Leadership Actions for Equitable Arts Education

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Abstract

In May of 2020, over fifty arts and education organizations released a joint statement regarding the essential nature of arts education (NAEA, 2020). This announcement and subsequent campaign highlighted some benefits of a rich arts education such as increased social-emotional well-being and levels of empathy, the development of a safe and welcoming school environment, as well as lower suspension and drop-out rates (Gehry, 2020; NAEA, 2020). It also highlighted the consistent inequities that continually plague arts education programs (Gehry, 2020).

Five district level arts leaders from New York State, striving for equity in their programs, participated in this phenomenological, multi-sited, qualitative study looking at the impact of leadership practices on equity and excellence in arts education. This dissertation is guided by the following research questions: 1) What are the major contributing factors necessary to produce an excellent and equitable K-12 arts education program? 2) What leadership beliefs, actions and experiences influence and sustain equity in the arts for students?

An Arts Equity Framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016) and ten “high-leverage equitable leadership practices” (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, p. 376) provide a foundation for analysis in which to understand leadership actions that promote and sustain equitable and excellent arts education programs as well as lead to the development of a theory of leadership for arts equity. Implications for implementation of this theory of leadership for arts equity as well as future research conclude this dissertation.
LEADERSHIP ACTIONS FOR EQUITABLE ARTS EDUCATION

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“This is the only time that he can receive his pull-out services. It’s better that he’s removed from specials so he’s not missing time from his real classes.”

~Fourth Grade Teacher

“She isn’t getting her work done and is having trouble keeping track of everything. Peer support and movement breaks are very helpful for her so we are going to need to remove her from chorus so that we can concentrate on her sitting down and getting her work done without interrupting others.”

~Fifth Grade Teacher

“He already has the required arts credit, so we’re not going to schedule him into any other arts classes.”

~High School Counselor

“They didn’t practice enough and didn’t seem very committed to the band so they weren’t invited to stay in the group.”

~Middle School Band Teacher

“Dance class isn’t weighted so why would I let you choose that over the other weighted classes that will look better on your transcript and college applications?”

~High School Counselor

“When I was applying to colleges, several admissions guys told me that because I only did orchestra and robotics for one year each, colleges might not think I can commit to things, like college, for a longer time. That hurt and I always wonder if that was a reason some colleges didn’t accept me. The crazy thing is that my high school told me to stop orchestra because I already got what I needed from it. I would have stayed in orchestra forever if I could have.”
“I wish I had known you could keep taking art classes in high school. I wanted to be a [graphic] designer but the college I talked to said I didn’t have enough art experience [in high school] for that to seem like a real choice for me. I like my job okay, I guess, I mean, I make money. But I still wish I had the chance to see if I could’ve been a designer. I miss drawing and all that stuff. That would’ve been so amazing.”

~High School Graduate, Office Custodial Crew

The above testimonials have been shared with me during conversations I’ve had over the years of my career as a music teacher and administrator. These statements and countless others have been stated or heard repeatedly by students that are kept out of arts education by seemingly superficial decisions or inflexible interpretation of policies. Often the students left out are those that are part of historically excluded populations and already may have limited access to arts education. Continued practices such as these deeply impact students by limiting their creative development and their access to opportunities in arts education. This could have profound and life-changing effects on their future as well as echo through coming generations.

The arts are an essential part of education. The 21st Century skills listed in the Partnership for 21st Century Learning’s Framework (Framework for 21st Century Learning, 2020) are all skills acquired in arts education and are in high demand from employers as evidenced in Forbes list of top skills employers want (Adams, 2015). While learning in the arts has aspects that are shared with other academic disciplines, more importantly, artistic endeavors are distinctive, both in the challenges they provide participants and in their fulfillment. While an arts education will enable students to be lifelong participants in and patrons of the arts, it also allows students to engage in opportunities for learning that no other discipline can provide, both as individuals and
collaboratively. The arts must be meaningfully included into every child’s educational experience—not only because of their connection to and impact in other disciplines, but also to provide the unique tools and experiences that enable students to “participate in circumstance, culture, and time in the ongoing human conversation that is perpetuated through the arts” (Davis, 2010, p. 41).

In May of 2020, over fifty arts and education organizations released a joint statement regarding the essential nature of arts education (NAEA, 2020). This announcement and subsequent campaign highlighted some benefits of a rich arts education such as increased social-emotional well-being and levels of empathy, the development of a safe and welcoming school environment, as well as lower suspension and drop-out rates (Gehry, 2020; NAEA, 2020). It also highlighted the consistent inequities that continually plague arts education programs (Gehry, 2020). For example, though over eighty percent of Americans are reported to support the funding of arts education in schools, there has been a continued decline of support, especially financially, for arts programs and it is expected to only worsen as a result of the pandemic (AAAS, 2021). When broken down demographically, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences Commission on the Arts shows that,

Schools designated as needing improvement and schools with higher percentages of minority students were more likely to experience decreases in time spent on arts education. White students have experienced virtually no declines in arts education since the mid-1980s, African American students have experienced reductions in arts education of 49 percent, and Hispanic/Latinx students have experienced reductions of 40 percent. Children whose parents have less than a high school education have experienced a 77 percent decline since 1982. Numerous local audits have found that schools serving low-
income students often provide no arts education or lack an arts teacher (AAAS, p.7, 2021).

Across the country, funding and access to arts programming has decreased steadily over the last thirty years (AAAS, 2021). As Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts President Deborah Rutter states, “Americans understand the value of an education that includes the arts, but we as a nation have not established sustainable educational policies that make it possible for all students to receive the education they need” (Franklin, 2021).

The previous section provided some insight into the current state of affairs of arts education. In the next segment, I will provide personal experiences and reflections that have led me to engage in this research. Next, a brief introduction to the theoretical frameworks that will be the lens used to analyze the strategies and actions shared from leaders in the study will be shared. Following this, a brief overview of the research study is included.

**Professional Practice Leads to Inquiry**

As a music teacher, I began my career in a mid-sized urban school district in New York State. My teaching “philosophy” naturally centered on including all students in whatever ways they could be included. I, admittedly and embarrassingly, initially did not put much thought into this practice—it just happened as I taught. I was passionate about creating an environment for music that was inclusive to all of my students. As my eyes were opened to the differing identities of my students, I searched for a variety of ways to connect with them and allow them to connect with me and with music. I figured the easiest way for me to learn what was best for my students or what might help them engage was to ask them. Not only was that a huge trust builder in terms of our student-teacher relationship, but it also immediately created engagement in the class community and our learning around music. I would notice how connected their requests were to
aspects of their identity. This is when my actual philosophy of teaching became more intentional, student focused, and identity based.

My growth into this more purposeful phase coincided with the district hiring a new administrator to lead the arts education department and, as a result of increased department interaction, I began to take note of the other teachers and programs in the district. For instance, some of the schools in the district had one chorus, some had many, and some had none. In terms of the instrumental program, most schools had band programs, only one-fifth of the schools in the district had orchestra programs, and the alternative schools did not have any instrumental music programming. All elementary schools had general music and art classes for classes at each grade level but how students with disabilities in self-contained classes attended general music varied immensely across the district. In terms of middle schools, some schools offered general music and arts classes in all grade levels and some only in select grade levels.

As I observed other classrooms or performances, I could not help but notice differences which prompted me to wonder why they occurred. Questions such as:

- In a district that is only about 1/4 White, why are so many of the performing ensembles filled with a majority of White students?
- Are there other student identities, that aren’t as easily seen as race, being excluded (or seemingly excluded) from programs?
- Why do some schools at the same level in the district have certain arts programs or classes and some schools do not?
- Who is making the choices or decisions to maintain or deny access and to include or exclude certain students?
How are these decisions being made and is the effect on the greater success or relevance of arts education programs taken into account?

These questions were always at the forefront of my mind, and I would raise them in department meetings. While some of my colleagues were open to these questions, others were not and there was much disagreement about how and why programming and participation demographics came to be. Moreover, there was dispute about whether this was even a necessary data point to examine. For the majority of my peer teachers, it seemed to be an interesting topic that we would discuss from time to time, but there was never a push or a larger move toward action.

As the years went on, I had the privilege of teaching in different schools and at different grade levels throughout the school district and eventually became the Supervisor of Fine Arts, the district administrator overseeing and leading the arts education programs. As I began understanding the department through the lens of my new leadership role, I came to see many of the same inequities on a much larger scale. What first was a noticing of various discrepancies grew into intense wonderings and data dives around race, gender, ability, and language. From disproportionate staffing to a variety of policies and procedures used as gatekeepers preventing students from access to arts education opportunities in the district, I could see that as a department we would need to dig much deeper to address the sources of our inequities and institute anti-oppressive policies and procedures for our students. I wondered where to begin and what the most effective strategies or practices would be to provide for increases in equity and access to our programming. As a result, that would be the focus of my leadership and the most crucial task during my tenure in this position.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Frameworks around equity in the arts and leadership for equity guide this work. I base
this research in these frameworks and combine them to direct my data analysis. I also use these frameworks as the foundation for building a new theory to serve as a model for arts education leaders.

**Arts Education Equity**

Arts Education has often been a field of exclusion for many reasons. Through the history of public education, this content has often not been taken seriously or been thought of as “non-academic” or an extra especially when decisions are based on what students need for success versus what society values in education (Davis, 2008; Whitford, 1923). Additionally, there has habitually been a focus on teaching the styles and techniques of the Western European “masters” to students deemed to have “talent.” This gatekeeping has left groups of students marginalized and overlooked for not fitting into this subjective mold (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016).

When Horace Mann initiated the public school movement in the 1830s and 1840s, he reasoned that public education would make the people better workers and would help create a self-governing society of self-governing individuals (Fowler, 1996; Peterson, 2010). Mann believed that to become a self-governing person, one’s mental powers must be strongly developed. He believed instruction in the arts was crucial to this development (Fowler, 1996; Peterson, 2010). By contrast, in 1893 the arts were omitted from the first national high school curriculum guidelines because it was felt the arts lacked the mental-disciplinary value of academic subjects (Davis, 2008; Whitford, 1923). William Torrey Harris, US Commissioner of Education (1889-1906), argued that the aesthetic principles in the arts of repetition, symmetry, and harmony parallel the stages of the individual’s development into civilized society (Peterson, 2010). The arts education pendulum continued to swing back and forth with the continued disagreements among Progressive Era educators (Davis, 2008; Whitford, 1923).
As Sputnik I was launched in 1957, the United States appeared to be falling behind in the space race (Fowler, 1996; Peterson, 2010). This led to increased pressure on educators to overhaul the focus of public school curriculum in the interests of economic and military competition with the Soviet Union (Fowler, 1996; Peterson, 2010). A forceful counterargument for widespread arts education as a Cold War resource was made by Harvard president James B. Conant (Whitford, 1923). He contended that all American students should “study works that unite them to a shared past and a shared future” (Davis, 2008, p.12). Again an emphasis on technical skills returned in the 1983 “Nation at Risk” report spawning the rise of the accountability movement, despite the 1985 national push by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts to make the arts more intellectual and therefore included as part of the core subjects (Fowler, 1996; Peterson, 2010). This eventually grew into the Common Core standards movement which also initially did not cover any arts (Peterson, 2010).

The rise of multicultural education and culturally responsive teaching has shifted the mindset of numerous educators and artists alike (Davis, 2008; Fowler, 1996; Peterson, 2010). While the arts can be an excellent vehicle for educators to teach about different cultures or ethnicities, schools and arts educators have often been given the impossible question: “which arts – whose culture – should be taught” (Fowler, 1996, p. 113)? Arts education can be the transformative subject in education if we allow them to be by developing educators and educational leaders and support them in doing so (Davis, 2008; Fowler, 1996; Kraehe, 2017). This research into equity in the arts will provide a framework for understanding the multiple facets of arts education that require intentional and purposeful work to find success.

**Educational Leadership for Equity**

Educational leadership is a phrase that can refer to anyone from a department chair up to
the Superintendent of Schools to the Board of Education. For these purposes, we will use
educational leadership to refer to school building leaders (principals, assistant principals, etc.)
and school district leaders (superintendent, assistant superintendents, directors, etc.). Many of
these roles grew out of head teacher roles, as schools and districts grew (Marzano, Waters &
McNulty, 2006; Peterson, 2010). In the early 20th century, educational leaders were often tasked
with the clerical needs of the daily running of schools as well as supervision and control of
students and then, as the need to establish common curriculum within states developed, the role
expanded to add these instructional based tasks (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2006; Peterson,
2010). As the 20th century continued to develop, education leaders became increasingly
responsible for operations matters as well such as transportation, budget, and facilities (Marzano,
Waters & McNulty, 2006; Peterson, 2010). As the accountability movement got started, again
with the “Nation at Risk” report, those metrics were folded into educational leaders’
responsibilities (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2006; Peterson, 2010).

As the roles and responsibilities of educational leaders were changing over time, so were
the mindsets and pedagogical beliefs of some in the field. Many were moving toward a more
socially just and inclusive view of education and leadership that focused on equitable outcomes
for students (Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis, 2009). These leaders recognize that various individual
identities can play a role in the successes that students have, or don’t have, in school and commit
to creating environments and experiences that address these inequities so all students meet with
success. (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Theoharis, 2009). As described by Scheurich and Skrla, “In
striving for both equity and excellence…we are aiming for schools in which there are no
persistent patterns of differences in academic success or treatment among students grouped by
race, ethnicity, culture, neighborhood, the income of parents, or home language. In other words,
we are aiming to foster schools that literally serve each and every student really well” (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p. 2). This research into educational leadership for equity will provide a framework for understanding the multiple facets of education leadership that require intentional and purposeful work to find success.

**Leadership Actions for Equitable Arts Education**

I have found that much of educational leadership research is focused on the school leader, or the principal. However, in departments with more specialized content, such as Fine Arts Departments, the department leader’s responsibilities are across the entire district, often managing fine arts teachers in multiple buildings. This leader must not only engage with and manage a specific group of staff but also work with building leaders across the district to ensure that department standards and initiatives are being appropriately prioritized and implemented. It would seem to follow that similar leadership practices would be integral for enactment by district leaders as well as building leaders to have consistent, equitable programming, but I also wondered if there might be additional practices that are crucial for district leaders. This gap in research piqued my interest in further understanding building leadership and district leadership.

To assist in this quest, I combined information and frameworks learned from both bodies of literature (arts equity and leadership for equity) to propose a further framework specific to leadership actions for equitable arts education. These structures and literature will be discussed in depth in Chapter Two. This framework and this research will focus on the more global, district nature of fine arts leadership and their work, even obligation, to disrupt problematic patterns and systems.

**The Study**

Previously, I conducted a qualitative study as part of a research apprenticeship where I
used semi-structured interviewing with four district level arts administrators responsible for overseeing district-wide arts programs. The study focused on how districts were managing their Fine Arts programming in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. While the focus of the study was not explicitly on leadership practices for equity within arts education, as I conducted the interviews and analyzed the data, I began to see the impact that leadership practices, both of the arts administrators and other district level administrators (at the same level or above the Fine Arts leader), have on equity on or within arts education programs. As a researcher, this led me to want to investigate the further specific connections between district leadership practices and equitable arts programs.

District level arts leaders are crucial figures in the pursuit of equity for all students. Not only do they have the ability to initiate and support changes that provide access for all to arts education, but as you will see the participants in this study believe, the duty to do so as well. This study hoped to fill the gap in the research in this area regarding district level art administrators and equity in arts education programming.

**Research Questions**

This dissertation is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the major contributing factors necessary to produce an excellent and equitable K-12 arts education program?
- What leadership beliefs, actions and experiences influence and sustain equity in the arts for students?

**Definitions of Key Terms and Guidance**

It was important for all stakeholders invested in this study to be aligned in their definitions and understandings of certain terminology and NYS guidance documents. This
agreement regarding information will allow not only for interview questions to be interpreted more objectively by all participants, but also for data collected to be analyzed more effectively by the researcher. This will also lead any findings to being more conclusive than supposed in nature. The rest of this section will define arts education, leadership (specific to education), equity and excellence for the purposes of this study in order to ensure this connection. Following the definitions, two major NYS Education Department directives will be explained, also safeguarding this relation.

In this study and subsequent discussion, *arts education* is defined as the intentional and separate instruction (as opposed to instruction integrated with or within other content), by a content certified instructor, of visual and performing arts disciplinary content: i.e., visual arts, media arts, music, theater, and dance. While works of art are almost integrative by nature, this study is focusing only on the distinct teaching in the various disciplines of the arts. “The value of the arts in education is clear and non-negotiable and must withstand rather than respond to differing tides and winds. We need to include the arts in education not because the serve other kinds of learning (and of course they do), but because they offer students opportunities for learning that other subjects do not” (Davis, 2008, p. 7).

As noted, when examining *leadership* in education, most often what is meant is school building leadership, or the principal. While there is markedly less research on district leadership, the practices highlighted in this work are as important for implementation by department and district leaders. “Educational leaders in all parts of the education system must provide direction and support for the ecologies that educators need to reboot a focus on personalized learning and meaning making” (Kozleski et al., 2020, p. 494). As it is the responsibility of the principal to rally teachers and staff around a clear vision and purpose, it is likewise important that a
superintendent and district leadership must do the same for the district as a whole. For this study, the terms *leader* and *leadership* will encompass both building and district leadership. As different types of leaders are discussed, their specific leadership role will be identified.

*Equity*, which is different from equality, is defined for these purposes, as “a commitment to ensure that every student receives what he or she needs to succeed” (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015, p. 3). Leaders working toward equity must also recognize the historical understandings at play and deliberately search for or create fair scenarios for students while continuing to navigate inherently biased structures (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Rigby et al., 2019). The key portion of the definition being that not all students, families, or community members should expect all students to receive duplicate educational experiences, but rather more personal, individualized experience based on their unique, distinct strengths and requirements.

*Excellence* can be difficult to find a definition that most will come to consensus around. Often when speaking of educational excellence, people are referring to test scores or interventions and other times they are referring to an undefined concept thus rendering the word meaningless. For this study, *excellence* is defined as standards-based, student centered, authentic engagement and continuous improvement (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015). This means that “every student has the specific supports they need for equal access and opportunity…every student feels a sense of belonging, benefits from tapping into the power of diversity, and develops the aspiration and skills to form authentic relationships across differences (Krownapple, 2017, p. 8). As is evident through these definitions, excellence and equity are interdependent since programs cannot fully be deemed excellent without also being equitable and vice versa.

Since this study intentionally occurred exclusively in New York State (NYS), it is important to highlight two initiatives and subsequent documents that were driving district
leadership from the state level – the NYS Framework for Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education (CRSE) and the NYS Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Initiative. The NYS CRSE Framework was born out of a January 2018 directive from the state education governing body to create a document that would help guide those in education in creating policies and practices that lead to positive and uplifting classroom environments and academic outcomes (NYS CRSE Framework, 2018). The framework is organized around four tenets – Welcoming and Affirming Environment, High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction, Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment, and Ongoing Professional Learning (NYS CRSE Framework, 2018). This framework is important for districts to keep in mind as they progress with equity work and references to it arose during this study.

The NYS DEI Initiative, begun slightly more recently with the release of a DEI framework and policy statement in May 2021, is an effort by state education leaders to make diversity and inclusion a priority for all schools across the state (Diversity, equity and inclusion. 2021). During the first year of implementation, school districts were tasked with developing and implementing DEI policies as well as familiarizing themselves with the information included in the framework (Diversity, equity and inclusion. 2021). Districts then use this information as a foundation for their own work around the principles listed. As anticipated, this initiative and framework was in the forefront of leader’s minds in New York State, and as expected, surfaced during this study.

As noted, not all students are treated equally or given equitable access when it comes to arts education. It is critical that leaders find ways to provide more equitable opportunities for students within the arts so this vicious cycle is interrupted and we do better for our future students.
Overview of Chapters

This remaining section serves to provide a content overview of the remaining chapters. Chapter Two stages the literature review for the study. This review focuses on the literature surrounding equity within arts education, leadership actions for equity, and finishes with a proposed new framework of leadership for equity in arts education. This framework serves as the basis for data analysis further in the study.

The research methodology for this study is presented in Chapter Three. The design of the research, details of the methodology, as well as information about data collection and analysis are all included. Additionally, there is discussion about my positionality and role as the researcher of this study.

Chapter Four provides a detailed narrative introduction to the administrators and school districts that participated in this study. Demographic information about the individuals and districts is included. It is important to gain an understanding of who these leaders are as educators and their beliefs about arts education to understand the work they are doing in the area of equity in their schools.

Chapter Five inspects the analysis of the data from the study around the first research question - What are the major contributing factors necessary to produce an excellent and equitable K-12 arts education program? This chapter provides information from participants around specific actions they take in particular areas of their job that have led to increased equity within their programs.

Chapter Six examines the analysis of the data from the study that addresses the second research question: What leadership beliefs, actions and experiences influence and sustain equity in the arts for students? This chapter provides information from participants around not only their
convictions, principles, and events, but also those of their colleagues and superiors in leadership, that propel them forward in the fight for equity.

Finally, Chapter Seven concludes this work with discussion of the key findings from this study as well as implications for future research. Practical implications for educators and leaders striving to create equitable arts programming for students are also included.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

When investigating leadership actions that lead to equity in arts education programs, it is necessary to not only examine how equity is manifested in arts education, but also how educational leaders are able to establish equity through their leadership. This chapter will first review literature around equity in arts education and then literature around leadership practices for equity. Finally, it will conclude with connections made between the bodies of literature and a proposed framework for analyzing leadership practices for equity specifically in arts education.

Equity in Arts Education

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed into law in 2015, stresses the need for all students to have access to a “well-rounded education”, the definition of which decisively includes the arts (ESSA, 2015; Wan et al., 2020). Ideally, this would put arts education on a more even playing field with other content areas, but unfortunately, it has remained a depreciated content area (Risner, 2006; von Zastrow, 2019; Wan et al., 2020). While there are equity and inclusiveness issues in all of public education in the United States, there is often not a lot of urgency with regard to addressing these issues within arts education classrooms, especially in urban environments (Frierson-Campbell, 2007; NCES, 2017). Now, more than ever, these issues of equity need to be raised and addressed. It is the intent of this synthesis to analyze the current literature pertaining to equity in arts education to determine potential causes, patterns, and solutions. The synthesis is structured to provide additional context in this introductory section under Method for Synthesis and Frameworks for Equity. The next section, An Arts Equity Framework, describes the framework of focus and be used to organize the synthesis of the literature. Finally, the synthesis will conclude by identifying ways to improve upon the Arts Equity Framework and areas for further attention.
Method for Synthesis

To begin collecting and analyzing the literature on equity in arts education, I gathered books and journal articles from my collection as well as conducted searches through Syracuse University’s library databases. I gathered sources such as academic articles and research studies from both theoretical and empirical publications by utilizing the ERIC and Education Source databases. I first applied “education,” “arts education” and “equity” as key terms. To ensure that potential resources were not excluded, terms such as “music education,” “visual arts education,” “media arts education,” “theater education,” and “dance education” were also paired with “equity” for expanded searches. The findings that resulted were case studies, empirical works, and conceptual works, as well as articles and reports relating to praxis. In all, these searches resulted in seventy-five articles.

An initial review for relevance and applicability focused only on pieces involving public school education and public school systems. These systems were largely in the United States, although one article involving schools in Toronto, Canada was also included. This narrowed the scope of my review to a total of forty-one pieces of literature for this synthesis. Surprisingly, a small amount of the sources were empirical studies and the remaining majority were either conceptual works, praxis articles, or works of commentary. As equity in arts education is a relatively new focus area for research, all research cited was written from 1998 to the present.

Frameworks for Equity

Varieties of frameworks have been developed to deal with equity in an assortment of educational settings and many would be helpful when looking specifically at equity in arts education. Scheurich et al. (2017) propose a Community-Based Framework based around the
four components of community, democracy, context, and time. Based on the thinking that the achievement gap is in reality made up of a plethora of gaps (teacher quality gap, school funding gap, healthcare gap, etc.), the extent of which varies for each location and community. They argue that each location and community should be able to decide their priorities for equity (Scheurich et al., 2017). Lopez et al. (2017) developed the Pedagogy for Change Framework based on the four components of self, context, students, and pedagogy. The key to this framework, as stated by the authors, is keeping it “dynamic and responsive to the needs of our students and the community” (Lopez et al., 2017, p. 36). A third framework, the Quantum Ten Equity Framework, combines ten research-based practices (social and emotional learning, trauma-informed practices, universal design for learning, response to intervention, positive behaviors interventions and supports, restorative practices, culturally responsive practices, inclusive practices, growth mindset, and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs) to create equitable systems for students (Sullivan, 2020). While the aforementioned frameworks are weighty and concentrate on equity, they often have components that exist outside of arts education (in the current education environment) or miss nuanced components of arts education that have a pronounced impact on equity. Because of this, the Arts Equity Framework, developed by Amelia Kraehe and discussed in depth to follow, will be used to organize and further discuss the findings for this synthesis (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016).

**An Arts Equity Framework**

Amelia Kraehe (2017) in “Arts Equity: A Praxis-Oriented Tale” writes that “equity is an elusive concept that is rarely defined and remains underdeveloped” (p. 268). The arts and urban communities have a complex history of inclusion and exclusion that also influences the
inequities in urban school systems. In addition, there are few policies ensuring that students from traditionally marginalized groups have equitable access to arts education (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). To assist in developing the concept of equity and defining the concept more precisely as it pertains to arts education practice, Kraehe presents an arts equity framework developed out of the understanding that educational equity is not a linear concept, but rather one that involves many elements that are interrelated and interdependent upon one another (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). These can create layers of inequity that are woven into the system of education, all of which have been refined over time (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Given these layers, Kraehe’s framework is based on six dimensions that are interconnected in their work and create a “more comprehensive consideration of the challenges of educational equity” (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016).

Figure 2.1

*Arts Equity Framework*
The framework is based on the dimensions of distribution, access, participation, recognition, effect and transformation (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016; Kraehe, 2017). Distribution is a term within this framework referring to the decisions that determine how and where resources (e.g., materials, space, staffing, and professional development) are dispersed, as well as the quality of such resources (Kraehe, 2017). Access not only refers to the availability of arts education classes and relevant content within them, but also the ease with which students are scheduled into the classes and are engaged in the content (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). Participation, most obviously, deals with who is in the arts education classes, the various communities they belong to, and the demographics they represent. However, this arts equity framework also looks at participation in terms of the students that are not in the classes and what might be happening to cause these particular disengagements or breakdowns in access (Kraehe, 2017). This is an important divergence from past reviews of participation. Recognition is about the inclusion, acknowledgment, and valuing of diverse cultural expressions and perspectives (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). Effect, or the various ways that students are influenced or impacted as creative thinkers, continues the transition of the framework from data collection into a phase of action (Kraehe, 2017; Stokas, 2016). And finally, transformation is the process of making a change to a better, more equitable system by acknowledging bias and working against it (Kraehe, 2017). This framework will help to provide a structure with which to organize the findings and help to showcase where gaps might exist for potential future work. Investigating equity in arts education through this framework can help policy makers, school administrators, parents, educators, and
students identify bias, whether conscious or unconscious, as well as make changes to emphasize a more aggressive spotlight on equitable practices in the arts (Darden & Cavendish, 2011).

**Distribution**

While education is considered a state issue, funding disparities can vary from state to state as well as within states (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In addition to inequitable state funding formulas, districts also engage in the repeated process of staff-based budgeting which refers to the “practice of treating schools within the district as *units* that differ only by the number of pupils” (Darden & Cavendish, 2011, p. 64) thus overlooking any differences or nuances within the schools or among the students. Urban schools tend to have larger struggles with funding and the arts classrooms are often the first impacted negatively in terms of materials and equipment (Darden & Cavendish, 2011; von Zastrow, 2019). In this era of high stakes testing, priority in schools is often given to the subjects that are tested as they are seen as more important (Baker, 2012). Arts teachers, regardless of specific artistic discipline, while often serving the entire school, are at times left to travel on a cart from classroom to classroom as they are regularly the first staff members forced to surrender a designated teaching space (Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Kelly-McHale, 2018). This impacts the amount and types of materials teachers are able to bring to students and therefore narrows the students’ opportunities. In what some argue to be the most unsettling matter relating to equity, urban school districts tend to have the least experienced and least qualified teachers due to a multitude of challenges leading to high turnover rates (Darden & Cavendish, 2011; Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Kraehe, 2017). This ever-changing staff composition can lead to less buy-in and community building, less structured support, and more stressful environments for these teachers. Poor decision-making, less relationship-building, higher
behavioral incidents, and lowered expectations of learning in arts classrooms are typical results in learning environments with less experienced teachers. Adding to that inexperience, scholars have noted opportunities for professional learning and development among arts teachers are few and far between, citing far less than those of classroom teachers (Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Kraehe, 2017). Even when professional development opportunities are available, the focus is often on the arts supporting designated core subjects rather than on developing teachers’ capacities to teach their arts content (Frierson-Campbell, 2007). A look into the distribution practices can show that pro-arts mindsets and beliefs are not always implemented with the intent they are initially given. This harkens back to the lack of policies and practices surrounding equity in arts education (Kraehe, 2017; Kraehe & Acuff, 2013).

As it pertains to distribution, an equitable arts program will display characteristics such as equitable budgeting practices, equitable and diverse staffing practices, equitable programming decisions and curricular and professional learning policies and practices that see the arts as a content equal with other content. Budgeting practices will move toward equity when they take into account the cost of student participation in the arts so that cost is not a barrier for participation (Darden & Cavendish, 2011; Kelly-McHale, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; von Zastrow, 2019). That may look different for each artistic discipline. For instance, in the visual arts, this would look like classrooms outfitted with all the materials students would need from various types of paper, paints, clay and tools, to equipment such as kilns, printers, and computers with appropriate programs, to appropriate furniture and storage capabilities. In dance, this might look like appropriate budgets for music rights as well as costumes and shoes for performances. In addition to discipline specific budgeting, thought should be given to some individual student
budgeting in terms of students with a variety of needs. For example, students with visual impairments may require more specialized equipment for access in the visual arts such as a light tracer board or magnifying lenses.

Equitable staffing practices will encompass recruitment and selection of teachers and also the support and retention of teachers once hired (Darden & Cavendish, 2011; Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Hess, 2017; Kraehe, 2017). There will need to be intentionality around how and where positions are posted and advertised in order to recruit the most diverse and qualified field of applicants (Darden & Cavendish, 2011; Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Hess, 2017; Kraehe, 2017). This might look like building relationships with colleges and universities that offer certification pathways in the various arts disciplines that are also committed to serving a diverse student population within their programs. Researching the ways in which historically minoritized teacher candidates search out jobs might also be a valuable way to learn about valuable changes that might be made to a school district’s staffing practices. Additionally, it is imperative that the idea of staffing practices does not end when teachers are hired. Building intentional practices around supporting new teachers (both new to the profession and new to a particular school or school district) will lead to a greater likelihood of retaining those teachers for years to come (Darden & Cavendish, 2011; Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Hess, 2017; Kraehe, 2017). This might look like mentoring partnerships, peer coaching practices, or affinity groups for teachers of particular identities. Engaging teachers in periodic check-ins to find their wants and needs, and work to meet them, as they adjust to their position might also be part of supporting and retaining arts staff.
Equitable programming decisions, from deciding which classes are offered to master scheduling to teaching space assignments within a school building, are a constant battle in this era of testing and accountability (Baker, 2012; Darden & Cavendish, 2011; Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Hess, 2017; Kelly-McHale, 2018; Kraehe, 2017). This might look like programming decisions that involve representation from multiple stakeholder groups and engaging in reviews of research into best practices around programming for the whole child and scheduling for the deepest impact. In addition, ensuring that education spaces fit the needs of the content being taught in the spaces would be another move toward equity. Again, this would require flexible thinking and the understanding that this will look different for each artistic medium. A dance class needs a large open space, with flooring suitable for dancing while a visual arts classroom would need tables and chairs for students to work at as well as spaces for materials and storage of student work.

Finally, recognition for the arts as a valued content area in terms of the policies and practices around curriculum and professional learning are needed for equity within this element of distribution (Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Kraehe, 2017; Kraehe & Acuff, 2013). This might look like board approved policies that ensure a school district’s commitment to arts education. It might also look like a school district guaranteeing funding for teachers to engage in reflective and culturally responsive curriculum work as necessary. Ensuring that arts teachers have regular and repeated discipline specific professional learning opportunities to continue to refine their craft would also be another way to maintain this recognition. These opportunities would be in line with similar opportunities for teachers in other content areas throughout a school district.

Access
The President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (2011) reported that “students in schools that are most challenged and serving the highest need student populations often have the fewest arts opportunities” (p. 32). In urban schools, there can be more scheduling conflicts or resistance for students wishing to access more arts classes since classes are often viewed as a requirement to complete while the “more important” classes are given a priority focus in the scheduling process. These classes are often ranked in importance according to school accountability measures, which often place ELA and Math at the top of the list as test scores in these contents can make or break a school’s designation as a success or failure (Kraehe, 2010; Thomas et al., 2013; von Zastrow, 2019). Evidence shows that course offerings in the arts can vary widely by school size, location, in addition to teacher beliefs and student demographics (de Brey, 2019; Stokas, 2016; Thomas et al., 2013; von Zastrow, 2019). Data such as “White students earned more credits in fine arts (2.0 credits) than Asian students (1.8 credits), and both groups earned more credits than Hispanic students (1.6 credits) and Black students (1.5 credits)” can begin to illustrate these disparities (de Brey, 2019, p. 85). Parent involvement can also play a large role in these inequities, with very active parent groups lobbying their schools for more arts opportunities for students (Darden & Cavendish, 2011). In some schools, tracking efforts can also negatively impact the way students are scheduled into arts education classes (Gaztambide-Fernández & Parekh, 2017). This is also true for students needing specialized services identified in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). In some states, students are even removed from arts education classes when their schools do not meet accountability targets (Baker, 2012; Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). Additionally, teachers tend to fall back to teaching the same types of art
and artists they were taught which has been dominated by the pro-western European mindset (Kelly-McHale, 2018; Kraehe, 2010).

While the arts can be naturally multicultural themselves, arts education curriculums often have a tendency to be multicultural only in a perfunctory or surface-level manner, focusing on dances or recreating the same artwork, which can be culturally damaging to students based on the interpretations and decisions teachers make in implementation (Acuff, 2013; Butler, Lind & McKoy, 2007). While this is changing for the positive in some areas of the country, it is not the case everywhere. The use of culturally relevant curricula in arts classes is important because it helps prevent exclusion of access to knowledge for students from non-Eurocentric cultures (Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Hess, 2015; Hess, 2017; Wexler, 2017). Additionally, often the standards based curriculum that school districts offer in the arts is a framework carried through from colonization and is a reflection of an oppressive system (Hess, 2015; Hess, 2017). Student need to have access to curriculum and materials that is more reflective of them and where they are and gives them agency and voice in their learning (Hess, 2015; Hess, 2017). Access is one of the first steps toward ensuring equity for students and breaking patterns of social hierarchies (Gaztambide-Fernández & Parekh, 2017).

As it pertains to access, an equitable arts program will display characteristics such as equitable programming decisions and equitable scheduling practices (as previously stated), employing practices such as equity audits to monitor the inclusion (or lack of inclusion) of various student subgroups, and the implementation of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy. Equity audits are a way to use data to help assess practices, identify inequities in programs and provide information to lead to solutions (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Skrla,
McKenzie & Scheurich, 2009). This might look like looking at student data over time in relation to scheduling to determine any barriers to access that students may incur. Data could include disaggregated student participation data but also more qualitative, storytelling data such as surveys or interviews. Are students being encouraged to forgo arts courses for different pathways? Are students being given correct information about their options? Inquiring into the data may provide insight and potential solutions that is not readily seen.

Moving away from a colonist based educational structure to culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy is critical to offering equitable access to an arts education (Acuff, 2013; Butler, Lind & McKoy, 2007; Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Gaztambide-Fernández & Parekh, 2017; Hess, 2015; Hess, 2017; Wexler, 2017). This might look like individual teacher self-reflection and learning on biases and cultural proficiency. It might also look like increased curriculum drafting and professional learning around cultural responsiveness. Involving students in this process and allowing teachers and leaders to hear of student’s arts learning needs and wants could also help propel a district toward more equitable curriculum and pedagogy.

**Participation**

While investigating the qualities and demographics of students that are participating is quite important to this work, understanding the qualities, demographics, and reasons of the non-participating students can be equally or even more telling in terms of the inequities that exist. Often the reasons for students not participating are not easily detected, as “many states do not gauge progress towards arts education goals they have enshrined into law” and will only be uncovered after a deeper probe into the data (von Zastrow, 2019, p. 3).
When digging into participation, it is important to dissect the demographics of teachers that participate in the profession as arts educators. A look at the data shows that in both music education and visual arts education teacher preparation programs, teacher candidates are overwhelmingly White (Berman, 2016; Kraehe, 2015). If they have not engaged in self-reflection around their Whiteness, they may be unprepared to teach in classrooms with Black and Brown students and could be a deterrent to student participation (Kraehe 2010). In addition, as Berman (2016) states, “There is a voice missing from the profession” (p. 18). It is important for all students to be able to see themselves represented in their teachers and role models so that they can feel like their participation in the arts is acceptable and encouraged. If the majority of arts teachers are not representative of the diversity in the United States, there is the risk of excluding a whole population of students from arts classes and lifelong arts engagement (Berman, 2016; Kraehe, 2105; Salvador, 2019).

As it pertains to participation, an equitable arts program will display many of the characteristics previously noted such as equitable and diverse staffing practices, equitable programming decisions, equitable scheduling practices, employing practices such as equity audits to monitor the inclusion (or lack of inclusion) of various student subgroups, and the implementation of culturally relevant curriculum, pedagogy, and professional learning.

It is important when moving through these dimensions of the arts equity framework, that access and participation are explored separately as well as in conjunction with one another. Some smaller schools that have fewer course offerings have an abundance of student participation while a larger school might have an abundance of offerings with less participation (NCES, 2017; von Zastrow, 2019). This can occur for many reasons, the two most common being because of
the distribution of staffing resources or a philosophical approach that only moves students forward in the arts if they are showing incredible displays of talent (Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Wan et al., 2020). When assessing whether a school is providing equitable arts experiences, Thomas et al. (2013) found that course availability and student participation tend to have this inverse relationship and the data regarding such, needs to be analyzed concurrently through a combination index. Studying access and participation both separately and apart will provide the best data for analysis.

**Recognition**

Traditional arts education can be purposefully exclusive and not reflective of society as a whole, which can play a role in enabling and continuing oppression for non-dominant groups (Kelly-McHale, 2018). As mentioned, there are not many policies protecting rights with regard to the arts and the policies and practices that do exist, although appearing to be unbiased can actually promote inequities (Kraehe, Acuff, & Travis, 2016). These damaging policies (i.e., the pretense of “colorblindness”) can actually do the opposite of what this dimension of the arts equity framework is specifying. In actuality, proclaiming the absence of difference reinforces the dominant viewpoint and continues to demean and silence marginalized viewpoints, cultural practices and lived experiences by continuing to reinforce their positioning as the “other” (Desai, 2000). Teachers must intentionally create curriculum and content that restores the value of divergent student voices (Kraehe, 2010). However, there must be critical intention applied in the effort to expand representation towards authentically learning from particular cultures rather than merely engaging in cultural appropriation (Desai, 2000). Arts teachers must remember that one aspect of a culture or tradition does not necessarily speak for an entire group of people, and that
the goal of arts education should not be to replicate traditional art forms or perpetuate bias by misrepresenting the meanings of those art forms to other groups (Kelly-McHale, 2018).

Effective teachers must recognize the strengths of their students and the differences they bring to the classroom and their learning. This is the only way teachers will truly be able to provide personalized learning and promote student growth. Students want to be able to see themselves in the content; therefore, issues in recognition can also circle back to the access dimension of Kraehe’s framework through reflections about representation in curriculum and resources. Realization of this recognition aspect will be when the field moves away from an either-or position, with regard to arts excellence, representational equity, and the realization that “the absence of one hinders full attainment of the other” (Zimmerman, 1997, p. 25).

As it pertains to recognition, an equitable arts program will display characteristics such as development and implementation of equitable policies, and the development and implementation of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy (as previously noted). A review of a school district’s policies to recognize if they are protecting the status quo in lieu of moving toward equity will be important (Desai, 2000; Kelly-McHale, 2018; Kraehe, Acuff, & Travis, 2016; Zimmerman, 1997). It is necessary to commit to changing any potentially damaging policies that may be leaving many students feeling othered or as if they don’t belong (Desai, 2000; Kelly-McHale, 2018; Kraehe, Acuff, & Travis, 2016; Zimmerman, 1997). This might look like identifying policies that may conflict with or hinder an equitable arts education or perhaps instituting policies that would protect an equitable arts education. Policies that value the different backgrounds and identities of all people can be the most influential in terms of moving forward with equitable programming.
Effect

Inequities in arts education can show themselves in a variety of student outcomes. From policies and structures that are not inclusive or even on policy maker’s radar, to teacher belief systems and effectiveness, students are often at the mercy of complex intersections of these different forces (Risner, 2006). By recognizing the need to allow students to not only preserve their cultural integrity, but to embrace their culture as an instrument to enhance learning, teachers can make great strides in this dimension of the framework (Ladson-Billings, 1995). When digging deeper into these effects, teachers and administrators must look past the obvious access gaps to find true effects that could lead to true changes (Kraehe, 2017). However, there is a need to be careful when studying the impact of arts education that something is actually done with the information to improve experiences for students. As Ladson-Billings (2006) points out, “We [education researchers] seem to study them but rarely provide the kind of remedies that help them to solve their problems” (p. 3). The benefit of this dimension is that the focus moves to the outcomes rather than the inputs as in previous dimensions. This could allow practitioners to see the ramifications of policies and procedures rather than previous discussion or speculation. Analyzing data from National Arts Assessments would help districts see more clearly the inequity that are present such as:

- “On average, students eligible for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) score lower than students from a higher family income.
- On average, students in suburban schools score higher than students in city schools.
- More White students than Black and Hispanic students report playing an instrument at school” (NCES, 2017).
Learning that states and districts seldom use data that is readily accessible to exemplify valuable evidence about arts education indicators illustrates how significant this “effect” part of the framework truly is (von Zastrow, 2019).

As it pertains to effects, an equitable arts program will display previously noted characteristics such as the development and implementation of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy, and employing practices such as equity audits to monitor the inclusion (or lack of inclusion) of various student subgroups and their access to the arts programming.

**Transformation**

Just as the arts can be elitist, they can also be uniquely positioned to engage in social justice education (Kraehe & Acuff, 2013). Often students from a minoritized group (whether categorized by race, gender, disability, language status, or sexuality) are thought of as needing to be changed, helped or even “filled with forms of cultural knowledge deemed valuable by dominant society” (Yosso 2005, p. 75). Education through the arts, in a program that has been transformed, allows an opportunity for students to celebrate their cultural capital rather than feeling the need to hide themselves or assimilate (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis 2016; Yosso 2005). Highly effective, transformational teachers, along with policies and systems, use students’ cultural wealth to recognize their strengths and integrate their home and community knowledge into their learning for maximum achievement (Yosso, 2005). This showcases how the transformational dimension works on individual, group and societal levels, as well as across these levels (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis 2016). This is sometimes referred to as equity pedagogy. Equity pedagogy can be described as creating student-centered classroom environments in addition to using teaching strategies that help “students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural
groups attain knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society” (Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 152). In short, in addition to learning specific content, students also need to learn to question the systems they are learning within as well. By engaging students in the dismantling process, arts educators can create meaningful experiences that will in turn allow transformed systems to strengthen (Banks & Banks, 1995). Ideally, this is the goal of all equity work in arts education – to make the necessary changes to move to a system that ensures equitable access, opportunity and validation for all.

As it pertains to transformation, an equitable arts program will display previously noted characteristics such as development and implementation of equitable policies, the development and implementation of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy, and the inclusion of student voice in curriculum and programmatic decisions.

**Teacher Effectiveness**

A major thread that can be found throughout Kraehe’s entire framework, though not explicitly called out, is the importance of teacher effectiveness as it relates to preparedness to provide equitable arts education experiences for all students. Teacher effectiveness is largely based on the ability to meet each individual student’s needs and requires a deeper understanding of who students are and where they come from (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Continuing this thread leads to a deeper look into how cultural relevance and equity are addressed in teacher preparation programs that lead to certification (Kraehe, 2015). Ideally, these programs would develop an understanding within student teachers of the instructional core in relation to the constructs and
dimensions that intersect and play out within the components of the instructional core (Butler, Lind & McKoy, 2007; Kraehe & Acuff, 2013).

The most important investment, as well as an ingredient for classroom success, is for a teacher to build strong relationships with students. Positive student-teacher relationships build physically and intellectually safe environments which allows for both social and academic growth (Hammond, 2015; Kraehe, 2010). It is especially important for teachers in the arts to carefully plan ways to create these safe spaces for students to investigate and experiment with their creativity. Building relational trust is often something that is assumed that teachers will do but not really discussed or taught in teacher preparation programs or professional learning sessions (Hammond, 2015; Kraehe, 2010). This could be a high-leverage skill to be taught because once the relationships are built, teachers will be poised to meet student needs based on their individual backgrounds and experiences. (Hammond, 2015; Kraehe, 2010). Too often, this partnership is not cultivated in the rush to move right into content instruction resulting in disadvantages for both teachers and students from the start.

The instructional core is the interconnection between the teacher, the students, and the content within a classroom. The first principle of the instructional core states, “Increases in student learning occur only as a consequence of improving in the level of content, teacher knowledge and skill, and student engagement” (City et al., 2014, p. 24). Two of the three factors listed in this first principle can be directly related to the effectiveness of teacher preparatory programming. Teachers must develop knowledge and skills not only concerning their content, but also meeting the needs of their students. The ability to build relationships with students allows teachers to access students’ cultural capital and make more meaningful connections
between students and content to inspire learning and deepen engagement (City et al., 2014; Yosso, 2005). Teacher observations and reflections should include descriptions of what is said and done within the classroom between students and content so that inequity can be evidenced and therefore improved upon. By grounding the equity work in the instructional core, educators can ensure teachers, students, and content are all dissected and not neglected.

Current teacher preparation programs for arts education that actually integrate culturally responsive pedagogy within the instructional core are either insufficient or scarce (Acuff, 2013; Gadsen, 2008). Programs that do engage students in this work often do not push prospective arts teachers to identify power and privilege as obstacles or encourage prospective teachers to examine their places of privilege and what they bring to the classroom. Many types of engagement in this work for pre-service arts teachers often stop at the surface and more performative level of inclusion (Kraehe & Acuff, 2013; Butler, Lind & McKoy, 2007). In addition, arts student teachers often see themselves as separate from the diversity they will encounter in classrooms, not seeing that their own cultural identities will influence their curriculum decisions and interactions with students (Acuff, 2013; Butler, Lind & McKoy, 2007; Kraehe, Hood & Travis, 2015). Student teachers often do not consider teaching populations other than their own, and as a result, oftentimes teacher preparation programs create experiences where beliefs and ideas aren’t being challenged in a sufficient manner (Acuff, 2013; Butler, Lind & McKoy, 2007; Kraehe, Hood & Travis, 2015). While many teacher preparation programs are pushing toward this change, there are just as many stuck not changing and so the field has an imbalance (Hess, 2015; Hess, 2017). Because of this, arts teachers are often ill prepared for starting or continuing discussions surrounding differences or issues of race, gender, disability,
language status, or sexuality, and therefore, students can often feel suppressed or shamed when their cultural voices are not recognized.

Arts educators need to “unlearn their enactment of cultural Whiteness” to fully engage in culturally relevant teaching (Bradley, Golner & Hanson, 2007, p. 294). Whether it is a classroom management decision or the fear of reflecting on one’s own teaching practices, when arts teachers silence students (intentionally or inadvertently), the potential for meaningful conversation ceases to exist and students are left to navigate this dichotomy (hooks, 2017). Urban schools see the effects of this play out each school year with new arts education hires often quitting or being asked to leave when they are culturally damaging in their classrooms (Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Gadsen, 2008). Other young arts educators, while not culturally damaging, can still be suppressive and not supportive of students from marginalized groups without having the requisite knowledge and skills to develop and appreciate cultural wealth in the classroom.

The cultivation of culturally responsive beliefs and practices is not something that teacher candidates or educators can receive in one course or even one semester of instruction; this is work that needs to be embedded throughout all learning and work of teaching (Kraehe, Hood & Travis 2015). As Hammond (2015) indicates, “The true power in culturally responsive teaching comes from being comfortable in your own skin because you are not a neutral party in the process” (p. 53). Arts teachers would be infinitely more prepared for real teaching if their preparation included this work. It is important that teacher candidates and current educators feel supported throughout this work so they can meet with as much success as possible (Gadsen, 2008).
The lack of preparedness for effective, culturally responsive teaching, in addition to deeply ingrained biases, beliefs and mindsets, can lead to “stereotype threat” for students within arts education classrooms. Stereotype threat can be defined as “anything one does or any of one’s features that conform to a stereotype to make that stereotype more plausible as a self-characterization in the eyes of others, and perhaps even in one’s own eyes” (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Teachers that buy into these stereotypes end up creating hierarchies within classrooms that can affect any marginalized group of students as well as students in the perceived majority (Kraehe, 2017). Stereotype threat can be manifested as lowered teacher expectations, easier tasks assigned, avoidance, and through varied grading practices. Students facing stereotype threat run the risk of falling into a self-defeating pattern of believing these institutional patterns against them can lead to lowered confidence, repeated poor performance and achievement and loss of interest and engagement in school (Steele & Aronson, 1995). In short, stereotype threat can disrupt a student’s entire educational trajectory.

To reiterate, teacher effectiveness is of utmost importance when setting out to abolish inequity within the arts education classrooms (Darden & Cavendish, 2011; Frierson-Campbell, 2007). School districts cannot do this work themselves and need the cooperation and partnership from teacher preparation programs to change the tide toward equity in arts education. While teacher preparation and effectiveness was not necessarily highlighted in the framework, it is vital to equity and success of programs for students. Much of the work, both conceptual and empirical, indicates this as an importance so it warrants a section regardless of the framework.
As it pertains to teacher effectiveness, an equitable arts program will display the previously noted characteristics such as equitable and diverse staffing and retention practices, and deeply reflective culturally responsive teacher professional learning and supports.

**A Revised Framework**

As noted, the dimensions in the Kraehe framework are recursive and interdependent. An equity issue in one dimension can lead to more issues in other dimensions. In addition, the historic and systemic nature of many of the inequities make them all the more ingrained into the current fabric of education.

As teacher quality is the main factor that affects student learning (Bradley, Golner & Hanson, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995), further study into culturally relevant arts educator preparation, culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy in the arts in addition to the effect and impact of state accountability systems on equity in arts education is warranted (Baker, 2012; Brown, 2006; Kraehe, 2010; Thomas et al., 2013; Wan et al., 2020). As this is equally important as the other dimensions in the arts equity framework, a revised framework is proposed (see Figure 2). For teacher preparation programs, equity audits may be a first good step to collect the required data needed to begin to reflect on policies, procedures, as well as group and individual bias. An equity audit is a comprehensive way to collect specialized data about programs, schools or districts that can be used to assess the degree of equity or inequity within them. (Khalifa, 2018). Using data related to distribution, access and participation from a variety of schools or districts may offer the insight needed to begin to assess programs through an arts equity framework. This understanding could progress into more difficult conversations involving recognition and effect. This work is equally important to do with practicing teachers in continued
professional learning. Arts educators and their leaders need to commit to creating and using culturally responsive curricula and materials in their classrooms as well as collecting data to measure its effectiveness and impact on students. It would be important to monitor both the curriculum itself, in terms of responsiveness and the implementation of the curriculum of pedagogy, and instructional methods used within the classroom.

Figure 2.2

Revised Arts Equity Framework

![Figure 2.2 Revised Arts Equity Framework](image)

*Note.* Proposed by S. Gentile.

Another large gap in the literature, as well as the arts equity framework, is the lack of evidence or discussion of school and district administration, and the effect these positions have on arts education equity. One might argue that the entire equity framework is dependent on the decisions they make, however that is never explicitly called out within the framework. Who makes decisions relating to arts education within a system and how practices are held
accountable is crucial for equitable programming. These decisions have impact across entire K-12 systems and all arts disciplines. In addition, most often leadership refers to school leadership, but the reality is that district leadership also plays a significant role in major programmatic decisions.

Using a revised arts equity framework inclusive of equitable leadership practices, would be an excellent way to analyze data around how programming decisions are made in schools and districts, in addition to answering who makes those decisions, what influences those decisions and of course, the impact of those decisions. Engaging stakeholders with distribution, access and participation data from schools would allow them to pinpoint the mindset and logistical issues within their districts, schools, and staff to develop a plan to address them.

**Leadership for Equity**

“School leadership is second only to teacher quality among school related factors that affect student learning” (Brown, 2006, p. 702). This indicates that leaders must make decisions with all the students they serve in mind, not just a majority of them. Unfortunately, the education system was established on the concept of “normal” (meaning White, Christian, abled, heterosexual, and cisgender) and often students from traditionally underserved populations continue to remain underserved in many public school systems (Kozleski et al., 2020; Rigby et al., 2019). While the concepts of leadership for equity and social justice have certainly existed previously, until recently, there has been little research sharing tangible practices or strategies for leaders to follow and implement in their work to achieve those goals (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Furman, 2012; Vogel, 2011). Often leaders jump into equity work by engaging stakeholders in conversations and learning to raise consciousness or develop comfort, but stop short or do not have the tools to move toward taking definitive actions. This may account for the slower
development of practical strategies for use by leaders (Ward et al., 2015). It is the intent of this synthesis to analyze the current literature around leadership for equity and social justice around the following ten practices: engaging in self-reflection and growth for equity, developing organizational leadership for equity, constructing and enacting an equity vision, supervising for improvement of equitable teaching and learning, fostering equitable school culture, collaborating with families and communities, influencing sociopolitical context, allocating resources, hiring and placing personnel, and modeling (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, p. 382-385). The synthesis is structured to provide additional context in this introductory section under the headings Key Terms within the Literature and Method for Synthesis. The next section, Framework for Leadership Practices, will describe the ten leadership practices, and finally the synthesis will conclude by identifying potential gaps in the literature and areas for further study.

**Key Terms within the Literature**

Discussion and conversations regarding equity and socially just education can be fraught with misunderstandings and misinterpretations (Capper, 2019; Farley et al., 2019). It is wise to identify common definitions for foundational terms such as social justice and cultural responsiveness with regards to educational leadership at the outset to center the analysis of the literature.

*Social Justice* is more difficult to define both in the literature and in practice, as it has been used differently in varied circumstances (Farley et al., 2019; Vogel, 2011). Despite these different uses, many scholars agree that social justice centers on the disruption of the marginalization of various groups (by race, gender, class, home language, ability, religion, sexuality, etc.) and the educational discriminations that follow (Furman, 2012; Irby et al., 2019). Theoharis (2007) defines social justice leadership “to mean that these principals make issues of
race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalized conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice and vision. This definition centers on addressing and eliminating marginalization in schools” (p. 223). Centering on the disruption of unjust systems will be the focus of the definition for this work because by engaging in practices that can transform education structures to be more democratic and inclusive to all students, leaders can better promote justice and therefore equity in schools.

Cultural responsiveness is the act of recognizing and responding positively to students’ cultures and ways of meaning making, identifying established circumstances around inequity or oppression and organizing resources or solutions to bring about change (Khalifa, 2018). It is also about understanding the importance of relationship building with students and the community to make certain that school is a safe space for all to learn (Khalifa, 2018). Santamaria (2013) further describes culturally responsive leadership practices, as demonstrated in a study with African American principals, as “compassion for and understanding of their students and communities, their desire to empower students, setting high standards for themselves, their teachers and students, and their confidence in the ability of African American children to learn” (p. 354). Cultural responsiveness is often discussed in terms of pedagogy and instruction and while that cannot be ignored, school and district leadership must engage in culturally responsive practices as well. It is all educators and leaders “responsibility to create the right conditions for optimum learning.” (Hammond, 2015, p. 50) which will be the focus for the definition in this synthesis.

**Method for Synthesis**

To begin this process of collecting and analyzing the literature on equitable and socially just leadership, I gathered books and journal articles from my collection as well as conducted
searches through Syracuse University’s library databases. I gathered sources such as academic articles and research studies from both theoretical and empirical publications by searching through the databases of ERIC (EBSCO), SAGE Knowledge, Education Sources, and JSTOR. The initial search terms I used were “education leadership” and “equity.” To ensure that potential resources were not excluded, terms such as “social justice leadership,” “culturally responsive leadership,” “leadership,” and “equitable leadership practices” were also paired in a variety of ways for continued searches.

While the initial searches resulted in several hundred results, I leaned into resources that highlighted specific research based practices for leaders as a focus to help narrow the field, as well as works that were regarding practices in schools specific to the United States. I then reviewed and analyzed the resulting works and organized them into a spreadsheet while using the following categories: author, title, year of publication, format, type, framework, location, APA citation, and a summary of the work. I followed this with coding my findings in the literature to see what commonalities emerged and to help shape this synthesis. In all, 51 resources were reviewed and analyzed and 25 were used in this synthesis. Ten “high-leverage equitable leadership practices” (p. 376) (engaging in self-reflection and growth for equity, developing organizational leadership for equity, constructing and enacting an equity vision, supervising for improvement of equitable teaching and learning, fostering equitable school culture, collaborating with families and communities, influencing sociopolitical context, allocating resources, hiring and placing personnel, and modeling) identified by Mollie Galloway and Ann Ishimaru (2015) will be used to organize and further discuss the findings.

**Framework of Leadership Practices**

Candidates selected to fill educational leadership positions are often ones that have
developed the skills and proficiencies to succeed within the measure of what is considered “normative,” therefore equity-focused leaders must act intentionally and deliberately to combat those habitual structures for the greater good (Kozleski et al., 2020). Blankstein & Noguera (2015) reinforce this by warning that the welfare of all children is weakened when we remain silent in the face of inequity and injustice.

Throughout this important work, it is important to remember, “Equity is a continuum, not a static assessment” (Rigby et al., 2019, p. 488). While it might be easiest to think of the practices that follow as items to check off or policies to institute, leaders must remember that working towards equitable schools is a process that will need continual thought and reflection (Farley et al., 2019; Rigby et al., 2019). True leaders for equity and social justice know that they must not only identify the problems but also take the steps and coordinate assistance and settings for all stakeholders to make the authentic change happen (Rigby et al., 2019; Theoharis, 2007). We have seen year after year that “the perpetuation of the status quo that has served to benefit the same students and families” has left other students and families to “fall into a predetermined mold designed for school failure and social inequity” (Honig & Honsa, 2020; Brown, 2006, p. 701). This change may be drastic and uncomfortable at times, but it is necessary and overdue so discomfort is to be expected.

**Engaging in Self-Reflection and Growth for Equity**

Leaders must be willing to take part in individual work around their own identities relating to a variety of factors of diversity (such as race, class, religion, home language, gender, ability, age, or sexual orientation) and any biases or privileges associated with those identities (Brown, 2006; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Shah, 2010). These identities shape the expectations and behaviors of educators with students, so leaders must be
open to examining them (Furman, 2012; Hammond, 2015). Engaging in these reflections
themselves, will allow leaders to facilitate and support others through a similar thought process
which could lead to increased buy-in and collaboration from stakeholders with equity work in the
future (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Hammond, 2015).

Leaders must “consistently look for how they are positioned within organizations that
have marginalized students” (Khalifa, 2018, p. 59). Leaders also should remain conscious of
what data they can use for their self-reflections including qualitative data like discipline referrals
but also student and family narratives to understand perspectives held by diverse communities
(Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Hammond, 2015; Irby et al., 2019; Khalifa, 2018; Shah, 2010).
This is especially important if leaders are a part of “normative” cultures themselves. By
continuing to advocate for and listen to counter-narratives, they may ensure their own growth
surrounding equity and social justice can continue (Capper, 2019; Khalifa, 2018).

Culturally responsive and equitable leadership can be alienating and challenging and
leaders need to be certain of their core values and positionality in their environment (Blankstein
& Noguera, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Scheurich & Skrla,
2003). They must be willing to take risks and act in the face of oppression when necessary. The
ability for a leader to be secure with themselves and their beliefs so that they can commit to
acting when necessary is the real potential of cultural responsiveness (Hammond, 2015). Leaders
must also pursue self-reflection to recognize how their leadership style and decisions have and
could continue to subsidize any current states of oppression for students (Honig & Honsa, 2020;
Kozleski et al., 2020).

Developing Organizational Leadership for Equity

Leadership that is focused on equity understands the importance of building the
leadership capabilities of others within their school systems, including teachers, staff, students, families, and other stakeholders. This not only builds support for the mission of equitable and socially just schools, but also provides collaborators to change the biased practices and systems for the betterment of all students (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). “Leaders developing other leaders at all levels of the system is central to short-term efficacy and longer-term sustainability in systems” (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015, p. 49). Using a systems-focused approach will really pull the organizational supports and structures into the inquiry process for change as well (Honig & Honsa, 2020).

Looking at organizational improvement strategies would be beneficial for leaders as establishing structures and systems throughout an organization that promote equity will be of service to all (Irby et al., 2019). As Irby et al. (2109) state, “Organizational structures are power laden. And the power of structures stems from their assumed normativity. Unless called into question, structures persist” (p. 103). By studying organizational theories that extend beyond the field of education, leaders are often able to gain a greater perspective and deeper contemplation by stepping back from the school organizational structures with which they are intimate (Capper, 2019).

Organizational leadership also encompasses a component of accountability that strives to not only guarantee equitable, rigorous, and standards-based learning but also equity and inclusiveness in the opportunities presented to students for learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Schools and leaders prepared to make assessment and revision a regular phase of all aspects of their work, will be more apt to sustain the trajectory toward equity (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Current systems often have outside evaluators and district or state level teams assessing schools, identifying their needs and demanding they fix practices without much collaboration or input.
from educators or students (ESSA, 2015; NYSED, 2021). A system of authentic shared accountability would see states, school districts, schools, teachers, and leaders working together to meet needs, address standards and regularly evaluate their effectiveness and adjust as necessary (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

**Constructing and Enacting an Equity Vision**

The creation and implementation of “a vision that explicitly recognizes inequities as systemic in nature, rather than something rooted in individual children or their families” (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, p. 383) is the first step in demonstrating high expectations for all members of the school community (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Ward et al., 2015). This shared vision must be developed collaboratively with representation from all facets of the organization, expressly historically marginalized populations in the organization (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Ward et al., 2015). Creating this vision is essential for addressing the systemic barriers that have perpetuated inequity (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Ward et al., 2015). The vision should lean towards a description of equitable and inclusive education that stems from thinking that shifts from “sorting, categorizing, and separating” (Kozleski et al., 2020, p. 493) to ensuring that all students have multiple opportunities to access and participate in learning experiences (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017).

In addition, creating a plan for disputing conflict and encouraging shared accountability will ensure that this important work can move forward and will not be easily diverted (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017). Anticipating common arguments about why equity cannot or will not be achieved will help leaders to be prepared with responses and potential actions to help the work continue to move forward (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015;
Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Hammond, 2015). The vision and subsequent plans that are created must “include explicit language around systemic, institutional, and structural barriers and disparities” (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017, p. 14).

**Supervising for Improvement of Equitable Teaching and Learning**

It is critical for leaders to not just be logistical managers. They must serve as instructional leaders by expecting teachers to implement highly effective, research-based, culturally responsive strategies to ensure student success. Leaders also must look to observe these practices in classrooms (ideally outside of the evaluative process) and should provide teachers with individual, specific, and actionable feedback for equity (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Garver & Maloney, 2019; Hammond, 2015). Leaders can also assist teachers in identifying which instructional strategies should be prioritized to better achieve equity (Ross & Berger, 2009). Supporting teachers in building cognitive routines as well as basing content on the perspective of students’ lives is important for engaging learners and expanding intellectual aptitude (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Hammond, 2015). A leader should almost feel a certain pressure “to build the teacher’s self-awareness, coach them in multicultural issues, and help them reflect on their practice to ensure that each student is receiving the best education possible” (Garver & Maloney, 2019, p. 341). It is crucial that leaders help all the adults in schools reject seeing students through a deficit lens and make the environment inclusive and equitable (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017).

Leaders that have successfully implemented this practice may have generated instructional changes in their schools like a shift to a full inclusion model rather than pull-out special education services, or de-tracking accelerated courses and opening access and the expectation of rigor for all students (Theoharis, 2007). Rather than using one static data point
from which to make decisions about students and programs, these leaders trusted and empowered
their staff to use multiple data sources, including tangible student work, to drive their decision-
making process (Irby et al., 2019; Theoharis, 2009).

**Fostering an Equitable School Culture**

“Leadership builds authentic relationships across the school community, furthers
community understanding, and deepens belonging and voice for students, families, and staff who
have been traditionally marginalized” (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, p. 384). Relationships, and
the trust that is built through them, are the foundation for all learning exercises and culturally
responsive practices (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Furman, 2012; Hammond, 2015). Leaders
must believe in the capacity of all learners (educators and students) and address inequitable
issues swiftly and transparently so that hope for success may be restored (Blankstein & Noguera,

As school systems can naturally perpetuate oppression, there must be a conscious effort
to never remain neutral or risk becoming active participants in oppression. Leaders must ensure
they are working beyond compliance when it comes to welcoming and affirming school cultures
for all student identities so they may feel safe enough to learn (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Ross
& Berger, 2009). Physical, psychological, and emotional safety can only be achieved when
schools and districts are welcoming spaces and promote inclusiveness and equity for all students
(Khalifa, 2018). “Quality relationships are even more powerful than moral purpose” (Blankstein
& Noguera, 2015, p. 237) and therefore the priority must be on building positive, supportive, and
restorative relationships and providing equitable access to learning (Blankstein & Noguera,
2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015).

**Collaborating With Families and Communities**
In addition to the importance of relationships within the schools, leaders must take care to build significant and enduring relationships with student’s families and the greater community (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). “School leaders must establish structures that will infuse all forms of leadership with unique community cultural knowledge, epistemology, and perceptions” (Khalifa, 2018, p. 169). Families and communities should feel like an extension of the school and district and therefore welcome in buildings and at events (Khalifa, 2018). By valuing the expertise of family and community members, equitable leaders continue to open communications and position the school as an integral part of the community while deepening the school’s understandings of the community’s values and cultural wealth (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Kozleski et al., 2020; Ross & Berger, 2009; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Yosso, 2005).

In addition to inviting the community into the schools, leaders must also travel outside of their school into the community. When they are visible among the community and are seen as an advocate of community issues as well, they will often see increased gains in trust and partnership with families and community members, which can lead to improved student outcomes (Ross & Berger, 2009; Santamaria, 2013). Leadership is about responsive communication and transparency with all members of the school community – teacher, students, families, and other stakeholders (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Theoharis, 2007).

**Influencing the Sociopolitical Context**

When community relationships are strong, leaders can then unite with members to advocate for change against the larger organizations (district, government, etc.) regarding systemic oppression and influence the removal of inequitable and unjust policies (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017). Hammond (2015) defines sociopolitical context as
a term used to describe the series of mutually reinforcing policies and practices across social, economic, and political domains that contribute to disparities and unequal opportunities for people of color in housing, transportation, education, and health care, to name a few (p. 28).

While these inequities seem on the surface to be simply due to unrelated policies or organizational structures, it is important for leaders to name and address the bias, whether it be political, legal, economical, or social, that has historically formed them (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Hammond, 2015). It will be critical for leaders to encourage conversation and advocacy and the teaching of aptitudes and accountabilities when creating change with educators and students alike (Theoharis, 2009).

**Allocating Resources**

Equitable leaders ensure that resources (such as time, financial, human resources, materials and supplies) are distributed in a manner that aligns with supporting students that have traditionally been marginalized (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). This may look like increased budget amount for special education programs so students may have access to adaptive equipment that is needed or it may look like schedules produced strategically and timetables created based on student need rather than fitting classes into pre-configured slots (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Ross & Berger, 2009; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003).

This allocation of resources also refers to the equitable distribution “throughout the system, not only within the sphere of influence of control designated by the institution of the district” (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, p. 385). Larger districts can see disparity within their districts for a variety of reasons from decision making to appease families or communities to
sacrificing others because they do not have the advocacy to back them up (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015). In widening the scope even more, one could compare the inequitable allocation of resources across multiple districts in neighboring counties or states (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015). Remediating this issue would require more national attention given to equity to provide “greater equalization of federal funding across states. It will require state funding systems that provide comparable per pupil funding, adjusted for differentials in cost-of-living and pupil needs…” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 280).

**Hiring and Placing Personnel**

Leaders must be prepared to make strategic decisions for staff placement based on equity and excellence. Equity-based personnel decisions will also mean that leaders actively recruit staff from traditionally underrepresented groups and develop a system to retain them, promote them, and attract more diverse, highly effective staff (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Including members of traditionally minoritized groups in leadership roles and positions is extremely important as they undoubtedly practice leadership through “different filters of experience” (Santamaria, 2013, p. 349) which can result in greater awareness and understanding of students and application of equitable leadership practices. Leaders should be prepared to implement “culturally conscious strategic HR hiring practices” (Tran et al., 2020, p. 79) in their recruitment plan that revolve around the vision for equity, include students on a committee, and use a committee that has engaged in self-reflection around their own diversity biases (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017).

Leaders engaged in equity work will need to remember that though they find like-minded personnel to join their team, they will still have to provide professional learning experiences for all staff members to maintain any progress and continue to move forward (Theoharis, 2007).
Theoharis (2009) found a successful strategy used by school leaders for social justice “involved providing continuing staff development on equity gaps of concern” (p. 51). By using the equity needs of the school to drive staff development, leaders are more apt to remain on track toward their vision for equity (Theoharis, 2009).

**Modeling**

Equitable leaders live their work in all aspects of their lives, as it becomes part of their daily customs and they are continually working for change (Furman, 2012; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). Leaders must model the fight for equity and social justice while leading their schools or districts but also outside of “work.” The way leaders approach equity, social justice, and cultural responsiveness influence policies that are developed and implemented, teacher attitudes and behaviors in the classroom, and student and family trust and attitudes toward education (Ross & Berger, 2009). Their actions must model advocacy for students, as well as “integrity and transparency to redress systemic inequities for non-dominant students, families, and communities” (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, p. 385).

Another way equitable leadership can be modeled is by “engaging in ‘routine’ equity audits around anything from ‘discipline and special program placement’ to ‘facilities, curriculum, communication, instruction’ and ‘physical space [and] resources’” (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017, p. 17). Equity audits can be a way to begin and continue courageous and critical conversations within a school, district and community, by providing data and quantifying progress (Cumby et al., 2017). Equity audits typically start with analyzing quantitative data that “breaks the system down into granular parts to examine patterns of disproportionality across race, dis/ability, socioeconomics, language and sex” (Radd et al., 2021, p. 161). A powerful follow-up to analyzing proportional representation is to investigate what conditions have influenced those
numbers, to provide a deeper perspective for the audit (Radd et al., 2021). School and district reforms, changes in policies and practices have been influenced by information that equity audits have provided leading to increased equitable educational opportunities and reducing barriers for students (Cumby et al., 2017).

**Conclusion**

As shared, leadership practices for equity, social justice and cultural responsiveness are layered and employing them is an evolving process. Systemic oppression is ingrained in the fabric of education. Leaders need to remain vigilant about continually employing the ten practices of equity focused leadership (engaging in self-reflection and growth for equity, developing organizational leadership for equity, constructing and enacting an equity vision, supervising for improvement of equitable teaching and learning, fostering equitable school culture, collaborating with families and communities, influencing sociopolitical context, allocating resources, hiring and placing personnel, and modeling) for the benefit of all students (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, p. 382-385).

Further study into culturally relevant leadership preparation is warranted. For leader preparation programs, diving deeply into each of the ten practices and the skills that need to be developed to effectively implement the practices may be a good first step. Allowing future leaders the opportunity to role play responses in different equity based scenarios might allow candidates the opportunity to explore their values and beliefs surrounding social justice as well as activate development of their vision. Committing to understanding culturally responsive pedagogy will also be important in leadership programs so that leaders will develop into critically reflective instructional leaders in support of their teachers. Preparing future leaders to
conduct equity audits will also be crucial for the collection and analysis of data as well as transparency and accountability to the school community.

As highlighted, a large gap in the literature centers around the lack of evidence or discussion of content directors or district administration, and the impact they have on educational equity, social justice and cultural responsiveness. While the leadership practices discussed in this synthesis can certainly be implemented by every level of leadership, the focus of the research has clearly been on the principal. While the school leader is immensely important, they are dependent to some extent on the district leadership that surrounds and supports them. District decisions can impact equity across an entire K-12 system, positively or negatively. Further study is warranted on equitable practices associated with district leadership.

Another gap in the literature is leadership practices as they affect equity within specific subject areas, such as the arts. Much of the current literature defaults to the traditional classroom experience or “core subject” experience without delving into the nuances that arise with other disciplines such as music, visual art, dance, theater, or media arts. Further study with a focus on leadership practices that specifically advance equity in arts education is deserved.

As I have analyzed and reflected on my learning from this synthesis, I was pleasantly surprised to identify some strategies that I have engaged with or even implemented. I believe that going forward, I can implement these practices further through the scope of my own district leadership.

**Leadership for Equity in Arts Education**

Examining the “high leverage leadership practices” (engaging in self-reflection and growth for equity, developing organizational leadership for equity, constructing and enacting an equity vision, supervising for improvement of equitable teaching and learning, fostering
equitable school culture, collaborating with families and communities, influencing sociopolitical context, allocating resources, hiring and placing personnel, and modeling) from Galloway & Ishimaru (2015, p. 382-385), one can see how they organize into four main categories – self-awareness, organizational mindset, management of resources, and community connections. Self-awareness, as a category, would include leaders engaging in self-reflection and growth for equity as well as modeling those practices within their leadership. The category of organizational mindset includes developing an organizational leadership for equity, constructing and enacting an equity vision, and supervising for the improvement of equitable teaching and learning practices in classrooms. Allocating resources as well as hiring and placing personnel would fall under management of resources and finally, the category of community connections would include fostering an equitable school culture, collaborating with families and communities, and influencing the socio-political context. Using the elements from Kraehe’s Arts Equity Framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016) of distribution, recognition, participation, access, effect, and transformation as well as the addition of teacher effectiveness, to focus the leadership practices through creates a new framework (see Figure 3) that will ultimately lead to the best leadership actions for arts equity and equitable arts education experiences for students.

Figure 2.3

Proposed Leadership for Arts Equity Framework

Note. Proposed by S. Gentile.
I provide a few examples of how this proposed framework might be used as a lens to create equitable arts experiences. A district fine arts leader becoming self-aware around the element of equitable distribution, might reflect on how resources are being divided across the district to arts teachers and students. She might also model equitable practices with transparency in regards to resource allocation, including budgeting. In terms of equitable access and participation to arts education experiences, this same self-aware leader might reflect on arts opportunities offered throughout the district and at which schools, as well as the scheduling practices in those schools. She might also engage with students involved in these experiences and maybe more importantly students interested but unable to be involved to find what barriers they encounter with their involvement in arts education opportunities.

A district fine arts leader working on their organizational mindset around the element of recognition, might establish and implement a vision of equitable arts education that centers the representation of diverse and historically marginalized voices. He might use a variety of data (disaggregated participation data, disaggregated attrition data, or behavioral data as examples) to measure the element of effect in terms of the implementation of this vision. In addition, the leader will be sure to include a focus on student responsive curriculum and instructional practices to fit the vision for equity, both through a teacher lens and a student lens. All of this attention and planning to counteract historical and systemic bias through organizational mindset will help this leader to address the element of transformation.

Finally, a district fine arts leader focusing on managing resources around the arts equity element of teacher effectiveness might create a plan to recruit, hire, and retain more diverse teachers both in terms of dimensions of identity and culturally responsive teaching practices. She also might develop new thinking around how and where she places the staff members that she
has, perhaps putting the strongest and most responsive teachers in the most difficult placements. The previous examples give a brief hint into how this framework may be used not only for analysis of practices, but also for planning of new practices for district arts leaders to move toward more equitable arts education programming.

This work is incredibly urgent as these threats are affecting students on a daily basis and molding their educational experiences. By continuing to investigate and call attention to these areas of inequities in arts education, leadership practices and actions can be constructed to better prepare and support schools to make the transformation by providing truly equitable experiences for all students. The following chapter will provide in-depth description of the research design and methodology used in this research inquiry.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This dissertation study looked at school districts that are having success in providing equitable arts experiences for their students and investigating what district leaders that oversee their arts education programming have done and are currently doing to provide for excellence and equity. Equity in the arts for this purpose will look at the specific infrastructure elements, pulled directly from the Kraehe Arts Equity Framework, of equitable budget practices, participation data, staffing data, culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum and resources, and a commitment to achieve equitable arts programming (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). In addition, participating leaders will have other areas in which they have found success in their work towards excellence and equity in the arts.

This chapter is organized as follows. First, I describe the qualitative methodology of the study with added descriptions on phenomenological and multi-sited research to further explain the design. Second, the process for recruitment and selection of participants is depicted in depth. Third, I describe the process for data collection, including multiple in-depth, semi-structured interviews and document review. Fourth, procedures for data analysis, including memo writing and member checking with participants, is documented. Finally, I address considerations with this research including my positionality as the researcher, and ethical considerations of the study.

The Study

Design

“Qualitative inquiry typically encompasses an intentional contemplation of meaning making in the examination of human behavior and interactions across and within social contexts” (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2020, p. 6). This sentence jumped out when I was first reading it as it exactly describes what I wanted to do with this project. Identifying district leader’s practices
through interviews and document reviews, related to the arts or not, and reviewing evidence of how they affect programming and experiences for students, will ideally help other districts and education organizations design more equitable programming from the start. Creswell (2007) defines qualitative research in the following manner:

“Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action” (p. 37).

This definition is the basis for the design of the rest of the inquiry.

This phenomenological study used qualitative scholarship by means of a series of multisited, semi-structured interviews and a focus group throughout the 2021-2022 school year.

“A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57-58).

Following an interactive design model, this study also employed some characteristics of grounded theory research, which requires shifting past merely describing a phenomenon to
creating a model that accounts for the phenomenon’s occurrence (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2009). My goal, as the researcher, was to pinpoint concrete leadership practices for developing and maintaining equitable arts programs could be replicated, cultivated, and implemented in school districts across the country.

Multi-sited research compares data collected from similar groups “looking at similarities and differences in perspectives and situations to develop an analysis and build theory” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 75). The emphasis is transferred from specific locations or people and instead concentrated on significant implications and connections and the transference of those conditions throughout a variety of environments (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Comparing and contrasting data from several sites allowed the researcher to identify commonalities that led to success and develop actions for others to follow (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This type of research helped me accurately examine the intricacies of both district leadership and arts education and the relationship between the two, thus attaining the goals of this study.

**Research Site and Participants**

As I was interested in limiting this study to school districts in New York State, to initially recruit participants I started in the fall of 2021 by surveying the professional organizations for arts educators in New York State. They are the New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA), the New York State Art Teachers Association (NYSATA), the New York State Dance Education Association (NYSDEA), the New York State Media Arts Teachers Association (NYSMATA) and the New York State Theatre Education Association (NYSTEA). The questionnaire sent to these organizations asked members to nominate their school district or another school district as one that has committed to equitable arts education in accordance with the categories noted (equitable budget practices, participation data, staffing data, culturally
responsive and sustaining curriculum and resources, and a commitment to achieve equitable arts programming) as well as their perceived achievement of equity (see Appendix A). I received one hundred and twelve responses to the questionnaire nominating thirteen districts. I also received an email contact from a Superintendent that had seen the questionnaire and wanted to know more about the study as he was thinking he might like to participate. Surprisingly, one of the districts nominated several times was the district I had worked in for twenty-three years, most recently as the Supervisor of Fine Arts for seven years, and only just departed. While I did not include this district in the study to avoid a conflict of interest, it was affirming to realize that state-wide my colleagues recognized not only that working to provide equity in the arts education programs was my highest priority but also that there was tangible progress being made.

I took the list of the remaining thirteen districts that had been nominated or volunteered and began internet searches to gain more information about each district such as where they were located within NYS, basic district sizes, and review of the district websites. Ideally, I was looking for districts that would represent a variety of regions throughout NYS in addition to representation of rural, suburban, and urban districts. Of the thirteen districts, Monroe and Orange Counties each had two districts nominated while Cattaraugus, Chemung, Madison, Nassau, Onondaga, St. Lawrence, Suffolk, and Thompkins Counties all had one district nominated respectively. The New York City Department of Education was also nominated. Figure 3.1 is a visual representation of the general locations of the nominated school districts in New York State.

Figure 3.1 Initial Nomination Locations
It was also important that I had a variety of district sizes represented in the districts that would participate. This information for districts was pulled from the NYS Education Department Data website. Of the thirteen districts, five were described as urban, five were described as suburban, and three were described as rural. Finally, in reviewing the district websites, I was looking to see what district standards were being communicated both in terms of arts education programming and in terms of general diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Did a district proclaim to be a supporter of the arts but have no clear way to access any information on their website about their arts education programming? Did they include pictures of students generally or involved in arts activities and if so, what students were being represented? Did the district have any information on their website about their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion? Was there information on how the district was engaging in this work or what their goals and actions items might include? Did the pictures of student reflected on their website include the historically marginalized populations that are included in the district? These questions guided the reviews of each school district’s website. The annotations were an important indicator of how the district is received upon first view. I wanted participants to be from school districts that were not only working towards equity as a whole, but ones that included and celebrated their arts programs as well.
In addition to the internet searches, I reviewed the details in the respondent’s answers to the basic questions about arts education equity in the nominated districts (see Appendix B). From the information I gained, I narrowed the list of thirteen districts down further and selected eight school districts to proceed with contacting for this study. In December of 2021, I contacted the administrator that oversees arts programming in each of these eight districts. Five administrators responded quickly and seemed eager to participate. One administrator responded that while they were very interested in this kind of study, they did not have the capacity to participate during the time frame indicated. Two of the eight administrators never responded.

The final five participating districts represented a wide variety of school districts – urban, suburban, rural, varying sizes and socioeconomic levels. The titles and roles of the participants depended on each individual district's hierarchical structure; in four cases it was a Director of Fine Arts and in one case it was the Superintendent of Schools. The title was less important than the job duties, which all included overseeing the fine arts programming. To make participants feel most comfortable and safe during COVID-19 restrictions, all interviews were held during the spring and early summer of 2022 over Zoom. Participants were able to identify a place in which to join the Zoom interview where they were most comfortable and had privacy. To avoid any conflicts of interest on my part as the researcher, the Syracuse City School District and the West Genesee Central School District (my former employer and current employer respectively) were intentionally excluded from the study.

It was important to be aware of the relationships that developed between myself, the researcher and interviewer, and the participants in the study. I obviously wanted to build rapport and trust with the participants, yet I also needed to maintain professional boundaries. Being
mindful of reflexivity or “mutual influence of the researcher and participants on each other” helped to lessen the chance of false conclusions from the data (Maxwell, 2009, p. 234).

**Data Collection**

Data was collected, as previously stated during the spring and early summer of 2022, in two fundamental ways during this study – semi-structured interviews and document review through the collection of artifacts. Research interviews were intended to “better understand how the participant thinks or feels about a subject” or their “perspectives and interpretations of the social world” (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022, p. 88). Each participating leader committed to partaking in a minimum of two one-on-one semi-structured interviews over the course of the study to ensure that the most information possible was gathered (Creswell, 2007).

Each initial interview was sixty minutes in length. Subsequent interviews were scheduled and conducted as needed so I could gain more information and clarity around participant responses and experiences. My main research questions around equitable arts programs were broken down into the following categories: infrastructure including equitable budget practices, participation data, staffing data (number of staff and diversity of staff), culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum and resources, and a commitment to achieve equitable arts programming. Through the use of the semi-structured interview, I, as the researcher was able to let participants' responses drive the follow-up interviews and conversation (see Appendices C and D).

Documents around any and all of the categories (infrastructure including equitable budget practices, participation data, staffing data, culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum and resources, and a commitment to achieve equitable arts programming) were requested from participants to provide further evidence of the information gained in interviews. Documentation that was received from participating school districts were budget guidance memos, specific
student and staff data, human resources data, curriculum documents, vision and mission documents and a district strategic plan. Documents were used as evidence to support data collected during the interview process.

Data Analysis

Formal analysis of data collected from the coded interviews, focus group, and documents, in addition to the reflections and memos that I wrote, began almost immediately and was ongoing throughout this study (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2009). Known as the constant comparative method, analysis began with the collection of data as I looked to identify key topics or recurring issues. As more data was collected, there was a need to focus on the “diversity of the dimensions under categories” as well as the variety of data that was gathered (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 75). As phrases, experiences, and practices were noted in the data, codes were constructed to label the data; a list of which can be found in Appendix E. These codes were used to split data into organizational themes such as the equity criteria at the start of the study or more theoretical and conceptual themes around leadership practices for arts equity. Data was coded, reflections were noted and memos were written as the data was being broken down and connections were being made (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Maxwell, 2009). Initial analysis was used to help guide following interviews. This cycle repeated as data continued to be collected and themes steadily emerged and converged into conclusions.

Data collected and evidence reviewed was analyzed through the lens of the leadership for arts equity framework as proposed in the synthesis of the literature (see Figure 2). Conclusions were developed through this line of thinking in order to cultivate clear leadership actions that promote equitable arts education programs.

Considerations
Positionality of the Researcher

As an arts administrator striving for equity myself, I have an obvious bias in this area of research. This resulted in the potential to complicate my interactions as well as my analysis of data that was collected. I believe acknowledging this reality and disclosing this information to participants from the beginning helped to keep me focused on the goal of the research and forego any prior thoughts and assumptions I may have had about what school districts should or should not be doing in the name of arts education equity. Further, I acknowledge that I am a White woman that was studying districts with a wide range of Black and Brown students. I could not ignore the implicit bias my Whiteness brought to the table. It was important to keep my Whiteness at the forefront and intentionally establish appropriate relationships with participants to build their trust and safety throughout the study. I also needed to consistently acknowledge my personal goals regarding this research and monitor how they may have influenced the study in order to assure the validity of conclusions that were made (Maxwell, 2009).

In thinking of researcher positionality from a positive standpoint, I have been engaged in this work as the leader of the Fine Arts Department in two very different districts. This provided given me an opportunity to think about equity in arts education in ways that others might not. Acknowledging the experiences and knowledge I bring to the study, rather than trying to shut it out altogether, often me helped to be “a valuable source of insight, theory, and data about the phenomena” being studied (Maxwell, 2009, p. 220). To acknowledge and investigate this duality, I completed a “research identity memo” (see Appendix F) as part of the data collection process (Maxwell, 2009, p. 225).

Ethical Considerations
As Maxwell (2009) states, “…ethical concerns should be involved in every aspect of [research] design” (p. 216). Much of the ethical considerations for this study surrounded the study itself and how the information of the study was conveyed to the participants.

Participants were asked to give informed consent upon their agreement to join this study (Creswell, 2007). By giving participants all the information about the study up front and allowing them to have questions or concerns addressed, they indicated feeling more comfortable and at ease during the interview process and were able to participate fully. In addition, understanding that participation is voluntary and they may withdraw from participation at any time allowed them to have more control over their involvement, which also led to increased comfort.

Part of the study information shared within the informed consent process, included data storage and confidentiality (Creswell, 2007). It was important that participants know that the information they shared in interviews would be cared for in a respectful and professional manner and that it would be stored securely without public access. Participants were assured that pseudonyms would be used to conceal identifying information when the information was used for publication purposes, and that their data would not be publicly connected to them to the best of the researcher’s ability.

Finally, it was important that participants fully understood that participation in this study would not benefit them directly in any way (Creswell, 2007). That is to say that they would not be compensated or receive any notoriety from participation. However, as they are leaders ideally looking to maintain or grow more equitable arts education programs, learning from the results of the study had the potential to be beneficial to them in terms of future practices.

Conclusion
The goal of this study was to better understand how leadership practices can be employed to promote and sustain equitable arts education programs in K-12 school districts for all students. This work is incredibly urgent as these threats to equity are affecting students on a daily basis and molding their educational experiences. By continuing to investigate and call attention to the impact that leadership practices have on arts education, policies and practices can be generated to better prepare and support leaders to make the transformation to truly providing equitable experiences for all students. The following chapter will introduce each participating school district, their administrator leading the arts programming, as well as information about their arts education programs.
Chapter Four: Participating School Districts and Administrators

In order to provide context to the data gathered in this study, I will first give an introduction to each participating school district, their arts education programs, and the administrator that took part in this study. In order to keep the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms are used for both the individuals and the school districts. By protecting their anonymity, participants are more likely to participate authentically and be less constrained by subjective thoughts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The School Districts, Arts Programs, and Administrators

As mentioned in the previous chapter, five district administrators from five school districts participated in this study. They are Director Miranda of the Washington Heights Central School District, Superintendent Arnold from the Kennedy Street School District, Director Kusama of the Infinity Mirror Central School District, Director Battle from the Portsmouth Free School District, and Director O’Riordan of the Cranberry Falls School District. The subsequent sections will provide general size and demographic information for each of the five school districts, including a general overview of each school district’s arts programming, as well as a detailed introduction to each participant administrator. This will include information about their identities, backgrounds, and experiences, along with their definitions of equity and excellence within education and more specifically within arts education. I will also include information on each administrator’s recent arts equity priorities and actions within their school districts. A summary of the five administrator demographics can be found in Table 4.1 prior to the narrative information. A summary of all school district student demographics can be found in Table 4.2 and all district’s arts programming can be found in Table 4.3. Those tables follow the narrative information.
Table 4.1. *Administrator Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>1st Language</th>
<th>LGBTQ</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Admin. Experience</th>
<th>Live in District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miranda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>50-55</td>
<td>10 yrs.</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnold</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>55-60</td>
<td>20 yrs.</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kusama</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>7 yrs.</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battle</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>40-45</td>
<td>6 yrs.</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Riordan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>10 yrs.</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Information sourced from participant interviews. “LGBTQ” column indicates whether the administrator identifies as a member of that community. “Live in District” column indicates whether the administrator lives in the district in which they serve.

**Washington Heights Central School District**

The Washington Heights Central School District is a small urban school district located in a fairly liberal, mid-sized college town. The district serves 5,500 students and employs approximately 1,100 adults. The student population in terms of racial and ethnic demographics is fifty-two percent White students. Black students, Hispanic or Latino students, Asian or Pacific Islander students, and Multiracial students account, fairly evenly, for twelve percent of the student population each. Sixteen percent of the student population are students with disabilities and six percent are considered English language learners. Additionally, forty-two percent of the student population is determined to be economically disadvantaged as designated by New York State. The student population is evenly split in terms of reported gender.

The Fine Arts Department at Washington Heights provides music, visual arts and theater programming to students. Music opportunities include classroom music, choral, band, and orchestral ensemble participation and instruction, as well as music production. Visual arts opportunities include classroom art instruction at the elementary level and more discipline specific instruction (studio art, ceramics, photography, media arts) at the secondary level. The
majority of theater opportunities involve rehearsing and staging productions, the majority of
which occur outside of the regular school day. The Washington Heights District collects data
around their instrumental program, as well as Fine Arts curricular and co-curricular participation
that can be disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, free and reduced price lunch status, special
education classification, and/or English learner status.

Washington Heights is known regionally, and beyond, not only for the exceptional arts
programming they support within their district, but also with the work they are promoting
districtwide around diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Superintendent of the district is a leader
beyond the district in this work as well. Both the Superintendent and the Director of Fine Arts
recognize the value that the strong support of the arts in the community brings to a district and
have been very intentionally including the arts in equity work from the beginning. Their district
website very clearly delineates the vision for their students that is equity centered and their
strategic plan outlines goals and action steps to ensure this vision becomes reality. The district
has identified clear metrics to monitor their progress and publishes the data around these metrics
for transparency to the community. They have developed anti-racist and anti-oppressive learning
units that are cross disciplinary, including and often highlighting the arts, and multi-grade level.
These units and the student products of engaging in these units are displayed on the district
website. It is difficult to navigate around the district website without coming across evidence that
this work is a thread throughout much of the district daily business.

In terms of Fine Arts, the district has a separate webpage dedicated to this department. In
addition to sharing the vision and mission for Fine Arts at Washington Heights, the page includes
information about upcoming events, recent department news, pictures of current student artwork
and performances, and course and curricular information. There are also links on the page to
various inclusive community projects that the department has participated in over the years.

Again, navigating the Fine Arts section of the website, it is clear that this department is a proud and connected aspect of the district and that the centerpieces of equity and inclusion are equally as important within the department as they are throughout the district.

**Director Miranda**

The administrator that participated in this study is the Washington Heights CSD Director of Fine Arts, Mrs. Miranda. Director Miranda has worked for the Washington Heights district for over a decade and brings a wealth of arts education and community arts knowledge to her work. She is a middle-aged, White, female administrator that lives in the same community in which she works with her husband and two children that attend the Washington Heights Central School District. She has a self-stated passion for providing spaces to students where they feel like they belong and are valued.

Director Miranda came to the education field from the community arts arena rather than starting out her professional life as an educator. After attending college in New York City, in theater performance and in the theater world, she found herself working for a community organization that served primarily Black and Latino/Latina students. It was an arts focused organization that centered primarily on cultural experiences in music, dance, and theater. Director Miranda ran the theater program, and it didn’t take her long to recognize that as a White person in this organization, serving primarily historically marginalized populations in society as well as in the arts, she had a responsibility to not only interrupt a cycle of marginalization but also be responsive to the cultural needs of this community within the arts programming she was providing. In addition, Director Miranda recognized how much she needed to learn and how much she could learn from working with this organization. She found the job to be an enormous
privilege.

One of the things that Director Miranda realized, as she was doing this work for over fifteen years, was how connected theater was to “the overall empowerment for students by helping them find their voice, being able to appreciate the importance of holding conversations with one another where you're listening and speaking to one another, the whole concept and art of storytelling.” She stated that while she was working with the students as a theater director, what she valued most in theater was empowering students with strategies to attack the hard topics. Theater enabled students to surface personal stories that addressed racism, sexism, and other social inequities that highlight power and privilege in society. A second realization that Director Miranda made was that theater arts are intimately connected to literacy development. She shared that these associations, combined with having lived in New York City for almost 20 years, “kind of got me to a place where I felt like it was time to move on to another chapter in my life. Perhaps moving out of New York City to another area and really kind of digging into the connections that I was finding with theater and the other development of important skills in our youth.” She enrolled in a university closer to the middle of New York State, rather than in New York City, to earn a master’s degree in education.

Director Miranda was first hired in an elementary school in a public school district. She was able to infuse her theater background and her new learning around literacy development while serving in this new position. She shared that she had a “wonderful, smart, and supportive principal.” A great school leader that really gave Director Miranda the opportunity to flourish as an educator and the ability to start new initiatives; initiatives that were often arts-based or supported art integration into other areas of student development such as literacy and social emotional skills. It was through leading these initiatives and the support of her principal that
encouraged her to move into an early childhood administrative position and then into the fine arts director position after getting her degree in education leadership. Though becoming an administrator was not a goal of hers when she transitioned into the field of education, she feels this position has allowed her “to connect with and influence and support more students” than she would be able to do staying in one building as a teacher.

As the Director of Fine Arts for Washington Heights, Director Miranda has been integral in not only continuing to move the fine arts program forward, but also in having arts integration programs move forward as well. She has connected the trajectory of the Fine Arts department with the superintendent's vision and direction for the district centered on critical thinking and student engagement. She has made a lot of progress in building support for the connections that the arts have to both critical thinking and overall student engagement with the school district’s superintendent, building administrators, Board of Education, and community members. When asked about her definition of equity, she related it to this vision as well. She stated,

We have to be clear that equity does not mean equal. Equity and the perception that we're working towards equity must include excellence and that if we don't have equity, we cannot call what we're doing excellent.

In terms of what that looks like in Fine Arts, the district is looking at really providing authentic learning experiences for students. This results in 100% student engagement and examining the engagement through a critical lens. This supports the district’s commitment to antiracist curriculum and pedagogy and is helpful to defining what that looks like and means in the arts classrooms. Director Miranda stated,

We're really working on looking at our systems and our practices and beginning to really look at how we can have a dialogue so we approach student engagement in a different
way to reduce the harm for our students.

Additionally, she reports that this is work that is happening across the Washington Heights district. Miranda shared,

And the exciting part for me is that the arts are included in that. I've been able to partner very much with the executive team and with our building leaders in surfacing and recognizing how the arts are so deeply involved in student engagement and critical thinking. And I feel supported in the way that we've built an understanding and a recognition among the rest of the leaders in the district on how critical the arts are to that. So I think for me, equity within the fine arts really is about acknowledging that our young people exist in a system, system that is not fair and equitable. And for that reason we need to provide additional systems and supports for students who are historically marginalized so that they can have the same level of opportunities to achieve in the arts.

**Kennedy Street School District**

The Kennedy Street School District is a small rural school district located in a conservative, farming area. While the district serves 300 students and employs around 75 adults, it covers over fifty square miles. The student population in terms of racial and ethnic demographics is overwhelmingly populated with White students at ninety-one percent. Black students, Hispanic or Latino students, and Multiracial students account for three percent of the population each. Fifteen percent of the student population are students with disabilities and sixty percent of the student population is determined to be economically disadvantaged as designated by New York State. The student population is fairly evenly split in terms of reported gender.

The Fine Arts Department at Kennedy Street provides music and visual arts programming to students. Music opportunities include classroom music, choral and band ensemble
participation and instruction, and an annual musical theater extra-curricular production. Visual arts opportunities include classroom art instruction at the elementary level, in addition to studio art and three levels of advanced art at the secondary level. This district boasts a near one hundred percent participation rate in their music program. Data is not collected specific to their Fine Arts programming and participation, but they feel they are small enough that they could compile the information and disaggregate it quickly if needed.

The Superintendent of Kennedy Street School District has long been involved in equity initiatives throughout his career in his capacity in several other statewide professional organizations. Once he became the leader of Kennedy Street, he knew it was important to continue to champion this work at the district as well. While the district does not have a separate diversity, equity, and inclusion webpage like many other districts do, the idea of and movement toward equity is apparent through all the pages on the website from the district vision and mission right through to the business office information. In terms of the Fine Arts information, there isn’t much other than course listings and descriptions. However, the district social media postings, which are linked to their website front page, are a consistent stream of celebrating student accomplishments in the arts.

**Superintendent Arnold**

The administrator that participated in this study is the Kennedy Street School District Superintendent, Mr. Arnold. Superintendent Arnold has been with this district for only a few years and according to parent and family feedback is a “hands-on, community-minded” leader. He is a middle-aged, White, male administrator that lives with his wife and two children in a much more affluent area approximately an hour away from the Kennedy Street School District area. Superintendent Arnold was the only individual to reach out about volunteering for this
study prior to participant recruitment and after hearing about the study through mutual colleagues.

Superintendent Arnold's journey in arts education did not start in the direction of the arts. He started out getting an associate’s degree in business and math from his local community college with the intention of going on in business or becoming a math teacher. While fulfilling his liberal arts requirements he regularly elected to take music classes, including voice lessons, until his voice teacher questioned why he wasn’t pursuing music since that was truly his passion. Until then, he didn’t think music was actually a viable career path, but with that nudging from supporters, he shifted his focus to music education. When he graduated, he was hired by a small rural school district as the vocal, general music teacher for the entire district. After teaching there for five years and completing his master’s degree, he began to look at larger districts. He really wanted to become a high school choir director.

Over the next ten years, Superintendent Arnold served as a high school choral director in two larger suburban districts in New York State. Along the way, he had a principal that encouraged his leadership capabilities and the pursuit of an administrative degree. Initially, he opposed the idea of leaving the classroom, but the principal further supported his development by sharing some leadership positions that would allow him to continue teaching. He pursued the leadership degree and over the years has appreciated how much of an impact he could have on students in these leadership roles.

Initially Superintendent Arnold’s push toward equity came from, as he puts it, “selfish motives” and was directed solely towards music education. He taught for districts that were pretty well known around New York State for being powerhouses in the music education field. He noticed that the band teachers and orchestra teachers provided students in their programs
with individual or small group lessons during the school day. However, this was not the practice or expectation for him or the choir program. When he took on a leadership role as the department chair, he advocated for incorporating voice lessons as part of the choir. He saw this as important for his program, his students and the department because the voice is an actual instrument and they need to learn how to play that instrument and progress through various skills.

Life changes led to a move to another city, where he received a position teaching high school music, directing the high school choir, and also coordinating the district K-12 music program. After a few years, Superintendent Arnold continued on his journey by filling a newly created position and becoming the first Director of Fine Arts in a much larger school district. After several years in that position, Superintendent Arnold was asked to consider an assistant superintendent position. Initially, he refused the change but was encouraged and eventually accepted the challenge. After twelve years in that school district, Superintendent Arnold applied for and was appointed as the leader of the Kennedy Street School District.

In addition to his work in educational administration, Superintendent Arnold has been very active in professional organizations in New York State. Through this role, he has been able to see the positive results from high quality music and arts programming in addition to the barriers that prevent students from accessing arts education or participating in arts programs. Seeing the disparity across counties, cities, and the state, led him to become deeply invested in advocating for and providing equity within the arts.

Kennedy Street School District is a rural, conservative community; a community that is very much tied to the school district. Superintendent Arnold stated, “I work very closely with the mayor and the town supervisor and when I came here four years ago, we were near bankrupt, and
closing the doors was a very real concern for the entire community.” The district is in much better shape fiscally at this time, but as the community struggles with poverty, the district has tough times as well. While the community depends on the school district, Arnold shared,

They can often be anti-education in a sense. Some families have had bad experiences and feel like the schools didn't support them when they were students, so there is an assumption that their children won’t be supported either. There's a cycle of mistrust that I, as superintendent, have been really trying to break. And one of the things that I truly believe is that music and the arts can help with making some gains in building that trust with families by attending to the well-roundedness of the child's education.

He says the community is equally supportive of the arts as they are of athletics and that is why they can help lay that foundation of trust.

Superintendent Arnold defines equity in terms of his overall goal as an educator. He indicated, “I want students to become productive members of society. And we know that productive members of society are even more productive when they've had a broad foundation in arts education.” He works hard within the Kennedy Street School District as well as the professional organizations he is a part of to ensure equity conversations don’t stop at the beginning but involve reflections and pushing to change mindsets on many traditionally elite practices that keep students from participation. Arnold shared,

So, I guess my definition of equity is a question. Are all students given a pathway to become productive members of society? Are all students given access to pathways to become productive members of society and pathways that are well rounded? If we can answer that question with a yes, then we've succeeded. Then we know we're being equitable.
Infinity Mirror Central School District

The Infinity Mirror Central School District is a self-described large, suburban school district located between an upper-middle-class town and an upper-class town. The district serves 5,000 students and employs a little more than 1,200 adults. The student population in terms of racial and ethnic demographics is sixty percent White students and thirty percent Asian students. Black students, Hispanic or Latino students, and Multiracial students account for the remaining population at zero percent, seven percent, and three percent respectively. Eighteen percent of the student population are students with disabilities while only five percent of students are considered English learners. Thirteen percent of the student population is determined to be economically disadvantaged as designated by New York State. The student population is fairly evenly split in terms of reported gender.

The Fine Arts Department at Infinity Mirror provides music, visual arts and theater programming to students. Music opportunities include classroom music, choral, band, and orchestral ensemble participation and instruction, and a variety of smaller musical ensembles at the secondary level. Visual arts opportunities include classroom art instruction at the elementary level and more discipline specific instruction (studio art, ceramics, photography, media arts) at the secondary level. The majority of theater opportunities involve rehearsing and staging productions outside of the school day. The Infinity Mirror District collects participation data around their instrumental program as well as secondary Fine Arts curricular and co-curricular participation.

Infinity Mirror Central School District has established an equity committee that has become the footing for all the school district’s diversity, equity, and inclusion undertakings. As the district had been engaging in conversations about culturally responsive practices for the last
six or seven years, many individuals were primed and excited to move the work forward. Many of these individuals were teachers within the Fine Arts department so this work naturally became a focal point of the department as well. The district has strategically used staff surveys and professional learning opportunities to build staff capacity from an awareness phase into action. While Infinity Mirror does not have a separate page for their diversity, equity, and inclusion work, it is evident throughout the district site.

The Fine Arts has two webpages – one for art and one for music and performing arts. Both of these pages show evidence of a commitment to equity right from the anti-racist and anti-oppressive language in the vision and mission statements. The pages also include program, course and curriculum information, department staff information, district arts partnership information and arts advocacy information.

**Director Kusama**

The administrator that participated in this study is the Infinity Mirror Central School District Director of Music and Arts, Mr. Kusama. Director Kusama has been with this district for just under a decade. He is a White, male administrator that lives in the town next to Infinity Mirror with his wife and two young children and is in his late thirties. He is also involved in leadership positions in arts professional organizations for New York State. Through these positions he is a constant advocate for social justice and is relentlessly pushing all he connects with to do better in terms of providing equitable opportunities for students.

Director Kusama loved music classes and all his extra-curricular music activities in high school. He wanted to emulate his high school music teachers in becoming a music teacher himself. After graduating with his bachelor's degree, he got a job teaching music in a private school near where he grew up. In addition to teaching, he maintained a private lesson studio, was
a performing musician, and an invested member of the music educator professional organization in New York. These varied experiences allowed him to benefit from an array of perspectives and learning environments throughout the years. He taught at the private school for nine years, and served as the school’s Coordinator of the Arts for six years, before deciding to get his administrative degree. He decided to seek an administrative degree because he found that he wanted to be involved in the decision-making process, especially when it came to arts programming at his work. He felt really strongly in the advocacy for the profession and felt that it was really important that leaders and advocates be as articulate as possible with the benefits of music and arts education. His experiences at the private school and in the professional organization piqued his curiosity regarding the disparity in arts experiences throughout the state.

Soon after finishing his administrative degree and getting his certification, Director Kusama became the Director of Fine Arts for the Infinity Mirror Central School District, where he's been for six years. He's become increasingly passionate about equity in education and in arts education and has focused a lot of his efforts there within his school district. They have many very popular arts programs that earn a lot of accolades and positive publicity for the district.

In terms of the word equity itself, Director Kusama defines it as “leveling the playing field for everyone.” He feels very strongly that being fair and equal is an important aspect of equity although he will admit that his definition is changing as of late to not just end with equal. He has come to understand that due to historical oppression and marginalization, there may be some people that need more than an equal share to be successful.

Over the years, Director Kusama had always been struck by the disparities he would find, anecdotally, regarding budgets for arts educators. He would often hear reports of disparities between different districts but also has heard about disparities within districts with seemingly no
explanation for the inconsistency. Director Kusama shared, “We are a pretty well-off district so people tend to assume that there are no equity issues in terms of money. We’re fortunate that we have the resources but in the past they haven’t been distributed equally.” He made equitable budgeting a priority when he began at Infinity Mirror and introduced a budgeting formula based on student numbers in programs to begin to balance the spending. As the years have progressed, he has adjusted the funding formulas to account for more expensive programs and fluctuations in costs. He stated, “I don’t know that I would say we are equitable yet. We’re definitely moving in the right direction but have not yet found a way to account for the variations in student need.

We’ll get there.”

**Portsmouth Free School District**

The Portsmouth Free School District is a large, suburban school district located in the suburb of a medium sized city. The district serves 7,000 students and employs just under 2,000 adults. The student population in terms of racial and ethnic demographics is seventy percent White students, accounting for well over two-thirds of the population. Black students, Hispanic or Latino students, Asian or Pacific Islander students, American Indian students, and Multiracial students account for the remaining population at twelve percent, seven percent, five percent, one percent, and five percent respectively. Twenty-two percent of the student population are students with disabilities and three percent of students are considered English learners. Forty percent of the student population is determined to be economically disadvantaged as designated by New York State. The student population is fairly evenly split in terms of reported gender.

The Fine Arts Department at Portsmouth provides music, visual arts, and theater programming to students. Music opportunities include classroom music, choral and band ensemble participation and instruction, and a variety of smaller musical ensembles at the
secondary level. Visual arts opportunities include classroom art instruction at the elementary level and more discipline specific instruction (studio art, ceramics, photography, media arts) at the secondary level. While they are starting to add curricular theater courses, the majority of theater opportunities involve rehearsing and staging productions outside of the school day. The Portsmouth District collects participation data around their instrumental program as well as secondary Fine Arts curricular and co-curricular participation.

In contrast to the previous three districts, the Portsmouth Free School District has a Director of Equity and a separate “Equity and Inclusion” page on the district website. However, this does not isolate equity information to only this section. The district website includes a commitment to equity and inclusion throughout, with the more specific actions related to equity and inclusion outlined on the separate page. In service of moving toward more equitable practices, Portsmouth created an equity committee to investigate district data and develop recommendations. From that process, the Director of Equity position was established and a variety of professional learning opportunities for staff. The district has also established some accountability and data review procedures to continue to identify systemic inequities.

The Fine Arts department website offers information about the programs, the booster organization, summer programming and how to make a donation. The vision and mission of the Fine Arts department mirrors the equity and inclusion language of the district mission and vision and adds equity and inclusion statements specific to the arts. The Director of Fine Arts and several of the arts teachers served on the equity committee in setting up the course of action for the district. According to the Fine Arts director, this has helped to propel equity and inclusion work within the department as so many are already committed and invested in the work.

Director Battle
The administrator that participated in this study is the Portsmouth Free School District Director of Fine Arts, Mr. Battle. This is Director Battle’s first year with this district, but he has served as an arts administrator for six years with another smaller district in the same county. He is a White, male, early forties administrator that lives in a neighboring town with his husband and their pets. He is heavily involved in the music and theater professional organizations for New York State. In all his capacities, he feels he has been an advocate for equity and equal representation of diverse identities.

Director Battle started his journey in education as both an undergraduate theater education major and a music education major. He was very passionate about theater education and about the need for all students to have access to theater education, but was also realistic in that many more students, many more schools and school districts have music programs where they don't have theater programs, and theater tends to be a more co-curricular or extra-curricular activity. Therefore, he made the decision to double major in both and became certified in both as an educator. He worked as both a high school theater teacher and a high school music teacher (at the same time in the same school) for a number of years. This was still in New York State, but pretty far from his hometown. He started and developed the entire theater program and he also enhanced the middle and high school choral programs to be renowned and known as high quality examples throughout the region.

Eventually, Director Battle preferred to move closer to his hometown, where he might be able to get to family within an hour or two to drive. He made a significant move across New York State to be a high school choral director in addition to being in charge of the entire district’s extracurricular theater program. The high school did a straight play production once per year and a musical theater production once per year that he would oversee and be in charge of, in addition
to coordinating all the extra-curricular middle and elementary school performances that go along with that program. With his co-director, he again made great strides in further developing the theater program. He also elevated the idea of theater education throughout the district, whether it be curricular or extracurricular, from something that is not just a club to do some fun games and activities but serious standard-based skills, knowledge development for students, and essential to their development as well-rounded individuals.

Director Battle, along the way, had the fortunate situation in this district of working for a superintendent that was not only supportive of the arts but also served as a mentor to Battle and encouraged him to develop his leadership skills. Eventually, when he had completed his administrative degree, he was named as the Coordinator of Fine Arts for that same district. He was excited for this role and found that he could have a broader impact for more students. After serving in this role for five years, he moved on to become the Director of Fine Arts at Portsmouth Free School District, where he is in charge of the district’s music program, visual arts program, and co-curricular theater program. As he took on this role, he had the music teachers reflect on how open their policies were in terms of student participation and in terms of representation of pieces and composers that they chose for students to learn about and whose music the selected to play. He also encouraged them to reflect on their inclusion of students with disabilities in meaningful ways, not just defaulting to teaching these students as a self-contained group. In terms of visual arts, he urged teachers to look at which artists were selected, how students were selected for more advanced art classes, and how students were chosen and filtered through that, and then how student demographics were represented in the various programs. And finally, he was preparing the fine arts staff for a restructured budgeting process within the department to one that reflected more equity for students and was less reflective of which teacher
Within the move to his new district, Director Battle is encountering some identity situations that he hadn't encountered in his previous district in terms of religious beliefs and how that can impact student participation within the arts. He is trying to use this as an opportunity to model growth for his teachers and to help them see that equity is work that is never completed; that there are always things to be learned. Additionally, the district went through a restructuring of some of the elementary and middle schools in terms of which schools house which grade levels and how students are dispersed across the district. By default, this meant that there would be some shifting in the arts programming and staffing for students. For instance, elementary schools that were previously kindergarten through fifth grade are now kindergarten through fourth grade. He questioned whether schools that previously had fourth and fifth grade chorus, should now have third and fourth grade chorus? Do they have just fourth grade chorus? Is everyone in chorus? That is just a small example of the questions that needed to be answered throughout this district restructuring process. He also focused on shifting the mindset along the lines of equity, of the arts being just for the naturally talented and that the arts are really for all students. The responsibility of arts educators is to educate students in the arts so that there isn't this pervasive feeling of talented versus not talented.

Overall, the Portsmouth Free School District increased a focus on equity and identified metrics they report to the community. Mr. Battle used some of those metrics within the arts program to begin to collect data, some longitudinal data to identify trends within the arts programs in terms of equity, whether positive or negative.

**Cranberry Falls School District**

The Cranberry Falls School District is a mid-size, urban school district located in a large
metropolitan area. The district serves 27,000 students and employs 7,000 adults. The student population in terms of racial and ethnic demographics is sixty percent Black students and thirty percent Hispanic or Latino students. White students, Asian or Pacific Islander students, and Multiracial students account for the remaining population at six percent, two percent, and two percent respectively. Twenty percent of the student population are students with disabilities and the same amount of students are considered English learners. At ninety-two percent of the population, nearly the entire student body is determined to be economically disadvantaged as designated by New York State. The student population is fairly evenly split in terms of reported gender.

The Fine Arts Department at Cranberry Falls provides music, visual arts, theater and dance programming to students. Music opportunities include classroom music, choral, band, and orchestral ensemble participation and instruction, and a variety of other musical ensembles at the secondary level. Visual arts opportunities include classroom art instruction at the elementary level and more discipline specific instruction (studio art, ceramics, photography, media arts) at the secondary level. The majority of theater and dance opportunities are enrichment opportunities rather than curricular. Many of the arts opportunities in this district are school dependent based on the wants of students, parents, and community involvement or school leaders. The Cranberry Falls District has not typically collected participation data as a Fine Arts Department, but individual teachers or school buildings have done so for their own interests or needs.

The Cranberry Falls District has information on their commitment to equity and the work that the district is engaged in, but it is difficult to navigate and find at times as it is located within the Student Support Services pages. Much of the work that the district is doing around diversity, equity, and inclusion is only found on these pages. While the district has been engaged in this
work for quite some time, they have recently created an Executive Director of Equity and Student Support Services to lead this work districtwide.

The Fine Arts webpage is found through the master directory of the website. It includes both vision and mission statements that are focused on an equity commitment, similar to the Cranberry Falls main vision and mission statements. The page also includes program and course information for all arts disciplines (music, visual arts-inclusive of media arts, dance, and theater) as well as curriculum resources for all arts disciplines.

**Director O’Riordan**

The administrator that participated in this study is the Cranberry Falls School District Director of Fine Arts, Mr. O’Riordan. He is a White, male administrator in his early thirties that lives in the city of Cranberry Falls with his wife and their pets. Director O’Riordan has been in this position for a decade and states that he has been striving for equity within the arts program and throughout the district since his arrival.

Director O’Riordan grew up outside of the city where he currently serves. He grew up as a violin player, a cello player, and a vocalist. He also plays the guitar. He was a gigging musician throughout high school and college and continues that to this day; playing in a folk music band locally. After college, he was hired as an instrumental music teacher in Cranberry Falls and has spent his entire career within this district. Throughout his teaching career of eight years, he taught at a variety of elementary schools and middle schools within the district. As a teacher, he began to understand multiple kinds of disparities not only compared to surrounding suburban districts, but also the disparity within his own district and how certain schools or certain areas of the district seem to be supported more and had more funding or their programs were thriving more than in other areas of the district. These actions made him curious as to how decisions were
made that led to this inconsistency.

His continued questioning and pushing for things to be more fair or equal throughout the district had a lot of colleagues encouraging him to move into leadership and to eventually move into a bigger role within the district. This inspired him to complete his administrative degree while teaching. When he completed that degree, was named as the Director of Fine Arts for the Cranberry Falls District. Director O’Riordan did a lot of work to promote equality among the teachers in his district and across the district, but also to promote more access for students to other opportunities that students from his district might not always be provided throughout their time. Whether it is partnering with other schools, partnering with other districts, or working with other local organizations to change policies and procedures to provide for more access to Cranberry Fall students, he has had this at the forefront of his mind.

Maintaining that focus on access has been critically important for Director O’Riordan. One of his crowning achievements was that he felt that the county professional music organization was not inclusive enough of the Cranberry Falls School District. To remedy this, he has done a lot of work to build those connections and maybe foster some ideas or present solutions to have Cranberry Falls students more included and have Cranberry Falls be more regularly a district that the county organizations do not see as separate from the county. Brainstorming solutions and bringing them to fruition has been an interesting battle for him. He has really had to work to find that balance of having everyone agree with what you say but then having them show their agreement in terms of putting things in place or giving the funding to make sure that students are afforded opportunities.

Discussion

In looking at the overall district and administrator information, there are a few items of
note. These include topics of racial demographics of both students and adults, socio-economic demographics, and participant’s pathways to administration. As these findings are noted, they inevitably lead to more questions rather than answers.

The racial and ethnic demographics (Table 4.2) of the student population lean White in four of the districts, while White is a minority classification in the large urban district. This does not appear to effect the amount of arts opportunities offered or when they are offered in these districts according to Table 4.3. Will there be any other effects influenced by race as more data is reviewed?

Table 4.2. District Student Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th># Students</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>FrPL</th>
<th>SWD</th>
<th>EL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washington Heights</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>52% 12% 12% 12%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy Street</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>91% 3% 3% 0% 0%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infinity Mirror</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>60% 0% 7% 30% 3% 0%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portsmouth</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>70% 12% 7% 5% 5% 1%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cranberry Falls</td>
<td>27,000</td>
<td>6% 60% 30% 2% 2% 0%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Information sourced from [https://data.nysed.gov/](https://data.nysed.gov/). # Students refers to the approximate number of student in each district. The race/ethnicity abbreviations are as follows: W – White, B – Black or African American, H – Hispanic or Latino, A – Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, M – Multiracial, and AI – American Indian or Alaskan Native. FRPL stands for Free or Reduced Price Lunch which is the NYS designation of economically disadvantaged. SWD stands for students with disabilities. EL stands for English learners.

Table 4.3 District Arts Programming

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Visual Arts</th>
<th>Vocal/General Music</th>
<th>Instrumental Music Band</th>
<th>Orchestra</th>
<th>Theater</th>
<th>Dance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C/EC</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
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<td>----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Heights</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C/EC</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy Street</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>EC</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infinity Mirror</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>EC</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portsmouth</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C/EC</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cranberry Falls</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C/EC*</td>
<td>C/EC*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Information sourced from interviews. C stands for curricular meaning within the school day. EC stands for extracurricular meaning outside or after the school day. N/A stands for not applicable or not in the district. Entries denoted with a * indicates that the offerings (curricular or extracurricular) are inconsistently offered across the district.*

One demographic of note regarding the participating district administrators, is that they are all White. This follows the national trend of eighty-five percent of school leadership being White (NCES, 2015). Of the four participants that are Directors, three of them serve White, male superintendents. One serves a superintendent that is a Black male. It is interesting to note that the district seemingly the furthest “ahead” in terms of equity in arts education is this district with a person of color in the highest leadership position. Is this purely a coincidence based on the participating school districts or is this a trend in arts education leadership? Does this impact how decisions are made and what impact do those decisions have on equity in these arts education programs?

A large disparity among the districts appears in terms of economic status. As stated in Chapter Two, the arts can be costly and that can easily contribute to an elitist and exclusionary situation in schools. The interview questions around budgeting practices will certainly be intriguing based on these demographics and any impact on equitable arts programming.

One final noticing from this information presented. None of the participating administrators set out in life to be educational leaders and two of them didn’t even set out to be
arts teachers. In all of their paths, something happened to lead them to see that they could reach more students by moving into leadership. Does that impact their views of equity? Does that have any impact on the decisions they make as leaders?

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided an introduction to the participating school districts and administrators in order to provide a foundation and context for the information to follow in the findings chapters. By gaining a deeper understanding of the participants and their motivations, readers will be better prepared to synthesize the data in the subsequent chapters as leadership actions and beliefs toward both elements influencing equity and school, district and community mindset are deeply investigated. In the next chapter, I will provide evidence and analysis around the contributing factors necessary to produce and maintain an excellent and equitable K-12 arts education program. More specifically, the findings will center on what the participating leaders have done or plan to do to further equitable practices around these contributing factors and their impact.
Chapter Five: Producing Excellent and Equitable K-12 Arts Education Programs

This chapter examines the first research question: What are the major contributing factors necessary to produce an excellent and equitable K-12 arts education program? As previously noted in Chapter three, prior to the start of this study and through my review of the Arts Equity Framework and the High-Leverage Equitable Leadership Practices, I identified several influencing elements necessary for producing excellent and equitable arts education programs to question the study participants about during interviews (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). These components I singled out to question leaders about are having a culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum, equitable budget practices, reviewing and reflecting on student participation data, equitable staffing practices, and having a strong vision for this work. In addition to these priori factors, I constructed additional themes from the data collection, specifically from the words of the participants. They are student leadership and accountability. The chapter will highlight the factors and evidence discovered through interviews and document review, as well as connect them to elements of the Arts Equity Framework (distribution, recognition, participation, access, effects, and transformation) and the ten High-Leverage Equitable Leadership Practices (engaging in self-reflection and growth for equity, developing organizational leadership for equity, constructing and enacting an equity vision, supervising for improvement of equitable teaching and learning, fostering equitable school culture, collaborating with families and communities, influencing sociopolitical context, allocating resources, hiring and placing personnel, and modeling) (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016).

Vision
It is important that a leader for arts education striving for equity would have a solid vision of what equity in arts education looks like in practice and the associated belief that reaching that vision is achievable (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). I asked participants to discuss their vision for equity in arts education more deeply, explaining what it might look like, sound like and feel like for both educators and students. “Access,” “opportunity,” and “fairness,” were all common to each leader’s vision. Additionally, phrases such as “not just talent,” “removing barriers,” and “limit exclusiveness” were common in the conversations.

Superintendent Arnold started sharing his vision by stating,

My own overall vision for equity in the arts involves making space for any and all that want to take part and belong. I knew coming into my position here, we’d have a lot to do around the idea of equity in all contents and disciplines. In terms of the arts specifically, as we have 100% participation in our programs, I wanted to first assess where the district landed in terms of equity, access, and opportunities and see what the needs were. Then I’d adjust my vision for this district specifically and we could create a plan to move forward.

When questioned further about how he might assess the district for equity, he listed many elements that connected with the Kraehe framework (distribution, recognition, participation, access, and effects) (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016).

Well, you want to look at how many students are participating and then break that down to see who is and who isn’t among those numbers and why. You also want to look at if the programs are being supported both financially and publicly. Looking at what is being offered to students, what is being taught and how it is being taught is also important as well as how building schedules are created and how that impacts arts programs. And
Finally, you’ll want to ask students about their experiences in the arts programs and where they would like to see changes or improvements.

Although he was not familiar with the Arts Equity framework, his description of how and what to assess for equity seemed to be pulled right from it. Distribution and recognition are highlighted in the assessment around financial and public supports, while access, participation, and effects are highlighted in participation data review in addition to reviewing student schedules.

Director Miranda has given her vision a great deal of thought as she has progressed through her many arts experiences as well as her development as a leader.

My vision starts with what I am passionate about. I am passionate about empowering students and helping them to find their voice and the arts can do that. But the arts can also have this exclusive status where they are only for the people that can afford them or have natural talent. That is so absurd to me because the benefits of the arts are gained by students regardless of their ‘natural talent’ so why would we want to limit who can be part of that? So my vision for our work is that our programs and our teachers welcome and encourage all students through the policies, practices, resources, and supports [budgets, staffing, scheduling, supplies, curriculum, and development of staff]. And we find out how to better do this by going directly to the students and asking them for their feedback on their feelings of belonging and engagement with the policies, practices, resources, and supports in the arts programs. We should ask them and involve them in decisions about everything. My vision also includes seeing the arts as core content and recognizing what benefits arts instruction and arts integration bring to all content areas and all students.
Director Miranda’s vision connects with many aspects of the Kraehe Arts Equity Framework through the comprehensive nature of her vision (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). Addressing policies and practices around budgets, staffing, scheduling, and supplies connects with the distribution and recognition elements of the framework. Curriculum as well as scheduling connect with the participation and access elements of the framework. The involvement of student voice is essential to the effect and transformation elements of the framework. And finally, development of staff as well as the arts as core content mindset connects with the teacher effectiveness elements of the revised framework.

Director O’Riordan described his vision for equity in arts education as a function focused on the participation and access elements of the framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016).

My vision of equity in our arts programs is basically that every student is a part of the program in the earlier years when the classes are more mandatory and that when kids have more choice, that any student that wants to participate in whichever arts discipline they choose should be able to do so. Remedial needs like special education services wouldn’t automatically prevent a student from “specials” (participant used his fingers to create air quotes when saying this word) or other requested classes college level or for remedial purposes wouldn’t prevent the scheduling of arts classes. My vision means that adults find solutions to these more common problems to clear pathways for students much the way it is done in other content areas like ELA and Math.

In an interesting juxtaposition to Director O’Riordan’s comments but certainly not to the Arts Equity Framework, Director Kusama described his arts education equity vision more in terms of budgets and resources, connecting to the distribution element of the Kraehe framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016).
My vision for equity in our programs? I would say it would be about everyone getting what they need to participate. Do the teachers and classroom have the correct and needed supplies for students in visual arts? Do they have instruments for band and orchestra? If they don’t have instruments can they get them or do they not have the resources to do that? Do music teachers have the ability to get music scores for the students to read? The arts can be exclusionary for so many ways that it is our job to ensure that having the proper materials is not one of those ways. And I know there are arts programs that are very creative at handing a deficit of resources and maintaining successful programs, but I really feel that is still limiting and exclusionary as there is only so much progress students can make without appropriate resources.

Finally, with regards to his vision, Director Battle shared,

When I think about a vision for equity, I think about what I want the outcomes of the program to be. I want students to be excited and proud to be part of our programs and to be supported, challenged, and celebrated in them. Supported with materials, curriculum and great staff...challenged with curriculum topics and extension experiences and projects...celebrated with other students, staff, and our community. When we look at the students that are participating, I want to see a diverse representation of our student population...and what I mean by is many different kinds of students representing different races, genders, religions, languages, abilities...things like that. I want to see our school community and greater community coming together for the benefit and growth of the programs.

Again, this vision seems to envelope most, if not all of the elements of the Arts Equity framework. Starting with thinking about student outcomes of the program points directly to the
transformation element of the framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). Supporting outcomes of equity and excellence with resources, staffing, and curriculum connect with distribution, recognition, participation and access, as well as the teacher effectiveness component of the Revised Arts Equity Framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). And finally the school community and greater community coming together speaks directly to the effects element of the Kraehe Framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016).

While all of the leaders had definitely given a lot of thought to a vision for equity in the arts, none of the leaders had written anything down or documented it for the public, their department staff, or the district students. When asked specifically about this dilemma, most of the participants said they did not have the vision detailed anywhere, but Director Miranda said, “I’m embarrassed that I never thought of this. Seeing this type of vision in writing might be a powerful statement of support for our systemically marginalized students. I will be moving forward on this!”

In terms of having a vision for equitable and excellent arts education programs, all five participants had one and all believed it is viable (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Scheurich & Skrila, 2003). Four of the five participating administrators highlighted connections to the distribution, participation, and access elements of the Kraehe Arts Equity Framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). Three of the participating administrators connected with the recognition and effect elements and two participating administrators connected their vision with the transformation element and the teacher effectiveness element of the proposed Revised Arts Equity Framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). In all, every element of the framework and revised framework were included over the visions of all five participating administrators. The next component to be addressed is student participation data.
Student Participation Data

Student participation data can be a great step in reviewing an arts education program for equitable practices. This is an important data source when focusing on equity and a great first step towards including equity audits in arts department, school building, and school district practices. Equity audits have had several definitions and history of development in several capacities – investigations into inequities due to racial makeup as brought to the forefront during the U.S. civil rights movement, investigations into curriculum and grade level alignment there in, and investigations into standards alignment as brought forward during the standards-based reform in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Skrla, McKenzie & Scheurich, 2009). For the purpose of this research, the description was based on the words of Scheurich and Skrla (2003, p. 82) regarding their definition of equity audits, “What we are recommending, then, is to use the data that schools and districts already collect to identify systemic patterns of inequity internal to the school, patterns that prevent, or form barriers to, our being equally successful with all student groups.” Disaggregating student participation data by race, socio-economic status, special education status, English learner status can give leaders very specific insight into patterns that may need to be further investigated or dismantled (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Skrla, McKenzie & Scheurich, 2009).

During the interviews, participants were asked first, if they collected participation data for their arts programs and second, if they reviewed the data looking for trends or patterns among the demographic break downs. This practice, as whole, connects to the participation, access, and effects elements of the Kraehe Arts Equity Framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). Superintendent Arnold shared, “We haven’t really done this as our entire student population participates somehow in our arts programs, so we generally just look at our population
demographics as a whole.” When digging deeper into these practices at Kennedy Street Schools, Superintendent Arnold reflected, “I think that perhaps we should break our data down further in the future by each separate program. These conversations have me realizing that we may be missing some inequitable situations by not breaking down in this way.”

Director Kusama admitted,

We haven’t really reviewed participation data in this way. Sure, we collect who participates in our programs, and we look at the overall numbers in terms of the health of the program, but we’ve never broken down the demographics of the participants and looked at those numbers. I’ve got to admit, I’m kind of embarrassed that we’ve never done that. I talk a lot about equity and strongly believe we need to be working towards it every day but I missed this fairly easy thing right in front of my face.

During a later interview a few months later, Director Kusama shared that following his reflections during the first interview, he jumped into reviewing student participation data for the instrumental music program with a few of his instrumental music teachers. He reported,

We had some amazing conversations about this! The very first thing we noticed was that we have very little labelled special education students in our instrumental program. And then we discussed why that might be, like…were those students not interested in playing an instrument? …were they being given a real chance to participate? …were we as teachers unknowingly encouraging students not to participate in some way? …are special education students unable to participate because of the schedules of their services? This is something we definitely plan to bring to the rest of the instrumental music department and really try to find the answers to why the numbers are as they are. Another pattern we noticed was that while our percentage of White and Asian students in instrumental music
were pretty close to the district percentages, our participation of Hispanic students was not even close. Again, many of the same questions came up so we will be investigating that as well. I’m not going to lie, it didn’t feel great to see these numbers and I had to spend some time thinking about it before I would have been ready to admit it to you. Because of my own processing, I am worried about the feelings that might come up in these conversations and that people might feel threatened so I have to plan this next meeting and make sure I’m ready well ahead of time.

It was thought-provoking to following this process with Superintendent Arnold and Director Kusama. Their reflections, not only on the data, but also on their thoughts and reactions throughout speak to the challenging and constant nature of equity work.

Director Battle is currently planning on using student participation data as part of his process in his program review with his new staff at the Portsmouth Free School District as he understands what a powerful tool that data can be in reflecting on programmatic equity. However, since this is his first year with this district, his priority has been working on building trust and relationships with his staff this school year. He shared he has been preparing his staff for the review of participation data in the future but engaging them in conversations about what kinds of data would be helpful for them as they move toward equitable practices. He noted that these conversations have been powerful for his staff as well.

At the outset, I thought I was just preparing them and getting them used to thinking about using data to make our decisions, but we began really digging in deep to why we would use data and what data we should be using. For instance, when I asked the group what participation data would be beneficial, the majority initially jumped to wanting participation data for all of the arts programs K through 12. As that discussion
progressed, some teachers realized that our music and art classes in Kindergarten through Eighth Grade are mandatory for all students to take so reviewing that data would the same as reviewing the over district census data for those grades and probably wouldn’t show us anything super specific to the arts. So then we began thinking about what programs are not mandatory that would benefit from a look into the student participation data. We settled on the entire instrumental music program which is from grade four on up, the voluntary…uhh I don’t really like that word but I can’t think of a better one right now so…voluntary choral program which is from grade seven on up and the high school arts courses as they are essentially choice based. I’m even more excited about this upcoming data dive now because the teachers are interested in what it will reveal as well.

Director Battle felt that these conversation not only deepened the relationships and trust he was building with his new staff but also developed interested and engagement among the teachers for this work. He is hopeful that this will help support solution based conversations in the future if difficult trends are noticed within the data.

Directors O’Riordan and Miranda indicated they have been regularly using student participation data in their planning for their department and with staff in reviewing department practices. While both admit to some push-back and adjustments when they first began bringing participation data to staff for reflection, they have come to a point where it is a valued part of their department workings. Director O’Riordan shared,

Several years ago, we first started looking at this data in terms of our district and our surrounding districts and participation in county and regional festivals. We came together to fight for our district in a sense so when we transitioned in to looking inward at our own data, there was some nervousness and even a little fear. My teachers needed to be assured
that this was coming from me and not from higher up administrators as some kind of gotcha exercise. So we started small with our upper level Music Theory classes at the high school level. For a district that is around ninety-four percent students of color, all of the students in those classes were White. We dug into why that might be happening and found that the reasons differed between the different high schools. In one it was the additional school based rules that the music theory teacher had for students to be in the class, in another the class was omitted from the course selection process in the spring, and it yet another, students were encouraged to take higher level courses in math and science only. So of course then I had to work with the different departments and often upper level administration to fix these problems. Now we use continued review of participation data each year to reflect on our recruitment/retention practices and scheduling practices, as well as our curriculum practices. While we are much more balanced than we were when we started, we still have a ways to go.

Director Miranda shared that the arts are included in Washington Heights use of data in the drive towards equity. Student participation data for all the arts programs is one factor that is used frequently and the instrumental program participation data is one that is reported to the community annually in a district equity reflection. She said,

I have been using some form or another of participation data since I stepped into this Director position. It’s so easy for people to fall back on their perceptions without realizing that those can be biased by our backgrounds and experiences. I have found that using data helps to ground the conversations and focus on solutions rather than the guessing game of what is reality. Having this data review become a consistent and regular part of department meetings helps the arts in many ways. When asking for budget
increases or other financial requests, having data to back up the requests leads to more frequent approvals. Leaning on data puts a halt to speculation within and between content areas regarding budgets, staffing, and other decisions. Most of all, digging into data can lead to deep conversations around equity, if you let it, which can lead to real change for students. In our case, the community has really responded to the inclusion of the instrumental demographics as part of the equity data that is released-sometimes they ask the best questions about the data and move use to better resolutions than we were planning!

The Washington Heights School District has made several changes over the years that are direct consequences of the interaction with student participation data. From changes in schedules to allow students more participation, to providing funding to appropriately outfit students with the proper materials for participation.

As noted above, the use of student participation connects most readily to the participation, access, and effects elements of the Kraehe Arts Equity Framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). However, upon deeper analysis, it is evident that review of student data through an equity audit process connects to the distribution, recognition, and transformation elements as well. When leaders use the data in this manner, recognize systemic inequities, and then are able to create positive change that provides more equitable programming (potentially through distribution of resources or by providing more access), they are transforming their programs and the opportunities for their students (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016).

In terms of using disaggregated student participation data as part of equity audit practices to look for systemic inequities in their arts education programs, all five participants agreed that this was a valuable practice to engage in or to begin engaging in (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003;
Skrla, McKenzie & Scheurich, 2009). Three of the five participating administrators highlighted connections to the participation, access, and effects elements of the Kraehe Arts Equity Framework through their responses (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). Two of the participating administrators had not engaged in this practice yet but made the connection to the transformation element through their learning of this practice and interest in adding it to their collection of praxes (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). The next component that will be discussed is budgetary practices.

**Budget Practices**

Understanding the budget is another way to assess an organizations views and actions towards equity. As noted in Chapter Two, the arts can be costly and that can easily be used to gate-keep students from programs (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). When districts engage in equitable budgeting practices, they purposefully align monies to district goals as well as ensuring that they direct the fiscal resources to students that need them (ERS, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Kraehe, 2017). At the outset, developing equitable budgetary practices connects to the distribution and recognition elements of the Arts Equity Framework, but as with previous components, further analysis of the interview data may indicate more connections to be found (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016).

Learning about each district highlighted vast differences in budgeting practices and decision making processes across the districts as well as within each individual district. All participating administrators agreed that budgeting is an essential factor in equity work, both as a content area itself and for students within the arts content area. Director Miranda noted,

Well, when we talk about budget practices, I immediately think about friends I know in districts that just don’t financially support the Arts contents like they do ELA and Math
just because they don’t find it to be as important. So without even getting into practices within our department, I want to acknowledge that we couldn’t do any of the equity work that we have done or plan to do without the district, and specifically the Superintendent, showing their support of us through the budget as well as their public statements. I know I’m preaching to the choir here (she laughed) but it’s a really important point that should not go unspoken. I can divide up my department’s money equitably but if there isn’t money allotted to the arts that’s not equitable either, ya know?!

This was a common sentiment expressed by all the participants. They shared stories of themselves or colleagues that had been in situations where larger budgets were not created equitably with respect to the arts. While all of the administrators in the study felt they have supportive and more equitable situations currently, they were quick to note that it was a combination of advocacy and their collaboration with equity minded district leadership that has created these current circumstances.

Superintendent Arnold supported this in saying,

In terms of budgets, my first order of business when I came here as I said earlier, was to pull the district out of financial straits so we could keep the doors open. Part of these larger budget conversations has been to provide more equity overall whether it be in terms of content areas, various programs, or even facilities. As we have moved forward, we have a process where we prioritize needs and wants and review the district budget through an equity lens. We certainly have a way to go in terms of moving to more fiscal equity within specific departments but as it stands we have made great improvement overall and that includes recognizing the arts programs needs in the budgeting process.
The era of high stakes testing has often made school districts feel like they have to choose between ELA/Math and other content which can lead to the erosion of the budgets for said other content. This was a significant differentiation in terms of budgeting pointed out by the participants. This will be discussed further in the following chapter with the role of the Superintendent.

Directors Kusama, Battle, and O’Riordan all indicated that the work towards equity had already been in motion in their districts, either initiated by themselves or their predecessors. While the advocacy and push for equity for the arts overall, all three have made their department budgetary practices a priority in terms of creating equitable systems. Director O’Riordan explains,

Previously, my district left the supply budgets for teachers, all teachers, not just arts teachers, up to the decision of school building principals. In terms of the arts, this led to incredible inequity across the district. Some principals would divide the money up equally amongst all teachers in the school, some would give a small amount to the arts teachers and allocate the rest to the classroom teachers [the non-arts teachers], and there were even some that would forget about the arts teachers all together and divide the money amongst the classroom teachers only. Obviously, that didn’t make our teachers feel appreciated or even part of the staff. That has been rectified with a change in district administration so I’ve been focusing on what I can to in terms of equity with my budget practices. Currently, we have the [arts] supply budgets now through my office and they are calculated per school with a per student formula. Each level, like elementary, middle, or high school is designated a certain amount [of arts funding] per student and then the amount teachers get depends on the amount of students in the school or the program. In
terms of bigger [arts purchases] purchases [such as a tuba, bassoon, or pottery kiln], we have a rotating schedule for different sections of our district and we have a certain amount earmarked for unanticipated needs during the school year. I know we’re moving in the right direction and this has worked out over the last five or six years but we can’t settle here. We’re using some of our regular meeting times now to talk as a department about how to make the budgeting practices even more equitable.

Along the same vein, Director Battle discussed where the Portsmouth Fine Arts Department is with using formulas to regulate budget allotments in terms of equity and budgeting practices.

The budget practices, in terms of supply budget type things, was set when I joined Portsmouth. There is a formula that are used to determine both the Arts and the Physical Education teacher’s amounts. The interesting thing I found out, was that in the arts department, teachers weren’t given any information as to how their amounts came to be. They had no knowledge of the formula or even that there was a formula. So, I explained it all to them – first, because I wholeheartedly believe in transparency and second, because that transparency would help to build the trust and relationships I was working on. It was amazing how some teacher’s walls immediately came down without this air of secrecy. This year, I’ve asked them to keep track of their spending as well as any classroom or program needs that they have not been able to afford. I hope to have the department come together to have a big budget discussion to see where we can make improvements and become more equitable. My hope is that with some data that the teachers bring themselves will help for the conversation to stay more objective and focused on the outcomes of the students.
Finally, while speaking about the Infinity Mirror budgeting practices, Director Kusama defined a path similar to what Director O’Riordan and Director Battle described.

Equitable budgeting was a priority of mine when I took this position. When I started, I started more with the idea of an equal budgeting practice by implementing a budget formula based on a certain dollar amount per student. Prior to this practice, teachers that asked for more money or the purchase of large items, while the ones that didn’t simply made do with what they were allotted. Switching to a practice that used the formula built trust among the teachers and myself and teachers didn’t feel they had to become a “favorite” or a “pet” to get what was needed for their students. As we lived with that practice, we reviewed it and adjusted as necessary over time. Multiple times along the way, the conversation would return to the fact that some of our programs cost more than others for students to participate in. For instance, graphic arts needs technology and printing materials at the very least, while a choral program only needs music. (He laughed) That’s obviously a very watered down example but shows the obvious differences. Ok so as a department we decided to try implementing different dollar amounts per student for different programs. The teachers kept track of their spending and additional, sometimes unable to met needs for the new dollar amounts to be created from. We also worked with the Infinity Mirror Business and Finance Office when working on this. This has been very successful so far and we’re excited to make even more progress toward equity as we move forward!

As previously mentioned, equitable budgeting practices connects most obviously to the elements of distribution and recognition in the Arts Equity Framework (Krahe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). However, when digging deeper into the information giving by the participating administrators, it
became evident that equitable budgeting practices impact each element in the framework. Without the recognition for the need of equitable distribution of financial resources, programs are deeply impacted in terms of how many students they can serve, what materials are available to students, and what curriculum and resources they are able to access (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). This would negatively impact the effects of the arts programs and cause their transformation in a negative way (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016).

Additionally, all the participating administrators concur that the Superintendent role is extremely important in terms of budgetary practices. The four Directors agreed that without the support from their superintendents, they wouldn’t be able to make any of the progress they’ve made – both in terms of support for arts education in general, but also in terms of improving the equity and excellence of their arts education programs. Several of the participating administrators indicated previous work experiences for superintendents that didn’t support the arts or didn’t understand what truly supporting arts education programs entailed. In their current situations, they are truly appreciative of the knowledge of arts education that their superintendents have and the support that they are given by these leaders.

Three of the five participating administrators have brought equitable budget practices, or continued equitable budget practices, in their arts education programs. Two of the five have equitable budgeting practices as part of their goals and action steps in the future. Five out of five were passionate in their comments about the importance of the Superintendent in providing equitable and excellent arts education. The next component discussed is equitable staffing practices.

**Staffing Practices**
Staffing practices, like budgetary practices, are concrete ways to assess movements toward equity for schools. Teaching is an occupation of which the overwhelming majority is White women but the students are much more diverse (Brown, 2006; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Kalifa, 2018; Kraehe, 2017). How are these participant leaders dealing with this dichotomy in their districts and programs? In addition to hiring a more diverse staff, equitable staffing practices look at recruitment and retention of said diverse staff, as well as teacher evaluation and effectiveness and the placement of staff in certain positions (Brown, 2006; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Garver & Maloney, 2019; Kalifa, 2018; Tran, Buckman & Johnson, 2020).

As a leader in education, you often enter into position with a staff, of someone else’s choosing, already in place. If we are working towards developing more inclusive, representative, and equitable environments that create a feeling of belonging, we must ensure that we plan staffing practices that reflect this vision rather than leave it to happenstance. The participant administrators all spoke to this importance and in a variety of facets. Director Kusama reflected on staffing practices by saying,

The staff that was here when I began as Director here is the staff that is still here today. I have been very lucky, in one sense that I haven’t had to worry about filling positions. However, all of the teachers in my department are White while only sixty percent of our students are White. I worry about what that says to students and families when they come here. Because of that I think staffing practices means so much more than just hiring and firing. In my position, I spend a lot of time thinking about how to serve my staff so they can best serve our students. So that means things like professional development on culturally responsive teaching practices and other supports so those are the staffing
practices I’ve really been focusing on, the practices that will help our current staff reach students.

Superintendent Arnold echoed those sentiments and shared,

We are so small and have had the same arts staff for years. We haven’t had to hire anyone since I’ve been here. But that doesn’t mean we can just sit around and wait until we can hire someone to bring more diversity. So we are focusing on building up our staff and building their knowledge of equitable practices. For instance, right now our biggest “DEI issue” that folks are grappling with is gender. So we’re bringing in professional development for them and identifying where they can turn to learn more and continue conversations. So while we are, as a district, looking at our recruiting and hiring practices making necessary changes there, we also understand that staffing practices also encompass retention and development of existing staff as we are doing.

Another important reminder that each factor is not one-dimensional and needs to be investigated through multiple viewpoints.

In terms of recruiting and hiring practices, Directors O’Riordan and Battle both discussed that the traditional applicant pool tends to keep to the White, female demographic and that they are actively looking for a more diverse candidate group. Director O’Riordan shares his hiring experiences in Cranberry Falls saying,

Our applicant pool is usually brand new teachers looking for their first job. We also get a lot of uncertified applicants. Due to the continuing shortage of teachers, we sometimes don’t have any certified applicants. When this is the case we can hire uncertified candidates as long as they are working on their certification. I have found that although this is strongly discouraged by the powers that be, we have found some really great
candidates that are uncertified and they’ve gone on to become certified. This group is often more diverse racially and linguistically. As I’ve gotten to know them, the reasons they never pursued a career in arts education initially is that they felt excluded from being able to become a part of that world. They have been discouraged from applying to college programs or felt that the traditional Western focused programs just didn’t suit them. As long as we have this shortage of teachers, I’ll keep using this pathway as a way to add to my staff as well as providing the supports for them to be successful. I think they are bringing equity to my department. I know that some other urban school districts have created programs to go to or bring a different pool of candidates to their district. I’m hoping that my district is paying attention and our HR department can do the same things for us!

Director Battle shared his hiring experiences in the Portsmouth Free School District saying,

Equitable staffing practices are certainly more difficult the less teachers become available. This is something I’ve been working on both in this district and my work in my previous district. We post jobs and candidates apply for them on a central website but rarely post the positions or advertise them anywhere else. So how do we change who applies for our jobs if we don’t change what we’re doing to get them? To try and help the process, I’ve been trying to build relationships with colleges that have arts education certification programs. I figured this way we could attract different applicants. Several leaders of these programs never responded to me but I moved forward with the ones that did. And I found that the majority of the students in their programs are White and female too. It’s a vicious cycle. I have a friend who told me once that he didn’t go into dance like he wanted to because he had never seen a man doing ballet, let alone a black man. If
students never see anyone that looks like them in the arts, they will be less driven to go on in the arts – not that making new artists should be our primary goal but you know. IF they don’t go on, our teaching force remains seemingly unreachable to them. I keep working at it but wow is the status quo so deeply entrenched in everything.

How can we transform the systems that need changing in order to create real change for the future?

Director Miranda took a completely different approach to staffing practices with the Washington Heights Schools. She explained,

Staffing was definitely a systemic issue that I wanted to tackle. Our staff is more diverse, outwardly…racially, than many of the content areas in my district so I attacked it from a different angle. Last year, we were able to add an additional staffing to eliminate itinerant teaching on the elementary level for music and art. Prior, we had teachers in multiple buildings teaching art and music, which created this kind of on the fringe perception of art class and music class because the teachers were not present in the building to be a part of the school wide things that happened in the building. And so there were a few additional FTEs that were created to then make their presence more available. And it also allowed the art and music teachers to begin to implement art integration. Instead of just having students go to art or music class, the arts teachers could collaborate with classroom teachers to build units and case study designs and projects that integrated the arts into what the students were learning overall. So that was one thing that we've done that I feel like has been able to we've been able to make a shift. I’m really proud of that.

Much like budget practices, equitable staffing practices connect most readily to the distribution and recognition element of the Arts Equity framework, especially when thinking
about recruitment and hiring (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). When expanding the thinking to retention, we add connections to participation, access, and effects by supporting teachers in learning equitable and culturally responsive practices (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). The change at the Washington Heights Central School District is a perfect example of the effects and transformation elements of the Arts Equity Framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). By approaching this from a different viewpoint, Director Miranda has made these teaching positions more a part of the school buildings and more integral to student learning. According to Director Miranda, this has begun to drive more stakeholders to be invested in the recruitment and selection of arts teachers as well as seeing the benefits of diversity within the staff and push for more.

A factor of staffing practices that is a little more complicated is that of the teacher effectiveness element of the Revised Arts Equity Framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). If teachers are not effective in their communications and engagement of students, equity cannot exist (Brown, 2006; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Garver & Maloney, 2019; Kalifa, 2018). Moreover, teachers have different strengths and weaknesses that make them more or less successful in different situations (Brown, 2006; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Garver & Maloney, 2019; Kalifa, 2018). This is often a difficult conversation in education as traditionally staffing placements have been based on other factors such as seniority or preference (Brown, 2006; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Garver & Maloney, 2019; Kalifa, 2018). Participating administrators agreed this is made even more complicated in their departments due to the fact that there aren’t as many positions available to move teachers through if changes are necessary. Director Kusama said,

It’s hard. I have a teacher that would be much better at the elementary level [than the high
school level they are currently at]. But the elementary teachers have all been at their places for over twenty years. Moving people around might cause a lot of drama and I have to think about how that would affect the department as well. We just don’t have as many spaces to place teachers as say the elementary education folks do. It’s hard.

This aspect of staffing practices certainly has many layers to address.

In terms of equitable staffing practices, four of the five participating administrators acknowledged the importance of growing these practices and the difficulty in recruiting and hiring more diverse candidates for positions and that district’s need to change their whole systems to encourage different applicants to become interested. One of the five has engaged in divergent thinking around staffing practices with success and has been able to increase the diversity among their staff. Five of the five discussed building current staff capacity through professional development around cultural relevancy and equity and admitted that teacher placement was another difficult aspect of staffing practices to ensure equity through. The next component addressed is curriculum.

**Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Curriculum**

The arts can be incredibly exclusive, often teaching the Western traditions as the “real” arts to the ignorance of anything else (Acuff, 2013; Butler, Lind & McCoy, 2007; Darden & Cavendish, 2011; Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Gadsen, 2008; Kraehe, Hood & Travis, 2015; Kraehe, 2017). If curriculum is not audited with an eye towards cultural responsiveness, we run the risk not only of students missing out on exposure to amazing genres and styles of arts mediums but of also being alienated and made to feel like arts from other cultures and customs, often their own, aren’t valued or real (Acuff, 2013; Butler, Lind & McCoy, 2007; Darden & Cavendish, 2011; Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Gadsen, 2008; Kraehe, Hood & Travis, 2015;
Director O’Riordan, Superintendent Arnold, and Director Kusama each readily admitted that they aren’t at a place to review their arts curriculum just yet. The staff members of their districts are presently being trained in the NYS CRSE Framework and they are familiarizing themselves with tools to engage in the review of curriculum and resources. As Director O’Riordan explained,

We know we are not ready yet. And I am not ready to lead the work yet. We need to have a stronger grounding in the CRSE Framework and I need to have better familiarity with the selected tool so that any tough conversations or conflict during the audit process can be supported and facilitated in the most objective way possible to avoid devolving into a battle of people’s opinions. I’m anticipating there will be a lot of feelings during this process and want to be as prepared as possible.

All three of these participating administrators indicated that their department would be beginning curriculum reviews and audits in the coming school year.

Directors Battle and Miranda have both begun to review curriculum and resources in their districts as well as creating new curriculum and resources if deemed necessary. Director Battle shares the process at Portsmouth,

One of the first things I’ve noticed was the different ways that students with special education labels were approached in terms of the arts curriculum. It seemed that rather than providing modifications or adaptations for these students to be able to have the same learning objectives as any other student in arts classes, they were given tasks or activities that did not ask very much of them. That combined with the fact that special education students are often scheduled differently in a more exclusionary manner was a big change that needed to happen if we were really about equity. We have started by pouring over
our curriculum and identifying the standards for which we have traditionally limited our special education students and focused our work their first. I found it important to keep reminding my teachers that we weren’t doing this for blame. We had a fairly strict protocol in use at first about how teachers could respond to others during this identification process, like previously agreed upon clarifying questions, to help the group understand but refrain from judgment. It was challenging at first as the group was hesitant but after a while (and several reviews of the protocol!) we settled into a more comfortable way of working and made progress. Now that we have standards identified we are doing some learning around what our special education students’ needs are in these areas so that we can create lesson plans with tasks and activities that will support their learning at a high level. It was almost a relief when teachers, and myself, began to admit that they made the past choices they did, it was mostly because they didn’t know what else to do! So my role now in the process is really to facilitate connections or funding or whatever is needed for the department to continue learning how to best teach students.

As the Washington Heights District has been engaged in much of this work as a whole, the process for Director Miranda has been slightly different. She explained,

This has been such energizing work for me! Our district has been in the process over the last several years of creating units of study that are inquiry based, project based, interdisciplinary, service minded and most importantly infuses and develops anti-oppressive awareness and habits. It has been really exciting to see the learning that has taken place for students and teachers that have engaged in these projects. Some of our high school students took these units as a model to begin to investigate the high school
visual arts curriculum. They started this on their own time so it wasn’t an official unit and isn’t presented on our website with the others. But, it jump started this work in our fine arts department. They didn’t get through the whole curriculum but the issues they brought to us from reviewing just a part of the curriculum made the majority of my teachers realize that we needed to deeply look into all the curriculum. The students mostly focused on race and gender/sexual orientation of artists and art movements in their review. While the high school art curriculum had moved more multicultural over the years, the students showed that it was still quite grounded in the Western traditions. Additionally, any of the artists introduced were straight and cisgender. And if they weren’t, their lives outside of art typically weren’t shared. Students want to see more representation in the artists they learn about. Once our department expanded and reviewed all our curriculum, we made a plan of what needed to change in each. And then the real work began – the learning.

Obviously, we needed to broaden our knowledge both around content and pedagogy. Some of our teachers that are further along in their journey towards anti-oppressive teaching were happy to share their learnings with the department and how they have seen positive outcomes in their classrooms. So we continue this cycle – we learn, we adjust our curriculum, we learn, we adjust – and we just keep trying to do better.

While this can be a bumpy process, it is surely a crucial one in terms of providing equitable experiences for learners. Director Miranda also shared that in addition to review the curriculum her department is also reviewing what teachers learn about teaching in general and more specifically about teaching the arts during the certification process.

Reflecting on how we were even trained as artists and teachers to deliver that curriculum and realizing how that a lot of the thinking of the training of the arts actually uplifts some
White supremacist ideas that we should dismantle instead, such as perfectionism and either/or thinking. Those are things that we are having ongoing discussions about. How do we train students in the arts to become artists and develop self-knowledge without it uplifting this notion of perfectionism and the either/or thinking of whether you succeeded or failed in the work that you were doing artistically? We’re really trying to dismantle that culture and that thinking and recognizing that that actually characteristics of White supremacist culture and that is something that we need to not uplift.

Ensuring a culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum for all students, regardless of identities, is critically important to becoming excellent and equitable programs (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Hammond, 2015; Khalifa, 2018; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). We know that students need to see themselves in the curriculum but also to learn about the diversity around us – the mirrors and windows that are so often reference in this work (Bishop, 1990). This curriculum work should go hand in hand with teacher professional learning around culturally responsive instructional practices (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Hammond, 2015; Khalifa, 2018; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). This work around curriculum connects to the recognition, participation, access, effects, transformation, and teacher effectiveness elements of the Revised Arts Equity Framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). As arts curriculum becomes less oppressive and solely Western-based, the more opportunity for all students to access coursework will be seen thus allowing for the transformation of programs (Acuff, 2013; Butler, Lind & McCoy, 2007; Darden & Cavendish, 2011; Kraehe, Hood & Travis, 2015; Kraehe, 2017; Kraehe, 2013; Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016).

Three of the five participating administrators have not reached this point on their equity journey. Two of the five have begun these curriculum audits with their departments and are
working to build better, more inclusive curriculum and continue to grow and develop in their responsive practices. The next component to be discussed is student leadership and is the first component that was not preselected and arose from the analysis of the interview data.

**Student Leadership**

One of the additional factors necessary to produce an excellent and equitable arts education programs that the participant administrators identified was student leadership. These leaders used the term *student leadership* to represent all the ways that students are leading work in their schools – this could range from individually with their own learning, within their classrooms, to much bigger work such as student government or other student leadership projects. In addition to their drive for more inclusive curriculum, Director Miranda refers to the importance of student engagement in the Washington Heights mission as she discusses how important student leadership is for equity.

Our department has really tried to take student engagement to heart. Students have been leaders in driven for change is many of our spaces so why not keep that going? I mean we do what we do for their benefit so they should be involved in the decisions, right? So one area that has embraced this is our extra-curricular high school theater program. We’ve been able to make a shift to where our theater productions are student led as opposed to adult driven; where students have more of a say and a dialogue in the choices of the productions that are selected and are acting in ways that are like a producer in that way. Where they’re making decisions about the shows and the budgets and that kind of thing and leading in that way and students taking roles within the production that might typically have been done by an adult that now they were doing instead where there’s adult supervision. But they are leading that. So, we have student stage managers and student
lighting designers and student sound designers and that kind of thing. So that’s one example. Another example would be the arts student advisory group that I facilitate. I invite our arts students to come together fairly regularly to discuss equity and inclusion issues within the arts and how to build bridges and supports to make things better. In this group, students have expressed concern that there aren’t as many students of color participating in the arts as there are in the district. We learned that students of color feel as if they aren’t always seen or heard for who they are. And, they feel that building those relationships with other students of color is what they have shared that they feel that that would be helpful for them. So, we're working on developing that and strengthening supports for students of color that are participating in the arts. All of this from students having ideas and driving the work.

Superintendent Arnold also highlights the importance of student involvement in the drive towards equity for his whole district, not just the arts. He said,

One of the things I started to do when I first got this job is to ask the children what we want to know – how do they feel school supports them and how do they feel school neglects them. Often as adults in education we are so bad at trying to figure out the answers without talking to the people we are serving. So, I have a superintendent's council. I meet with high school students - two children from 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grades. And we meet once a month and just say, hey, how's it going? You have the ear of the superintendent, let's talk. I feel very strongly about this for any leaders. You need to have the voice of the children or you should get out of this business. And, there are people in my own district like, why do you want children? And, I think, why are you in
this business? If you don't talk to kids about what's working, what's not working, you shouldn't do this work.

Director Kusama shared,

We started an arts advisory group that is entirely run by our students where they surface issues within the department and then they brainstorm solutions to them. They bring these issues and solutions to the teachers and leaders and everyone works together to implement the improvements. It’s really been remarkable to watch the transformation that has happened within the department. Students have really taken ownership of what happens in the department and are proud of the changes they have influenced. They also don’t really blindly complain very much anymore now that they are a real part of the process.

Directors Battle and O’Riordan expressed similar thoughts regarding student involvement and leadership, especially when it comes to equity and inclusion work. While they didn’t have structures as formalized as Director Miranda, Director Kusama, and Superintendent Arnold, they all spoke to methods such as asking students’ questions or having them complete anonymous surveys to keep an accurate reading of the needs of the students.

Student involvement and leadership connects on a surface level to the participation and access elements of the Arts Equity Framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). Upon further review, student leadership connects to all the elements of the framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). Often students have a fresh look on some of the issues facing departments and can suggest innovative solutions (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). Treating students as partners rather than subordinates will lead to transformative change (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016).
All five of the participating administrators agreed that student leadership is an important factor of moving towards an excellent and equitable program. As all brought this factor to the surface independently during their interviews, it is an important finding for leaders to keep in mind. The next and final component to be discussed in this analysis is accountability.

**Accountability**

The second critical factor I constructed based on the participants’ interview data is accountability. In this instance, the administrators defined *accountability* as holding all to the expectations of all students achieving high levels of academic success regardless of identity or background (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). The actions of people practicing accountability towards equity including modeling the practices, holding teachers and students working against equity responsible to the group, being willing to listen and learn, and apologizing and working to restore trust when making mistakes (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Overall though, they were in agreement Director O’Riordan explained,

I worked for a leader once that lived these characteristics of accountability. Once a teacher said something negative about Muslim students observing Ramadan in school and this leader firmly but still nicely told the teacher that not only was their suggestion illegal as it would have excluded students from school, but it would also make the students feel shame and negatively about a part of themselves. She handled it in such a kind manner that I have always tried to emulate that. She was always known for having super high expectations but also for building people up to meeting them. To me that is a leader that lives accountability.

Director Miranda also stated,
Equity work is such a huge part of everything I do that sometimes people will refer to me as an expert on it. I hate that. So much. I am no expert – far from it. I just try my best to take what I’ve learned and help make my small corner of the world better because of it.

But that means, especially as a White, cisgender, abled, English speaking, woman, that I make mistakes sometimes. Anytime a mistake or offense is pointed out to me, I try to apologize immediately and sincerely and learn from the experience. I feel like it is part of the work to be an example in learning to others. To help the work continue and grow.

When this discussion came up in our interviews, Superintendent Arnold and Directors Battle and Kusama agreed with Directors O’Riordon and Miranda and Superintendent Arnold added,

I can’t have a more privileged seat. Let’s just be honest. I’m a White, straight, male. I know a lot of things, but I don’t know anything about what it is like to be oppressed for something that I AM. So, to me accountability also means having people that can tell me when I’m wrong or guide me in areas that I don’t have experience in. Knowing that I can’t do any of this alone is being accountable.

Accountability is certainly an important factor to highlight in creating and sustaining equitable programs. It is important to remain accountable to get “each and every child, no matter what his or her differences are and no matter what he or she has learned or not learned at home, to learn the designated curriculum material at the highest level” (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p. 68). This idea of accountability connects with the transformation element of the Arts Equity Framework which in a larger sense means that it connects with all of the elements in the framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). By holding oneself accountable to the tenets of equitable and excellent programs, changes can be made in distribution, recognition, participation, access, and effects and lead to true transformation and change.
All five of the participating administrators agreed that accountability is an important factor of moving towards an excellent and equitable program. Similar to student leadership, all five leaders brought accountability to the surface independently during their interviews making it another important finding.

**Conclusion**

This chapter highlighted the findings and answered the research question: What are the major contributing factors necessary to produce an excellent and equitable K-12 arts education program? The data in this chapter demonstrates the aspects that arts administrators deem integral in producing and sustaining equitable art education programs for all students – a strong vision for the work and a belief that it can be achieved, reviewing and reflecting on student participation data, equitable budget practices, equitable staffing practices, culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum, student leadership and accountability. The data highlights a clear need for equitable systems as well as individual practices to generate tangible and lasting change. In the next chapter, I address the following research question: What leadership beliefs, actions, and experiences influence and sustain equity in the arts for students? More specifically, the findings center on what dynamics have most impacted district level arts leaders success in creating equity in arts programming.
Chapter Six: Necessary Leadership Beliefs, Actions, and Experiences

This chapter addresses the second research question: What leadership beliefs, actions, and experiences influence and sustain equity in the arts for students? During the interviews with participants, we discussed the behaviors and traits they found to be essential for developing and maintaining excellent and equitable K-12 arts education programs. Additionally, we discussed the traits they needed as they led this work and traits needed in other district leaders to ensure the sustainability of the work. The traits are mindset and building buy-in, collaboration with many different stakeholder groups, the inclusion of the district community, leader self-reflection and accountability, and the role of the Superintendent. The chapter will highlight the factors and evidence discovered through interviews and document review during this study as well as their connections to the high-leverage leadership practices of engaging in self-reflection and growth for equity, developing organizational leadership for equity, constructing and enacting an equity vision, supervising for improvement of equitable teaching and learning, fostering equitable school culture, collaborating with families and communities, influencing sociopolitical context, allocating resources, hiring and placing personnel, and modeling (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015).

Mindset and Building Buy-in

Working toward equity in arts education cannot be accomplished by one leader alone. All leaders participating in this study had strong feelings that bring others on board with their vision and sharing the work was critical to success (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Director Battle explained,

As I’ve stressed building relationships and trust being new this year, through this I have also been teaching my new district who I am as a leader and what my beliefs are about arts education. Planting these seeds early and often will help, I think, for us to come
together more quickly around initiatives as they are introduced.

Superintendent Arnold shared his mindset toward the arts this way,

My vision for all of our students is for them to develop into productive members of society during their time in our district. But what does that mean in terms of what we teach? It means that we must provide all of our students with a well-rounded education which I firmly believe includes the arts. They are just as important for students, all students, as other content. We need to communicate that to teachers, to students, to families, to our government officials and show them why it’s important. Collect the hard data, the soft data, the stories, whatever we need to do to convey the message far and wide. In my own district, the community is typically very conservative and can, at times, be anti-school because of their own experiences. An “if the school didn’t ever support me, when I should I support them” kind of thinking. However, the community is very supportive of the arts – on par with athletics and our other programs. So because they’ve had a previous belief in the arts, I’ve been able to bring the majority on board fairly quickly. When folks see the positive impact on students, it’s hard to argue against it.

Like Superintendent Arnold, Director Miranda has built buy-in around arts education and arts equity, by connecting the content to the overall district mission. Miranda stated,

Well, I feel like we’ve built a lot of support from the board and the superintendent and other district leadership in regards to how the arts connect to critical thinking and overall student engagement. And, so I feel like the district vision or mission of empowering and engaging students and having them think critically all really aligned to what we do in the fine arts. And so in the arts department, we're really looking at providing authentic learning experiences for students. We're working for 100% student engagement and
examining from a critical lens our commitment to an anti-oppressive curriculum and pedagogy and what that really looks like and means for the arts. We connect with all involved like students, arts teachers, and the community to reorient to the department goals and the district mission and continue to move our work along. I feel like I've partnered very much with the executive team and the building leaders in surfacing and recognizing how the arts are involved in student engagement and feel supported in that way and feel understood and recognize that we have some systems that we've been able to dismantle that do not integrate the arts.

As noted by Director Miranda, when you can garner support and become of similar mind around the arts, the ability to move forward toward arts equity removes barriers and becomes more achievable.

As we saw in Chapter Five, creating a vision for equity is of utmost importance. However, just having a vision isn’t enough. This finding helps us understand that a leader also needs to be able to share that belief and bring others into believing the vision is possible (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). This component connects with the high-leverage equitable leadership practices of constructing and enacting an equity vision, developing organizational leadership for equity, and modeling (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). The capability to create an equity vision includes the ability to communicate that vision to the community and developing organizational leadership discusses building support for the mission of equity while building the beliefs and capacity of others (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). As leaders engage in the fight for equity in all facets of their lives, they model their vision for others, thus building buy-in and changing mindsets, which can lead to the transformative change of excellent and equitable arts programs (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Galloway &
Ishimaru, 2015; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003).

Three of the five participating administrators shared strategies that they have used to change mindsets and build buy-in while all five agreed it is an important skill and action to engage in for this work to be successful. The next trait to be discussed is that of collaboration.

**Collaboration**

All five participating administrators heartily agreed that in addition to building buy-in for the work, true collaboration between all stakeholders must be developed and facilitated. Interactions and work proposals should be carefully planned using norms and protocols in order to keep on track and build trust among the stakeholders (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Krownapple, 2017; Ross & Berger, 2009; Scheurich et al., 2017; Theoharis, 2007). Director O’Riordan said,

Not only can one person not do this work and make change by themselves, but even if they could, change won’t continue if many different groups are a part of the decisions and have labored for the change together. When I first became an administrator, I thought shared leadership was too much of a “touch-y feel-y” style and would take double the time to make any decisions. But then I saw colleagues who totally believed in shared leadership and it seemed like they were able to get so much done within their department and their teachers seemed so much more interested in what their department was doing. So, I learned about shared leadership and learned from those colleagues and eventually began adopting some of those ways myself and the collaboration that came from that was cool. We developed ways to communicate and disagree but come to settlements about important things for our department. We took those understandings and practices and applied them to all our major initiatives including the equity work we’ve been
undertaking. Looking back, I don’t know that we would have gotten anywhere in terms of equity in the arts if we hadn’t had this beginning in collaboration.

Collaboration is a natural follow-up to buy-in. When people share a vision and mindset, they are more likely to want to move together toward progress. However, without guidance and supports, collaboration can easily become unproductive or turn sour (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Krownapple, 2017; Ross & Berger, 2009; Scheurich et al., 2017; Theoharis, 2007). Director Kusama shared,

I’ve been in equity workshops where no protocols were followed and people became hostile and felt like it was all just a blame game. I was determined to do whatever I could to not let this happen as we began examining equity in our arts department. Initially, we started by just discussing various identities and our thoughts and biases associated with them. While teachers sometimes shared upsetting or embarrassing items during these conversations, because we had spent time outlining the expectations and protocols, things never got out of hand and teachers didn’t shut down or stop participating. I really think beginning this way has been the key to our ability to continue to move forward.

And as Director Battle points out,

So much of engagement in the arts is collaborative. A choir doesn’t just combine a bunch of people singing together but people singing together while listening to each other and developing knowledge of the group to anticipate reactions and musical interpretations. Theater would not succeed without collaboration amongst the actors performing or the collaboration between the actors, the crew, and the audience. And, each performance is a different experience because of the different members collaborating each time. Even visual arts which people tend to think of as more individualistic is a collaboration
between the artist and the viewer. If we are trying to make arts education experiences more inclusive and create spaces for belonging, then we should be using inclusive processes by creating spaces for belonging in the hard work of change through collaboration!

This component connects with the high-leverage practices of fostering equitable school culture and collaborating with families and communities, and modeling (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). As leaders model collaboration among stakeholders, especially families and communities, is encouraged and increased, relationships are strengthened and trust is built which creates more safety and encourages more collaboration (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). This leads to and equitable school culture with a conscious effort towards anti-oppression (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003).

**Community**

As these participating leaders spoke about the importance of a shared vision and collaboration, they were also very clear on defining who should be included. While school district teachers and staff were of utmost importance, they also recognized that real progress can’t be made without the inclusion of students’ families or caregivers and the whole district community at large. Superintendent Arnold mentioned community at the outset when describing his district, “We are very much a community-based district. We do so much as a community. I work very closely with the mayor and the town supervisor to ensure that the community-mindedness is respected in all discussions and decisions.” Director Kusama said,

Well let’s be honest. The inclusion of community is multifaceted—some reasons purely logistical and some more moral or ethical. Logistically speaking, we are the arts, so we
want people to come see our students’ productions, attend their concerts, and view their art exhibits. We are also funded through our taxpaying community members so we want them to see value in what we provide students so that they will continue to support the district (and through that our department) financially. Moving away from logistics, when dealing with issues of equity and inclusion of course we want to be as welcoming as possible and move toward making changes with everyone and that includes families and members of our community. The more that are involved in the process, that more successful we can be.

Director O’Riordan shared,

In Cranberry Falls, it was the community that really pushed for the district to begin doing more in terms of equity. More publicly anyway. The feeling in the community was that nothing was happening because what was happening was happening quietly. And they were upset to think that the issues that had been flagged in the district were being ignored. One of the ways the Superintendent that was here at that time handled it was to have some community forums and then invited community members to join the committees that were engaged in this work. This first helped to get the word out that at least there was some action. And that was really the start of community members being asked to be more involved in our district and in things happening at individual schools. I think it helps to keep the work transparent and focused as well.

Director Miranda surfaced yet another aspect of community that is equally important when engaging in equity work.

It’s important to maintain a recognition that we're a community and that we need to maintain that sense of community in terms of bringing everyone along in the journey,
even those people that are resisting the work, continuing to push the work through, just continuing to help build awareness of the importance of not letting the work go and not being silent about oppression of any kind.

Deeply connecting with families and community is so important in building equitable and excellent school systems. It is important to break the barriers that have been built between schools and communities; “whatever the historical reasons for separating schools from their parents and communities, it is no longer useful and can even be argued to be harmful” (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p. 120). Leaders have to review our internal biases and expectations in order to be open to connecting with community members in ways that are comfortable for them, not in ways that leaders deem the model way (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). This component connects with the high-leverage practices of collaborating with families and communities, influencing sociopolitical context, and modeling (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). Families and community members should feel welcome and safe in schools, just as leaders should build comfort levels of traveling into the community (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Khalifa, 2018; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Theoharis, 2007; Yosso, 2005). As the community relations grow, the community and the schools can work together towards even greater change in policies across larger organizations and domains (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Hammond, 2015).

Five out of the five participating administrators stated that connecting with families and communities are important to their work and an important action to take for work to be successful. The next trait to be discussed is that of self-reflection.

**Self-Reflection**

When discussing strategies or practices the leaders would advise others who strive for
equity to imbed in their practices, the participants initially shared answers that included words or phrases such as “be honest with yourself”, “publicly acknowledge your missteps”, “openness”, “honesty in all actions”, and “don’t stop doing the internal work”. When pushed to explain these thoughts further, they all described characteristics of continually engaging in self-reflection and being accountable and transparent to those they serve. Director Battle explains why he thinks this is so important,

I’ve had the opportunity in various facets of my life to engage in this work and self-reflection is so important in equity work. If you can’t be honest with yourself, how can you lead this work? So much of equity work is about reflecting on internal beliefs and biases, you have to be able to reflect on your past, your thinking and your behaviors. Director Miranda noted,

I would say the most important trait a leader needs when engaging in this work is the ability to self-reflect and to do their own identity work in relation to the work that needs to be done overall. An ability to be honest and vulnerable about who they are and their role within the systems of race that we live in and being really honest about that and reflective on their personal approach and agenda for what fighting racism and oppression will look like for them as a leader. That is really needed first to begin to have an honest discussion with other people about this issue and to be very honest about the work and to go into areas that feel uncomfortable and to investigate the why of that and to just continue to be self-reflective just to add on to it and that there's no way to quickly fix this and that the work will never end.

Director Kusama shared,

As I started doing equity work, many of the books and workshop I attended had me
engage in self-reflection exercises. That was the first time I didn’t like what I was coming up with as answers. The reflections forced me to grapple with some societal beliefs that I had always taken for granted and suddenly it was crazy to me that I had never seen these inequities and harmful ideas before. I try to keep that feeling in my mind to remember that I am or have been easily swayed by societal ideals in the past. This keeps me questioning and reflecting as I moved forward.

Superintendent Arnold shared how he manages his own practice of self-reflection.

I schedule time in my calendar regularly for self-reflection. I know it’s important and I can easily get caught up in the job responsibilities and family commitments and go too long without taking time to reflect. This forces me to slow down and think about why I’m doing the things I’m doing and what work I need to do for myself, for the students, for the staff, for anything. This practice has been really helpful for me. Life changing even.

Director O’Riordan agreed, “I would say, yes. Self-reflection is so very important for success to move past a certain point.”

Self-reflection is crucial for leaders engaging in equity work. By participating in self-reflection, leaders will then be better able to support their staff through the same process (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Hammond, 2015; Khalifa, 2018). As this work can be isolating, it is important that leaders have taken the time to reflect on their core beliefs so that they can withstand opposition (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Hammond, 2015; Khalifa, 2018). This component connects most obviously with the high-leverage practice of engaging in self-reflection and growth for equity (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). Less obviously, this component connects with the high-leverage practices of fostering equitable school culture, collaborating with families and communities, influencing
sociopolitical context, and modeling (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). Self-reflective practices can help leaders prepare for interactions around this work, build relationships and trust with others around this work, and help propel them to take risks in the face of oppression (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017).

Five out of the five participating administrators stated that self-reflection is crucial to the work and a significant practice for leaders to ensure success. The final finding to be discussed is that of the Superintendent.

**The Superintendent**

When given the opportunity to share any additional thoughts related to developing equitable arts education programs, every participant circled back to the importance of a strong and supportive Superintendent. Both strong and supportive of the arts as a valued content and strong and supportive of moving school districts toward equitable practices overall.

Superintendent Arnold noted,

> In any position I ever held, whether music teacher or administrator, any big change initiative I wanted to introduce ultimately came down to the support of the Superintendent. That was crucial. I could still try and get it done without the support and meet with some success but the follow through might not be as dependable or the initiative ran the risk of not being sustained with any changes in working systems. I’ve thought about this a lot as I’ve become a Superintendent myself. I need to remember how influential the position can be and to not dismiss new ideas too soon. But, I also need to use my role to advocate for the arts with other Superintendents. I know of several districts that had vibrant arts programs until a change in leadership and then the support of the programs dwindled into nothing. As Superintendent, I need to be mindful of my
responsibility to students.

Director Miranda kept it succinct saying, “If you don’t have the support of the Superintendent to do this work, it’s near impossible to do this with much success.”

Director Battle added the following,

While I am in charge of the distribution of the fine arts budget and staffing, among other resources, I only have that ability because the Superintendent believes in the arts and believes in me. I mean, he includes adequate Fine Arts funding in the overall budget that I can then share with my staff to get what they need. If he didn’t support the Fine Arts, he could easily cut my budget and prevent me from fiscally supporting my staff. So I guess what I’m getting at is that my success is only because of the support that I get from my boss.

Director O’Riordan said,

I have been through a few Superintendents over the years in this position. It’s been frustrating, in terms of the equity work, because sometimes I have been limited in what I can do because of the Superintendent at the time. It’s not that they have been against arts education and when it comes to equity it’s been the opposite. But they didn’t seem to include the arts in the equity work and always prioritized other content over the arts.

Currently, I have an extremely supportive Superintendent. The work we continued to do during the past Superintendent’s tenures was helpful and now that we have the support, we’re able to move so much faster.

And finally, Director Kusama stated, “I honestly don’t know if I would have any success at all, if it weren’t for the support of my Superintendent.”

Given the data shared in Chapter Five and this Chapter, the importance of the role of the
Superintendent is crucial to providing for equity in the arts. Not only does the Superintendent have the responsibility to provide equitable experiences for the students in their district, they also have an obligation to use research-based information to support the arts as a content area (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Kraehe & Acuff, 2013). As the Superintendent is the highest leader in the school district, this component connects to all the high-leverage leadership practices (engaging in self-reflection and growth for equity, developing organizational leadership for equity, constructing and enacting an equity vision, supervising for improvement of equitable teaching and learning, fostering equitable school culture, collaborating with families and communities, influencing sociopolitical context, allocating resources, hiring and placing personnel, and modeling) as these are all practices that Superintendent’s should be engaged in.

All five of the participating administrators agreed wholeheartedly that the role of the Superintendent is absolutely critical to providing equitable and excellence arts education programming for a school district.

Conclusion

This chapter provided the findings to the research question: What leadership beliefs, actions, and experiences influence and sustain equity in the arts for students? The data in this chapter demonstrates the dynamics that most positively impacted arts administrators in growing equity in their programs. The data highlights a clear need for change in terms of current arts education mindset and practices as well as teacher and leadership preparation programs. In the next chapter, I will put forth recommendations to create change so leaders can continue to strive toward equitable arts education programs and experiences for all students.
Chapter Seven: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

This dissertation study was a result of a need for arts leaders to have specific, effective actions and beliefs to develop, implement, create, sustain, and replicate equitable arts education programs. To identify these actions and beliefs, I studied the policies, procedures, actions, and experiences of my participating leaders to find what has led to their successes in moving towards equity in their arts programs. I also questioned the participants about the external factors that support their work and positively effect change in their school districts. Following the data shared in the previous chapters, this concluding chapter will review and summarize the key findings from that data analysis as well as move the dialogue toward a new theory of leadership for arts equity. Furthermore, I will examine implications and recommendations to come from this research as well as limitations to this study and potential future research to develop from this study. Finally, I will conclude with my final thoughts on leadership for equity in arts education.

Summary of Key Findings

This section will identify and describe the key findings that developed through the analysis of the data as shared in Chapters Five and Six correlated to the research questions that steered my inquiry and analysis:

- What are the major contributing factors necessary to produce an excellent and equitable K-12 arts education program?
- What leadership beliefs, actions and experiences influence and sustain equity in the arts for students?

Data from this study suggests that all five participants were in agreement that having a vision for equity in the arts and then building buy-in to that vision is crucial for success. Results in Chapter Five indicate that all of the administrators found it was important for this vision to
include what programs would be like once equity was achieved. However, none of them had a consistent way to assess the state of affairs, in terms of equity, in their arts education programs. Results in Chapter Six show the importance of sharing that vision to build common mindsets and buy-in around the vision for this work.

Additionally, the five participants have all found the use of data and reviewing disaggregated data for trends is critical when making decisions. This was evident in the participant’s discussions of student participation data, budget practices, and staffing practices. Data can remove the inherent human tendency to rely on implicit bias or stereotypes when making decisions. Not only does the data provide evidence for changes but it can often guide the work toward changes of systems and in practices to ensure greater equity.

Another finding was how important engaging and working with all stakeholders is in the process of building greater equity. Data in Chapter Five highlighted the importance of involving students in the work. Whether they are participants on teams or even leaders, it is important for them to have a voice in the decisions being made about their opportunities and programming. Data in Chapter Six highlighted the importance of engaging the community in the work as well as the significance of all stakeholders working collaboratively.

Holding the stakeholders accountable to expectations is an important finding. Committing to the work, each other and being responsible to the process not only builds trust among the community, but also helps the work progress faster leading to more equitable outcomes for all. Being honest about learning needs as well as conclusions from self-reflection, are all examples of the accountability that needed.

Finally, data from both chapters illustrate the importance of the Superintendent in the creation and sustenance of equitable arts education. A Superintendent that is pro-arts education
and understands the power that equitable arts education can provide, can be a force in this fight. Alternatively, stakeholders fighting for arts education and equity in a school district without a solidly pro-arts Superintendent are bound to meet with barriers to any real success. As the Superintendent sets the tone for an entire school district, they hold much of the power in this pursuit of equity.

**Toward a Theory of Leadership for Arts Equity**

As noted in the literature review in Chapter Two, I found there to be a gap in the research that also influenced my direction in developing this study to further contribute to and expand the research in the area of district level leadership and district level arts leadership and their impact on equity.

I began this dissertation study with an initial proposed framework for Leadership for Arts Equity (Figure 7.1). This initial proposed framework took the ten high-leverage leadership practices that advance equity (engaging in self-reflection and growth for equity, developing organizational leadership for equity, constructing and enacting an equity vision, supervising for improvement of equitable teaching and learning, fostering equitable school culture, collaborating with families and communities, influencing sociopolitical context, allocating resources, hiring and placing personnel, and modeling) as proposed by Galloway & Ishimaru (2015) and grouped them into the four larger categories of self-awareness, organizational mindset, management of resources, and community connections. These four categories combined with the elements of the Kraehe’s Arts Equity Framework (Krahe, Acuff & Travis, 2016) of distribution, recognition, participation, access, effects, and transformation became the initial proposed Leadership for Arts Equity Framework.

Figure 7.1
Initial Proposed Leadership for Arts Equity Framework

Note. Proposed by S. Gentile.

This initial framework helped me organize and analyze the data I collected throughout this project. It helped connections between leading for equity and equity in arts education to be seen and highlighted for review and further exploration. While this initial proposed framework was helpful as a starting point for this inquiry, I found that it did not completely work for what I was discovering through my analysis. I needed a way to understand leadership for arts equity, a theory that not only highlighted the elements from both the Kraehe Arts Equity Framework and the Galloway and Ishimaru high leverage leadership practices for equity that the administrators found most valuable in their equity work, but also the people or practices that were most influential in creating and sustaining equitable arts education programs (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016).

My thinking in moving toward a theory of Leadership for Arts Equity provides more focus on the core beliefs administrators must have to bring success, and also the critical engagements that arts administrators must lead to develop equitable practices effectively. This developing theory is less linear than my initial proposed framework and should focus on the interconnectedness of all these elements while also acknowledging that there is still a need for someone in power to accomplish the work. Finally, there are several practices included in this theory of Leadership for Arts Equity that leaders are encouraged to engage in on a regular and
recurring basis. To summarize, this new theory has the components of positional authority, arts equity commitments, arts equity actions, and everyday practices of arts equity leadership.

**Positional Authority**

A critical element that came from this research study, is that Leadership for Arts Equity needs someone, an administrator, with the authority to make decisions. The administrators with positional authority have the influence and the resources to commit to moving equity and inclusion goals forward and also has the power to also deny this work moving forward. For true arts equity, it is crucial that these administrators understand arts education as content and understands how equity is achieved in arts education (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). In four of the participating districts, that administrator was the Director of Fine Arts and in the fifth, it was the Superintendent. In the districts with a separate administrative position for the arts, each participant was also very clear on how essential the support and authority of the Superintendent is to their success. In the district without a separate administrative position for the arts, the Superintendent while committed to providing for equity in the arts, admitted that because he oversees the entire district he often cannot provide enough attention to move the arts toward equity at a faster pace.

This need for positional authority and the information gleaned from the participants leads me to conclude that in addition to a superintendent, a school district needs to have an administrative position solely for the arts. Specific knowledge is necessary to successfully lead the arts and this requires a leader that can spend their time supporting work in the arts without having to spread their attention too thin. With an Administrator for the Arts that is focused on equitable programming, and a Superintendent that supports this administrator and this direction, a district will be set up for success.
Arts Equity Commitments

The next element that was clearly important for Leadership for Arts Equity is the commitments or dispositions of the administrator. These values and beliefs include believing in the arts and in equity, having a vision and building buy-in, a belief the importance of collaboration and community, and a belief and commitment to student leadership.

Believing in Arts and Equity

A clear vision for what arts equity will look like in action is very important as is the belief that it is a worthy and achievable goal (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). A vision for arts equity starts with a strong belief in the importance of arts education as well as the importance of equity in education. With these foundational beliefs in equity and in the arts, a vision for this will fall flat.

Vision and Buy-in

This clear vision for arts equity should include fully funded and resourced arts programs that are accessible for all students, with curriculum, materials, and educators that respect, reflect, and build on their identities, cultures, and backgrounds. These programs should be respected and supported throughout the school district and seen as a vital part of a student’s educational experience. Without a clear vision of where a program is going, programs will not have checkpoints or destinations to achieve or guideposts on the journey.

Having the mindset that education systems and arts education practices can be changed to fulfill the goals of the vision as well as understanding that part of the role of the leader is to build buy-in into that vision, is vital for any quest for equity to be successful (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). A vision is just a dream without the belief that the goals can be reached. Believing that these positive changes can occur will
ensure that leaders a better able to construct actionable steps toward enacting their vision.

**Collaboration and Community**

The belief that equity work is collaborative work and cannot be done by one person is another foundational element of this framework (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Krownapple, 2017; Ross & Berger, 2009; Scheurich et al., 2017; Theoharis, 2007). This is not work that can be done by one person and it will take the leader, the teachers, the students, and the community working together to bring this vision to fruition. It is essential that leaders believe in the power of collaboration to have success.

A foundation in collaboration goes hand in hand with another foundational element of community (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Khalifa, 2018; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Theoharis, 2007; Yosso, 2005). This is work that everyone must engage in together – from the greater school district community, to students, to families, to teachers, to arts teachers, to building and district leaders, to anyone that is involved and engaged in these arts programs, they need to be valued and included as important parts of the system, the work, and the solutions (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Khalifa, 2018; Krownapple, 2017; Ross & Berger, 2009; Scheurich et al., 2017; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Theoharis, 2007; Yosso, 2005).

**Student Leadership**

The final foundational belief is in student leadership. This is important because the more students are engaged in the processes of their learning and the “why” behind their learning, the more they are engaged in the actual learning (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). Too often in education we make decisions about what students need or even what they want without actually asking any students. As arts educators, we are trying to grow student’s capacities for creative and critical thought and engaging with them in this work in an
authentic, meaningful way is an excellent approach to not only build buy-in and aptitude but also in moving the needle towards equity (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016).

**Arts Equity Actions**

The third element that was unmistakably important for Leadership for Arts Equity is the intentional and purposeful actions taken by the administrator. These actions include engaging in equity audits around student participation data, culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum and materials, budgeting practices and staffing practices.

**Equity Audits & Student Participation Data**

Student participation data, especially disaggregated data, is an important metric to look at in terms of what's happening in the programs (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Skrla, McKenzie & Scheurich, 2009). But the data does not need to end there. Equity audits can help leaders grow the use of data to help assess programs and inform pathways to solutions (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Skrla, McKenzie & Scheurich, 2009). “Equity audits are a systemic way for school leaders – principals, superintendents, curriculum directors, teacher leaders – to assess the degree of equity or inequity present in three key areas of their schools or districts: programs, teacher quality, and achievement” (Skrla & Scheurich, 2009, p. 3). Equity audits can be powerful tools that can help move equity forward in any program, not just the arts (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Skrla, McKenzie & Scheurich, 2009).

**Culturally Responsive & Sustaining Curriculum**

As represented in the data collected from the participants of this study, a culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum is as formidable as it is essential. As a result, guidance from the CRSE Framework can be helpful for leaders making equitable moves regarding
curriculum and resources (Acuff, 2013; Butler, Lind & McCoy, 2007; Darden & Cavendish, 2011; Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Gadsen, 2008; Hess, 2015; Hess, 2017; Kraehe, Hood & Travis, 2015; Kraehe, 2017; NYS CRSE Framework, 2018; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Skrla, McKenzie & Scheurich, 2009). Diversity of authors, representation of characters or discipline professionals, the affirmation of a variety of knowledge systems, languages, understandings, and contexts are all of utmost importance when developing or selecting curricular resources and materials to provide both windows and mirrors for students and families (Acuff, 2013; Bishop, 1990; Butler, Lind & McCoy, 2007; Darden & Cavendish, 2011; Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Gadsen, 2008; Kraehe, Hood & Travis, 2015; Hess, 2015; Hess, 2017; Kraehe, 2017; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Skrla, McKenzie & Scheurich, 2009).

**Equitable Budgeting Practices**

Budgeting practices are another system in which leaders can find leverage in terms of equity. This study found that this often starts with more equal budgeting practices to create an even playing field – for example, using budgeting formulas based on the number of participating students (ERS, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Kraehe, 2017; Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016). While this is start, it is not enough! Schools and districts must develop more specialized formulas or other budgetary practices to attend to the varied needs of students – for instance, does it cost more to provide materials for high quality instruction to a ceramics class (needing clay, tools, glazes, pottery wheels, kiln, etc.) versus a choral ensemble (needing sheet music)? These are questions that leaders will need to grapple with as they progress towards equitable budgeting practices (ERS, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Kraehe, 2017; Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016).

**Equitable Staffing Practices**

Staffing practices are a final system to investigate and leverage for equity. Certainly there
is a need for a more diversified teaching staff in the school districts that were part of this study and likely many others in our education system (Brown, 2006; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Kalifa, 2018; Kraehe, 2017). But that alone requires many intentional procedures to recruit and select candidates (Brown, 2006; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Kalifa, 2018; Kraehe, 2017). Schools and school districts may need to change their recruitment practices or develop recruitment practices that involve less traditional job postings or locations (Brown, 2006; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Kalifa, 2018; Kraehe, 2017). New or different interview procedures and situations may need to be cultivated to allow a more varied candidate pool to participate in the process (Brown, 2006; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Kalifa, 2018; Kraehe, 2017). Additionally, staff involved in the interview and hiring practices needs to be coached in terms of awareness and prevention of unconscious bias or favoritism (Brown, 2006; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Kalifa, 2018; Kraehe, 2017). Schools and districts need to be intentional about retaining a diversified teaching staff once they have hired them (Brown, 2006; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Kalifa, 2018; Kraehe, 2017). This may mean they must revisit and revise school and district professional learning plans to promote responsive and inclusive practices for all, while developing employee feedback processes like climate surveys, stay interviews, or by providing additional individualized supports such as differentiated observation/feedback cycles or fostering affinity groups to create positive and supportive work cultures (Brown, 2006; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Kalifa, 2018; Kraehe, 2017). In addition to staffing practices regarding teachers, staffing practices regarding leaders should be reviewed and changed as well. As noted, the majority of educational leaders are White. Changes are needed to increase diversity
in the leadership role as well as in the teacher role.

**Everyday Practices of Arts Equity Leadership**

The final component in this developing framework is that of everyday practices that equitable arts leaders must engage in for this work to be sustainable. The elements in this component are accountability, self-reflection, and professional community.

**Accountability**

The participants in this study all stressed that it is imperative to remain accountable to leading for equity in the arts. As leaders of this all important work, we must remain accountable to the vision for arts equity, to the arts programs, to the students, and to the community (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). To accomplish this, leaders must maintain clear methods of communication about the progress and the obstacles along the way. In addition, leaders must maintain transparency with regards to this work (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). The journey will undoubtedly not be a smooth one but leaders that own responsibility, communicate honestly, and share all aspects of the agenda will preserve trust and buy-in and most importantly focus.

**Self-Reflection**

This emerging theory is not linear as equity work is not linear. However, while each element or practice is important in and of itself, they are also connected and interdependent on one another for equity to true become part of a program’s (or school’s or district’s) culture. There will constant monitoring and adjusting along the way. This is where the reflection component is of importance. Leaders will need to continually engage in self-reflection of their own biases and beliefs as well as engage in reflective practices regarding every step of the work along the way (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Hammond, 2015; Khalifa, 2018).
Continually reflecting on what is working to promote equity and why as well as what isn’t working and why will strengthen the progress overall (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Hammond, 2015; Khalifa, 2018).

**Professional Community**

All of the participating administrators commented frequently that they appreciated the opportunity to discuss this work with me and they were eager to hear what other participants shared and requested to continue having conversations. They reported feeling rejuvenated after our interview sessions as they were able to step back and see the bigger picture and allow for further reflection. Building and maintaining community with other Administrators of the Arts will help to support these regular actions of self-reflection and accountability. Through the arts professional organizations, Arts Administrators should lean into their colleagues statewide and use the collective knowledge and supports to further their own departments in reaching their goals. By finding like-minded colleagues to vent to, brainstorm with, and share success with will prevent leaders from feeling as if they are doing the work alone.

**Conclusion**

My emerging theory of Leadership for Arts Equity encompasses the four components of positional authority, arts equity commitments, arts equity actions, and everyday practices of arts equity leadership. These four components working interdependently will allow leaders to develop and sustain equitable arts education programs. Equity does not just happen. It is an outcome derived from multiple continuous and intentional acts. The components in this emerging theory help to pinpoint and illustrate how these acts can work together to achieve the outcomes of equitable arts education for all students.

**Implications and Recommendations**
The data from this dissertation study leads to several inferences for leaders in terms of building and sustaining equitable arts education programming. This section will highlight several of these implications for district leaders, in terms of policy, and for teacher and leader preparation programs. I formulate this section using two headings – Implications in Practice and Implications for Preparation Programs.

**Implications in Practice**

This study’s findings indicate several immediate actions that leaders can take as well as several long term actions as they strive toward equity in the arts. District leadership, both from arts leaders and Superintendents, is critical in establishing the vision for equity as well as the creation and implementation of policies, procedures, and systems for ensuring greater access and opportunity for students historically marginalized in the arts. School districts in addition to state and federal education leaders need to collectively address these continued inequities.

**Arts Leaders**

From this study’s findings, I propose three recommendations that school district arts leaders should implement to begin to advance equity in their arts education programs. First, I recommend that school district arts leaders engage in a visioning process to identify their goals in terms of equity and their expectations in terms of the work and the results. I also recommend that school district arts leaders build buy-in to this vision by engaging a variety of stakeholders including students and community members. Building relationships with invested contributors will lead to greater and more comfortable collaboration for the continued work. Finally, I recommend school district arts leaders establish their own learning needs as the work continues. This, coupled with expectations of accountability such as self-reflection, modeling, and being responsible to the group through restorative practices will develop strong teams that can
complete difficult work.

**Superintendents**

From this study’s findings, I propose three recommendations that superintendents must implement to begin to advance equity in their district arts education programs. First, I recommend the Superintendent develop a commitment to arts education and equity in arts education. Second, I recommend that superintendents connect with the school district arts leader to norm around the vision for equitable arts programs. It is crucial for a superintendent and district arts administrator to be united in their goals and expectations for equity. The superintendent should also help to promote buy-in when conversing with various stakeholder groups. Finally, I recommend that a superintendent demonstrate accountability to equitable arts education but increasing their knowledge of the importance of arts education for all students and the impact that equitable programming will have for students. The investment in additional learning that a superintendent can show to arts leaders and teachers as well as all district staff, will not only assist with buy-in but also provide a sense of support and value to the arts professionals.

**Policy**

From this study’s findings, I offer two policy recommendations that school districts may implement to begin to advance equity in their district arts education programs. First, at the very least, school districts should develop a district equity policy to be presented to and approved by the school district board of education. This policy should outline definitions and what is expected by the district in terms of equity. However, to really show a commitment to equitable arts education, I recommend school districts develop a district arts education equity policy to be presented to and approved by the school district board of education. This might state the
expectations of the arts programs in terms of being funded and resourced through the district budget, in terms of access for all students regardless of their identity, background, or other interests. It might state curricular and pedagogical expectations in terms of cultural responsiveness and inclusion of student interests. Too often, the arts are an easy target and programming can ebb or flow at the whim of a superintendent. Having a clear board policy, could provide a shield for programs in times of need.

**Implications for Preparation Programs**

This study’s findings also indicate several actions, both immediate and long term, which preparation programs should take to increase the visibility of the issue of arts education equity as well as prepare those in these programs to confront this challenging and multifaceted issue. Teachers of the arts, school and district leaders, and superintendents all need to be developed suitably to be equipped work with equity in arts education in the front of their mind.

**Arts Teachers and School/District Leaders**

I advocate three recommendations for both arts teacher preparation programs and school building or district leader preparation programs. First, I recommend that preparation programs incorporate learning around the importance of arts education for all students and the impact that equitable programming will have for students. Second, these preparation programs must engage future teachers and leaders in equity focused discussions and learning to prepare them for scrutinizing and confronting inequitable practices and systems they observe in their schools and districts. Additionally, I recommend that teacher preparation programs spend time examining Krahe’s Arts Equity Framework and school and district leader preparation programs spend time examining the proposed Leadership for Arts Equity Framework (Kraehe, Acuff & Travis, 2016; Kraehe, 2017). This will ensure that whether individuals are arts specialists or arts novices, they
will develop an understanding of the interdependent dimensions that impact arts education equity.

**Arts Leaders**

I suggest two recommendations for developing arts leaders. First, these leaders are most often in the general leadership preparation programs and so as previously recommended, they must be engaged in equity focused discussions and learning to prepare them for scrutinizing and confronting inequitable practices and systems they observe in their schools and districts. This should include spending ample time deeply examining the proposed Leadership for Arts Equity Framework. Secondly, and perhaps most strongly, I am recommending the development of more specialized training or perhaps a certificate program for potential arts leaders. This would allow for future arts leaders to deeply engage in learning about assessing arts programs for equity, implementing equitable practices, and developing responsive arts curriculum and pedagogy. This would help ensure that these leaders enter the field with the knowledge and skills necessary to reach success in achieving equity in arts education.

**Superintendents**

I propose three recommendations for Superintendents. First, superintendent preparation programs must engage these future top leaders in equity focused discussions and learning to prepare them for scrutinizing and confronting inequitable practices and systems they will find in their school districts. Secondly, I recommend that superintendent preparation programs spend time examining the proposed Leadership for Arts Equity Framework to build their knowledge of what investments are needed for truly equitable arts education programs. Finally, I recommend that a superintendent preparation programs incorporate learning around the importance of arts education for all students and the impact that equitable programming will have for students.
Often, the superintendent support just isn’t there in school districts because of the top leader’s lack of knowledge around arts education.

**Limitations**

This dissertation study focused on K-12 public school systems in New York State and their relative success in the realm of equitable arts education programming. Five school district administrators participated in this study. This small sample size potentially restricts the ability to transfer the results to other contexts. It is imperative that conclusions are further tested prior to merely assuming they stand for all situations regarding arts education.

Secondly, as noted in Chapter Four, the participating administrators were all White. Overwhelmingly White leadership is a continual trend in education with currently approximately eighty-five percent of school leadership positions being occupied by White people (NCES, 2015). This dominant Whiteness could potentially influence the success of their practices and actions in their school districts. Conducting further study with participants representing various racial identities will be important to confirming the validity of the results. Additionally, the staffing needs and practices identified by the participants indicate that there is a need to increase the racial diversity in teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators. Further research might dig into how future arts leaders are encouraged and developed into the field and then sustained once they’ve entered the field. Identifying particular successes and barriers could help to create specific and intentional supports to aid in diversifying the field.

Finally, as a district arts administrator I was seen as an insider by the participants because of my familiarity with the general expectations of the role as well as the deep understanding of the duality of arts education – the rich, life-changing experiences that arts can provide and the exclusionary, western tradition centering. While I made every effort to ensure credibility, this had
the potential to not only influence the participating administrator responses but also shape my interpretation of their responses.

**Future Research**

As I conducted this dissertation study, further questions, situations, and considerations would emerge which must be considered in future research. This study, as well as any replications and validations of this study, will contribute to the literature around leadership actions for arts education equity. Potential considerations to enrich this research include an extension of this study to incorporate more school districts from New York State or to involve school districts from other states or regions in the country. Expanding the participant pool to include administrators that are representative of a variety of backgrounds and identities would also enrich this research and further test the validity of the findings. The study could also augment the identified participants to include arts teachers, students, and families in the investigation of program equity to learn about factors and influences from differing yet important perspectives. Taking one of the elements of this research (such as budgets or staffing) and really breaking it down quantitatively is another way to further expand and enhance this study. Additionally, having leaders enact this developing Leadership for Arts Equity framework and these practices and measuring impact on student participation data or potentially other outcome data would continue this research.

**Final Thoughts**

As a Director of Fine Arts, a district level leadership position, I embarked on this research journey to better understand and educate myself about the beliefs, action, experiences, and contributing factors necessary to create and sustain equitable and excellent arts education opportunities for students. Engaging in this study helped me to affirm practices that I was
confident led to equity in the arts, broaden my perspectives on the elements that interrelate to contribute to equity in the arts, and encourage me to continue to be relentless in my advocacy for equity in arts education.

I hope the narratives of these leaders striving for equity in arts education provide a structure and benefit current and future leaders to do the same. As a field, we need to come together in more of a community to ensure that the conversation moves toward the inclusion of all students in arts education regardless of identity and not let up! By implementing the knowledge, skills, and actions that have emerged from these leaders, we can reach a tipping point for real change in our schools. I hope to use this research to propel my colleagues around the state to come together more frequently as a community of practice to support each other in this work and begin to implement this new theory for Leadership for Arts Equity.

Ultimately, I end this process hopeful. Hopeful that this research can help district level arts leaders make impactful, equity-focused decisions for their students, hopeful that this research will help develop strong leaders passionate about equitable arts education that will become change agents for policies and procedures that uphold the arts as opportunities for celebrating identity and as experiences open to all students, and hopeful that through the development of truly equitable arts education programs students have the possibility to learn and grow in and through all aspects of themselves. As Charles Fowler states, “Perhaps the thing that the arts do best, at their best, is open the doors to learning. They open our eyes, our ears, our feelings, our minds” (Fowler, 1996, p. 9). And isn’t that what we want for each and every student in all our schools?
Appendix A

Questionnaire for Nominating Districts

District: ________________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________

Administrator(s) Responsible for Fine Arts: (please include name and title)

__________________________________________________________________________

How do you know this district has prioritized equity in arts education? (Please provide specific examples)

__________________________________________________________________________

How does this district provide for equitable arts programming and instruction with regards to budgetary practices?

__________________________________________________________________________

How does this district provide for equitable arts programming and instruction with regards to student participation in arts classes and ensembles?

__________________________________________________________________________

How does this district provide for equitable arts programming and instruction with regards to staffing practices, both in terms of allocating staff across the district as well as hiring practices?

__________________________________________________________________________

How does this district provide for equitable arts programming and instruction with regards to providing and supporting culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum and resources in the arts?

__________________________________________________________________________

How does this district provide for equitable arts programming and instruction with regards to publicly living a commitment to achieve an equitable K-12 arts program?

__________________________________________________________________________
Appendix B

Participant Screening Protocol

Procedure for screening nominated districts into the study.

1. Send *Nominating Questionnaire* to NYS professional arts education organizations (NYSSMA, NYSATA, NYSTEA, NYSDEA, NYSMATA). Collate responses and review.

2. Pull demographic data for nominated districts and review.

3. Confirm evidence (as able) included in nomination forms for each district, such as:
   
   a. Public commitment to equity in the arts
   
   b. How arts programs are highlighted and referred to on website, social media, district guiding documents.
   
   c. Availability of culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum and resources
   
   d. Community perception of level of equity within the arts programs
Appendix C

Initial Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your path to education. Tell me about your experiences in the arts.

2. How did you decide to transition into leadership? What did that route look like for you?

3. Tell me about this district. How is the district vision/mission connected to the arts? How are district initiatives connected to the arts?

4. Tell me about the history of arts education in this district. What do the arts programs currently look like in the district? Tell me about the availability of arts experiences for elementary/middle/high school students in your district. What is the process for students to take advantage of these opportunities?

5. Talk about the culture in your district. How do the arts fit into that?

6. What is the district philosophy or mindset regarding arts education? How is this communicated to teachers/students/families/community? Tell me what this looks/sounds/feels like in action.

7. How are shared visions/mindsets built in the district? How is resistance to shared visions managed?

8. What are some ways that policies (state or federal) support equitable arts education in your district? What are some ways that policies (state and federal) are a hindrance to equitable arts education?

9. What does equity mean to you? What does leadership for equity look/sound/feel like in action?

10. Tell me about the district’s journey with equity. Where and how has this happened?
11. What is your leadership role with regards to the arts in the district? What leadership traits or skills do you find most important?

12. What does equitable arts education mean to you? How is that communicated to your staff, students, community? How will teachers and staff know if they are part of an equitable arts education program? How will students and families know if they are part of an equitable arts education program?

13. What have you experienced in terms of leadership for equity in arts education? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of leadership for equity in arts education?

14. What is your process for providing culturally responsive and sustaining arts education curriculum and resources to your staff and students? Tell me how curriculum is developed and resources are chosen. What professional development do teachers receive related to culturally responsive and sustaining arts education?

15. What is your process for budgeting for arts education? How do you provide for equity within this process?

16. Do you look at student participation data? Why/Why not? Tell me about the process that you use for this. What do you notice?

17. Tell me about how you allocate arts staff in your programs. Do you look at staffing data? Why/Why not? What do you notice?

18. Tell me about specific strategies or practices you have used to combat inequity in your arts education programs. What effects have occurred as a result?

19. Tell me about a time you experienced success or pride in your arts equity work. What did you learn from that experience?
20. Tell me about school building barriers to arts education equity. Tell me about district level barriers to arts education equity. How do you manage these?

21. Have you encountered conflict with staff, students, or the community in the district around arts education equity? How have you handled that? What have you learned from those experiences?

22. Tell me about your collaboration with other leaders to enact equity in the district.

23. What strategies or practices would you advise other arts leaders striving toward equity to imbed in their practice?

24. What is your Superintendent’s role or the role of the BOE in arts equity in your district?

25. Does the short term superintendency impact art equity? What do you do to protect equity from that?

26. Is there anything you think would be important to tell me to add to this interview?
Appendix D

Subsequent Interviews Protocol

1. For the second (or additional) semi-structured interview with each administrator, I will start by asking if there is anything from the first interview that they would like to revisit or build on. I will refer to the sentence stems below to help facilitate the conversation and encourage each participant to share as much information as possible.

2. Moving forward in the second interview, I will have questions identified from the first interview that I need more information or clarification on, as well as questions that I may not have been able to ask due to time constraints. I will ask each administrator to give more detailed examples or explain their answers further to increase my understanding of their responses.

3. Member check protocol: Introduce emerging themes from individual interviews. Give the group the opportunity to comment on their agreement or disagreement as part of the data analysis.

Sentence stems to probe participants:

- Tell me more
- Give me an example of
- What did you think about
- Please describe that further
- I heard you say ____. Is that correct?
- What does that mean to you?
- How did you feel about
- What was your thinking when
Appendix E

Coding Categories

Budget
- Decisions
- Allocations

Staffing
- Schedules
- Hiring
- Demographics
- Certification
- Experience

Leaders
- Superintendent
  - Role in Arts Equity
  - Inhibitor?
- BOE
  - Role in Arts Equity
  - Inhibitor?
- Arts Leaders
- District Leaders
- Building Leaders
- Community Leaders

Participation Data
- Student Schedules
- Demographics of participants
- Scheduling practices
- Course offerings

Arts Equity Tenets
- Distribution
- Recognition
- Participation
- Access
- Effect
- Transformation
- Teacher Effectiveness

Arts Education

District Information
- Demographics
• Race
• Gender
• Special Education
• Language Learners
• SES

• Arts History
• Reputation
• Descriptions of School/District

**Leadership Practices**

• Self-Awareness
  • Self-Reflection & Growth for Equity
  • Modeling

• Organizational Mindset
  • Organizational Leadership for Equity
  • Constructing/Enacting an Equity Vision
  • Fostering Equitable School Culture

• Community
  • Foster Equitable School Culture
  • Collaborating with Families/Community
  • Sociopolitical Context

• Management of Resources
  • Allocating Resources
  • Hiring and Placing Personnel
Appendix F
Identity Memo

Maxwell (2009) notes that writing a researcher identity memo is designed to be primarily for the benefit of the researcher, as opposed to an audience.

- What prior experiences, and beliefs and assumptions about topic or setting emerge from this? How have the experiences shaped the choice of topic, why are you doing this?
- What advantages/disadvantages do the goals, beliefs, and experiences described have for your study? How will you deal with disadvantages?

My interest in the broader impact of equitable arts education comes from entering the education field as a music teacher. I truly think that if done well, arts education can be the most important context in education. While my experiences as a teacher have been varied over the course of 15 years in the classroom, I have always tried to listen to the responses, questions, and feedback of students. And their experiences have been remarkably similar. Often their comments are about how other people have been largely in control of whether they get to choose arts classes as part of their education. Whether it be budget cuts causing classes to be canceled, an inability to hire effective teachers for all their classes, the scheduling of classes and course selection processes, or even the actual material they are taught in arts classes, there are multiple points along the journey where students are at the mercy of adult decisions. Decisions that kids have often felt aren’t in their best interests. As a teacher this frustrated me but also was part of the impetus for me to move toward administration. Could I be an administrator that makes a difference?

As I moved into the Supervisor of Fine Arts role, it became apparent that some of the issues were systemic to the district. The disease of “we’ve always done it this way” had
continued to eat away at procedures and structures, however, there was also a lack of advocacy on behalf of the arts in the leadership conversations. This meant that the arts were falling further and further from the forefront of people’s thinking in terms of decisions being made throughout the district. After assessing the situation during my first year, I realized that I needed a plan of action. I needed to make note of what actions needed to occur, prioritize those actions, and start encouraging change. As I progressed through the years I kept note of what I’d been doing that had been successful (and also not successful!) and began to wonder if these were actions other leaders took as well. Was there a method to the madness or were people just fumbling around trying to figure it out the best way they could? I so often wished for a manual or a “how-to” book to help me on my journey. At conferences or professional organization meetings, I would always ask other leaders but in such small, snip-it conversations, I often wasn’t able to see the whole picture.

As it came time to develop a topic for dissertation research, this seemed to be a natural fit. To have the time to converse deeply with other leaders about their practices, would be so beneficial. Not just to me but potentially to other arts leaders if I found commonalities and clear steps that should be taken. I was excited as I seemed to finally be on the track to answers.

**Advantages**

Some advantages to having these experiences, is that I will have insider knowledge, so to speak, of what the participants deal with on a daily basis. I understand what the job entails in terms of positive actions but also in terms of the barriers that must be overcome. I will also have immediate knowledge of the state education systems including curriculum, data collection, and accountability, which might be referred to in the interviews.
Disadvantages

The advantages listed above could also be disadvantages. By being an insider, I could potentially miss details or opportunities for follow-up questions by thinking I already know the information. This will mean that I have to remain vigilant of myself and my objectivity during the interviews as well as during the data analysis.
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Curriculum Vitae

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RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Equity, Access, Inclusion and Belonging in Education
- Arts Education
- Educational Neuroscience
- Leading for Equity
- Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Practices
- Social-Emotional Learning
- Trauma-Informed Practices
- Restorative Justice

EDUCATION & CERTIFICATIONS

- Ed.D., Equity in Educational Leadership, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York  – in progress
  - Dissertation: Leadership Actions for Equitable Arts Education
- C.A.S., School District Leader/School Building Leader, LeMoyne College, Syracuse, New York
  - School District Leader, NYS Professional Certificate
  - School Building Leader, NYS Initial Certificate, Expired 1/2021
- M. Mus., Music Education, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York
  - Music Education, K-12, NYS Permanent Certificate

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

- Dissertation Research: Leadership for Equity in Arts Education, 2021-2023, with Dr. George Theoharis
- Qualitative Research Apprenticeship: Arts Education and COVID-19, 2020-2021, with Dr. George Theoharis
- Research Collaborator, Equity Audit Project, Syracuse City School District, 2016-2022, with Dr. George Theoharis and Dr. Christine Ashby

PUBLICATIONS


**CONFERENCE PAPERS/PRESENTATIONS**


**INVITED PRESENTATIONS/PARTICIPATION**

- **Gentile, S.** (2021, November). *Creative = Creative Activity.* Panelist in Conversation with Local Creative Leaders on Youth and Civic Engagement as part of *Creative Activity as a Human Right* event at The Lender Center for Social Justice at Syracuse University.

**PK-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION EXPERIENCE**

**COORDINATOR OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION**

West Genesee Central School District

2022-Present
DIRECTOR OF FINE ARTS
West Genesee Central School District
2021-Present

SUPERVISOR OF FINE ARTS
Syracuse City School District
2013-2021

PEER OBSERVER
Syracuse City School District
2012-2013

MUSIC TEACHER
Syracuse City School District - Huntington PK-8 School, Van Duyn Elementary School, HW Smith PK-8 School, Elmwood Elementary School, Henninger High School
1998-2013

MUSIC TEACHER
Diocese of Syracuse - Most Holy Rosary School
1997-1998

ADDITIONAL TRAINING
- Equity Focused School Leadership
- Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Schools
- Cognitive Coaching
- Courageous Conversations About Race Facilitator Training
- Discipline with Dignity
- Syracuse Aspiring Leaders Academy (SALA)
- Peer Coaching
- Syracuse City School District Mentor Program
- Orff-Schulwerk Teacher Education, Levels I, II, and III

SERVICE
- Belonging, Equity, Diversity, & Representation Committee Member, OCMEA (2022-present)
- Equity in Curriculum Committee, NYSCAME (2021-present)
- Education Committee Member, Symphoria (2019-present)
- Anti-Racism Coalition, Syracuse City School District and Community (2020-2021)
- Equity and Diversity Task Force Member, Everson Museum of Art (2020-2021)
- Ex-Officio Member, Board of Directors, Everson Museum of Art (2013-2021)
- Secretary, Board of Directors, Syracuse City School District Educational Foundation (2016-2020)
- Member, Board of Directors, Syracuse City School District Educational Foundation (2014-2016)

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS
- NAfME/NYSSMA – National Association for Music Educators/New York State School Music Association
- NYSCAME - New York State Council of Administrators of Music Education
- NAEA/NYSATA – National Art Educators Association/New York State Art Teachers Association
- AERA – American Educational Research Association
- ASCD