

**A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE CASE OF EAVESTON SCHOOL DISTRICT: CORE VALUES FROM DEFICIT-BASED TO ASSET-BASED**

*Don't tell me what you value, tell me what you do and I will tell you what you value.*

--Attributed to Malcolm X

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**ABSTRACT**

A growing body of research has linked educational leadership and student achievement; however, the oppression of students of diverse race, ethnicity, and social class has perpetuated inequities and educational gaps for decades across the United States. Some educational leaders who care deeply about equity and social justice are examining their core values, behaviors, and beliefs, as well as their organization's policies and practices to identify and implement knowledge and skills that disrupt the inequities producing educational and opportunity gaps. This article reports findings that are part of a larger qualitative descriptive case study that investigated the implementation and experiences of Eaveston School District's intentional journey to become a culturally proficient school district. For this article, the authors included findings related to (1) how the implementation of the *Cultural Proficiency Framework* influenced change, and (2) the challenges educational leaders face while implementing the work of Cultural Proficiency. The findings and conclusions of the study suggest that educators can lead organizational change and increase equity, access, and inclusion for all students by using the *Four Tools of Cultural Proficiency* to cause shifts from deficit-based to asset-based mindsets about students.

*Keywords:* equity, cultural proficiency, organizational change, core values, school improvement

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**Introduction**

Parker's quote, "The greatest educational challenge of our time is upon us," as cited in the forward of *Culturally Proficient Education* (Lindsey, Karns, & Myatt, 2010, p. viii), embodies one of the most pernicious and intractable educational research topics in the United States – inequity and opportunity in educational practice and policy. While many believe that one goal of education is to prepare all students for success in the world, numerous researchers have shown the persistence of inequities within school systems and structures, with emphasis on the depressed educational outcomes among students from lower-social-class and racialized backgrounds (Apple & Beane, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Freire, 1970; Hammond, 2015; Howard, 2006; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2008).

Some leaders, like those from Eveston School District, have engaged in a critical examination of their core values and their impact on educational practice. Included here are those *deficit-based core values* associated with negative beliefs and behaviors that focus on what is not working or what is wrong with the students, and *asset-based core values* that inform positive beliefs and behaviors and are focused on how teachers and leaders serve the needs of all students. In Eveston, school leaders are applying the equity framework of Cultural Proficiency to address inequities and education gaps among student groups. Research related to evidence-based practice is essential for empowering leaders to initiate and sustain actions to change policies and practices that better support school effectiveness and fulfill the moral imperative of education in society (Fullan, 2003; Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, Terrell, & Lindsey, 2019). One approach to investigating and understanding complex social and educational contexts is through case study methodology.

This article reports findings and conclusions from part of a descriptive, qualitative case study that investigated one district's journey of becoming a culturally-proficient school district (Wellborn, 2019). The methodology focused on using the Tools of Cultural Proficiency as a change initiative. It is important to note the purpose of the study was not to evaluate the Cultural Proficiency Framework, which was co-developed for education by one of this article's authors, but rather, to investigate the implementation and experiences of Cultural Proficiency work in a suburban, public PK-12 school district in the Midwest United States. In this article, the authors discuss behaviors and practices associated with deficit-based and asset-based core values related to (1) the ways in which implementation of the Cultural Proficiency Framework influenced change; and (2) challenges educational leaders faced while implementing the work of Cultural Proficiency. This research calls educational leaders to more closely examine and consider empirical research to inform their efforts in seeking knowledge and skills in designing equitable policies and practices within their districts, schools, and classrooms. Often, educational leaders depend on social justice-conscious inquiry methods to examine inequitable outcomes and failure. Attention to the research outcomes of this study may inform transformative change within organizations. With cultural, social, political, and economic contexts in mind, the urgency around leadership using an equity framework such as Cultural Proficiency to address inequities in education is needed more than ever, and leaders are called to rely on emancipatory methodologies, those that advance equity and transform marginalized communities, for social justice in education.

### **A Deeper Look: Eveston School District**

Eveston School District, pseudonymous for a suburban, public PK-12 school district in the Midwest United States, was established as "A Place to Live, Learn, and Grow." With almost 6,000 students, Eveston School District has one high school, two middle schools, one traditional school (PreK-8), five elementary schools, as well as preschool and alternative education settings serving students in grades 6-12. Eveston School District stands among many businesses, factories, casinos, and an international airport in a metropolitan county of more than one million people. The district receives approximately 90% of funds from local sources, and its student population represents 78 different countries, speaks 48 languages, and demographically is 46% White, 34% African American/Black, 11% Hispanic, 5% multiracial, and 4% Asian. The intersectionality of cultural differences among Eveston's students is coupled by nearly half of Eveston School District's students who are living at or below the United States defined poverty line. District officials are proud of its rating as the most diverse school district in the state.

The Eaveston School District operates with a focus on its mission and core values. The mission, “That all will learn,” relates to the district’s asset-based core values, which guide development and implementation of many practices and policies. Faced with challenges stemming from major geographical and economic changes in the larger community over the last two decades, as well as the diversity of the student body in terms of culture, race, and social class, the district has defined diversity as a positive contribution to the values and assets of the school district. Some district and school-site leaders identify themselves as transformative leaders using the Framework of Cultural Proficiency (Lindsey et al., 2019). Consequently, they believe their leadership actions have influenced the improvement in the district’s accreditation status and student achievement indicators on state performance ratings and demographic group achievement. In past years, Eaveston School District has been recognized as one of the best school districts in the state, according to state rankings.

### **Eaveston’s WHY for Cultural Proficiency**

A key element of case study methodology is shaping “why” and “how” questions. The researcher collected and examined evidence from both questions: *Why is the work of Cultural Proficiency important, and how is the work being implemented?* Responses to the “why” question were found in documents and other artifacts as well as from interviews. As written in Eaveston’s mission, student success for all learners is essential. The district’s expressed core values of *Diversity, Knowledge, Commitment, Care, Safety, Learning, Interdependence, Contribution, Strength, Freedom, and Success*, guide the design, development, implementation, and revision of policies, practices, events, and programs in efforts to achieve the mission. So why did leaders in Eaveston commit to using the Framework for Cultural Proficiency? The rationale for selecting this framework included the need to:

- (1) systemically address opportunity and educational gaps among students in regards to demographics such as race, ethnicity, and social class;
- (2) manage the dynamics of difference from the high level of cultural, racial/ethnic, and social class diversity;
- (3) provide stakeholders in the district with tools to examine current implementation and outcomes of practices and policies and to make changes to those adversely affecting student success;
- (4) develop a common language around increasing school improvement efforts through opportunity, access, and equity, while building capacity among all district stakeholders to initiate and sustain significant changes.

It is important to note both authors, including the researcher, did not introduce the school district to the Cultural Proficiency Framework. In 2016, the district embarked on a journey to use the Framework, including two days of professional development, led by Corwin consultants, and the formation of the District Cultural Proficiency Committee. In 2017, at the superintendent’s request, the researcher began working with a central office administrator and building administrator to plan and implement professional learning using the Cultural Proficiency Framework. The period of data collection for this study was limited from August 2018 to May 2019, but Eaveston School District continues to implement the Cultural Proficiency Framework with plans to continue the work with administrators, support staff, and new teachers for the 2020-2021 school year. No incentives were provided to the school district or its employees aside from the researcher’s gratis service to the school district.

## Literature Review

Research on educational leadership, school reform, and student achievement is substantive. In fact, since Coleman's *Equality of Educational Opportunity* was published, as well as *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), many scholars and practitioners have focused on educational reform (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Byrk & Schneider, 2002; Fullan, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Sarason, 1990). National, state, and local efforts to reduce educational gaps through initiatives, (i.e., Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, No Child Left Behind, 2002, Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015), have led to improvements. However, the commitment to equal opportunity of a quality education has failed to produce the intended outcomes for some groups of students. Many schools in the United States continue with systems, policies, and practices that largely reflect the values and behaviors of the dominant, most powerful groups in society. These practices and behaviors, guided by deficit-based core values, perpetuate inequities and educational achievement deficits for students of color and from lower-social class communities (Apple & Beane, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Friere, 1970; Hammond, 2015; Howard, 2006; Kendi, 2019; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2008; Sarason, 1990).

Recently, literature focusing on culturally proficient leadership encourages educators to advocate for increasing educational access and opportunity for those students who have been historically underserved by school systems. Culturally proficient leadership focuses on using an inside-out process to examine individuals' values and behaviors, as well as the organization's policies and practices (Lindsey et al., 2019). Thus, school leaders are called to implement and sustain professional learning using the Cultural Proficiency Framework for serving all students. The following sections address the literature focusing on: (1) the conceptual framework of Cultural Proficiency, (2) the importance of school leadership in educational reform, and (3) the role of culturally proficient leadership for organizational change.

**Cultural proficiency.** Cultural Proficiency reflects a mindset based on social justice and equity, and the literature supported the development of tools for individuals and organizations to navigate cross-cultural interactions. The mindset is based upon the belief that all cultures are important and have assets that drive positive contributions to the school, community, and/or society. Educators whose values and behaviors align with the mindset of Cultural Proficiency are more likely to view cultural differences as assets on which to build educational programs, not as a problem to be solved (Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, & Terrell, 2009).

Cultural proficiency is a mindset for how we interact with all people, irrespective of their cultural membership. Cultural proficiency is a worldview that carries explicit values, language, and standards for effective personal interaction and professional practices. Cultural proficiency is a 24/7 approach to our personal and professional lives. Most important, cultural proficiency is not a set of independent activities or strategies that you learn to use with your students, colleagues, or community members. (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p. 21)

Often, educators and school organizations that use the Framework of Cultural Proficiency intentionally utilize the interrelated set of four tools to increase access to equal educational opportunity and assist in practices related to developing and implementing school board policies, allocating resources, using assessment data, delivering curriculum and instruction, interacting with parents and community members, and planning and delivering professional development. Some authors suggested the use of the four tools may support changes to practices and policies leading to equal opportunity and equitable outcomes. Lindsey et al. (2009) suggested

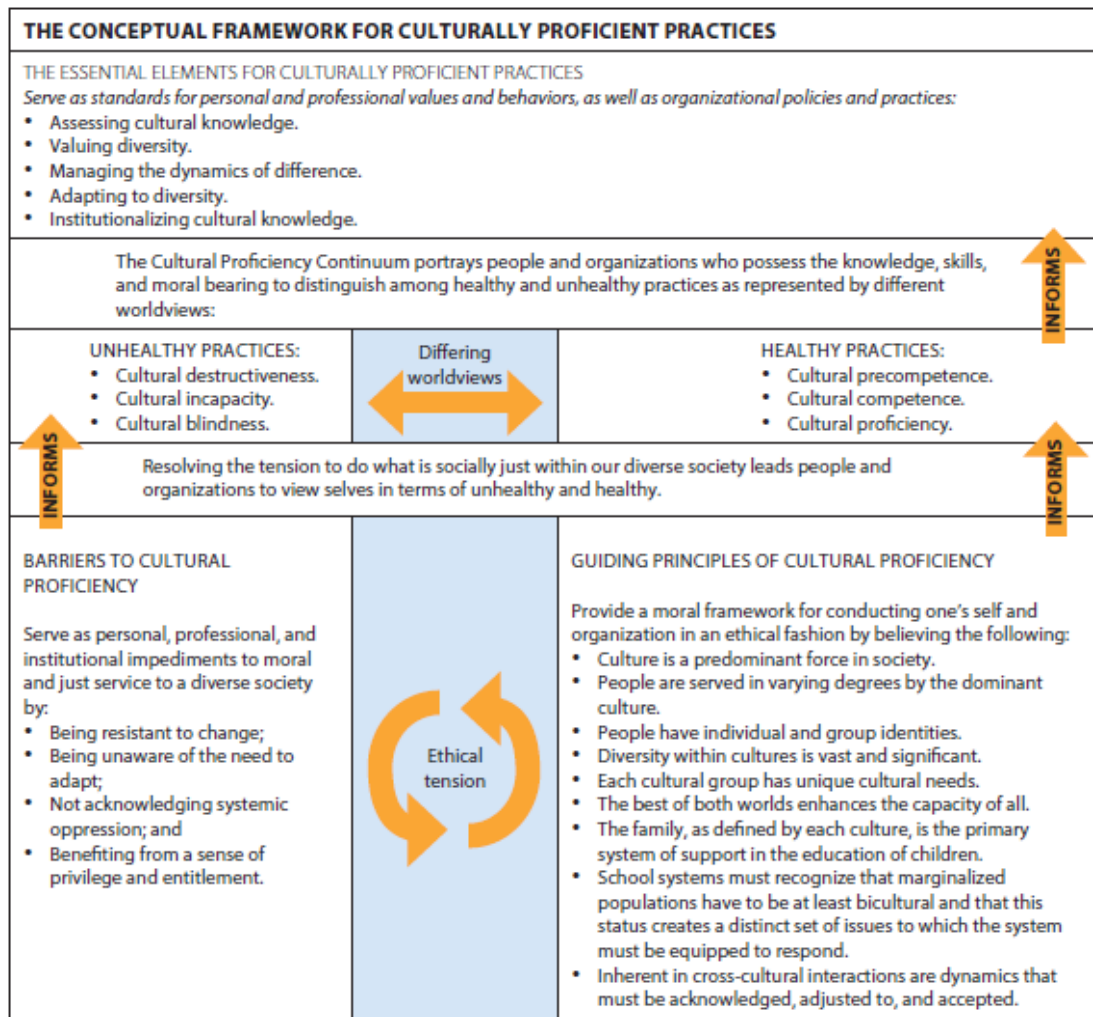
acknowledging deficit-based core values and how they present barriers to culturally proficient practice. Those practices increase understanding of how to overcome oppressive systems and practices, as well as resistance to change in schools that perpetuate inequitable outcomes for students.

**Conceptual framework.** In research, a conceptual framework is a tool that aids in explaining the main concepts studied, such as key factors, constructs, and variables (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This qualitative study integrated constructs such as educational leadership, school reform, and student achievement with the Cultural Proficiency Framework. The equity framework of Cultural Proficiency (Figure 1) is an inside-out approach educational leaders can utilize to unpack inequities and educational gaps in student achievement and school improvement as well as to address the responses to diversity that are encountered in educational organizations (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Issacs, 1989; Lindsey et al., 2019).

The Cultural Proficiency Framework has four unique Tools: (1) the Barriers, (2) the Guiding Principles, (3) the Continuum, and (4) the Essential Elements. Figure 1 displays how the tools work interdependently. Educational leaders may increase equitable outcomes by examining the Barriers that are guided by deficit-based core values, as indicated on the lower left side of the framework. The Barriers include being resistant to change, being unaware of the need to adapt, not acknowledging systemic oppression, and benefiting from underserved privileges and entitlements based on class, race, or gender. The Barriers inform unhealthy practices, policies, and behaviors that deny or reduce access to quality education for students. The Guiding Principles, as shown on the lower right side of the framework, include nine “values related to issues that emerge in diverse environments and when engaging with people who are not members of the dominant culture” (Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, & Terrell, 2009, p. 61). The Guiding Principles are directed by asset-based core values and inform healthy practices, policies, and behaviors that increase access to quality education for students and create conditions in which all students can thrive. The Barriers and Guiding Principles inform the placement of unhealthy and healthy practices, policies, and behaviors on the Continuum that are discovered through self-examination and case study.

The third tool, the Continuum of Cultural Proficiency, includes six points for recognizing and aligning practices, policies, and behaviors of a school organization. As individuals within the organization rely on their personal and organizational core values, they transform their thinking and practices to those that promote healthy practices, policies, and behaviors and effective cross-cultural interactions (as shown from left to right in Figure 1) (Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, & Terrell, 2009). The fourth tool, the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency, is indicated at the top of the framework and provides five actions for increasing equity, access, and inclusion: (1) assessing culture, (2) valuing diversity, (3) managing the dynamics of difference, (4) adapting to diversity, and (5) institutionalizing cultural knowledge. The Essential Elements guide educational leaders to be intentional in their journey of creating goals and action toward increasing equity and access for all students. These standards of action become normal practice in making decisions about policy and practices that align with the core values the individuals in the organization profess, thus leading to increased equity in the organization.

Figure 1. Cultural Proficiency Framework.



SOURCE: Lindsey, Nuri Robins, &amp; Terrell, 2009.

The key strategies for effective utilization of the framework in cross-cultural situations are reflection and dialogue (Lindsey, Terrell, Robins, & Lindsey, 2010). For decades, scholars have written about the importance of self-awareness in the role of educational change agents. As educational leaders implement and sustain systemic, transformative organizational change in efforts to improve outcomes and increase equity, they may begin with intentional reflection and personal change before focusing efforts on the system (Dilts, 1990; Fullan, 1997; Gardner, 2004; Lindsey, et al., 2019).

**The importance of school leadership in educational reform.** Research regarding the relationship between school leadership and student achievement is substantive. Many educators rely on the literature to guide their responsibilities and practices regarding effective schools and closing educational gaps (Byrk & Schneider, 2002; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Lezotte & Snyder, 2011; Marzano, Water, & McNulty, 2005). Often, cultural differences between educators and students influence student achievement outcomes in educational settings because differences in core values, deficit-based and asset-based, lead individuals to develop behaviors and implement practices.

In committing to the moral imperative of educational leadership, it is important to note that despite national, state, and local reform efforts, educational gaps in academic outcomes between African American, Native American, and Latino students, and certain White and Asian American peers, still persist (Hammond, 2015; Howard, 2010; Kendi, 2019; Kozol, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2008). Fullan (2003) discussed the meaning of the moral imperative for educational leaders, with an emphasis on introducing new elements into the setting that are intended to influence behavior for the better. When introduced into the setting as assets, stakeholders with varying interests, economic situations, cultural origins, religions, ethnicities, and racialized group memberships are essential to educational reform. Since race and social class are complex issues for school leaders, no one approach will close educational and access gaps (Barton & Coley, 2009; Murphy, 2009).

However, Murphy (2009) suggested two ways educators can support or empower students on the lower end of opportunity and educational gaps. Leaders may use programs that target disadvantaged students and use strategies that can provide gains to all, but greater gains for those disadvantaged students. School leaders focused on closing educational gaps through educational reform efforts may engage in reflective practices and collaborative work to create organizational change and influence learning outcomes. Often, principals are those expected to launch initiatives and develop programs that are evidenced-based to raise student achievement and disproportionately advantage those performing on the lower end of educational gaps (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Fullan (2003) suggested, “At the school level – the moral imperative of the principal involves leading deep cultural change that mobilizes the passions and commitments of teachers, parents, and others to improve the learning of all students, including closing the achievement gap” (p. 41).

In educational reform efforts, it is necessary for the school leader to acknowledge the “what” of change and the “how” of change. The importance of school leadership in educational reform is the ability to build capacity with a focus on results. In order for large-scale reform to reduce educational outcome gaps, school leaders must develop a shared meaning with a focus on individual and organizational change in the complex social context (Fullan, 2016).

**Culturally proficient leadership for organizational change.** Terrell, Terrell, Lindsey, & Lindsey (2018) described culturally-proficient leadership as an approach grounded in the belief that leaders who are effective in cross-cultural settings have an understanding of their own assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding people and cultures different from their own. Furthermore, Fullan (2003) defined the moral imperative of school leadership as the individual's responsibility for all students. With the moral imperative, knowledge, and skills, effective educators examine their values, behaviors, and beliefs, as well as their organization's policies and practices (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Issacs, 1989).

Culturally-proficient leaders utilize the Tools of Cultural Proficiency, to acknowledge behaviors and values, as well as school policies and practices that have performance ramifications related to student demographics (Lindsey et al., 2018). Professional learning focusing on Cultural Proficiency supports leaders dedicated to changing systems that will effectively serve all students. For example, change is expected in education, and school improvement plans help guide organizations toward increased student achievement targets. Dilt's model of nested levels of learning details the importance of professional learning and collaboration necessary for organizational change to occur. The five levels of organizational change identified by Dilt (1990) included identity, belief system, capabilities, behaviors, and environment. Culturally-proficient leaders rely on perspectives and ideas of diverse stakeholders

to be most effective in developing policies and practices that produce the most equitable outcomes for students (Clark-Louque, Lindsey, Quezada, & Jew, 2020; Fullan, 2016; Lindsey et al., 2019). Overall, professional learning and collaboration are necessary components for educational change, hence the focus on reflection, dialogue, and action toward transforming one's mindset from deficit-based to asset-based in culturally-proficient leadership. Literature suggests it is essential educational leaders understand that organizational change begins with self (Dewey, 1938; Dilt, 1990; Gardener, 2004).

### **Research Methodology and Design**

This research study was conducted using a descriptive, qualitative case study methodology to “reveal the multifaceted nature of certain situations, settings, processes, relationships, systems, or people” regarding Eaveston School District’s journey to become a culturally-proficient district (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). With the intent to investigate a district’s why and how of the application of the Cultural Proficiency Framework, data from interviews, observations, and documents were collected and analyzed to determine findings and conclusions related to the research questions and conceptual framework of this study. The findings present rich descriptions and analyses of a contemporary set of events in a single, bounded system, Eaveston School District (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2018). Although case study does not allow for replication of a situation, process, or system, it is heuristic in the sense that the case study “illuminates the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” and can be used to generalize experiences (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2018). Eaveston School District was selected for this case study because of (1) the school district’s implementation of professional learning using the Cultural Proficiency Framework at the district and building levels; (2) the school district’s high level of cultural, racial/ethnic, and social class diversity; (3) its increase in student achievement; and (4) its proximity to a metropolitan city with racial and social class implications on governmental, political, and educational contexts.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The case study focused on the implementation and experiences of Cultural Proficiency work in a suburban, public PK-12 school district in the Midwest United States. This article provides findings and conclusions related to two research questions that were used to guide part of a larger case study:

1. In what ways do the school district’s implementation plans and experiences influence changes associated with culturally-proficient practice to serve all students?
2. What challenges do educational leaders face during the work of Cultural Proficiency?

### **Population and Sample**

The population for this case study research consisted of *leaders* in Eaveston School District who were involved in the implementation or experiences of the Cultural Proficiency work and/or participated in quarterly, full-day professional development related to Cultural Proficiency during the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years. The term leaders in this study included teachers, building and district administrators, staff, parents, and community members involved in the work of Cultural Proficiency. The population included three groups. Figure 2 provides details related to each population group. The first population group included 55 leaders involved in the work at the district level. The second population included 110 teachers, administrators, and staff from two middle schools in Eaveston School District. These teachers participated in whole staff Cultural Proficiency professional development during the 2017-2018



school year. The third population was from one middle school and included a group of 70 teachers, staff, and administrators led by members of a building-level Cultural Proficiency Committee. This group formally continued their professional development using the Cultural Proficiency Framework during bi-monthly meetings.

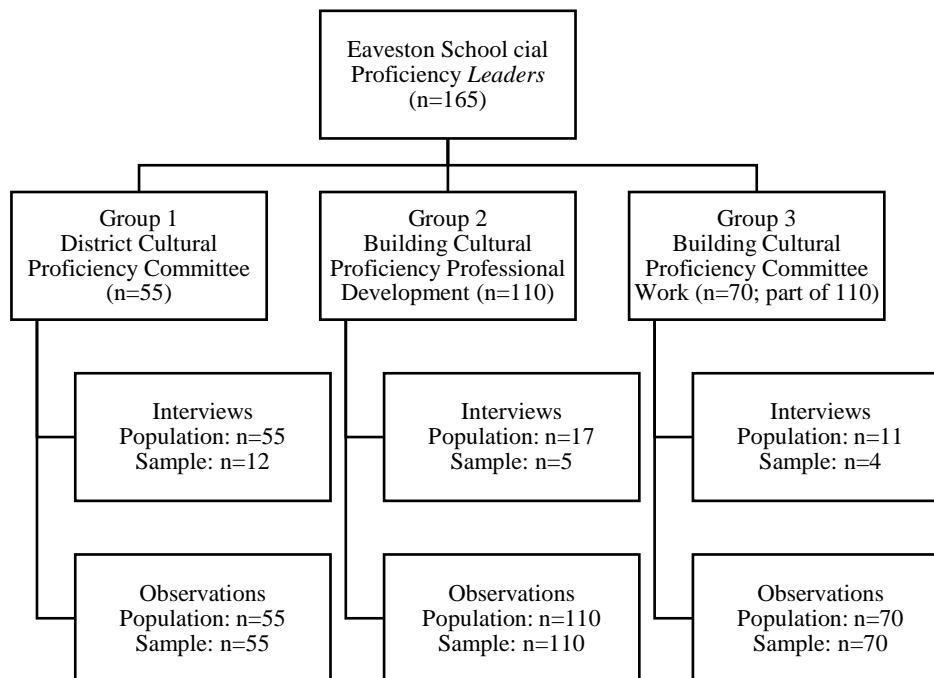


Figure 2. Population and Sample of Eaveston School District Case Study.

Sampling involves decisions for the researcher related to which people to interview and/or observe, which documents to mine for data, as well as settings, events, and social processes (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2020). Because of the conceptual framework of Cultural Proficiency and the research questions, the researcher set boundaries within the settings, events, documents, and people involved in the work of Cultural Proficiency. The sample in this case study included 14 volunteers from the three population groups. Through purposeful sampling, the researcher selected the sample based on respondents' availability and desire to participate. Merriam (2009) suggested purposeful sampling to maximize findings in a research study. The researcher sampled from individuals who experienced the Cultural Proficiency work as part of one or more of the three groups included in Figure 2 (Creswell, 2013). Fourteen individuals responded to an invitation to participate, and the researcher conducted interviews with the sample group of 14 volunteers. Table 1 displays the interview participants' characteristics, population and group membership, and school level.

Table 1  
*Interview Participants' Characteristics*

Role	Gender	Population Membership	Groups*	School Level
(1) Principal	Female	Building CPC	2,3	Middle

(2) Principal	Male	District CPC	1	Elementary
(3) Principal	Female	District CPC	1	Elementary
(4) Principal	Male	District CPC	1	Elementary/Middle
(5) Assistant Principal	Female	District /	1,2,3	Middle
(6) Teacher	Female	Building	1,2,3	Middle
(7) Sp. Language Pathologist	Female	District /	1	High
(8) Sp. Education Teacher	Female	Building	2,3	Middle
(9) Teacher	Female	District	1	Elementary
(10) Parent	Male	Building CPC	1	All
(11) Teacher	Female	District CPC	1	Middle
(12) Assistant Superintendent	Female	Building CPC	1	All
(13) Director	Female	District CPC	1	All
(14) Principal	Male	District CPC	1	Middle

Note. Group 1 District Cultural Proficiency Committee (CPC) Work; Group 2 Building Cultural Proficiency Professional Development; and Group 3 Building Cultural Proficiency Committee (CPC) Work.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher developed and utilized three instruments to collect data in this case study to better understand the implementation process: (1) an interview protocol; (2) an observation guide; and (3) a document retrieval form. In order to answer the research questions, an interview protocol was developed with ten questions to ask participants during the interview sessions (Creswell, 2014). The interview questions were designed using a semi-structured approach and addressed school leadership, educational reform, and culturally-proficient practice and policy. The data were used to produce perspectives about facts and feelings related to the work of Cultural Proficiency (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

The researcher developed an observation guide to use during Cultural Proficiency events such as planning meetings and work sessions at the district and building levels. The observation guide included a T-chart to separate descriptive notes from reflective notes. Since participant observation can be subjective, the researcher observed in a way to address the research questions related to the application of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency and challenges to produce trustworthy results. In addition, the observation guide included ways to collect data regarding the physical settings, participants, activities and interactions, and the researcher's own behavior (Merriam, 2009).

Similar to the observation guide, the researcher developed a document retrieval form to collect and analyze data mined from various district documents. The document retrieval form was designed as a T-chart to separate descriptive notes from reflective notes (Merriam, 2009). This instrument's purpose was to mine data from various documents in categories of school improvement (planning), description, and communication. To refrain from subjectivity, the researcher collected data in a systematic way to address the research questions, specifically focusing on the Four Tools of Cultural Proficiency.

### **Data Collection and Analyses**

The researcher collected data throughout this case study to answer the research questions and provide an example of one school district's journey to become a culturally-proficient organization by developing and implementing culturally-proficient policies and practices. Merriam (2001) and Yin (2018) provided details for the data collection phase in case study methodology. Typically, this process involves interviewing, observing, and analyzing

documents. During the 2018-2019 school year, the researcher completed three phases of data collection. The phases do not represent chronological order, rather they focus on the source of collection. Phase I yielded data from 14 interviews to build thick, rich descriptions of school leaders' perceptions and experiences of implementing the equity and access work. In Phase II, the researcher collected field notes on the observation protocol during building and district level Cultural Proficiency Committee meetings and professional development events. Descriptive notes were recorded such as descriptions of the activities and participants in the setting. The researcher utilized the T-chart to record behaviors and reflective notes to summarize the meetings and professional development events (Creswell, 2014).

Phase III included a collection of data from document retrieval forms using descriptive and reflective notes. Thomas (2011) explained the importance of finding the right documents in a case study. The researcher focused on documents related to the Cultural Proficiency work and reflected the espoused values and beliefs of the district, as well as the values-in-action. Therefore, data were mined from several available district documents such as vision/mission statements, policies, handbooks, brochures, a book chapter, school improvement plans, climate survey reports, electronic documents available on the district's website, newsletters, and social media posts.

In the final step of conducting this case study, the researcher analyzed and interpreted the collected data to answer the research questions and draw conclusions. The findings and conclusions in this article focus on the school district's use of core values in identifying Barriers, relying on the Guiding Principles, and changing practices and policies identified on the Continuum using the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency. The researcher conducted the analysis by preparing and organizing the data, and then reducing it into themes after using an *in vivo* coding process related to the conceptual framework (Creswell, 2014). The themes gathered from the three data collection instruments were triangulated to develop conclusions and implications of the study. Throughout the study and reporting of the school district's journey of Cultural Proficiency, confidentiality, reliability, and validity of the data collection and analysis processes were conducted with the highest integrity. The researcher used prolonged engagement in the field to build trust with the participants, learn the culture, and check for misinformation; as well as triangulation (Figure 3) to provide corroborating evidence from different data sources (Creswell, 2013). The school district and all employees' anonymity were guaranteed and protected to promote transparent responses in interviews and behaviors within observed professional development events.

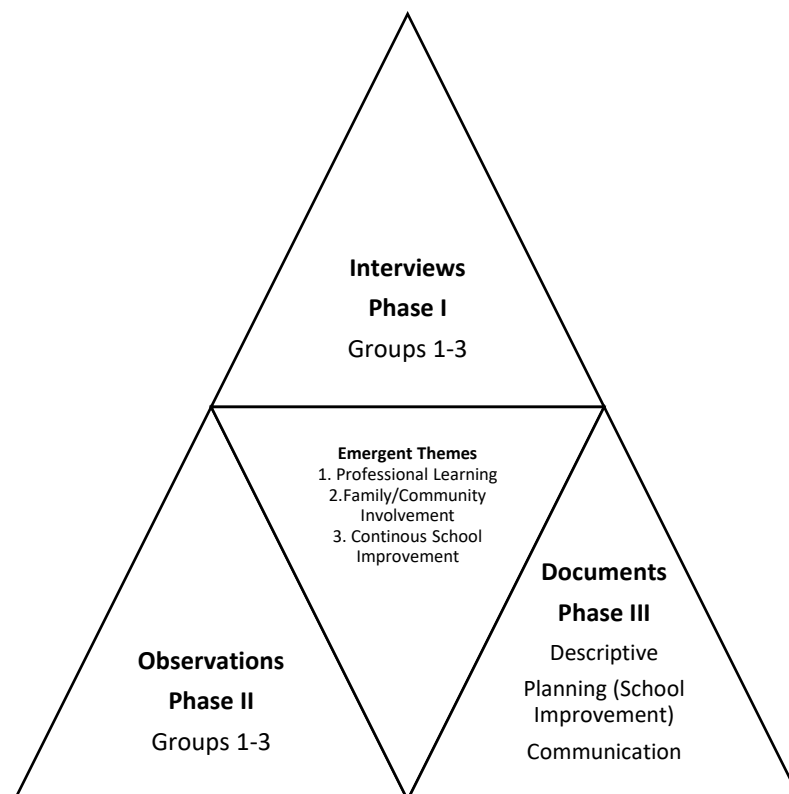
**Limitations.** As with any research study, this case study has limitations that affect the findings, conclusions, and implications for practice. The limitations include the sample size, the difficulty in replicating the study across all settings, and the researcher's role. The sample size of this study was small in relation to the number of employees working for the district. Therefore, generalizations made through the findings and conclusions are difficult to transfer across all buildings within the district and beyond.

In addition, the researcher played a role in the meetings and professional learning events by providing content and learning strategies related to the Cultural Proficiency Framework. Yin (2018) posited, researchers using case study methodology must understand the conditions of the case prior to the study. More importantly, the researcher must acknowledge that this knowledge is what can introduce bias and sway the researcher toward supportive or favorable evidence. The researcher avoided this bias by looking at all relevant data and being open to supportive and contrary evidence. Interviews and observations produced data that were both supportive of and

contrary to the preconceptions of the researcher. Contrary evidence were supported through discussions about the Barriers and challenges of implementing and sustaining the work of Cultural Proficiency. Leedy & Ormrod (2013) suggested, “Good researchers demonstrate their integrity by admitting, without reservation, that bias is omnipresent and may well have influence on their findings” (p. 219). The researcher was aware that the dual role of professional developer and researcher would influence the research design, thus limiting the findings and conclusions. Reflexivity allowed the researcher to acknowledge interfering biases, speculate effects, and interpret results in order to reduce bias (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

### **Findings Related to the Tools of Cultural Proficiency**

The descriptive single case study data were collected from participants through interviews, observations, and relevant documents and analyzed using the lens of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency. Three themes emerged from the triangulation of data that are related to the implementation and experiences of Cultural Proficiency in Eaveston School District: (1) professional learning through various professional learning communities; (2) diverse family and community involvement; and (3) continuous school improvement toward student achievement. Figure 3 provides details about the triangulation of data. The themes are presented in detail throughout the analysis. The report begins with the findings in relation to the conceptual framework (Figure 1) and concludes by answering two research questions, part of the overall study, as displayed in Table 5. The findings are organized with rich descriptive details by the Tools of Cultural Proficiency used by Eaveston School District leaders in implementing this work. Focus is given to how core values, both deficit-based and asset-based, can lead action toward organizational change. See Figure 3 below that illustrates the case study findings.



**Barriers of Cultural Proficiency: Identifying Behaviors and Practices  
Informed by Deficit-Based Core Values**

One tool used in the implementation of Cultural Proficiency is the Barriers. During Cultural Proficiency Committee meetings and professional development sessions, the three population groups engaged in a data collection process of using the Continuum of Cultural Proficiency. During the process, participants worked to identify themes among practices and behaviors on the left side of the Continuum, those that are informed by Barriers and function as deficit-laden core values, to set a direction to begin increasing equity and access for students in Eaveston. The emergent findings are displayed in Table 2 to explain ways Eaveston leaders identify and overcome four Barriers to Cultural Proficiency: (1) systemic barriers; (2) unawareness of the need for educators to adapt to the diversity of the community being served; (3) a sense of privilege and entitlement; and (4) resistance to change.

Table 2

*Eaveston School District's Application of Cultural Proficiency's Barriers to District Core Values and Actions*

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**Systemic barriers present in Eaveston's policies and prevalent practices to be addressed, minimized, and eliminated include:**

- Policies that perceived different norms, values, beliefs, behaviors as wrong (e.g., dress code that resulted in disciplinary actions and other negative sanctions against students of color);
- A diverse student body in contrast to school administration, faculty, and staff who were White, middle class, and female;
- Differing feelings of belonging to the school (i.e., historical implications due to parents' childhood school experiences, teacher/administrator relationships with families, past experiences of families coming to school – discipline, IEP meetings, celebrations, student awards);
- Differing levels of support for family engagement (i.e., PTO, family attendance at events); and
- Historical effects of stress between African American community and police in the area.

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**The manner in which Eaveston will overcome the identified barriers is:**

- Use data, communicate clearly about who is being left out or being denied access, then commit to action;
- Review/revise policies using the Framework;
- Review hiring practices through engagement with Cultural Proficiency Committee;
- Extend and deepen Restorative Practices activities at school sites;
- Extend and deepen school and family involvement/engagement; and
- Use of Cultural Proficiency learning strategies to promote asset-based approaches to difference (i.e., Managing Conflict with our Core Values, Guiding Principles Discussion Starters, Listening and Hearing – Source: Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, Terrell, & Lindsey, 2009).

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**The Barrier - unawareness of the need for Eaveston educators to adapt to the community include:**

- Well-intentioned adults who desire to do the work, but don't know how to initiate or sustain self-study;
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- 
- Differences in norms, experiences, behaviors, learning styles among educators and community served gives rise to culturally-based misunderstandings that too often lead to mistrust; and
  - Educators' lack of knowledge and experiences related to the community's history and experiences of being oppressed.
- 

**The manner in which Eaveston will overcome internalized unawareness of the need to adapt to the community being served is:**

- Work continuously toward equity and understanding, appreciating, and respecting differences in cultures – targeted resources;
  - Implement Eaveston's Personalized Learning Initiative; and
  - Maintain high expectations, assess needs, and focus on communication.
- 

**The Barrier - a sense of entitlement or privilege at Eaveston, include:**

- Rejection of the term "privilege;"
  - Historical "roles" of teacher vs. student as a power struggle; and
  - Perspectives become some school members' reality in which community perspectives are often viewed as being wrong.
- 

**The manner in which Eaveston will overcome a sense of privilege and entitlement involve:**

- Encourage family engagement strategies as a means for educators to gain healthy perspectives about communities served by Eaveston District.
  - Implement personalized learning and competency-based curricula that utilize research-based strategies and scaffolding to support students realizing their full potential.
  - Maintain high expectations, ensure discipline policies are equitable, expand use of Restorative Practices; and
  - Honor individual stories of school members as well as community members.
- 

**The Barrier - resistance to change, at Eaveston include:**

- Resistance against mandated Cultural Proficiency professional development;
  - Resistance/avoidance by some educators and staff members due to fear, discomfort in addressing issues related to cultural differences; and
  - Resistance because some believe there has been little progress, change, or sustainability in prior equity work.
- 

**The manner in which Eaveston will overcome resistance to change is:**

- Focus change from individuals to our values and behaviors;
  - Change the model and methods of professional development to focus on educator needs in responding to a diverse community;
  - Utilize professional learning strategies of reflection, dialogue, and action to build trust, empathy, and relationships in professional development programs; and
  - Provide opportunities for teachers and students to respond to contentious issues, to express feelings, and to support inclusive change processes.
- 

Unfolding the Barriers to Cultural Proficiency as a means to embrace their historical negativity provided Eaveston's stakeholders opportunity to study, embrace, and adapt the inclusive Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency and guide the district from being school-centric to being a community-centric district focused on the academic and social needs of Eaveston's diverse community.

### **The Guiding Principles: Eaveston's Core Values for Systemic Change**

Eaveston school district leaders used Tool 2, the Guiding Principles, in the implementation of the Cultural Proficiency work. Participants identified themes among practices and behaviors on the right side of the Continuum, those that are informed by guiding principles and function as asset-based core values. Eaveston School District's Core Values have been summarized as:

**Expressed Values** - Diversity, Knowledge, Commitment, Care, Safety, Learning, Interdependence, Contribution, Strength, Freedom, Success

**Underlying Values** - Communication, Creativity, Curiosity, Teamwork, Growth, Hope, Quality, Innovation, Achievement, Service.

As a result of the district's Cultural Proficiency journey, Eaveston's expressed and underlying core values have been expanded through thoughtful consideration of the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency. Table 3 displays an analysis of data from interviews, observations, and document reviews regarding Eaveston leaders' adaptations of the Guiding Principles in a manner that deepens the district's expressed and underlying core values.

Table 3

*Eaveston School District's Application of Cultural Proficiency's Guiding Principles to District Core Values and Actions*

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#### **Culture is ever-present.**

1. Eaveston is focused on building the critical mass of educators who are committed to the equity work, but recognizes that due to cultural values and behaviors, some are uncomfortable, some are critical, and some avoid the conversation all together.
2. Culture will bring in a dynamic of difference. Eaveston School District leaders are committed to continuous conversation and training, both informally and formally to promote growth and development related to cultural knowledge.

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#### **People have group identities and personal identities.**

1. Eaveston is implementing personalized learning to help each child thrive and succeed in the learning environment.
2. Eaveston School District promotes conversations and deconstruction of assumptions among staff related to perceived group identities and behaviors that follow (i.e., discipline, misunderstood language or behaviors, academics).

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#### **Diversity within cultures is important.**

1. As a district on the journey to Cultural Proficiency, Eaveston leaders are acutely aware of their recognized diversity in terms of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and language. Data to support knowledge regarding the diversity within those cultures is less apparent.
2. The district is focused on students' individual stories, building relationships, increasing communication, and providing services and support related to those stories is trending.

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#### **Each group has unique cultural needs that must be respected.**

1. Educators in Eaveston use professional development and professional learning communities to learn about the unique cultural needs that individual students have (i.e., socioeconomic status, disability). These events are subconsciously used to teach members of the dominant group about differences.
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2. “Wrap-around” services and support programs are available to help meet those unique cultural needs (i.e., tiered system, food, medical, dental, clothing, etc.).
- 

**The best of both worlds enhances capacity of all.**

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1. Diversity is an attribute to the district, a part of the district that is not looked at as an obstacle.
  2. Eaveston provides avenues for continuous growth through reflection and dialogue, where multiple perspectives are included for the purpose of serving each and every child in the district.
- 

**The family, as defined by each culture, is the primary system of support in the education of children.**

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1. Eaveston School District leaders engage families by purposefully reaching out to increase diversity, perspective, and participation among various cultures on committees and events.
  2. One of the core values related to family engagement is communication. The district keeps families informed and connected through multiple modalities of communication, including those who are translated and/or interpreted.
  3. Eaveston School District connects with and engages families through “community-centric” events/activities that meet the basic needs of children and their family members (i.e., food, school supplies, clothing, glasses or dental care).
- 

Relying on the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency as an avenue to organizational change provided Eaveston’s stakeholders opportunities to study and embrace the asset-based core values that have led to many policies, practices, and behaviors implemented to meet the academic and social needs of Eaveston’s students.

**The Continuum of Cultural Proficiency: Eaveston’s Awareness of ‘Telling Stories’ and Changing the Conversation**

Over several months, administration, faculty, and staff engaged in processes to identify systemic barriers to students’ access to equitable educational outcomes and rely on the Guiding Principles using Tool 3 of the Cultural Proficiency Framework, the Continuum. Pertinent to the conclusions of this study, leaders in Eaveston ensured parents and community members were involved in professional learning opportunities at the district level. Armed with awareness and understanding the function of core values among the Barriers and Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency, group participants, identified in Figure 2, immersed themselves in understanding policies and practices they posted along the six points of the Cultural Proficiency Continuum. Figure 4 includes examples on individual sticky notes that represent each point on the Continuum.

Whereas, illustrations along the Continuum provided vivid detail to the manner in which policy and practice examples of *Destructiveness*, *Incapacity*, and *Blindness* supported deficit-based core values; policy and practice examples of *Precompetence*, *Competence*, and *Proficiency* supported asset-based core values. Eaveston leaders’ study of the Cultural Proficiency Framework proceeded to the fourth tool, the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency. It is at this point that members were prepared to be intentional in devising actionable pathways derived from core values that embraced students’ cultures as assets on which to build their educational experiences. For each of the six points, participants were asked to contribute at least one policy or practice of Eaveston School District or individual behavior, meaning something someone has said or done. An example from each point on The Continuum is included in Figure 4.



<b>Culturally Destructive Policies Practices Behaviors</b>	<b>Culturally Incapacitating Policies Practices Behaviors</b>	<b>Culturally Blind Policies Practices Behaviors</b>	<b>Culturally Precompetent Policies Practices Behaviors</b>	<b>Culturally Competent Policies Practices Behaviors</b>	<b>Culturally Proficient Policies Practices Behaviors</b>
<b>Example</b> “If they can’t understand or read my homework or newsletter, that is their problem.”	<b>Example</b> Giving nicknames to students with unfamiliar names, mocking the pronunciation of the name, or negatively commenting on the “uniqueness of the name.”	<b>Example</b> “I don’t see color; all students are treated fairly in my class.”	<b>Example</b> Hosting Diversity Days, International Night, Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, etc.	<b>Example</b> Choosing literature for the classroom and library that represents cultural differences and providing training on using it appropriately.	<b>Example</b> Disaggregating data and changing practice on recruiting and hiring a diverse workforce, and facilitating conversations with stakeholders about current and best practice.

*Figure 4.* The Continuum of Cultural Proficiency: Examples of practices, policies, and/or behaviors gathered on color-specific sticky notes during the data collection process, both negative and positive.

Using the most powerful themes from the data collected by the District Cultural Proficiency Committee, the members created action plans for the next school year related to: 1) Disparity in student discipline; 2) Diversity among Eaveston’s workforce, and 3) Continued learning and growth using the Cultural Proficiency Framework. Although each group produced separate themes and action plans, these findings were gathered during the district’s Cultural Proficiency events using observations and document analyses of the sticky notes collected during this learning strategy, as well as other documents related to the action plan themes listed above.

#### **The Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency: Committing to Standards of Change through Improvement and Growth**

The five Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency, Tool 4 of the framework, serve to guide policy development and implementation as well as intentional practices in support of all students achieving high levels through continuous school improvement. The Essential Elements are an overlapping and mutual reinforcing means to inclusive macro-policy making, as well as guidance for the everyday behaviors of school district members. Table 4 presents illustrations of how the Essential Elements are being used to inform policymaking and practice, as well as educator values and behaviors. The examples represent organizational change to increase equity and access for all students in Eaveston based upon asset-based core values.

Table 4  
*Essential Elements Inform Organizations’ Policies and Practices, and Individuals’ Values, and Behaviors*

Examples from Case	Data Source(s)	Emergent Theme(s)
<b>Assessing Culture</b> Leaders and educators review, revise, and implement instructional practices based upon cultural knowledge to ensure high expectations and rigorous standards through personalized	Observations Document Analysis	Professional Learning Communities Continuous School Improvement

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learning.

### **Valuing Diversity**

Leaders examine how well the school is meeting students' and the community's needs and search for of new strategies to engage families. Eaveston involves students, parents, and community members' perspectives in planning special events and celebrations.

Interviews  
Observations  
Document Analysis

Family and  
Community  
Involvement  
Continuous School  
Improvement  
Professional Learning  
Communities

### **Managing the Dynamics of Difference**

The human resource department and administrators in Eaveston are committed to managing the difference in student demographics and teacher demographics by recruiting, hiring, and promoting people who think and act inclusively. Teachers of color are actively involved in the prospective teacher recruitment process.

Interviews  
Observations  
Document Analysis

Continuous School  
Improvement  
Family and  
Community  
Involvement

### **Adapting to Diversity**

Educators in Eaveston are committed to effective communication; particularly in learning new ways to effectively communicate to families who speak a native language other than English.

Interviews  
Observations  
Document Analysis

Family and  
Community  
Involvement

### **Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge**

Eaveston is building capacity of individuals committed to sustainable equity-based diversity training using the Tools of Cultural Proficiency to identify and overcome barriers to access, achievement, and success.

Interviews  
Observations

Continuous School  
Improvement  
Family and  
Community  
Involvement  
Professional Learning  
Communities

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Assessing culture relates to the way Eaveston School District leaders are examining their core values and culture, as well as the cultural norms of the school district. This Essential Elements requires educators understand how the culture of the organization affects those with different cultures. An example of Eaveston's action toward organizational change is evidenced from data gathered in observations and document analyses. Table 4 includes the practice of leaders and educators reviewing, revising, and implementing instructional practices based upon cultural knowledge to ensure high expectations and rigorous standards through personalized learning. During a District Cultural Proficiency meeting, two district administrators presented a new personalized learning initiative including components such as learner profiles. Similarly, in a document analysis, the personalized learning plan was described as, "a competency-based,

personalized learning environment in preschool through 12th grades that leads students to be ready for high school course content, and ultimately, success after graduation.” In this plan, Eaveston is preparing its employees through professional learning and input from family and the community to customize learning to meet student needs, which includes an in-depth look at student and family culture. Eaveston is committed to embedding Cultural Proficiency in all aspects of the district, especially those related to the personalized learning plan, to maximize efforts toward continuous school improvement.

Valuing diversity is another standard that intentionally guides Eaveston in their journey to become culturally proficient. In this area of organizational change, Eaveston School District leaders are celebrating and encouraging the presence of a wide variety of people in all activities, as well as accepting that each culture finds some values and behaviors more important than others. Data from interviews, observations, and document analyses indicated Eaveston’s leaders examine how well the school is meeting students’ and the community’s needs and how leaders search for new strategies to engage families and include students, parents, and community members’ perspectives in planning special events and celebrations.

The standard of Managing the Dynamics of Difference is about responding to conflict. Eaveston leaders are committed to responding appropriately and effectively when issues arise based upon cultural differences. One goal that developed from the district’s Cultural Proficiency Committee work with the Continuum was the need to diversify the workforce. As indicated in Table 4, data from interviews, observations, and document analyses concluded the human resource department and administrators in Eaveston are committed to managing the difference in student and teacher demographics by recruiting, hiring, and promoting people who think and act inclusively. In an interview, the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources commented on the district’s recent changes to who accompanies him at career fairs. In order to manage the dynamics of difference in this situation, these administrators are now adapting to diversity by joining forces and taking teachers of color, both male and female, with them to recruitment fairs and ensuring diversity is represented in interview committees. A document produced by the human resources department from a meeting with the District Cultural Proficiency Committee demonstrated commitment to teachers’ of color active involvement in the prospective teacher recruiting process. Ideas on recruitment and hiring were collected from the members on the District Cultural Proficiency Committee.

Adapting to Diversity is a standard that Eaveston leaders are using to change practices that acknowledge the differences among students, families, and staff. The data collected from interviews, observations, and document analyses related to this standard concluded some educators in Eaveston are committed to effective communication; particularly in learning new ways to communicate to families who speak a native language other than English. In an interview, a principal commented, “We have Family English Night here where families can come two nights a week to take a formal English class for free.” Through observations, members of the District Cultural Proficiency Committee discussed ways in which documents such as handbooks and letters are translated to provide increased access for families who do not speak English.

Eaveston leaders have used the standard of Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge to drive changes into the organization. In the district committee’s work with the Continuum, leaders created a goal for building capacity of individuals committed to sustainable equity-based diversity training. Both district and building-level leaders sponsored professional learning opportunities related to equity, diversity, and Cultural Proficiency to inform district members and

the school as an organization. In an interview a teacher commented, “I am part of the district’s Cultural Proficiency Committee, and I feel like we’re really digging deeper and doing it in a way that we want to make plans for growth with staff and students.” At the building level, observations of planning meetings demonstrate the commitment to institutionalizing cultural knowledge by discussing and incorporating knowledge of how one’s own culture, students’ cultures, and the school or district’s culture affect those with different cultures. A member of the Building Cultural Proficiency Committee commented, “I think that we’re headed in the right direction because we have a great group on our committee that is willing to kind of take the reins and do this professional development training that we need with our staff. I think it’s going to be much more meaningful coming from their colleagues and not from administrators.” In a planning document for the district’s Professional Development Committee, one goal is written as, “Exploring means to support and provide leadership for staff development initiatives at both the district level and building level.” Overall, the work of Cultural Proficiency is being implemented by using the standards of the Essential Elements to inform action toward organizational change.

### **Case Study Research Questions and Findings**

The case study focused on the implementation and experiences of Cultural Proficiency work in a suburban, public PK-12 school district in the Midwest United States. The two research questions used to guide part of a larger case study included: (1) In what ways do the school district’s implementation plans and experiences influence changes regarding culturally-proficient practice to serve all students? (2) What challenges do educational leaders face during the work of Cultural Proficiency? (Wellborn, 2019). Table 5 includes the emergent themes related to the implementation experiences and challenges faced by Eaveston’s leaders.

Table 5  
*Case Study Research Questions and Findings*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Emergent Themes</b>
In what ways do the school district’s implementation and experiences influence changes regarding culturally-proficient practice to serve all students?	(1) professional development through professional learning communities (PLC) with sub themes of high expectations, individual students, student achievement and excellence; and (2) dialogue and action with family and community involvement.
What challenges do educational leaders face during the work of Cultural Proficiency?	(1) barriers to Cultural Proficiency; (2) availability of time and resources; and (3) building site-specific capacity to implement and sustain the equity work across the district.

**In what ways do the school district’s implementation and experiences influence changes regarding culturally-proficient practice to serve all students?**

This research question was used to investigate the ways in which educational leaders have implemented and experienced the work of Cultural Proficiency to influence change and serve all students. Behavior, practice, and policy changes result from using asset-based core values informed by the Guiding Principles to counter deficit-based core values informed by the Barriers of Cultural Proficiency. Out of the analyses of data from leader interviews, meeting and professional learning event observations, and related document reviews, two themes emerged from the data to support the answer to this research question. The themes include: (1) professional development through professional learning communities with sub-themes of high expectations, individual students, student achievement, and excellence; and (2) dialogue and action planning with family and community involvement.

Eaveston’s leaders involved in implementing the Cultural Proficiency Framework focus on increasing equity for all students by providing opportunities for staff members to examine core values and practices through collaboration in professional learning communities. For example, there are many opportunities for staff members to collaborate with others in the district around topics such as restorative practices, trauma-informed care, social-emotional learning, personalized learning, and Cultural Proficiency. This includes sessions for new teachers and support staff. District administrators increased their involvement in events related to implementing the Cultural Proficiency Framework and utilized the tools in their discussions with the board members, families, and community members (Welborn, 2019).

Eaveston School District has experienced change in the organization through reflection and dialogue in using the Four Tools of Cultural Proficiency. The utilization of the Continuum of Cultural Proficiency is instrumental in beginning work to address areas of needed improvement. One key to successful implementation of the framework is involving families and community members in discussions and work related to advancing the goals set out by the committee. District leaders engage community members by bringing in experts to help facilitate conversations about restorative practices and trauma. They also include parents in school improvement planning and as members of the district’s Cultural Proficiency Committee. District leaders plan to build capacity among the district’s committee by increasing opportunity for reflection and dialogue so that all school buildings in the district gain support in implementing the Tools of Cultural Proficiency to promote equity, access, and inclusion (Welborn, 2019).

**What challenges do educational leaders face during the work of Cultural Proficiency?**

This research question focused on the challenges educational leaders face as they implemented the work of Cultural Proficiency in Eaveston School District. From the data emerged three themes. The themes include barriers to Cultural Proficiency; availability of time and resources; and building site-specific capacity to implement and sustain the equity work across the district. Eaveston School District’s leaders acknowledge barriers such as the unawareness of the need to adapt, resistance to change, and mistrust impede the journey of becoming a culturally-proficient school district. The historical mistrust that was formed from a previous social justice training plays a role in building capacity for all district employees to engage in the work. Using the tool, Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency, and focusing on asset-based core values, district leaders work to build capacity and trust among those involved in the work through reflection, dialogue, and action (Welborn, 2019).

Some leaders in Eaveston feel insufficient time and resources are the greatest challenges in implementing the Cultural Proficiency work across the district. Professional learning sessions require both time and resources, which limits the number of sessions that can involve teachers, administrators, and support staff throughout the school year when students are present. Many school leaders have realized that this work is challenging, and it is a journey. School leaders implement this work by prioritizing the utilization of time and resources to build capacity and embed the work in all aspects of the Eaveston School District. They want to ensure that all who educate Eaveston's youth understand this work is here to stay. Building site-specific capacity to implement and sustain the equity work across the district is a challenge prompting school leaders to balance the urgency of spreading the equity work beyond the district's Cultural Proficiency Committee and throughout the district. School leaders want to ensure the Cultural Proficiency work is implemented with urgency, but not in a way that causes an increase in resistance, protest, and unrest within the larger system (Wellborn, 2019).

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Case study data reveal richness and depth of a single-bounded system. At present, Eaveston School District is on an ascendant trajectory in the manner in which it is addressing policies and practices that impede student access and achievement. Leaders determined it necessary to uncover issues of inequities as an important initial step in the journey to having inclusive policies and educator practices that result in increasing student academic and social success in the Eaveston School District. Eaveston's leaders know the importance of aligning what is expressed as core values with the policies and practices of the district and the behaviors of educators throughout the district. Being deliberate in unpacking and overcoming Barriers to Cultural Proficiency served as an important initial link to being able to consider deeply the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency in shaping district core values. It was in this deep consideration of Barriers and Guiding Principles that district leaders were able to make the Essential Elements actionable in district policy and educator practices. In other words, 'aligning what they say with what they do,' Viewing students and their cultures as assets is an important step in building and selecting curricular, instructional, and assessment approaches. In doing so, educators view their role as being engaged in their own professional learning. The old deficit-based model of what is wrong with students and their cultures is relegated to the historical bin of our segregated history.

Findings from single case studies can be used to support generalizations for other school district leaders to consider (Yin, 2018). The conceptual framework of Cultural Proficiency has been used and studied within a specific, bounded, contemporary setting. The important point to note is for district leaders to *study the study* as well as the conceptual framework and focus on the 'why' and 'how' for their context and conditions.

In addition to the examples included within the findings of the case study, three implications are provided for school-district and building administrators as a result of the conclusions of the research. Culturally-proficient educators can lead organizational change and may increase equity, access, and inclusion for all students by applying the Four Tools of Cultural Proficiency, causing shifts in core value-related mindsets and actions from deficit-based to asset-based. The implications for practice include:

1. Developing a common language around the Cultural Proficiency Framework, intentionally embedding the work of reflection, dialogue, and change to promote access

and equity for all students during professional learning through various professional learning communities;

2. Building the capacity of all stakeholders in the district community by inviting diverse family and community perspectives to help in identifying barriers, focusing on core values, and creating goals and action for changing inequitable practices, policies, and behaviors; and
3. Aligning the district's strategic plan, professional learning, and policy review with the mission and core values of the district. Embed Cultural Proficiency in every aspect of the district while focusing on continuous school improvement toward student achievement.

Thus far, Eaveston's story has revealed that some district leaders understand and appreciate that their journey to becoming a culturally-proficient School District has barely begun. They recognize the journey before them embraces the students and their families, along with their multiple cultures, as assets on which successful school programs will be constructed. Some district leaders understand and appreciate that they, just like the students in their classrooms, are learners as they continue to strive for ways to meet the academic and social needs of their diverse community.

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