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## Equitable Hiring Practices for HR Directors: It is all about the How

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Equitable Hiring Practices for HR Directors: It is all about the How

By

Jennifer Harlan

A dissertation submitted

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Seattle Pacific University

2023

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

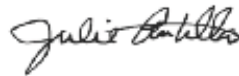
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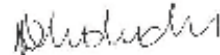
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## **Abstract**

District Human Resource departments are tasked with developing rationale, policies, and a hiring process that prioritizes hiring high quality applicants that reflect diverse backgrounds with proven experience and success with district student populations. Staff must hire diverse candidates but to do so, they must examine the implications for equitable hiring practices and remove obstacles and barriers currently in place. The purpose of this paper is to research district action plans and system changes that are taking place in schools to hire a diverse staff. State laws, district policies, and action plans are a great step but how the steps are implemented by personnel across a school system can determine the success or failure of established expectations. A commitment to preparing, engaging, hiring, and retaining a diverse educational team is crucial to student achievement. What training and professional development do Human Resource Directors in Stanley County have to implement equitable hiring expectations and what preparation and support do they need to develop a racially diverse educator workforce? HR Director preparation for equitable hiring outcomes is vital for system success.

*Keywords:* equitable hiring practices, human resource director, human resource preparation, Critical Race Theory

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*Wipe-Out* is an American game show that features elements that push a contestant's athleticism and determination through a multi-stage obstacle course. It requires numerous strategy and decision points designed to challenge stamina and success. It takes skill, determination, and luck. Education hiring is like the television show *Wipe-Out*.

In the educational hiring process, applying and screening are the first steps in the obstacle course. V. Whitney, a teacher of color at Potter Elementary in District D, sent an email after an interview with the district Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) affinity group, which illustrated concrete obstacles for teacher candidates:

When looking at applicants through HRM+ (*district online hiring system*) I am noticing it is so difficult to have an equity lens while scrolling through the applicant summary. Some copy and paste the same job descriptions for various grade bands, have missing information, and rank preferences but apply to positions that are the last on their list. It makes me think that this part is a test on how well an applicant can navigate a database. But I also wonder if this is a true test of the applicant's dedication and desire to apply for the position.

The future of hiring must challenge the traditional system by expecting different results through protecting and promoting, not minimizing and eliminating. As gatekeepers to the *Wipe-Out* obstacle course, Human Resource Directors (HRDs) are significant district leaders. They can change the course of hiring for teachers of color (TOC). Education Northwest encourages districts to focus on diverse hiring that benefits every student and school community by exposing stakeholders to various ideas, cultures, and knowledge. According to the *Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northwest*, the

U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics reported that 51% of K-12 students are students of color but only 20% of teachers are TOC (Motamedi, 2018) . This statistic highlights the system need to recruit, hire, and support TOC.

As an administrator in District D, principals were charged with hiring teachers that represented the 70% Hispanic student population. At the time, 80% of the teachers in the district were White. The White teaching staff did not represent the student population. Understanding the urgency and moral obligation, administrators looked to the district for guidance but the gap of expectations between building hiring and district support was a deep canyon of uncertainty. Being charged to hire TOC is strong in theory and belief but can be difficult in the actual application and implementation.

**Problem: HR Director Preparation for Equitable Hiring is Lacking**

A diverse teacher workforce provides benefits to all students. Candidates that represent our student population offer diverse ideas and knowledge. We must critically consider the changing and evolving system of hiring. A commitment to preparing, engaging, hiring, and retaining a diverse educational team is crucial for student success. The problem is that HRDs' preparation for equitable hiring is lacking.

We are in the midst of a critical social change. The Black Lives Matter movement, global social protests, George Floyd's death, defund police demands, and the global covid-19 pandemic highlight the heavy inequitable divide in our communities.

Fletcher and Beauregard (2022) stated:

Diversity in the workplace has been a research topic of interest for many years, yet it is particularly over the last decade where significant global events and social

changes have underscored the need for research to keep advancing our knowledge on this subject (p. 2)

It is no longer acceptable or justifiable to limit opportunities and resources by race, gender, or sexual orientation. Education leaders are tasked with policies, initiatives, and leadership selection procedures to better serve students and teachers. Leaders can and should prioritize diversity, inclusion, and equity.

Equity work relevant to educational procedure includes state law, ESSB (*Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill*) 5044 titled, *AN ACT*, relating to equity, cultural competency, and dismantling institutional racism in the public-school system. This law guides school board policies as local communities work to create equitable educational systems in Washington State. It was enacted on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021. ESSB 5044 (Washington State Legislator, 2021) focuses on diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism in public education and requires educator equity training. Furthermore, this bill directs all school stakeholders to inform and develop cultural competency, diversity, equity, and inclusion standards of practice. These standards include district hiring practices.

Washington State laws clarify and support equitable practices in K-12 schools. In addition to ESSB 5044, new equity-based certificate renewal requirements are now mandatory for school employees. State House Bill 1426, signed by Governor Inslee, requires school personnel to complete professional learning focused on equity-based school practices by July 2023. The path to an equitable school system has many threads and requires a systematic approach that is communicated and supported by stakeholders. This includes changes to outdated hiring practices. Hiring steps in districts are motivated by traditional practices that continue to employ the same candidate repeatedly – the

winner who plays the game the best and can dodge the obstacles littering the hiring course. It is time for HRDs to remove barriers, calibrate skill expectations across the system, and communicate transparency and inclusion to their school communities.

In Stanley County, District D adopted a Racial Equity Board Policy in the spring of 2020 (Name withheld, 2020). After the adoption, district personnel created an action plan to hold all stakeholders accountable to learning, growing, and changing the system to break down barriers and increase opportunities for all students. Priority strategies and evidence of impact in the action policy purposefully and explicitly address hiring practices. District D's Human Resource (HR) Department was tasked with developing rationale, policies, and a hiring process that prioritizes hiring high quality applicants that reflect diverse backgrounds with proven experience and success with the student population. For Stanley County schools, District D is unique in their adopted Racial Equity policy and action plan including a hiring strategy.

As a building administrator with 10 years of hiring experience, I participated in multiple educational employment processes and find the subjective, obstacle-driven process to be sluggish and blurred. Applicant screening, the interview process, and teacher onboarding varied from district to district with minimal oversight. Unclear expectations come from the district HR office with a hybrid of central and decentralized hiring expectations that are inconsistent across the district system (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019). With state law adoptions and established school board equity policies, equitable hiring expectations in districts can vary by HRD system implementation. The California Public School Board Association (2013) stated, "Maximizing the collective abilities of a talented group of professionals is far more difficult than many believe" (p. 9).

For school districts to implement expected state and school board equitable expected outcomes, HRDs are critical school personnel that can direct and implement significant and lasting systems that empower our school leaders to hire a diverse teaching force. It is far more difficult than just adopting a hiring policy. HRDs need district policy adoptions, explicit equitable hiring training, and education to successfully lead their districts in this important and timely directive.

### **Purpose of the Study**

There is a need to hire diverse candidates but to do that, the district must examine the implications for equitable hiring practices and remove the obstacles and barriers currently in place. This leads to the question: What training and professional development do school district human resource officers possess to hire a racially diverse workforce?

HR Officers play a critical role in teacher hiring. There is limited research on HR preparation for equitable hiring and policies and procedures vary from neighboring districts in equity work. HRDs need support to make meaningful changes that impact their teaching force and should not rely on traditional practices, intuition, or superficial changes for hiring.

Local, state, and national systems reflect a lack of preparation and training for school personnel to hire for equitable outcomes (Goings et al., 2019). Lack of relevant equitable hiring professional development and training opportunities for our HR leaders leaves a system gap that will maintain traditional hiring practices.

For our students to have equitable resources in our school communities, they need access to teachers that are familiar with “themes, cultural icons, celebrations and artifacts

of one's heritage" and teachers who look like our students (Thompson & Thompson, 2018, p. 36). Culturally Responsive Teaching and teachers that represent our student demographics enhances achievement for all students (Hammond, 2015). Center for American Progress indicated, "Teachers of color tend to have more positive perceptions of students of color – both academically and behaviorally – than other teachers do" (Partelow et al., 2017, para. 6). Florida researchers analyzed data from 92,000 teachers and three million students and found a positive effect in both math and reading scores when Black students were taught by Black teachers (Partelow et al., 2017, para. 10).

Hiring TOC shows that students of color have improved test scores, less exclusionary discipline, benefit from higher teacher expectations, and are more engaged. All students benefit because they are exposed to multiple perspectives, have an increased sense of civic engagement, and improve student problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Evidence suggests that diversity in the workplace can improve organizational success, and this includes school (Douglas-McNab, 2014). Diversity promotes strategic decision making, increases relationships with the community, and improves student learning. Kozleskie and Proffitt (2019) explicated:

We know now that children from marginalized groups continue to be handicapped by lack of access to teachers who understand their students' knowledge bases and can shape their students' development in ways that increase access to the tools and knowledge funds that are the birthright of others. This is not solely a civil rights issue; it is also a human rights issue. (p. 65)

Equitable hiring comes from a human rights perspective – rights in education, rights to education, and rights through education. The Inter-agency Network for



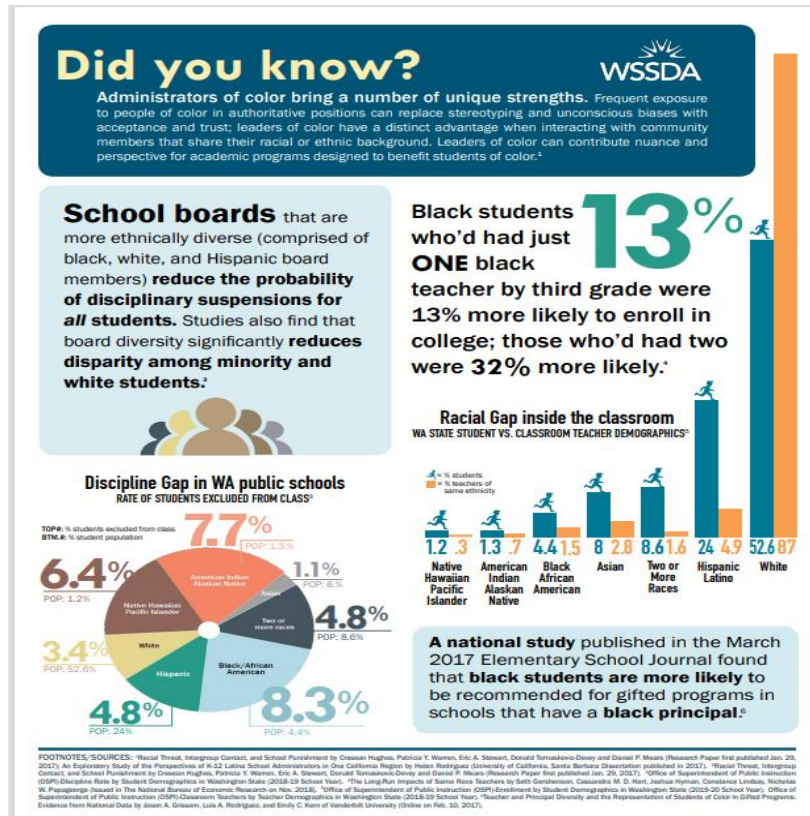
Education in Emergencies (INEE) defines rights-based approach to education as, “A rights-based approach to education rests on the human rights principles of nondiscrimination and equality, accountability and transparency, participation, empowerment, and the right to education to guide and organize all aspects of learning, from policy to the classroom” (The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2010).

Another equitable hiring consideration is district resources. Hiring should be a top priority because human capital is the biggest district expense (salaries) and the most important aspect to student success. According to Sally Parson (pseudonym), Chief Financial Officer of District D, the average teacher cost in District D is \$125,000; this includes pay and benefits. It does not include all the professional development, time, and other resources offered to teachers. To be good stewards of community money and to support student success, equitable hiring practices must be at the forefront of all district goals.

The Washington State Schools Director Association (WSSDA) Equity Statement includes the following: “Equity is foundational to the work of WSSDA...we must identify and eliminate any discriminatory practices and prejudices within our state’s public education system” (WSSDA, para 3, 2022). Figure 1, WSSDA Equity Infographic, reviews the positive impact of ethnically diverse school staff on student academic and disciplinary suspensions.

### **Figure 1**

*Washington State School Director Association Equity Infographic*



In addition to federal and state hiring laws, the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* provides guidelines and outlines 10 foundational standards for district leaders. Standard 3, *Equity and Cultural Responsiveness*, clearly connects to equitable hiring expectations for public school districts across the United States. Standard 3 has the following eight foundational principals and three directly connect to equitable hiring:

- ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and other resources necessary for success
- act with cultural competence and responsiveness in their interactions, decision making, and practice

- address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership.

(Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, p. 11)

With laws and guidelines in place, hiring expectations have been set and the work must be done at the district level. District leaders interpret the established expected outcomes and guide staff in a challenging and dynamic hiring landscape. The traditional *Wipe-Out* course has ended and district HRDs are establishing a new path for teacher candidates.

### **Theoretical Construct**

#### ***Critical Theory, Critical Legal Studies, and Critical Race Theory***

The problem of equitable hiring practices in HR is cemented in critical race theory (CRT). CRT asserts institutions (schools, law system, housing and labor markets, healthcare) are entrenched with racism because decisions and pathways lead to different outcomes determined by race. Traditional hiring practices in education can lead to varied outcomes determined by teacher race. To understand the construct of CRT, it helps to understand its origin and its connection to critical theory, a social theory with a focus on critiquing and changing society. Critical theories look to find, in social life, the fundamental assumptions that keep people from fully and accurately understanding how the world works. To fully comprehend the modern social order, we must examine the power dynamics among groups. Critical theory was developed in the Frankfurt School by scholars Theodor W. Adorno and his student, Jürgen Habermas. Both were foremost social philosophers after World War II. The Frankfurt School is responsible for the creation and various paths of critical theory in contemporary humanities and social sciences (Garlitz & Kögler, 2015).

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, critical theory branched into Critical Legal Studies (CLS). In a CLS overview, Cornell Law indicated that CLS theory states that laws are entwined with social issues and innate biases. Is the law truly just and fair? Advocates of CLS believe that the law supports the interests of people who create the law. CLS's roots are in embedded in social activism during the Civil Rights and Vietnam War era and it officially started during a 1977 conference at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Critical legal theorists include Roberto Mangabeira Unger, Robert W. Gordon, and Duncan Kennedy (Legal Institute at Cornell Law School, 2022).

CLS branched to CRT. News from Columbia Law School in 2017 reported that Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in 1989 and engineered the framework of CRT. Crenshaw is a law professor at Columbia University and UCLA and was a pioneer scholar and writer on race, civil rights, and law. Crenshaw stated that intersectionality is a lens to see where power happens and collides, links, and intersects (Columbia Law, 2017). The oppression of African- American women by race and gender intersect; it is not just race or gender but both. For CRT, Crenshaw believed it is a verb, not a noun. It assesses how the social construct of race and institutionalized racism continue a racial caste system that downgrades people of color to bottom tiers in society (George, 2021).

In an interview with NRP's A. Martinez on the Morning Show, in September 2022, Crenshaw described how to better explain CRT:

Critical race theory is something that people practice every day. If you yourself put your hands on the steering wheel at the 10 and 2 o'clock position when you see those lights in the rearview mirror, you are practicing critical race theory.

Critical race theory is practiced by any number of people and groups who recognize that colorblindness is an aspiration, but it's not the reality in American society. And to survive and to thrive, you have to be aware of how race plays a role. You have to pass it on to your children. You have to practice it in your workplace. You practice it in the stores. You practice it wherever you go. (NPR, 2022)

Gloria Ladson-Billings was one of the first to apply CRT into the educational arena. Like CLS, CRT in education focuses on social issues and innate biases (Ladson-Billings, 1999). It is an approach for analyzing power structures and seeks to transform these structures and cultural characteristics that maintain dominant and subordinate racial positions in and out of the classroom. It is a systematic tool to help us understand the disparities in education. Who has advantages and who are exploited in our system? Race is the spectrum in which advocates of CRT analyze all aspects of life (NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., 2023).

There are three central propositions to CRT reviewed in the article, *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education*, by G. Ladson-Billings and W. Tate IV (1995):

- Race is a signification factor in inequity.
- U.S. society is based on property rights.
- The intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool to understand social context and inequity in schools.

### **Current Controversy of CRT**

In the last couple of years, there has been a significant push back on CRT in education. Why has it, today, become so divisive when it has been around for almost 30

years? Schools are changing and the discussion and topics within them are also changing. According to P. Bromley in *The Economist* (July, 2022), a culture war is raging in educations. Because CRT grew from a social movement that worked for change, people use it for political ends. It has become a tool for some and a divisive political fight for others. It polarized the discussion of race in the United States. Opponents of CRT believe the theory labels all Whites as racist and Black people as oppressed victims. In social circles, CRT became a broad term for unease, anxiety, and discomfort over the discussion of race in our communities (Sawchuk, 2021).

Proponents of CRT believe the opposing narratives are exaggerations on the theoretical framework. The CRT theoretical framework does not call individual racists; it states our institutions are built on racism (Ray & Gibbons, 2021). There is a deficit in our society because people are not willing to recognize that life for many Americans is not great (Saxon, 2021). “The problem is not bad people,” said Mari Matsuda, a law professor at the University of Hawaii who was an early developer of critical race theory. “The problem is a system that reproduces bad outcomes. It is both humane and inclusive to say, ‘We have done things that have hurt all of us, and we need to find a way out’” (Fortin, 2021).

### **Conceptual Constructs for HR Equitable Hiring – HR Directors and Students**

Constructs for equitable hiring apply to both HRDs and for the students they serve.

***Human Resource Directors: Reflexivity, Morality, Ethics, Human Resource Management***

Equitable, in simple terms, means fair or impartial. For HRDs to focus on equitable practices, morality and ethics are concepts that surface for district hiring. Morality stems from a set of values that enable people to live compliantly in groups. It focuses on what societies conclude to be correct and acceptable. This means, sometimes HRDs must act in a moral manner and possibly sacrifice their own short-term interests to benefit the district (Morin, 2023). They cannot allow their moral drive to be minimized or neutralized by the organization or community (de Gama et al., 2012).

Ethics in Human Resource Management (HRM) is based on the HRD helping an organization uphold its set values. By doing this, HRDs can build, sustain, and improve employee faith in the system and build positive relationships. de Gama et al. (2012) noted there is ethical action with moral focus and ethical inaction through the process of distancing. Distancing happens by being asked to perform duties that separate HR leaders from their actions. By thinking of humans as resources, rather than people, hiring becomes dehumanizing.

The concept of HRM and the process of managing humans can be insensitive, dehumanizing, and focused on a capitalistic relationship with employees (de Gama et al., 2012). It is a system of categorization and supervision. Without morality and ethics, people become objects to maneuver and place judgement on, instead of, to be in-service for employees.

The concept of reflexivity, in anthropology, can be used to remove barriers to diversity in HR practices. It is the act of self-reflection to how your values and environment can shape outcomes. Learning and examining beliefs, routines, and attitudes

can be useful to Human Resource leaders. It puts pressure on the organization to remove bias from hiring (Gordon, 2021).

### ***Students – Motivation***

Teacher hiring impacts students in the classroom. A crucial piece for positive student motivation depends on who is hired to teach in the classroom. Equitable hiring practices focused on improving diverse staff demographics highlight the need for effective, high-quality student-teacher relationships. Teachers are an important motivator of student positive change (Meece & Eccles, 2010).

HRDs hiring teachers that represent their student population directly connects to student and teacher relationships. Hiring a teacher that looks like our students and can connect with them culturally and socially, positively impacts student academic performance. In the *Handbook of Research on Schools, Schooling, and Human Development*, motivation includes self-determination, person-environment fit, and attachment. As Meece and Eccles (2010) highlighted, “aspects of teacher-student relationships have a causal effect on children’s school-related competence, primarily by promoting a positive sense of self and emotional well-being” (p. 78). There are significant connections between a student’s social and academic accomplishments at school and their positive relationships and interactions with teachers. These relationships help support the development of students’ self-processes and specific social and academic skills.

Meece and Eccles (2010) discussed the impact on student development by focusing on school change that is developmentally appropriate and provides social context that will motivate students’ interest. In the classroom, teacher beliefs contain



efficacy and expectations for students. Beliefs and expectations are important for positive emotional and cognitive support for students. This directly ties into hiring teachers, who perform in the classroom and relate to their student population.

## **Terms and Definitions**

### ***Centralization of Hiring***

Centralization is when all hiring decisions and recruitment responsibilities are completed in the HR department. It has sole decision-making authority regarding all areas of the hiring process.

### ***Critical Race Theory***

The theory states U.S. social institutions, including education, have racism rooted in laws, regulations, rules, and procedures that lead to disparity in outcomes by race.

### ***Decentralization of Hiring***

Decentralization is when building administration is responsible for making recruitment decisions within their building and can choose employees based on different criteria. It allows for freedom in hiring decisions.

### ***Diverse Workforce***

A diverse workforce includes people of all physical and cognitive abilities and disabilities. It is a collective assortment of employees' differences and similarities that include characteristics, experiences, backgrounds, values, beliefs, and behaviors.

### ***Equitable Hiring***

Equitable hiring is the intentional recognition of what diversity can bring to the workforce. It is the active effort to promote equity for marginalized populations through

hiring practices. The goal is to break down barriers and remove bias and discrimination from the current hiring system.

### ***Human Resource Department***

The HR department of an organization that deals with the hiring, administration, and training of personnel.

### ***Personnel Department***

The part of an organization concerned with the hiring, training, and welfare of employees.

### ***School Board Responsibilities and Policies on Equity***

Key roles of the school board include reviewing, developing, and adopting policy to direct the district and establishing the mission, vision, and strategic plan for the district. School boards can establish equity policies and practices that ensure an educational system for student success.

### ***Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM)***

SHRM is the practice of attracting, developing, rewarding, and retaining employees for the benefit of both the employees as individuals and the organization. The department interacts with other departments to understand organization goals and create strategies that align with the goals. SHRM is seen as a partner in organizational success, as opposed to a necessity for legal compliance or compensation. It develops the talent and uses the opportunity to make other departments stronger and more effective (Strategic Human Resource Management Objective & Importance, 2017).

## **Paper Structure**

Chapter 1 includes the statement of the problem, its significance, theoretical foundation, and definitions of key terms. In Chapter 2, the result of *Brown v Board of Education*'s impact on hiring are broadly reviewed, leading to an overview of current hiring practices, a literature review focused on K-12 public education HRDs and their preparation to implement equitable hiring practices. The chapter concludes with a critical analysis of the literature.

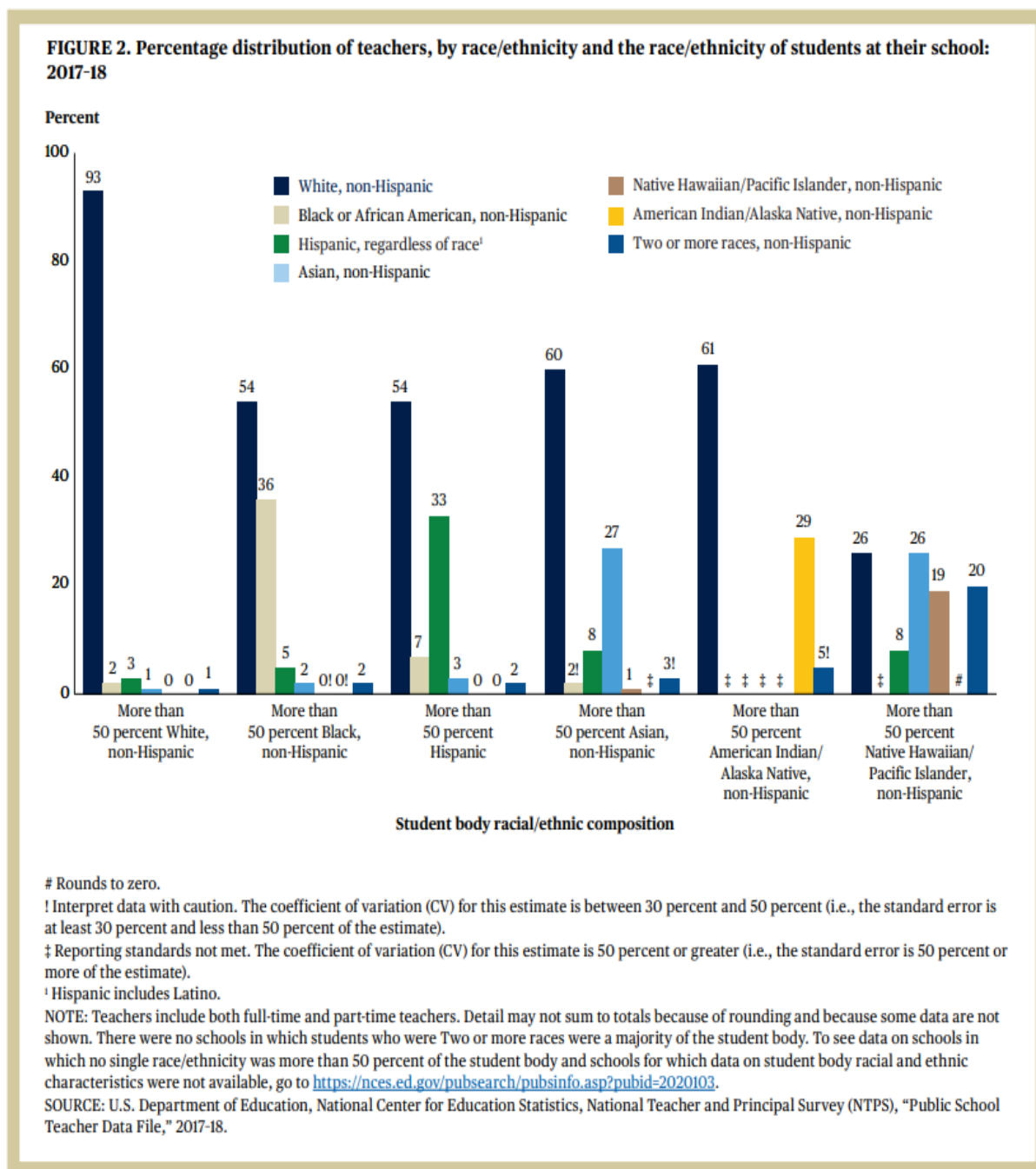
Chapter 3 includes discussions of the method and research design focused on the research questions, participants, sampling procedures, measures used, data analyses and anticipated results. Chapter 4 includes the data, codes, themes, and salient data review. Chapter 5 concludes the paper with analysis, study question review, implications, and conclusion.

## Chapter 2: Background and Relevant Literature

### **Impact of *Brown v Board of Education* (1954)**

In May 1954, the Supreme Court declared the doctrine of “separate but equal” unconstitutional. State-sanctioned segregation of public schools was a violation of the 14th amendment. This decision allowed Black children access to the same educational opportunities as White children, but it had unintended consequences that are still felt today. This decision led to the dismissal of many experienced Black educators who staffed Black-only schools. rather than have them instruct White students in integrated classrooms, TOC were fired. Because of this, students of color lost valued role models and over 38,000 TOC in the South and border states lost their jobs (Lutz, 2017). Diversity continued to decline in the teaching force. Figure 2 Institute of Education Science (IES) *Race and Ethnicity of Public School Teachers and Their Students, Data Point in September 2020*, shows in 2017-2018, 79% of public-school teachers were White, 7% were Black, and about 9% were Hispanic. TOC are more often hired in schools where their ethnicity and race matched most of the student demographics.

Figure 2

*Race and Ethnicity of Public School Teachers and Their Students*

*Note.* Data Point: September 2020 NCES 2020-103. U.S. Department of Education, a publication of the National Center for Education Statistics at IES.

## **Current Hiring Landscape and Impact of School Boards**

National law makers and educators study the ethnic and racial demographics in the United States and the shifting population majority to people of color. Sandra Colby and Jennifer Ortan's *Population Report*, issued in March 2015, proposes that people of color will become most of our national population by 2040. This shift is evident in our public schools. "As racial and ethnic demographics in the US public schools have shifted, the teacher workforce has lagged behind because of uneven recruitment and retention efforts" (Goings et al., 2018, p. 8). In the current hiring landscape, local school boards play a leading role in directing district employees, specifically HRDs, to hire teachers that represent diverse community demographics.

Success or failure of students hinges on effective HR systems and school boards are instrumental in setting the district expectation for equitable hiring practices. The California School Board Association stated that school boards do not directly supervise staff but have an important responsibility to ensure their district has an effective HR framework and positive school culture focused on student excellence (2013, p. 9).

HR creates an inclusive climate to implement the organizations vision and goals approved by local school boards. HRDs advance their systems by "...identifying, nurturing, managing, and using the abilities demonstrated by employees in order to help the company to attain its objectives" (LaMarco, 2018, para. 2). District personnel are tasked with how they will hire and manage their teacher talent and incorporate community expectations set forth by the school board. Expectations embody local culture, and depending on where the organization resides, national culture. School board directives, local culture and district hiring practices all influence teacher hiring.

## **Centralized and Decentralized Hiring**

School district hiring practices follow federal and state laws and district established policies. Because of unique community qualities, hiring also embraces community expectations, local culture, and district capacity. Community expectations, culture and capacity can determine the locus of control in the hiring process.

Historically, school principals have the primary responsibility of hiring teacher candidates for their building, which is decentralized hiring (Bartanen & Grissom 2019). Decentralized hiring at the building level gives building administration freedom in hiring decisions. The opposite is centralized hiring, which utilizes a standardized system across the district and district level administration make hiring decisions. Of the two types of hiring, decentralized hiring can lead to a more subjective process and inequitable outcomes for TOC. If administrators work in a decentralized hiring system, how is the HRD helping building principals and district leaders to implement expected laws and policies? How are they guiding the system to hire a diverse staff?

How HRDs move their organizations toward equitable hiring practices in a centralized or decentralized system, standardized or subjective approach, influences hiring outcomes for teacher candidates. LaMarco (2018) wrote that to achieve fidelity and sustainability districtwide, training and education can help HRDs lead a complex and emotional process.

## **Literature Review**

HR preparation for equitable hiring, Hughes (2018) explained the concern with HR hiring in education:

...important personnel hiring decisions are routinely based on scattered learning opportunities, often lacking coordination or in-depth focus. Seldom is comprehensive professional development in personnel practices made available to practicing school leaders. Mostly, administrators receive just-in-time coaching when they are faced with terminating someone who perhaps should not have been hired in the first place. (para. 2)

HRDs seem to be “doing something” about the “lack of diversity in teaching while the historical and structural inequalities that have created the stubbornly White and monolingual teaching profession remain unquestioned” (Burns Thomas, 2020, p. 217). Burns Thomas stated districts need policies that make clear who is hired, and direct teacher focus to make positive changes in a student’s school experience and outcomes.

*Examining the Preparation of School Human Resource Officers on Developing a Racially Diverse Educator Workforce* by Goings et al. (2019) highlighted the following:

1. HR Officers play a critical role in teacher hiring.
2. There is a need for educational leadership programs and ongoing quality professional development to support HR Officers in understanding their critical role in hiring a diverse teacher workforce.
3. Research on HR Officers’ training and recruitment practices is limited, and it is rare to discuss steps HR departments take to hire and support teachers.

Goings et al. (2021) discussed how the perspective of HR Officers in education is excluded from the current discourse and how HRDs’ intuition plays a role in hiring. Feelings and intuition may be strong in a hiring process and sometimes overpower logical thought processes and system steps. Administrators often rely on previous experience as



teachers and school building leaders and may make decisions that do not guarantee the best hiring decisions.

Previous experience, intuition, and feelings play out in hiring decisions based on culture fit. Culture fit describes how well a candidate can adapt to an organization and get along in the school culture. The belief in culture fit can lead to hiring bias and a homogenous school culture (Dries et al., 2014). It is quite easy for hiring teams to claim, “not a fit to our culture” while hiding unfounded feelings of dislike and prejudices when interviewing candidates. Culture fit is a hazy and vague term to dismiss potential candidates or to validate a candidate’s hiring. It is an example of affinity bias. Affinity bias is having a more favorable opinion of someone because they are more like us. They may share our same race or gender, or speak the same language, or have attended the same school. They look for a perfect match.

Conversely, culture add is an attitude that intentionally embraces individuals from different experiences, demographics, and communities to encourage a philosophy of inclusiveness. Instead of seeing differences as problems, hiring committees see them as an opportunity. Someone who comes from a unique background, or a unique set of skills is a plus, not a minus. Hiring for culture brings something new to the team and makes the community heterogeneous instead of homogeneous. Any objections to a candidate’s hiring must be justified based on knowledge, competency, and candidate dependability. Culture fit must change to culture add and HRDs are instrumental in changing the district culture (Boulton, 2021).

In a Phi Delta Kappa Special Report, Gist and Bristol (2021) discussed the critical need for preparation and growth of HR development and training of leaders. Implications

for policy, protocols and practice include using "...critical theoretical and conceptual orientations of race, justice, and education reform to understand and shape the policies, procedures, and practices of human resource development leaders charged with recruiting, developing, and retaining teachers, leaders, and staff" (Gist & Bristol, 2021, p. 30). Goings et al. (2018) suggested that revising the training for school leaders responsible for hiring teachers is needed.

A Wallace Foundation (2016) report identified five main themes that can directly connect and extend from principal preparation programs to district leaders and HRD preparation programs. The themes include the following:

- District leaders are dissatisfied with the quality of administrative preparation programs, and many universities believe that their programs have room for improvement.
- Strong university-district partnerships are vital to high-quality preparation but are far from universal.
- The course of study at preparation programs does not always reflect real job expectations.
- University policies and practices can hamper change.
- States have authority to play a role in improving leadership preparation, but many are not using this power as successfully as possible.

### **Global Connections**

The Province of Ontario, Canada's most populous and diverse province, is a strong global comparison to the United States educational system. The Ministry of Education's Policy Program Memorandum (PPM119), *Developing and Implementing*

*Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools*, was implemented in 2009 (Ministry of Education, 2014). It commits to bias-free hiring.

Boards should make every effort to identify and remove discriminatory biases and systemic barriers that may limit the opportunities of individuals from diverse communities for employment, mentoring, retention, promotion, and succession planning in all board and school positions. The board's workforce should reflect the diversity within the community so that students, parents, and community members are able to see themselves represented. (p. 5)

What is bias-free hiring? The goal of bias-free hiring is to move past first impressions, judgements, and stereotypes of candidates and focus on assessing skills and abilities against the job duties. Bias-free hiring assumes a "color-blind" approach to differentiating the teacher population by treating all applicants equally. Hiring focuses on skills, knowledge, experience, and merit. But critics of bias-free hiring, believe the practice of bias-free hiring "omits the importance of naming and acknowledging the importance of race and racism in teacher hiring practices" (Abawi, 2021, p. 4).

The literature review and qualitative data from interviews in *Bias-Free or Biased Hiring? Racialized Teachers' Perspectives on Educational Hiring Practices in Ontario* critiques the version associated with "bias-free" hiring practices rooted in Ontario's equity and inclusive policies (Abawi & Eizadirad, 2020). Abawi and Eizadirad (2020) used the theoretical framework of CRT and Critical Whiteness Studies. In CRT, there is no room for color blindness and bias free hiring. Researchers contend that the teacher workforce has remained White and unchanged in representation with the minoritized student population in Ontario (Abawi & Eizadirad, 2020). The idea of bias-free hiring

permits a color-blind lens by minimizing White privilege and focuses on merit. Abawi and Eizadirad argued, “Meritocracy effectively permits ‘White individuals to explain social inequalities as the result of individual ability and effort rather than due to historical and contemporary racism’” (p. 22). In CRT, the intersection of race and employment opportunities creates an analytical tool to understand inequities in school hiring practices. It does not focus on merit.

Abawi and Eizadirad (2020) recommended three things for the policy to move in the right direction and one recommendation ties directly to HR expectations. They recommended school administrators participate in critical reflection and introspection, individually and collectively as a school (including the school board) to determine how a school leader’s social position influence their recruitment decisions.

### **Strategies for Hiring**

There is significant research on strategies for districts to implement for hiring TOC. *REL Northwest* infographic listed strategies for recruiting, hiring, and retaining diverse teachers for HRDs. They include:

1. Data Use – check for staff underrepresentation and staff needs. Also use data to create marketing advertisements and to highlight benefits the district has to offer.
2. Institutional Partnerships – build partnerships between district and teacher preparation programs.
3. Relationship-Based Recruitment – build personal relationships with potential candidates.

4. Early Hiring – hire early in the process and ideally one month before the end of the prior school year.
5. Implicit Bias – train staff involved in hiring to recognize implicit bias and to use interviewing techniques that reveal candidates experience, knowledge, and strengths.
6. Multiple Measures – use multiple measures to evaluate qualifications of applicants. Remove gatekeepers and barriers like test scores, education, and experience are not always the best predictors of performance in the classroom.
7. Intentional Placement – place teachers of color for success and look at organizational conditions, leadership of school, and overall fit for teacher success.
8. Professional Learning – district needs to provide quality learning for teachers of color and allow collaborative work with other educators, mentoring and groups for support.
9. Develop Leaders – build capacity for leaders to improve working conditions and support TOC (Douglas-McNab, 2014; Motamedi, 2018).

These strategies and concepts are helpful, but HRDs may be wasting time and resources without specific training and education to implement valid, sustainable, and system changing hiring expectations.

### **Critical Analysis**

All public education hiring is funneled through a district's HR office. HR advertises open positions, maintains, and reviews application materials, directs screening and interview expectations, and finalizes candidate hires. Knowing this, the lack of

relevant equitable hiring professional development and formal training (education and certification programs) opportunities to guide our HR hiring leaders highlights a system gap that will keep districts complicit in a teaching workforce not having similarity with our student population. Burns Thomas (2020) indicated, “Well-intentioned efforts are undermined by a focus on incremental change and formal processes marked by racism and interest convergence” that do not threaten the whiteness of a district (p. 226).

There is limited research on HR preparation for equitable hiring. “We know little about the process through which teachers are selected and placed in schools from the perspectives of Human Resource professionals” (Goings et al., 2021, p. 190). Because of the varying teacher hiring landscape, equitable hiring practices, and the impact of these practices, change in equitable hiring is in an early stage. Policies and procedures vary from state to state and even local neighboring districts vary in their equity work. Currently, in Stanley County, Washington, four out of seven districts have an equity policy focused on system change. Three of the districts address equity in their system goals but a policy does not exist to spur and support the work. If that is one county in Washington State, what is it like in other states and countries? Tran (2015) stated “...education HR practice has not kept pace with the field of HR overall. Specifically, education appears to still espouse and institutionalize personnel rather than strategic HR management” (p.112).

From the infrequent research focused on HRDs’ hiring, there needs to a deeper look into meaningful educational administration coursework focused on equitable hiring practices including district and community expectations for diversity. Who has the power to hire and who approves the hire? HRDs have the power to hire but school boards

approve the hire. HRDs need school board backing to make meaningful changes that impact the teaching force. Changes must be based on data, directed by the board and community expectations, and implemented by the HRD. In *Inclusive Workplaces: A Review and Model*, Shore et al. (2018) proposed a model for an inclusive organization. This model recommends top management should “lead toward practices, processes, and policies that promote inclusions and discourage exclusion” (p. 2).

HR prepares individuals, groups, and organizations for learning and transformation. They must rely on theoretical frameworks to inform their practice and change school culture (Sparkman, 2019). It will be ongoing work that must stay present and relevant to the school population. Diversity, inclusion, and equity are a continual struggle for our communities. According to Alfred and Chlup (2010):

Yet, in all honesty, we still struggle with our own racist, heterosexist, classist, ageist, elitist thinking. Diversity awareness is a daily struggle, and our socialization of devaluing differences in some and valuing it in others has been pervasive and deep. (p. 343)

The future of hiring can challenge traditional systems, culture fit, and merit-based hiring. Acknowledging there will be community push back and that implicit bias is present in our hiring practices, professional development and system commitment will allow school employees to implement the laws and policies focused on equitable hiring. Without a clear understanding of outcomes, laws, policies, and action plans are a step toward improved equitable hiring but how the steps are implemented by personnel across a school system can determine the success or failure of established expectations. As the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report *Teachers*

*Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* (2005) stated, “The teaching profession must adapt a great deal so that it can act in a constructive manner within a fast-changing society if it is to retain the confidence of society” (p. 27).

In higher education, a program called Search Advocates was established by Oregon State University in 2007 to promote equity, diversity and legitimacy in university hiring. This program has been adopted in other universities, including Seattle Pacific University. The program is anchored by university staff, students and faculty who are trained as advisors in the hiring process. This includes search and selection (Oregon State University, 2023).

Focused on a foundation of current research, college personnel are trained in diversity, implicit bias, legal expectations, inclusive principles, search process strategies and effective communication skills. Search Advocates work with various campus hiring committees to help them diversify university staff by employing ethical strategies and decisions in their hiring choices. From, *An Evaluation of the Search Advocate Program at Oregon State University: Identifying Strengths and Opportunities for Development*, using search advocate was associated with increased hiring rates for underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. (DeFelice, 2019).

In February 2021, Search Advocate extended the diversity conversation to a National Search Advocate Community of Practice (NSACOP). Oregon State University and Stockton University started the NSACOP to bring college and university search advocate members to discuss and address the topics of inclusion, diversity and equity and share best practices. K-12 public education could examine and adopt practices like



Search Advocates to help support school districts and HRDs implement ethical strategies and decisions in hiring practices.

### Chapter 3: Method

Hiring in K-12 public education is funneled through a district's HR office which is led by an HRD. Equitable employment opportunities for teacher applicants, equitable hiring policies and procedures can vary in local, neighboring districts. In the same geographical area and within the same county boundaries, local school districts can diverge in their hiring practices and in community expectations.

After reading the study, *Examining the Preparation of School Human Resource Officers on Developing a Racially Diverse Educator Workforce Post Brown* by Goings et al. (2019), the implications for educational training for school based HRDs mirrored my experience and beliefs as a public-school administrator. Intrigued by this study and the training of HRDs to lead equitable hiring outcomes are the foundation for this case study. Using this study as a model, the research design focused on a specific location in Washington State and seven districts, five within Stanley County boundaries and two districts bordering Stanley County lines. As the seven districts grapple with equity barriers in all aspects of education, this study focused on how equipped the HRDs are to move forward with the equitable hiring directive. What training and professional development do HRDs have to implement equitable hiring expectations and what preparation and support do they need to develop a racially diverse educator workforce?

Collective case study is used to analyze HRD preparation in seven school districts in or near Stanley County. A case study is a qualitative approach to investigate a real-life system that can be defined within certain parameters. The real names of the county and districts were replaced with a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. HRDs in the seven Washington K-12 school districts were the population for the study. The districts ranged

in size from 300 to 7,000 students. The rural county is rich in agricultural with a history of logging, fishing, and railroads. In 2020, the population was 127,442 and the county seat is the City of District D.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), in a collective case study, various aspects are analyzed to pursue patterns and reasons of behavior. A case study allows a researcher to investigate things that may be difficult or impossible to replicate in a lab and allows for collection of substantial amounts of information about specific cases. It is naturalistic in presentation; information is descriptive and in narrative form. Theory is grounded in data after time is spent in the field and a picture takes shape as data are collected and analyzed. In case studies, the results cannot be generalized to the larger population. Further, such studies cannot infer causation and can lead to bias.

In a collective case study, meaning is established with interaction between the researcher and participants through questions about backgrounds, experiences, and ideas on structure of the social world. It gives a voice to the data and allows for a better understanding for how the theoretical foundation, CRT, may or may not connect to hiring practices in the seven districts. The intersection of race and employment opportunities creates a systematic tool to understand social inequity in school hiring practices.

The purpose of the study was to answer the following three questions:

- What school board policies, district action plans, and district systems are in place to hire a diverse school staff in the seven K-12 public education Stanley County School Districts?
- What educational training and professional development do Human Resource Directors from the seven districts possess to implement equitable hiring policies?

- What do districts who consistently hire a diversified workforce do differently than districts who do not hire staff that share cultural and ethnic similarities with their student population?

### **Participants**

The parameters for this study are a specific location, Stanley County, Washington, and seven HRDs hired by the school board to lead and promote district vision and personnel management participated in the study. Five out of seven Stanley Districts and two districts boarding county lines agreed to participate in the study.

### **Recruitment**

The sampling was based on convenience. Researchers use convenience sampling to collect data from a conveniently available pool of participants. It is commonly used and is prompt, economical, and uncomplicated. HRDs are readily available at district offices and when an HRD chose not to participate, an assistant or another available school leader was asked to participate. Keeping the study geographical area in and around Stanley County allowed for ease of access and timely data gathering.

### **The Journey to Seven**

The journey to collecting study results started with recruitment of seven HR leaders in Stanley County public school districts. The study proposal focused on seven districts within a county geographical territory. Through emails, telephone calls, and repeat emails, three districts in Stanley County committed to participation.

The next step to secure more participation was to utilize social capital and connections. The invite urged lifelong educational learners to help a colleague pursue new knowledge and achieve a higher educational degree. With the extra outreach, I

secured two additional district participants, which brought the participant total to five. Because of the district's packed hiring schedule in one of the five districts, I secured survey and written interview responses from the HRD and finalized the interview data with an in-person conversation with the superintendent.

Two districts from the original study plans declined participation. One of the Stanley districts never responded to participation requests and the second district declined because the HRD had just been fired and the Superintendent was completing his own study for his doctorate.

To support data collection, recruitment expanded beyond county lines. Two districts bordering Stanley County agreed to participate in the study. Total participation for district involvement reached seven.

### **Data Analysis**

This study included a large array of texts and approaches to gather data in a real world, bounded system with data collection including field notes and interviews with audio and zoom recordings. Being in the field and interviewing directors, led to balanced participation and observation and I gained a better understanding of how personal characteristics such as class, gender, race, disabilities, age, cultural identity, and status affect relationships with individual participants.

Interviews established purposeful two-way conversation and were the dominate strategy for data collection. I had structured and unstructured conversation with the participants, which built rapport.

To compare director backgrounds, I collected and analyzed a survey, resume and a list of education, job experience, and HR professional development courses. I also

collected District demographics and hiring data from district HR departments.

### **Coding the Data**

I coded the documents, district information, and interviews. As survey and interview data were transcribed, I developed and expanded the codes to incorporate the information gathered. Codes were modeled from examples in *Examining the Preparation of School Human Resource Officers on Developing a Racially Diverse Educator Workforce* by Goings et al. (2019). Patterns developed and threads began to weave connections to the three study questions. Below are the codes used for the study and they were developed once the data were transcribed:

- Challenges in Equitable Hiring
- Ah ha! Interesting and Unique
- HR Hiring Knowledge
- District Equity Policy
- Professional Organizations/Relationships that Impact Hiring
- HR Professional Development Ideas
- De-Centralized or Centralized Hiring
- Administrative Preparation Course
- No Experience or Training in HR Hiring Before Current Position
- One Metric for Hiring
- HR Support for Building Hiring

### **Anticipated Results**

The research is focused on a real-world concern, practical implications on current HR training, and directed at changing existing practices of hiring. The research question

concentrates on HRDs, as key district leaders, and their training and educational preparation to change current hiring systems for improved equitable outcomes. It begins an examination of educational hiring system that may be lacking in support and structure for district leaders. A review of current literature on equitable hiring highlights a study gap on the preparation and education in equitable hiring practices for HRD. CRT theoretical framework opens and exposes an analysis of the district power structures in relation to hiring and the cultural characteristics that maintain dominant and subordinate racial positions in hiring. CRT can help districts understand the disparities in district employment.

The following were the anticipated results from the study:

- A better understanding of the current equitable hiring landscape in Stanley County districts and the needed supports for the HR departments to successfully sustain equitable hiring practices
- A review of policies and procedures that identify the rationale for hiring staff who best represent our student population in Stanley County schools
- A data collection of TOC hires in Stanley County Districts and hiring landscape of TOC compared to mainstream teachers
- The implications of a district adopting equity policies and the impact of the policy on district hiring
- Professional connections and improved effectiveness and guidance in hiring process.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Study Participation and Data Gathering**

The study took place over an eight-week period in January-March 2023. All seven participants signed the consent letter (see Appendix A), emailed a resume, completed an online survey (average time for completion was 3 minutes) and a 45 to 60-minute interview (see Appendix B). Interviews were done in-person or via zoom based on participant preference. All interviews were transcribed from zoom or audio recordings into a Microsoft Word document.

After data were transcribed, the data were imported into Taguette. The original plan was to transcribe, print, highlight, and gather all codes/themes in Microsoft Excel. An EdD mentor recommended Taguette. Taguette is a free, open-source tool for qualitative research. Research materials can be imported, data highlighted, and quotes tagged in Taguette. The results can be exported.

HR interview transcripts and resumes were uploaded and coded in Taguette. For the online survey, responses were downloaded from the Windows survey form into Excel. The major research findings and trends are discussed next.

### **Data**

For study context, district demographics were secured from state report cards (2022-2023) and the HR online survey. The information clarifies current district student gender/race/ethnicity and teacher gender/race/ethnicity.

### **District Demographics**

#### *Overview*



- All districts have a 72% or more females employed and 86.5% or more of all employees are White.
- District B and D have a 55-56% Hispanic student population and Hispanic teachers represent 8-10% of the teacher work force in the two districts.
- Out of the seven districts, three have more teacher diversity than the others. District D has 13.5% teacher diversity, District B has 12% teacher diversity, and District F has 11.2% teacher diversity.
- One hundred percent of the teachers in District G were White.

**Table 1***District Demographics*

District	Student Gender	Student Race/Ethnicity	Teacher Demographics Female/Male	Teacher Race/Ethnicity
District A	Female 49% Male 50.9% Gender X 0.2%	67.8% White 23.8% Hispanic/Latino 5.3% Two or more races 1.7% American Indian/Alaskan Native 0.6% Asian 0.5% Black/African American	Female 75.4% Male 24.6%	94.2% White 1.8% Hispanic/Latino 1.8% Asian 1.4% American Indian/Alaskan Native .4% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander 0.4% not provided
District B	Female 46.7% Male 53.2% Gender X .1%	55.3% Hispanic/Latino 38.5% White 3.7% Two or more races 1.2% Asian 0.5% American Indian/Alaskan Native 0.5% Black/African American 0.3% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Female 76.4% Male 23.6%	88% White 10.7% Hispanic/Latino 0.9% Asian .04% Two or more races
District C	Female 48.1% Male 51.6% Gender X 0.3%	74.7% White 12.4% Hispanic/Latino 8.6% Two or more races 2.1% Asian 1.1% Black/African American 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native 0.1% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Female 70.7% Male 29.3%	96.8% White 1.3% Two or more races 0.6% Hispanic/Latino 0.6% American Indian/Alaskan Native 0.6% Black/African American

District D	Female 48.6% Male 51.4%	56.4% Hispanic/Latino 36.3% White 2.8% Two or more races 1.9% Asian 1.2% Black/African American 0.8% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander 0.6% American Indian/Alaskan Native	Female 72.8% Male 27% 0.2% not provided	86.5% White 8.3% Hispanic/Latino 1.9% not provided 1.2% Asian 0.6% American Indian/Alaskan Native 0.6% Black/African American 0.6% Two or more races 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
District E	Female 48.5% Male 51.2% Gender X 0.3%	77.2% White 12.1% Hispanic/Latino 5.8% Two or more races 2.1% Asian 1.2% American Indian/Alaskan Native 1.0% Black/African American 0.5% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Female 74.5% Male 25.5%	93.4% White 2.1% Two or more races 1.7% Asian 1.4% Hispanic/Latino 0.7% American Indian/Alaskan Native 0.3% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander 0.3% not provided
District F	Female 47.4% Male 52% Gender X 0.5%	55.7% White 20.8% Hispanic/Latino 12.2% Two or more races 5.9% Asian 4.0% Black/African American 0.9% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander 0.4% American Indian/Alaskan Native	Female 74.3% Male 25.5%	88.8% White 3.3% Hispanic/Latino 2.8% not provided 2.0% Asian 1.8% Black/African American 0.8% Two or more races 0.8% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
District G	Female 48% Male 52%	77.2% White 13.4% Hispanic/Latino 2.1% Two or more races 1.3% Asian 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native 0.9% Black/African American	Female 80% Male 20%	100% White

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## Diverse and Homogenous

Sections of the data were separated into diverse teacher districts and homogeneous teacher districts. The districts in Stanley County were not diverse but three districts had greater teacher diversity than the other four districts.

- Teacher diversity was not strong in any of the districts with 13.5% diversity as the highest.
- Three districts (B, D, F) had 11.2% - 13.5% teacher diversity.
- Four districts (A, C, E, G) had 0% - 6.6 % teacher diversity.

**Table 2**

*Codes, Total Highlights, and Comparison of Diverse & Homogeneous Teacher Districts*

Interview Transcript Codes	Total # Highlights	Diverse Teacher Districts B 13.5% D 12% F 11.2%	Homogeneous Teacher Districts A, C, E, G 93.4 % White or higher
Challenges in Equitable Hiring	27	14	13
Ah ha! Interesting and Unique	23	9	14
HR hiring knowledge	12	6	6
District Equity Policy	10	4	6
Professional Organizations /relationships that impact Hiring	9	5	4
HR professional development ideas	8	5	3
Decentralized or centralized hiring	8	4	4
Administrative preparation course	7	3	4
No experience or training in HR hiring before current position	7	2	5
One metric for hiring	4	2	2
HR support for building hiring	3	0	3

The above highlights are based on the number of times the code was mentioned. An example of this is evident in “Do you believe an administrative preparation course is needed?” One participant mentioned the need for a preparation course in two of the answers. The number of highlights for this code totaled eight. This is also seen in “District Equity Policy.” A participant discussed the equity policy in more than one question, and this increased the total number of highlights.

### **Themes**

The following six themes emerged from coding surveys and interviews:

- HR Supports in a Decentralized System: structures provided for equitable building hiring
- On-the-job: HR leaders all agree, knowledge comes from on-the-job experience
- Status of Learning: Past and current district learning for equity and hiring
- System Challenges: Challenges faced in hiring a diverse staff with state system barriers
- The Struggle is Real: Problems and issues faced by HR leaders in their districts
- Push Back: Community push back on hiring strategies and decisions by HR

Themes showed a pattern within the data through a topic or concept that surfaced repeatedly in the data. My use of themes summarized the data in a useful way. They shed light on answers to the study questions by categorizing patterns found in district systems, equitable learning, community support, and challenges faced by HR leaders.

### **District Policy, Plans and System: Hiring a Diverse Staff**

This section includes the answer to Study Question #1: What school board policies, district action plans, and district systems are in place to hire a diverse school staff in the seven K-12 public education Stanley County School Districts?

#### ***Theme: HR Supports in a Decentralized System***

District policies, survey and interview data were utilized to analyze the current equity work in each district.

**Policy.**

- Four of the seven districts (B, C, D, E) have an equity policy. All policies were adopted between 2020-2022.
- One out of the four districts with equity policies (D) hired a Director of Equity. This was an expectation from the School Board. The Director of Equity is charged with managing equity professional development, keeping the district focused on student equitable outcomes, and achieving the Racial Equity policy action plan expectations.
- Two of the four districts (B, C) stated equity work should be shouldered by all staff and hiring an equity director takes responsibility away from stakeholders.
- The superintendent leads the fourth district's (E) equity focus.

**Plans.**

- Three Stanley Districts (B, C, F) hired Dr. Q (pseudonym) to help engage district staff and communities in equity work.
- District A recently hired diverse district office certificated employees.
- District B committed to using a racial equity justice tool for systems and hires.
- District C established a 3-year district vision and action plan focused on accountability and diversity.
- District D adopted a racial equity policy, guiding principles, and 3-year action plan subcategory hiring.
- District E recently hired an administrator of color for high school principal position.

### District Systems.

- All seven districts employ decentralized hiring.
- District D is utilizing a few centralized hiring strategies (hiring building positions at the district level), but most positions are hired in the buildings.
- District C developed a bank of hiring questions required during interviews. The HRD helps staff recognize district teacher needs and trains building teams on implicit bias before interviews.
- Director X stated, “They (building admin) are not hiring for the building; they are hiring for the district, and I may have to move that person. Can they work with district and not just the building?”
- District B staff gives permission to call out bias, a second principal is present on all hiring interviews, and staff uses racial justice tools and approved interview questions.
- “We have been able to retain TOC over the last 5 years and mainly because of the Dual Language program. People stay when they have an identity like the DL program. When no one looks like them, they ask for transfer” (Director Y, District B).

**Table 3**

*Diverse and Homogenous District Hiring System, Equity Policy, Director of Equity and Actions for Equitable Hiring*

District	Centralized or De-Centralized Hiring	Equity Policy	Director of Equity	Actions for Equitable Hiring
Higher Teacher Diverse Districts – B, D, F				
District B	De-centralized more confident in decentralized process	Yes	No, believe work should be shouldered by all	Equity policy racial justice tool bank of approved interview questions

	with HR supports in place			second administrator in interview permission to call out bias working with Dr. Q for district equity learning dual language school
District D	De-centralized moving to more centralization by focusing on standardized screening and questions.	Yes	Yes	Equity policy with guiding principles, and 3-year action plan with subcategory hiring building equity teams administration training on bias dual language school
District F	De-centralized	No	No	Planning to begin work with Dr. Q for district equity learning
Homogenous Teacher Districts – A, C, E, G				
District A	De-centralized	No	No	Recent district office racial hires
District C	De-centralized	Yes	No, believe work should be shouldered by all	Equity policy 3-year district vision and action plan focused on accountability and diversity working with Dr. Q for district equity learning
District E	De-centralized	Yes	No	Equity policy hired an administrator of color for high school principal equity dashboard for school board
District G	De-centralized	No	No	Staff learning during professional development time

## HR Professional Development for Equitable Hiring

This section helps to answer Study Question #2: What educational training and professional development do Human Resource Directors from the seven districts possess to implement equitable hiring policies?

### *Theme: On-the-Job*

Survey and interview data were utilized to analyze HR professional learning and the theme, *On-the-job*. When participants were asked where they learned most of their knowledge on equitable hiring practices (academic preparation courses, professional development, or on-the-job experience) all seven stated, “on-the-job.” Their learning for the HR position came from work experience.

- Four directors had diversity coursework but nothing that prepared them for equitable hiring practices.
- Four directors started their HR path as teachers, building administration and then moved into HR leadership roles.
- One director started their HR path as a counselor, building administration and then moved into HR leadership role.
- Two directors began in HR as HR assistants and then moved into HR leadership roles.
- All seven HR leaders agreed an academic preparation course for equitable hiring is needed before they begin their HR role.
  - “Yes! What throws me is new principals that have no idea of HR or the lens. They don’t understand all the components and the whys behind what we do, laws and RCWs. The Superintendentcy (certification) has a little bit with it. There was no course or theory and that is missing, and discipline is as well, HR discipline, they need to know what it means and building principals are left on their own. My focus is to help PD for principals because it is second nature for me, and we have veteran and new (administrators), and some are hungry, and some don’t want to hear it anymore. Things are not black and white – there is gray, and you have to know the nuances” (Director X, District C)
  - “Yes, they are going to have to! They have courses expected for teachers in learning strategies and we need it for HR” (Director Y, District B).
- The most valued professional learning:



- Washington School Personnel Association (WSPA) and HR colleagues.
- None of the participants mentioned their academic preparation course.

**Table 4***HR Leader Data*

HR Demographics/ Ethnicity	K-12 settings employed	Diversity coursework in formal education?	Is an academic equitable hiring preparation course needed?	Path to Current HR Leadership Role	Certification and/or Experience	Years in HR	Most Important Professional Support for Equitable Hiring
Director Z White male	Private school, rural public	Yes	Yes	Teacher  Building administration  HR Director	Principal certification	21	American Association of School Personnel  Washington School Personnel Association  HR colleagues
Director Y Native American/ White female	Suburban rural public	No	Yes	HR background	HR administrative assistant  HR Director	11	Washington School Personnel Association  Washington State School Directors' Association  Lawyers  HR colleagues
Director X Hispanic female	Urban and rural public	No	Yes	HR background	Administration assistant  Certificated analyst  Human Resource Coordinator	20	Washington School Personnel Association  University cohort  HR colleagues

Director W White male	Suburban public, urban charter school	Yes	Yes	Counselor  Building administration  HR Director	Principal and superintendent certification	3	Washington School Personnel Association  HR colleagues
Director V White female	Suburban public	No	Yes	Teacher  Building administrator  ESD Director  HR Director	Principal certification	8	Washington School Personnel Association  HR colleagues
Director U White male	Suburban public	Yes	Yes	Teacher  Building administrator  HR Director	Principal certification	1	Washington School Personnel Association HR Colleagues
Director T White male	Suburban public	Yes	Yes	Teacher  Building administrator  HR Director  Superintendent	Principal and superintendent certification	4	Washington School Personnel Association  HR colleagues  Human Resources in Education Leadership (HELP) program

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### Comparing Districts: Diversified and Homogenous Teacher Districts

Study Question #3 was what do districts, who consistently hire a diversified workforce, do differently than districts who do not hire staff that share cultural and ethnic similarities with their student population? This question was harder to answer.

Coding data helped to develop themes from the interviews to give a better understanding. The themes, *Status of Equity Learning*, *System Challenges*, *Struggle is Real*, and *Push Back* are discussed in Table 5.

**Table 5***Themes*

	Themes			
	Status of Equity Learning	System Challenges	Struggle is Real	Push Back
Higher Teacher Diversity Districts				
District B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 years</li> <li>• Equity policy</li> <li>• Hired equity consultant</li> <li>• Dual language program</li> <li>• Equity work needs to be done by all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Union seniority</li> <li>• Budget cuts</li> <li>• Varying employment programs between districts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location</li> <li>• White school board, 45 and older</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public record requests over superintendent candidates</li> <li>• Spanish preferred challenged</li> </ul>
District D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 years</li> <li>• Equity policy</li> <li>• Equity Director</li> <li>• Dual language program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Union seniority</li> <li>• Budget cuts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location</li> <li>• Retention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People leaving the district</li> <li>• Reluctance in community</li> </ul>
District F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginning equity work</li> <li>• Hired equity consultant to start next school year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Union seniority</li> <li>• Budget cuts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slow to get started</li> </ul>
Teacher Homogenous Districts				
District A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginning equity work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Union seniority</li> <li>• Budget cuts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location</li> <li>• Lack of community diversity</li> <li>• Retention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slow to get started</li> </ul>
District C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 years</li> <li>• Equity policy</li> <li>• Hired equity consultant</li> <li>• Equity work needs to be done by all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Union seniority</li> <li>• Budget cuts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location</li> <li>• Lack of community diversity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public record requests on hires</li> <li>• District versus community</li> <li>• Recent negative incident with TOC hire</li> </ul>
District E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equity policy this year</li> <li>• Equity dashboard</li> <li>• Beginning equity work with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Union seniority</li> <li>• Budget cuts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of community diversity</li> <li>• Minimal teacher turnover</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slow to get started</li> </ul>

	community and staff			
District G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beginning equity work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Union seniority</li> <li>Budget cuts</li> <li>Small size</li> <li>Different hiring websites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of community diversity</li> <li>Minimal teacher turnover</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slow to get started</li> </ul>

***Theme: Status of Equity Learning***

Equity learning occurs in all districts, but the depth and rate are different.

Depending on school board leadership, administrative planning and community support, equity work travels at various speeds.

**Districts B, D, F.**

- District B and F hired the same equity consultant.
- District B adopted an Educational Justice and Racial Equity Analysis Tool.
- District B district believes equity work must be done by all stakeholders and will not hire a Director of Equity.
- District D hired a Director of Equity and has a 3-year action plan focused on academic and hiring barriers.
- “[A] Large percentage in most districts are reluctant and intentionally so. They are reluctant to look at diversity” (Director W, District D).
- District F is beginning the equity journey. When asked if the district had an equity policy, Director U stated, “Yes, I believe it does. (I am) new to job and we align with WSSDA.”

**Districts A, C, E, G.**

- District A is “getting more diverse but not as much as other districts in the area” (Director Z).

- District C began an equity journey before the other districts, and it became tense. Hiring for increased teacher diversity, currently with a 96.8% White teaching staff, in a district with 25.3% student diversity, has not been a straightforward change.
  - “We did do an approach and started teaching to community and staff. It depends on presenter and how it can change or break something. It (equity learning) was going rogue. We had to back away from the monthly meetings and had one hundred members. It got away from district and became district versus community. I call it the relationship tango” (Director X, District C).
  - “Our population isn’t as diverse, and it is a slow roll, and it is intentional. We are still looking at TL frameworks and side by side depending on population and audience. We should have equity and not just about color, everything with student learning, special education, and opportunities” (Director X, District C).
- District E established an equity dashboard and superintendent notifies the school board as actions items are completed.
  - Director V, District E stated, “It is hard for people of color to live in District E. Why put yourself through this, when they can live in (neighboring city) and have a more diverse community? Diversity is coming.”
- District F is starting a strategic plan with Dr E. this summer. “Optimistic (Dr. Q) will give us some starting points. Cautious with how we talk about it. It is important to keep people in the conversations, not talking out of turn and not feeling threatened,” said Director V.

- District T, District G stated, “Anomaly. We do not have much diversity. We are not seeing the same diversity. We are rural, 262 (students) in district.”

***Theme: System Challenges***

Hiring challenges are not just at a local district level. When trying to hire a diverse staff, all seven HR leaders drew attention to state system challenges. The two biggest state issues are union seniority and state funding cuts.

Union seniority makes it difficult to hire new teachers and attract TOC. Director W mentioned that their district collective bargaining agreement (CBA) language supports diversity hiring but with budget cuts and reduction in force (RIF), they are reducing staff and cutting their best and brightest. Director Z stated, “We need to keep seniority out of the (teacher) contract language.” Director W confirmed this statement, “The teachers’ union will not sacrifice seniority for newly hired TOC, and this is a huge barrier to successful TOC hiring.” Director W continued, “It’s touchy, going to job fairs, looking for diversity and seeking people to apply. It’s hard when we are not hiring, so why go?”

Other system concerns noted by all HR leaders is high percentage of White female teachers and minimal staff turnover because of seniority and retirement. For District F, most of the teachers are female, all teachers are White, and it is rare that someone leaves and when they do, Director T said, “it’s usually for retirement.” The District E HRD stated, “We are like the hotel California. They can check out but never leave.”

Director A mentioned that most of their teachers are female and stated that the state educational association slapped their district education association’s hand for not having more diversity on their executive board. “They did get one person of color and

once they saw all the crap behind the scenes, quit.” This is in reference to the politics and self-promotion that was taking place in executive board meetings. Director U said, “...looking at gender gap in elementary. (We need) males in elementary because we are so heavy female.”

A unique problem for District F is 175 of the out-of-district student choice waivers are not diverse. White families come to District F to leave other local districts. District F accepts the student waivers because it helps to fund district needs and this continues the flow of White student transfers. Families are seeking a district that meets their needs and, in this situation, it also matches a homogenous population. Director T said, “We call it white flight. We are very different from District D and very different demographics.” White flight refers to White students moving to districts that fit personal ideals and demographics.

***Theme: The Struggle is Real***

All district leaders described the struggle to attract and retain TOC. Geographical location for the districts means seven districts often compete for the same candidates. If they can hire TOC, the lack of community diversity makes it hard to retain TOC. Director T said, “All staff is listed as White and where do we find someone that wants to come that reflects our (student) demographics, don’t know where to find them and (we will) not fly to Texas for one teacher. It’s rare that someone leaves, usually retirement.” “We try but problem is it is difficult to get TOC to apply and I won’t just hire someone for their skin or ethnicity” (Director Z, District A).

Past negative hiring outcomes also play a role in attracting candidates. Director X stated, “Because of the situation from last year with our (building administrator), he was

not doing his job and turned it into color...and outside looking in, they think we are racist.”

***Theme: Push Back***

All seven districts reported community push-back in an unwillingness to change and the increase in challenges to diverse hires. Below are quotes from HRDs that highlight community pushback. They highlighted bias and fear that exists in Stanley district communities. From a reflexivity concept lens, district leaders can begin to examine beliefs, routines, and attitudes in the seven districts that impact hiring. Reflexivity is the act of self-reflection on how your values and environment can shape outcomes.

***Director Z, District A***

- “Our school board did not get into hiring unless it was athletic director or football coach, it was a nightmare.”

***Director Y, District B***

- “Board is all Caucasian and 45 or older and equity protocols are not looked on with favor.”
- “Push back on postings from community members that want to apply for a job with Spanish preferred, (they ask) why does it say that?”
- “(We received) requests for public records for the backgrounds on the 19 (superintendent) candidates. We are employers and they didn’t believe us that we couldn’t give it because we hired a consulting firm. Legally when you are screening for a candidate, we can’t legally look at race.”

***Director X, District C***



- “Community has money and pay for everything and that comes with strings. They are very educated and get into email conversation about equity and hiring. It is a big thing here and (the district) get a lot of public records requests looking for if we did a background check and followed procedure. That can be very uncomfortable for teachers coming to our district or coming from out of state.”
- “It feels that it is heavy on the heart and that is what we are trying to change and bring someone in and teach our community... (community needs to) back-off from our hires, we do background checks.”

***Director W, District D***

- “People have left the district because they do not believe what the district stands for (social justice and equity) and find a new district that believes their ideology.”
- “We are seeing new laws trying to be pushed through for more parental control of schools.”
- “I see it slowly evolving but an old guard that wants to see it remain the same... no one of color or with disabilities. Everyone is reluctant.”

***Director V, District E***

- “We have a unique opportunity to provide for our kids and we had three strong candidates, but we picked someone with less experience (candidate was diverse) because we can train them, but we can’t make them (the other candidates) a role model for our students.”

The quotes highlight the struggle of communities to hold to traditional hiring systems cemented in inequitable practices. Challenges are demonstrated with public record requests, the voices heard in times of dispute, and unenrolling students because of

ideology conflicts. HR leaders are on the frontlines battling the community equity reluctance.

### **Summary of Salient Findings**

The seven districts, five in Stanley County and two in neighboring counties, are in varying stages of equity learning and TOC hiring. The challenge to hire diverse staff involves multiple layers. Inadequate state hiring systems, district budget cuts, and collective bargaining agreements that prioritize union seniority cause barriers to TOC hiring. Additional barriers include undesirable geographical location, lack of community diversity, public pushback on diversity hires, and attitudes and hidden biases of HR leaders. One bright spot in TOC hiring is districts with dual language programs can staff, train, and retain a diverse workforce.

All seven HR leaders continue to work to move to equitable hiring practices as they face the challenging barriers. As seen in Chapter 4 data, they employ strategies (bias training, interview questions, racial justice tool) to support building leaders, in a decentralized system, to calibrate hiring practices systemwide and to help staff confront bias while simultaneously working to improve their own learning in equitable hiring practices (WASA training and consultation support).

HR leaders all agreed that most of the learning took place on-the-job with significant support from Washington State Personnel Association (WSPA) and HR colleagues. In unanimous agreement, all HRDs believed an academic preparation course focused on equitable hiring practices is needed, welcomed and vital for state and district hiring success. This course should be offered to all district administrators and HR employees.

## Chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion of Results

### Study Question #1

What school board policies, action plans, and district systems are in place to hire a diverse school staff in the seven K-12 public education Stanley County School Districts?

#### *Data*

All seven districts utilized decentralized hiring. One district, District D, began using centralized practices (central office interviews and candidate placement) but most of the hiring continues to be directed by building administration. In a decentralized hiring system, the seven HRDs work to support building administration with district approved equitable hiring strategies. These strategies include bias training, interview preparation, and candidate screening.

As with equitable hiring strategies, Stanley Districts are engaged in district wide equity work but at varying degrees. School boards and superintendents' lead equity work. This direction is often dictated and pushed by their communities and constituents. Four of the seven districts (B, C, D, E) adopted equity policies in the last three years. All policies are accompanied by action plans, yearly goals and hiring expectations. Districts B and D, with the most student and teacher diversity, currently lead other districts in equity learning and hiring strategies. Interestingly, the first district to start equity work in Stanley County was District C but when community meetings became contentious, district leaders slowed the equity work and hired an outside equity consultant, Dr. Q, to facilitate the effort.

This leads to the question, who should lead the district equity work? Three districts (B, C, F) hired the same equity consultant, Dr. Q, to help lead equity learning in

their districts. They believe the equity work should be carried by all stakeholders and everyone should have a part in removing barriers.

For District D, the school board instructed them to hire a Director of Equity. The Director of Equity is expected to shoulder the district learning expectations and direct the stakeholders to equitable practices. Does it matter who leads the work if the work remains relevant and timely?

Three districts (A, F, G) are at the beginning stages of their equity learning. District F, as one of the three heterogenous districts, has 44.3% student and 11.2% teacher diversity but is just beginning their equity work. This could be attributed to a new superintendent, two new assistant superintendents, and the mobile military community that frequently transfers. Military families would increase community diversity while new district leaders could slow the momentum on equity progress. According to Theus (2022):

Yes, there must be a structural change in HR policies and practices remove barriers to DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion), but these structural barriers were created to reinforce the personal world views of the leaders who put them in place. If you want true change it has to start with the leaders' worldviews and mindsets. (para. 9)

Educational training and professional development for HRDs is critical for success in equitable hiring.

### ***Geography and Demographics***

Geography and demographics shape the equity path in all seven districts. Stanley County is rural. Rural is open countryside with less population density and tend to have

less job opportunities and services and entertainment are harder to access. The rural location can make it harder to attracting teaching candidates to the area.

The Employment Security Department reported that 90.3% of Stanley County identify as White compared to 78.5 % statewide. Looking at ethnicity, Stanley County has a greater proportion of Hispanic or Latino residents,18.6 % compared to 13.0 % statewide (Name withheld, 2022). For diverse teaching candidates, working in varied racial community with a more diverse population is often attractive.

### **Study Question #2**

What educational training and professional development do Human Resource Directors from the seven districts possess to implement equitable hiring policies? Five of the seven HRDs started their educational careers as teachers or counselor. They achieved school administrative certificates and spent time as building principals. In this role, principals complete HR tasks such as employee hiring, management, and termination but the preparation and experience for these HR tasks can vary depending on the university program and district support. The five HRDs advanced from building administration to HR district leadership roles. This entry into district work encompassed minimal preparation in HR equitable hiring and district hiring systems. Their learning for their HR District roles happened on-the-job.

The other two HRDs began their career paths as classified staff. Their journey started as HR administrative assistants and allowed for on-the-job experience. They progressed to HR leadership roles as opportunities evolved. The training for these two directors was based on district HR practices and strategies while the other five directors

were trained in educational and system learning. The two directors (District B and District C) had a deeper understanding of HR practices because of their roles.

For all participants, on-the-job learning was supplemented with professional development. The most valued professional learning for HRDs was Washington School Personnel Association (WSPA) and connecting with their HR colleagues. None of the HRDs mentioned their academic preparation course as a learning avenue for equitable hiring. Their academic learning discussed diversity but nothing about equitable hiring practices.

All seven participants agreed, an administrative preparation course is essential for HRDs and is vital for system success before they enter their district roles. Application and implementation of equitable hiring practices when learned on-the-job, does not set the district on a course for success. Students feel the impact when leaders build the plane as they fly it.

Years of experience in the HRD role was a factor in data responses. Director Z and Director X, each with over 20 years of experience, provided detailed responses highlighted with examples. Director U, with less than one year of experience, provided broad and abstract responses. To account for this, a review of district documents and state reports were used to help support the director interview data.

No matter the experience, equitable hiring confidence is lacking in Stanley leaders. Three districts are employing consultants to help them lead this work. One district hired a director to focus solely on equity to push system change. The last three districts are apprehensive and tentative to start the work, because of fear of competition, change and the unknown. Leading communities in equity work is hard and without

knowledge, community support, and a dedication to change, HRDs may fail to influence their school communities. HRDs need academic preparation, continued training, and timely professional development to implement equitable hiring practices that positively impact a school system.

### **Study Question #3**

What do districts, who consistently hire a diversified workforce, do differently than districts who do not hire staff that share cultural and ethnic similarities with their student population? Districts that engage in equity work and focus on a system approach have had more success in hiring a diverse workforce. Equity policies, that explicitly direct staff and call-out hiring expectations, in addition to intentional decentralized district hiring strategies, have helped to move the needle in district diversity hiring.

### ***Dual Language Program***

One key take-away for hiring and retaining staff is a dual language program. This is significant for equity hiring in Stanley County. Two districts have dual language programs in Stanley County. District B, with the highest diversity of teachers, has a dual language program that attracts and retains teachers. District D, a close second, also has a dual language program. HRD Y stated the district attracted and retained TOC over the last five years mainly because of their dual language program. “People stay when they have an identity like the DL program.” When teachers do not feel connected or do not have others that look like them, they ask for a transfer or leave the district. District B intentionally posts across the nation and attends job fairs in New Mexico and Arizona, to help fill the dual language positions. Through these planned actions, they can hire and

keep their dual language positions filled. A sense of identity and seeing others like them, attracts and retains TOC.

The goals of school dual-language immersion programs are focused on language proficiency and academic success in students' first and second languages. Another goal is cross-cultural understanding for students. The school programs are characteristically found in kindergarten through eighth grade, but it can be offered through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Teachers hired to fill dual language positions tend to stay in districts because they feel needed, connected, and dedicated to their hired role. The program also promotes cross-cultural understanding which is important piece for TOC. DL programs give teachers a community in their professional positions.

### **Implications for Theory and Conceptual Constructs**

CRT asserts our institutions are built on racism. Our social institutions are rooted in regulations, rules and procedures that led to a disparity in hiring outcomes by race. The traditional system supports traditional outcomes and leads districts to focus on culture fit rather than culture add. Director Z, District A said, “We try but problem is it is difficult to get TOC to apply and I won’t just hire someone for their skin or ethnicity.” Director Z explained that districts seek qualified TOC candidates. It is not about a ratio or hiring a designated number of TOC but hiring a TOC that is qualified to deliver the best education to students.

Director V said:

We have a unique opportunity to provide for our kids and we had three strong candidates, but we picked someone with less experience (candidate was diverse)



because we can train them, but we can't make them (the other candidates) a role model for our students.

In unpacking this quote, Director V stated the superintendent was the district leader for equity and strongly believes in giving opportunities for TOC. The TOC principal candidate did not have as much experience as other applicants, but the district felt the culture add and intangible skills of the TOC principal hire was the most beneficial for the school community. Sometimes it is not about experience but what the candidate can offer to students.

### **Living Your Word**

An interesting and significant discovery from the study rests in concept of ethics and morality. Why is ethics important in HR hiring? HR departments hold a great deal of power to make decisions that direct and support current and future systems. Surrounded with turmoil, a director works to implement equitable hiring practices in their districts while holding stakeholders to a high morale standard. An example of this is District C.

District C is a homogenous community with affluence. It began its equity journey before all other Stanley Districts but found community pushback slowed the process. Community distrust has remained, and to continue the learning, the district hired Dr. Q to help them lead the charged, emotional work. Director X is unique in her director role and in the District C community. Director X is female, Hispanic, and began her career in a classified position in HR. She learned to emerge from “playing the game” to “living her word:”

I learned early to code switch. Not a lot of Hispanic students stayed in Stanley County after graduation. I learned early on how to play the game, even if I felt

targeted and minimized and being Hispanic and female, you play the game to get hired and not ruffle feathers. Now, I am speaking up and giving myself more permission to speak up and I didn't do it before. When recruiting, you have to live your word.

The growth and confidence of Director X in her HR role, show in a recent teacher hire. The teacher had disabilities and needed support to complete her job duties. Director X said:

We lived within our truth, and we hired her, and she needed extra help than others (service dog). I treated her like everyone else. All walk within our walls and often we only talk about color, (but we have) an array of backgrounds and they (teachers) fill a need that we have.

For District C, it is not just about racial and gender hires but teachers that can be role models for all students, and this includes disabilities, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, age, and veteran status. Dr. Arthur Langer (2019) stated:

Acknowledging all forms of diversity will enable any organization to foster a more collaborative workplace positioned to grow to its fullest potential.

Encouraging all employees to embrace and be inclusive of their colleagues' differences, will position your organization on the right path toward greater success. (para. 2)

For Director X, it is about living her truth. "My focus is pretty much about belonging and what I have is a central office focus. That is my guidance."

The concept of motivation for students is an important aspect of teacher hiring but through this study, we also should apply motivation to teachers. What impacts and

motivates teachers to work in Stanley County? Just like students, is the district environment a fit for the teacher, can the teacher build attachments in the community, and can they commit to stay (retention) in the district? Intrinsic factors contribute to teacher job satisfaction. As noted by Shaw (2020), “The five factors: engagement, respect (praise and appreciation), fair compensation, motivation, and life satisfaction all help lead to job satisfaction in the workplace. While extrinsic factors like compensation are important, intrinsic factors generally contribute more to job satisfaction” (para. 6). The Dual Language programs in Stanley County were an avenue for teacher satisfaction.

### **Implications for Practice**

HRDs in Stanley County feel a moral obligation to focus on equitable hiring for their districts. They all agree an academic preparation course, in school education certification programs, is needed. The work is too large for an arbitrary approach and a mass use of resources (human, financial) that may not succeed. Equity is not about isolated interventions. It is a planned multi-year approach with all staff involvement. As evident in the interview data, HRDs face moral and ethical decisions to diversify their school communities while facing a lack of support from both staff and community. The relationship tango between community beliefs and HR ethical expectations is an intricate dance that can often push HR leaders off the dance floor. Director W said, “People have left the district because they do not believe what the district stands for (social justice and equity) and find a new district that believes their ideology.” As districts hire TOC, community members do not trust the added contributions TOC can bring to their school communities and are choosing to remove their students to find a district that matches

their belief of teacher fit. This highlights the complicated relationship between stakeholder community interests.

### **Recommendation for the School of Education**

A solid foundation of learning before HR leaders move into their district roles is needed. It sets-up a proactive system. Currently, on-the-job learning keeps leaders in a reactive mode and scrambling for the right strategy, right moment, and right person to move the work. A review of the training and services provided by Educational Service District (ESD) that supports Stanley County show the services offered do not include HR support or equitable hiring professional development.

There is no lockstep, perfect approach to equitable hiring because every community is different, and their needs are varied and change over time. Elements of successful equitable hiring is a place to start. The equitable hiring essential elements, applied to various district settings, is needed in academic coursework. Without this preparation, districts are hiring outside equity consultants. What are equity consultants providing that could be transferred to administrative academic coursework before leaders begin their district roles? One idea for academic preparation is to look at program elements from Search Advocates. It is utilized in higher education and uses a reflexivity approach of self-reflection on how values and environment can shape outcomes. Learning and examining beliefs, routines, and attitudes can be useful to HR leaders. Search Advocates could be applied to a K-12 public school system.

### **System Changes**

Other implications for practice include moving the hiring locus of control from decentralized building hiring to a centralized district system and transitioning district

traditional HR departments into SHRM models. These two practices cannot be implemented without a clear directive from the school board. Hiring can prioritize partnerships with district departments to attract, develop, and retain diverse teacher talent.

### **Role of the School Board**

The role of the School Board for equitable hiring is visible in the seven districts. Four of the districts adopted policies to direct staff in equity work, three are working with a hired equity consultant, two have dual language programs, and all are making strides in their system practices for equitable hiring. But the strategies may lack system continuity and if work gets push-back from the community, it slows progress to a sluggish roll.

The equity rhythm of the districts is present in school board members. The districts range from active, explicit direction with an adoption of board policy (District D) to indirect support in district strategic plans (District A and G). When the path is defined by the board, district staff move forward with expectations knowing they are supported. This is visible in District B, C, and D. These three districts implemented district trainings, tools, and strategies to help staff navigate expectations.

Without a clear path and a vague nod to equity, district staff are rudderless in stormy water. Movement is difficult and safety is unpredictable. Because of this, the work in District A and G remains hesitant and focused on equity learning determined by building administration. School Boards may be slow to act on equitable hiring.

A review of the seven district's school board members highlights the need for more diverse community representation. Each district has five board members. Of the 35 board members, 57% are female and 43% are male. In addition, 94.3% of board members are White and 5.7% are Hispanic. With the lack of diverse representation on school

boards, as communities push back on equitable hiring practices, what voices are being heard?

### **Investigation**

The investigation resulted in:

- a review of policies and procedures that identify the rationale for hiring staff who best represent our student population in Stanley County schools,
- data collection pertaining to TOC hires in Stanley County Districts and the hiring landscape of TOC compared to mainstream teachers, and
- professional connections and improved effectiveness and guidance in hiring process.

The data gathered in this study was consistent with original thoughts and the review of literature. HRDs lack education and training to systematize successful equitable hiring practices. They unanimously agreed that academic preparation courses are needed for district equitable hiring expectations.

### **Limitations**

The qualitative data from the study elucidated the challenging task of equitable hiring in varying districts and large need for academic preparation for HR leaders. A consideration is the study focus on a rural geographical location. The seven districts in this area could hinder wider application of the findings. Sampling suburban and urban districts for wider context as well as directors in other states that are statistically stronger in equity hiring could give strengthen conclusions.

An area of improvement for the study is expanding the participants beyond HRDs. Hiring impacts all stakeholders. Including additional district leaders, school board

members and teachers could enhance the study data. Additionally, examining the influence of centralized hiring systems and SHRM systems in K-12 public education may shine light on system success, deficits, and needs.

### **Contributions**

The following are strengths and unique contributions from the study:

- The results provide evidence for an academic preparation course focused on district administration and HR equitable hiring practices.
- The results provide insight and perceptions on equitable hiring practices in a rural county with diverse community strengths and challenges.
- The study offers a new perspective and pathway for K-12 school administration research, *Search Advocates*.
- The study proposes moral and ethical connections for HRDs implementing equitable hiring practices.

### **Future Research**

A research avenue for hiring could look at traditional practices that limit and stunt equitable hiring. School employees cling to traditional hiring practices out of comfort and familiarity. These practices perpetuate the belief that in hiring candidates of color, we are hiring race over skill, quota over quality. Traditional practices allow us to remain comfortable and continue to give us the same results. We must move the discussion of affirmative action in teacher hiring from a quota focus to an excellence and asset outlook. What hiring practices support, highlight, and encourage candidates to demonstrate skills that will benefit our students and school community?

Research on essential elements of successful equitable hiring that can be applied to all districts is needed. There are many approaches, beliefs, and strategies used in districts but what are the elements needed to establish system success in varied districts?

A look at the roles that impact hiring is another area for research. What is the role of the school board in equity hiring? What about the experience of HRDs? Is there a difference in hiring success with HRDs that rise through the ranks of HR or directors that enter HR from an educational background?

Finally, a future research avenue can examine district struggles. How are district resources (human and fiscal) and stakeholder (community, students, and staff) morale impacted when districts stop, start, and flounder with equity? Public education is charged with fiduciary responsibilities and are pushed by political and moral obligations. What is the impact on system success when district resources are misused or depleted?

## **Conclusion**

“Leadership development, organization development, career development, and training can be impacted by unrecognized bias and unchallenged assumptions based on race” (Sparkman, 2019, p. 187). HRDs must be at the forefront of exploring backgrounds and experiences of staff members and make equity, inclusion, and diversity a priority to improve trust, growth, and district achievements. They are the gatekeepers of hiring and how they manifest federal and state expectations into local practice determines the success of equitable hiring practices. They are unique school leaders that have a significant impact on hiring and retention of teachers. As Director Y stated:



You can't be what you can't see. Students have to be able to see what they can become and (we need to) supply role models. For the staff, we have to have representation and connection as well, carrying the load.

The future of hiring must challenge the traditional system by expecting different results through protecting and promoting, not minimizing, and eliminating candidates. Acknowledging there will be community push back and that implicit bias is present in our hiring practices, professional development and system commitment will allow school employees to implement the important laws and policies focused on equitable hiring. HR training and professional development have huge implications on future hiring. Without a clear understanding of outcomes, how the steps are implemented by personnel across a school system can determine the success or failure of established expectations.

We can stop traditional practices that allow us to remain comfortable and continue to give us the same results. The *Wipe-Out* hiring obstacle course must be retired, as indicated by the District D Superintendent:

If we are comfortable with what we always do, we will get the same results. We need to check ourselves and our implicit bias. What will we do about it and how will we hold each other accountable? Do we hire people that look like us or our kids? The racial equity lens needs to weave into the fabric of all that we do and then we will get different results.

When looking up antonyms for *Wipe-Out*, these words appeared: *conserve*, *preserve*, *protect*, and *save*. When looking for antonyms for *obstacle*, these words appeared: *opening*, *promotion*, *clearance*, and *help*. As gatekeepers to the *Wipe-Out* obstacle course, HRDs are significant district leaders. They have influence to manage

organizational conditions that promote TOC, support them, and cultivate their abilities to enable all students to grow and learn.

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**Appendix A**  
**Recruitment Letter**

January 2023

Dear Human Resource Director,

As a current doctoral student with Seattle Pacific University, I am conducting a qualitative research study for my dissertation. I am asking Stanley County Human Resource Directors to participate in this study. This research will examine the current equitable hiring practices in Stanley County school districts and how HRDs are supported in this work.

All hiring is funneled through a district's HR office. Knowing this, the lack of relevant school-based Human Resource professional development opportunities and formal training, focused on equitable hiring practices to guide our hiring leaders, highlights a large gap in our system. The purpose of the study is to answer the following questions:

- What policies, action plans, and system changes are taking place to hire a diverse school staff in your school district?
- What education and professional development do Human Resource Directors have to implement equitable hiring practices in their respective districts in Stanley County?
- What possible next steps could your school district utilize to implement and sustain success equitable hiring practices?

The study will include HRDs submitting a resume with experience, education and relevant professional development, a demographic survey, a 45-60-minute interview, and a follow-up meeting (by Zoom or in-person) to confirm data information.

Data collection will be in the form of survey information, field notes, resumes, and relevant hiring and equity focused district documents. Minimal disruption and protection of confidentiality both for you and your district will be a priority. I will be happy to share the findings with you after the research is completed.

The research is focused on a real-world concern, practical and current practices, and directed at changing existing practices of discrimination. The potential benefits that may be gained by participation include local professional connections and improved effectiveness and guidance in equitable hiring practices for Stanley School Districts.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent will be given to you to keep.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Harlan  
Seattle Pacific Doctoral Student

## Appendix B

### Data Collection List

Demographic survey (race, gender, age)

Resume with experience, education, and professional development

45- to 60-min individual interview

#### Interview Questions

1. Does your district have a diversity/equity policy and if so, does it include a hiring action plan focused on equity and hiring?
2. Is your district working to develop an assessment tool that investigates the training techniques and frameworks that promote diversity and identify in-service and pre-service teachers from various racial and cultural backgrounds?
3. The simplest way to improve diversity hiring is to pick one metric to improve upon – what would one metric be for your district?
4. Does your district hire in a centralized or de-centralized system? Why?
5. What do you see as the most challenging aspects of an increasingly diverse academic community?
6. What are some of the political/social issues around equitable hiring in your district?
7. What steps has the district taken to meet such challenges?
8. What are the strengths of diversity hiring?
9. What kind of leadership efforts would you undertake to encourage a commitment to excellence through diversity?
10. Title, years in education, years in HR/hiring
11. What is your degree and certifications?

12. How would you describe your current thinking about diversity in hiring, and how has your thinking changed over time?
13. Did your administrator preparatory program academic requirements provide sufficient equity on hiring training for you in your current role?
14. Have you attended or been offered professional development and training on equitable hiring practices?
15. Would you find a content-specific course that offers a HR and diversity component for future school-based district HR/talent evaluators, of value in your current position?
16. What professional organization do you go to for support when new initiatives and new laws are implemented?
17. Do you seek out HR colleagues as a resource?
18. Where does most of your knowledge about equitable hiring come from – course requirements, professional development, on-the-job experience?

### Survey Questions

1. Last name, first name
2. Race
3. Position and title for current role
4. District and years in current position/HR
5. How many years have you worked in Human Resources or directed the work for HR?
6. Please check where you have been employed in your K-12 public education positions:
7. In your career, what was your trajectory into Human Resources?

8. During your formal education, were you exposed to coursework centered around workplace diversity?
9. What key professional development have you participated in that relates to workplace diversity and hiring?
10. What informal training have you utilized to support hiring a diverse staff?
11. What is the demographic data for your teachers and students in your district?
12. What percent of principals of color are in your school district?