: Building Capacity	PIL: BC	The ways in which district leaders communicate, plan, and coordinate work across the district in support of the integration program
Building Systemic Capacity: Establishing Policies	PIL: EP	Policies (discipline, grading, curriculum, scheduling, access to advanced course work, etc.) established at the school and district level that impact the climate in integrated schools and support equitable, differentiated instruction for all
Demographics	D	Demographic information about interviewee or contextual information about district