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## A Qualitative Case Study of Principal Supervisors' Perceptions of Equity-Based Instructional Leadership

Dontae Wilson

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A Qualitative Case Study of Principal Supervisors' Perceptions of  
Equity-Based Instructional Leadership

by  
Dontae Wilson

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the  
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education  
and School of Criminal Justice in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Education

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## Approval Page

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## Statement of Original Work

I declare the following:

I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility as described in the *Student Handbook* of Nova Southeastern University. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

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## Abstract

A Qualitative Case Study of Principal Supervisors' Perceptions of Equity-Based Instructional Leadership. Dontae Wilson, 2022: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: instructional leadership, leadership styles, principals, leadership effectiveness

Principal supervisors play a critical role in supporting school principals. However, historically, principal supervisors were ill prepared to address these challenges at either the district or school level. Since 2011, the role of the principal supervisors has been reexamined to provide better outcomes for students and increased support for principals. The development of equity-based instructional leadership practices was identified and therefore added to the tools focused on developing transformative, race-conscious, and culturally responsive educational leadership.

The problem explored in this qualitative study is that little research has focused on the perceptions of principal supervisors to improve equitable practices in schools that may result in equitable teaching and learning. This case study used a semistructured interview format to examine the perceptions of principal supervisors about the standards for equity-based instructional leadership that may result in equitable teaching and learning. The researcher also examined potential differences in the perceptions of novice principal supervisors compared to experienced principal supervisors. This study was intended to answer the following research question: How do principal supervisors view the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership and their capacity to promote equitable teaching and learning for all students?

After rigorous analysis of the data, which including a priori and emergent coding, findings indicated that principal supervisors have limited prior awareness of but positive perceptions of standards for equity-based instructional leadership, principal supervisors tend to focus on different standards for equity-based instructional leadership, and principal supervisors face both external and internal challenges when enacting standards for equity-based instructional leadership. Future studies might explore time spent by principal supervisors on equity-based instructional leadership, district efforts to increase time spent on equity-based instructional leadership, and professional-development needs of principal supervisors to support implementation of standards for equity-based instructional leadership.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The role of principals has become increasingly complex in recent decades (Thessin & Louis, 2019). Many districts have a central office structure that includes the role of principal supervisors to support the work of principals (Goldring et al., 2018). However, within each district, different titles are given to persons who fulfill this role, such as assistant superintendent, area superintendent, and senior instructional leadership executive director; in some districts, the superintendent has the sole responsibility of supervising principals (Goldring et al., 2018). In many districts, principal supervisors are responsible for not only evaluating principals, but also supporting them as they navigate varying layers of complexity. These layers include ensuring high-quality instruction, enhancing teachers' practice, motivating school staff, developing strong parent-family partnerships, maintaining a positive school climate, and attempting to maintain an appropriate balance between work and home life (Levin et al., 2019). However, frequently, the workload and number of principal supervisees have not lessened to reflect the increasing complex roles of principal supervisors (Corcoran et al., 2013).

As a result, several school districts have needed to reexamine the role of principal supervisors to better align with the "increased demand for school-based instructional leadership, [yet] staff charged with overseeing principal performance report that they struggle with mixed messages and conflicting mandates" (Corcoran et al., 2013, p. 38). Staff may encounter difficulties in the shift from a traditional focus on climate, operations, and crisis management to a more instructional focus (Goldring et al., 2020). Principal supervisors reported a lack of role clarity and frustration regarding the priorities associated with their positions given these conflicting and often competing mandates (Corcoran et al., 2013). Efforts to remedy these concerns and better support principal

supervisors and principals have led to a growing body of research centered on the role of principal supervisors and their focus on instructional leadership (Baker & Bloom, 2017; Corcoran et al., 2013; Goldring et al., 2018; Honig & Rainey, 2019).

### **Statement of the Problem**

School leaders play a critical role in positively impacting student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004). Teachers and principals were found to have the largest and second largest effects on student achievement, respectively (Marzano et al., 2005). However, despite the positive effect on overall student achievement, significant disparities between students from different socioeconomic status groups remain (Corcoran et al., 2013; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). As a result, a large body of research has identified potential strategies and resources available to leaders to address these disparities and inequities.

Researchers studied the role of principals in helping create equitable school environments (Corcoran et al., 2013; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). However, principals often reported feeling unprepared for the task of improving instructional practices to meet the needs of all students (Leithwood et al., 2004; Markow et al., 2013). Principals also reported a lack of coaching or mentoring support they required to develop and maintain an instructional focus (Goldring et al., 2018).

Tyre (2015) found that a lack of support for improving instruction contributed to the resignation of 30% of principals each year, and Markow et al. (2013) noted a 9% decrease in principals' job satisfaction. Since 2011, several districts, such as Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Denver Public Schools, Gwinnett County Public Schools, Hillsborough County Public Schools, and Prince George's County Public Schools, have sought to address principal turnover (Corcoran et al., 2013; Honig & Rainey, 2019); in

this process, the supportive work of principal supervisors became increasingly important (Honig & Rainey, 2019). In large urban areas, principal supervisors are often a major support system for principals (Goldring et al., 2018). School district leaders have begun to recognize the need to further examine the role of principal supervisors and to provide greater support to principals (Honig & Rainey, 2019). Principal supervisors often lack the training, time, and resources to provide instructional support to principals so these principals may ensure equitable outcomes for all students (Corcoran et al., 2013; Gill et al., 2010; Honig & Rainey, 2019; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012).

The development of equity-based instructional leadership practices added to “a growing and sorely needed body of frameworks and tools, focused on developing transformative, race-conscious, and culturally-responsive educational and constructionist leadership” (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017, p. 26). However, historically, principal supervisors were ill prepared to address these challenges at either the district or school level. The lack of preparedness created a leadership void for principal supervisors, and numerous supervisors opted to avoid or only briefly referenced issues related to equity in instructional practices (Lochmiller, 2018). Similarly, peer-reviewed literature is scarce on how principal supervisors perceived national standards of equity-based instructional leadership and how these standards may be used to improve teaching and learning (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015).

### ***The Research Problem***

The problem studied was that little research has focused on the perceptions of principal supervisors to improve equitable practices in schools that result in improved teaching and learning (Rigby et al., 2019). The gap in the research involved principal supervisors’ current perceptions of the national standards of equity-based instructional

leadership and what the national standards suggest the principal supervisors' perceptions should be. Rigby et al. (2019) argued that research has yet to explore the perceptions of principal supervisors and their views on how the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership may influence equitable teaching and learning for all students. Several researchers have recommended an examination of the role of principal supervisors in influencing equitable teaching and learning for all students because of the support that they provide to principals and indirectly to students (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, 2017; Honig & Rainey, 2019; Rigby et al., 2019).

### ***Significance of the Problem***

Research has suggested that it is vital to explore principal supervisors' perceptions of equity-based instructional leadership to better understand how they factor into support for principals (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, 2017; Honig & Rainey, 2019; Rigby et al., 2019). Principal supervisors' perceptions about equity-based instructional leadership are critical because principal supervisors are responsible for communicating district priorities to school leaders and helping principals determine ways to communicate and collaborate with school staff to support the implementation of these priorities (Honig & Rainey, 2019). Discussions in the literature surrounding equity have centered on the role of teachers and principals, but rarely has attention been provided to the role of principal supervisors or central office staff in influencing equitable teaching and learning (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, 2017; Honig & Rainey, 2019; Rigby et al., 2019).

### ***Background and Justification***

Equity-based instructional leadership has its roots in the late 1990s movement toward creating culturally responsive schools (Cooper & Jordan, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive schools became increasingly important as researchers and

legislators began to recognize the need to meet the educational needs of multicultural societies with diverse learners (Schmeichel, 2012). Researchers argued that the American educational system had to change, as disparities had emerged in the achievement and engagement of students of color compared with those of their White peers (Cavanagh, 2008; Ferguson et al., 2001; Schmeichel, 2012). The need for a change to culturally responsive schools was advocated by Rusch (2004), who stated, “Processes and practices in schools suggest that educator knowledge on equitable social relations is missing or scant. In fact, professional practices based on the privileges and traditions of a longstanding male centric and meritocratic society are common” (p. 20).

Due to these gaps in both processes and practices towards equity, researchers such as Gutiérrez (2006) argued that there was an “urgency in developing a new educational discourse and analytical framework that makes visible the persistence of inequity and supremacy in educational policy [and] practice” (p. 223). The urgent need to address the gap in processes and practice towards equity has led researchers to examine the standards and frameworks used when developing educational leaders (Galloway et al., 2013; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Young & Mawhinney, 2012).

Since 2006, several attempts have been made to reexamine the standards and frameworks used to develop educational leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). For example, in 2011 and 2015, the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration revised the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, which are used to develop educators (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). However, despite these revisions, terms such as *equity* and *inclusive* were scarcely referenced in either revision (Minkos et al., 2017). This lack of attention to equity and issues surrounding inequity in

American society led researchers to draft a set of 10 equity-based instructional leadership standards with three primary drivers to support the implementation of the standards with a focus on equity from a central office perspective (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017).

Although the equity-based instructional leadership standards are a significant step forward in providing educational leadership with a framework to address equity-related concerns, the research regarding their implementation has limitations (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017).

Historically, research related to equity-based instructional leadership took place almost entirely at the district level with the superintendent or at the school level with the principal (Rimmer, 2016). However, this binary approach led to the limited treatment of the middle tier of district administration or the principal supervisor level (Nordqvist & Ärlestig, 2020; Thessin & Louis, 2019). The distinction between the superintendent and principal supervisor is important because, in some districts, the role of principal supervisor is held exclusively by the superintendent, whereas, in others, the role is delegated to other central office staff, such as directors, assistant superintendents, or regional/network superintendents (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017; Goldring et al., 2018).

### ***Deficiencies in the Evidence***

Despite the growing body of research on equity-based leadership, some deficiencies in the literature have emerged (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, 2017; Honig & Rainey, 2019; Rigby et al., 2019). These deficiencies include strategies for attracting and retaining equity-focused leaders, perceptions school leaders have about equity, and ways to support educational leaders in equity work at the district and school levels.

Research is lacking regarding how school districts hire and retain educational leaders, including principal supervisors, with a teaching and learning approach that is focused on

equity (Honig & Rainey, 2019). School districts may need to develop resources and tools to effectively gauge candidates' capacity for equity-based instructional leadership based on past experiences in order to increase the potential for success in their new role (Honig & Rainey, 2019). Conversely, without these tools and resources, several districts have needed to reorient school leaders towards a greater focus on equity, which has contributed to frustration about role clarity and the nature of their work for some educational leaders (Corcoran et al., 2013). Additionally, according to Corcoran et al. (2013), school leaders who do not see the alignment of their actual work (operational) with their perceived work (instructional) have become frustrated.

Research is lacking with respect to the “collective understandings about equitable practice; how understandings, contradictions, shared meanings, and behaviors emerge” (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017, p. 27). Therefore, school district and educational leaders must consider how they engage in the process of enhancing or improving the practices of central office or district staff towards equity, whether and how decision-makers can learn and develop their leadership to promote equity, and the impact of changes in practice on student outcomes. This echoes the earlier recommendation of Galloway and Ishimaru (2015) “to stimulate more theorizing in the field about how to develop equitable leadership capacity by engaging in empirical work on understanding equitable leadership practice” (p. 372).

Research is lacking regarding ways to support educational leaders in equity work at the district and school levels (Rigby et al., 2019). Rigby et al. (2019) identified some key issues that have not been discussed in depth in the literature:

While there is research focused on how principal supervisors support principals as instructional leaders and what equity-focused leadership looks at the school level,

research has not yet examined how principal supervision and other systems leadership can support principals district-wide in equitable leadership practice.

(p. 485)

A key problem is that there is little understanding of how principal supervisors perceive the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership as a way of improving teaching and learning (Rigby et al., 2019). Researchers have noted the importance of principal supervisors' role in encouraging principals to increase their focus on instruction for all students (Corcoran et al., 2013; Goldring et al., 2018; Rigby et al., 2019).

### ***Audience***

This study was designed to increase the knowledge of principal supervisors as they reflect on their own practices with a focus on equity (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017). Identifying specific knowledge of practices that may lead to more equitable environments is of particular interest at the district or central office level as school leaders move “beyond a general emphasis on improved teaching and learning for all students” (Honig & Rainey, 2019, p. 458). Principals may benefit, as principal supervisors play a critical role in helping support their work in equity-based leadership at the school level (Lochmiller, 2018). Lastly, teachers may benefit as principal and principal supervisors collaborate with teachers to provide greater academic and emotional support to students due to the shift toward equity-based leadership practices (Ishimaru, 2019).

### **Setting of the Study**

This study focused on principal supervisors from five districts in the United States. District characteristics are shown in Appendix A. One school district is a large urban district with a 2021 student enrollment of 202,944. According to district 2021 data, of the 202,944 students, 119,492 are in district-operated schools, 68,364 are in charter

schools, 12,131 are in cyber-charter schools, and 2,956 are in alternative-education placements. The student enrollment demographics are diverse. Students are enrolled in one of 326 schools, of which 215 are district operated, 86 are charter operated, and 25 are alternative-education schools. There are 216 principals and 16 principal supervisors in the district-operated schools.

The second school district is a kindergarten through Grade 8 charter school district with 4,500 students. The student demographics are predominantly Black or African American. Enrolled students reside in municipalities from three southeastern Pennsylvania counties and over six sending school districts. Students are enrolled in one of nine school buildings under the supervision of nine principals, three assistant principals, and two principal supervisors. The third school district is a kindergarten through Grade 12 public school district with 1,557 students. The student demographics are predominantly White. Students are enrolled in one of six school buildings under the supervision of six principals, and the superintendent serves as the principal supervisor.

The fourth school district is a kindergarten through Grade 12 public school district with 76,850 students. The student demographics are predominantly Hispanic and African American. Students are enrolled in one of 144 school buildings under the supervision of principals, assistant principals, and 12 principal supervisors who are organized by geographic regions or pyramids. The fifth school district is a kindergarten through Grade 12 charter school network with 31,000 students. The student demographics are almost one third Black or African American, one third Hispanic, and one third White. Enrolled students reside in municipalities across eight states, mostly in the southern part of the United States and the District of Columbia. Students are enrolled in one of 55 school buildings under the supervision of 57 principals and six principal supervisors.

## **Researcher's Role**

The present study was a qualitative case study in which the primary instrument and findings relied on the researcher's description and synthesis of the principal supervisors' perspectives. In qualitative case studies, the researcher's role as an educator, including personal assumptions and biases, can affect the research findings. The current section discussed the researcher's position in the present study regarding equity-based instructional leadership. The researcher identifies as an African American man and has served as an educator, with 21 years as both a teacher and principal. In the role of principal, he worked with principal supervisors at varying stages of their ability to demonstrate equity-based instructional leadership. During academic studies, he earned his bachelor's degree in human services, earned a master's degree in education, and completed graduate courses in research, statistics, and program evaluation. His interest and experiences in equity-based instructional leadership are what prompted him to conduct further research on this topic.

The researcher explored the perceptions of principal supervisors from five districts in the United States using semistructured interviews and document review to analyze their views on how the new national standards of equity-based instructional leadership can be used to improve teaching and learning for all students. All interviews were individually using Zoom as the primary platform. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded, and classified into categories and then themes to determine commonalities and points of distinction.

Participants were selected using a criterion-based purposeful sample. The following criteria were used to select principal supervisors for this study: (a) they served as a principal supervisor in a school district during the 2020-2021 school year, (b) they

had served for a minimum of 1 year, and (c) they were willing to participate in the study.

In addition, it should be noted that the researcher was an administrator in the charter school district included in the present study. As a result, two of the principal supervisors were previously known to him. These two principal supervisors represent two of five participants in the study. However, none of the potential participants were under his supervision. As the sole researcher of the present study, the researcher was aware of the need to monitor and reduce bias that can occur in qualitative research. Specifically, due to the collaborative work with the dissertation chair, the research design and collection process was vetted to avoid or minimize confirmation bias, question-order bias, and leading questions or wording bias. Although this insider role within one organization had the potential to introduce potential bias, the researcher viewed this role as a potential strength as it increased potential access to participants and identification of relevant data sources.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this applied dissertation, the following terms are defined.

*Equity-based instructional leadership* is the intentional focus by parents, teachers, principals, and district leaders, such as principal supervisors and superintendents, on “the assurance of excellence, equity, and a quality learning experience for every child, in every classroom, every day in order to close achievement (and opportunity) gap(s)” (Rimmer, 2016, p. 94).

*Principal supervisors* may also be termed assistant superintendents, area superintendents, senior instructional leadership executive directors, or even superintendents. Principal supervisors are expected to experience and efforts to helping principals grow as instructional leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015).

Principal supervisors are tasked with supporting principals in managing the allocation or reallocation of resources to increase student learning (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014) and are often charged with evaluating and coaching principals (Honig & Rainey, 2019).

*Transformational leadership* is the process in which leaders and followers have a mutually beneficial impact on each other's process motivation and sense of commitment (Burns, 1978). Specific to education, transformational leadership theory focuses on the constructs that enable principals and school leaders to be able to influence, activate, and assess of the needs of members of the school community by building a culture of respect and an expectation of participation (Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore perceptions of the principal supervisors from five districts in the United States regarding their views on national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning for all students. The study included information on who is serving in the role of principal supervisors, support and training they receive focused on coaching principals on instituting equitable practices on schools, and barriers that may hinder their work. Additional information included whether principal supervisors are evaluated with regards to supporting principals in implementing equitable practices in schools and which of the national equity-based standards principal supervisors tend to focus when supporting principals. Collectively, this information was intended to support districts seeking ways to strengthen the instructional focus of principal supervisors.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Overview

The role of the researcher was to research and investigate principal supervisors' perceptions of equity-based instructional leadership standards to improve teaching and learning for all students. The literature review begins with an examination of the federal legislature that has attempted to address disparities in education. Next, the researcher presents an overview of leadership models appropriate to address these disparities and resulting inequities: transformational leadership theory, social justice leadership theory, and equity-based instructional leadership. During this review, the body of research in equity-based leadership (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, 2017; Honig & Rainey, 2019; Rigby et al., 2019) was identified and discussed.

This literature review examines the origins of equity-based instructional leadership and its connections with theories of culturally responsive and socially just leadership (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Rigby et al., 2019; Starr, 2019). In addition, the standards of equity-based instructional leadership by Galloway and Ishimaru (2015) are presented and their relationship with the role of principal supervisors (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Honig & Rainey, 2019; Rigby et al., 2019). Next, the role of principal supervisors is explored along with common challenges that they face. Finally, the chapter concludes with a description of the distinctions between equity practices, equitable teaching and learning, equitable teaching, and equitable learning. The literature review demonstrates a lack of research on how principal supervisors perceive equity-based instructional leadership standards and their capacity to promote equitable teaching and learning for all students (Rigby et al., 2019; Thessin & Louis, 2019).

## Search Terms

Education databases were used to research the topic of equity-based instructional leadership. These databases were available through the Nova Southeastern University library. The databases used were ERIC, Education Complete, and SAGE Premier. Keywords used to search these databases included but were not limited to *equity-based instructional leadership, educational leadership models, principal supervisors, and educational equity*. After a thorough investigation of these databases for current and peer-reviewed articles, Google Scholar was used. The literature review was organized using major headings related to variables and list all headings.

## A History of Disparities in Education

The landscape of education in America has changed drastically over the past 150 years. To illustrate this point, one can look to one of the classic works by American author Mark Twain (1884/2003), when he wrote in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*:

And looky here—you drop that school, you hear? I'll learn people to bring up a boy to put on airs over his own father and let on to be better'n what he is. You lemme catch you fooling around that school again, you hear? Your mother couldn't read, and she couldn't write, nuther, before she died. None of the family couldn't before they died. I can't; and here you're a-swelling yourself up like this. I ain't the man to stand it—you hear? (p. 29)

By 1965, there was general agreement that continued federal intervention was necessary. Although some Americans may still hold this sentiment, both the composition of who is sitting in America's classrooms as well as the increased level of accountability placed upon America's school leaders suggest otherwise (Marzano et al., 2005). For example, during Mark Twain's writing in the 1880s, students attended school for 10

weeks out of the year, and this expectation was largely reserved for White males (Cameron & Heckman, 2001). Also, in many parts of the country, females, African Americans, and other groups were not provided with the opportunity for a formal education. In this way, a formal public education was regarded a privilege for the few rather than a right for everyone.

By 1954, America's classrooms not only included female students, but also students from various other ethnic groups as well. However, it was clear that the components of a formal public education were not consistent or equal in all schools. A major reform of federal education policy was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The act was passed to strengthen and improve educational quality and educational opportunities in the nation's elementary and secondary schools by providing financial assistance to local educational agencies for the education of children of low-income families. According to Polikoff (2017), through several subsequent reauthorizations, such as the Educational Opportunity Act of 1974, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, the legislation continued as federal policy governing kindergarten through Grade 12 public education. However, despite these federal statutes, regulations, and intervention, disparities continue in America's public schools (Bishop, 2015; Jacob, 2007).

In America's public schools, disparities exist with respect to educational outcomes and achievement of students from diverse backgrounds. Some examples include graduation rates, participation in Advanced Placement courses, and the percentage of students who require remediation classes at the collegiate level (Silver, 2020). Achievement outcomes are evidenced by National Assessment of Educational Progress data. Students of color continue to perform below White students (Silver, 2020).

In an attempt to address these inequities, educational leadership continues to be an area of needed research. Effective educational leadership is needed to address challenges facing school communities, including persistent educational disparities. Several leadership theories may be used to describe effective educational leaders. Leithwood and Duke (1999) provided the six models commonly found in education research: instructional, transformational, moral, participative, managerial, and contingent. Details regarding each model can be found in Appendix B. In the next section, the researcher examined models of educational leadership that most closely aligned with the subject of this research.

### **Transformational Leadership Theory**

Transformation leadership theory has its origins based on the work of political scientist Burns (1978) and researcher Bass (1985). Burns identified transformational leadership as the process in which leaders and followers have a mutually beneficial impact on each other's process motivation and sense of commitment. Although transformational leadership has its origins in organizational management theory, it became an important framework for school leadership through principal and superintendent preparation and development programs (Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

Transformational leadership became an important part of principal and superintendent preparation and development programs because school leaders play a critical role in establishing the culture, climate, and instructional focus for schools. However, this work cannot be accomplished in isolation or independent of the other members of the school community. Transformational leadership theory focuses on the constructs that enable principals and school leaders to be able to influence, activate, and assess of the needs of members of the school community by building a culture of respect and an expectation of participation (Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

According to Leithwood (1994), the transformational model has four critical leadership practices: building the vision and setting direction, understanding people, redesigning the organization, and managing the teaching and learning program. Educational leaders build the vision by establishing a shared vision by motivating, inspiring, and clarifying goals that help stimulate members of the school community. Vision-setting practices are used to set the direction when educational leaders inspire sense of purpose, enhance work of members of the school community, and help establish reasonable expectations (Leithwood, 1994). For educational leaders using the transformational model, the practice of understanding people is important because it involves building the knowledge and skills of teachers, staff, and members of the community as well as motivational strategies that will aid in performing the work (Gill et al., 2010). The practice of redesigning the organization for transformational leaders involves establishing the working conditions, which includes building collaborative cultures, restructuring systems, and deploying resources to help the school connect or reconnect with the vision of educating and developing students.

The practice of managing the teaching and learning programs involves providing coherence to instructional practices, minimizing distractions from instruction, providing professional development to teachers, monitoring student achievement, and implementing interventions based on achievement data (Gill et al., 2010). Other researchers (Judge & Piccolo, 2004) used similar terminology when defining core components of transformational leadership. According to Judge and Piccolo (2004), the four core components of transformational leadership are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These components are described in detail in the next sections.

### ***Idealized Influence***

Transformational leaders are expected to influence others in ways “that cause the followers to identify with the leader” (Judge & Piccolo, 2004, p. 755). For educational leaders, these followers include teachers, staff, parents, students, and members of the school community, who are drawn to the transformational leader’s display of conviction and persistence towards reaching a common goal. In this way, Bass et al. (2003) considered transformational leaders as “guiding lights” who act as beacons of “ethics, principles, and values” (p. 208). For principals and principal supervisors, the idealized influence of transformational leadership means modeling ethical behavior in such a way that teachers, staff, and other members of the school community emulate the leader’s behavior within the organization in their collective service of students (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). When effectively leveraged, the school community will become more ethical as result of the leader’s influence on the followers (Bass et al., 2003; Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

### ***Inspirational Motivation***

Transformational leaders articulate their organizational vision in a way that resonates with and inspires their followers (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Followers are motivated because the leader demonstrates high professional standards for the quality of their work, high regard for the nature of the work, and a clear optimism for the completion of the work (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). This sense of optimism is essential, considering the harsh realities facing many schools (Greenlee & Brown, 2009). In this way, transformational leaders are able to develop a deep connection with followers to promote collaboration that can be essential in performing the work of schools (Bass et al., 2003; Quatro et al., 2007).

### ***Intellectual Stimulation***

Transformational leaders are able to challenge school staff so that they are stimulated intellectually and not bored at work. Leaders who exhibit this quality are able to challenge assumptions, take risks, solicit followers' ideas, and encourage creativity in their followers (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Noddings, 2011). The ability to be creative at work is connected with employees' sense of autonomy and results in higher motivation (Azzam, 2014; Bass et al., 2003). Transformational leaders are able to foster an environment where creative efforts are recognized and valued for the process, regardless of whether or not the actual solutions were successful (Bass et al., 2003). In contrast, Bass et al. (2003) also discussed the negative consequences when leaders reprimand failed creative efforts. Over time, teachers and school staff are less likely to present new ideas, suggest solutions, or give input if they perceive negative consequences will occur (Bass et al., 2003; Bolman & Deal, 2013). Transformational leaders use the creativity of individuals to increase the success of the organization.

### ***Individualized Consideration***

Transformational leaders understand the needs of followers and place the needs of followers above the leader's needs (Bass et al., 2003). In schools, effective leaders incorporate the needs and concerns of individual teachers and staff in the decision-making process. This aspect of change leadership is critical in making sure teachers and staff are provided opportunities for input, which increases their sense of agency in the school community (Bass et al., 2003). Staff members with an increased sense of agency have reported higher levels of job satisfaction, which has the potential to reduce teacher and staff turnover (Ross & Gray, 2006). Studies have examined the positive benefits on student achievement of reducing teacher turnover (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Leithwood &

Jantzi, 2006; Ross & Gray, 2006).

### ***Positive Outcomes of Transformational Leadership***

Studies have indicated the positive impact of transformational leadership on student achievement (Leithwood, 1994; Marzano, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005). Educational leadership has the second greatest impact on student achievement, after teachers (Leithwood, 1994; Marzano, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005). However, it is important not to think of transformational leaders as rare charismatic figures in education but rather to understand that transformational leaders are effective because they are able to correctly identify the focus and order of change within schools (Marzano et al., 2005).

This is in part due to a common characteristic among transformational leaders and their keen ability to “focus on improving the school and classroom practices to most likely have a positive impact on student achievement” (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 6). In terms of the order of change, transformational leaders are able to integrate the work of Heifetz (1994), Fullan (1993) and Hesselbein (2002), with respect to understanding that the magnitude of change is different to different stakeholder groups. Therefore, transformational leaders identify organizational strategies, practices, and initiatives that are can be as first order change (extensions from the past and within existing paradigms) and second order change, breaking from the past and outside of existing paradigms (Heifetz, 1994).

### ***Limitations of Transformational Leadership***

Educational leaders employ a variety of strategies during the course of their leadership practices in schools (Corcoran et al., 2013; Goldring et al., 2018). This literature review includes details about one of the models of leadership identified, rather than the other five, yet leaders do not exclusively employ strategies of only one model.

However, leaders' behaviors or practices tend to lean towards one model more than the other models. Also, the focus on transformational leadership does not imply that one model is better than the other models of leadership but that transformational leadership is more closely aligned to the critical aspects of equity-based instructional leadership, the subject of this study (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

### **Social Justice Leadership**

Social justice leadership is when leaders “make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223). Social justice educational leadership theory is based on the belief that all students can reach proficiency and the schools should focus on equitable learning for all students (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011). Within this framework, there is a keen focus on “situations of marginalization” in order to address and eliminate (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223). In others, immoral uses of power have led to the representation and reproduction of the dominant culture at the expense of all other groups (Bogotch, 2002). The primary functions of social justice leadership are to acknowledge, challenge, and attempt to change the impact of existing White dominant structures and foster a more equitable and socially responsible environment.

Educational leaders must acknowledge, challenge, and attempt to change existing White dominant structures in schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Rigby et al., 2020). Schools benefit from an examination of all areas of the school community, such as curriculum, disciplinary policies, and communication protocols, to uncover potential impacts of existing White dominant structures on these aspects of the school. For instance, regarding curriculum, Khalifa et al. (2016) observed, “Indeed, all minoritized

students also have rich histories of agency, appropriation, and resistance to oppression; yet, this term recognizes the histories of oppression minoritized students have faced and the need for schools to resist the continuing contexts of oppression” (p. 1275). A well-documented discipline gap indicates that Black, Latino, and Indigenous students have a disproportionate number of disciplinary referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and court citations compared to their White counterparts (Khalifa et al., 2016). A deeper analysis of disciplinary referral data indicated that Blacks and Latinos were more likely to be referred for subjective offenses such as noncompliance than their White peers (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Regarding communication protocols, it is important that the school leaders and staff be able to engage students, families, and communities in culturally appropriate ways (Khalifa et al., 2016). School leaders who acknowledge, challenge, and attempt to change existing White dominant structures in schools are able to better equip their staff with strategies to create a more equitable environment and are posed to provide better outcomes for students (McKenzie et al., 2008).

Researchers have suggested ways to create a more equitable environment in schools using social justice leadership as a framework (Heller & Firestone, 1995; Hoy & Miskel, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008). According to McKenzie et al. (2008), schools must both raise the academic achievement of all students regardless of background and prepare students to become critical citizens. In this way, students should recognize injustice and become change agents who impact the systems that promote social injustice. For schools, several positive outcomes are connected with the social justice leadership model.

### ***Positive Outcomes of Social Justice Leadership***

Among the positive impacts of social justice leadership are raising student

achievement, improving school structures, recentering and enhancing staff capacity, and strengthening school culture and community (Theoharis, 2007). Principals and school leaders who enact social justice leadership practices impact student achievement by addressing issues such as inclusive practices or the access of students with disabilities to the general education curriculum with appropriate supports, participation in standardized assessments by students from all student groups, and rigorous instruction for all students (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011).

Principals and school leaders improve school structures by adapting human and instructional resource allocations. For some principals, this may involve eliminating pullout and segregated programs and prohibiting academic tracking (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). Generally, school leaders who have a social justice orientation have ensured “an inclusive, warm, and welcoming climate for all stakeholders and utilized professional development opportunities and data analysis techniques to support teachers in better addressing issues of race, disability, and equity” (DeMatthews, 2015, p. 147). Social justice leadership theory involves recentering and enhancing staff capacity by finding solutions to such questions as, “How can we draw upon the unique backgrounds and experiences of our school community to reimagine our school and improve our decision-making processes?” (DeMatthews, 2015, p. 146). Lastly, leaders with a social justice orientation strengthen school culture and community by ensuring members of the school community have a voice and feel heard as a result of exercising their voice (Jean-Marie, 2008).

### ***Criticism of Social Justice Leadership Theory***

One criticism of the social justice leadership theory is the limited body of research is available (DeMatthews, 2015). This criticism may be true, but the research that is

available has provided important insight on the ways that educational leaders work to address inequities in schools and has explored the effects of that work on policies, cultures, and structures within school communities (DeMatthews, 2015; Furman, 2012; Jansen, 2006; Theoharis, 2007). Also, this limited body of research has provided an opportunity for researchers to continue to explore aspects of social justice leadership. DeMatthews (2015) recommended researchers “should explore how successful, struggling, new, and veteran principals of various gender, race, and professional experiences apply leadership to establish more socially just schools, handle leadership dilemmas, and navigate difficult and inequitable school districts and accountability policies” (pp. 161-162). Due to expanding definitions of leadership based on the consideration of historic inequities and incorporation of historically marginalized groups, researchers may also need to continue existing research that supports the need for social justice leadership theory.

A second criticism of the social justice leadership theory is that most educational leaders believe they already lead in socially just ways (DeMatthews, 2015). Therefore, it is important to delineate the characteristics of social leadership theory from just good leadership. To help in this regard, it is important to consider the contextual aspects of the social justice leadership theory in that the inequities and marginalization may not exist along the same student demographics, such as race, disability, poverty, or sexual orientation groups, from school to school (Bogotch, 2002). As a result, principals who consider themselves socially just must continue to examine potential blindspots with respect to marginalization or inequities within their school community. Some researchers, such as Galloway and Ishimaru (2020), have explored other theoretical frameworks in an attempt to better address this void.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Defining Equity-Based Instructional Leadership***

The definition of Galloway and Ishimaru (2015, 2017, 2020) regarding equity-based instructional leadership served as the theoretical framework for the present study. Equity-based instructional leadership is the intentional focus by parents, teachers, principals, and district leaders (such as principal supervisors and superintendents) on “the assurance of excellence, equity, and a quality learning experience for every child, in every classroom, every day in order to close achievement (and opportunity) gap(s)” (Rimmer, 2016, p. 94). Galloway and Ishimaru (2015) developed 10 standards of equity-based instructional leadership to explore how that district leaders can address achievement gaps (see Appendix C).

To ensure the success of school reform, Galloway and Ishimaru (2017) urged school leaders to use these standards to guide professional development and serve as a trigger for conversations and transformative actions at all levels. Galloway and Ishimaru added, “Without such changes, colorblind educational policies and practices can continue to appear neutral or even laudable as written yet do not address the education debt owed to nondominant students” (p. 23). Transformative work is required at the district level vis-à-vis principal supervisors to support systemwide change (Honig & Rainey, 2019). The researcher intended to use these standards as the foundation of the present study to explore the views of principal supervisors from southeastern Pennsylvania on the new national standards of equity-based instructional leadership and how they can be used to improve teaching and learning for all students.

Researchers have attributed the origins of equity-based instructional leadership to culturally responsive and socially just theories of leadership (Galloway & Ishimaru,

2015; Rigby et al., 2019; Starr, 2019). Educational leaders must be aware of the distinctions between culturally responsive theoretical frameworks and socially just theoretical approaches. For example, under culturally responsive theoretical frameworks, educators must consider the political context, pedagogical approach, the students' personal journey, and educators' professional duty with respect to the communities they serve (Horsford et al., 2011). However, under socially just theoretical frameworks, educators must consider their role as actors in the pursuit of social justice alongside the communities that they serve (Byrne-Jimenez & Orr, 2013). Equity-based instructional leadership continues this line of thought by examining not only the social, cultural, and political approaches that are foundational to a culturally responsive framework, but also the structural and technical processes underlying the quality of instruction, the culture of learning, and distribution and redistribution of resources (Rimmer, 2016). Principal supervisors are vital to ensuring equity for students in each of these areas (Brown et al., 2011; Petty, 2015; Rigby, 2014).

### ***Positive Outcomes of Equity-Based Instructional Leadership***

Research has suggested that equity-based instructional leadership provides several positive outcomes for students, including student achievement for diverse learners in the K-12 educational process (Santamaría, 2012; Tooms & Boske, 2010), positive school climate and culture (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Turan & Bektas, 2013; Wahlstrom et al., 2010), increased job satisfaction for staff (Deal & Peterson, 2009), and reduction in staff turnover (Turan & Bektas, 2013). The body of research related to the positive outcomes of equity-based instructional leadership provides insight into the ways that principals at the school level address educational equity. Based on this review of the existing literature, an examination of the role of principal supervisors who work across schools to

address educational equity is needed.

### **Equity-Based Instructional Leadership and Principal Supervisors**

Effective equity-based instructional leadership requires principal supervisors to take “a teaching and learning stance” through regular classroom visits, organizing principals’ learning, and “modelling for principals how to think and act like an instructional leader” (Honig & Rainey, 2020a, p. 56). However, in several districts, principal supervisors experienced barriers from various central office departments that hindered their ability to fulfill these functions (Honig & Rainey, 2020a). These barriers included serving as compliance monitors, evaluators, heads of operations, and Chromebook distributors (Corcoran et al., 2013; Honig & Rainey, 2020a). This finding led Honig and Rainey (2020a) to suggest, “The pandemic and protests of the past several months have shone an especially bright light on persistent inequities in our public-school systems and generated a broad consensus that school districts must not return to business as usual” (p. 54). This spotlight has come as a result of considering the lack of access by students and families in marginalized communities to technology and affordable internet as well as policing and anticrime strategies that may negatively impact those same communities (DeMatthews, 2015; Honig & Rainey, 2020a, 2020b). Considering this view, revisiting the national standards for equity-based instructional leadership in the context of principal supervisors is appropriate (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2020).

### ***Self-Reflection and Opportunities for Growth Toward Equity***

Educational leaders with an orientation towards equity engage in self-reflection and consider opportunities for growth toward equity (Brown, 2004). In doing so, they consider critical concepts of power, privilege, and oppressive acts within not only the organization generally but also within each education leader. For education leaders, it is

important that leaders ask, “Who am I serving and why? Who have I excluded or included by my actions or words, and in what ways?” For principals, this may mean considering equal access of families of English language learners or the implementation of coteaching for students with disabilities (Theoharis, 2007). For principal supervisors, this might mean ensuring that a critical lens is applied to how principal supervisors operate in connection with students, families, principals, and other district-level staff. As principal supervisors engage in self-reflection regarding equity, they can begin to seek ways to support district-wide implementation toward equitable practices and help build this capacity within others.

Educational leaders can add quality and depth to their reflections by implementing specific strategies to their reflection and critical inquiry process (Brown, 2004). Brown (2004) suggested several strategies to support the self-reflection for educators and other adult leaders: “(a) complete cultural autobiographies; (b) engage in life history interviews; (c) participate in prejudice-reduction workshops; and (d) write in reflective analysis journals engage in self-directed, experiential learning” (p. 81).

Educational leaders can improve their ability to identify assumptions, understand multiple perspectives, and to expand their worldview, which has the potential to bring change within the organization (Brock et al., 2017; Brown, 2004).

### ***Developing Organizational Leadership for Equity***

Educational leaders engage in organizational leadership to promote equity by helping other members of the organization develop their understanding of and capacity for creating an equitable learning environment for all students. According to Rigby and Tredway (2015), principals must first examine the multiracial, multicultural, and class identities that often influence the ways they intersect with a multitude of different people

(Page, 2007). Education leaders must understand the culture and history of the communities that they serve. This knowledge of history includes popular culture, youth culture, relationships between stakeholders, and potential sources of historical tension among stakeholders within the community where the school is situated (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Educational leaders must be willing to facilitate conversations within schools and address systemic barriers based on an understanding how issues related to equity can be magnified by traditional structures and policies within schools and classrooms (Byrne-Jimenez & Orr, 2013; Gooden & Dantley, 2012). Educator leaders must address inequities both at the macro-level (central office) and micro-level (schools and classrooms).

### ***Constructing and Enacting an Equity Vision***

Educational leaders with an orientation towards equity develop a shared vision for equity and articulate the vision in a way that provides meaning and illustrates what excellence looks like in each classroom (May & Supovitz, 2011; Neumerski, 2013). It is critical that the vision is based on data and reflects a picture of excellence with measurable goals and clear indicators of success for all students (Marzano, 2003; Senge, 2006). For principals, this means constructing a vision that principal supervisors must be committed to equity-based instructional leadership and develop a consistent vision for instruction, a culture of learning, and the distribution of resources. In many districts throughout the United States, principal supervisors are charged with both evaluating and coaching principals (Honig & Rainey, 2019). This coaching role enables principal supervisors and principals to craft and implement a shared vision for high-quality instruction that includes indicators of student learning and the allocation or reallocation of resources (Goldring et al., 2018).

In this vision-setting stage, there is a clear and compelling impetus for discussion and exploration of practices that promote equity. Rigby et al. (2019) termed this the *framing stage*, stating, “Without explicitly framing an aim, individuals are likely to continue their current practices that may or may not be equity-driven and are unlikely to align with the practices of others in the system” (p. 496). The collaborative effort by principals and principal supervisors helps ensure that the leadership promotes equity and that a concurrent system approach effectuates student learning across the trajectory of schools in a district or network (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Rigby et al., 2019).

### ***Supervising for Improvement of Equitable Instruction***

Educational leaders supervise for improvement of equitable instruction by not only being able to identify high quality instruction but also demonstrating the ability to teach teachers how to effectively teach all students (McKenzie et al., 2008). Educational leaders may find this to be a daunting task when considering the diverse composition of many school communities in terms of race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and intellectual identity. This challenge is exacerbated when considering the relatively homogeneous composition of teachers in most schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010). In addition, educational leaders must be “deliberate about organizational structure, for creating proactive systems of support and attention is to significantly diminish the vulnerability of teachers and students to failure” (McKenzie et al., 2008, p. 126). At both the principal and principal supervisor levels, it is important to reexamine programs such as English as Second Language instruction, special education, multitiered system of school supports, and gift-talented programs to determine whether enrolled students are being exposed to rigorous instruction.

Principal supervisors support the development of key indicators of student learning at the district level under the direction of the superintendent (Corcoran et al., 2013; Goldring et al., 2018). Districts face challenges in implementing Common Core State Standards and the impact of these standards on expectations regarding grade-level mastery (Corcoran et al., 2013). Shifts in grade-level expectations are at the heart of the discussion surrounding equity and whether achievement gaps are widening (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). As data reveal continuing issues related to equity, principal supervisors are tasked with supporting principals in managing the allocation or reallocation of resources to increase student learning (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014).

### ***Collaborating With Families and Communities***

Collaborating with families and communities is a critical part of ensuring an equitable environment (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). School leaders must seek to increase family engagement by developing strategies to truly connect with the various stakeholders of the school community and sustain those connections over time (Flores & Kyere, 2020; Rigby et al., 2020). Effective collaboration and partnerships require educational leaders to commit time and effort but, if managed well, can help schools achieve goals more effectively and with fewer resources (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017). Sustainable family engagement is predicated on the goal of a systemic culture of collaboration that is able to grow and evolve as the needs of staff, students, and the community change. Effective principals and principal supervisors develop and maintain meaningful ongoing relationships with parents, families, and community leaders, particularly those from nondominant communities, to engage them in the educational process with the aim of enhancing equity (Ishimaru, 2019). According to Ishimaru (2019), this means “shifting from remediating families and staffing family engagement

positions to cultivating reflective educator practice to fuel collective organizational improvement and leveraging family expertise to foster professional learning and innovations in designing equitable educational environments” (p. 382).

### ***Influencing the Sociopolitical Context***

Educational leaders must influence the sociopolitical context to help organize and manage instruction for excellence and equity (Ishimaru, 2019). According to Peurach et al. (2019), this involves “serving to bridge, buffer, and reconcile many cultural, political, and technical influences bearing on how the district understands and pursues equity” (p. 815). For principal supervisors, this means discussing aspirations and values, federal and state policies, philanthropists’ agendas, and educational research with families and communities (Honig & Hatch, 2004). At the school level, principals work with members of the school community to identify power dynamics as well as systems and structures that help eliminate or reduce marginalization within the school community. At the district level, effective principal supervisors leverage the relationships formed from their sociopolitical work to impact the allocation of resources both at the school and district level (Thessin & Louis, 2019). Equity-focused principal supervisors examine power dynamics at the school level and across schools to determine ways to refocus how those in power use that power to help eliminate or reduce the gap between students who are advantaged and students who are not advantaged. In some districts and school communities, existing power dynamics may necessitate the redistribution of power or resources to promote equitable outcomes for students.

### ***Allocating Resources***

Equity-based instructional leadership involves allocating resources in a manner that helps bridge the gap between students who are advantaged and students who are

disadvantaged. This aspect of leadership requires reallocating existing resources while advocating and acquiring new resources when existing resources are not sufficient to meet the needs of all students. For educational leaders, periodic resource allocation audits can be a helpful tool in this process (Pan et al., 2003). This audit can be accomplished by reviewing student demographic data and conducting an inventory of existing resources such as curricula, technology, and personnel. Leaders could ask questions such as the following: Who are our students? What resources do we have to meet their respective needs? Which students are helped or supported by each of these resources? What are the gaps between the needs of our students and the allocation of our current resources? What additional resources are needed to ensure access and outcomes for all students? The findings of these resource allocation audits have the potential to guide strategic planning by educational leaders.

Equity-based educational leaders work strategically to ensure that resources address equity needs at both the school and district level. At the school level, principals focus the existing resources on the addressing learning gaps within the school community and work with stakeholders to identify additional resources that may be needed to improve access and outcomes for all students. At the district level, principal supervisors help support equity-based instructional leadership by engaging in intentional discussions with principals regarding the allocation of resources and can adjust school budgets to support emerging needs (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). Honig (2008) argued that principal supervisors should lead these important conversations on the rationale for decision-making, adding that principal supervisors may need to model the process of equity-based decision-making for principals using if-then scenarios that consider different student groups to ensure equity for all students. However, research such as that

which informed the development of the Professional Standards for Educators presupposed that principal supervisors had or were developing an awareness of equity-based instructional leadership (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). However, districts differ in the ways and degree to which principal supervisors are directly involved in supporting schools in obtaining and reallocating resources for students (Honig & Rainey, 2020a).

### ***Hiring and Placement of Personnel***

Equity-based instructional leaders strategically influence hiring and placement of staff based on bridging the gap between those students who are advantaged and those who are not advantaged. For principals, a significant variation between their level of input exists across districts and school communities. Some school districts have site-based selection that enables principals and school communities to interview and hire staff, which enables principals to ask interview questions that demonstrate an equity focus. In other school districts, a centrally controlled staffing process occurs, in which new hires are selected from available schools based on existing vacancies and seniority is used for internal staff transfers. Principal supervisors work alongside district leadership and school principals to assist with the recruitment, retention, and promotion of staff with strong equity commitments. In this capacity, principal supervisors also assist in helping principals make equity-based staff placements, such as placing the most skilled teachers with students whose need is greatest (Corcoran et al., 2013). The importance of this role was highlighted by Corcoran et al. (2013), who stated, “There should be a greater connection between the work of principal supervisors and district human-capital and talent-management strategies” (p. 55). In this way, principal supervisors model equity-based decision-making for principals and building leadership. Educational leaders with an equity focus utilize the processes that exist within their district to hire and retain staff

who have an equity focus while advocating for new processes that potentially increase their level of input into the hiring and placement of personnel.

### ***Modeling Ethical and Equitable Behavior***

Equity-based instructional leadership involves modeling ethical and equitable behavior for staff. One way that this characteristic is accomplished through ensuring staff, students, and families have input in the decision-making process in school communities. Additionally, modeling ethical and equitable behavior is accomplished by engaging in discussions with members of the school community that involve transparent review of data, identification of limiting factors or barriers, a systematic review process, and the rationale for change or maintaining the status quo. For principals, diverse cross-stakeholder group think tanks and open leadership team meetings are two potential strategies to help demonstrate equitable behaviors. Principal supervisors demonstrate equity-based instructional leadership by modeling ethical and equitable behavior (Ishimaru, 2019).

Several critical leadership characteristics are foundational for principal supervisors to effectively model ethical and equitable behavior: integrity, advocacy, conviction, transparency, and persistence for pursuing equity (McKim et al., 2019). This means following through on commitments, even in the face of risk, challenges, and resistance, and helping principals show initiative, implement innovative ideas, and take calculated risks (McKim et al., 2019). Educational leaders with focus on equity-based instructional leadership help ensure that members of the school community focus on bridging the gap between students who are advantaged and students who are not disadvantaged.

## **Equitable Teaching and Learning**

The literature regarding educational equity uses terms such as *equitable practices*, *equitable teaching and learning*, *equitable teaching*, and *equitable learning*, at times seeming interchangeably (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). However, some important distinctions between these terms are worth noting. Equitable practices refer to classroom practices that ensure curricula and instruction are culturally relevant to students due to the content and resources (Brenner, 1998). According to Brenner's framework, cultural content reveals the extent activities related to activities operating in local community practices (Brenner, 1998; Moschkovich, 2013). Social organization "takes into account a variety of possible roles, responsibilities, and communication styles and includes multiple and hybrid repertoires of practice" (Moschkovich, 2013, p. 29). Cognitive resources are ways of thinking that are based on previous instruction and thinking used in communities (Moschkovich, 2013). Equitable teaching is the process of instructional planning and delivery that utilizes practices that support both conceptual understanding and discourse as well as broaden participation for students from nondominant communities (Moschkovich, 2013). Equitable learning refers to a process between bridging the learning gap between those who are advantaged and those who are disadvantaged in terms of educational resources (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics, 2012).

Equitable teaching and learning involve the process of instructional planning and delivery that utilizes practices that support conceptual understanding, discourse, and participation from nondominant communities that results in bridging the gap between those that are advantaged and those who are disadvantaged (Moschkovich, 2013; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics, 2012).

In this way, equitable teaching and equitable practices focus on what the teacher does and says in the classroom; equitable learning focuses on what students say and do as a result of the practices employed by teachers; and equitable teaching and learning combine what teachers and students say in do in the classroom to bridge the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students (Moschkovich, 2013; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics, 2012). This study focused on equity-based instructional leadership from the perspectives of principal supervisors in light of these terms.

### **Principal Supervisors as Instructional Leaders**

Principal supervisors are expected to dedicate their time and expertise to helping principals grow as instructional leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015). This focus for principal supervisors requires training for principal supervisors as coaches and mentors to principals, protocols and systems for conducting joint work with principals, and a deep understanding of the organizational climate of the district or larger school system (Baker & Bloom, 2017; Honig, 2012). Principal supervisors are often former principals or directors who were considered effective in improving the climate or student achievement at the school level (Corcoran et al., 2013). However, typically principal supervisors support both low-performing and high-achieving schools (Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). Therefore, training is needed for principal supervisors to as coaches and mentors to principals of schools performing at varying levels (Corcoran et al., 2013).

Additionally, effective principal supervisors engage in joint work with principals by engaging in classroom observations, participating in communities of practice, modeling effective practices for principals, and leading data meetings (Honig, 2012;

Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). Finally, a deep understanding is needed of the organizational climate of the district due the inherently complex nature of school districts and the role of principal supervisors at the school and district levels (Honig, 2012).

Principal supervisors often report being challenged by this dichotomy of their positioning with the organization (Corcoran et al., 2013).

### **Challenges Facing Principal Supervisors in Instructional Leadership**

Principal supervisors are an integral part of most large districts' efforts to support principals and their schools. Whereas smaller school districts may hire principal supervisors dedicated specifically to support and evaluate principals, the practice is more common in larger districts. Commonly, smaller districts (for instance, districts with fewer than 10,000 students) expect superintendents or directors of teaching and learning to support and evaluate principals. As a result, there are significant distinctions and, at times, disparities in the function of principal supervisors across districts (Corcoran et al., 2013).

Despite the distinctions and disparities regarding how principal supervisors function across districts, some common themes emerged based on the literature. Corcoran et al. (2013) found that principal supervisors tend to receive competing messages regarding the intended focus of their positions between instructional and noninstructional tasks. In their study commissioned by the Council of Great City Schools, Corcoran et al. concluded, "While many districts envision a strong and growing instructional leadership role for principal supervisors, in practice supervisors often still handle extensive administrative oversight responsibilities as vestiges of past structures or roles—and with diminished central office resources" (p. 39).

Additionally, research has indicated that, when principal supervisors are asked to

focus on instructional issues, they often believe they lack the training, time, tools, and professional development expertise to effectively support principals and schools (Corcoran et al., 2013; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; Kimball & Milanowski, 2009; Syed, 2014). Even when principal supervisors are able to focus on instructional tasks and have a higher degree of self-efficacy, they often serve as brokers between principals and departments at the central office level (Honig, 2012).

Principal supervisors often function as brokers or middle managers who are considered director-level leaders who report to cabinet-level leaders (Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). For instance, in districts such as Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, principal supervisors report to the chief academic officer; in Denver Public Schools, principal supervisors report to the assistant superintendent for elementary instruction or to the assistant superintendent for postsecondary readiness; a hierarchy and reporting structure exist (Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). As a result of this hierarchy and report structure, principal supervisors provide high-level information about schools, advocate for resources, and represent principals and schools on cross-functioning committees or teams (Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012). Honig and Rainey (2014) cited one cabinet-level member by writing:

The rationale is that they [principal supervisors] have such a large scope of impact in the work. Our work is schools, and they are supervising our schools, and everything that we discuss at the management team level-whether its growth, or financial, or marketing, is about those schools. It doesn't make sense for them not to be a part of the conversation. (p. 453)

Therefore, principal supervisors have the opportunity to influence decisions at the central office level by sharing information about schools including their current resources

as well as their needs, representing principals at cross-functional meetings, and helping to identify new resources for existing or potential external partners to address issues on equity across and within school communities. This role as a broker provides opportunity and promise for principal supervisors in regard to equity-based instructional leadership (Honig, 2012). The present study is intended to add to the body of the research related to the role of principal supervisors as brokers for equity-based instructional leadership.

### **Summary of the Literature**

The literature review began with an examination of the federal legislation that has attempted to address disparities in education. Next, the researcher presented an overview of leadership models appropriate to or designed to address these disparities and resulting inequities. The review included research related to transformational leadership theory, social justice leadership theory, and equity-based instructional leadership. During this review, the emerging body of research in equity-based leadership (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, 2017; Honig & Rainey, 2019; Rigby et al., 2019) was identified and discussed. This literature review examined the origins of equity-based instructional leadership and its connections with theories of culturally responsive and socially just leadership (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Rigby et al., 2019; Starr, 2019). In addition, the standards of equity-based instructional leadership by Galloway and Ishimaru (2015) were presented, and each of these standards was subsequently examined considering the relationship with the role of principal supervisors (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Honig & Rainey, 2019; Rigby et al., 2019). Next, the role of principal supervisors was explored along with common challenges that they face. Finally, the chapter concludes with a description of the distinctions among terms such as *equity practices*, *equitable teaching and learning*, *equitable teaching*, and *equitable learning*. The literature review demonstrated a lack of

research on how principal supervisors perceive equity-based instructional leadership standards and their capacity to promote equitable teaching and learning for all students (Rigby et al., 2019; Thessin & Louis, 2019).

## **Research Questions**

### ***Central Research Question***

Since 2001, educational leaders and researchers have continued to explore how to provide equitable outcomes for students. During the mid-2010s, several large urban school districts reexamined the role of principal supervisors in improving the academic achievement of students (Corcoran et al., 2013). This reexamination led to changes in the functions and responsibilities of principal supervisors in an attempt to provide improved outcomes for students. In 2015, Galloway and Ishimaru introduced equity-based instructional leadership standards to provide insight into practices that may lead to equitable outcomes. Research provided by Galloway and Ishimaru in 2015 and Rigby et al. (2019), as well as principles of social justice leadership theory and equity-based instructional leadership, supported the central research question and research subquestions that guided this study. This study was intended to answer the following research question: How do principal supervisors view the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership and their capacity to promote equitable teaching and learning for all students?

### ***Research Subquestions***

1. What are the perceptions of principal supervisors of the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning?
2. What are some of the specific standards derived from equity-based instructional leadership that principal supervisors identify as areas on which they may need to focus

that may lead to equitable teaching and learning for students?

3. What are some differences in the perceptions of experienced principal supervisors compared to novice principal supervisors regarding how the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership principles may be used to promote equitable teaching?

4. What are some differences in the perceptions of experienced principal supervisors compared to novice principal supervisors regarding the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership with a focus on equitable learning for students?

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Aim of the Study**

Based on the central research question and subquestions, the aim of this qualitative case study was to explore perceptions of the principal supervisors from five districts in the United States regarding their views on national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning for all students. This study contributes to the research community by building on the framework of equitable leadership practice through the lens of the principal supervisors and exploring possible differences related to the experience level of the principal supervisor (Rigby et al., 2019). This study is expected to contribute to the implementation of equitable practices by principal supervisors by identifying and describing some of the specific standards that principal supervisors may need to focus on to lead to equitable teaching and learning for students. The researcher considered both a quantitative and qualitative approach to help accomplish the aim of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Qualitative Research Approach**

The research method chosen for this study was a qualitative descriptive case study. This method helped the researcher explore the perceptions of principal supervisors of the national standards for equity-based instructional leadership. Qualitative research provides the appropriate framework for this study because the primary purpose was to examine personally held beliefs, knowledge, subjective understanding, and perceptions. The researcher was primarily interested in exploring the views of principal supervisors rather than views of the principals whom principal supervisors support. The intention was to contextualize, interpret, and understand participants' perspectives rather than predict, generalize, or find causal explanations (Glesne, 2016; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Creswell

and Creswell (2019) stated that a qualitative approach is appropriate when researchers “want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (p. 45). To hear the voices of principal supervisors and develop an indepth understanding of the case, the researcher proposed a qualitative case study approach involving indepth interviewing. Data sources provided insights into the perceptions of the principal supervisor participants and their experiences with standards for equity-based instructional leadership. Upon determining to take a qualitative approach, the next task for the researcher was to determine which qualitative approach was appropriate given the purpose of the study and the research questions.

For the purposes of this study, each of the five qualitative approaches identified by Creswell and Poth (2018) was considered. A narrative approach was considered but did not represent the depth of principal supervisors’ views related to equity-based instructional leadership that the researcher intends to capture during the course of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). A phenomenological approach was considered as it examines the specific phenomenon to gain an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). A grounded theory approach was not selected because the goal was not to develop a theory in the view of the participants. Also, a grounded theory approach tends to rely more heavily on observations in the real world, and the purpose of the study is not to develop a theory based on the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2019).

An ethnography was considered but not appropriate because the goal is not to describe or interpret a culture-sharing group (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). As a result of these considerations, a case study approach was the most logical fit to the purpose and

research questions established for this study. Creswell and Creswell (2019) defined case study research as follows:

A qualitative research approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (cause) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, indepth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case descriptions and case themes. (p. 96)

This case study was bound in two ways to ensure feasibility. First, the participants were principal supervisors during the 2020-2021 school year. Therefore, their experiences and perceptions were bound by time. Second, the participants were principal supervisors in from five districts in the United States. These districts were bound by a place in that that their respective districts represented schools that had a student population that was greater than 75% eligible for free and reduced-price lunch and from homes characterized by low socioeconomic status backgrounds. The demographics, specifically the socioeconomic status, of the students served by the principal supervisors included in this study may have an impact on findings derived from the case.

The researcher gathered evidence regarding principal supervisors' perceptions of the standards for equity-based instructional leadership, including which standards they tend to focus on consistently. Evidence was gathered through indepth interviews as well as artifacts participants were asked to bring to the interview for discussion. Relevant artifacts provided additional sources of information, as appropriate for a case study, yet the discussion focused on participants' perceptions. Artifacts included district documents, emails, newsletters, leadership projects, improvement plans, or training or meeting agendas. The next section describes the study's sampling methodology in detail.

## **Participants**

Participants in the case study were selected using a criterion-i purposeful sampling approach. According to Patton (2002), criterion-i sampling “can be used to identify cases from standardized questionnaires for indepth follow-up” (p. 280). An invitation letter was sent to principal supervisors from each of the five identified school districts (see Appendix D). The number of recipients of the invitation letter was 18. The letter also served as a sampling instrument for criterion-based sampling, as the letter listed required criteria for participation. The purpose of the selection part of the invitation was to ensure that potential study participants met the following criteria: (a) they served as a principal supervisor in a school district during the 2020-2021 school year, (b) they had served for a minimum of 1 year, and (c) they were willing to participate in the study. The invitation included the study’s informed consent form.

Purposeful sampling was used to identify study participants. Purposeful sampling involves “a purposeful sample that will intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination” (Creswell & Creswell, 2019, p. 148). This step is foundational in conducting qualitative research due to the relatively small sample size that may accompany qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). Principal supervisor email addresses were publicly available. A recruitment email was sent to each principal supervisor with an informed consent form. Potential respondents were informed of the confidentiality of their identities; all research materials were coded with a participant number rather than name. Participants were able to withdraw from the voluntary study at any time without repercussion.

## **Data-Collection Tools**

To develop procedures for conducting extensive data collection drawing on

multiple data sources, Yin (2018) recommended up to six types of data collection tools: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. Multiple data sources are an integral part of the case research design process in that they enable the research to describe the case in detail including “investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (VanWynsberghe & Khan, 2007, p. 83). Yin established the recommended types of data-collection tools that should be included in qualitative research but did not expressly specify a minimal number for inclusion.

### ***Semistructured Principal Supervisor Interviews***

Following informed consent, the discussion at the initial, virtual interview were the center on the principal supervisors’ views on equitable teaching and learning. The interview protocol is presented in Appendix E. Participants were asked to bring artifacts relevant to equity-based instructional leadership to the interview; these could include district documents, emails, newsletters, leadership projects, improvement plans, or training or meeting agendas. Prior to the interview, the researcher shared with interviewees the standards of equity-based instructional leadership developed by Galloway and Ishimaru (2015). The researcher structured the interview protocol to align with the research subquestions (see Appendix F).

### ***Physical Artifacts***

The researcher collected artifacts from participants, which could include meeting agendas, meeting documentation, e-mails, newsletters, and leadership projects. These artifacts were discussed during interviews conducted by the researcher as supplemental evidence. The researcher used a case study protocol (Yin, 2009, 2018) to increase the reliability of this research. A case study protocol (see Appendix G) is a formal document

capturing the entire set of procedures involved in the collection of material to be used in the case study (Yin, 2009, 2018). Yin (2009) recommended case researchers document their procedures “to make as many steps as operational as possible and to conduct research as if someone were always looking over your shoulder” (p. 45).

In an attempt to operationalize his steps, the researcher followed the guidance provided by Yin (2009, 2018) in two ways. First, the researcher created a case study protocol to (a) provide an overview of the study, (b) detail field procedures, and (c) outline the case study report. Second, the researcher maintained a case study database that includes transcribed interviews, field notes, assorted relevant documents, artifacts, my methodological and analytical memos, and the case study protocol. The case study database served as an evidentiary source for persons wishing to review the evidence directly or replicate this study.

### **Procedures**

In the first (or pilot) phase, two principal supervisors participated in a pilot interview before the researcher conducted any actual interviews. Yin (2011) explained that pilot interviews help a researcher test and refine the study design and data collection instruments. During the pilot phase, the researcher wrote memos to self and journal entries to capture any potential important information that could have impact on the study. Time was allotted to review the instruments following the pilot. Patterns were detected during the pilot interview; participant were asked about having any thoughts regarding emerging themes to advance understanding of the strategies for analysis and fill in any gaps (Merriam, 2009).

Prior to any data collection, Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board approval was obtained. For recruitment, the researcher contacted potential

participants from the five districts via email. The recruitment email included an approved information sheet and consent form. Recipients were asked to electronically sign the consent form prior to participating in the study. Study participants were purposefully sampled who (a) served as a principal supervisor in one of the five school districts selected from the U.S. school districts during the 2020-2021 school year, (b) had served for a minimum of 1 year, and (c) were willing to participate in the study.

Semistructured interviews were conducted with principal supervisors based on their availability and interest in doing so. The purpose of interviews was to understand the values of each principal supervisor related to equity, vision for equity-based instructional leadership, perception of each of the standards for equity-based instruction leadership, which standards the principal supervisors tend to focus on, and potential reasons for their focus. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for indepth analysis.

Prior to the interviews, participants were asked to provide any artifacts regarding their work in equity-based instructional leadership. During the interviews, participants were asked to provide insight about their artifacts: (a) what led them to identify that particular artifacts as one for equity-based instructional leadership, (b) what was taken place in their district or community of schools that prompted the creation of the artifact, and (c) how the artifacts were used to support their leadership in school. Upon conclusion of the interviews, artifacts were analyzed to identify potential alignment between the data source and the research questions (Belotto, 2018).

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected, predominantly from semistructured interviews but also including artifacts, were analyzed qualitatively (Miles et al., 2019; Saldaña, 2016). Semistructured interviews were transcribed by a third-party vendor. Completed

transcripts were reviewed, edited for mistakes, and downloaded. First-round coding was provisional, based on a priori codes that correspond to the equitable leadership standards. NVivo software was used to facilitate coding, annotating, and organizing the deidentified data and analysis material. A second round of coding was completed using concepts from social justice leadership to inform the coding process (Saldaña, 2016). Concepts from transformational leadership, social justice leadership, and equity-based instructional leadership were used to inform the code book (Saldaña, 2016). Additionally, during the second round, in vivo codes was used, based on the interviewees' exact words (Saldaña, 2016).

Data displays were used to organize emergent themes (Miles et al., 2019). The same process was applied to field observations. The researcher took notes during the observation and wrote a written reflection following the observation. The notes and reflections were analyzed for concepts that emerge to inform themes (Miles et al., 2019). Concepts were used from transformational leadership, social justice leadership, and equity-based instructional leadership to inform the second round of coding of field observations. Similarly, artifacts were examined for patterns and emergent themes. Codes from the codebook were applied and memos written about emergent themes. These data were used to triangulate emergent themes (Saldaña, 2016).

Following the analysis of the interviews, artifacts, and observations, results were shared with the principal supervisors to check for accuracy and validation, in a process called member checking (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). Principal supervisors were asked to provide any additional reflections that they may have as a result of their initial review of the data and overall participation in the study. Revisions to the coding and included content resulted from these discussions.

After sharing the results with principal supervisors, a case-ordered display was created to facilitate a deeper understanding of the perceptions of the principal supervisors (Miles et al., 2019). The display provided insight into the perceptions of the standards across the districts and related to years of experience. The findings from the analysis were used to answer Research Subquestions 3 and 4 related to any differences based on principal supervisors' experience.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to any data collection. Participants were assured of efforts to provide confidentiality; no personally identifying information or names was included in the dissertation report. All study materials were labeled with a participant number rather than name. Recordings, transcripts, and other data would be stored securely for 3 years after the study and then destroyed. All participants were reminded of the voluntary nature of the study and that they may withdraw at any time without repercussion. They were reminded that the study was entirely for the researcher's doctoral research and would not affect their professional situation. The researcher was not a supervisor of any potential respondents.

### **Trustworthiness**

Use of a semistructured protocol ensured each respondent was asked the same interview questions. Additionally, participants were supplied with a draft write-up of findings for review and comment; member checking helped improve accuracy (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). Using interviews from principal supervisors from five districts and collecting artifacts helped triangulate the data. Detailed description of procedures acted as an audit trail so other researchers may replicate this study.

### **Potential Research Bias**

Merriam (2009) recommended that investigators explain their biases and assumptions regarding the research being undertaken. Yin (2011) stated, “Reflexivity is the process of describing as best as possible the interactive effects between researcher and participants, including social roles as they evolve in the field, but also covering advocacy positions” (p. 43). As an educator and aspiring principal supervisor, the researcher has a great deal of passion for leadership development. Additionally, the researcher worked with the charter school organization included in this study and held familiarity with the people who served in these roles.

As a result of potential bias, the researcher made deliberate efforts to maintain an open mind and work toward bracketing my thoughts in order to capture the themes and patterns expressed by participants in the data. The researcher used reflexivity to reflect and recognize the influences that could contribute to bias and to disclose them appropriately. Bias was mitigated by member checking or asking each interviewee to read the initial analysis of the data’s patterns and themes to check for accuracy in the presentation of the findings (Merriam, 2009). With these considerations in mind, the researcher assumed the participants provided information honestly and sincerely.

### **Summary**

This qualitative case study approach was selected to provide an indepth descriptive process to add to the existing body of knowledge on perceptions of principal supervisors of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to more equitable teaching and learning for students. Subsequently, in Chapter 4, data analysis and the research findings were presented. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of findings, including conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of principal supervisors from five districts in the United States regarding their views on national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning for all students (Rigby et al., 2019). Specifically, this study was intended to answer the following research question: How do principal supervisors view the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership and their capacity to promote equitable teaching and learning for all students? Four research subquestions were developed to gather additional data regarding the perceptions of principal supervisors and potential differences among principal supervisors:

1. What are the perceptions of principal supervisors of the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning?
2. What are some of the specific standards derived from equity-based instructional leadership that principal supervisors identify as areas that they may need to focus that may lead to equitable teaching and learning for students?
3. What are some differences in the perceptions of experienced principal supervisors compared to novice principal supervisors regarding how the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership may be used to promote equitable teaching?
4. What are some differences in the perceptions of experienced principal supervisors compared to novice principal supervisors regarding the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership with a focus on equitable learning for students?

To answer these questions, the researcher conducted semistructured interviews of

five principal supervisors from school districts in the northeastern, southwestern, and southern regions of the United States to examine their perceptions of the standards of equity-based instructional leadership and submitted artifacts related to equity-based instructional leadership from their respective districts. The standards of equity-based instructional leadership were used as a guide for the reflective perception of the principal supervisors. This chapter briefly describes the information regarding the backgrounds, experiences, and districts for the principal supervisors who participated in the study. Next, the findings of each research question and corresponding themes that emerged are presented here with extensive quotations from the principal supervisors.

### **Principal Supervisors' Backgrounds, Experiences, and Types of Districts**

Five principal supervisors from districts in Florida, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Vermont participated in this study. They included a superintendent, assistant superintendents, and a regional director. The participants served in the role as a principal supervisor for anywhere from 1 year to 15 years, and each participant previously served as a principal (see Appendix H). Principal supervisors were selected from a pool of candidates who met the following criteria for inclusion: (a) they served as a principal supervisor in a school district in the United States during the 2020-2021 school year, (b) they had served for a minimum of 1 year, and (c) they were willing to participate in the study.

The principal supervisors all agreed to share their experiences and perceptions about the standards for equity-based instructional leadership this study. The interviews took place electronically via Zoom; interviews were transcribed and returned to interviewees for member checking. Following the conclusion of each interview, the researcher completed analytic memos to apply a priori codes. Upon completion of all the

interviews, the researcher began to sift through the data for code connections and themes. Each interviewee was identified only as a principal supervisor with a number assigned by the researcher. Themes identified from codes and statements of the principal supervisors about the equity-based instructional leadership standards that answered the research questions are presented as corresponding to the question.

## **Presentation of Findings**

### ***Theme 1***

**Discussion of Theme 1.** Principal supervisors have limited prior awareness of but positive perceptions of standards for equity-based instructional leadership. The theme of the perceptions of principal supervisors regarding the Standards for Equity-Based Instructional Leadership was consistent in that none of the principal supervisors were familiar with the standards prior to the interviews. However, they were familiar with the themes and expectations of the standards even if they did not know them as the Standards for Equity-Based Instructional Leadership. Their responses to this question led the researcher to determine that their perceptions of the standards were overall positive, despite at different stages of implementation in each of their respective districts.

PS1, with more than 20 years of experience in education and 3 years as a principal supervisor, perceived that the standards as useful as guiding principles for an organization and reflected on the importance of viewing the standards through the lens of the district's strategic plan. PS1 spoke about the opportunities offered by the standards:

When I hear that, I think about opportunities. And so when I hear that, I think that it's important to put everything on the table as it relates to opportunity. And again, always go back to a strategic plan because every great leader needs to have a strategic plan of how they're going to meet those goals.

This principal supervisor sees the standards as a part of the larger picture within the district or organization that must have a shared understanding of equity and how to apply the standards to promote equitable education for students. He continued:

And so when we're talking about equitable education, first of all, we need to survey the people that are within that educational environment and ask us, do we even know what equitable education looks like or mean? Are these buzzwords, you know, some school districts this year, are changing all their terminology around discipline. And they're doing that to fit in buzzword acceptance, or the, you know, political terminology that needs to be used, so are they going to really dig deep around what equitable climates look like for black and brown children.

According to this principal supervisor, organizations or district help establish the priority or focus for central administrators and building leaders through internal discussions, professional development, and ongoing communications with leaders.

The principal supervisor shared his belief that there are opportunities through the standards to look at the district's strategic plan to have a conducive learning environment but added:

I want to go a step further, which for me is to have some level of mentorship or socio-emotional learning for students in order to meet them at the area of trauma, meet them at their area of dealing with not having the prerequisite skills that they need to be successful in the classroom and changing the paradigms of the teachers that teach them.

At this point, the researcher noted that the visible frustration of the principal supervisor with the level of implementation of the standards compared to the opportunities offered by the standards. More detail about some factors contributing to this

frustration will be discussed in a later theme as the focus of this theme is related to the perception of principal supervisors of the standards. PS1 has a positive perception of the Standards for Equity-based Instructional Leadership while remaining frustrated by the level of their implementation in districts across the country.

PS2, with more than 27 years of experience as an educator, two of those as a principal supervisor, saw the standards as beneficial to helping principal supervisors function effectively in their role. PS2 stated that the standards “included all of the components that a leader needs to consider being because of all things that a great leader contends with, has to resolve, and consider on a daily basis.” PS2 discussed a sense of hope in the potential for positive outcomes based on recent discussions with the principal supervisor’s district. The researcher noted that this sense of hope was conveyed in PS2’s tone of voice and words as PS2 stated:

There's definitely a lot of the conversation in education now, basically culturally responsive classrooms, culturally responsive schools. In (my district), that is one of their focuses and it's one of the focuses of the school board as well in terms of having racial equity and imbalance in schools and in delivery of instruction so in terms of teaching, I know for the (my district), that is something that is a part of the curriculum design, how professional development is conducted and how schools and classrooms are instructionally led and even with, like I said, the creation of the curriculum. It's just making sure that things are equitable across classrooms and being culturally responsive and culturally respectful to all cultures. So it's thinking, building, and having teachers teach with those things in mind but not at, at the point where you're singling people out. It's just naturally embedded into what we do and it's being more strategic and thoughtful about it

and how do we make sure that that equity is happening in the classrooms and it's a constant conversation, it's a constant check and then involving various levels of stakeholders, so sure that those things are happening.

The researcher noted in an analytic memo of the interview that principal supervisor discussed the importance of “equitable differentiation” in making sure the standards are realized at the classroom level. PS2 defined equitable differentiation as “providing resources according to the needs of each person and treating everyone in a way that they need to feel like a human by giving support and time based on need.” The researcher noted the emphasis on a humanistic approach to leadership in order to generate outcomes for students and teachers.

PS3, with more than 21 years of experience as an educator, one as a principal supervisor, saw the standards as beneficial but quickly addressed implementation at a practical and concrete level. PS3 addressed issues related to the practice and concrete level by stating the following:

Well, they all sound really good. They all sound good. I think the question is, how do you feel it? And how do you know when you're doing it? I mean, I think like engaging in self-reflection and growth, I think that's it for equity. I love that. But when? What does that look like? How do you know when you're doing it? Do you set it? Is it setting, it could be in your Outlook calendar or Google Calendar 20 minutes every day to reflect upon the day and say, Hey, what did I do for equity? And what is equity? That's the other piece is that coming up with a common definition of equity. It's interesting, as principal supervisor, I had six principals. And each principal has a little bit of a different version of what they think equity is, and they'll be I am an equity, I'm fighting and you're sitting, you walk into a

building, and you're like, this doesn't look equitable; you got some kids here and some kids here. I remember, I worked with some vice principals in a district in Connecticut, and they're all about equity. And they said all the things and then you walked in, and you found out that like 20% of the kids in special-ed were being placed into a self-contained classrooms, I'm like, shouldn't we have a co-teaching model? What about inclusion? Oh, yeah, we don't want to do that, because the kids can't do it. And I'm like, that doesn't seem equity, that seems kind of like, there's a belief system there that kids can't do it. So I think these 10 standards here are really good if they're accompanied by some examples or what they would be.

It should be stated Galloway and Ishamiru (2015) provided concrete examples and descriptions of each of the Standards for Equity-Based Instructional Leadership in their research. These examples were not part of the interview protocol as not to overly influence the responses of the participants. The response provided by PS3 indicated a positive perception of the standards despite not receiving a detailed descriptions or examples of each standard. This positive perception was referenced in PS3's comments about potential outcomes. PS3 also stated:

Positive outcomes, I think we improve student achievement. And I think we get more children opportunities, we start addressing that opportunity gap. It's no longer about where you're born, where you're raised, or what the color of your skin is, or if you're rich or poor, it doesn't -- I think we start trying to take that out of it and giving everyone the promise of actually having access to that American dream, is where I think that if you're going to implement those 10, of course it'd be nice to know, as a principal supervisor, it would be nice to know how am I

being rated on this? Is there a rating scale for implementing these? I mean, allocating resources, what does that look like equitably? Are we doing performance-based budgeting? Are we structuring it around something like that? What does that look like?

PS4, with more than 20 years of experience as an educator and 5 years as a principal supervisor, was also unfamiliar with the standards as evidenced by the principal supervisor's initial response: "So I've never seen it before. Where did that come from? Is this something out of...I've never seen it before." According to PS4, like the other participants, expressed a positive view of the standards and their ability to help "move the need for student achievement." The lack of awareness of the standards for equity-based instructional leadership did not impact the perceptions of PS4.

Similarly, PS5 did not have prior knowledge of the standards for equity-based instructional leadership but made connections to standards for educational leadership with their state. PS5 who has more than twenty years as an educator and fifteen years as a principal supervisor, made an almost immediate connection with the state standards for leadership and their importance on learning at the student level. PS 5 stated:

They are similar to some of the (state) School Leadership standards. They add equity to it, which might be a little different but -- self-reflection organization, I think we do that in different ways. I think we've been all forced to look at equity over recent times which is great because we never want any of our students to feel marginalized or segregated from learning.

PS5 cited the potential positive outcomes that can be achieved at the student or classroom level by drawing a connection between the standards for leadership and kindergarten to Grade 12 state content standards. This was evidence when PS5 stated the

following:

The positive results would see that no matter their background that they have the equitable instruction in all core content areas and a high student engagement, you have highly effective teachers teaching those resources and you have the right resources in the hands for teachers to use for students so that the resources are on grade level or higher so that all students can meet the required standards for each subject.

In a manner similar to the previous four principal supervisors, PS5 had a positive perception despite a lack of prior knowledge.

**Summary of Theme 1.** The data disclosed that none of the five principal supervisors had direct knowledge of the Standards for Equity-Based Instructional Leadership; however, each of the five principal supervisors had positive perceptions of the Standards for Equity-Based Instructional Leadership. The principal supervisors identified potential positive outcomes in areas such as student achievement, school climate, and leader effectiveness. Therefore, Theme 1 (Principal supervisors have limited prior awareness of but positive perceptions of standards for equity-based instructional leadership) captured a common theme based on the data.

### ***Theme 2***

**Discussion of Theme 2.** Principal supervisors tend to focus on different standards. Principal supervisors were asked which standards they tend to prioritize in their role and to give some ways that the standards are evidence in their work. Their responses, as shown in Appendix I, indicated that different principal supervisors tend to focus on different standards. However, despite the tendency to focus on different standards, each principal supervisor was able to identify ways that the standards are

evident in their role. This section highlights responses from principal supervisors regarding the standards that they tend to focus on and ways that the standards are evident in their role.

PS1 shared some of the following ways that the standards for equity-based instructional leadership are evident in his leadership practices:

1. Look at strategic plans and how schools will help meet goals for English-language arts, math, and climate.
2. Attend conference of Black educators (professional development) of how schools receive funds and use funds for targeted groups of students.
3. Transformational leadership style.
4. Strong leadership teams.
5. Empowering people.
6. Privilege walks in the community.
7. Challenging words used by White educators regarding disciplinary infractions (i.e., assault).
8. Challenging the status quo.
9. Communication: Open-door policy for concerns.
10. District-wide surveys.

These responses centered mostly on practices at the macro or organizational level. However, PS1 also expressed the importance of ensuring that practices impact the individual school and that “everything principal supervisors do must be in serve to schools, principals, and teachers.”

PS2 indicated a focus on Standards 1, 4, 5, 9, and 10. Principal supervisor gave examples of ways that these standards are evident in her work by stating the following:

In my one-on-one meetings with principals, as I said, those conversations, not only the one-on-ones, the one-on-ones and even my evaluation conversations with principals inclusive of and the one-on-one, those conversations allowed principals to be self-reflective about their own leadership because self-reflection is super important and critical to me.

These examples provided by PS2 focused mostly on coaching and building interpersonal connections or walks with principals.

PS 3 gave some ways that the standards are evident in his work. Based on his responses, some ways included the following:

1. Aligned level of support and aligned feeder patten-so whatever is happening in elementary is also happening in high school.
2. Ask teachers, “What are we doing to make sure that the student is learning?”
3. Situational leadership.
4. Conducts calibration walks.
5. Conversation different with each principal.
6. Has to be differentiated and situational.
7. Having principals have voice in the vision setting-walking and talking.
8. Department of Equity and Excellence: restorative practice, pushing respect agreements, well-being, and social-emotional learning embedded in the curriculum.
9. Every conversation is about equity.
10. Looking at who are our most marginalized students and make sure we improve their student outcomes as well; very intentional.
11. Honest conversations with people when we see inequitable practices to call to people’s attention and be bold.

These examples provided by PS3 focused mostly on instructional leadership and coherency within the organization. PS3 indicated that there are a variety of ways that principal supervisors can demonstrate “instructional leadership with an equity focus when they have the time and ability to focus on what’s important.”

PS4 took a more esoteric approach to discussing ways that the standards are evident in his work as a principal supervisor. He stated the following:

Okay. So I think that it's really about, it is going to come down to two things. Organizational doing and active listening. So one of the things I learned being superintendent principal is you got to the level of being a superintendent, or got to a level being a principal supervisor, because you know how to do the work, you know how to do it.

This principal supervisor expressed frustration given the constraints that districts and charter networks place on principal supervisors in terms of time, competing priorities, and micromanagement because of the respect for the work of principals and teachers and the need to support the work that they do. This was evident as PS5 expressed a situational component to deciding which standard to focus on based on the time of the year. For example, PS5 said the following:

I would say four and five are probably the biggest focus. Depending on the season of the year, it would be eight and nine that which would most likely come towards the end of the school year, May June-ish. Ethical and equitable behavior, I think that's constant and we talk about that all the time and I encourage number one frequently. During our sessions monthly, we have a lot of time for self-reflection and growth. And because we're working on making sure resources and student engagement and equity of instruction is there, we do have questions on how we

can get our leaders to ensure that teachers are teaching with those standards in mind and those expectations in mind.

PS5 recognized the need to focus on aligning the work with needs of their principals, schools, and the overall goals of the organization.

**Summary of Theme 2.** Although different principal supervisors tend to focus on different standards, based on their responses, Standards 4, 5, and 10 were the standards focused on by most of the principal supervisors. Also, each principal supervisor was able to cite ways that the standards are evident in their work despite identifying different standards that they tend to focus on in their role.

### ***Theme 3***

**Discussion of Theme 3.** Principal supervisors face both external and internal challenges when enacting standards for equity-based instructional leadership. Principal supervisors face challenges from external sources as well as within their organizations or districts when enacting standards for equity-based instructional leadership. It should be noted that principal supervisors were not directly asked this question as a part of the interview protocol but it emerged as a theme based on participant responses to questions used as a part of the protocol. This section includes the analysis of ways that this theme emerged during the interview process.

PS1 addressed internal challenges such as a lack of organizational vision towards equity based instructional leadership as well as external challenges such as pervasive systemic racism in the design and fabric of school systems. Regarding the internal challenges, he expressed frustration with the lack of alignment of his personal mission towards equity specifically for black and brown students with the “organization’s lack of urgency in addressing equity.” He added that he questions the design of educational

systems and their ability within existing structures to address inequity and bring about equitable practices in schools. Therefore, he indicated that it was his personal responsibility and that of every principal supervisor to help facilitate equitable teaching and learning using equity-based instructional standards as a resource regardless of the organization's focus.

PS2 discussed internal challenges such as a lack of organizational focus regarding equitable teaching and learning. In her discussion about this topic, she attributed this to the fact "that there weren't big pockets of racial inequities." Therefore, it was difficult at the principal supervisor level to help the organization develop and promote a shared vision towards equity and achievement. According to PS2, the lack of organizational focus combined with chronic teacher turnover made it difficult for principal supervisors and the organization to focus on "persistent underachievement" and "learning gaps" among students.

PS3 cited challenges with balancing being a risk taker as articulated by a presenter he once heard who said, "If you're not doing this work where you're afraid to lose your job, you really aren't doing the work" with his reality that "losing a job is real and everyone's got bills to pay." He did not cite any source of pressure within the organization that contributed to this concern but indicated the need to influence the sociopolitical context "within your locus of control." This principal supervisor categorized himself as "a little reserved" when enacting some of the equity-based instructional leadership standards because of this challenge.

PS4 cited organizational will as an internal challenge to enacting equity-based instructional leadership standards. In his response, PS4 described experiences with the district providing services to English-language learners and what he described as

reminiscent of the “Civil Rights Movement by not wanting to allow students to attend school because of language and immigration status.” As he explained, the issue was not truly about the immigration status of the student or xenophobia, but rather about a willingness to align the curriculum to meet the needs of diverse learners and allocate the funding and resources that are required. According to PS4, “We know how to improve scholars that are not doing well, but it’s political and (uncomfortable).” PS4 stated that, when he began in the role, his initial assumption was that the organizational will was present; however, he quickly learned that organizational will was a bigger factor compared to his skills and experience as a principal supervisor. By the end of his first year as a principal supervisor, he determined that risk involved in ensuring equitable teaching and learning was greater than the school community was prepared to take.

PS5 discussed the challenges principal supervisors have with difficult conversations with staff regarding instructional practices. She asked and answered a pivotal question regarding this challenge: “Why are we afraid to have those conversations? We never want to hurt anyone because they are doing a monumental task.” She added that it is important to visit classrooms as well as having conversations with teachers and principals to understand their decision-making process. She described a tendency among teachers to think that everyone teaches like them but that conversations can help expand teachers’ view of what is possible in the classroom. To illustrate this point, PS5 described an experience when she visited classrooms with the principal of one of her schools. She stated that she noticed that students were not receiving materials on grade level. She noticed that it was a trend in the school and asked some of the teachers about it during subsequent conversations. According to PS5, one of the teachers stated that the students were unable to complete the work at grade level and that she felt bad for

them. PS5 described letting the teacher know that, with support and her expertise, her students will rise to the level of her expectations and have the teacher a gentle challenge for the teacher to “just try it and see what happens.” PS5 indicated that the teacher came back some time later and said that she began giving them grade-level work and seeing that, although some students struggled initially, they began to master grade-level material.

**Summary of Theme 3.** The third theme (Principal supervisors face both external and internal challenges when enacting standards for equity-based instructional leadership) emerged as principal supervisors were asked questions about which standards they tend to focus on and which standards they may need to on during this study. Some of the challenges identified included “lack of organizational focus,” “organizational vision,” “systemic racism,” organizational will,” professional balance of risk-taking with fear of losing one’s job, and apprehension towards “having difficult conversations.” Although there were no challenges cited by the principal supervisors, they were able to identify challenges that impact their work in enacting equity-based instructional leadership standards.

### **Summary**

This study sought to explore the perceptions of the principal supervisors from five districts in the United States regarding their views on national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning for all students. Five principal supervisors from district or charter schools were interviewed over the course of 4 months to gain their perceptions of the standards and explore differences between novice and veteran principal supervisors regarding their perception of the standards. After rigorous analysis of the data, which included a priori and emergent

coding, three themes emerged:

1. Principal supervisors have limited prior awareness of but positive perceptions of standards for equity-based instructional leadership.

2. Principal supervisors tend to focus on different standards for equity based instructional leadership.

3. Principal supervisors face both external and internal challenges when enacting standards for equity-based instructional leadership.

Quotes from the participants and results of the data analysis from the artifact review were embedded in the findings section of this study. In Chapter 5, the researcher examines these findings through the lens of this study's research questions, as they relate to previous research. Chapter 5 also provides implications for policy and practice as they relate to principal supervisors, district or organizational leaders, and policy makers. Finally, the chapter provides insight as to the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Introduction

This chapter summarizes this study's findings related to the central research question and four research subquestions, presents recommendations to educators and policy makers, and identifies opportunities for future research. This study sought to explore perceptions of principal supervisors from five districts in the United States regarding their views on the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning for all students. The researcher sought to gain insight into which standards principal supervisors tend to focus on in their practices. An additional purpose of this study was to identify potential differences in the perceptions of novice principal supervisors compared to veteran principal supervisors. The researcher used a qualitative case study research design to hear the voices of principal supervisors and develop an indepth understanding of the then-current efforts to provide equitable teaching and learning to districts or charter networks in which they work (Creswell & Creswell, 2019).

This chapter interprets the findings from indepth interviews conducted with principal supervisors as they described their perceptions of the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning for all students. The interviews were used to provide information on their current position, philosophy of education that grounds their work, professional development they have received, leadership style, views of national standards of equity-based instructional leadership, which standards for equity-based instructional leadership they tend to focus on, and which standards for equity-based instructional leadership they may need to focus on more in their work. Through qualitative data analysis, three themes emerged: (a)

principal supervisors have limited prior awareness of but positive perceptions of standards for equity-based instructional leadership, (b) principal supervisors tend to focus on different standards for equity-based instructional leadership, and (c) principal supervisors face both external and internal challenges when enacting standards for equity-based instructional leadership. In the next section, the context under which these themes emerged is revisited.

### **Context**

Second only to teachers, school principals have a significant impact on increasing student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004). School principals accomplish this through establishing and maintaining conditions in schools that foster a positive school culture and lead to teacher growth (Levin et al., 2019). Despite this critical role, the demands and pressures that principals face continue to increase as parents, students, superintendents, and even school boards are calling for greater accountability to improve student-related outcomes (Leithwood et al. 2004; Markow et al., 2013). These increased calls for accountability have occurred during a time of budget challenges due to increased insurance and retirement costs, outdated buildings, and a competitive marketplace for teachers. Principal supervisors serve as the persons tasked with supporting principals in managing and leading schools in the face of these challenges. As a result, in recent years, the work of principal supervisors has become the subject of several studies to better understand their time and how their role impacts the work of principals and ultimately helps schools to become successful. This emerging field of study indicates a positive relationship between principal supervisors and student achievement. Researchers have examined the impact of specific practices and conditions, such as central office supports, span of control, use of time, knowledge of and use of professional standards in daily

work, and job-embedded professional development, on the effectiveness and overall perceptions of principal supervisors (Corcoran et al., 2013; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015; Goldring et al., 2018; Honig & Rainey, 2019). These studies have led to changes not only in the practices of principal supervisors, but also more importantly in the school districts and charter networks that support principal supervisors. Findings indicate that school districts and charter networks benefit when the principal supervisors have an increased instructional focus on their work.

### **Research Focus**

This study sought to explore the perceptions of principal supervisors of the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership. The research used a qualitative case study approach to gather and analyze data from five interviews with leaders serving in the role of principal supervisor. Participants were interviewed using semistructured, open-ended questions that provided them with the opportunity to share their perceptions of and experiences with the national standards for equity-based instructional leadership (Creswell & Creswell, 2019; Yin, 2018). To develop a better understanding of the case, principal supervisors were asked to submit artifacts related to their implementation of the national standards for equity-based instructional leadership.

### **Summary of Findings**

This qualitative case study sought to explore the perceptions of principal supervisors of the national standards for equity-based instructional leadership. Through qualitative data analysis, three themes emerged: (a) principal supervisors have limited prior awareness of but positive perceptions of standards for equity-based instructional leadership, (b) principal supervisors tend to focus on different standards for equity-based instructional leadership, and (c) principal supervisors face both external and internal

challenges when enacting standards for equity-based instructional leadership. In this section, the summary of research findings is discussed, organized by research question. The following central research question was established to guide this applied dissertation: How do principal supervisors view the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership and their capacity to promote equitable teaching and learning for all students? Four research subquestions were developed to support the central research question.

### ***Research Subquestion 1***

What are the perceptions of principal supervisors of the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning? One of the themes that emerged in Chapter 4 was that principal supervisors have limited prior awareness of but positive perceptions of standards for equity-based instructional leadership. This limited awareness of the national standards for equity-based instructional leadership is consistent with national concerns articulated by Honig and Rainey (2014) regarding the lack of knowledge among principal supervisors of “the high-leverage practices and professional development to support them in taking a more intentional teaching approach in their work” (p. 435). However, this lack of knowledge among principal supervisors does not speak to a deficiency or failure on the part of principal supervisors but rather to potential failure on the part of districts and charter networks to provide professional development to principal supervisors regarding standards for equity-based instructional leadership and how to implement them in the varied and complex settings that compose many districts and charter school networks. In fact, all of the principal supervisors who participated in this study were previously successful as principals.

One of the challenges facing principal supervisors who experienced past success

as principals is that they still require training and support for their role (Corcoran et al., 2013). Rogers (2022) and Goldring et al. (2020) drew similar conclusions and acknowledged that few principal supervisors enter the role with specific training on how to do the job effectively. Therefore, districts should incorporate a strong professional-development component specifically for the principal supervisor that includes coaching. By experiencing a systemic and comprehensive approach to professional development and personalized coaching, principal supervisors gain depth of knowledge for leading principals toward making significant transformations in their schools (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015). However, this does not mean that principal supervisors are not provided any professional development for their role but that they are often left to find sources of professional development beyond their district or charter network that may lack alignment or specificity with regards to district or charter network priorities (Honig & Rainey, 2014), such as ensuring equitable teaching and learning for all students.

Principal supervisors who participated in this study were able to describe professional-development opportunities that positively influenced their work as principal supervisors. These professional-development opportunities included conferences, national fellowships, work with external consultants, and reading books from recommended reading lists for business and leadership professionals. Furthermore, although these professional-development opportunities were from internal and external providers, only two of the five principal supervisors identified a professional-development opportunity that was explicitly related to equitable teaching and learning and none that directly addressed or identified national standards for equity-based instructional leadership. The lack of focus and depth of professional development for

principal supervisors on equity-based instructional leadership impacts the likelihood that they are aware of the standards as well as their capacity to enact to promote equitable teaching and learning for all students.

Data for this study suggest that professional development for principal supervisors should be designed to address the knowledge gap for principal supervisors with respect to equity-based instructional leadership and the implementation gap regarding how to implement the standards consistently across settings. The knowledge gap has been addressed previously in this section; however, the implementation gap bears some further discussion.

The implementation gap exists because, simply stated, work-related equity is hard work (Rogers, 2022). While some researchers have highlighted that in recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic shone a bright light on the “persistent inequities in our public-school systems and generated a broad consensus that school districts must not return to business as usual” (Honig & Rainey, 2020b, p. 2); for many principal supervisors, equity work is new work. New work requires new learning and new ways of doing or performing in their role. For this reason, principal supervisors need specific training on engaging in equity-based learning. According to findings and recommendations of Galloway and Ishimaru (2020), this involves centering professional learning on key drivers such as “framing disparities and action through organizational routines for professional learning and ongoing inquiry on equity-based improvements” (p. 107). In this way, principal supervisors will work with both central office leadership and school-based leadership (principals) to foster reflection on both individual and collective practices that promote or inhibit equity. These reflections should lead principal supervisors to begin shifting power and constructing leadership as collective activity,

another key driver identified by Galloway and Ishimaru (2019).

Another challenge for principal supervisors implementing standards for equity-based instructional leadership is the work that must be done by districts and charter networks towards shifting power and constructing leadership as a collective activity. Several principal supervisors in this study shared their reflections about their own agency and ownership when engaging in practices to promote equitable teaching and learning. For instance, PS3 stated, “There's enough people out there who've done the work and who understand the work. It's just are we going to allow those people if and when they're selected to lead schools, or districts, the opportunity to do the work?” Shifting power and constructing leadership as a collective activity requires that principal supervisors build ownership, agency, and choice with principal supervisors and that principal supervisors can model these foundational components of professional learning with the principals they support (Honig & Rainey, 2019). While districts and charter networks must take an active role in training principal supervisors in the standards for equity-based instructional leadership, they must also provide them with the autonomy and freedom to engage in the work (Honig & Rainey, 2019). The autonomy and freedom proved to principal supervisors may result in working on different standards at different times of the year based on the needs of school leaders but in a manner consistent with the overall goals of the districts or charter networks.

### ***Research Subquestion 2***

What are some of the specific standards derived from equity-based instructional leadership that principal supervisors identify as areas that they may need to focus that may lead to equitable teaching and learning for students? A second theme that emerged in Chapter 4 was that principal supervisors tend to focus on different standards for equity-

based instructional leadership. This finding was not surprising given the historical neglect towards the role of principal supervisors in terms of principles guiding their work, role clarity, and job-embedded professional development. As a result of these mitigating factors, principal supervisors tend to receive no specific guidance from districts or charter networks regarding which standards to make a priority in their work. Goldring et al. (2018) recommended districts place priority towards aligning the work of principal supervisors to the goals and needs of the district as well as the areas of needed growth for principal supervisors as they take a teaching and learning approach to equity-based instructional leadership (Honig & Rainey, 2019).

The importance of aligning the work of principal supervisors to the goals and needs of the district was addressed by participants in this study. Three of the participants spoke directly about alignment of the work of principal supervisors with the district's strategic plan or goals. PS3 spoke in detail about the need for districts to develop a plan specifically to address equity through a comprehensive equity audit. However, despite the importance of alignment, there are often inherent tensions that emerge as principal supervisors attempt to align their work to the district or charter network goals and strategic plan. For one, the districts and charter networks included in this study did not explicitly reference principal supervisors in their strategic plans (Rogers, 2022). Although the lack of reference to principal supervisors in the strategic plan cannot be regarded as complete omission, in that the work of principal supervisors in that role may have been inferred or included in general terms such as central office administrators or central office staff, the lack of clear delineation about how principal supervisors may oversee the implementation of a district's strategic plan may contribute to the lack of role clarity and lack of prioritization of tasks within the role of principal supervisor (Honig & Rainey,

2019).

The lack of prioritization of specific tasks for principal supervisors within the context of the district's or charter network's strategic plan leads to principal supervisors having to determine for themselves the appropriate balance between operational and instructional priorities. According to Rogers (2022), this often results in principal supervisors defaulted to operational priorities, as district and charter network offices may also use previous job descriptions and past practice to make requests of principal supervisors that may no longer be their primary area of responsibility (Rogers, 2022).

Principal supervisors engage in practices towards equity-based instructional leadership in varying degrees and at varying stages of their work. For instance, some principal supervisors in this study, such as PS1 and PS3, cited a reliance on their districts' strategic plans, while other principal supervisors, such as PS2, PS4 and PS5, did not mention a reliance on these resources to guide their work. Researchers such as Donaldson et al. (2016) and Rigby et al. (2019) highlighted the need for effective coordination with districts to ensure strategy alignment and support for principal supervisors to promote equitable teaching and learning.

### ***Research Subquestion 3***

What are some differences in the perceptions of experienced principal supervisors compared to novice principal supervisors regarding how the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership may be used to promote equitable teaching? A third theme that emerged in Chapter 4 was that principal supervisors face both external and internal challenges when enacting standards for equity-based instructional leadership. This finding was consistent with the existing literature indicating that, when educational leaders such as principal supervisors "designed a set of instructional policies that

resembled those highlighted in research on effective districts but that dispensed with equity-oriented, rigorous challenges to the status quo” (Trujillo, 2013, p. 553), systematic change in equitable teaching practices becomes difficult to obtain. These difficulties are particularly true in large urban districts where the resistance from principals, teachers, and parents may be greater due to the influence of groups such as unions and school-based advisory councils, which may be beholden to dominant norms within the district or community (Trujillo, 2013).

Novice principal supervisors may lack the ability and experience necessary to clearly communicate the *why* for changes to instructional practices (Corcoran et al., 2013). Honig and Rainey (2014) discussed challenges that emerged for principal supervisors who did not have the necessary knowledge of high-leverage practices and professional development to support them in taking a more intentional teaching and learning approach to their work. These challenges included working with unions, leaders resistant to change, and the overall complexity of district hierarchy, which may result in principal supervisors and curriculum department directors working on different directives from different supervisors (Goldring et al., 2018). As a result, for novice principal supervisors, equitable teaching is a frequently neglected area of instructional leadership (Honig & Rainey, 2020a, 2020b). This may be due to the tendency to combine the terms equitable teaching and learning as one activity or to signify that one can occur without the other. While some researchers have articulated this sentiment, other researchers (Honig & Rainey, 2019; Phuong et al., 2017) would conclude doing so ignores the discrete skills and core attributes of each area of instructional leadership.

Differences noted in the standards that novice principal supervisors tend to focus on compared to veteran principal supervisors may be attributed to nuanced definitions of

some of the key terms associated with this study, such as *equitable teaching*, *equitable learning*, and *equitable teaching and learning*. The differences in these terms may result in novice principal supervisors focusing more on equitable teaching or equitable learning. In part, the difficulty of separating these terms was evidenced by the need to define the terms and their distinctions for four of the five principal supervisors interviewed.

#### ***Research Subquestion 4***

What are some differences in the perceptions of experienced principal supervisors compared to novice principal supervisors regarding the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership with a focus on equitable learning for students? Principal supervisors who participated in the study were former teachers and principals who were successful as principals and asked to train, support, and evaluate principals in their role as principal supervisor. However, despite their past success as principals, many of the principal supervisors discussed hesitancy entering the role of principal supervisor. Although this study did not explore all the potential reasons for this hesitancy, a desire to remain more directly connected to a school and ultimately students as well as feelings akin to the “imposter’s syndrome” were discussed by several participants. For some participants, this “internal experience of believing that you are not as competent as other perceive you to be” or “imposter’s syndrome” is only heightened by the enormity of the role of principal supervisors in districts and charter networks across the country (Honig, 2012). The principal supervisors who participated in this study described a variety of instructional and noninstructional responsibilities in their current role. Principal supervisors are often tasked with managerial and operational responsibilities that are distractions to instructional leadership and limit their ability to spend time with principals in the schools that they are asked to support. The challenge of balancing instructional and

noninstructional responsibilities along with navigating the district or charter network structures and external pressures can be particularly difficult for novice principal supervisors and does not provide the time to focus on equitable learning specifically student outcomes.

Novice principal supervisors who participated in this study had positive perceptions of the standards for equity-based instructional leadership as the standards related to equitable learning for students but were more likely to identify organizational challenges that made them difficult to implement. For instance, PS3 discussed frustration and underlying tension by stating the following:

Positive outcomes, I think we improve student achievement. And I think we get more children opportunities, we start addressing that opportunity gap. It's no longer about where you're born, where you're raised, or what the color of your skin is, or if you're rich or poor, it doesn't -- I think we start trying to take that out of it and giving everyone the promise of actually having access to that American dream, is where I think that if you're going to implement those 10, of course it'd be nice to know, as a principal supervisor, it would be nice to know how am I being rated on this? Is there a rating scale for implementing these? I mean, allocating resources, what does that look like equitably? Are we doing performance-based budgeting? Are we structuring it around something like that? Or are we -- what does that look like?

These sentiments indicate the need to ensure that there is alignment throughout the district or charter network regarding its strategic plan, budgeting processing, resource allocation, and principal supervisor evaluation based on clear definition of equity and equitable teaching and learning.

Several studies highlight the challenges principal supervisors face when attempting to focus on equitable learning and student outcomes (Corcoran et al., 2013; Honig & Rainey, 2020a, 2020b). While these studies discussed the need to include transparent and clear expectations regarding principal, teacher, and student performance assessments, they demonstrate the varying ways in which these assessments are factored into principal supervisor evaluations if at all. Two of the three novice principal supervisors included in this study questioned their district's or charter network's commitment to ensuring equitable learning based on the restraints of time and resources to do the work that they were hired to do. The two veteran principal supervisors discussed ways in which their district or charter networks focused on student data and addressing equitable learning in systematic ways. However, based on the voices of both veteran and novice principal supervisors, there is much work to be done for policy makers and leaders from districts or charter networks.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings of this study have implications for policy makers, particularly at the state and local levels. These implications include prioritizing the work of principal supervisors in equity-based instructional leadership by revisiting standards used in certifying preparation programs for Superintendent's Letter of Eligibility, a common requirement of principal supervisors in school districts or charter school networks (Goldring et al., 2018; Thessin & Louis, 2019). In this way, principal supervisors entering the role would be required to receive additional training and coursework related to equity-based instructional leadership and potentially increase their capacity to implement the national standards for equity-based instructional leadership. Additionally, passage of legislation that requires continuing education related to equity-based instructional

leadership could assist current principal supervisors in their implementation of the standards for equity-based instructional leadership and prompt districts and charter school networks to reorient the work of principal supervisors towards implementation of equity-based instructional leadership.

The researcher organized the findings according to the three major themes that emerged as a result of the qualitative data analysis: (a) principal supervisors have limited prior awareness of but positive perceptions of standards for equity-based instructional leadership, (b) principal supervisors tend to focus on different standards for equity-based instructional leadership, and (c) principal supervisors face both external and internal challenges when enacting standards for equity-based instructional leadership. As a result of analyzing the data, the researcher was able to explore the perceptions of principal supervisors of the national standards for equity-based instructional leadership and gain insight into district and charter network practices that may support their work implementing these standards.

The findings of this study have implications for leaders in school districts and charter school networks. School districts and charter network leaders can support principal supervisors by fully adopting the standards for equity-based instructional leadership and integrating them into their strategic plan. This would promote alignment at the system level as well as enable opportunities for discussion at the school level. Principal supervisors in this study and previous studies have articulated a desire for clarity regarding the intended focus of their work (Corcoran et al., 2013; Gill et al., 2010; Honig & Rainey, 2014).

Next, school district and charter network leaders can focus on analyzing the current evaluation systems for principal supervisors to place a greater emphasis on

equitable teaching and learning (Rigby et al., 2019). This work would create opportunities for discussions with principal supervisors, central office staff, and principals about specific practices and strategies that demonstrate equitable teaching which may lead to equitable learning. From these discussions, district and charter network leaders can focus their attention on the professional development and support needed by principal supervisors to reach “proficient” and “distinguished” in the standards for equity-based instructional leadership.

School district and charter network leaders can support the work of principal supervisor by providing differentiated professional development to principal supervisor beginning with foundational training on critical concepts such as equity, instructional leadership, and prioritizing the work of principal supervisors in supporting these areas. Indications such as “emerging,” “proficient, or “distinguished” speak to a critical need for principal supervisors regarding differentiated professional development. As principal supervisors in this study demonstrated, the needs of novice principal supervisors regarding the standards for equity-based instructional leadership tend to be different that of veteran principal supervisors. This is also consistent with previous studies regarding the need for differentiated professional development (Corcoran et al., 2013; Honig & Rainey, 2014).

School district and charter network leaders must work with principal supervisors to expand common definitions and paradigms when discussing equity and equitable teaching and learning (Leithwood et al., 2004). The work of developing an organization’s definition of equity is essential to not only the work of principal supervisors, but also ensuring all central office departments and staff are moving together towards the student outcomes that are associated with that definition. In other words, has the district or

charter network considered the needs of its students from various student groups such as Black, White, Latino, Asian, and free and reduced lunch, as well as students who are gifted and talented or homeless or members of the LGBTQ+ community? Within each of these groups are potentially different access points to the general curriculum and as a result different needs to support their intellectual, social, and emotional development. To assist districts or charter network in reaching their equity goals, principal supervisors require both ongoing district-led and external partner-led professional development and training.

Regardless of the provider, ongoing professional development must focus on models of supervision and best practices for equity-based instructional leadership. Professional development should recognize the continuum of needs for principal supervisors based on not only years of experience (novice principal supervisors versus veteran principal supervisors), but also potentially creating and administering readiness assessments of principal supervisors for equity-based instructional leadership that can be used to guide professional development efforts (Honig & Rainey, 2014). This will help ensure that principal supervisors know the standards for equitable-based instructional leadership, develop ways to better align their work to the standards, and have agency to advocate ways to restructure their current work to make equitable teaching and learning for all students the central focus of their work.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations in this study, including sample size, the differences in the districts or charter networks in which participants worked as principal supervisors, participants' understanding and familiarity with key terms embedded in interview questions, and, to some degree, the inherent challenges associated with interviewing as a

primary component of qualitative research. The sample size used for this study was small with five principal supervisors from five districts or charter school networks included as a part of this case study. While there are benefits such as providing the researcher an indepth understanding of each district or charter school network, there are limitations with a small sample size, such as the need for caution when generalizing results and findings to settings or districts not including in the study. This is particularly important given the vast differences in the role and number of principal supervisors within districts and charter school network across the United States. For instance, some districts have one principal supervisor and other school districts have principal supervisors who focus almost entirely on instruction.

A second limitation of this study involved the difference in the size, student demographic, and complexity of school districts or charter school networks of principal supervisor participants. To provide context for the case study, the researcher provided a detailed description of each district or charter school network and applied a robust data analysis to determine themes that were common across each of these settings. This approach enables the researcher to highlight commonality of the themes that emerged while recognizing the limitation that the differences among the districts or charter school network present.

Participants' understanding and familiarity with key terms embedded in interview questions was another limitation of this study. Terms such as *social justice* or *transformative* that were used during the participant interviews may have different connotations to each participant. In order to mitigate this limitation, the researcher defined terms when asked by participants. However, not all participants requested clarification or a definition of terms embedded in the interview questions. In instances in

which principal supervisors did not request clarification about a term used during the interview, the researcher assumed that the participant was familiar with the term based on personal experience and further clarification was not necessary. Also, as the researcher reviewed transcripts from the interviews and prepared analytic memos, instances were noted in which the participant requested clarification of a key term used and participant responses were analyzed to ensure the responses demonstrated understanding of the key terms.

There are limitations inherent to qualitative research, such as the need for researcher to make judgments in the data-analysis process. Therefore, it is recommended that researcher maintain analytic memos to capture judgments and understandings gathered from the research process. Analytic memos are commonly used in qualitative research. In keeping with this best practice, the researcher in this study created and maintained analytic memos regarding the interviews and artifacts gathered in this study. These memos were used by the researcher in the coding process and can serve to help future researchers understand the development of emerging themes associated with this study.

Finally, the researcher was not able to collect some artifacts that could have been valuable for triangulation purposes (such as monthly feedback from principal supervisors to principals) due to the sensitive and evaluative nature of some of those artifacts. Still, this study does pose questions and ideas that could be valuable to policy makers and district leaders seeking to better understanding strategies to support principal supervisors implementation of equity-based instructional leadership to promote equitable teaching and learning for all students.

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

This study sought to explore perceptions of the principal supervisors from five districts in the United States regarding their views on national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning for all students. The researcher sought to gain insight into which standards principal supervisors tend to focus on in their practices. An additional purpose of this study was to identify potential differences in the perceptions of novice principal supervisors compared to veteran principal supervisors.

Future studies might explore time spent by principal supervisors on equity-based instructional leadership and districts' efforts to increase time spent on equity-based instructional leadership. This research might help districts and charter school networks better understand the amount of time currently spent by principal supervisors on equity-based instructional leadership. As a result, leaders from districts or charter school networks may use this information to explore additional ways to reassign tasks and responsibilities not related to equity-based instructional leadership to other personnel within the district or charter school network.

Additionally, researchers might further explore professional development needed for principal supervisors to effectively engage in equity-based instructional leadership to promote equitable teaching and learning for all students. Participants in this study spoke about professional development that impacted their work, but only one identified professional development provided by the district or charter school network explicitly related to equity-based instructional leadership. Addressing this gap in professional development may assist principal supervisors in their capacity to effectively implement standards for equity-based instructional leadership.

Finally, this research relied upon a qualitative study utilizing data collected through the interviews of five school leaders serving in the role of principal supervisors. While a qualitative approach provided an indepth understanding of the case involved in the study, research using a quantitative approach, collecting and analyzing data from a larger population of principal supervisors, could further increase understanding of perceptions of the standards of equity-based instructional leadership and the implementation of the standards across larger settings in United States.

### **Conclusion**

School principals and teachers play a critical role in impacting student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004). Therefore, school districts and charter networks have frequently allocated resources and supports to assist teachers and principals in these areas but have not provided the same effort and attention to the work of principal supervisors (Corcoran et al., 2013; Honig & Rainey, 2020a, 2020b). A review of existing literature revealed that research is lacking regarding ways to support educational leaders in equity work at the district and school levels (Rigby et al., 2019). These findings revealed that there is little understanding of how principal supervisors perceive the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership as a way of improving teaching and learning (Rigby et al., 2019). This study sought to explore the perceptions of the principal supervisors from five districts in the United States regarding their views on national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning for all students.

The principal supervisors who participated in this study have positive perceptions of the national standards for equity-based instructional leadership despite limited prior awareness and limited consistency among the principal supervisors regarding which

standards they tend to focus on in their work. If the goal of equitable teaching and learning for all students is to become a reality in districts and schools across the landscape of education in the United States, greater attention must be given to the role of principal supervisors and specifically implementing standards for equity-based instructional leadership. Policy makers as well as leaders from school districts and charter networks must accept their joint responsibility and problem-solve system changes needed to support principal supervisors in providing equitable teaching and learning. Policy makers and school district leaders must work collaboratively to help eliminate distractions to the capacity of principal supervisors to focus on instructional leadership and consistently implement standards for equity-based instructional leadership.

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Appendix A

Characteristics of the Five School Districts

## Characteristics of the Five School Districts

Characteristic	District 1	District 2	District 3	District 4	District 5
2021 student enrollment total	202,944	4,500	1,557	76,858	31,000
Enrollment in district- operated schools	119,492				
Number of schools	326	9	6	144	55
District-operated schools	215				
Principals in district- operated schools	216	9	6	144	55
Principal supervisors in district-operated schools	16	2	1	12	6
Student demographics (%)					
American Indian/Alaskan Native					1
Asian American	7	0	1	2	5
Black/African American	2	85	2	21	27
Hispanic	21	11	2	64	30
White/European American	14	1	92	11	33
Multiracial	5	3	3	2	4

Appendix B  
Models of Leadership

## Models of Leadership

Leadership model	Description
Instructional	Instructional leadership and leadership for learning, focus primarily on the direction and purpose of leaders' influence; targeted at student learning via teachers. There is much less emphasis on the influence process itself. Leaders are expected to direct and influence teachers, targeted at student learning via teachers.
Transformational	Successful leaders are expected to engage with staff and other stakeholders to produce higher levels of commitment to achieving the goals of the organization which, in turn, are linked to the vision. Leaders are expected to engage with staff and other stakeholders to produce higher levels of commitment to achieving the goals of the organization, which, in turn, are linked to the vision.
Moral	Leaders are expected to behave with integrity and to develop and support goals underpinned by explicit values.
Participative	Leaders are expected to foster an environment that fosters participation from everyone.
Managerial	Leaders are expected to behave with integrity and to develop and support goals underpinned by explicit values. Leaders are expected to focus on the functions, tasks, and behaviors of those they supervise.
Contingent	Contingent leadership acknowledges the diverse nature of school contexts, and the advantages of adapting leadership styles to the particular situation, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all stance.

*Note.* Adapted from "A Century's Quest to Understand School Leadership," by K. Leithwood and D. L. Duke, 1999, in J. Murphy and K. Seashore Louis (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Educational Administration* (2nd ed., pp. 45–72), Jossey-Bass.

Appendix C

Standards of Equity-Based Instructional Leadership

### Standards of Equity-Based Instructional Leadership

1. “Engaging in self-reflection and growth for equity” (p. 11)
2. “Developing organizational leadership for equity” (p. 11)
3. “Constructing and enacting an equity vision” (p. 12)
4. “Supervising for improvement of equitable instruction” (p. 12)
5. “Fostering an equitable school culture” (p. 13)
6. “Collaborating with families and communities” (p. 13)
7. “Influencing the sociopolitical context” (p. 13)
8. “Allocating resources” (p. 14)
9. “Hiring and placing personnel” (p. 14)
10. “Modeling” ethical and equitable behavior (p. 15). (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, p. 11-15)

Appendix D

Invitation Letter and Supervisor Criteria Questions

## Invitation Letter and Supervisor Criteria Questions

Dear Colleague,

My name is Dontae Wilson. I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Fischler Graduate School of Education and Criminal Justice at Nova Southeastern University. I am conducting a research study to explore perceptions of the principal supervisors from Southeastern Pennsylvania regarding their views on national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning for all students. I am recruiting participants from school districts and charter school organizations located in Southeastern Pennsylvania. I am attempting to gain insight into which standards principal supervisors tend to focus on in their practices. Additional information will include potential differences in the perceptions of novice principal supervisors compared to veteran principal supervisors.

In order to participate, you must meet the following three selection criteria:

1. Do you supervise at least one principal within your school district or charter organization?
2. Have you served in your current position supervising principals for at least one academic year?
3. Are you willing to participate in this study?

If you would like to participate, please let me know by responding back to me via this e-mail. You are not required to participate in this student, this will not affect your standing in the school community. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to provide a copy any artifacts that relate to the national standards for equity-based instructional leadership (a copy will be provided to you) and asked to participate in a 60-minute interview. Your participation will be kept confidential, meaning that your name will not appear on interview contents. This interview will be recording to ensure that I capture your thoughts accurately.

If you have any questions regarding this research, please contact the researcher. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at NSU at to report problems or concerns related to this study.

Appendix E

Principal Supervisor Interview Protocol

## Principal Supervisor Interview Protocol

Interview questions version date: May 26, 2021

### A CASE STUDY OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS' PERCEPTIONS OF EQUITY-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP STANDARDS

Prior to the interview, the researcher will share with interviewees the standards of equity-based instructional leadership developed by Galloway and Ishimaru (2015) to explore how that district leaders can address achievement gaps:

1. Engaging in self-reflection and growth for equity
2. Developing organizational leadership for equity
3. Constructing and enacting an equity vision
4. Supervising for improvement of equitable instruction
5. Fostering an equitable school culture
6. Collaborating with families and communities
7. Influencing the sociopolitical context
8. Allocating resources
9. Hiring and placing personnel
10. Modeling ethical and equitable behavior

### **Background Questions**

1. Please share any information about your background that you feel is a part of your journey to becoming a principal supervisor.
2. Tell me about your current position.
3. How long have you served as a principal supervisor?
4. What educational philosophy or beliefs ground your work?
5. What professional development or experiences have you received in the course of

your journey that have prepared you to become a principal supervisor?

6. What additional professional development is needed to be effective in your work as a principal supervisor?
7. Describe your leadership style as a principal supervisor.

***Research Subquestion 1***

What are the perceptions of principal supervisors of the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning?

*Transformational (2)*

8. What does it mean to be “transformational” as a principal supervisor may lead to equitable teaching based on the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership?
9. What does it mean to be “transformational” as a principal supervisor may lead to equitable learning based on the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership?
10. How have you promoted a shared vision aligned with equity-based instructional leadership that influences the principals that you supervise to act on that shared vision that may lead to equitable teaching and learning?
11. How have you challenged assumptions, taken risks, solicited ideas and encouraged creativity that may lead to equitable teaching and learning based on the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership?
12. How have you incorporated the needs and concerns of individual teachers and staff in the decisions making process based on the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning?

*Social Justice (2)*

13. What does it mean to be “socially just” as a principal supervisor that may lead to equitable teaching and learning?
14. How have you worked to reduce the impact of marginalization between advantaged and disadvantaged students considering the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership if at all?

*Equity (3)*

15. What are some ways that you in your roles as a principal supervisor demonstrate equity-based instructional leadership based on the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership?
16. What are your current efforts at the district level regarding equitable teaching and learning?
17. What are your perceptions of the equity-based instructional leadership standards leading to equitable teaching and learning?
18. How have you included students and parents in the decision-making process for curriculum and curricular resources that may lead to equitable teaching and learning and that align with equity-based instructional leadership standards?
19. How have you included students and parents in the decisions making process for instructional delivery including technology use?

***Research Subquestion 2***

What are some of the specific standards derived from equity-based instructional leadership that principal supervisors identify as areas that they may need to focus that may lead to equitable teaching and learning for students?

20. Describe the standards for equity-based instructional leadership standards you tend to prioritize in your work as a principal supervisor.

21. How are these standards for equity-based instructional leadership evident in your leadership?
22. What are some ways positive outcomes for teaching and learning that could be addressed by implementing equity-based instructional leadership principles?

***Research Subquestion 3***

What are some differences in the perceptions of experienced principal supervisors compared to novice principal supervisors regarding how the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership principles can be used to promote equitable teaching?

23. Based on your experience and the national standards for equity-based instructional leadership what are some ways these standards may contribute to equitable teaching?

***Research Subquestion 4***

What are some differences in the perceptions of experienced principal supervisors compared to novice principal supervisors regarding the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership with a focus on equitable learning for students?

24. Based on your experience and the national standards for equity-based instructional leadership what are some ways these standards may contribute to equitable learning?

***Artifact Discussion***

25. Thank you for bringing documents and artifacts as requested. Describe this artifact and what led you to identify it as one for equity-based instructional leadership.
26. What was taking place in your district or community of schools that prompted the creation of the artifact?

27. How were the artifacts used to support leadership in schools?

## Appendix F

### Research Subquestion Alignment to Data-Collection Type

### Research Subquestion Alignment to Data-Collection Type

Research Subquestion	Data collection type
1. What are the perceptions of principal supervisors of the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning?	Interview Questions 8–18; Interview Questions 23–25 (artifact discussion), artifacts
2. What are some of the specific standards derived from equity-based instructional leadership that principal supervisors identify as areas that they may need to focus that may lead to equitable teaching and learning for students?	Interview Questions 6, 19–20; Interview Questions 23–25 (artifact discussion), artifacts
3. What are some differences in the perceptions of experienced principal supervisors compared to novice principal supervisors regarding how the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership may be used to promote equitable teaching?	Interview Question 3 (years of experience), Interview Question 21
4. What are some differences in the perceptions of experienced principal supervisors compared to novice principal supervisors regarding the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership with a focus on equitable learning for students?	Interview Question 3 (years of experience), Interview Question 22

Appendix G  
Case Study Protocol

## Case Study Protocol

Overview	<p>The purpose of this research study is to explore perceptions of the principal supervisors regarding their views on national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning for all students. The researcher will attempt to gain insight into which standards principal supervisors tend to focus on in their practices. Additional information will include potential differences in the perceptions of novice principal supervisors compared to experienced principal supervisors.</p> <p>Tentative timeline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 weeks to recruit principal supervisors from districts and charter school organizations in Southeastern Pennsylvania (June)</li> <li>• 1 month to conduct all interviews and begin preliminary analysis (July)</li> <li>• 2 months for continued analysis and writing dissertation findings (August-September)</li> <li>• 2 months for writing discussion section and finalizing dissertation (October-November)</li> </ul>
Field Procedures	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recruitment of a purposeful sample: Talk with colleagues and former colleagues to identify principal supervisor</li> <li>2. Data Collection: Interview Principal Supervisors. Discuss Principal Supervisor's perceptions of national standards for equity-based instructional leadership</li> <li>3. Data Collection: Artifacts from Principal Supervisors Examine these artifacts as they relate to the national standards for equity-based instructional leadership.</li> <li>4. Data Analysis: Share preliminary data. Iterative cycles of reading and coding the data to lead to a comprehensive interpretation of findings. Member checking for validation</li> </ol>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Please share any information about your background that you feel is a part of your journey to becoming a principal supervisor.</li> <li>2. Tell me about your current position.</li> <li>3. How long have you served as a principal supervisor?</li> <li>4. What educational philosophy or beliefs ground your work?</li> <li>5. What professional development or experiences have you received in the course of your journey that have prepared you to become a principal supervisor?</li> <li>6. What additional professional development is needed to be effective in your work as a principal supervisor?</li> <li>7. Describe your leadership style as a principal supervisor.</li> </ol> <p>Research Subquestion 1 What are the perceptions of principal supervisors of the national</p>

	<p>standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning?</p> <p><i>Transformational (2)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. What does it mean to be “transformational” as a principal supervisor may lead to equitable teaching based on the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership?</li> <li>9. What does it mean to be “transformational” as a principal supervisor may lead to equitable learning based on the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership?</li> <li>10. How have you promoted a shared vision aligned with equity based instructional leadership that influences the principals that you supervise to act on that shared vision that may lead to equitable teaching and learning?</li> <li>11. How have you challenged assumptions, taken risks, solicited ideas and encouraged creativity that may lead to equitable teaching and learning based on the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership?</li> <li>12. How have you incorporated the needs and concerns of individual teachers and staff in the decisions making process based on the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership that may lead to equitable teaching and learning?</li> </ol> <p><i>Social Justice (2)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. What does it mean to be “socially just” as a principal supervisor that may lead to equitable teaching and learning?</li> <li>14. How have you worked to reduce the impact of marginalization between advantaged and disadvantaged students considering the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership if at all?</li> </ol> <p><i>Equity (3)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15. What are some ways that you in your roles as a principal supervisor demonstrate equity-based instructional leadership based on the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership?</li> <li>16. What are your current efforts at the district level regarding equity?</li> <li>17. What are your perceptions of the equity-based instructional leadership standards leading to equitable teaching and learning?</li> <li>18. How have you included students and parents in the decisions making process for curriculum and curricular resources that may lead to equitable teaching and learning and that align with equity-based instructional leadership standards?</li> <li>19. How have you included students and parents in the decisions making process for instructional delivery including technology use?</li> </ol> <p>Research Subquestion 2</p> <p>What are some of the specific standards derived from equity-based</p>
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	<p>instructional leadership that principal supervisors identify as areas that they may need to focus that may lead to equitable teaching and learning for students?</p> <p>20. Describe the standards for equity-based instructional leadership standards you tend to prioritize in your work as a principal supervisor.</p> <p>21. How are these standards for equity-based instructional leadership evident in your leadership?</p> <p>22. What are some ways positive outcomes for teaching and learning that could be addressed by implementing equity-based instructional leadership principles?</p> <p>Research Subquestion 3</p> <p>What are some differences in the perceptions of experienced principal supervisors compared to novice principal supervisors regarding how the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership principles can be used to promote equitable teaching?</p> <p>23. Based on your experience and the national standards for equity-based instructional leadership what are some ways these standards may contribute to equitable teaching?</p> <p>Research Subquestion 4</p> <p>What are some differences in the perceptions of experienced principal supervisors compared to novice principal supervisors regarding the national standards of equity-based instructional leadership with a focus on equitable learning for students?</p> <p>24. Based on your experience and the national standards for equity-based instructional leadership what are some ways these standards may contribute to equitable learning?</p> <p><i>Artifact Discussion</i></p> <p>25. Thank you for bringing documents and artifacts as requested. Describe this artifact and what led you to identify it as one for equity-based instructional leadership.</p> <p>26. What was taking place in your district or community of schools that prompted the creation of the artifact?</p> <p>27. How were the artifacts used to support leadership in schools?</p>
A reminder for the Dissertation	<p>Target audience:  Dissertation committee  District leadership  Principal Supervisors</p>

Appendix H

Participants' Years of Experience

## Participants' Years of Experience

Principal Supervisor	Position	Experience as a Principal Supervisor (Years)	Experience prior to role as principal supervisor	Type of District
PS1	Assistant Superintendent	2	Principal	Charter
PS2	Assistant Superintendent	1	Principal	Public
PS3	Assistant Superintendent	10	Principal	Public
PS4	Superintendent	1	Principal	Public
PS5	Regional Director	15	Principal	Charter
Average years in position		5.8		

Appendix I

Focus Standards for Principal Supervisors

## Focus Standards for Principal Supervisors

Standard	PS1	PS2	PS3	PS4	PS5
1	X		X		
2					
3		X			
4	X	X			X
5	X			X	X
6				X	
7					
8			X		
9	X		X		
10	X		X		X