

DO EQUITY/DIVERSITY LEADERS MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE IN SCHOOL DIVISIONS?

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ABSTRACT

Schools throughout the country have begun to consider how students can best be served, equitably. Varieties of initiatives have been considered, such as professional development for teachers, curriculum audits and changes, and an analysis of disaggregated data. Many school divisions have created new positions to serve in division-wide leadership roles to address equity and embrace diversity to improve all students' performance. Have these equity/diversity leadership roles in school divisions actually made a significant difference as far as closing academic achievement gaps, decreasing discipline gaps and enhancing the performance of marginalized students? A review of randomly selected school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia including those divisions that have a division equity/diversity leader compared to those school divisions that do not have a division equity/diversity leader were selected. The researcher aimed at determining if division equity/diversity leaders make a significant difference regarding parameters such as culture, behavioral gaps and discipline gaps of marginalized groups. This group comparison study analyzed data obtained from the Virginia Department of Education. Research-based strategies will also be shared that have proven to improve school environments by focusing on equity and embracing diversity.

Keywords: equity leadership, diversity, discipline-culture, performance gaps

INTRODUCTION

Education has gained prominence as the pathway to social and economic mobility in the United States. The learning institutions setting in the country has undergone demographic shifts, with schools becoming more ethnically diverse, multilingual and greatly disadvantaged (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). The school leadership has retained the traditional teaching template focusing on a largely white, female, unilingual and middle-class homogenous student population. According to Ashikali and Groeneveld (2015), the staffs in institutions of learning are an embodiment of an outdated paradigm that pays little attention to equality and diversity as instructors fall under the demographic category of white, middle-class, unilingual and female. This demonstrates a prevailing incongruity between a static instructor's population and changing student demographics raising the question on the approaches used by leaders to address issues relating to equality and inclusion (Torres et al., 2018). The leader's acknowledgment of the cultural variability requires them to identify differences in communication rules, shared meaning, style and sociocultural heritage within their diverse learners' population. Madsen et al. (2019) highlighted that diversity/equality leaders must identify and mitigate resistance that is likely to result to conflict within the institution.

A culturally responsive environment encourages students to become more accepting of others, promotes tolerance among school peers and potentially narrows achievement gaps. Stanley (2016) defined culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them." It is also worth noting that "the dynamic nature of the word 'responsiveness' suggests the ability to acknowledge the unique needs of diverse students, take action to address those needs, and adapt approaches as student needs and demographics change over time."

Schools throughout the country have begun to consider how students can best be served equitably. Many school divisions have created new positions to serve in division-wide leadership roles to address equity and embrace diversity to improve all students' performance. Some initiatives include professional development for teachers, self-reflection, curriculum and program adjustments and disaggregated data. Adams and Muthiah (2020) has indicated that as important as culturally responsive teaching is, it alone cannot solve the challenges marginalized students face. She has emphasized the importance of reforming and addressing all aspects of education, such as policymaking, funding and administration, so they too are culturally responsive. Barakat et al. (2019) suggest that to truly raise awareness and address equity, districts need to analyze discipline practices at the division level by identifying disparities in discipline severity and/or frequency by gender, race and/or ability and to consider alternative practices that promote interventions.

Purpose Statement

Schools in the United States are faced with the challenge on how to increase diversity of amongst their teachers, administrators and student population. America's population is becoming more culturally and ethnically diverse

due to evolution from a non-diversity and mono-cultural environment to one that comprises of linguistic and ethnic diverse and socioeconomic disadvantaged students (González et al., 2019). The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reported in fall 2017 that 24.1 million of the nation's students were White, 7.7 million were Black, 13.6 million were Hispanic, 2.8 million were Asian/Pacific Islander (2.6 million were Asian and 185,000 were Pacific Islander), half a million were American Indian/Alaska Native, and 2 million were of two or more races. According to a Warren-Grice (2017), by the year 2025, one-third of the population in the United States will consist of a person of color. As we view these percentages, it is clear there is much diversity within classrooms and schools. Gary Howard founder of the REACH Center for Multicultural Education, argued educators of all racial and cultural groups need to develop new competencies and pedagogies to engage successfully the changing populations (Stanley, 2016).

The percentages presented by The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) also highlights the prevailing disparities within education institutions in regards to students from racial minority backgrounds and white students. The outcomes show that non-white K-12 learners score lower on average in the national assessments especially in STEM subjects such as math and science (Banerjee, 2018). Despite white students constituting the greatest percentage in public institutions in America, the non-white students are enrolled in special education programs. However, the ethnic minority populations are more prone to suspension or abandon school before the completion of the education program (Stanley, 2016). The existence of such evidence conforms to research findings of numerous studies that highlighted prevailing challenges in terms of education leaders meeting the needs of ethnic diverse students (Drake & Cowen, 2022). Arnold (2016) argued that schools are unable to cater for the needs of a heterogeneous student population as majority of them are inclined towards maintaining the status quo in relation to prioritizing white norms are at the expense of ethnic traditional perspectives. The prevailing ethnic differences between the student and their teachers undermine their motivation and commitment to study thus hindering their success. Additionally, the existence of ethnic differences between the school leaders and teachers might lead to a working approach or expectations that influence the quality of exchanges (Stanley, 2016). Additionally, majority of the study in the field of diversity and equality leadership have focused on the importance of leadership within diverse contexts (Williams et al., 2020; Dixon, 2018), limited emphasis is given to the approach used by leaders in the mobilization and motivation of teachers to work in diverse environments. For this particular study, the researcher will propose three main research questions:

- 1) Do school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia with division equity/diversity leaders Black and Hispanic student subgroups have higher past rates in English and math on the Standard of Learning (SOL) tests than divisions without a division equity/diversity leader?
- 2) Do school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia with division equity/diversity leaders have narrower achievement gaps between White and Black students and White and Hispanic students in English and math on the SOL test than divisions without a division equity/diversity leader?
- 3) Do school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia with division equity/diversity leaders have narrower school suspension gaps between White and Black students and White and Hispanic student subgroups than divisions without a division equity/diversity leader?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review section sought to incorporate both theoretical and conceptual frameworks to identify the intersection between strategic diversity plans and education plans. The researcher used two theoretical models to explain the administration and implementation of division diversity plans by school leaders: the planned change model and diversity self-efficacy approach. The rationale behind selecting the diversity self-efficacy theory is because it will assist in determining whether diversity/equality leaders have confidence in their ability to gather cognitive resources to bring about the desired learning environment regarding diversity. The planned change model investigated how various diversity initiatives are integrated into the learning institution's culture (Hargreaves et al., 2015). The literature will review Cox (2016) diversity model as it similar with the Commonwealth of Virginia division process. The model is also ideal in addressing the leaders' perceptions of their abilities to deal with diversity issues within the school environment.

Theoretical Framework

Diversity Self-Efficacy and Leadership

The administration and implementation of diversity initiatives is predicated on the efforts of school leaders. However, leaders are constantly faced with the challenge of dealing with diversity, which is complicated by their exposure to people holding different value systems that hinders the approach of dealing with issues surrounding racism and ethnicity (Arnold, 2016). In the school setting, leaders are required to uphold a culture that emphasizes inclusion requiring them to remain flexible, adaptable and value diversity (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). Diversity has both positive and negative advantages in learning institutions since it is responsible for expanding the students'

and teachers perspective while resulting in conflict on matters relating to diversity (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005). The emergence of negative beliefs about diversity amongst the teaching staff results in personnel turnover, increased cases of absenteeism and affects group cohesiveness. The failure of the leaders to address emerging conflict and resistance because of the composition of diverse students leads to unfair discipline practices, low student performance and inequality.

The self-efficacy training on diversity gives an in depth perspective on the establishing an inclusive organization. According to Eva et al. (2021), diversity resistance is one of the major challenges facing leaders as it impedes on their confidence in their capabilities to deal with conflict arising in the learning environment. The model also emphasizes the importance of establishing and strengthening the relationship in demographically diverse populations (Madsen et al., 2014). The aspect of self-awareness of one's judgment and belief is emphasized under the diversity self-efficacy model. Equality/diversity leaders must possess the capacity to remain proactive diversity change agents in the process of creating inclusive learning environments (Madsen & Mabokela, 2014).

The module use in training leaders on diversity should not focus on the aspect of "awareness" of diversity alone, as successful diversity leadership is predicated on capabilities of the administrators to direct and regulate the actions leading to inclusivity (Torres et al., 2018). By demonstrating confidence in dealing with intergroup conflict and strengthening relational partnership in diverse groups, the leader shows they possess viable management capabilities. According to Stanley (2016), the creation of an inclusive teaching environment is dependent on the leader's determination to change the perception and attitude towards diversity and demonstration of personal confidence.

In diversity training, the module mostly focuses on comprehending and valuing human differences although it refrains from influencing leaders into changing the existing practices. Madsen and Mabokela (2014) pointed out that "cultural proficient" administrators focus on the best approach of determining their cultural knowledge and tolerance while adapting and managing the existing dynamics (Lindsey & Lindsey, 2016). However, this approach to diversity training tends to emphasize the aspect of awareness of cultural differences while ignoring other important facets such as organizational systems and structures that deal with prevailing inequalities (Aronson & Laughter, 2020). The findings of the study by Madsen and Mabokela (2014) on diversity efficacy training highlighted the temporary nature of the approach as it dissociates the staff from existing organizational issues. This is because the training on diversity is only inclined towards "awareness" on matters diversity while limiting the available tools that could be used to mitigate occurrence of emotional tension and intergroup conflict in the learning environment (Torres et al., 2018). Madsen et al. (2019) proposed that diversity efficacy training should emphasize leadership factors such as the determination, level of comfort and perseverance relating to the establishment of inclusion.

Planned Strategic Diversity Approach

Research into diversity and equality in learning institutions have identified emotional conflict, increased occurrence of absenteeism amongst the students and teachers, high rates of personnel turnover and lack of group cohesiveness as common aspects in learning organizations that fail to embrace inclusion (Cox, 2016)). Madsen and Mabokela (2016) observed that implementation of awareness-oriented initiatives is one of the ways through which leaders could deal with diversity resistance as it eliminates the occurrence of prejudice and discrimination. However, institutions that have adopted awareness-oriented approach to deal with diversity challenges are bound to experience uncertainty, ambiguity and interdependence. Cox (2016) proposed the planned-change strategy as an effective mechanism of dealing with changing demographics in the learning environment. The strategy has proven useful in addressing diversity in the workplace, reducing the intensity of conflict and improving the overall outcomes. The findings of a study conducted by Stanley (2016) revealed that integrating the planned change model enhances the understanding of one's clients while improving the quality of services by conforming to their needs. Additionally, the theory of planned change places emphasis on diversity programs as they consider inclusion as a major goal of the institution.

Designing an integrated organizational environment accommodates personnel with different views and value system guaranteeing successful outcomes. Cox (2016) proposed that leaders should allow employees to adopt and integrate different value systems provided they are aimed at achieving organizational outcomes, which also works towards ensuring they remain motivated and committed. Establishing learning environment with similar condition allows for positive outcomes as students and instructors from minority groups feel respected. Madsen et al. (2019) argued that in such institutions the leaders are capable of integrating the existing differences while ensuring the recognition of the differences. Leaders operating in ethnic diverse environments need to understand the prevailing cultural and socioeconomic differences and recognize their effects on the development and negotiation of

relationships amongst the followers. Adopting this approach is pivotal for mitigating the occurrence of intergroup conflict while ensuring that the different groups maintain their cultural identity in the institution.

Leaders developing a strategic diversity process must factor in incentives to encourage their followers to adopt practices that are in alignment to the goals of the organization. Cox (2016) observed that while majority of the leaders in individual schools have the empathetic comprehension of issues around inclusivity and equality, they lack the capacity to regulate and channel their actions towards dealing with discrimination of ethnical minorities in the institutional setting (Torres et al., 2018). The formulation and implementation of successful diversity plans requires school leaders to adopt appropriate approaches of motivating their personnel to achieve the goals stipulated in the diversity plan (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005).

Research on divisions that have adopted elaborate integrated diversity plans into their educational goals is limited. The education system acknowledges the existing diversity by emphasizing the need for human protection and legal compliance by the various at the various education levels (Cox, 2016). However, the formulation and implementation of a strategic diversity plan will prove essential for school leaders and teachers in tackling prevailing diversity issues. The leader should embrace both transformational and instructional leadership to define clear directions. The formulation of clear vision provides the followers with a clear framework providing them with targets that regulate behavior. School divisions need a clear sense of direction in the identification and recruitment of personnel by factoring in diverse cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds to guarantee a seamless transition in diverse schools. Welborn and Lindsey (2020) also recommended the need to incorporate monitoring and evaluation cycles into the strategic plans.

The success of the diversity plan is predicated on the establishment of viable conditions to enhance the image of the school in terms of accommodating diverse demographic populations. According to Ezzani and Brooks (2015), defining the leaders role in the strategic diversity process is the most important aspect in the diversity plan as it initiates the change process. The leader is responsible for formulating and communicating the vision, which in turn determines whether the followers will buy into and adopt the necessary factors to enhance the achievement of success. Cox (2016) emphasized the importance of this step especially in division diverse backgrounds as it strengthens the relationship with other key stakeholders. Leaders that are charismatic and considered strong are effective in encouraging their followers to fully embrace diversity. According to Madsen and Mabokela (2014), such leaders need to identify their socioeconomic and cultural identity and its coinciding influence on others. Ezzani and Brooks (2015) proposed the need for interpersonal skills to enhance the cooperation between the school leader and teacher while integrating their social networks at the same time.

Conceptual Framework

The Concept of Diversity Leadership and Discipline Culture

Leadership is a valued aspect of education that cannot be ignored in the learning institution context especially when it is considered a critical element in the student turnaround process regarding behavior, culture and discipline (Pecci et al., 2020). According to Madsen et al. (2018), one cannot ignore the link between discipline-culture and diversity leadership, as only few are perceived as effective leaders because of failure to uphold discipline in the learning environment. Additionally, the principals in the institutions are also required to improve the mode of instructional delivery to ensure cultural and ethnic inclusivity. Madsen and Mabokela (2014) proposed some essential characteristics that function as indicators of healthy school environment that include presence of open communication and collaboration between leadership and staff, trust and honesty, celebration and rewards based on accomplishments.

Leadership is described as a process capable of affecting individuals or a group within an organization setting to bring about the achievement of a common goal (Gonos & Gallo, 2013). The learning environment greatly relies on discipline to guarantee an all rounded student development towards attaining the approved behavior. Torres et al. (2018) argued that maintaining a positive students' discipline culture is critical for achieving, accountability, school growth and sustainability. The longevity of the school leadership is also dependent on security, calm and cultural inclusive learning environments (Arnold, 2016). Violent and discriminatory behavior impedes the other student's opportunity for quality learning necessitating the need for leadership that promotes disciplined-cultures. According to Madsen et al. (2019), students often deal with developmental changes during growth which results in situations they are unable to understand the implication of misbehavior both positive and negative. During this stage, students tend to focus on their feelings that are not influenced by aspects around classroom management. Liu (2013) argued that misconduct is a common occurrence during the growth process especially in amongst teenagers as mental and physical changes are a continuous process during adolescence. It is imperative that teachers and leaders understand the implications of these growth factors as they influence behavior and discipline amongst the students.

Aspects that are influential in influencing behavior, discipline and culture within the work environment include the decision-making approach and daily approach in the institution. According to Stanley (2016), administrators in the school setting integrate consistent and assertive approaches mostly as an approach of behavior controls. Cox (2016) proposed that diversity leaders need to formulate and implement policies and rules that are effective in enhancing the climate that functions as a morale and motivational booster amongst students and the personnel. The increased involvement of the leader ensures that the necessary structures are implemented within the organization as limited cases of discipline highlight highly engaged students and faculty (Madsen et al., 2019). The principal is tasked with facilitating an engaging environment capable of dealing with discipline issues happening in the environment outside the classroom while ensuring that the process is accelerated at the same time.

Diversity leaders should employ an instructional approach to enhance the expectations of their staff in terms of supporting the institutional norms, ensure order and discipline, maintain approved behavior and developing links within the community for social inclusion (Madsen & Mabokela 2014). Arnold (2016) recommends the use of democratic leadership, which place emphasis on inclusivity by acknowledging the student teacher input that works towards improving discipline in the school environment. Additionally, adopting a discipline-culture that remains democratic is pivotal in improving the level of achievement amongst students and faculty. Discipline is highly appraised as the process that results in the reformation of student behavior that might take the form of either negative or positive reinforcement reference. Punishment is usually the case when students are unable to follow the rules and policy that emanates mostly because of misinterpretation. According to Ezzani and Brooks (2020), the biggest concern amongst faculty and student is the prevailing belief on leadership amongst the school administrators that alludes to the approach used by the leaders to deal with disciplinary issues. The modern day learning environment presents several disciplinary problems that the leadership should promptly address to ensure that the students uphold values especially in the case of high school and college students (Mahmud, 2014).

The handling of disciplinary cases within the learning institution is determined by the teacher principal relationship that determines their propensity to act in the case of inappropriate behavior (Kafele, 2015). This is the same reason highlighted by administrators in the case of the rates of teachers' dissatisfaction in high schools. However, the diversity leader is tasked with the role of ensuring that learning occurs continuously and in environments outside the classroom. The discipline approach adopted needs to remain responsive to behavioral issues that deter the occurrence of further indiscipline in the future or reduce the frequency of reoccurrence.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The current research employed a quantitative research design in a bid to realize the effects of embracing diversity leadership on students' behavior, discipline and cultural integration amongst students in the Commonwealth of Virginia divisions. The paper will review school divisions with division equality/diversity leaders and compare them to respective divisions without division equality/diversity leaders to determine their influence in decreasing short-term suspension amongst marginalized groups.

A quasi-causal comparative research design was used to compare the school division pairs. To compare student achievement, division students' performance on the Virginia Standards of Learning test was used. The Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) is a public school standardized testing program in the Commonwealth of Virginia (Education, V. (n.d.). The SOL establishes minimum expectations for what students should know and be able to do at the end of a select grade level or course in English, mathematics, science, history/social science, and other subjects. For this study, English and math overall division-wide pass rates were used to compare Black and Hispanic students' pass rate as well as subgroups of White students versus Black and then White students versus Hispanic students when considering achievement gaps. In addition, short-term suspension rates were compared. Research has shown that the use of harsh and exclusionary discipline policies has contributed to higher dropout rates as well as reliance on alternative educational settings where educational supports and opportunities may be less available, including alternative schools or juvenile justice facilities (Christie et al., 2005).

Population

The population of this study consisted of 24 school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The 12 treatment school divisions were selected based on the fact that they each had a designated division equity/diversity leader. The additional 12 non-treatment school divisions were carefully selected as a partner school of each of the first 12 for comparison. The selection of the 12 non-treatment school divisions was based on similarities as far as student enrollment in the division and the percentage of free/reduced lunch eligibility. This was important to consider when comparing the 12 sets of schools because enrollment and the division's free and reduced lunch rate influences

the funding the division receives from the Commonwealth of Virginia and from the federal government. Student enrollment and free/reduced lunch eligibility information was obtained from the Virginia Department of Education's website. For the purposes of this study, the 12 sets of compared school divisions were referred to as division pair 1 through division pair 12.

The division pairs were categorized as either small, medium or large school divisions based on student enrollment. Divisions with enrollment with 7999 or fewer students were considered small; divisions with 8000 - 28,000 were considered medium, and divisions with enrollment of more than 28,000 students were considered large. Three divisions were considered small; four were considered medium; and four were considered large. When considering the free and reduced lunch rate the paired schools, in most cases, had no more than a 15 percent difference in the overall free and reduced lunch rate. The free and reduced lunch rates for divisions ranged from 13 percent to 90 percent.

Materials and Methods

The purpose of this study was to determine if division equity/diversity leaders in school divisions make a real difference in schools. Student populations compared were White, Hispanic and Black. The areas that were compared included short-term student suspension, which is the removal of a student from school for a period between 1 through 10 days, English and math performance, and achievement gaps as evidenced by student pass rate on the Standards of Learning test. Data obtained from the Virginia Department of Education was used to perform a quasi - comparative study using an inferential statistic T-Test.

Sampling and Participants

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) website was used to obtain a list of the 132 school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Next, the school divisions' staff directories page was reviewed to determine which of the 132 school divisions identified a division equity/diversity leader. After developing a list of the 12 school divisions that identified a division equity/diversity leader, a review of each school division's School Quality Profile from VDOE website was completed. The VDOE School Quality Profile "is a new way to look at the performance of Virginia's public schools. School Quality Profiles were developed by the state Board of Education in response to the 2015 Virginia General Assembly, which directed the board to redesign online reports for schools and school divisions to more effectively communicate to parents and the public about the status and achievements of Virginia's public schools. School Quality Profiles are available for all schools, school divisions, and for the state." (Virginia Department of Education, 2020). The School Quality Profiles were also used to identify schools that had similar enrollment and free and reduced lunch eligibility information to develop the 12 division pairs for the study.

Multiple independent t-tests were used to compare each division pairs' Black and Hispanic students' overall pass rate for English and math. Additional independent t-tests were used to compare English and math achievement gaps between Black and White subgroups and White and Hispanic subgroups and t-tests were used to compare school suspension gaps between White and Black subgroups and White and Hispanic subgroups. The purpose of running the t-test was to determine if there was a significant statistical difference of the means between the treatment group, those divisions with equity/diversity leaders; and the non-treatment group, those divisions without a division equity/diversity leader. This allowed the dependent variables (English/math pass rate, English/math achievement gap and suspension rate) to be tested based on the independent variable (whether the division has an equity/diversity leader or not) to determine statistical significance ($p \leq .05$).

The study is guided by three questions that include:

- 1) Do school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia with division equity/diversity leaders Black and Hispanic student subgroups have higher past rates in English and math on the Standard of Learning (SOL) tests than divisions without a division equity/diversity leader?
- 2) Do school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia with division equity/diversity leaders have narrower achievement gaps between White and Black students and White and Hispanic students in English and math on the SOL test than divisions without a division equity/diversity leader?
- 3) Do school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia with division equity/diversity leaders have narrower school suspension gaps between White and Black students and White and Hispanic student subgroups than divisions without a division equity/diversity leader?

Results

The research aimed at determining if division equity/diversity leaders make a significant difference regarding parameters such as discipline gaps and pass rates of marginalized groups. A statistical review allowed the researcher to presents the results and findings of the study.

In table 1, the influence of division equity/diversity leaders on Black students pass rate on the English SOL test is not significant to warrant consideration as divisions without equity/diversity leaders influence a higher pass rate amongst their students with a standard deviation of 8.184 compared to 7.012.

Table 1: *Black English Standard of Learning Pass Rate Descriptive Statistics*

Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Equity/Diversity Leader	12	64.9167	7.01243	2.02432
No Equity/Diversity Leader	12	65.9167	8.18489	2.36277

In table 2, the influence of equity/diversity division leaders on the pass rate of English SOL test for Hispanic students is not significant to warrant consideration as divisions without equity/diversity division leaders have a higher pass rate amongst their students with a standard deviation of 21.49 compared to 19.42.

Table 2: *Hispanic English Standard of Learning Pass Rate Descriptive Statistics*

Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Equity/Diversity Leader	12	58.7500	19.42877	5.60860
No Equity/Diversity Leader	12	62.7500	21.49471	6.20499

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, Black students performed better on the Math SOL test in school divisions without equity/diversity division leaders compared to those with equity/diversity division leaders, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: *Black Math Standard of Learning Pass Rate Descriptive Statistics*

Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Equity/Diversity Leader	12	70.1667	7.38344	2.13141
No Equity/Diversity Leader	12	71.000	10.40979	3.00505

As indicated in Table 4, Hispanic students in divisions without an equity/diversity leader, have a higher pass rate on the Math SOL test than Hispanic students in divisions with an equity/diversity division leader.

Table 4: *Hispanic Math Standard of Learning Pass Rate Descriptive Statistics*

Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Equity/Diversity Leader	12	68.1667	22.36813	6.45712
No Equity/Diversity Leader	12	70.2500	23.76064	6.85911

The performance gap comparison of White/Black students on English SOL test demonstrates a wider gap in school divisions with division equity/diversity leaders compared to those without division equity/diversity leaders, as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5: *White/Black English Standard of Learning Pass Rate Gap Descriptive Statistics*

Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Equity/Diversity Leader	12	20.8333	3.63901	1.05049
No Equity/Diversity Leader	12	18.7500	9.39173	2.71116

As indicated in Table 6, the performance gap comparison of White/Hispanic students on the English SOL test reveals a wider gap in school divisions with division equity/diversity leaders compared to those without division equity/diversity leaders.

Table 6 : *White/Hispanic English Standard of Learning Pass Rate Gap Descriptive Statistics*

Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Equity/Diversity Leader	12	19.7500	9.63068	2.78014
No Equity/Diversity Leader	12	13.8333	9.26217	2.67376

The performance gap comparison of White/Black students on the Math SOL test demonstrates a wider gap in school divisions with division equity/diversity leaders compared to those without division equity/diversity leaders, as indicated in table 7.

Table 7 : *White/Black Math Standard of Learning Pass Rate Gap Descriptive Statistics*

Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Equity/Diversity Leader	12	18.9167	5.07146	1.46400
No Equity/Diversity Leader	12	15.4167	6.15642	1.77721

The performance gap comparison of White/Hispanic students on the Math SOL test demonstrates a wider gap in school divisions with division equity/diversity leaders compared to those without division equity/diversity leaders as indicated in table 8.

Table 8: *White/Hispanic Math Standard of Learning Pass Rate Gap Descriptive Statistics*

Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Equity/Diversity Leader	12	15.6667	9.30624	2.68648
No Equity/Diversity Leader	12	11.0833	7.71608	2.22744

The short term suspension rate gap is wider in school divisions without a division equity/diversity leader between the White/Black student population compared to school divisions with a division equity/diversity leader. This demonstrates that division equity/diversity leaders may have an impact on dealing with emerging cases of discipline as indicated in table 9.

Table 9: *White/Black Short-term Suspension Rate Gap Descriptive Statistics*

Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Equity/Diversity Leader	12	37.9417	23.12108	6.67448
No Equity/Diversity Leader	12	54.8917	29.94891	8.64551

The short term suspension gap is also wider in school divisions without a division equity/diversity leader between the Hispanic/White student population compared to school divisions with a division equity/diversity leader. Again, this demonstrates that division equity/diversity leaders may have an impact on dealing with emerging cases of discipline as indicated in table 10.

Table 10: *White/Hispanic Short-term Suspension Rate Gap Descriptive Statistics*

Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Equity/Diversity Leader	12	23.7833	25.50707	7.36326
No Equity/Diversity Leader	12	36.4500	36.77668	10.61651

DISCUSSION

The findings of the research emphasize the importance of leadership (equity/diversity) which entails the use of both instructional and transformational approaches in improving the performance and discipline culture in learning institutions. The importance of teacher leadership in the process of performance and discipline-culture improvement cannot be understated as evidenced in Day et al. (2016) study. However, the principal plays a predominant role in guaranteeing a discipline-culture that result in the students' willingness to be disciplined and improve their performance gaps (Stanley, 2016). The leader should constantly interact with the teachers and students to establish as strong relationship, which results in the making of a thriving environment (Madsen & Mabokela). However, the data shows that the influence of division equity/diversity leaders on Math and English SOL pass rate is limited for Hispanic and Black student populations. This may imply diversity-based leadership improved the general temperament within the school.

Although equity/diversity leaders provide the support mechanism to bridge the performance and discipline gaps in the division's schools especially in low socio-economic backgrounds, the influence of equity/diversity leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia is limited. However, in reducing the rate of suspension gap between White/Black and White/Hispanic the significance level of $p \leq 0.5$ shows that equity/diversity leaders may be responsible for reducing the rate of short term suspension gap and how discipline is handled.

Limitations of the study

Several limitations in this study must be noted when examining the findings. The first limitation is the lack of knowledge about the amount of time the division equity/diversity leader has fulfilled this role. The data collected from the Virginia Department of Education division directory does not list the hire date for positions. The length of time an individual has served in a position may have a considerable impact on the work that is fulfilled in the role of division equity/diversity leader.

A second limitation was that the actual responsibilities and expectations of division equity/diversity leaders were not clearly defined. Several division equity/diversity leaders appeared to have had additional division-wide responsibilities, based on their title; this may have resulted in a diversion of time and focus from responsibilities, which could limit their overall impact. Additional limitations were related to the complete demographics of each school division. While there was an attempt to pair schools of similar size and socioeconomic status, other demographic factors may play a role. Perhaps a final important limitation includes not knowing the strategies schools and divisions were expected to implement and to what degree they were actually implemented to make an actual impact. Future studies could include examining student performance as well as academic and suspension gaps within one school division prior and after the hiring of a division equity/diversity leader. Another possibility would be to continue the investigation as a longitudinal study to determine the impact over a period. Further studies could also examine additional content areas, dropout rates, advanced courses enrollment as well as qualitative data that focuses on social emotional aspects.

CONCLUSION

As suggested (Khalifa, 2018) the need for enhanced culturally responsive school leadership in order to address improving student achievement and closing achievement gaps is emphasized in majority of the study as reviewed in the different sections. He has identified four strands of effective culturally responsive school leadership. They include critical self-awareness, culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation, culturally responsive and inclusive school environments, and engagement with students and parents in community contexts. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), passed in December 2015, provides states an opportunity to create new approaches to school accountability and continuous improvement. Virginia is one of several states that have chosen to use some of the ESSA's identified equity indicators, either to identify schools/divisions that may be in need of intervention to address equity issues or to guide improvement processes. The equity indicators are commonly used as goals for divisions. They include reducing rates of student suspension, building a positive school climate, reducing rates of chronic absenteeism, implementing an extended-year graduation rate and expanding access to a college- and career-ready curriculum. It is not noted to what degree Virginia has implemented or embraced the indicators. The conclusion of this study suggests that there is no significant difference in school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia that have division equity/diversity leaders with Black and Hispanic students' English and math pass rate on the Standards of Learning as well as no significant difference between White/Black and White/Hispanic pass rate gaps. The significant difference found is that divisions with equity/diversity leaders have a narrower short-term suspension gap between White and Hispanic students than school divisions without an equity/diversity leader. While the one significant finding is a start, it may not be enough to justify the position of division equity/diversity leaders. Therefore, divisions may choose to focus more on specific strategies and equity/diversity indicators while deepening the implementation of such, in order to improve all student performance and to eliminate academic and discipline gaps.

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