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Exploring Principals’ Experiences with Social Justice Issues in Their Work as School Leaders

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EXPLORING PRINCIPALS’ EXPERIENCES WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES IN THEIR WORK AS SCHOOL LEADERS

by

Djimtibaye Otalbaye

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology
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June 2021

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EXPLORING PRINCIPALS’ EXPERIENCES WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES IN THEIR WORK AS SCHOOL LEADERS

Djimtibaye Otalbaye, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2021

Social justice has taken on a special importance in education today, although it is not a new concept in terms of human history. Social justice is not a local issue, but exists in all parts of the world (Jean Marie et al., 2014). Differentiation among social environments of schools and increasing elements of diversity and roles of schools to create a socially just structure can be seen as main reasons for these issues (Turhan, 2010). Schools are therefore challenged to address the social conditions and hardships of students by responding to their needs (Avant, 2014).

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was twofold: (a) to describe and interpret how principals make meaning of their experiences and professional challenges in dealing with issues of social justice and equity, and (b) to find out what school principals do to overcome these social injustice issues impacting the students in their schools.

This study used interpretivism theory and involved 12 school principals selected using purposeful and snowball sampling techniques. All the participants were selected from within one Midwestern state. The data for this study came from one interview with each participant and the main instrument was a semi-structured interview protocol.

Findings revealed seven themes, created from 20 categories. The categories were comprised of 17 a priori categories and three emerging categories. The categories concern principals’ experiences with social justice issues, challenges, strategies, and support they receive. Finding indicated that principals experience multiple social justice issues, such as racism,
bullying and other violence, gender identity, and socioeconomic (SES) related issues. All participants identified barriers in addressing social justice issues. Most principals did not receive specific social justice training in their university programs, but all received some professional development or have other resources to support their efforts. Significant support received from other principals, their supervisors, their staff, and their own families. All shared how leading people to address social justice issues has helped shape their sense of purpose and approach to leadership. These findings add to the limited research conducted on social justice issues within schools.

Overall, this study provided principals with an opportunity to describe their day-to-day experiences related to social justice issues and their concerns as leaders. This study also provided more profound insight into social justice issues and challenges principals face in addressing them. As a core recommendation, the integration of social justice leadership within all university preparation programs is essential, as is the support for school leaders who address these issues on a daily basis.
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Djimtibaye Otalbaye
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Social justice has taken on a special importance in education today, although it is not a new concept in terms of human history. Social justice is not a local issue, but exists in all parts of the world (Jean Marie et al., 2014). Differentiation among social environments of schools and increasing elements of diversity and roles of schools to create a socially just structure can be seen as main reasons for this (Turhan, 2010). The increasing cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious diversity in most nations, particularly in western societies, has contributed enormously to the discourse surrounding social justice issues (Wang, 2014).

The characteristics, behaviors, and practices of effective leadership for social justice and equity are based on the values held by the individual leader. Leadership is the enactment of values; therefore, it is anticipated that leaders, such as school principals, must promote a school culture that values the diversity of each of its members, including teaching staff, students and the wider school community (Jayavant, 2016). Yet, principals are challenged in providing a positive learning environment for a highly diverse student population (Miller & Barbara, 2015). While some research has been conducted on these issues, more is needed to understand the voices of principals engaged in these issues.

Background

Social justice is a term that is not easily defined in the literature because of its differing nuances and degrees. Social justice generally refers to the idea of creating a society or institution that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, that understands and values human rights, and that recognizes the dignity of every human being (Zajda et al., 2006). Other scholars in religion (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007), psychology (Toporek et al., 2006), social work (Harrison-
Henderson & Gilmore, 2010), business (Lochner & Moretti, 2004; Konow, 2011), and education (Cochran-Smith, 2009; Curren, 2009; Hirsh & Hord, 2010) have developed various definitions that allow them to operationalize the abstract theories, goals, and beliefs inherent in social justice. Everson (2007) argued that in short, social justice is the quality of fairness that exists within communities or societies; the extent to which fairness and equity exist in a school community is, in part, the responsibility of its leaders (p. 178).

Underpinning the various definitions concerning social justice is the understanding by its proponents that change is needed to make society more just and equitable for marginalized groups (Alexander, 2005; Ayers et al., 2009). Social justice seeks to resist and challenge mechanisms in education that maintain social structures that preserve the status quo for marginalized groups (Alexander, 2016). Theoharis (2007) conceptualized it as involving leadership that deals with concerns regarding race, class gender, sexual orientation, disability, and other issues, often associated with marginalized populations. For the purpose of my study, I used Theoharis’ concepts of social justice as my definition.

Schools are organizations where such issues can occur and because of their complexities, school leaders must involve other people in order to address them. Overall, for the purpose of my study, social justice issues are defined as marginalization, exclusion, segregation, racism, discrimination, and the practice of inequalities in resource distribution that people face in society in general, as well as in schools. These descriptions are important for my study because they clarify the meanings of social justice issues to the readers.

Managing a school is a job that is too complex for one person alone, and members of the staff other than principals, such as school counselors, are a key (Siccone, 2012). The desired effect of such collaborative relationships is to improve student achievement and ensure equity
and access to educational opportunities for all students (Brannan, 2012). Even though principals work in collaboration with their personnel, principals face challenges in leading for social justice (Palace et al., 2010). Research showed that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act’s goal to reach high academic standard and proficiency for all students by the 2013/2014 school year was a challenge for high-need schools. Today’s principals are faced with increasingly diverse student populations; therefore, equal treatment for all students may be inherently unequal.

When principals face social issues in their schools, they use various strategies and their power as leaders to keep students in school. For instance, rewarding students’ good performance, as well as providing aid for struggling students are both decisive components that are noted as effective (Avant, 2016). Additionally, such principals provide immediate and various solutions promoting an organizational culture based on the assimilation of the student body. They consider their responsibility as educational leaders who should emphasize cultural transformation, creating spaces for encounter and exchange, and a reorganization of the school to ensure equal learning (Gomez-Hurtado et al., 2018). They also focus on the importance of coordination between the different actors in the school to provide an adequate response to all students.

According to Ayers (2009) and Roger and Oaks (2006), the earliest references to social justice education can be found in the philosophical writings of John Dewey. It is those writings that most resemble the contemporary meanings of social justice education. Dewey’s progressive efforts included a philosophy about a type of education that would serve to change the status quo and rid society of inequality by educating students in school about social injustice. In order to change the status quo and eradicate inequality in schools, principals need to receive leadership training on these issues.
For the past few decades, the U.S. federal government has enacted various policies focused on concerns related to improving the nation’s lowest performing public schools. Such efforts revealed the importance of preparing social justice-minded principals to work in schools identified as low-performing, which are often where poverty is rampant and students of color live (Nogurea & Wells, 2011). This importance given to social justice leadership preparation was cemented by NCLB in 2001. Leadership preparation programs sensitive to social justice have now included it as a stream that runs systematically throughout the course work and extra classroom experiences in their preparatory curriculum (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). However, research indicates that injustice is still perpetrated in some leadership preparation institutions. According to Boke (2010), students of color in leadership preparation programs he studied were not given enough resources, faced resistance from their professors because of their cultural and social background, and were also silenced in classrooms. There is clearly much more to do and learn related to social justice and principal leadership.

As one example, the topic of changing schools to become inclusive, supportive educational communities for English language learner (ELL) students is a pressing issue facing schools in the Midwestern region of the United States (U.S.). Because of the achievement gap between ELL and Native English Speakers students, as well as the shortage of licensed English as Second Language (ESL) teachers, it is clear that the needs of ELLs cannot be met by licensed ESL teachers alone (Brooks et al., 2010). These details indicate that social justice issues are crucial, and principals need to address them efficiently in schools in order to establish equality and improve education.
Problem Statement and Research Questions

Researchable Problem

A school leader with a social justice orientation seeks to improve the educational outcomes for historically marginalized groups, but confronts daunting challenges when navigating high-poverty schools and districts that often maintain entrenched structures of inequality. These inequities often include lingering segregation issues, non-recognition of students of color, students with disabilities, and ELLs. Many students are more racially segregated in schools today than they were in the late 1960s prior to the enforcement of court-ordered desegregation in school districts across the country (Dorsey, 2013). In the U.S., significant percentage of students involved in school-related arrests or referred to law enforcement are Hispanic or Black (Gooden & Dantley, 2012).

Researchers have also highlighted cases in which students were systematically denied special education services (Howe & Miramontes, 2015; Skiba et al., 2016). Since 1918, compulsory education laws have existed in the U.S., but many students with disabilities were excluded from being educated in traditional public schools until the mid-1970s (Yell, 2012). According to Brown vs Board of Education, the desegregation of America’s public schools and, more generally, the promotion of racial/ethnic and socioeconomic diversity in K-12 schools have been major goals of federal and state policy (Benner & Wang, 2014).

Schools are now challenged to address the social conditions and hardships of students by responding to their needs (Avant, 2014). American public schools continue to drastically change amid increased racial and ethnic diversity in student enrollment. There are growing inequalities between public and private schools (Hartwig, 2013), and changes are expected to result in more school districts serving predominantly students of color, many of whom live below the poverty
line (Hussar & Bailey, 2013). The impact of poverty is a significant issue for our educational system, as children are often stigmatized and suffer with low self-esteem, malnutrition, social and emotional isolation, and physical and psychological problems (Avant, 2014). McCray and Beachum (2014), for example, emphasize that students of cultural and linguistic diversity may lose a sense of purpose if they feel the educational experiences provided by the school do not accommodate their reality. As another example, a Department of Education’s 2009-2010 study found that Black students, especially Black male students, faced more difficult discipline measures than all other students in the public schools in the U.S. (Lewin, 2012). Access to basic teaching and learning resources is an ongoing problem for most schools (Hartwig, 2013).

Ladson-Billings (2012) pointed out the necessity for continual examination of racialized thinking to diminish the disparaging ways that the proclivities and abilities of students based on culture and race are perceived.

Over the past three decades, many educational leadership scholars and practitioners have eschewed traditional leader-centered and difference-blind perspectives of their work, and have instead advanced the notion that principals (and other leaders in schools) can be civil rights leaders for communities and schools (Jean-Marie et al., 2015). Many now believe that leaders, at all levels of the school system, must take actions to address the principles of social justice and the values of diversity, equality, and equity (Coleman & Glover, 2010).

Principals who are advocates for social justice recognize the need to examine some current system requirements and adapt systems where all students are correctly treated as human beings (Palace et al., 2010). Walker (2007) argues that social-justice issues in schools arise from the schools’ structures, policies and leadership practices, and according to McMahon (2007), threats to equity stem from economic and cultural differences, such as differences in socio-
economic status (SES), race and ability. For example, there has been rising concern that experiences of bullying are linked to emotional, behavioral, and academic risk for school-aged youth (Hong & Espelage, 2012), and growing interest in school policies and practices that can reduce bullying in schools (Hatzenbeuhler & Keyes, 2013; Russell et al., 2010).

It appears that more U.S. principals are definitely concerned with issues of social justice. However, the initial analyses of the data from structured focus groups also indicate that some U.S. principals do not focus on social justice issues; many seem to focus their concerns on students in general, not on specific groups (Palace et al., 2010). The undeniable truth is that the everyday education experience for too many students of color violates the principle of equity at the heart of the American promise (Lewin, 2012).

Related Studies

Most of the leadership work around promoting social justice and educational equity has been anchored by an urgency to close the gap achievement (Brooks & Miles, 2008; Normore, 2008; Shapiro, 2008). Yet, results have revealed that serious issues still remain. One study indicated that programs frequently failed to address a number of micro-political diversity issues school leaders face on a daily basis (Hawley & James, 2010). Another study showed that traditional leadership preparation programs only skim the surface when addressing issues of social justice (Dantley & Tilman, 2009). Other research addressed the fact that school leaders fail to acknowledge how race has been institutionalized in the educational system, allowing the dominant race (Whites) to maintain their privileges in society (Diem & Carpenter, 2012).

A substantial body of research also indicates that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth in the U.S. continue to face significant social discrimination and oppression due to their sexual orientation (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012; Espelage & Koenig,
2009; Kosciw et al., 2012; National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 2011). Many middle and high-schools remain hostile environments for sexual minorities due to high rates of discrimination, marginalization, and violence experienced by such students within school settings (Kosciw et al., 2012).

A large part of the literature on social justice leadership literature recognizes that if social justice practices are to endure, then norms, policies, and practices at the whole-school level must be transformed to address the challenges that marginalized groups and minorities face (Berkovich, 2014; Bogotch & Shields, 2014). The principal has a primary responsibility to build the school’s capacity for improvement that needs to embrace education for all, not just for a few; a good school leader must be sensitive to multicultural reality and promote an education which creates opportunities for the most disadvantaged members of society (Obiakor, 2014; Obiakor & Algozzine, 2011). Lochmiller and Lester (2017) argue that programs training practitioners should provide students with experiences immersed in leadership programs directly located within schools and districts.

Numerous studies on bullying describe its prevalence in schools, and they enumerate its negative effects on students’ achievements (Al-Ali & Shattawani, 2018; Russell, 2016; Kibriya et al., 2017; Peguero & Williams, 2013; Terry, 2018). For instance, bullying is common in U.S. schools and is linked to emotional, behavioral, and academic risk for school-aged students. School policies and practices focused on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) have been designed to reduce bullying and show promising results (Russell et al., 2016). Bullying also affects students’ academic performance and female students suffer more than male students. However, female educators diminish the effect of bullying on female students (Kibriya et al., 2017). One study found that blacks and Hispanics who came from families that reported higher
incomes were more likely to be victims of bullying. This finding coincides with other studies that concluded that additional factors in conjunction with race better predict incidents of bullying (Peguero & Williams, 2013).

A small but emerging body of literature focused on leadership for social justice examines school leaders and schools that have demonstrated success in improving outcomes for historically marginalized groups of students (Fattura & Capper, 2007; Furman, 2012). For example, Fattura and Capper (2007) found that some principals had a broad-based vision for the successful academic achievement and college readiness for all students, while Furman (2012) found that the common understanding of many leadership scholars is that social justice focuses on the experiences of marginalized groups and inequities in educational opportunities and outcomes.

Another small body of literature has emerged and focused on special education and its implementation in schools. (Padhi, 2016; Sproston, 2017). For instance, one study indicated that considering special education as providing something different or additional to that which is generally available to others of similar age in schools, upholds and perpetuates a fundamentally unequal and unjust value system in relation to everyone’s human right to education (Florian, 2014). It is recognized that current strategies and programs have largely been insufficient or inappropriate with regard to needs of children and youth who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion (Padhi, 2016).

Finally, a small growing international body of scholarship on social justice also highlights the global views and orientations of social justice-minded principals’ effective leadership principles, obstacles to equity in schools, and high student achievements obtained through heroic efforts (DeMatthews 2014; Furman, 2012; Jansen, 2006; Theoharis, 2007).
Deficiencies

Many examples from present society and recent research suggest the need for examining and applying social justice (Harrison & Clark, 2016). Similarly, Ladson-Billings (2012) indicated that it is necessary to continually examine the radicalized thinking to decrease the disparaging ways the proclivities and abilities of students based on culture and race are perceived. Additionally, there is a growing body of concern that the role of the principal has not changed sufficiently to deal with the increasing complexity of challenges of the twenty-first century, and countries are looking for better solutions (Rapp, 2012).

Although scholars within educational leadership for social justice argue against a definitive and universal conceptualization of social justice (Bogotch, 2002; Shoho et al., 2005), many implicitly argue that leading for social justice means recultivating individual and institutionalized practices rooted in low expectations, deficit thinking, marginalization, and cultural imperialism of diverse students. Whether principals in high-needs schools are more likely to develop leadership for social justice has yet to be determined at an international level (Szeto et al., 2018).

There is still a considerable amount of research on educational leadership in countries like Canada, England, and the United States, and there is a growing body of research comparing the context and practice of leadership from different nations, but there is less known about social justice leadership within schools (Angelle, 2017). Indeed, there is still little in the professional literature about how school leaders or other professionals committed to promoting social justice deal with and manage their emotional responses to the challenges that await them in educational arenas. Research has only begun to uncover some of the challenges and conflicts school leaders are confronted with when they engage in social justice work (Theoharis, 2007).
Significance

It is important to learn more about principals’ understanding and preparation for dealing with social justice issues in both the U.S. and developing countries. My study provides information on social justice issues and the strategies principals utilize to overcome them in schools. By describing the social justice issues principals face in their position and by sharing their lived experiences, they might help other principals to better understand what to do to overcome these leadership challenges mainly social justice issues. Principals’ experiences and perceptions matter for my study, and the information they provided can be used to contribute to the research literature on social justice issues.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of my proposed basic qualitative study is twofold: (a) to describe and interpret how principals make meaning of their experiences and professional challenges in dealing with issues of social justice and equity, and (b) to find out what school principals do to overcome these social injustice issues impacting the students in their schools. In gathering this information, I gained a better understanding of how high school principals perceive and address social justice issues in their work.

The central question guiding this study was: How do principals experience and respond to social justice issues when leading their schools? Specific research questions included:

1) What social justice issues are principals facing in their schools?

2) What challenges do they face in responding to those issues, and how do they address these challenges?

3) What training on social justice issues have such principals received in their leadership preparation programs, or via professional development?
4) What supports do they experience from other principals, families, and others in dealing with these issues?

5) How do principals’ experiences with social justice issues and challenges shape their sense of purpose and approach to leadership as principals?

**Conceptual Framework and Narrative**

The conceptual framework for this basic qualitative study depicts the elements of social justice as described by a synthesis of research. It was designed to guide my study, and it took into consideration all constructs that might help to understand principals’ experiences with social justice issues.

Maxwell (2013) defines a conceptual framework of a study as something that is constructed, not found. It incorporates pieces that are borrowed from elsewhere, but the overall coherence, is something that the researcher builds, not something that exists ready-made. A conceptual framework is a visual representation of the main conceptual ideas about a study and how they interact and interplay with each other (Miles et al., 2014). It forces the researcher to be selective, to decide which constructs are most important, which factors are likely to be most meaningful, and consequently, what information should be collected and analyzed. Figure 1 illustrates my conceptual framework.
In my diagram, the box on the left is about social justice issues that principals may face in their schools. It is possible that when students come from families with different backgrounds and meet in school, social justice issues arise among them. The moral responsibility of educational leaders is especially important in light of numerous social problems that marginalized groups and minorities face because of discrimination or lack of resources (Arar, 2014). I cited this author because he addressed social injustices in schools in his book and his research findings indicate that a more open gender discourse could offer symbolic resources and/or practical tools to enhance the every-day implementation of equity in the school.

The right top box within Figure 1 depicts my interest in learning the types of social justice issues that principals may face in their work as school leaders. The kinds of social justice issues principals face were investigated to better describe their experiences, challenges, and
achievements. New threats to social justice have emerged as a result of the growing diversity, and historical issues of inequality continue to impede student learning, participation and development (Chiu & Walker, 2007). These authors’ study identified several contextual factors prevalent in Hong Kong that maintain inequality and applied research findings to explain how these discriminate against both disadvantaged and advantages students.

However, a review of previous work on educational leadership still suggests that there is little research activity investigating principals’ approaches to cultural diversity and inclusion (Angelides, 2011). I used this author because her study focused on forms of leadership that promote inclusive education in Cypriot schools, and it contributed to a better understanding of the characteristics of the leader that modern Cypriot schools need at this time.

The box in the middle on the right outlines my interest in collecting data on any strategies used by principals to overcome social justice issues, the meaning that principals make of social justice issues, their experience with social justice issues, and their leadership preparation to handle social justice issues. In response to the increasing diversity of the student population, principals in different education settings implement different leadership practices to address social-justice issues and these practices are contextually specific (Hallinger, 2016). His study explored several types of school contexts (institutional, community, socio-cultural, political, economic, school improvement) and what we have learned about how they shape school leadership practice. This box also depicts challenges principals may face in dealing with social justice issues. Principals are also encouraged and shaped by their preparation programs to become leaders of social justice, instruction, and community engagement.

The box on the right at the bottom depicts my interest in examining the different sources of support principals need to receive to handle social justice. Supports may come from school
personnel and from others who have a stake in schools because schools are for everybody, not just for principals to manage alone. In some cases, community involvement and support help principals to solve social justice issues, such as when principals take a legal stance and cite laws or policies in the school’s handbook in response to community pressure (Albritton, et al., 2017). These authors explored the specific strategies principals use to overcome any perceived resistance from the communities that may affect establishing a socially-just school climate for LGBTQ+ students. They found that principals embraced two strategies when dealing with community pressures: following laws and rules, and avoiding the issues.

**Chapter 1 Closure**

Principals are in charge of solving social justice issues in schools to promote justice, inclusion, diversity, and equality of education for all. Their roles are complex as the literature indicates many challenges they face on a daily basis.

In Chapter 2, I explore the literature that establishes the foundation for understanding and interpreting principals’ experiences with social justice issues. In doing so, I further reveal the gap regarding the research about social justice issues in my area of study. To this end, let us now turn to a review of the literature surrounding this topic.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review accomplishes several purposes. It shares with the reader the results of other studies that are closely related to the one being undertaken, and it relates a study to the larger, ongoing dialogue in the literature filling in gaps and extending prior studies (Cooper, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). A literature review also provides a framework for establishing the importance of the study as well as a benchmark for comparing the results with other findings (Creswell, 2014).

My literature review in this chapter therefore provides a context for establishing the significance of my research and is used in later chapters to compare the results of my study with previous studies. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on social justice issues principals might face in their work, and is broken into four major subsections: social justice issues, strategies, challenges, and principals’ leadership preparation to deal with social justice issues. The second section focuses on how principals handle social justice issues and is broken into three subsections: challenges, strategies, and principals’ preparation to deal with social justice issues. The third section focuses on various supports principals might receive from their colleagues, staff, students, parents, supervisors, families, policies, and other professionals to deal with social justice issues. However, it is important to note that it was hard to find the literature exploring the constructs of this section.

My literature review includes studies from many countries because concerns and findings surrounding social justice issues have become communal around the world.
Social Justice Issues

Principals might face a variety of social justice issues in their day-to-day work in schools. Principals are in charge of solving social justice issues in schools to promote justice, inclusion, diversity, and equality of education for all. Their roles are complex as the literature indicates many challenges they face on daily basis.

Social justice issues could have a negative impact on the progress of education because they could destroy cohesion, and result in student achievement gaps and students dropping out from school. Studies in the literature have addressed a variety of social justice issues in the U.S., such as segregation, discrimination, racism and marginalization, academic inequalities, bullying, stigmatization, and exclusion (Bolick et al., 2010; Dorsey, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2012; Murray-Johnson & Guerra, 2018; Rushing, 2017; Russell et al., 2016). Other studies have dealt with social justice issues in other countries around the world (Chinga-Ramirez, 2017; Hunter 2010; Riey et al., 2017; Montecino, & Ahamuda, 2017; Tabane & Human-Vogel, 2010). Social justice issues are numerous, so the above-described are the crucial ones that researchers have extensively explored. This section of my literature review addresses how such social justice issues often occur in tandem within schools and how principals address them. It should be noted that a vast research base exists on each topic, and for the purposes of my study, I offer example research studies for each major social justice topic as a way to overview such issues potentially being faced by school principals.

Race/Ethnicity-Related Social Justice Issues

Segregation and Racism

School segregation is a social justice issue that is particularly entrenched and long-lasting in the U.S. because of its roots from legal slavery. Racism is one of the major social justice
issues in schools because it reduces opportunities for students of color. The racial climate of schools is reflected in interracial interactions, stereotypes, inequitable treatment, and the lack of institutional supports for a positive racial climate (Byrd & Chavoux, 2012; Ray et al., 2016).

Declines in segregation over time have occurred in response to federal government actions aimed at equal rights and racial equality, however its negative impact continues. Segregation has remained crucial and controversial issue in the U.S. education because it lasted for a long time, and it was established by the law. There were schools segregated by law or government action (de jure segregation) and schools segregated by individual choice or social practices (de facto segregation) (Hocschild & Scovronick, 2003). Prior to the landmark Brown v. Board of Education, U.S. Supreme Court decision, Black-White school segregation was absolute in the South and very high in many school districts in other parts of the country (Reardon & Owens, 2014). Laws that legalized segregation in the South, also called Jim Crow laws, were passed in the late 1800s by the legislatures of the southern states. These laws discriminated against African Americans in every aspect of life; restrooms, waiting rooms, and water fountains reminded Whites and Blacks to stay apart (Payne, 2016). Segregation proponents supported the Plessy vs Ferguson 1896 Supreme Court decision, which permitted “Equal but separate accommodations in transportation and by extension in schools and other public facilities” (Hocschild & Scovronick, 2003, p. 32). By 1914 every southern state had passed laws that created two separate societies: one Black, the other White.

Segregation opponents fought for integration and filed lawsuits. For instance, in the 1950s, the National Association for the Advancement of People of Color (NAACP) worked hard against segregation laws in public schools and filed lawsuits against plaintiffs in the South. Later in 1954, the Brown vs Board of Education lawsuit led the Supreme Court to unanimously
reject Plessy vs Ferguson and declared that separate educational facilities were inherently unequal.

Despite law changes, minority suburbanization still leads to segregation of Black, Hispanic, and Asian students from White students (Reardon et al., 2012). As a U.S. study example, Dorsey (2013) examined the relationship between housing patterns in urban communities and racial segregation in U.S. schools. She found that the growth of racial and ethnic minority populations is a trend expected to continue for decades to come. She added that such changes might mean to some people that school resegregation is a foregone and acceptable conclusion. However, to many others it serves as a cautionary tale that U.S. school stakeholders need to do more to ensure that schools are an inclusive representation of their democratic society and not an exclusive racial apartheid system.

Similarly, Byrd and Chavoux (2012) wanted to know how the congruence between students’ racial identity beliefs and their experienced racial climates related to their motivation and engagement. These researchers examined students’ racial identity beliefs, their affective feelings about their group membership or group pride, and their perceptions of societal views of their racial group. The study involved participants 263 African American 11th grade public school students from Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study (MADICS). Findings indicated that students with positive affective feelings about their racial group showed higher intrinsic school motivation when their perceived racial climate was consistent with their positive racial identity beliefs. Also, students who reported positive feelings reported higher satisfaction when they perceived their school as fair relative compared those who perceived less equal status.

Some studies are revealing that some progress is being made. For example, Stroub and Richards (2013) reviewed public documents to examine school segregation in 350 U.S.
metropolitan areas, and found that the resegregation or the renewal of segregation and its policies that existed during the 1990s had not continued into the 21st century. In fact, the decades following that period had witnessed a modest reintegration for all racial/ethnic groups, as well as a continuation of the trend toward integration among non-White students that characterized the 1990s.

As another example of healing, in a case study conducted at Carter High School in the U.S., Welton et al. (2015) found, via interviews, field notes, observations, and syllabi review, that the diversity of student identities represented in the social justice class made it a space unique to that school, especially concerning the school structure that segregated students academically and socially across race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. They found that the school curriculum allowed students of color to discuss their personal experience with racism with other people.

In another U.S. study related to race, Ray et al. (2016) examined standardized test data of quantitative differences between traditional and experiential based learning of fifth-grade students from public schools in Washington, DC. They found that the presence of experiential learning via a school garden was associated with higher test scores and persisted even when controlling for the race and class composition of students for reading and science. Their findings also indicated that teachers at the school labeled Black and Hispanic students with far more negative stereotypes about their English-speaking skills, and their interest and ability to learn effectively.

Similar findings are found in several international studies. In South Africa, Tabane and Human-Vogel’s (2010) study used interviews and focus groups with Black and Indian learners in one school to determine the successes and possible challenges of ensuring racial integration at
the school level and its contribution to social cohesion. They found that in that country, apartheid policies contributed to the creation of social stigmas related to race. However, they also found that learners can experience a sense of belonging in racially integrated environments, and racial integration can impact positively on a personal sense of belonging and contributes to social cohesion. Additionally, their study indicated that positive social contact specifically includes experiencing positive emotions, such as trust, respect, harmony, and joy; thus, pointing to the importance of positive affirmation. This suggests that healing can occur when social contact exists among people, but it takes time and effort.

In another study conducted on racial segregation and schooling in South Africa, Hunter (2010) found that while overt racism is still evident, it is not possible to see schools as being located on a simple linear axis running from racial segregation to nonracial integration; race and class are embedded in much more complex processes. She also found that there are considerable differences in quality between what Black South Africans call multiracial public schools, many of which are heavily oversubscribed, resulting in inequalities.

**Discrimination**

Discrimination is defined as unfair behavior or unequal treatment accorded to others on the basis of their group membership or possession of an arbitrary trait, such as skin color (Dion, 2003, p. 507). The issue of discrimination reflects a long history of persistent gaps in educational, economic, legal, and social outcomes, as well as laws and policies that have dictated or enabled differential treatment (James et al., 2012). This phenomenon is more frequently reported in racially diverse schools than in less diverse schools, because in homogenous schools there is less opportunity for students to act on potential stereotypes and prejudice they have about other racial groups (Bellmore et al., 2012). Sometimes, ethnically diverse high school contexts
present unique social opportunities for students to form interethnic relationships, but they may also subject students to certain social challenges such as peer ethnic discrimination.

Research has revealed students who perceived more peer discrimination reported lower academic persistence. Schools provide a place of learning for students and can be considered safe havens. However, in some cases, African American students are subjected to discrimination by peers and teachers, which can impact their own academic engagement and abilities (Banerjee et al., 2018).

For example, Rosenbloom and Way (2004) found that variations in the experience of discrimination differed according to students’ racial and/or ethnic backgrounds. Asian American reported having been harassed and discriminated from their non-Asian American peers in school. As far as African American and Latino students were concerned, they described hostile relationships with adults in positions of authority and perceived their teachers as implicitly or explicitly racist or discriminatory. The authors examined how adolescents’ describe their experiences of racial and/or ethnic discrimination in school by interviewing 60 Latino American, Asian American, and African American 9 grade students of New York City public schools.

In another study, Vega et al. (2015) surveyed and interviewed 10 African American youth in the U.S. to explore their perceptions of racial discrimination. They found that African American students perceived their White peers and teachers as holding discriminatory and stereotypic beliefs about their racial group. They also reported negative perceptions from members of their own racial group. Nonetheless, those students in the study shared that they sought to prove others wrong as a response to perceived discrimination.

These findings were confirmed by Murray-Johnson and Guerra’s (2018) study. They found, via anecdotal data, surveys, and focus groups with teachers, parents, and students in
northwestern elementary school that Black and Hispanic students were assigned individual seatwork for much of the class period and were asked few, low-level questions. This was contrary to the case of their White classmates who frequently participated in classroom activities and were asked higher level questions during class discussions.

Also, Ropac (2017) used data from original surveys of a longitudinal study of 1,507 children of immigrants of Hispanic, Afro-Caribbean, and Asian origin residing in San Diego, CA, and Miami/Fort Lauderdale, FL. His study aimed to examine the effects of perceived racial/ethnic discrimination on second-generation immigrant incorporation. Findings showed that all Asians and Afro-Caribbeans as well as Mexicans are significantly more likely to perceive discrimination than Cubans. In contrast, there were no significant differences in perceived discrimination rates between Cubans, Nicaraguans, Colombians, Dominicans, and other Latin Americans. They also indicated that Jamaicans, Haitians, and West Indians combined had the highest rate of perceived discrimination (78%), whereas Asians ranked second, with more than two thirds (67%) reporting discrimination. In contrast, less than half (49%) of Hispanic immigrant children reported experiences of racial/ethnic discrimination. Additionally, the study showed that different perceived discrimination rates across ethnic groups mostly varied according to social and political environment, level of community strength, and immigrant children’s cultural integration in their co-ethnic or immigrant community.

Furthermore, Sorouri (2017) surveyed 150 young adult Muslims as well as non-Muslim young adults from workplaces and schools of Orange County, CA, and explored the impact of discrimination as measured by perceived quality of life on young adult Muslims. Findings showed that young adult Muslims reported more experiences of discrimination than their non-Muslim peers. Participants who identified as Muslim showed a statistically significant perception
of being discriminated against than those who did not identify as Muslim. However, those participants who identified as Muslim showed a statistically significant perception of positive quality of life than those who did not identify as Muslim. Finally, findings indicated that the relationship between identification as a follower of the Muslim religion and level of religiosity were found to be negatively correlated. Taking into account the findings of this study, religious discrimination needs to be carefully addressed in schools, if not, it would grow like racism and marginalization that are already prevalent.

Finally, Banerjee and Rowley (2018) investigated whether racial socialization moderated the relationship between school-based discrimination and achievement outcomes. They also examined the relationship between adolescents’ perceptions of school-based discrimination and academic outcomes. Findings showed that participants perceived school-based discrimination and racial socialization as predictors of academic outcomes. They also indicated that dimensions of racial socialization buffered the effects of school-based discrimination on academic outcomes. Furthermore, participants who perceived more discrimination by peers had parents who perceived their academic ability to be lower. This study was carried out with a sample of 74 African American middle school students.

Discrimination is also connected to the intersection of both gender and ethnicity, and I offer four studies as examples. First, in a longitudinal study, Quinones (2015) conducted surveys with 6,000 students from over 300 diverse neighborhoods in 26 middle school schools from varied racial/ethnic diversities across Los Angeles County, California. The purpose was to examine students’ experiences with racial/ethnic discrimination in a school setting with a focus on racial/ethnic composition. Findings indicated that overall, students did not report extreme levels of teacher or peer-initiated racial/ethnic discrimination, but there were statistically
significant results by gender and race/ethnicity. In examining perceptions of teacher-initiated racial/ethnic discrimination, there was a main effect of gender whereby African American, Latina/o, Asian American, and European American/White males reported higher levels of teacher-initiated racial/ethnic discrimination than females. Findings also showed that neighborhood-school incongruence affected students’ reports of both teacher-and-peer-initiated racial/ethnic discrimination differently depending on students’ racial/ethnic background and gender.

Second, Brown et al. (2010) found that boys were less likely than girls to attribute actions to gender discrimination. They suggested that girls have a greater awareness of their lower social status and in turn have a greater sensitivity for discriminatory treatment based on gender.

Third, Cogburn et al. (2011) used survey data of a previous study to examine school-based racial and gender discrimination experiences of 413 African American adolescents in Grade 8 in Maryland. Findings revealed a statistically reliable difference between the mean of discrimination for girls and boys. Boys reported more gender discrimination than did girls. However, in terms of racial discrimination, girls and boys did not differ in average reported frequency.

Finally, Benner and Graham (2013) examined possible differences in perceived racial/ethnic discrimination to determine whether perceptions of the specific sources of discrimination under study varied across boys versus girls or adolescents of different races/ethnicities. They surveyed 876 students in the greater Los Angeles schools. Findings indicated that African American and Latino youth reported less discrimination by peers compared to Asian American adolescents, but more discrimination by societal institutions. Concerning differences in gender, boys perceived significantly more discrimination by both
peers and societal institutions than did girls. However, no significant race/ethnic or gender differences emerged for adolescents’ perceptions of discrimination by school personnel, and all race-by-gender interactions.

**Bullying and Stigmatization Related to Race**

Bullying is intentional and repeated acts that occur through physical, verbal, and relational forms in situations where a power difference is present, with racial issues often a factor (Terry, 2018). Although definitions vary, including definitions used by federal agencies, many experts generally agree that bullying involves intent to cause harm, accompanied by repetition, and an imbalance of power (Calbom, 2012). It is a significant problem worldwide and one of the most common antisocial behaviors among children and adolescents. Bullying can include face-to-face confrontation like hitting, damaging, kicking, and other types of physical harm; and psychological harms or even online (Al-Ali & Khulood, 2018).

Cyber bullying has emerged as a new form of bullying and is correlated with involvement in traditional forms of bullying. Cyberbullying is typically defined as aggression that is intentionally and repeatedly carried out in an electronic context (e.g., e-mail, blogs, instant messages, text messages) against a person who cannot easily defend him- or herself (Kowalski et al., 2014). Over the last decade, research emphasis has shifted to the prevention of aggression online, where adolescents can both bully and be victimized (Modecki et al., 2014). Bullying in schools has been a popular topic in the public debate surrounding school legislation and policy. Given the limited efficacy of current bullying intervention programs, closer attention to the multiple predictors of bullying, both individual and contextual, is critical (Cook et al., 2010).

While bullying has increased, some have found that race does not appear to be a factor. For example, Schneider et al. (2012) found that there were no differences in overall reporting of
cyberbullying or school bullying by race/ethnicity. Overall, findings also revealed that 15.8% of students reported cyberbullying, and 25.9% reported school bullying. Their study examined the prevalence of cyberbullying and school bullying and the degree of overlap between the two forms of victimization. This study used data of the Metro West Adolescent Health Survey from high schools of the western suburbs and small cities of the Boston metropolitan area. This study involved 2000 students.

Other studies found that race is indeed a factor. Connell et al. (2015) study revealed that there were no differences in bullying victimization by race/ethnicity, but perceived victimization, as well as perceived and actual bullying behavior, differed across racial/ethnic groups. The study also indicated that clear racial/ethnic differences existed. Black students were more likely to self-report actual bullying but less likely to report perceived bullying in comparison with white students. As far as Latino students were concerned, they were less likely than whites to report perceived bullying, but there were no differences between white and Asian students. They used survey data of 3,965 students in grades 5-8 to examine whether there were racial/ethnic differences in perceived victimization, actual victimization, perceived bullying and actual bullying.

In another study, Vitoroulis et al. (2016) showed that European Canadian students reported more social victimization than non-European Canadian students, while non-European Canadian participants reported more physical, cyber, and bullying perpetration than European Canadian participants. This study involved a survey of 11,649 students from 114 schools of a large public-school district in urban/suburban and rural Southern Ontario, Canada. The study aimed to examine students’ reports on bullying perpetration and victimization within ethnically diverse schools.
In terms of stigmatization, Webb et al. (2018) surveyed 100 students to determine the extent accusation which student characteristics are associated with the acting White among them. The study was conducted in one of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) in the southeastern region of the state of Louisiana. Findings revealed that both student classification and age are significantly associated with a number of aspects related to the race-based stigmatization. First-year Black graduate students and sophomore students are less likely to believe that they are accused of acting White on the basis of associating with individuals who possess different racial characteristics. In contrast, older students are more likely to experience the accusation when compared with younger students.

*Discipline/Exclusion-Related to Race*

Exclusion from school is accepted to be a disciplinary tool used in schools where a student is removed from the school environment. It is the most common and serious discipline response to student misbehavior and often disproportionately involves minority students (Parker & Ford, 2013; Theriot et al., 2010). The major causes of exclusion from schools are: inappropriate school environments, tensions in school relationships, problems with staff. It is reported that some schools use the exclusion of a student as a gatekeeper to services due to the high threshold of need that children are required to reach before some services are able to work with the student and school (Sproton & Sedgewick, 2017). Exclusive practices have several faces. The more obvious ones are for instance bullying and lack of respect or involvement. However, in a broader sense, exclusion is institutional and may be understood as the ways in which schools perpetuate social injustice by limiting access to education (Andersen & Ottesen, 2011).
Other research studies support this finding. National data have shown for decades that Black students in the U.S. experience more frequent and severe disciplinary actions that remove them from school compared with their White peers (Bottiani et al., 2017). For example, Vincent and Tobin (2011) found disproportionately in their examination of disciplinary exclusion data from 77 U.S. schools implementing School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS). They found that at the elementary school level, reductions in exclusion rates were associated with SWPBS implementation in the classroom, whereas at the high school level, reductions in exclusion rates were associated with SWPBS implementation in non-classroom settings.

Students from non-White backgrounds, in particular African American students, tend to be more frequently excluded from school at a disproportionate rate compared to all other ethnicities.

Similarly, Hope et al. (2015) sought to understand issues related to racial discrimination and inequality in two public school districts, Harbor School District and Youngers School District, in Southeastern Michigan. They conducted semi-structured interviews with eight Black students from these schools. Findings indicated that these young people viewed discrimination as an old issue and as potentially painful for those who experienced it. Those participants deplored the ways they were discriminated against in school. They indicated that there were cases of inequitable classroom discipline practices in which a Black student was treated unfairly in comparison with White classmates. Overall, findings showed that despite purported changes in societal attitudes and behaviors toward race, the legacy of racism and related prejudice and discrimination remained crucial in defining the lived experiences of future possibilities for Black youth.

As a final example, Khalifa (2015) interviewed and observed Black principals, Black students and parents to examine parental perceptions of exclusionary practices of Black school
principals. His study highlighted the role of White privilege and racism in schools and districts, despite the presence of Black principals. The study suggested that in their own process of racial sensemaking, Black principals could distance themselves from stereotypes of Black students that encountered in schools. Additionally, the findings showed that Black principals could contribute to the reproduction of racism and marginalizing school practice on Black students. For example, those Black principals dealt more harshly with Black students and their families. Moreover, they blamed Black students for their lower achievement and unique behaviors, and they reproduced oppressive practices of White supremacy on Black students in schools.

**Gender Identity-Related Social Justice Issues**

While no youth are exempt from being bullied, some populations tend to be more vulnerable and at greater risk than others. For example, many LGBTQ+ students continue to experience a climate of violence at school with respect to their sexual identity (Kosciw et al., 2014). The typical bully narrative articulates LGBTQ+ students as perpetual victims, bullies as bad kids within adequate social skills and/or who come from abusive homes, and schools as neutral sites that are forced to mitigate encroaching external forces rooted in familial shortcomings and pathology (Payne & Smith, 2013). Prior research has demonstrated that school is often not a safe or affirming environment for LGBTQ+ youth (UNESCO, 2012).

For example, Kosciw et al. (2012) found that almost 57% of participants (LGBTQ+ students) reported hearing homophobic remarks from teachers or school staff, nearly 82% experienced verbal abuse and 38% experienced physical harassment due to their sexual orientation, and 63% reported feeling unsafe or uncomfortable at school. Those students reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and they reported most commonly avoiding school bathrooms and locker rooms because they felt uncomfortable in those spaces.
Furthermore, many students identified school buses, school hallways, and areas outside of school buildings like parking lots or athletic fields as unsafe spaces for them.

As another U.S. example, Russell et al. (2016) conducted surveys and reviewed teachers and principals’ reports on bullying and sexual orientation in 154 schools in California. They found that 17% of the variance in bullying problems depended on differences between schools because some schools had greater bullying problems than others. Additionally, their findings suggested the importance of adopting multiple Sexually Oriented Gender Identity (SOGI) focused programs and practices that might be most beneficial to schools that are least safe, or where they are needed most.

Other studies demonstrate that LGBTQ+-related social justice issues occur outside the U.S. Pizmony-Levy and Kosciw (2016) examined differences in student experiences with regard to school climate and in relation between school climate and engagement of LGBTQ+ students in the U.S. and Israel. The study used national survey data on LGBTQ+ students and their experiences in school. Findings revealed that, in general, school experiences for LGBTQ+ youth in the U.S. have been more negative than for those youth in Israel. For LGBTQ+ students in both countries, hearing homophobic remarks at school was a common occurrence. Nearly 72.2% of respondents in the U.S. said they frequently had heard the word gay used in a negative way, and slightly more than 44.8% had heard other types of homophobic remarks. In Israel, 55.6% of respondents reported having frequently heard the word “homo” used as pejorative remark; 33.2% of them heard other types of homophobic remarks, and 7.6% heard the word “lesbian” used as pejorative remark. In the U.S., 26.4% of students reported having been sexually harassed and close to one tenth of the students 8.1% reported having been physically assaulted. In contrast, in
Israel, these figures were minimal, and (3%). LGBTQ+ students in the U.S. reported having lower degree of belonging to their school community than their counterparts in Israel.

**Disability and Inclusion-Related Social Justice Issues**

Inclusion starts with school leadership and is associated with a social justice awareness of issues of marginalization of special education students (Dematthews & Mawhinney, 2014). The term inclusive education was first put on the agenda in the UNESCO declaration in *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (1994). Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within child-centered pedagogy (p. 8). In many places in the U.S., inclusion is defined as students with disabilities spending more than 80% of their school day in regular education settings (Baglieri et al., 2011). Inclusion is the process of increasing the participation of students and reducing their exclusion from the curricula, cultures, and communities of schools (Messiou, 2018). For instance, the logical starting point for developing inclusion within a school is through a detailed analysis of existing practice and with the sharing of expertise amongst staff members (Ainscow et al., 2014).

In a recent study, The National Council on Disability’s (2018) research team conducted interviews with state and local educators, parents, students or adults with disabilities to determine current issues regarding the placement and participation of students with disabilities in general education in the U.S. They found that inclusive special education services are more effective than segregated special education services. They also found that when students are included in general education instruction, they have more access to the general curriculum and effective instructional methods, they achieve at higher rates of academic performance. They
added that when educated in inclusive classrooms, students without disabilities experience a positive academic and social impact.

One study conducted in Israel by Shani (2013) explored and gained a better understanding of general School Administrators Team Members’ (SATM) role in the process of including children with disabilities in their schools. He used documents and conducted interviews with school principals, assistant principals, and school counselors in seven schools in Israel. He found that SATM tended to limit inclusion to children who did not have severe language learning, emotional or behavioral difficulties. Findings also indicated that differential pedagogy, which was essential for inclusion, was difficult to implement. Additionally, SATM viewed the relationships with parents crucial to the success of inclusion, but there were difficulties creating trustful relationships with parents. Finally, within SATM, assistant principals and school counselors did not sufficiently utilize their professional knowledge for the benefit of inclusion. They spent most of their time fulfilling bureaucratic tasks instead of emotionally supporting students with disabilities in their inclusion efforts. The study was carried out using interviews with the participants.

As another international study example, Kayama and Haight (2018) examined Japanese parents’ experiences raising their children who have disabilities, focusing on any associated stigmatization. They found that many parents' anticipation or actual experience of stigmatization made them reluctant to use disability labels and services for their children. Over time, they were more concerned about the impact of disability and stigmatization on their children's education and development that motivated them to actively seek out specialized services. Additionally, parents expressed their concerns about their children's relatively negative
relationships with other students, and how such relationships affected their overall experiences at school.

**Socioeconomic Status-Related Social Justice Issues**

A number of studies focused on various social justice issues related to students’ socioeconomic status. They indicated that students’ high and low socioeconomic status are associated with their achievement, exposure to exclusion, bullying, and discrimination (Chaux & Castellanos, 2016; Gazeley, 2012; Igah, 2018; Min & Goff, 2016; Montecino et al., 2017). For example, Min and Goff (2016) examined a school’s capacity for institutional diversity related to student achievement in socio-economically, ethnically, and linguistically diverse schools. They reviewed surveys of 25,506 ninth grade students from 944 schools, parents, principals and teachers. Their study indicated that a school’s capacity for institutional diversity was critical to the academic performance of students. It also confirmed that different types of school diversity had different associations with the academic achievement of students from varied family and language backgrounds. Overall school diversity varied across schools; for instance, ethnic diversity ranged from a low of 0% to a high of 100% of student of color. Results showed that students from average SES families benefit more from the capacity for institutional diversity of their schools: as the level of school capacity increases, the achievement for students from average SES families increases, whereas the achievement of students from higher SES students is likely to decrease.

Also, Igah (2018) found that schools with a high population of low SES students relied more heavily on the use of exclusions when sanctioning student behavior. Additionally, he found that African-American and Caucasian students who were identified as low SES tended to be associated with having accompanying risk factors, and consequently being more likely to be
excluded than their peers. He used data from the Ohio Department of Education’s database to examine trends of school disciplinary exclusions following a state-wide change in the behavioral system used to discipline students. They indicated no statistically significant difference when comparing the overall total, objective and subjective rates of exclusion of Caucasian students to African-American.

As another example, Gazeley (2012) observed and conducted in-depth interviews with 31 parents and principals to explore the impact of social class on school exclusion processes operating in one local authority in England. His study indicated that parents who were involved in school exclusion processes did not form a homogeneous group because of their differences not only in their circumstances but also in their levels of engagement with these processes. The study also indicated that social class shaped parent-professional interaction that occurred within school exclusion processes in a number of ways. Parents in the interview sample had a great deal of contact with the school and they indicated that their involvement in school exclusion processes made significant demands on their time as well as financially and emotionally. Additionally, the respondents reported that there were occasions when professional practices fell short of expected standards. For instance, some thought that there were occasions when parents were subjected to undue pressure exerted by the principals.

In Columbia, Chaux and Castellanos (2016) surveyed 53,316 students from public schools to examine the role that age and socioeconomic differences between classmates could play on bullying. They found that 13.5% of 5th graders and 15.3% of 9th graders admitted bullying classmates but did not report being bullied, while 20.8% of 5th graders and 10.3% of 9th graders reported being bullied by classmates but did not report bullying others. Additionally, 8.3% of 5th graders and 4.4% of 9th graders reported bullying and also being bullied by their
classmates. Findings also indicated that bullies only were found to be significantly older than all the other groups. Among 9th graders, victims only had significantly lower SES levels than all other groups. The study also showed that being a boy, having aggressive beliefs, coming from authoritarian families, and living in violent communities were associated with being a victim and with being a bully, both among 5th and 9th graders. Furthermore, the study suggested that, at least at the school level, wealth inequality might be related to bullying.

Finally, Riey et al. (2017) interviewed three principals in Chilian schools and they found that these principals were working in more socially segregated schools. The distribution of students by type of school reflected a high concentration of low-income students in public schools, and such low-income students were sometimes discriminated by their peers because of their status.

Social Justice Leadership Challenges Facing Principals

Principals may face a number of challenges that prevent them from handling social justice issues and other issues in their day-to-day work. Challenges can prevent principals them from assuring an effective control of what happens in schools and using their knowledge and skills to solve social justice issues. In order to succeed in running schools, it is crucial for principals to overcome social justice challenges first and how they can do that is described in this literature. Several studies have been conducted to explore social justice challenges principals face: communication and awareness, internal and external forces, resistance to inclusion, tension, inadequate materials, limited leadership, and dealing with different languages (Boske & Benaventure-McEnery, 2015; Brooks et al., 2007; DeMatthews, 2014, 2015; Slater et al., 2006; Garduno, & Mentz, 2018; Mafora, 2013; Mwangi & Orodho, 2014).
For example, Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) found, via their interviews with six principals, field notes, observation notes, and documents reviews of schools in the U.S., that the participants might have been prepared to handle inclusion in their schools but not to grasp the multicultural dimensions of leadership. Besides, they found that problems of equity, excellence, and social justice took place in the schools and principals could succeed in solving them if they received a strong support from their district-level administrator.

With a similar focus, Brooks et al. (2007) conducted a phenomenological study in high schools of Southeastern region of the U.S. They interviewed and observed 42 teachers and administrators using a snowball technique and they used technical and nontechnical documents to collect data. They found that although many dynamics are in play as educators seek to conduct bridge work for social justice, two key phenomena have a tremendous influence over the success of this sort of leadership practice: communication and awareness. Additionally, they found that leadership for social justice as a practiced phenomenon is ripe with promise but fraught with complexity and contradiction.

Another study focused on two principals within elementary schools in an urban school district in the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. It found, via structured interviews and observation in a case study by DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014), that school principals faced numerous internal and external forces that were discouraging and slowed the progress of their social justice work. Their study also indicated that principals who continue to engage in social justice work are truly heroic but at times imperfect, especially while leading under immensely challenging conditions.

In terms of inclusion, DeMatthews (2014, 2015) found that principals faced tremendous challenges when developing inclusion programs in U.S. schools. The first case study involved
one new principal of an urban school in a district with a long history of segregation. Its findings revealed numerous challenges, such as constant student behavioral problems, school violence, crime, low graduation and attendance rates, poor student performance, high drug use, teachers’ resistance, and gap between students with disabilities and the entire student body. The second study also involved one principal of an elementary school in the Mid-Atlantic region and used interview, observations, and documents. The study aimed to find out how the principal led to create a more inclusive school. Findings indicated that the principal faced challenges, such as teachers and parents’ resistance to inclusion. However, the study also showed that the principal was optimistic about the students’ behavior related to inclusion after observing them in class.

Furthermore, Boske and Benaventure-McEnery (2015) conducted a grounded theory study by interviewing three assistant principals in schools of a Southern state. They used a snowball sampling technique and they found that committing to social justice and equity-oriented work in schools often creates tension when assistant principals ask teachers and their supervisors to consider multiple perspectives to improve student learning. They also found that assistant principals recognized the need to step out of traditional disciplinarian roles and utilize the fullness of their identity, lived experiences and emotions to take actions to empower the underserved populations.

Similar challenges exist in other countries. In Nyeri town, Kenya, Mwangi and Orodho (2014) investigated the challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education programs in public primary schools. They observed, interviewed, and surveyed 42 principals, 538 primary school teachers, and 40 ministry officials. They found that there were inadequate teaching and learning materials such as a favorable curriculum, equipment and other facilities to accommodate students. For example, students with learning disabilities used the same facilities with their
counterpart regular students and that caused a major challenge to both teachers and learners. The study also revealed that the major challenges parents faced in educating their children with learning disabilities were stigmatization, negative attitudes from members of the society and parental ignorance.

In a study by Mafora (2013) in South Africa, findings showed that teachers perceived their schools generally lacked fairness and principals were not transforming because their leadership practices were limited. The participants also perceived their principals as failing to create an environment that promoted social justice. The study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with five secondary school principals and teachers of Soweto, Johannesburg West-D12 Education district in South Africa to explore how teachers and learners of School Governing Base (SGB) perceived and experienced principals’ transformative leadership for social justice.

More recently, Slater et al. (2018) conducted a cross-cultural study on novice principals in 15 countries on five continents using surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and narrative accounts to examine the usefulness of principal preparation programs and novice principals’ challenges. Findings of their study indicated that novice principals had faced many challenges like professional isolation and loneliness, the legacy, practice and style of the previous principal management of time, multiple tasks, priorities, school budget and ineffective staff. Another important challenge was dealing with different languages spoken in schools. Additionally, the study indicated that managing paperwork, dealing with poorly performing staff, achieving a work-life balance, and balancing system imperatives with local needs were the major challenges.
Strategies for Overcoming Social Justice Issues

Principals utilize various leadership strategies to address social justice issues in their day-to-day work in schools. Social justice leadership strategies, in particular, are useful for principals for assuring cohesion, a peaceful environment, and school success. Without utilizing strategies, principals might be overwhelmed by the social justice issues they face because they are complex and diverse, and each one needs to be addressed differently with an adequate strategy. How important strategies are for principals and how principals utilize them to handle social justice issues are described in the following review of literature. This section provides information on school-wide change reforms, as well as strategies to work with certain specific populations.

School-Wide Strategies

Studies conducted in the U.S. and England revealed that principals use a number of school-wide strategies to address social justice issues to accommodate all students in their schools (Moral et al., 2018; Theoharis, 2007, 2010; Tilley, 2014; Winterbottom & Winterbottom, 2017; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016).

Theoharis’ (2007, 2010) studies revealed findings from social justice leaders attempting to make school-wide changes. In his first study, he found that principals faced resistance to social justice from their staff, the community, the school district, and beyond. Therefore, they used several proactive strategies to enable themselves professionally to overcome that resistance and raising student achievement for marginalized students: (a) improving school structures by changing them and by leading an elimination of pullout and segregated programs at their schools, (b) recentering and enhancing staff capacity by addressing issues of race, providing ongoing staff development based on building equity, developing staff investment in social justice, hiring and supervising for justice, and empowering staff, and (c) strengthening school
culture and community by creating a warm and welcoming school climate and how to reach out to community and marginalized families. He carried out this study by interviewing seven principals in urban schools in the Midwest to learn how they sustain their capacities to implement social justice. His second study revealed similar practices of six other principals.

In 2014, Tilley conducted a study to determine the usefulness of a handbook entitled *Keeping Equity in Mind* edited to support teacher leaders as they continue equity work in their classrooms; and to provide teacher leaders and principals with a product that had been field tested and ready for operational use in their school sites. He surveyed and interviewed 10 school principals and teacher leaders of two schools in the U.S. Those participants reported that the use of focal student strategies presented in the handbook supported teacher leaders in taking the first steps to address equity concerns in their classrooms. The author found that teachers constantly lacked time to meet their students’ academic needs while maintaining a rigorous pace in order to meet academic goals. Overall, several of the participants reported feeling as though they would continue to use the strategies they learned from the handbook, such as coupling formal equity training with the use of *Keeping Equity in Mind*, and selecting focal students and working with them because they fall in the academic gap.

A few studies outside the U.S. offer similar strategies. Studying a Greek-Cypriot principal’s leadership strategies using interviews and focus groups, Zembylas and Iasonos (2016) found that she used various strategies when acting as an advocate for marginalized and poor students by promoting inclusion and equality at her school. She garnered resources for the school, developed networks between the school and the community. The authors also found that she found individual solutions to challenges she faced in her school. For example, offering
numerous opportunities to her teaching staff for professional development that supported the school’s vision that benefitted marginalized students.

In two studies conducted in Spain and England, Morale et al. (2018) and Winterbottom and Winterbottom (2017) wanted to identify particular strategies principals use in secondary and elementary schools to promote social justice. They found via interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires the following strategies: maintaining a very clear vision and well-defined sense of direction, building a vision connected to the context, creating structures for shared decision-making, sharing power with the teaching staff, adopting an attitude of taking risks, seeking new ways to curriculum improvement, favoring an education that takes diversity and plurality into account, building and creating a school community, building relations and addressing social justice pedagogical challenges by focusing on respect, trust, excellence, fairness, encouragement, and family.

**Special Education-Related Strategies**

A few studies focusing on special education found that principals faced various challenges and used various strategies as to assure inclusion in their schools (DeMatthews & Mawhinneys, 2014; Day & Prunty, 2015; Hedgecock, 2012; Jahnukainen, 2015; McMaster, 2014; The National Council on Disability, 2018). For example, Hedgecock (2012) used surveys, interviews, field notes, and observations of principals in four schools in the U.S. He wanted to determine how principal’s knowledge of implementing special education programs. The participants reported that fostering collaboration and communicating were crucial in the effectiveness of implementing special education programs. The study also suggested that all school stakeholders (teachers, parents, districts, and students) should be given the opportunity to have a voice in the implementation and sustainability of these programs.
In DeMatthews and Mawhinney's (2014) study, findings indicated that making student placement decisions was challenging because some of the students had significant behavioral problems or were generally well behaved but might have extreme outbursts. They added principals faced challenges caused by district policy and the demands of the upper-middle class community members living in the school’s neighborhood. For instance, whenever a student in the self-contained program had his or her Individualized Education Program (IEP) revised to be included in general education classes more than 50% of the school day, the district would add another student into the self-contained program from another school. The study was carried out using interviews, document reviews and observations of two principals, teachers, and staff of two elementary schools in the U.S.

In another study, Day and Prunty (2015) found via interviews, document review, and observations that principals faced three types of challenges in schools: providing appropriate support and concerns about the behavioral difficulties of some students, the need for more expertise in meeting students’ individual needs through differentiation and the lack of time, and language barriers and different cultural values and expectations. They also identified strategies principals used for making inclusion, such as leading and supporting inclusive policies and moving towards collaborative cultures, and providing social and emotional support for students.

In a more recent study, The National Council on Disability’s (2018) research team conducted interviews with state and local educators, parents, students or adults with disabilities to determine current issues to the placement and participation of students with disabilities in general education in the U.S. The team found that inclusive special education services are more effective than segregated special education services. It also found that when students are included in general education instruction, they have more access to the general curriculum and
effective instructional methods, they achieve at higher rates of academic performance. Furthermore, the study indicated that when educated in inclusive classrooms, students without disabilities experience a positive academic and social impact.

In an international study, Jahnukainen (2015) wanted to understand and compare school principals’ views related to the current state of organizing the special needs education in their schools. He interviewed 12 school principals: six in Alberta and six in Finland. Findings revealed some linguistic and historical differences and conventions related to the use of language. For example, the Finnish participants talked mostly about integration instead of inclusion because inclusion does not exist in the school law, although it is commonly used in the field. As far as Albertans were concerned, they more frequently used the inclusive education terminology in the school law. The author also found that some principals had had a broader orientation to being inclusive in the meaning of meeting the social, economic and ethnic differences, while for others the inclusivity comprised more narrow definitions. Furthermore, most principals had quite a pragmatic idea of what was possible to do and what was not, but actually, none of them was in favor of full inclusion.

Another non-U.S. study conducted by McMaster (2014) explored ways principals can create more inclusive environments. He used field notes and interviewed the principal and students of Aoteora school, New Zealand, to examine elements of inclusive changes. He identified five elements of inclusion: relationships, advocacy, a sense of identity, shared experiences, and transparency which work to strengthen the effort to develop inclusion in schools and communities. Relationship, which is an essential element in making any type of inclusion successful involves is the teachers’ and students’ ability to create relationships. As far as advocacy is concerned, it not only results in non-participation but in the lack of voice. The
author indicated that without an advocate to push for inclusion and lacking the skills to effectively speak for oneself, a situation of exclusion is more likely to emerge. For example, one way that this can occur is if there is lack of response to students who experience communication challenges, this can result in exclusion from the curriculum and from social relationships. In schools where the sense of identity is strong there is more confidence in advocacy, there are more opportunities to share in experience, and more relationships are formed. Sharing experiences, doing and celebrating together, creates a familiarity in which those unknown people become known. Finally, the author indicated that transparency, in this sense, is seeing what is present, but also seeing what is not. As the school becomes transparent there are fewer shadows in which exclusionary practice can exist.

**Bullying and Discipline-Related Strategies**

Four studies were found that offered bullying strategies, such as responding, suspending, seeking support, and educating emotionally (Bickmore, 2011; Gazeley et al., 2015; Raynor & Wylie, 2012; Rigby, 2012). For example, Bickmore (2011) studied violence in five elementary and secondary schools of the U.S. and found via interviews and document reviews that concerns about bullying were prominent in those schools. He identified many strategies principals used to address bullying, such as responding to serious individual incidents, suspending, expelling or transferring individual students out of their schools. He also found that principals referred the suspended students to various voluntary programs. Another strategy was to facilitate face-to-face dialogue between students in conflict.

Rigby (2012) also wanted to know how schools respond to bullying. He found that schools addressed bullying using the following strategies: (a) providing social and emotional education for all students to reduce the likelihood of bullying or focus upon changing the
relevant desires of those who have been identified as engaging in bullying, (b) including lessons delivered through the curriculum to foster more positive relations among members of the school community, and (c) using of non-punitive intervention strategies to deal with suitable cases of bullying.

In Gazeley et al.’s (2015) study, they focused on the difficulty of identifying schools’ success in reducing rates of recorded exclusion due to discipline-related issues. They interviewed staff, tutors, local authorities, and students in six schools of the U.S. They found that rates of permanent exclusion declined in all six schools. They also found that the need to reduce rates of permanent exclusion was attributed to problems caused by previous high demand for places in pupil referral units. Additionally, the study confirmed that the policy focus on reducing rates of permanent exclusion had encouraged a shift away from permanent exclusion to the use of other sanctions and approaches. They included allocating additional support, providing access to alternative curricula and off-site provision, alternative disciplinary sanctions, and whole day spent within-school isolation units.

In another study, Raynor and Wylie (2012) found in two London borough schools that principals and students addressed bullying using strategies categorized into four different groups: (a) adopt no clear strategy, (b) seek support from allies by staying close to friends and telling parents and teachers about the bullying, (c) talk to the bully, and (d) fight back and stand up bullies or make friends with them. Their study explored grade 8 students’ views on successful approaches to tackle bullying and was carried out with 304 participants.

Race-Related Strategies

Many studies have been conducted concerning race-related strategies principals used such as restructuring, attracting racially diverse students, using a critical race theory lens,
improving adolescents’ perceptions of school equity, integrating examples and content that reflected students’ origins, advocating for inclusion, and providing highly flexible timetables (Andersen & Ottesen, 2011; Debnam et al., 2014; Eden, 2015; Gill, 2013; Gould, 2017; Kimelberg & Billingham, 2013; Santamaría, 2014; Zanoni & Mampaey, 2013; Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011).

Several studies focus on the positive impact of integrating diverse populations. For example, Theoharis and O’Toole (2011) found, via multiple interviews of two principals, classroom observations and field notes from elementary schools of the U.S., that principals used strategies of inclusive services that benefit traditionally marginalized English Language Learners (ELL) students as well as their peers. Restructuring was used to serve ELL students inclusively and was to comply with state regulations and to raise staff capacity to better meet the needs of these students in the classroom. They also engaged staff in professional development around ELL students. These authors also found that social justice and inclusion for ELLs are inherently linked and that socially just practices are possible for ELL students when school leaders are willing to actively engage in the struggles and often difficult processes that lead to inclusive practices and mind-sets.

Similarly, Eden (2015) focused on the inclusion children of migrant workers. He found, via interviews, observations of principals, and document reviews that because of discriminatory policy of Israel, children of migrant workers were ignored by the educational system, and their names were ejected from the Education Ministry's computer lists. He added that situation led principals to develop cooperation, build coalition, mobilize the media, and they received support from teachers, parents’ associations, and politicians to defy the State and local authorities to implement inclusion in schools.
A study by Kimelberg and Billingham (2013) also showed that attracting racially tolerant middle-and upper-middle-class Whites to a district that was largely non-White and low-income was an efficient strategy for reducing segregation. However, it also found that efforts to attract certain types of people to urban school districts would be limited in their utility, and might even be counterproductive, if officials did not understand the broader context within which people select schools. The study was conducted by interviewing 32 middle class parents in Boston, MA, to examine attitudes toward diversity in schools.

Other studies revealed the positive impacts of dialogue regarding equity issues with students and others. For example, Santamaría (2014) found, via her surveys and interviews with six participants in Southern California, that any leader can choose to use a critical race theory lens when practicing leadership for social justice and equity in diverse settings. She also found that school leaders purposely lead in order to give back to the marginalized communities with which they identified or served, supporting their own social justice journeys. Additionally, these studied leaders felt it was their responsibility to publicly bring critical issues with regard to race, ethnicity, gender, and class to their constituents for resolution.

Additionally, Debnam et al. (2014) surveyed 19,833 students from 52 Maryland high schools in 10 counties and conducted focus groups with district personnel. Their study examined students’ perceptions of school equity related to their perceptions of connection and engagement within their schools. Findings indicated that improving adolescents’ perceptions of school equity is a key process that schools should address to promote student connection and engagement. They also indicated that adolescents who perceived their school to be equitable were also more likely to feel engaged. Additionally, the authors found that in less ethnically diverse schools,
where the majority of students might have similar race and socioeconomic status, greater equity is associated with a better school environment.

In Andersen and Ottesen’s (2011) study, they explored school personnel’s responses to know about challenges of inclusion in their schools. They interviewed principals, deputies, and social advisers of two upper secondary schools in a medium-sized town in south-eastern Norway. Findings indicated that participants had considered the lack of social interaction between minority and majority students as the main challenge. For instance, many minority students refused to spend time with majority students in the canteen, and they hesitated or resisted joining teams with minority students in physical education classes. To address those challenges, principals recognized the importance of integrating examples and content that reflected the students’ ethnic origin, histories and experiences in the curriculum but that was not their priority. Their preferred strategy was to embrace and practice inclusion individually. Additionally, they reported that developing an inclusive school required developing critical consciousness to be able to break out of the usual patterns of practice. Finally, the study indicated that critical conversations might help school communities acknowledge, recognize, critique and change the invisible practices that may impede inclusion.

In Canada, Gill (2013) explored how an inclusive school is able to manage the contradiction between its own inclusive mission and the pressure to exclude minority students. He conducted a case study focusing on some of the challenges and tensions that principals and district leaders experience regarding the issues of social justice in Canada. He found, via document review and narrative of one participant that, leadership for inclusion must be non-hierarchical and collectively focused on inclusion. His study also revealed that leadership
strategies include advocating for inclusion, educating participants, developing critical consciousness, nurturing dialogue, emphasizing student learning and classroom practice.

Another international study by Zanoni and Mampaey (2013) found that the macro-context in which a school is embedded represents a key factor in attempting to explain its strategy towards inclusion. The studied school used various strategies for inclusion, such as integrating minority students’ cultures in its didactical and pedagogical approach, reconstructing students’ ethnic diversity as an educational resource. It also fostered minority students’ self-reflectivity to make them aware of their own capacities and confidence in their ability to succeed. Their study was carried out by interviewing one principal, four teachers, the administrative staff members, minority students and their parents in Belgium.

Finally, regarding inclusion, Gould (2017) conducted semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups with Gypsy, Roma and Traveler (GRT) students, their parents, and school staff in the UK and Ireland to identify effective support strategies schools used to ensure social inclusion and academic progress for those students. He found that schools supporting GRT students could potentially implement many effective strategies to promote both the social inclusion and their academic progress. He enumerated providing highly flexible timetables and classroom management, establishing strong links with the GRT community and involving them in school decisions, accommodating students’ culture, and building trust.

Social Justice Leadership Preparation

Principals need to receive general leadership preparation to run schools, but more specifically, they also need social justice leadership training that prepares them to better handle social justice issues. It is important for them receive both trainings because while solving social justice issues with people, they combine various skills (cultural, social, administrative, professional, and personal), and competences with social justice skills to succeed. Social justice
leadership preparation is important for principals because it will teach them social justice theories and develop their capabilities to lead students, teachers, and staff in a climate of social justice, equality, inclusion, equity, equality, fairness, and mutual respect.

Some studies have been conducted concerning social justice leadership preparation and focused on the need for training on managing, advocating, changing, and maintaining a welcome environment for students (Allen et al., 2017; Everson & Bussey, 2007; Garza, 2015; McKinney & Capper, 2007; Merchant & Graza, 2015; Miller & Martin, 2015; Ryan & Katz, 2007). Some studies focused on graduate preparation programs, and efforts to understand social justice leadership needs. For instance, in a case study with two teachers and five graduate students regarding their leadership preparation program at Cedarcrest University, U.S., McKinney and Capper (2007) found three critical points related to their research questions: a) evolving meanings of diversity, multiculturalism, and social justice emerged; (b) the need to manage tensions was key, and (c) leveraging funding. They also found that reflecting on how the implementation of a program oriented toward equity and social justice is an on-going process.

Everson and Bussey (2007) also assessed graduate students as ethical and social leaders at Saint Louis University using surveys, interviews, and analysis of public data. Their data indicated whether or not graduates were working in districts where there was a serious need for strong leader advocacy for equity. These researchers also found that there was hope for the development of effective school leaders and hope for social justice to be a foundational value in the schools and districts. Similarly, Ryan and Katz (2007), as professors in educational leadership preparation programs, examined how students in their courses in a school district of the U.S. were learning about social responsibility and issues of equity in schools. They also
found that the participants appeared particularly unprepared to teach the current changing population of students.

In 2015, Merchant and Garza found in their study that a 12-year district-university partnership created and sustained principal preparation program reflecting a number of strengths that contribute to its continued success. They added that students in the program developed not only a guiding philosophy but also the tools to be effective advocates for social justice for students and their families. Besides, their self-assessments provided crucial insights into the ways in which the program impacted their personal and professional development as leaders. Allen et al. (2017) explored the relationship between a social justice curriculum and their dispositions in an advanced level foundations of educational leadership online course. They used surveys and essays by 112 U.S. graduates. Findings showed a positive shift in the development of students’ dispositions in five specific areas: (1) the common good over personal interests, (2) diversity as an asset, (3) a safe and supportive learning environment, (4) every student learning, and (5) build on diverse social and cultural assets.

Yet, despite some efforts to infuse social justice training in preparation programs, this is still not happening everywhere. In a study by Miller and Martin (2015), findings indicated a consensus among all of the participants that minimal emphasis was placed on their preparation coursework to prepare for leading in culturally diverse schools with a social justice focus. These researchers also found that convincingly, all principals emphasized the importance of maintaining a welcoming school environment that is inclusive and affirming for all students. They conducted a multiple qualitative case study using purposeful sampling in four demographically changing or urban schools in Missouri, U.S., and collecting data using semi-structured interviews with four principals.
Chapter 2 Closure

This literature review has revealed that social justice issues are numerous and ongoing in the U.S. and in other countries throughout the world. These issues include racism, segregation, discrimination, exclusion, bullying, stigmatization, and discipline concerns. Some research on effective strategies exist and some principals are trying to become social justice leaders, but challenges remain. Principals also face resistance from their personnel and other stakeholders. Some research on leadership training for social justice exists, but it is limited. All such findings confirmed the need for my study, with methods detailed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The purpose of my proposed basic qualitative study was twofold: (a) to describe and interpret how principals make meaning of their experiences and professional challenges in dealing with issues of social justice and equity, and (b) to find out what school principals do to overcome these social injustice issues impacting the students in their schools. I chose school principals as participants but excluded teachers because my interest was in educational leadership but not in teaching.

The central question guiding this study was: How do principals experience and respond to social justice issues when leading their schools? Specific research questions included:

1) What social justice issues are principals facing in their schools?
2) What challenges do they face in responding to those issues, and how do they address these challenges?
3) What training on social justice issues have such principals received in their leadership preparation programs, or via professional development?
4) What supports do they receive from other principals, families, and others in dealing with these issues?
5) How do their experiences with social justice issues and challenges shape their sense of purpose and approach to leadership as principals?

Methodology Overview and Rationale

This study used a basic qualitative approach, which is when researchers simply describe their study as a qualitative research study without declaring it a particular type of qualitative study, such as phenomenology, grounded theory, or narrative analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Such approach was based on constructivism or the construction of knowledge, whereby
reality is constructed and interpreted by individuals according to their ideological and cultural positions; it is assumed that a single phenomenon can have multiple interpretations or meanings (Cohen et al., 2007; Ernest, 1994). In a basic qualitative approach, the researcher’s interest is understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved. Meaning is not discovered but constructed; it does not inhere in the object, simply waiting for someone to come upon it (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This means that the researcher can only find out the participants’ ideas or problems by asking them appropriate questions that enable them to clearly describe them to him or her. Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998).

Researchers conducting a basic qualitative study are interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In other words, the purpose of the basic qualitative study is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences. Basic qualitative studies are probably the most common form of qualitative research found in the education literature. In this approach, researchers collect data through interviews, observations, or documents analysis, and they analyze data by identifying recurring patterns that characterize them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In a basic qualitative study, findings are the recurring patterns or themes supported by the data from which they derived.

I used this basic qualitative approach because my study was not intended to collect statistical data from principals, teachers, and students in the selected schools. I also used this qualitative method because social justice issues constitute a problem that needs to be explored, and I was interested in collecting qualitative data from principals experiencing social justice issues to better understand the meaning they ascribe to their experiences. Qualitative researchers
often collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study (Creswell, 2013). Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2013) state that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Other reasons for using a basic qualitative study were about the characteristics of the qualitative study that Creswell (2014) described, such as a qualitative research process is emergent and initial methods, questions, and data collection evolve with the study. Qualitative researchers develop and present a holistic account of the problem being studied. They focus on identifying complex interactions rather than cause and effect relationships. Furthermore, this approach provided me with an opportunity to reflect on myself, because Creswell indicated that the researcher first talks about his or her experiences with the phenomenon being explored. This involved relaying past experiences through work, schooling, family, dynamics, and so forth.

I also wanted to learn from the participants as Marshall and Rossman (2016) noted: “The researcher learns from the participants to understand the meaning of their lives but should maintain a stance of neutrality” (p. 22). Additionally, this study aimed to discover the real meaning of challenges and how principals dealt with social justice issues in their daily life. Knowing that qualitative study takes place in the setting enabled me to be well imbued in these principals’ realities. Furthermore, using this qualitative method enabled me to use purposeful sampling according to my criteria. I also chose the qualitative method because of its design flexibility that helped me to conduct the study without lots of difficulties. Finally, this qualitative method was used because it aligned well with the research conceptual framework.

This basic qualitative study used interpretivism theory. A theory is a reasoned set of ideas intended to explain why something happens or exists. Interpretivism theory is often linked to
the thought of Max Weber (1864-1920), who suggested that in the human sciences we are concerned with verstehen (understanding) (Crotty, 1986, p. 67). I chose this approach because I needed an understanding of principals’ experiences dealing with social justice issues by talking directly to them and listening to them at their workplaces. This study was based on several philosophical assumptions as described in the next paragraph.

Whether we are aware of it or not, we always bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to our research (Creswell, 2013, p. 15). Some of the characteristics and philosophical assumptions behind this basic qualitative research were: ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Ontology relates to the nature of reality and reality is multiple as seen through many views. Epistemology enables the researcher to use subjective evidence from the participants; attempts to lessen the distance between himself or herself and that being researched. Methodology in which the researcher uses inductive logic, studies the topic within its context, and uses an emerging design (Creswell, 2013, p. 21). Methodology is the philosophy underlying the procedures and principles in a particular field of inquiry. It depends on ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of reality and the best ways of gaining access to that reality (Crotty, 2003). Research methodology of interpretivism is hermeneutic and dialectal (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

My methodology was based on interpretivism because, for an educational and social science researcher, interpretivism is a more suitable paradigm due to the enormous scope it offers. The core idea of interpretivism is to work with subjective meanings already there in the social world; that is to acknowledge their existence, to reconstruct them, to understand them, to avoid distorting them, and to use them as building-blocks in theorizing (Goldkuhl, 2012). The aim of interpretive inquiry is to carefully look into details, complexity, and situated meaning of
the everyday life of individuals or social phenomena (Schwandt, 1994). Bryman (2008) and Grix (2010) contend that interpretivism aims to explore individuals’ perceptions, share their meanings and develop insights about the observed case. In my study, I would like to better understand the U.S. principals’ experiences and perceptions of social justice issues through the participants I studied in the Midwest region, and to let other people know about them.

Interpretivists believe in the inseparability of understanding from interpretation, they see all social research as interpretive because all research is guided by the researcher’s desire to understand and interpret social reality (Bhattacharya, 2008). Interpretive research rejects a foundational base to knowledge, bringing into question its validity. Interpretive research cannot be judged using the same criteria as the scientific paradigm (Scotland, 2012).

**Reflections on My Identity**

Creswell (2013) indicated that how we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to the research. All writing is positioned in this stance. In the same context, Marshall and Rossman (2016) said that research designs should include reflection on one’s identity and sense of voice and perspectives, assumptions, and sensitivities. These are key elements in a proposal’s discussions of the choice of the research questions. Therefore, reflecting on my identity in this study was important for me because it enabled me to discuss my experiences with social justice issues and leadership challenges I faced while working as a principal in my home country, before studying the participants’ situations.

My experience with social justice issues started in Sarh, Chad in the 1992s where I was the principal of the evening high school founded by an association of the unemployed graduates of Moyen-Chari, Chad. As the school belonged to the association, my supervisors were the
association leaders. While working there, I experienced social justice issues practiced by my supervisors on me, and I also advocated for students and teachers as well.

Concerning myself, I used to work for five hours a day, from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. for a monthly pay of CFA 60,000 (the equivalent of $120), so I wanted an increase, but the association leaders rejected my claims. In addition to administrative tasks, they assigned me an additional one that was keeping money during the registration until the end but they paid me the same salary so I was always complaining. When I asked for a raise, they only promised to do it but they never did it and I was demotivated, but I could not quit because finding another position was difficult. Worse, every year they selected one or two teachers who were their close friends to give them awards arguing that they were the hardest workers of the year, but I never got an award until I left the school in 1998.

As far as students were concerned, many of them were disabled but they did not benefit from any exemptions concerning their registration fees and other treatments. They had to pay the same amount of tuition as non-disabled students did, and they did not have any place reserved for them because there was no law in their favor. For example, when a poor student could not pay his tuition because both parents passed away in the same year, the association excluded him from school in the middle of the academic year. I was so upset to see disabled students who had to leave their stroller outside and crawl to enter the classroom because no space was reserved for them inside so they had to sit with non-disabled students on the same desks or benches. In addition, while all students paid for their studies, they were not all studying in decent conditions because many students’ rights were not respected. For instance, the association refused to drill a well in the school to provide them with water, and there were no jars in classrooms. Students had to buy water from water sellers to drink. Sometimes, water sellers did not come with enough
water to school to sell so students had to go outside to fetch it to drink. I saw that it was important for the school to have a water pump for students, but the association leaders said there was not enough money to do that.

In my country, culture, ignorance, and illiteracy may be the causes of social justice issues. The culture is very conservative, and the country has a hierarchical society where many social categories have different considerations, so the notion of equality is ignored by the citizens. For instance, disabled people are considered members of the lowest category because the majority of people think they are unproductive for the society. Others believe that disabled people are cursed by God and do not deserve any consideration like other citizens. Culturally, people of higher rank or social class can ill-treat others who are of the lower rank without pity or compassion, and disabled persons are the real victims. For those reasons, disabled students of all levels are always clamoring for their rights, but they rarely get satisfaction, even though human rights associations are defending them. They cannot get satisfaction because they are discriminated against by both the society in general and their school communities. This situation is also exacerbated by the illiteracy that limits people’s mind to distinguish injustice from justice. It is very difficult for the illiterate and ignorant people to understand human rights so they think that respecting other people’s rights is a kind of weakness. As for the intellectuals, they are aware of human rights but their culture always weighs on their mind that even principals are not more supportive to their disabled students and so are the teachers and other students.

As a result of my personal experiences, I am very sensitive to social justice issues, and I conducted this study to see how principals handle social justice in the U.S.
Population, Sample and/or Setting

My study involved 12 school principals selected using purposeful and snowball sampling techniques based on their functions within their schools as leaders and the study criteria. “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). According to Creswell (2013, 2018), the concept of purposeful sampling in qualitative research means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study. Patton (2015) states that the logic and power of qualitative purposeful sampling derives from the emphasis on the in-depth understanding of specific information-rich cases. He explains that information-rich cases are those in which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Although, there are three broad approaches to selecting a sample in interpretive research (convenience, purposive or theoretical sample), the most common sampling technique is purposive sampling, which helps in acquiring in-depth information from those who are in position to give it (Cohen et al., 2007; Marshall, 1996).

As part of a qualitative practicum class, I obtained HSRIB approval for my study and interviewed three principals for that initial study. Review of that data revealed that my protocol worked well, except for the need to add some additional questions on professional preparation. After seeking some post-approval changes to my IRB approval, I re-interviewed the three principals using the additional interview questions, and recruited nine additional participants. I used the above-described sampling technique to approach the potential additional participants after obtaining their email address from their schools’ websites. I emailed the letter
of solicitation for participation to the prospective participants (see Appendix A), asking them to contact me if interested in participating. When they contacted me, I described the research to them and when they agreed to participate, I scheduled an interview time and location. At the interview, participants signed the informed consent form (see Appendix B).

I also used snowball sampling to recruit my participants. “Snowball sampling involves locating a few key participants who easily meet the criteria you have established for participation in the study. As you interview the early key participants, you ask each one to refer you to other participants” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 99). Therefore, I asked principals who participated in the study to inform other colleagues about it so that those who were interested in participating could contact me by phone or by email. Additionally, I contacted principals who were either graduates or current students in my Educational Leadership doctoral program.

All the participants were selected from within one Midwestern state. Criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). I believe that 12 participants were a sufficient number for the study in order to reach saturation, because Duke (1984) recommends studying 3 to 10 subjects. The inclusionary criteria were that the principals (1) had at least two years of experience in the school they are currently serving; and (2) had at least three years’ total experience as a principal. The exclusionary criterion was that any participant who refused to be audio recorded was excluded from the study.

I audio recorded each interview because audio recording was the best way of interviewing because it was difficult to listen the participant’s narrative and write it down accurately immediately. In contrast, by recording the interview, I was able to listen to it
repeatedly and transcribe it verbatim. This process also facilitated the member check with the participants concerning the transcription of their interviews.

**Instrumentation**

The data for this study came from one interview with each participant and the main instrument was a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix C). An interview is both the most ordinary of ways you can explore someone else’s experience. It is as ordinary as conversation and as intrusive as a spy camera. It may offer insights you never expected would come your way (Richards, 2016, p. 46).

In addition, I used observation notes. Marshall (2016) notes, “Even in studies using in-depth interviews, observation plays an important role, as the researcher notes the interview partner’s body language and effect, tone of voice, and other paralinguistic messages in addition to words” (p. 143). Other data were field notes and memos. Memos are data; and as such, they too, can be coded, categorized, and searched with an online program (Saldana, 2016, p. 45).

Each participant engaged in one face-to-face interview. I audio taped all interviews, with permission of the participants, and transcribed each interview accurately. Through member checking, participants had the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview and added additional information or clarification, if needed. The interview questions and the interview protocol were provided in (Appendix B).

**Data Collection Procedures**

In this study, I as a researcher was the main instrument. Before beginning the interview, I conducted a warm-up session to establish a rapport with the participant. According to Smith and Osborn (2007), it is sensible to concentrate in the beginning on putting the respondents at ease, to enable them to feel comfortable talking to you before any of the substantive areas of the
interview are introduced (p. 63). While conducting the interview, I talked in a normal voice and speed to enable the interviewee to listen to me clearly. I also used probes to help the interviewee continue talking if I noticed that the essential information was missing in the answers.

The interview recording procedures I used were described by (Creswell 2013, p. 168) as follows:

- Use a header to record essential information about the project and as a reminder to go over the purpose of the study with the interviewee.
- Place the space between the questions in the protocol form. Recognize that an individual may not always respond directly to the questions.
- Memorize the questions and their order to minimize losing eye contact with the participant. Provide appropriate verbal transitions from one question to the next.
- Write out the closing comments that thank the individual for the interview and request follow-up question to the next.

Furthermore, I observed other constructs listed by Marshall (2016): “Even in studies using in-depth interviews, observation plays an important role, as the researcher notes the interview partner’s body language and effect, tone of voice, and other paralinguistic messages in addition to words” (p. 143).

In this study, I collected data until I reached a point of saturation or redundancy before stopping. “You stop collecting data when the categories or themes are saturated: when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties of these core theoretical categories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 113). Lincoln and Guba (1985) also said that reaching a point of saturation or redundancy means that you begin hearing the same responses to your interview
questions or seeing the same behaviors in observations; no new insights are forthcoming. I was optimistic that this could be accomplished by interviewing 12 principals.

**Trustworthiness in Data Collection**

The first strategy was using a log trail and memos. A log trail represents a means of assuring quality in qualitative studies (Akkerman et al., 2006). Therefore, I used a log trail to have an account of all my research decisions and activities throughout this study.

The second strategy was writing reflective memos that helped me clarify my thinking on data (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Richards, 2015).

My third strategy for ensuring credibility of data collection was member checking. Member checking before analyzing verifies the accuracy and allows for clarification and extensions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checking is the single most important provision that can be made to bolster a study’s credibility and it may happen during or at the end of the data collection process (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002). Before analyzing the transcripts, I emailed them to the participants to look over and ensure that they were accurate.

**Data Analysis**

I started by audiotaping, transcribing, and analyzing all interviews (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985; Creswell, 2014). Next, I created a word file of a verbatim transcription of the interviews and field notes. I also gave pseudonyms to the interviewees and settings and removed other identifying information from the transcripts. I used the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009) as noted in the following steps.

First, I read and re-read transcripts and listened to the audio-recording. Reading and re-reading enables the analyst to immerse himself or herself in some of the original data. Repeated reading also allows a model of the overall interview structure to develop, and permits the analyst
to gain an understanding of how narratives can bind certain sections of an interview together. Besides, reading facilitates an appreciation of how rapport and trust build across an interview and thus highlight the location of richer and more detailed sections, or indeed contradictions and paradoxes. After this I moved to initial notes.

Second, I engaged in taking initial notes (descriptive and linguistic comments). Initial noting examines semantic content and language use on very explanatory level. It ensures a growing familiarity with the transcript, and moreover begins to identify specific ways by which the participant talks about, understands and thinks about an issue. The aim was to produce a comprehensive and detailed set of notes and comments on the data. This process involved looking at the language that the participants used (pronoun use, pauses, laughter, tones, etc.) thinking about the context of their concerns and identifying more abstract concepts which could help to make sense of the patterns of meaning in their account. Therefore, I wrote descriptive comments that focused on describing the content of what the participant had said, the subject of the talk in the interview. I also wrote linguistic comments that focused on exploring the specific use of language by the participant. The step following this one was the development of emerging themes.

Third, I wrote up individual narrative and developed emergent themes. Developing emergent themes consisted in reducing the volume of details of transcripts, mapping the interrelationships, and connections and patterns between exploratory notes using NVIVO software. It also consisted in identifying emergent themes and breaking up the narrative flow of the interview. The main task of turning notes into themes involved an attempt to produce a concise and pithy statement of what was important in the various comments attached to a piece
of transcript. Thus, the theme brought together a range of understandings relating directly to both participant and analyst.

Afterwards, the profile for each was then used to search for connections across emergent themes with each case. At this step I typed all themes in chronological order into a list. I went through the list and moved themes around to form clusters of related themes. Next, I printed out the typed list of themes. After that I cut the list so each theme was on separate piece of paper. Then I used a large space (floor or a card board) to move themes around. That enabled me to explore spatial representation of how emergent themes related to each other before moving to the next case. This step consisted in bracketing the ideas emerging from the analysis of the first case while working on the second, and after this step I looked for patterns across the cases.

Looking for patterns across cases

This process involved looking across cases to identify connections across cases, how a theme in one case helped illuminate a different case and which themes were the most potent. This process often helps the analyst to move to a more theoretical level as one recognizes.

In reference to trustworthiness in my data analysis, I used peer debriefing, member checking, and triangulation to ensure trustworthiness of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995; Yin 2009). Through peer debriefing, I asked other researchers to look into my data and findings to address questions of bias, errors of fact, competing integrations, convergence between data and the phenomena under study, and the themes that arose during the analysis (Billups, 2014). The purpose was to ensure consistency of findings across my data and findings. In case of no other researchers available to help, I could ensure trustworthiness by implementing a process of double coding where a set of data would be coded and then I would record them after a certain period of time to compare results.
I also checked my findings and preliminary analysis with some of the principals I interviewed, so they could assess whether the information they provided was interpreted accurately or not. This process enabled me to gather additional data and eventually provide trustworthy findings.

Finally, I did triangulation by comparing my interviews and documents to confirm the information provided by the principals (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

**Limitations and Delimitations**

**Limitations**

Limitations are influences that the researcher cannot control. They are the shortcomings, conditions or influences that cannot be controlled by the researcher that place restrictions on his or her methodology and conclusions. Limitations are unavoidable in studies, so no study is perfectly designed. As Patton (2002) notes, “There are no perfect research designs. There are always trade-offs” (p. 223).

In this study, the first limitation was the participants’ potential reluctance to address some aspects of the topic they might want to keep confidential. Additionally, the quality of discussions was somewhat limited because I, as the researcher, did not have extensive experience conducting research to produce academic papers individually, compared to the works of experienced researchers. Another limitation was the time constraint for the participants who were so busy.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are those characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of a study. The delimitations are in the researcher’s control. Delimiting factors include the choice of objectives, the research questions, constructs of interest, theoretical perspectives, and the chosen
population to investigate (Simon, 2011). I delimited this study to principals in one broader area within urban/suburban area of a Midwestern state. I explored principals’ experiences dealing with social justice issues because today, they constitute a crucial phenomenon. I chose principals as participants and excluded teachers because my interest is in educational leadership, not in teaching. I chose the purpose of this research because of the prevailing social justice issues occurring in schools within Chad, my home country. Exploring this topic helped me to see the similarities and differences of how principals handle social justice issues in the U.S. schools compared to those of my home country.

Furthermore, the findings of this study were not generalized to other areas of the Midwest state for two reasons: first, the study only involved 12 principals who were not representative of all principals in the state. Second, the goal of most qualitative research was not to generalize but rather to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of some aspect of human experience through the intensive study of particular cases (Polit & Beck, 2010).

**Chapter 3 Closure**

Principals’ experiences of social justice issues were the foundation of this basic qualitative research endeavor. The research used purposeful sampling and snowball sampling techniques for data collection and it involved 12 participants in a Midwestern state. I collected data through a face-to-face interview with each participant. After collecting data, I transcribed the interview and created participants’ profiles. Next, I presented the interview transcripts and participants’ profiles to the participants for member check, for validity, and to ensure trustworthiness (Mertens, 2010). Additionally, I analyzed each question, and I coded the interview transcripts and participants’ profiles using NVIVO software to see the emerging themes.
CHAPTER 4
PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

The purpose of my research was to describe and interpret principals’ experiences with social justice issues in their schools. Data were collected via interviews from a sample of 12 principals, and this chapter presents their narratives in order from the most years of experience in education to the least. Table 1 summarizes key information for each participant, and for confidentiality purposes, the participants chose pseudonyms themselves. Following this table is an individual narrative summary for each of my participants.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Highest Degree Level</th>
<th>Experience in Education</th>
<th>Experience in Principalship</th>
<th>School % of Free/Reduced Lunch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01 Moses</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>29 years</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02 Peter</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>28 years</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 Tina</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>22 years</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 Alice</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>21 years</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 Jay</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>22 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06 Allen</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07 John</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08 Holly</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09 Steve</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Logan</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Biker</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Bicoastal</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Principal Moses

Motivation and Meaning of Social Justice

Principal Moses is a Black male, who has been in education for 29 years, with six of those years as a principal. He began his career in education as a support staff working for three years on behavioral issues, and then he moved to a nonprofit organization that provides support for troubled youth and worked there for 11 years. He has a Ph.D. in educational leadership. Currently, he is the principal at a middle school that has 888 students, of which 67% are free and reduced lunch, and 4% are White.

Principal Moses said his motivation to become a principal went back to his junior year as an undergraduate student as he shared:

We took a field trip one day as a part of the class, and we went to a local high school in the area and that experience really hooked me. After that I saved money and then got into a Master’s program with the emphasis on curriculum and instruction at the university, where I fell in love with education. I had been able to do lots of things during that particular time, freshman academy, sophomore academy, building wide discipline and security at large a high school with the goal of one day becoming a high school principal.

Social Justice Issues Faced

Principal Moses said, the phrase “social justice issues” brings to his mind what he shared below:

When I hear the phrase “social justice issues, I immediately hone in on issues of race and what we deal with as varies in our society. What our Black children have to deal with on a day-to-day basis in our society. And even going through public education, they could be going through private school. So, when I hear social justice and issues of social justice, I
immediately go to how our black children are often not looked at right, treated right.

Lack of sensitivity in terms of how they behave, how they act, and how they learn, how we dress. Just a variety of things, I get very irritated and upset.

After sharing his point of view about social justice issues, Principal Moses indicated that in his school he has identified many social justice issues, such as race, trauma, SES, bullying, transportation, gender sexuality, and suicide.

Concerning the race issue, Principal Moses noted:

I think when you talk about social justice, the issue of race and being culturally responsive, that old topic is an old issue that will never go away. We put new words to it, but the reality is, our young Black men are continuing to do with stuff, it could be attendance or behavior issues or grades or whoever and they need. They need means to help them out.

Principal Moses also identified trauma as a new issue going on in his school as he noted:

We have children that are going through what is described as traumatic situations where we got families that are homeless. Well, if a family is homeless, then it could be considered that child is dealing with trauma, and how was all of that affecting their mental health? So, I would say that the mental health piece continues. I mean, back in the day, you didn't hear too much about children suffering with this kind of stuff. You hear about adults maybe but not so much about children.

After discussing trauma, he deplored his students’ socioeconomic status characterized by poverty that affects their academic performance as he noted:

If the issue of poverty is getting in the way, that child is not going to perform well academically. If that child is struggling with depression or sexual identity, if they're
homeless and hungry or they feel like somebody is bullying them because they're black, or somebody is bullying them because they're serious, they're not going to perform well academically, that’s it.

Additionally, Principal Moses said poverty is the cause of homelessness as he shared:

“We deal with homelessness in this district, we deal with it in this building and we have it at the city level.”

As Principal Moses noted below, bullying is also one of the issues going on in his school:

Bullying, oh, every day, and when I say every day, what I'm saying is, it would be wrong for me to say, 'oh, no, we don't have bullying in my school.' Sometimes, it's verbal, sometimes it's physical, sometimes it can be non-verbal with looks. Sometimes, it can be over the social media stuff. Sometimes, it could be like emails kids send to each other. It can be in a variety of ways in terms of when a student says I'm being bullied.

As far as transportation is concerned, it exists, and Principal Moses appreciates its good quality, but not all students can access it, so, it has become an issue for his school as he noted:

We have school buses, but we have families that because they choose to be here and maybe they're not, where they live the school bus doesn't go there. I mean, we have situations too where a family lives a mile or more from the school, or just a little bit over a mile but the bus can't get there, but because there's like a mile, they have to walk, but they don't like, they're walking that mile it's too much, can we get a bus? And so, I mean we have situations where that does come up.

Furthermore, Principal Moses identified the gender identity issue as a crucial one in his school as he shared:
We have young people trying to figure out who they are. So, one student that is a female may identify as a male. You may say that you may have a male and they're saying, I identify as a female. You may have a student that says I'm transgender. So, you have a host of things that are going on now when you have that going on in a student or even a parent. I've had parents bring it to our attention.

Finally, Principal Moses observed that suicide concerns are emerging in his school as he shared: “When kids are angry at each other and fighting and they do peer mediations or family mediations with the family, kids are thinking about suicide and they're having suicidal ideations.”

Concerning the meaning of social justice issues, Principal Moses shared this view:

This goes back hundreds of years ago. It was dealing with slavery and then all of a sudden, we're dealing with segregation and desegregation. And, it was right there in your face and folks didn't pull any punches. If White folks don't like you, I mean that's not always the case. These days, it's more sophisticated and it's subtler. But even though it's more sophisticated and subtler, it's still not right. It's still painful and has ill effects on our students and any even grown folk.

While describing the contributing factors to social justice issues, Principal Moses noted:

I think this particular time is literally turned upside down on its head, and I think the moral fabric of the American society is not healthy. And those things that were once important were at the top and are now down at the bottom of the list.

He added ignorance as another contributing factor to social justice issues as he noted:
I think ignorance has a lot to do with it. When you're dealing with it, I mean you talk about social economics, that is a contributing factor. Other, I mean we're dealing with this is a far stretch because I can't really get into why a person chooses to live a certain way.

**Challenges in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Moses reported that he has faced many challenges in his school. First, he found that enabling his students and teachers to better address sexuality issues has been a major challenge for him as he noted:

I would say more challenging is helping students and staff do with the issues pertaining to sexuality and people's life-style choice, helping them be sensitive, increase their awareness, how do we help students?

Second, he has found that dealing with mental health issues has become a challenge for him as he said:

Mental health, this was going on last year. This has been going on for a number of years, but it continues to become more and more of a challenge. Our young people are dealing with mental health issues and they're being diagnosed at early ages. This child is depressed, or this child is dealing with an eating disorder.

**Strategies to Address Social Justice Issues**

Principal Moses utilizes different strategies to address issues of race, trauma, poverty, bullying, transportation, gender identity, and suicide in his school. In order to address race issues, Principal Moses described his strategy as follows:

If a racial issue happens with students and they feel like they're being discriminated against, then we immediately investigate that situation. If it's the same with teacher to teacher, if it's student to teacher or teacher to student, we immediately investigate. And so, there's a pathway to address it.
As far as trauma is concerned, Principal Moses’ strategy addressing it involves many other people as he described:

One person can't do it. It takes a team and, in the edges in our educational system, I would dare say no. I would say firmly that we're not fully equipped to deal with it all right. That's why you see in schools, you have school social workers, you have school psychiatrists, and you have organizations that we consult with like [name] that helps with peer mediation.

Concerning socioeconomic situations involving food insecurity and homelessness, Principal Moses addresses them using these strategies:

We're like number one middle school in the district in terms of percentage of free and reduced lunch. So, it's cool now because like now if I'm in elementary and middle school, all students can eat for free breakfast and lunch. Now, here is what happened to us. Last year we were tops at free and reduced lunch as well. We were serving 500 lunches. So, some students bring their lunch to school, but we were literally serving 500 lunches throughout the course of each day out of 888 students.

In order to address homelessness, he involves other people as he shared:

At the district level we have an individual that connects with all of the schools in regard to families that are homeless and then we have a point person here in our community that is the liaison. So, when we have families in need, we are properly assisting them in their needs.

As far as addressing bullying is concerned, Principal Moses describes how he addresses it:
Once the case is reported, we interview the student that is accusing another student of it. We get the written information. We document it, we have documents that we have to fill out in terms of recording it. Then, we bring the other student that's being accused of bullying. We get their information and then what we have to do. And of course, we let the families know and then what we have to do is assess. Is this actually bullying?

Concerning students who tend to attempt suicide in the school, Principal Moses shared:

We need to refer them outside of the school to get some additional help. All that stuff is coming in the school and teachers are trying to get to instruction, but oftentimes before they can get to the instruction, they're dealing with all this social stuff that kids bring.

Principal Moses also addresses gender identity issues in his school in the way he described below:

With our students that are gay, lesbian, transgender, we actually provide training for our staff to help with that as well. We've done that. We did it my first year and my second year here. Additionally, we work with students and families and embrace that to help them so they know that at this school they do have a home. We're here to help them, serve them, and educate them.

When asked if his strategies worked well, Principal Moses replied:

I would say that in terms of how well it continues to be a work in progress, I would say if I think about the issue of homelessness and what we have in place at the district level and building level, I would say that we're pretty good with the area of culturally responsive education. And, I think we have a lot of work to do in that particular area. I think our district has done a great job of initiating it and supplied us with various resources.
Training on Social Justice Issues

Principal Moses said his undergraduate experience as well as his graduate experience had nothing on social justice. However, he acknowledged that, as principal, he has received more training concerning social justice as he shared:

I would say yes, I have gone through a good handful of trainings dealing with social justice issues, healing of racism, various trainings to help increase our awareness as we're serving our children. So, I probably had, I would say I've received more information and training and stuff in the work field.

Support in Addressing Social Justice Issues

Principal Moses said he has received a lot of support from other stakeholders: staff, principals, students, parents, supervisors, and other sources. He started by appreciating his staff support as follows:

That's the staff that contributes to the school. Oh yes. It must have been a very unique staff. There are two things that I first noticed when I started here almost four years ago: very sound with classroom instruction and very strong work ethic, and at the same time very nurturing. So, it's a nice place and it's a nice balance and very supportive. The thing that I believe in is collaboration. I'm always trying to work with them on different things and pull ideas from them and get feedback.

As far as the support from other principals is concerned, Principal Moses said: “We always connect with other principals, so there is a lot of support.”

Students also support Principal Moses in dealing with social justice issues as he shared:

We get a lot of support from our Student Service Department. Student Service Department is at the district level. They have two individuals that run that department and those individuals are constantly helping us out with different ideas.
Furthermore, Principal Moses acknowledged the support from students’ parents because he said when he first had started work, they came up to him and they said: 'Hey, you tell us what you want and we'll help you out.' And that has continued to be the case. He added that another support comes from [name] as he noted:

We also have a wonderful relationship with [name]. [This university] spends time with our student services department and then they come and spend time with us. Sometimes, as the entire family, [name] and student services spend time with principals and assistant principals and the central office.

After enumerating those supports, Principal Moses did not overlook the support he receives from his supervisors to address social justice as he shared:

Every day, my supervisors, I have them on speed dial. I call or send the text and they are right there on the spot with sending in any assistance that I need. I'm thankful for that.

I've been fortunate. In my career here in the school district, some advisors have always been supportive.

Finally, Principal Moses said he has received additional supports to address social justice issues as he shared: “I think there is a lot of support from reading power professionals and like I going to conferences, workshops and support from various agencies.”

**Shaping of Purpose and Leadership Lessons Learned**

Principal Moses explained how his experiences and challenges have shaped his sense of purpose and approach to leadership as a leader:

As a principal, I have to do a better job because there's so much other stuff that we're required to share and I have to make sure that's done. But it's like even if I'm going to take 15 minutes, 20 minutes at least, we took 15 to 20 minutes to talk about that.
Concerning lessons learned in reference to leading people to address social justice issues, Principal Moses also shared:

You have to have people, you have to have resources. Even in a situation where you find yourself and you don't have money. Even if you don't have money, then you've got to pull people together to figure out what you do have to help folks help the kids.

In conclusion Principal Moses said he has learned about carefulness as he shared:

“Always have your eyes and ears open, and your antennas up listening to your students constantly dropping nuggets and sharing things with you. Sometimes, a student may not even appear to be dealing with issues.”

Principal Peter

Motivation and Meaning of Social Justice

Principal Peter is a White male, who has been in education for 27 years, with 18 of those years as a principal. Before becoming principal, he taught for five years and was an assistant principal for three years. He has a Master’s degree in educational leadership. Currently, he is the principal at a high school that has about 1,349 students, of which 13% are free and reduced lunch, and 81% are White.

Principal Peter described his motivation to become principal as follows:

I did not plan originally going in education, but it often happens as the best things in life are not planned. So, I've been very fortunate to serve in this position for a good long time in the community that I trust and that I live in. I very much appreciate this community. I saw some of the things that I perceived we needed to work on in the community. I thought I could serve this community well to address those concerns and so, really, that has been my primary motivation.
Principal Peter said the phrase “social justice issues” brings to his mind a number of concepts as he enumerated:

I think of issues of respect and dignity. I think of issues like First Amendment, rights in terms of speech. I think of issues of harassment and tensions and conflicts. Social justice obviously covers a lot of ground.

Concerning the phrase “social justice issues,” Principal Peter said:

The meaning I take from it is that we continue to get more diverse as a school, we have to, number one, constantly recognize that there are going to be opportunities for conflict because of those different values and that we have to continue to work on building a culture that’s respectful of those differences where we can agree and disagree with one another, but also treating one another obviously as human beings who deserve respect.

Social Justice Issues Faced

Principal Peter elaborated on social justice issues in his high school by providing a past example that he had during a recent electoral period:

Let me use a concrete example if I may. Last November, we actually had a very difficult and contentious election here in the United States. And in that tension, issues of race and poverty and ethnicity and immigration status were all front and center in that discussion. Some of our students handled that really well and really maturely, and were able to talk and to disagree, and then, some of our students threatened and harassed. We had to work with them both to make sure the victims of those threats and harassment were protected. And so, the students who did the threatening in the dressing room understood what they were doing, understood why in our context it would not be appropriate. They worked through their consequences and then rejoined our community at the same time.

As another example of a social justice issue in his school, Principal Peter indicated that
some of students are using social media to cause trouble, and he referred to one racial case that occurred:

I may be reflecting on what happened on Friday night this weekend. We had a number of students from our two high schools that were using social media to communicate some pretty-hurtful statements, some of which had to do with race. For example, another student posted a picture of three of our boys. They used their computer to put the letter K on the shirt of those three boys. So, it wasn't actually the boys. They used photoshop to insert those cases. So, as a result, KKK. So, other folks were saying that here are three boys who are white supremacists. Are those boys white supremacists? No, they're not. And we have to work with those folks to communicate how we treat each other respectfully.

Additionally, Principal Peter reported that students’ socioeconomic situations are a prevailing issue in his high school as he noted:

We have a lot of students who have two parent incomes. We have as a result kids who have a good deal of money and a good deal of unsupervised time. Those two things, money and unsupervised times, are from my perspective a recipe for drinking alcohol. Furthermore, he did not ignore gender issues that still exist in the school but has become less and less crucial today as he shared:

Gender and gender differences or issues of homosexuality, that is better than it was 10 years ago. For example, we have three students right now who are working through hormone therapy and also surgeries to transition from one gender to another gender. And 10 years ago, that would have been a real source of anxiety and tension for a lot of kids and a lot of parents. And today it's really not; it’s really a name for most of our kids. It's a
conversation, but it's not a source of tension. Now our students recognize that this is part of our world, this is part of our life.

Finally, Principal Peter mentioned that student violence prevails and results in suspensions in his school as he shared:

When we actually started looking at our data, what we noticed is, our White kids tended to wrestle, our Black kids tended to hit. And so, just within our system, we were doing something without being cognizant of what we were doing that disproportionately hurt our African American students more than our White students.

As far as the contributing factors to social justice issues are concerned, Principal Peter indicated that the social change of the community is the main one, as he noted:

I think just for context, when I first came to this high school 26 years ago, we were 99% White. We are not that case anymore. Most of that happened because we as a community are going to get more diverse with more multinational companies. And once we merge in diversity, we have brought in parents and families and children from all around the globe. That transition from being a largely White suburban farming community, rural community, to being truly a blending of many different cultures and ethnicities and races, has not always been an easy one.

**Challenges in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Peter explained that a major challenge in addressing social justice issues is difference in viewpoints between people. He shared:

The challenge we face is, really, just good people disagree. That is to say, when we have to deal with any particular situation, we have to be prepared to know that there are members of our students, premier members of our community, and members of our parents who are going to have different values and are going to see things differently.
Concerning the origins of challenges, Principal Peter attributed them to the disagreements among people as he shared:

I think they come from those differences of values, if you are a parent and you have a particular, let's say, political ideology and we're acting in a way that you think is in contrast to that political ideology, that's where the tension happens. That's where their frustrations happen.

**Strategies to Address Social Justice Issues**

Concerning a recent gender issue, Principal Peter explained how he addressed it in his high school for one of the students:

He's a senior this year and it has been difficult for him. Physically in different form, emotionally difficult for him. That student had some difficult times with his dad as a result of this transition. But here at school it's been calm. That student has a lot of support to help him work through that transition. So, like I said, values change over time and what at one point used to be a hot button issue is not really now.

Concerning how to address behavioral issues in the school Principal Peter shared:

What we've done is, we have changed our consequences for those things to make sure to be as equitable as we possibly can. Have we made improvements? Without question. Do we still have work to do? Absolutely. And so, is that issue of school consequences social justice issue? From my perspective it is, because it speaks to the respect that we have for students who come from different backgrounds

**Training on Social Justice Issues**

As far as social justice issues were concerned, Principal Peter described a general training for principals: "One example of trainings that principals of public schools have gone through
was the Eliminating Racism and Creating/Celebrating Equity (ERACCE) training that I think was particularly influential for us."

In another example of training, Principal Peter appreciated the contribution of the Office of Civil Rights work and professional learning regarding the efficient resolution of social justice issues as he noted:

For example, the work we did with the Office of Civil Rights, that's hugely helpful and that was really informed by the letters and information they sent to us over time. Another area where professional learning has been really helpful is us looking at trying to work. I mean the phrase that is used right now is restorative justice. But really what it is, is following through with consequences but not just to be punitive, but to help better understand what it means to be a part of a community like this. So, yes professional learning has been helpful.

**Support in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Peter said he has received tremendous supports from other school stakeholders starting with his staff as he shared:

I think the biggest part of how the staff helps me is that right now we have a very experienced staff. We have had to deal with many clashes dealing with social justice issues. So, their experience helps us keep conflicts from boiling over. They are able to address them while things are still relatively small, and they can still be dealt with.

He also appreciates the students’ contribution that enables him to better handle social justice issues as he noted:
We get most of the support from our students. Most of our best ideas I think over time have come from our students over time. And so that is a huge part of our community giving us that feedback, and this is hugely important.

He added:

I think more often our kids respond in a healthier way to conflicts that deal with social justice better than we as adults do when tensions have come up. Most of our students by and large are much more open to differences than many of us as adults are. In a real, concrete way, they keep, they reflect what our values should be, so that I can keep those values in my mind as I try to work with students who disagree about the topic.

Another important support Principal Peter receives is from other principals during workshops as he shared:

Other principals are very helpful. Absolutely. For example, twice a year there's a group of principal colleagues that has been changing over the years. They've been meeting since the mid1980s. We meet twice a year in Okemos, Michigan. In fact, we all get together, we have a big white board. We throw out all of our problems that we're dealing with. And then, around the table, we all talk about how each of us is trying to do better in those particular things. So, principals are without question a huge support system.

He added: ‘Colleagues are very much involved in decision making but all the gathering of data and information that we need and analyze help us make the right decisions.’

After his colleagues’ support, Principal Peter mentioned parental support as well, as he noted:

Our parent community is overall supportive. When we have difficult situations by and large, parents help our kids sort through the emotional and values differences that
happen. Sometimes, we have parents who disagree, and my hope is that we developed
enough relationships with them, so, when we do have disagreements, they don't become
personal. Overall, I think parents do a really solid job.

Finally, Principal Peter indicated that he has received support from another source
mainly the Office of Civil Rights as he said: “I think we've made really good strides. So, for
example the Office of Civil Rights has been really informative particularly over the last three or
four years concerning social justice issues.”

**Shaping of Purpose and Leadership Lessons Learned**

As a leader, Principal Peter enumerated several things concerning how his experiences
with social justice issues have shaped his approach to leadership as he shared:

I think what my experience has taught me is to hold my tongue, to be careful about what
conclusions I draw. Because when we do that, then we can actually listen. And when we
listen, I think people feel respected. And when people feel respected, then they're more
apt to share their ideas.

In the same context, he added:

I mean that respect that you try to build with each one of your kids; if you can't build that
love of respect or an understanding, then you can't negotiate the differences of opinions
that happen anytime a social justice issue comes up. I think what is essential is having
real relationships with kids because they can trust you when you have to work through a
tense justice issue.

Concerning the lessons that he learned from leading people in addressing social justice
issues, Principal Peter implied how they reinforced his problem-solving capabilities as he shared:

I think the most important lesson I've learned in this role about those issues is to hold
your conclusions very carefully. I think, one thing that often happens with us as human
beings is that we draw a conclusion and then we think that is the answer, that is the perspective, and more often, that is not. I think it’s inaccurate that we have a conclusion today, and as we have our experience, it's not okay to change our conclusions so that we can deal with reality, rather than our preconceptions.

Finally, concerning all issues that occurred in his high school and discussed in this interview, Principal Peter acknowledged having learned something specific from them as he shared:

What I perceive we’ve learned over the time is, once we can talk openly about those things where we can actually start to come up with attempts at solutions and putting real systems in place, then at least we can do something. Does that mean we're going to solve every problem? Absolutely not. But at least it gives us a system in place so that we can build in adjustments to our kids.

Principal Tina

Motivation and Meaning of Social Justice

Principal Tina is a Black female, who has been in education for 22 years, with 13 of those years as a principal. She did her undergraduate in [name] and received a master's degree in [name] and then she returned to [name] and finished an ED.S. and then a Ph.D. in leadership. Currently, she is the principal at an elementary school that has 836 students, of which 67% are free and reduced lunch.

She described her motivation to become a principal as follows:

I was a classroom teacher and I enjoyed the classroom. I loved what I did, and I started working on courses in leadership for my master's degree and then our principal suddenly moved on. So, where I was working, they came and asked me to be the principal and
asked me to apply and I said yes. And from there I loved it. And so, I just enjoy doing that. I must have had the motivation just because of the fact that I was working on those classes and it gave me a chance to put the theory into practice, especially given the fact that I was in a private school setting. So, the transition was easier.

**Social Justice Issues Faced**

Principal Tina said, the phrase "social justice issues" brings to her mind what she shared below:

When I think of social justice, social, I think of society, justice, I think of equity or fairness. Issues, I think of the challenges associated in society with fairness, whether that be equal access to things and opportunities like education. It could be equal access with economics or jobs and ability for that piece.

Principal Tina identified two social justice issues she described below:

I think we have discrimination, we have racism in this world. One way, and I'll say this again, to the credit of the district that I've worked for, we have started looking at culturally responsive education and what that means and how that looks and what that can or should look like. And while I will say that we are possibly at the conscious level, that still a start versus avoiding the conversation and not having the conversation happen, especially within a given school. If there's 70% minority in a school, then there needs to be a conversation about closely responsive education. It needs to be in a conversation no matter what the percent in my opinion, those too I didn't observe.

Principal Tina also identified funding issue as she shared:

Having all the school funding is always something that could be enhanced. I need to always be supportive. And one reason is because there's such a diverse population with a diverse amount of needs. Having been someone that worked in a private school and then
in a public school there tends to be, I'm not going to say absolute, there tends to be more affluence in the private school because the students, the parents have to pay. So that means there's a real deep investment on the part of the family because there isn't this pain piece, there is this expectation of services.

Concerning the meaning she makes of social justice issues; Principal Tina shared her view:

The meaning that social justice issues hold for me are that we must remain aware, especially in education because we're teaching everyone and anyone. And so, you had the Geiger case that just happened and it's important for staff and whoever that may be teaching students of representing multiethnic background, that there is an awareness and even a perceived belief coming from the student to the teacher as well with regards to what they may think of them. So, I think it's important in education that we aren't so, I'm isolated that we forget that we actually live in this world.

When asked about the contributing factors to social juice, Principal Tina described them as follows:

One's perception of another influences their beliefs around that individual, which thus influences their behaviors. So, when there's this perception of what is, then we act on that perception as if it is, and then that becomes part of our belief system about individuals, whomever they are. I think belief is the core cause, that's what we operate from. We operate from our beliefs and our beliefs are influenced by our perceptions of what we think is. And when I say is, I'm saying what we perceive to be reality.

**Challenges in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Tina reported that she faced the issue of gender identity as she noted:

I think the challenge that I face is the fact that I'm a woman of color or a minority. What the challenge is there's a person, there could be a perception. Well, I'm saying this
because this is just right. And once again, that's getting into one's own value system and their own ethics about addressing matters. But when you're dealing with the human population, any human, you have variances, it's multifaceted. And because it is, that in itself can create a challenge if you let it.

**Strategies to Address Social Justice Issues**

Principal Tina said her school supports low-income students with food as she noted: We tried to, number one, have the expectations for all. So, there's not a different expectation for a student that's impoverished. Academic expectations are, and there may be very neat. So, one group might need a food pack where another group doesn't. So, we try to support in that way. When I say food pack, I mean the student is eating at the school, they can have up to three meals because if you have an after-school program, there's a dinner meal served as well. So, they have the breakfast, the lunch and the dinner if they're in an after program and then on the weekend.

In reply to the question concerning the success of her strategies, Principal Tina shared:

I think certain strategies or approaches that I have, well it's difficult to deduce to two individual items because I am a woman of color, so already that comes with a whole piece. So, if you're a minority and you're in a leadership position, when you speak to anything regarding minorities, it's going to weigh a little differently to the group, to the staff than if you were colleague to colleague just because of the position I would argue through. I think some things that I do are just kind of model the desired behavior, but that aligns with my own leadership beliefs and model the desired behavior with everyone.

**Training on Social Justice Issues**

Principal Tina said during her academic studies, she did not receive social justice training as she shared:
In the training, we didn't talk about this stuff. We're not, we're not providing educational experiences for the students today, like we were provided 10 years ago. It's different. And we have to address things. We have to speak to those things because the kids are talking about it. There is, they're going to call you on it.

However, Principal Tina acknowledged that in her professional development she learned enough about social justice issues as she noted:

I name, culturally responsive education. I think that's been the one that has been the most impactful piece and the continued dialogue around that. We just talked about equity, race, and accessibility to education, privilege and more, just all of those kinds of topics. And then of course, we align that with the populations that we serve from my staff.

**Support in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Tina said she appreciates the support her staff gives her as he noted:

In terms of my staff, I think just the real dialogue and the real conversations about how best to support our students when the common denominator is success for the students. That opens the door for lots of conversations. I think they do a good job. If they have questions, they bring questions to me or to the group dialogue or wondering or concerns or how can we, so those kinds of questions will come up. But that requires transparency and trust.

She also indicated that other principals support her leadership to solve social justice issues as she shared:

We talk about it in principals’ meetings as well. So, in our district, it's not just on certain levels, it's across the board because we represent multiple ethnic backgrounds as well and administration. So, in addition to that, people come with their own experiences and so life
experiences. So, those pieces aid in our rich dialogue and support systems that we have colleague to colleague in addressing any social issues that we may, that may arise.

Concerning the support received from her supervisor, Principal Tina shared:

Our direct supervisors provide support as well as always. We are looking for ways we can best support our students. That whole being not just the academic piece, recognizing the emotional and the social piece plays an integral role.

Additionally, Principal Tina did not overlook the community support as she said: “Well, that's kind of what I was saying with all the community support that's built within which provides the opportunities for our students.”

Furthermore, Principal Tina described how her family supports her, starting by her husband:

Well my husband works in education as well, so he and I, we tend to have matchy stories, I'll have a story, he'll have a story and we kind of help one another and remind ourselves of, so we kind of build each other up with regards to that and ways we can best are next time. If this I should have, we have to have reflective dialog and look for ways that we can best be of support to our students.

After enumerating the above-described supports, Principal Tina indicated that she usually refers to many people according to the issues she faces as she noted:

I usually go to whom can be of the most help; if something is dealing with finance, then I go to that support. If it's dealing with opportunity for something academically, I go to the one that's overseeing that. So, it depends on whatever that injustice or that lack of equity is happening and accessibility is happening. That's where the reference is. If it's
with regards to any type of prejudice behaviors, I go to, whomever wherever the support is that's going to address that in particular.

Finally, Principal Tina said she receives additional support from reading on how to address social justice issues as she noted:

I'm a reader too, so I read. My brother and I are really. One of my brothers and I were super close. I'm close to all my brothers and sisters, but this one brother, we talk a lot. He'll pitch me different material to read and look just in my own growth and continue to grow. But, I'm always trying to remain reflective as well and not only see things from one angle. I think that's helpful too.

**Shaping of Purpose and Leadership Lessons Learned**

Principal Tina explained how her experiences and challenges have shaped her sense of purpose and approach to leadership as a leader:

I think my shaping, in a great way, in a very meaningful way, I guess is what I want to say. Because we can allow things to make us bitter or better and I choose better. And so, when it becomes personal experiences or experiences that others are having, it's important to pause, reflect, in some cases, reframe it and begin to resolve, as one individual kind of pointed out a way of addressing things. And in doing so, you're less reactive. I'm one of those that believe that there's value, I value understanding and it's not just about saying your piece or being heard. I value being understood.

She added:

There is in my opinion strong dedication to push and push for high expectations for all students. And I'm speaking in general, I mean a real team spirit folks are on a mission to work together because we realize that the power is in us working together to get the job done. Collaboration and cooperation are good.
Concerning the lessons learned in reference to leading people to address social justice issues, Principal Tina shared:

Well, one thing about leading and leadership is you have to have someone following. So, in order to lead it's important to not just go for a walk and with regards to social justice issues, it only matters to people when it matters to people. So, it has to matter to me, whomever that me is. And oftentimes, when things are reframed or rephrased and others are able to see them another way, then they or I can see the bigger picture and the greater impact.

Principal Alice

**Motivation and Meaning of Social Justice**

Principal Alice is a White female, who has been in education for 21 years, with 13 of those years as a principal. She began her career in the area of restaurant, hotel management before getting into education. She has a master degree in Educational Leadership and now she is working on her Ph.D. program. Currently, she is the principal at an elementary school that has 535 students, of which 43% are free/reduced lunch, and 94% are White.

Principal Alice said her motivation to become a principal started from volunteering in a school as she shared:

After volunteering in my daughter's first grade classroom. I fell in love with that position. So, I went into education, worked at my city’s community schools and the other elementary school in another state, and then realized I wanted to go into administration. So, I went to the university for my masters in educational leadership and have been a principal at a community school, and now I'm back home.
Social Justice Issues Faced

Principal Alice said, the phrase "social justice issues" deals with inequalities as she shared:

When I think of social justice, I guess maybe there are people that are not getting the same opportunities as others. And so far, I think we have to admit that there’s a problem and be willing to kind of look at that.

She added:

I think right now with our state of affairs in our country there, it's everywhere. We're kind of looking at between not only just race but gender. I'm just trying to make the net, I guess it more equitable at our country. So, education, I think is really responsible for helping us make things more equitable for people.

When asked about social justice issues she faces in her school, Principal Alice replied:

In my school, probably we have more issues with the demographic of economically disadvantaged students who may come with less, I guess less voice sometimes because they may not have the families that have the time to center around following up on I guess unfortunately. Sometimes those with less economic, if they're disadvantaged economically, they might be holding down several jobs. They might be in a situation where it makes it hard for them to connect with the school.

She added:

Students from, not all, and I don't want to stereotype, but students that come with less economic means may have a difficult time because they may not have the structure of a family that has the time to connect with the school. So, I would say for me as a principal, we have students that might have less, whether it's stable housing, stable place for where they're gonna stay, resources, such as transportation and food, things like that.
She also faces discipline issues in her school as she shared:

We work a lot with, I don't know if by definition of bullying; it's very new, but we do have student discipline issues, conflict, and we really work on *The seven habits of highly effective people* by Dr. Steven Covey for not just our students, but our staff and our families.

**Challenges in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Alice said the main challenge she faces is helping young people further their studies:

And so, the gap of those, the haves and have-nots, as we may say, how do we bridge that and how do we get some of our young students to think with the end in mind that they have a future if they can follow this passion in this path and get their education and how do we do that? I think that's one of the biggest challenges.

Another challenge Principal Alice faces in her school is the lack of diversity as she noted:

I would say, the lack of diversity in our village and our community may make it difficult for those of different backgrounds to feel connected because it is changing but very slowly. So, we do not have a lot of diversity. I think that makes it hard for people that have different backgrounds.

She elaborated on this point by providing the statistical data below:

I think when we look at our subgroups and we look at data, pretty much everything's under less than 10%. So, it's hard for us to get a number on when we look at our data, our state data per se, other than the economically disadvantaged, we have like 43%. We bounce back and forth a little bit. But when it comes to different races, it's like less than 10%. Each of those, I think it's like 4% and we have mostly White students. Yes, I think 89% or 90. Very small percentage of Asian, Latino, African American.
Additionally, Principal Alice faces the challenge concerning family engagement as she noted:

I think the family engagement. For families that are struggling just getting by at times they're just having to, maybe there are families having to carry two jobs or are their paycheck to paycheck or trying to connect with families that are in a challenge themselves to try to help make education a source that feels safe for them.

Furthermore, Principal Alice identified changing families’ mindset as a challenge she shared:

I think it's hard for families that feel like the school has not been a good place for them. I think it's hard to change that mindset, if they feel like school cheated them or they feel like school did them wrong. It's hard to change that thinking of families and adults.

Finally, Principal Alice reported that administrative challenges are crucial as she noted:

There's a lot of state red tape. There's a lot of reports. There's a lot of things that get in the way of sometimes wanting to do and when you're looking at scores, but yet at the same time, kids are dealing with other things. It's hard when you are being put in the paper for your scores and that doesn't really tell the whole picture.

When asked where the challenges come from, Principal Alice indicated different sources, including the state and society, as she shared:

Some of them are placed upon us by state mandates, some of them are cyclical where families are dealing with things and this is all they know. And so, it's going to be hard to convince them that the school's a good place.

Concerning the society, she noted:

Society's tension towards the social media that goes, all of a sudden, there's something on Facebook and then it takes you another week to try to disclose the rumor that's not
accurate because society and some of the politics that get in the world of school.

Everyone, the thing that's interesting, everyone for the most part has gone through school, so they really think they know the answers because they've been in school. So that's sometimes challenging because everyone thinks they know.

**Strategies to Address Social Justice Issues**

Principal Alice utilizes overall strategies and specific to address social issues as she shared:

We learn the seven habits, that's big, that's really our philosophy. I wouldn't call it a program based on this book, *The leader in me*. And so, we'd really try to make sure that all kids feel like they have a voice. And so, I'm not saying we're there yet, but we definitely work really hard to make this the culture. So, every child has a voice. It's really what we try to say.

She added:

We really try to get them leadership roles. So, it's not the haves and the have-nots, it's all. So, our goal is to really try to get students involved in the school with making decisions. We have a student lighthouse team K through fifth. It's not just, it's different than a student senate. It is, kids apply for the role based on their application and if the parents are really on board and the teacher can see something about that child. So, we're trying to get away from a popularity contest where that may have been with student senate in the past. Kids have to work for it. And, we try to make that more of an eclectic group.

In order to address transportation issue, Principal Alice utilizes the following strategy:

I know we have gas cards at times that we want to be able to give out to families. I think it's really important for us to be aware of families if they do have a car that broke down,
what's their issue? That type of thing, making sure that we're observant for those situations that might come up.

As far as food issues are concerned, she uses a program destined to help needy students:

We do have the breakfast program and the lunch program in the summertime though, we don't have that going on. So, that's a concern during non-school times, how our families are getting some of their services. We do have a local organization called Generous Hands, which is wonderful. So, over the weekend we give a kind of what you may have heard of a backpack program or food goes home to the families that might need some more, and that local organization runs through some of the violence. The program is still in town for those families.

Concerning the discipline issue, Principal Alice said she addresses it in association with a professional as she shared:

I have a behavior coach two days a week and then I'm the other three days. We have what we call minor and major referrals we try with our seven habits. It's really a path. Like we go with the positive behavior interventions. At elementary, we really believe that it's our still teachable time. It is, discipline isn't going to be the one that corrects the behavior. The focus has to be on changing the behavior. So, we need to keep thinking of as teachable moment.

When asked if her strategies worked well, Principal Alice replied: “We've worked really hard on the culture and our building and I'm trying to get, trying to have kids have a positive outlook.”

Training on Social Justice Issues

Principal Alice said she received some training about social justice issues at the university level as she shared:
I think when it comes to that, now I'm in my doctorate program. I mean I just had a great course that really addressed inequalities and being in a leadership through diversity. But, I don't know if I can think about, it's been a while, but I don't think I feel like I had a lot of training in this area. I think it's getting more attention. I'm trying to read on things, but I don't know if I can say that I had a huge training on it.

She also acknowledged that in her professional development she learned about social justice issues but not too much as she noted:

We've talked, at my different districts about poverty but some of the old work that was out there on poverty was really being challenged that it's not good practice because it continues to, I guess fragment the different groups on what at one point we thought we should be doing for poverty. That's not the right way. So, I don't know. I don't really feel like I've got a lot of training in that.

**Support in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Alice said she received support from her staff, principals, students, supervisors, and family. She started by talking about her staff as follows:

I feel like my staff, I have what we call our lighthouse team, our leadership team and especially, after taking a course in my doctorate program about it, I shared that with some of my teachers that we probably should be doing a better job of this year, paying attention to it.

As far as the support from other principals are concerned, Principal Alice said:

I'm part of [a state association] though, which is our state’s elementary middle school principals’ association and pretty active in that. And so, discussions through either on Twitter or just good old email, talking with other principals across the state as well as principals here in my city. Just, hey, I had, I ran into this problem.
Additionally, Principal Alice acknowledged the support from students as she noted:

Sometimes students can be quite the cause of problems, but in some places, students also contribute to find solutions. Our lighthouse team, we also have a student lighthouse team. So, they are like our student leadership team and we have a think box, we have a problem box. And so, when we have problems in the building it goes in their box and then they meet monthly, and they look at some of the issues that are going on in our building and their voices hope hopefully going to try to help us solve some of the issues that come up I think.

Principal Alice also did not overlook the support she received from supervisors as she noted:

Oh, my people, my administrators are very supportive. I feel like I can call when I have an issue. This isn't someone's feeling. This has come up and I guess we've tried to collaborate together to find solutions.

Furthermore, Alice said she received a great family support to address issues as she shared:

We also have a family lighthouse team. So, there's a staff lighthouse team, a student lighthouse team. Last year we did what we call a family synergy night where we brought community members, stakeholders in. We brought the wide YMCA in the library. There was our police officer, our generous hands, the food program, so we brought in different communities and the families really helped organize that whole event. So, they help. We're trying to do a better job of engaging the families and community in schools as a trio.

Finally, Principal Alice mentioned that she needs additional support to better address social justice issues as she shared:
I need to learn more about what people might be feeling. I think I want to try, I've mentioned to my admin team recently that I'm trying to get, like my family lighthouse team, they were all White women, so I want to try to get a diverse group both socioeconomically race, all of that. So, I need to learn more.

**Shaping of Purpose and Leadership Lessons Learned**

Principal Alice explains how her experiences and challenges shaped her sense of purpose and approach to leadership:

I think, because it's such a huge factor right now in our country and in my role of future leader, I hold it close, like it's super, it's kind of a big responsibility that I have to keep closer to the forefront of my mind. Although it can get mixed, it can get lost because of all the other things. I'm trying to make sure that I continue to learn more, continue to try to think of the other person's perspective and then bring that to my building.

Concerning the lessons learned from leading people to address social justice issues, Principal Alice said the lesson she learned from leading people to address social justice issues is: “Never assume what someone else is going through. Like I really need to make sure I sit back and think about the person's perspective.” She illustrated this lesson with a case she experienced in her school as she noted:

Uh! an example would be, last year we had a musical concert and it was the animal kingdom and it was a really funny musical concert. Students were dressed as animals and there was one student dressed as the Black Panther kind of that's been really popular; the Black Panther in the Marvel comics. So, one of my families though felt very upset because their family came, and they thought it looked like the student was dressed in black face. Like they thought it was offensive. And I said, well, really, they were just like the Black Panther. They were a cat, they were a tiger like and this grandmother felt really
offended that she had family come and she was of color. And I needed to think, if I were her, how? And so, she sent me the picture and we had a discussion about it, but I need to remember the other person's shoes and perspective.

In conclusion Principal Alice said: “Don't assume that you know the other person. And also, things take time and we need to lead the cause I guess, and not back down when it gets hard.”

Principal Jay

Motivation and Meaning of Social Justice

Principal Jay is a White male, who has been in education in a variety of roles for 22 years, with four of those years as an assistant principal and four years as a principal. Two years ago he moved across the country to work on his Ph.D. full time. Thus, his reflections are from his leadership experiences in his last school, which had about 380 students, with about 70% Hispanic, mainly from Mexico and 87% are free and reduced lunch. He described his motivation to become a principal as follows:

I felt like if you really wanted to make an impact on a school as a whole, you'd needed to become a principal, and I felt that I could do so and benefit. I didn't have the skills at that point, but I could benefit students, the staff, and the community because my overall passion for all children is their success. So, that's why I wanted to become a principal.

Social Justice Issues Faced

When asked what idea he has about the phrase "social justice," Principal Jay replied: For me, the first thing that comes to my mind is equity. Giving every child, every family, every community an equitable opportunity to succeed within the educational system as
well as within society. I feel that at this point in our country there are a number of opportunities for the have nots.

Principal Jay said that in his school he had identified many social justice issues, such as socioeconomic situations, race, discipline, achievement gaps, lack of material resources, and funding.

Concerning students’ low socioeconomic statuses, Principal Jay noticed that this had prevented students from achieving high in their academic work as he shared:

We had a lot of students’ significant family situations that we had to work with in the school that affected their behavior and their achievement. I had about 380 students, and also the population was highly mobile. So, students tended to move a lot in and out of my school.

Another issue that he identified in his school was racism perpetrated by his personnel on students and he noted:

In my school the teaching staff is largely White, and the student clientele is largely not White. So, it is also working with in an environment that is highly conservative, and they tend to frown upon and look down upon the families and the students in my community.

Student discipline was also an issue going on in the school and it gave Principal Jay headache as he shared: “If we're talking about the young men at my school, they exhibit a number of significant behavioral problems which affect their academics. Many of my teachers wanted me to suspend them when they misbehaved. I refused to do so.” Additionally, he noted an academic difference between girls and boys due to disciplinary issues and said: “There are continuing achievement gap struggles with boys being suspended more than the girls.”

Furthermore, Principal Jay indicated that he faced a crucial issue of poor facilities
as he shared:

The continuing struggle with access, I mean for example, my school has leaking roofs and they wouldn't get fixed. So, I am just again going back to equal access and equity of resources. When you have schools in the district that are higher performing, that have brand new buildings, but then you have a school that's lower-performing and it has leaky roofs and trash in the playground and things like that. Why would a kid think anything is equal or equitable?

Finally, Principal Jay deplored the authorities’ influence on funding that affected his school as he shared: “The funding mechanism for the district and for the city, if it's not supported, you have to do a lot of begging and borrowing.”

Talking about the contributing factors to social issues, Principal Jay said:

Systemic racism is one. I think that there's expectation that students that come from a particular socioeconomic status come with a particular racial background or students that come from a family that might not have prioritized education that would be life continues. I can say there's a sort of fear of white Americans. They know that they preach equality, and they preach equity, but they don't actually believe in it because they don't have it.

In the same vein, he added:

It was kind of a unique situation but not so much. I think that it's ongoing because I don't think people necessarily want equality, they just say it. I think that there’s still a certain idea that people expect kids of color and kids that are poor to fail in America. And I fight against that notion every day.

Concerning what social justice issues mean, Principal Jay explained:
The meaning I attribute to them is that, as educators we all have to do our best and pay attention to kids that may be unique, minority groups or just anybody. Everybody deserves an equitable chance. Some need more, some need less, and so it's just really paying attention to what each child, parent, family, community needs to give them a fair opportunity.

**Challenges in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Jay said he had faced a number of challenges in his school, such the principalship position, remaining consistent, resistance to change, resources, and engaging people. Concerning the principalship position, Principal Jay said:

Being a principal is very difficult in particular when you're always fighting, and you take it personal that you're wondering: “Are my kids warm tonight from my school? Are they eating tonight or are they being abused because you have all of that going on? So, it's tough to balance.

Another challenge that Principal Jay faced was the rejection of his ideas and initiatives by his surrounding as he noted:

I think, just changing people's mindset about school is my biggest challenge because when people are used to a certain way and you're trying to change how they think about things, you either get pushback or resentment or acceptance. And so, I think, when I came to an understanding of where I came from and what my culture is, people tended to question why I was trying to do so with integrity and consistency.

Principal Jay also faced the resource challenge due the external influences in the school business as he shared:

When two miles away you have a brand-new school in the same district and kids want to go to that school, it makes it a challenge. And I think that there's still a certain idea that
people expect kids of color and kids that are poor to fail in America. And I fight against that notion every day. And so, I think that it takes a strong leader and it takes a strong vision by that leader to keep it going and if that is not supported from above like say by the superintendent or by the mayor of the city.

Additionally, he was challenged to engage his students to work for their success as he noted:

We have to provide a very respectful environment and a very confidential environment. And we also have to change the relationship where school isn’t where you just come for parties and snacks, it’s where you come for academics. So, we try to get everybody focused on academics to increase their achievement and increase their buy-in to the school and to the community and to the country. And I think that is difficult a little bit of pushback with people's understanding of the children.

Principal Jay identified two causes of challenges: first, he thinks that money is the main one as he shares: “There are some people in the country who think that you can’t just pour money into education to fix it.” Second, he thinks that challenges are caused by other school stakeholders as he shared:

If I discriminate against any group of students, then I am at fault and I have not provided an equitable opportunity for all students. If I take priority of one over the other, let’s say boys over girls or White students over African American students, vice versa, whatever it may be. If I do not have respect for every culture, every group from where they are, that in my mind is where challenges come from. They can come from parents, they can come from teachers that want to stay doing the same thing they're always used to.
Strategies to Address Social Justice Issues

Principal Jay used several strategies to address race, SES, discipline, and resistance to change issues.

In order to address his students’ SES issue, Principal Jay sought resources from charitable organizations to satisfy their needs as he shared:

We would work with churches to get Thanksgiving meals that kids could eat at Thanksgiving. We've got Christmas presents so that kids will actually get Christmas presents. We worked with the Fraternity to get money to get them shirts and ties so they could feel professional.

Principal Jay also involved students in solving discipline issues as he noted:

As a leader, I created a voice group that I facilitated, I led as a mentor and that significantly reduced the number of suspensions because we know that research tells us that if a young man, especially a young boy of color in particular African-American or Hispanic if I suspend them, they become disengaged with school and they basically are more likely to end up in prison or out of work.

In order to address the resistance to change in the school, Principal Jay focused more on all its stakeholders because they are the ones who could help him carry out the school vision, knowing that alone, he could not succeed as he shared:

I would just change the perception of people within the school and people outside of the school. So, I worked diligently with my staff and the leadership team to change how the teachers view the students and to change how the students viewed themselves, and to change how the families view their relationship with the school.

Despite numerous issues going on in the school, Principal Jay acknowledged that his strategies have been successful in addressing discipline issues as he noted:
When one of them was starting to act up or be disrespectful, their peer would come in and they would stop them like, hey! I need you to calm down. You know, the principal wouldn't be happy with you doing that. He took into consideration oral reports from his personnel and students to conclude that his strategies could substantially minimize discipline issues in his school as he shared:

And what I'm hearing is that they're not, still have some of them misbehaving but they don't misbehave as much as they should. So, we did our best to provide them an opportunity and I can only see that improving as time goes on.

Another success was changing people mindset as he noted:
We were able to turn the attitude of the adults around first and then the kids, and actually kind of mutual because once the kids started accepting things then the adults started accepting things because when their kids would come home and the other kids were coming home with better grades than the parents are starting to wonder what's going on at that school.

Training on Social Justice Issues

Principal Jay indicated that he had just acquired some basic social justice-related notions in his university studies as he shared:

In my program, there were no real formal classes about it. We had one multicultural class, but it was really kind of a historic class and not about current events or social justice. That term wasn't necessarily widespread back then as part of the program at this university. I just took a social justice policy class and it was fascinating because we looked at discrepancies, we looked at achievement gaps, we looked at opportunity gaps. It was very interesting.

As far as professional development was concerned, Principal Jay said he had learned
many things that had not essentially focused on social justice issues as he noted:

We got a great deal of development around English language learners because we had about 40% of students from backgrounds where English was a second language. So, that was a primary focus. And then we were talking about closing achievement gaps. We had a lot of training around instructional strategies to do so, but it wasn't necessarily under the umbrella of social justice. It was under the umbrella of equity and providing our kids an equitable chance.

**Support in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Jay reported that he had received support from his staff and students but he did not elaborate on it. However, he said the support from other principals had been tremendous and had enabled him to better address social justice issues as he noted:

The idea is immediate, you get on from other principals. You kind of pay attention to what they are doing. You go and you observe their schools and you see what they are doing if they're not doing what's working in terms of working with a particular issue.

On the contrary, Principal Jay expressed his dissatisfaction concerning the support he had lacked from his superiors as he shared:

My district wasn't supporting or wasn't moving in the direction I wanted to move. They wanted to move this way, I didn't want to move that way. And so, I am a strong believer in what I do, I can't really be told otherwise. I guess that kind of stuff never leaves.

He illustrated his dissatisfaction by quoting his direct supervisor who did not keep his promises as he shared:

No, our superintendent would talk well and he would say things that we're trying to do, but the actions didn't necessarily align with that. So, the ideas that I came up with were either mine or they came from a teacher or a parent or a kid.
As far as the support from students’ parents was concerned, principal Jay appreciated it very well by sharing:

I got a lot of support from parents in particular fathers. And the best support I got was from grandparents. I went there and they would say they've been in the community; a large number had been in the community for years. And they would say: ‘I've never seen anybody do this. I'm going to help you.’

Furthermore, Principal Jay does not ignore the support from other people because it helped him to address social justice issues as he noted:

It always helps to keep in your circle of colleagues, of mentors, of supports, individuals that have lived different lives so that they can provide you with different perspectives you might want to think about this because how you're handling it isn't necessarily appreciative of the culture or whatever it may be.

Finally, Principal Jay noted that he had used additional resources and his personal wisdom to address social justice issues:

In terms of other things, it's reading. You watch a TV show where you see somebody doing amazing things at a particular school and then just kind of figuring out why can't you do it here? So, it's all about your own belief in yourself and your own belief in what's right.

**Shaping of Purpose and Leadership Lessons Learned**

While talking about his experiences with social justice issues, Principal Jay shared:

My experience largely in my life has been more of, to be honest, I haven’t had to endure systemic racism or haven’t had to endure things like that. What I value is that every child under my care has an equitable shot. They have that I provide an environment and opportunities for every single child to succeed regardless of what they look like, their
level of academic ability, where they come from, how difficult their parents may be, how much money they have.

Concerning his takeaways from leading people to address social justice issues, Principal Jay mentioned a number of things. First, he has learned about the principal capabilities to make things different in a school community as he shared: “I think every principal has the power to change the entire makeup of the community if you have a clear vision and if you truly believe in the students you are with.”

Second, he has learned that a principal always has to mobilize other people around him to contribute with their efforts to the success of his actions as he noted: “You have to pull in community resources and you have to get your family on board if you have one because if they're not on board, it can cause a lot of issues.”

Third, Principal Jay has learned that a principal is like a financial and material manager who cannot escape the changes and resistance caused by other school stakeholders as he noted: Leading people is keeping good or managing money, pens. It's manageable in the sense that if you create a very coherent and clear plan for it, you can follow that, you can manage it. But, if you really want people to change and you really want them to have a growth of mindset and really adapt a new way of thinking, that's difficult because people are stuck in their ways, largely, especially when it is from something that maybe they have been taught throughout their whole life.

Additionally, Principal Jay stated that leading people requires courtesy and motivation to succeed as he noted:

You can't shove it down their throat. You can't make people want to be open and conscious of their biases. You can't force it upon people. They have to be willing to
accept new ways of thinking, but you also have to stand strong. Again, like I said before, as a member of the majority culture, I have to hold my own accountable for the things that they do and the things that they say and not play passive and silent and watch things happen.

Furthermore, principal Jay said: “If you have poor intentions or lack of integrity, you can cause a lot of damage as a principal. So, I had to learn how to balance things.”

In conclusion, Principal Jay acknowledged having learned that loving kids is essential in a principal’s function as he noted: “Being a principal, you have to be completely passionate about kids and everything else falls in your mind.”

Principal Allen

Motivation and Meaning of Social Justice

Principal Allen is a Black male. He has been an educator for 19 years and four years as principal. Before becoming a principal, he taught for 15 years. He has a Master’s degree. Currently, he is the principal at a middle school that has about 600 students, of which 70% are free and reduced lunch. When asked about his motivation to become principal he replied:

I was strongly motivated by one of the NAACP presidents. He was a mentor of mine who guided me and directed me in the educational leadership path. I really thought that I’d be a teacher. But after that guidance, I felt that I could do more to support and grow more students in the administrative role and break down some of the barriers that a lot of our students face within the school systems.

Principal Allen said that when he hears the phrase “social justice,” many things come to mind as he shared:
Well, the thing that I believe is most prominent is racism, classism, gay, lesbian rights, things of that matter and other things that seem to be most prominent in our society today. I'm sure there are several other things I think I can put my finger on, but as I said, those are the most prominent. Being the culturally responsive education of students, dealing with kids that I believe is a matter of social justice when we often don't say it, but the trauma that kids have experience throughout their lives, and how different classes of people respond to their trauma or their traumatic events.

Social Justice Issues Faced

Before discussing social justice issues, Principal Allen enumerated them in his introduction as follows:

Oh, we face several. One of the social justice issues that we often deal with is racism, the LGBTQ+ situation, transgender. But yeah, I would say the one that we don't speak much about, which is probably the biggest one is social economics, and I think it's so ingrained in the social economics, as I said, classism, that's so ingrained that we almost become complacent and allow it to just be. But it's not, it has a lot to do with students.

Concerning racism, Principal Allen indicated that there are two kinds of it, and he described how people practice it:

Racism is often manifested in its sense of, you can get racism systematically. Our kids deal with racism systematically. They deal with racism just in how people talk to them, how they are approached by others. Then you have blatant racism where a person may call them a derogatory name or refer to a situation or their situation as, you're poor. I'm this or demeaning things, the lower than the more blatant ones. And how we respond to it is, it depends on how it was presented.
He added that racism is intentional and can be observed in people’s acts, but is often not publicly declared by its perpetrators as he noted:

Racism is undercurrent, people aren't walking around and say, hey, you know, I'm a racist, but they may do things that when you see their actions, you see that was totally racially motivated. But then you also have those who have acted or behaved a certain way all their lives. So, they don't define it as racism. Racism is about power. So, once you start attacking the anti-bias, anti-racist culture of those who are in power through race, can you truly address racism?

After describing how people practice racism, Principal Allen indicated that gender identity is also an issue in his school as he shared:

Well, I have students who are lesbian. I have students who are gay. I have students who are bisexual, transgender. So, we deal with it. For the most part, our students don't, there's not a conflict. They have the same rights as every other student.

Additionally, Principal Allen described how low SES negatively affects students’ education as he shared:

A child's social economics has a lot to do with how they're responded to in the classroom, what their experiences are on a day-to-day basis, and how they respond to different situations. And now, you have a child who hasn’t eaten, you can't educate them the same way as a child that you have to provide food for them. It's not really available at home. It's not the same type of education that they are open and willing to receive and then, they pay attention to who's giving them or who's providing the support to them. That makes a big difference.
Transportation constitutes an issue in the school and Principal Allen identified SES as its cause; as he noted:

- We have all, we have all of that, 64% of our students walk. We serve two local housing communities that are low socioeconomics, are primarily section eight and both of those communities walk to school. So, we have a large population of walkers.

Another issue that prevails is bullying as Principal Allen described:

Bullying comes in different ways and there's a difference between bullying and bothering, bullying is ongoing. It's something we told students to stop. So, one of the biggest issues we've had with bullying has been name calling. But when we peel it back, we see that kids start off as what they considered as playing the dozens or cracking jokes on her and the other while at one point when the students no longer wanted to play, the dozens didn't want to crack the jokes and the other kid continued to go on and go on. And when other kids are laughing, he started to feel belittled, and it eventually becomes bullying.

When asked about the origins of social justice issues, Principal Allen attributed them to the society as he noted:

- It's what's accepted or rejected as a society. Our society accepted racism, our society accepted having this vast continuum of poverty, middle class, upper middle class, and rich, our society has accepted that and perpetuated it. So, that's the root of it.

Principal Allen illustrated this case with an example he shared:

- If you go and grab someone that's an impoverished, has an impoverished mindset, that's always been in poverty, second generational poverty, third generational poverty, and you give them $1 million, they will eventually be impoverished. Once again, because the
mindset is to spend the million dollars and they're going to spend $1 million, not necessarily in a year's time. Over time, they're going to spend that million dollars and they're not gonna leave that generational wealth that $1 million could provide and they will be back into poverty.

After identifying and describing various social justice issues that he faces in his school, Principal Allen described their contributing factors as he noted:

What we find is that oftentimes, it's deep seated. It's not something that they just came up with and they said it. It's something that parents believe. It's something that parents have encouraged now.

Furthermore, Principal Allen said the contributing factors involve school stakeholders as he noted:

That's the relationship between student and staff, the relationship between student and parent, the relationship between students and other students. That's the piece that I believe is the major contributor. If a child is, I'm not comfortable speaking to someone about whatever issue they have, then they allowed to manifest. And when they manifest, you never know what it's like. It comes out as trauma. And when you deal with that trauma you're dealing with, it manifests one way, but it may be from another thing. So, you have all these things that are impacting kids on a day to day.

Finally, Principal Allen indicated that the whole society has contributed to social justice issues as he noted:

I see it as the evolution of a society and the people in the society are responsible for. We as people in the society are responsible for what our society looks like and getting a common language, common understanding, common knowledge and the reformation of
common sense is a result of the reformation of society. I'm not a baby boomer, but I'm not a generation X. When certain things that we have to embrace and accept in our culture once were taboo, once were things that we wouldn't do, things we wouldn't say, things we wouldn't see, it's the evolution of our culture, our society. I think it's a constant phase.

**Challenges Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Allen started discussing challenges by describing the one he faces in addressing social justice issues in general as he noted:

The big issue with addressing social justice issues is to identify balance because trying to build a safe school with the intention and the purpose of educating kids in the academic end of the day. That's my duty. That is, my responsibility is to take kids and to provide an environment where they're able to learn the whole balance. You got to find balance because you can get caught up in the things that are not measurable. How many kids I helped over the summer to make sure they had a meal throughout the summer to make sure that they were safe throughout the summer may not, is not, going to show and the metrics that my district may utilize to evaluate me. So, offensively, I could risk my employment because I focused too heavily on the unmeasurable.

After discussing the challenges in addressing social justice issues in general, Principal Allen described how addressing bullying specifically gives him a headache as he shared:

The most challenging one for me is bullying because kids aren't really comfortable with reporting, because they're concerned with being called a snitch, so they won't speak up. And when they don't speak up, it doesn't give us the opportunity to address the situation because frankly, any situation we get, we address but the infrequent nature of reporting causes a delay in us getting to things.
In the same vein, Principal Allen indicated that the bullied themselves cover bullying which makes it a challenge for him as he noted:

Bullying, we try to put different things, systems in place for kids to report bullying. The tricky piece with bullying is if you, if you don't see it, you don't know if it's not reported. Oftentimes, you don't know it exists until it's manifested into the actions of a few. So, if the child is being bullied and they don't report it to us, we try to figure out, just through the relationships we have.

**Strategies to Address Social Justice Issues**

Principal Allen addressed racism by following the steps he described below:

A blatant form of racism that we may deal with, we first try to educate kids on what they're saying. After we make the attempt to educate them, sometimes, we have to get to a point where we have to punish them. And so, we don't start off with a punishment because a punishment doesn't necessarily change a person's mindset. You just punish me because essentially what my belief is, you're punishing me because I believe what I believe. So, we seek to educate before we get to a point of being punitive.

He added:

My staff has undergone culturally responsive education. We root out, we identify racist practices in our instruction. And we're intentional about attacking them. That's just a small, minuscule piece of the big racism pie. But we're doing something.

Concerning gender identity issue, Principal Allen indicated that as a leader, he provides a favorable environment to students who chose to be identified differently from their natural gender as he shared:

If a child wants to be referenced as he or a young man, they are referenced as such. You allow a person to be who they identified as, giving them safe space or safe place. If they
feel that there's a need for them to vent or converse with someone, give them the opportunity for. So, provide a safe space, that's how we address it here. We provide a safe space for a person who may not fit into our box to live, operate and thrive. And that comes from leadership, that comes from the person at the top, that comes from my supervisors, their supervisors, which are essentially our community.

Students’ socioeconomic status also constitutes an issue in the school, so Principal Allen addresses it by offering free food to those in need as he noted:

Regardless of what their financial situation is or whatever their household income or issue is, all kids at this particular school eat and there's no gray area. This year we were fortunate enough that we were given a grant, all the middle schools and the elementary schools where breakfast and lunch were free for all students.

Concerning poverty in general, Principal Allen said education is the efficient means to address it, but he also acknowledged that it cannot be totally eradicated as he noted:

Poverty has different looks. We can't solve, I can't solve poverty. What we can do is to remove barriers. So, we utilize community and access community resources to try to remove barriers. We use prevention works, we use communities in schools. We use the [name] Center, we use [name] Place. So, we try to remove barriers as they arise or as we can predict to support kids, but we're not equipped to remove poverty. What we can do and what our responsibility as educators is, is to equip kids to not break the cycle of poverty, which I believe the [name] promise is intended to break that cycle of poverty through education.

As transportation issue also prevails in the school, Principal Allen addresses it by associating other people with him as he noted:
We try to work with our neighbors and try to keep the sidewalks clear. We do things through one of our school clubs called Rake-and-Ride and they'll go down the hill and just as a community service outreach project, they'll rake our neighbors’ lines coming down the hill so that when we do come back and we ask, Hey, can you let us know? They can reflect back on to our service to them and they can provide service back to us.

As far as addressing bullying is concerned, Principal Allen said he has involved students and he explained how they contributed to the process.

Really, we try to empower our students to feel comfortable with reporting and the main thing is to get them in a position where they report. Once they report, we investigate. Any report of bullying is investigated. Not only as an investigator at the building level, we forwarded up to our office level who will then check to make sure that we follow a concise process. And I believe they also report bullying. We also report bullying to the state level, but oftentimes the bully bullying is one of those invisible subcultures that kids don't speak up about.

He added that bullying is ongoing, and he thought that addressing it requires different strategies as he shared:

Bullying isn't necessarily eradicated through punishment that often results in retaliation. So, we spend time with restorative practices, tried to restore the students and have them sit and go through the protocols to get them in a place where they can communicate and converse in a way that is not offensive. It's not little and it's not demeaning and degrading.

When asked if the strategies he utilizes have been successful, Principal Allen first replied with uncertainty as he noted:
I don't know that we've really zeroed in on a specific goal and spent all of our time consistently attaining a goal. I think we deal with them in a reactive manner. I would love to say we've eradicated bullying, we've eradicated issues, we eradicated transgender concerns. I would love to say that, but I can't. I would love to say we've eradicated poverty, but I can't say that. I don't know that there's, I don't see it. I don't know that there's a finish line.

Second, he expressed his optimism concerning some of the cases he solved as he shared: "I think this is successful for the situation. I think that they're successful for the specific situations."

**Training on Social Justice Issues**

Principal Allen reported that he had not received enough training related to social justice issues during his university studies as he noted: “I had one class within all of my years of professional education training that was a panel of homosexual people and we were charged with asking them questions, that was it.”

However, he said he had benefited enough from professional development in his position as he noted:

My district has provided us with culturally responsive education. My district has provided us with training for how to care. My district has provided us with restorative practices, a saint and civil schools training positive behavior support training, multi-tool systems support training. My district has provided the predominance of my training and understanding. First of all, I'll be able to define where I am on that continuum and erasing my own personal biases so that I can help to build others. So, it's still so much training.

**Support in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

When asked about the support he has received to address social justice issues, Principal Allen mentioned the support from his colleagues as he shared:
Other principals, I could think of one in particular who was pretty much my go to. If I have an issue, I give him a phone call and if he doesn't know the answer, he can often get me to somebody with the answer. But other than that, they're there. I think that the relationships that you build, you'll hear that word often from me. The relationship that you build with your colleagues is very vital, very important and relaxing.

Another support Principal Allen receives is from his superiors as he appreciated:

They provide us as I said before with the multi-tiered systems of support training, the culturally responsive education training, the trauma informed care, dealing with students’ special needs. We have two directors in our district, one over student services, one over special education. And they're phenomenal. They just know what they're doing. They are able to pinpoint the issues that we're having at the building level to listen to what we're saying at the building level, listen to what the community is calling us, asking for, and then they identify what tools can help us, not because there's not any quick fixes. So, it's awesome, it is often over continuum of time and it's not a microwave, it is the oven. As a matter of fact, it's a slow cooker.

Furthermore, Principal Allen said his family, especially his wife has been strongly supportive in addressing social justice issues as he shared:

My wife works as a child welfare worker. Now she recently is in psychiatric. So, we share the same views. She is often an additional resource for me. She's very well aware. She's trained in average childhood experiences. So, she's able to open my mind, and free my mind on some new things that I could do in order to mitigate the effects of adverse childhood experiences that kids may have, which are often dealing with poverty. So, it's really a matter of who you recognize as family and who you tap into as resources.
Finally, Principal Allen said in case he is stuck on a social justice issue, he usually resorts to one of his superiors to seek solutions as he noted:

> When I run across it and I don't feel like I can tackle or handle it myself, it's usually when there's a social justice issue and I think of these particular things, I would turn to my director of student services. She's very versed, she's very sharp, and she's got some good experiences under her belt, so that's whom I would actually turn to for support.

**Shaping of Purpose and Leadership Lessons Learned**

Principal Allen said leading people has shaped his sense of purpose and approach as he shared:

> The only thing that I really believe can help with social justice issues is to experience them. When they come about, when you run into them, then that's when you learn, what you learn, and you figure out what you don't know. So, I just welcomed opportunity to make decisions and choices. And when you're making those decisions based on what you know, you make the best decisions you can.

He added:

> Your approach may be educating the person in tolerance or not necessarily even tolerance. I don't like the word tolerance because it's like, why do you have to tolerate me? It's support. It's acceptance, it's driving. So, when I think about how, how I am, my office, I'm going to talk from my students and their experiences and knowing what my duty and my job is, what my responsibility is and knowing that I am here to serve.

Finally, Principal Allen said he has learned that the leader must listen to people first as he shared:

> Allow them to speak. The lesson I've learned is the first thing you have to do is allow a person to speak so they know where they're coming from. You have to allow them to be
for that, they are able to articulate what they truly feel. As they speak, then you have to make sure that you are open-minded to receive what they are saying.

**Principal John**

**Motivation and Meaning of Social Justice**

Principal John is a White male, who has been in education for 18 years, with three of those years as principal. He taught for 15 years before becoming a principal. He indicated that two of those three years as principal had been at the elementary. Principal John has a Master’s degree and is enrolled a Ph.D. program. At the time of the interview, he is in his first year as the principal at a middle school, that has 300 students, of which 92% are free and reduced lunch.

Principal John said his motivation to become a principal was mainly leadership as he shared:

I like working with people. I feel like I can relate to people and work and organize and delegate tasks easily and efficiently. I can build relationships with people on a very positive way, provide feedback, and constructive criticism. I just wanted to kind of branch out and to use my education towards something different.

When asked about what hits him in the phrase “social justice issues,” Principal John replied:

Basically, the main thing that comes to my mind is the climate and culture of a school. It's when you're thinking about social justice, you're thinking about just some of the issues and the concerns that are being faced within schools and how to work with the community to solve some of the problems that they might be facing.

**Social Justice Issues Faced**

Principal John reported that he had faced a number of social justice issues in his middle school, such as extreme poverty, race, gender identity, bullying, and drama.
Concerning extreme poverty, Principal John said:

We are facing many social justice issues in this building. The primary one is, we have an extremely high poverty rate. We're looking at about 92% of students who come from poverty. And so, with that brings a whole gambit of concerns. A lot of students are not coming with proper clothing or proper food. We are the one safe place, but at the exact same time, we're kind of dealing with some of the adversities out in the community that are being brought into the school.

After describing the issue of poverty, Principal John enumerated other social justice issues he faces in his school as he noted:

We've had some issues of race. We've some issues of gender identity. We've some concerns with bullying and however, it's the main issue. We're dealing with all that stems from the big umbrella of poverty.

Additionally, Principal John identified bullying that prevailed in the school as he noted:

It's happening verbally where a lot of the students are making fun of each other. They're really sitting there commenting on clothes or the appearance.

In the same vein he added:

A major issue that we're dealing with right now is cyber bullying. There's a lot going on with social media where kids are sending inappropriate pictures to each other, threatening each other that they're going to get into fights. So, we have to take each one of those situations very seriously and we have to investigate.

Principal John also faces the issue of drama resulting from social bullying as he shared:

A lot of times, we've had to spend a lot of time investigating based on a student just not liking another student. Unfortunately, when you're dealing with middle schoolers, there's
a lot of what we like to refer to as drama, where kids will make fun of other kids and say things about other kids and it's not true. They just want to do it just to get them in trouble.

When asked about the contributing factors to all those social justice issues Principal John replied:

Right now, it's primarily the students. We have not had any issues this year that have involved adults. That it's one of those wide variety of things. Students are exposed to more on media. In my mind, they're exposed to more on television, their music that they listen to. They are exposed to things on the internet, social media apps that they do where they're communicating with each other and they're not really being monitored by their parents or the adults that they're with. Kids are also very sneaky, so they tend to do things behind their back and kind of covered themselves a little bit.

**Challenges in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal John indicated that he faces one major challenge, without enumerating any others, as he shared:

The biggest challenge is actually communicating with parents over this and a lot of the parents do not want to hear and are not open to hearing those types of things. They didn't need to hear about what the kids are doing or whatever. I can only talk about their own children and when I'm communicating that to them, a lot of them become very defensive. Some of them become very vulgar. It's just kind of a mixture of emotions that go into play.

Concerning the origins of challenges that he faces in his middle school, Principal John indicated students and their parents as well.
Kids tend to push back a little bit, they tend to argue a little bit. But, for the most part, parents are the ones who are in denial, they don't want to believe every single thing and they have an issue with some staff.

**Strategies to Address Social Justice Issues**

In order to address the race issue, Principal John utilizes a strategy that consists of gathering all those involved to listen to them as he noted:

There's a wide variety of strategies. Our main strategy that we like to focus on is a restorative justice. We really try to focus on that one and really make sure that we are tackling it and really addressing the issue. But we're not sitting there doing it inappropriately. We're bringing all the parties together, really having a positive dialogue and communication that we have racial concerns that we've been having has not really been. The number one issue right now that we're dealing with is, there are some gang related issues that are coming into the building.

As far as a food issue was concerned, principal John’s strategy has been to offer breakfast and lunch to needy students at his school.

We have a motto. We can only control what we can control. And so, the main thing that we talk about or tackle is, we provide food. We provide free breakfast. The entire building receives that free breakfast. The entire building receives a free lunch. And so, that takes a lot off of family's plates right there.

Additionally, Principal John indicated that he has addressed gender identity issues by accommodating students with adequate facilities in their learning environment; as he shared:

The main thing that we are dealing with is, we have one bathroom in each classroom. So, the kids do not need to worry about having to use those bathrooms. We do have a one communal bathroom and the children who are struggling with that just tend to avoid
those ones and just use the ones in the classrooms. It's just not one of those issues that are prevalent in the building, but it's also one of those things that we are dealing with.

Since bullying is also an issue that is crucial in the school, Principal John explained how he addresses it as he shared:

We have a zero tolerance to bullying, so we're really addressing that quickly and that if they're starting to make fun of kids or we really tackle that and hand out some appropriate consequences for what's going on.

Another strategy against bullying was bringing in the school an external individual to work with students, as Principal John shared:

Not this year so far. We had them in the past where we've had some students who were questioning things. And so, we've provided a social worker that they can just sit there and kind of talk with and communicate with. We've worked with families, we've worked with community mental health that allows them to come in and really just kind of work with them.

In reply to the question concerning how his strategies worked, Principal John said:

So far it has not gone well. We have a clear-cut system that's put into place to deal with those specific strategies. The more severe strategies were we're trying to fine tune some of the other ones. So, when we're dealing with bullying or we're dealing with social media concerns, we have strategic plans and we have systems that we have to follow in order to address those.

Training on Social Justice Issues

Principal John said that he has participated in a number of trainings, but he mentioned that they were not specifically based on social justice issues, as he noted:
I've had a wide variety of things over the last 18 years. I worked in another school district where they were dealing with very similar issues, but I worked on it as a teacher front. So, we did cultural awareness training. We also dealt with some poverty trainings and how to address the needs.

In addition, he provided some details about the content of those trainings he received:

We were looking at a training that another school district just spent some time pulling all the teachers in and really just kind of starting the process of making teachers aware of the cultures that the students come from. And so, exposing different ideas, different cultures, different values and primarily through dialogue. Sometimes, it did happen through media of some sort like a visual media, but it was primarily through dialogue and just communication and just kind of evidence based.

He concluded that he has been handling social justice issues by using his personal skills acquired in the field without benefiting from any formal training.

As for any formal training that I have received at the administrative level, there has not been any. It's been more of an on-task error, a daily experience, just living every single day and kind of learning as you go right now.

**Support in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

As far as support is concerned, Principal John said he is expecting to receive it from his teachers later on to address social justice issues as he noted:

Most of them, I would say about 85% of the teachers tend to not fully understand the culture that our client or our students come from and so that's part of the training that I need to do. This is the first year that I've had this staff. I've only had this staff since August, so I am trying to get them acclimated to the culture that we're really currently dealing with.
Principal John also does not underestimate the support he receives from a colleague of his to address social justice issues he faces:

Kind of the same way that my assistant superintendent does, there's a lot of times where I'll just call up the other high school principal, and he and I would sit there and just process an issue that we might be working on together. The issues that I'm dealing with in this building are very similar to some of the issues at a high school is dealing with, but not so much in elementary. So, when we're such a small district, it's more of reaching out to the correct people to help you out with those.

After mentioning that support from his colleague, he acknowledged the important support that some students’ parents give him in his leadership:

Primarily most of the parents are very supportive. They are first a little surprised by it, but then they are very supportive, very cooperative, willing to communicate, willing to walk through things and really get to the bottom of it and cooperate with the school in any way. But there are some parents who become very defensive and will argue back.

Additionally, Principal John expressed his satisfaction concerning the regular support he receives from his superiors as he shared:

So, a lot of decisions that are of these extremes, I have to make alone in this building. However, I have central office and other administrators and an assistant superintendent that I can process with and really kind of piggyback off and really trying to understand the best approach to things. I'm very fortunate to have a very supportive assistant superintendent that I can talk with on a daily basis, and she can help me process some of these issues that might be arising and the best course of actions.
Furthermore, he acknowledged the support from his family, especially from his wife who is always on his side guiding him as he noted:

My personal family, the main way, honestly my wife is so I'm married and have four kids and my wife, she just is a sounding board. She just listens and just listens to me if I just need to get it off my chest or if I've had a rough day, she's just there to support.

Finally, Principal John reported that the person he mostly resorts to for support is his superior as he noted:

The assistant superintendent. I pick her brain a lot. She's been in that role for about 12 years. And so, I really just reach out to her. She's kind of, she used to be a middle school and a high school principal, so she's experienced quite a bit.

**Shaping of Purpose and Leadership Lessons Learned**

Principal John has gained enough experiences and faced challenges in his position as he shared:

When being in this role, you have many hats that you need to fulfill and you just need to make sure that you're listening to the entire story, both sides of the story before you make a judgment or a consequence or a call. You need to have all of your facts, this allows me to be very organized and very detailed and make sure I have all my documentation, everything all set for me before I proceed to the next level.

Finally, Principal John offered his takeaway from leading people as a piece of advice to other leaders to help them better address delicate situations they face as he shared:

The main lesson that I've learned is to slow down and really stay focused on the topic. A lot of times, some of these issues bring emotions out and a lot of people tend to be very emotional when you're dealing with them. You just have to have the facts, stay focused.
Don't let people get off guard there and really take your time when you're processing this. People want immediate solutions and sometimes the investigations take time.

**Principal Holly**

**Motivation and Meaning of Social Justice**

Principal Holly is a White female, who has been an educator for 17 years, with two of those years as principal. She began her career at the elementary level as pre-school assistant teacher, then she evolved step-by-step by doing many jobs in the same school before becoming a principal at a private school. She supervised recess, she was a teacher and now she is a member of the administration. Principal Holly has a bachelor’s degree.

The elementary school she is a principal at has about 85 students. Principal Holly described her motivation to become principal as follows:

My predecessor had a lot of struggles, he really struggled with the mantle of leadership and I was so happy as a classroom teacher. I love being a teacher and I also really love this organization. So, I decided, well, first I joined the search committee for the new person and I figured out very quickly that the search committee didn't have a clue as to what they were doing. So, I stepped off the search committee and I applied for the job and it's because I really understand this organization. I understand who we are, what we do and why we do it. So, that is what led me to this leadership role. It is really my deep love of the organization and not my great love of being in charge of anything.

When asked about what comes to mind when she hears the phrase “social justice issues,” Principal Holly replied:

When I think of social justice issues, I think of things like making sure everyone feels safe in this space. Making sure that we are looking at curriculum in a way that is
inclusive. Making sure that we're not providing only the European view of the world. We are looking from a lens, from other places and that we really work to guide our teachers to be inclusive. Making sure that people who are with LGBTQ+ are being represented in the literature that we read. Also making sure that people of color and people from many different backgrounds are represented in the curriculum.

**Social Justice Issues Faced**

Racism is a major social justice issue Principal Holly has faced in her school as she shared:

Probably the biggest issue that we faced in the last year is, we have a student who felt really strongly about communism and would say really inappropriate things to a Jewish student, and was also drawing swastikas around the school, like in the dirt, which was really fascinating because this particular student is actually of indigenous heritage, so his ethnicity is not fully European. And under the whole idea of communism/Nazi-ism, he would have been one of those people who was rounded up. We were able to have a conversation with him to help him understand like what the Nazis stood for and understand that he would also have been persecuted.

In the same vein she noted: “We've had situations where the white students would call the people of color by their same names. So, like the idea that the people of color within our community all are the same, which isn't true or real.”

Another issue that she identified in her school has been violence as she said: “We have also faced a lot of microaggressions for students in our school because we don't have as much racial diversity here.” She illustrated this with the example: “We had a situation last year where a student punched another student off campus, not on campus but we had to deal with it within the school because we're such a small community. Then we do have kind of conversation.”
She added that the school faces some bullying concerns as she noted:
A lot of times with the younger students, it's like we had something happening on Friday where one student peeked under the stall at another student and the student was not okay with that. So, he came out of the stall and he grabbed the child and grabbed the fellow student and like kind of scratched his arms a little bit. And that could be considered bullying, right? Peeking at someone, using the restroom and grabbing someone's body.
So, that's what the younger kids generally do, it's more physical.
Additionally, Principal Holly said transportation is an issue for her school as she shared:
We are able to receive transportation from the local school system, but because our day is a longer than most schools, we start at 8:00 AM and we end at 3:15. If we received transportation, it would make our school day shorter because we're beholden to the busing schedule.
Principal Holly said social justice means many things as she shared:
I think of social justice, I think a lot of those issues that are pervasive with our culture—people who do not have skills to have a healthy conflict, people who feel it is their right to demonize others because of their skin color or because they are a member of the LGBTQ+ community, the lack of understanding of other cultures, a lack of empathy.
Social justice is to me, helping the humans around us live with other humans with kindness, honesty, and empathy. It is something we have to continually educate ourselves about and try not to live within a narrow world view.
When asked about the contributing factors to social justice issues, Principal Holly shared:
I think the biggest thing is that within White culture people, I mean White people are the most segregated people out there and they don't really see. I mean, they don't understand
other cultures and when they're seeking to understand cultures, they are often inappropriate. And so, I think that's really the biggest thing because our community is predominantly White and trying to navigate, making sure that this is a space where all students can feel safe and comfortable without appropriating, without speaking for the people within our community who are people of color.

**Challenges in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Holly said she faces a number of challenges in her school, such as lack of understanding.

One challenge is, a lot of times we will be addressing things and the family whose child was harmed in some way, they don't see the work that we're doing. So, it's important that they trust us and trust our process. And so, a big challenge is just making sure that the parents of the child know that we're taking the concern seriously. We're doing a lot of work but it's work they can't see. We had an incident over the summer where a young child bit another young child and the parents were new to the school, so they didn't know how we take things like that so seriously.

In the same vein, she added:

A lot of times we have families who only have one child and they feel like if they do everything right, their child will be perfect and they don't know or understand or realize that when you have a child, you're creating a human being who will make mistakes and have problems and that's okay. So, a lot of times the parents really freak out and we just have to make sure they trust us.

Additionally, Principal Holly said there are racial challenges she faces in her school as she noted:

We have a few teachers who are people of color and they want to effect change within our organization. Their basic complaint is, in order for people of color to be successful
here, they have to be indoctrinated within White culture. They're saying that people who don't have White culture and aren't able to code-switch those children wouldn't feel safe here. And I kind of disagree with that, but I also am not a person of color, so I really want to respect that. And so, that's been really tough to navigate because these teachers feel so strong about it and they're continually pushing this.

Concerning the origins of challenges, Principal Holly indicated two groups of people as she noted:

Mainly from parents and teachers. Students are humans and they're developing humans. And so, their brain isn't fully developed so you expect them to have struggles and that's okay. It's just when you get these adults whose brains are fully developed, but maybe they haven't learned some of these skills and they're reacting and they're making everything bigger. And so, parents making things bigger and teachers making it bigger.

**Strategies to Address Social Justice Issues**

Principal Holly addresses behavioral issues by acting as she described:

We also have some kind of consequence, punitive measures in place when another student called a teacher a bitch. And so that student had to have a conversation with the teacher, but also was sent home and had some consequences for those choices and behaviors.

In order to address bullying, Principal Holly utilizes a strategy she described below:

We do see some bullying types of behaviors. We're able to have trained adults nearby to help facilitate those issues and what we often will do is we do something called like peace education circle or restorative chat that follows a format. First, we have the participants take some time to cool down, then we do an intake with the participants individually. “Hey, what happened?” “What happened next?” etc. Once we get the full
story from all participants, we bring everyone to the table and have them all go over their story together. Each participant has a turn, and they have to listen when it is not their turn and not interrupt. Once each person is able to tell their story, kids often see that the situation was perceived in many ways, and all have a valid point of view.

She added:

Once they talk through the situation and hear each other, we then talk about what they need to do moving forward. After they can agree on what needs to happen moving forward, then they talk about what they need from each other to repair the harm. This is usually a sorry and a promise to listen to their friend’s words moving forward. Restorative practices are so beneficial, we have the faculty have a restorative chat three times a year to keep us all on the same page and working together.

Another behavioral issue that Principal Holly has dealt with in her school is described as follows:

They're continually messing with each other and making fun of each other, but then it can so quickly get out of hand and end up being really inappropriate. For instance, we had a student who was making a joke, someone heard the joke and then misunderstood that it was a joke and then suddenly and even misunderstanding his words. So, he ended up going around the entire school saying that this kid was a pedophile, which wasn't true. So, we as a school, we ended up canceling classes and having a conversation with the whole middle school about that. So, just those middle schoolers just constantly love to whip things up.

In further to address discipline issues, Principal Holly noted:

Whenever we see kids whispering or sometimes, they'll go off and see talk to each other. And so, we'll go stand near them and listen to their conversation. And so, when we see
that triangulating happen, we make sure we sit down and have everyone have a conversation. So, it's continually putting them back on the same page and knowing that that type of behavior isn't tolerated. So, a lot of our discipline in our early elementary, we start out the day with a circle where students share their feelings, or we do something called zones of regulation where they identify their feelings. For instance, they say ‘I feel red because my brother punched me in the car or said I was a jerk in the car.

Concerning how well her strategies worked, Principal Holly noted:

Often what I will say to kids is that conflict creates understanding. So, there was a conflict here, but if we sit down and we talk about it, we will create understanding. You will understand the position that this person is coming from and they will understand where you are coming from and you are able to kind of meet in the middle ground. So, I think it's pretty successful.

**Training on Social Justice Issues**

Answering the question concerning social justice training, Principal Holly indicated that she had not received any specific as she shared:

Actually, I didn't have anything through my university training for social justice at all. Being a kid who went to this school, I really believe in being a lifelong learner. So, it took me a long time to get through university and that's mainly because I had to wait tables to go to pay for school. Anyway, long story short, I did take women's history courses and I took African history courses. I took Japanese history courses, and I took, like Black American history courses. So, I did have probably more understanding than a lot of my peers who went through the school. Since I've been here, I did do the two-and-a-half-day ERACCE anti-bias training. That was a big piece of really digging in deep and looking at systemic racism in the U.S. because it's here and there're so many layers to it.
**Support in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Holly reported she receives support from a colleague of hers as she noted:

The principal of another school that's up in Glen Arbor, he had lots of experiences. He was the principal of preschool through eighth grades and he just moved to a high school now. When I have a particularly difficult problem, I reach out to him and he helps me process through, like different options of what I can. So, that's been a really great source of support.

Furthermore, Principal Holly mentioned the support she receives from her supervisors as she shared:

I do have a board of directors, so, if I have a problem, I will reach out to the members of the board of directors. One woman who's on the board of directors, she just retired. She was an HR for a school district. Another person who is on our board of directors is the principal of high school, and another person, she's an associate Dean at Western Michigan University. So, I'm able to ask these people for question, I'm able to seek out their advice and help.

Concerning the person she mostly turns to to seek solutions for her issues, she shared:

It really depends on what the issue is. If it's something that I feel can be handled completely in the house with teachers, with faculty, staff, then, I'll reach out to, the faculty and staff. If it's something that's bigger, I often will reach out to one of my board chairs who has a degree in counseling. So, I will reach out to her and talk through the problem and kind of set up an action plan. And then, if it's even bigger and because though she has a degree in counseling, she's never been an independent school principal, then I reach out to my friend up North if it's even bigger. So, I kind of have layers, first faculty then board, then my mentor.
Finally, Principal Holly explained how her family supports her:

My family has definitely suffered because I work all the time and I'm not available to them. So, the biggest thing my family does to help me to really solve any of the problems here is, they understand that I work a lot. And they also know that sometimes I bring the stress home with me, and they're willing to listen to me and just be supportive. I am the White person in my family, when there is an issue involving racial inequality, they're able to give insight.

Finally, Principal Holly said something else that could help her address social justice issues is more professional development for her teachers as she noted:

Probably the biggest thing that would help right now is, we have four teachers who haven't been trained in anti-bias training through ERACCE. Getting them trained would be really helpful just because sometimes teachers accidentally create problems because they are not looking through an anti-bias lens as they create curriculum.

**Shaping of Purpose and Leadership Lessons Learned**

While talking about her experiences with social justice issues and challenges that shaped her purpose and leadership, Principal Holly shared:

I think my number one job is to support the teachers so that they can support students. And I feel like if we are approaching these problems well, students are going to gain skills that they will take out into the community and really make the community a better place for all. So that's really what drives me. When days are hard, I know that I'm doing things to make the world a better place. So, I know that sounds really kind of Pollyanna or dreamy, but I really believe that this work is so important. And making sure that the people who leave here have all of these skills that they can share them forward is so important.
Finally, Principal Holly described her takeaways from leading people to address social justice issues as follows:

If they want to do the work because addressing these things is an easy, a lot of times you can ignore things and they can blow up somewhere else. It's a lot of work. It's stopping your whole class and saying, we have a problem and we need to talk about this problem. And, making these community connections more important than getting them through curriculum, getting them through the lesson. So, the biggest lesson is definitely making sure everyone wants it and is willing to do the work.

Principal Steve

**Motivation and Meaning of Social Justice**

Principal Steve is a White male, who has been in education for 16 years, with 13 of those years as principal. Prior to that, he taught in a middle school in a Southern state. From an education perspective, he holds a Master and a Ph.D. Currently, he is the principal at a middle school that has 625 students, of which 44% are free and reduced lunch, and 68% are White.

When asked about what comes to mind when he hears the “phrase social justice,” Principal Steve said: “I think the primary one that comes to mind is, with regard to social justice the work that we try and do around race and ethnicity.”

**Social Justice Issues Faced**

Principal Steve said in his school he had identified bullying and transportation as crucial issues he faces. Concerning bullying, he said it exists in his school, and he discussed it by comparing the situation in his school to those in others as he noted:

There's bullying in every school but how you address it is different. I think we do a good job of addressing things, and I would say that here at my school there is minimal bullying...
when compared to some other schools that I've been a part of. And I think that's just part of the culture and the climate that you build within your school.

He also indicated that bullying is manifested in many ways as he described:

A lot of social media stuff. Mostly, there is rarely face-to-face bullying anymore. It is largely done on apps that are used outside of the school setting and then that stuff just trickles back into the school. So, dealing with a lot of stuff on Snapchat and Instagram and Kik and even though they can't access those things here, a lot of it happens outside of school, but we ended up dealing with the backlash of whatever happened the night before.

Principal Steve also said transportation for a growing homeless population has become an issue as his school population is increasing as he noted:

Its growing numbers are starting, so we have quite a few kids that are labeled homeless and they come to us from far and so, sometimes getting those kids to school is difficult. But we usually figure out a way to get them here.

When asked about what social justice issues mean to him, Principal Steve said:

To me they're all valuable issues that we need to talk about. I think we’re now talking about them because we're getting a generation of kids that feel empowered to make those decisions and challenge some of the status quo. The issues have always been there, they're new issues, but you're getting kids who look empowered. They want to do something about it.

After describing the meaning he makes of social justice issues, Principal Steve enumerated the factors that contribute to them:
I don't know if there's a set of conditions that are applicable to all of the issues. I think some of it is, kids feeling empowered, which is good, which is what we want. I think there is a drifting away of, I guess the normal nuclear family that used to exist. So, kids are working through some more difficult family dynamics, which in my mind requires them to mature a lot quicker and start making decisions that they maybe in the past it looked too apparent, and I think that I see kids going to their teachers a lot for that kind of advice or that kind of counseling or just outlet having someone to talk to.

In the same context, he added: “I think the political climate in our country has pushed some of these things to the surface as well regardless of what side, if you're a Republican or a Democrat.”

**Challenges in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Steve reported that he has faced a number of challenges in handling social justice issues and said increasing the number of personnel with special qualification was the first one as he noted:

I think the biggest challenge is finding enough support staff to make sure that all of the kids' needs are being met. We have a great special education teaching team but sometimes the paraPro support, we don't have enough paraPros to work with kids effectively. Finding people who want to do that job and who are qualified to do that job is difficult.

He added:

Finding resources for various social justice issues is difficult because the issues are time sensitive. So, like three years ago, when we were working through transgender issues, those resources didn't exist because no one was prepared for it. Now the resources exist because schools have gone through it and they can look back and say, this worked but
just finding groups who are willing to help out, I think we're able to find those people, but they're stretched so thin that they have a hard time committing to being part of your organization for a while.

Second, Principal Steve identified a transgender challenge that he faced in his school as shared:

I think the transgender one was difficult because the learning curve was so big. It took a lot of reaching out and consulting people who are well versed in the issue to educate us on what that looks like in a school setting. And I think building an awareness and training with our staff is not a mainstream thing. And some people grow up with a certain set of values or beliefs that this issue really challenged them on. That was some difficult conversation.

**Strategies to Address Social Justice Issues**

In order to address social justice issues Principal Steve faced in his school, he has utilized various strategies, such as working with communities, using networks, collaborating, and providing students with free food at school. Concerning the racial issue, Principal Steve explained how he addressed it as he noted:

Right now, we are working through some issues that have come up with regard to race.

We have a growing African American population in the building and there is some training that we need to do on our side for just so people have an understanding of some of the cultural differences of African American students and maybe what they grew up with in smaller, upper middle-class white communities.

He added:

One of the things that we've done is, we reached out to the community foundation. They have an educational team called the truth and racial healing and transformation project.
And what they do is they will come into the school and they provide a forum for whatever group of students you want. In this case, it's going to be a group of African American students and they're going to be able to talk about their experience in the school and what that looks like and how it feels. And then we're going to do the same thing with our teachers. They're going to have an opportunity to talk about those experiences and listen to the kids.

In order to address bullying, Principal Steve used a students’ network and his counseling personnel as he shared:

We're not going to tolerate people being made fun of or picked on or bullied but we do, we do have a very good network of how kids can report incidences that are going on. And then we have a great counseling staff who helped do some restorative practices in inappropriate situations. Some situations lend themselves very easily to that restorative approach and then others sometimes don't.

As far as transportation for homeless students is concerned, Principal Steve has addressed it by collaborating and using a busing network as he noted:

A lot of times we're able to collaborate with other districts. So, if a kid lives in [name] but is attending school here, if they're staying at the shelter downtown, there's a network of busing that we can get them to different pickup points where we can pick them up. That's time-consuming because the kids can sometimes be on a bus for two hours, but they know they're getting to a good school, which is important.

Concerning low-income students, Principal Steve said the school helped students with free food as he noted:
We give some benefits of food at school. No foods price issue here. 50% of our kids qualify for free lunch. So, that's quite a bigger number than the other middle schools. A lot of our kids do take advantage of that free breakfast and that free lunch.

When asked if the strategies he utilized for addressing social justice issues have worked well, Principal Steve replied:

With regard to our transgender trainings and strategies and things that we implemented, those went very well. I feel there isn't something I would look back on and do differently. There's always an opportunity to do more until you really know what that is. A lot of these things, they don't teach you how to deal with them. You just kinda learn how to deal with them and navigate the ups and downs and you have experience.

**Training on Social Justice Issues**

When asked if he received any social justice leadership training, principal Steve replied:

From the education and degree related side of things, I can't recall a class or a training around these issues? I think it should be something that should be part of every teacher and administrator prep program in the country. It's not, and then from a professional development standpoint, there are various professional organizations that most administrators belong to and we lean on them quite a bit to provide that training. So, they've done training around title IX laws and LGBTQ+ issues. It’s a kind of training or the issue that you're looking for, they'll go out and find the resources and try and get it for you, but you have to look for it.

**Support in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Steve said he receives supports from his administrative staff and teachers to address social justice issues as he noted:
Their biggest contribution is a willingness to learn and be open. I think that is what they bring to the table. We don’t have a group of people in this building who are anti anything. They are willing to learn and challenge maybe some of their thought processes on what a traditional school, or traditional upbringing or a traditional family looks like. So far, I cannot say enough good things about them.

Concerning the support from teachers, Principal Steve said they are working with him to bring change in the school as he noted:

I think they trust me in how we are going to move forward through some things. We work very hard to build the culture where it is ok to be wrong, it is ok to challenge each other on things.

The support received from other principals is also important and Principal Steve acknowledged it as he shared:

Absolutely, we often talk about what's going on in our schools and because more often than that, if the issue hasn't happened in another school, it's gonna happen. So, the way that we handle things needs to be somewhat similar.

Concerning the support from his students, Principal Steve indicated that it has been helpful because students are good informants as he shared:

They're usually the ones that tell us there's an issue and we want them to, we encourage them to come to us and tell us what's going on and how we can help. They're the best people to ask.

Additionally, Principal Steve appreciates the great support he receives from his superiors as he noted:
The administrative group in our district is very supportive. We have everyone from our HR person interpreting laws for us. We have a communications director who's handling any media questions and media feeds. We have a group of attorneys that are on retainer for any legal questions that we have. So, from a support standpoint, I couldn't ask for a better team. So, there isn't anything in that area that I think is lacking.

He added:

My direct boss is the assistant superintendent of instruction, he's been very helpful. Our communications director has been incredibly helpful. If it is working through any negative media that may come out of any of our schools, it really has to be a team effort when we're dealing with this kind of stuff.

Furthermore, Principal Steve indicated that he received support from his family as he noted:

Just the willingness to listen. I think getting a viewpoint from someone who is outside of this school is valuable. They provide different perspectives and having my own kids, they have their own perspective on how things should be handled and dealt with even if their contribution is just listening.

Finally, when asked about whom he usually turned to to seek solutions for addressing social justice issues, Principal Steve replied:

I lean heavily on my boss. He's an assistant superintendent and he has his network of people at the district level whom he talks to and consults. And then, we just work through problems together as a team.

**Shaping of Purpose and Leadership Lessons Learned**

Concerning how his experiences with social justice issues and challenges shaped his sense of purpose and approach to leadership, Principal Steve stated:
I see my role specifically with social justice issues as being, it's my job to make sure every kid in this building feels comfortable. And if there are things going on outside of this office that is contributing to them not feeling comfortable and part of this culture, then my job is to change that. And I do that through educating my staff on what these issues are. I don't tell them how to handle the issue. We work collaboratively to understand what the issue is and move forward in a positive direction.

Regarding the lessons learned from leading people, Principal Steve mentioned avoiding fast decision-making as he noted:

The biggest lesson I learned is to go slowly. Making quick decisions or snap decisions based on your own gut and intuition is sometimes detrimental to the process. So, I have learned not to answer quickly. Take time to understand the issue, gather your resources, and make informed decisions from that point.

Finally, he said:

I think you have to accept responsibility for whatever happens. It is easy to point a finger at something or a decision or a policy that is out of your control sometimes. Being able to own that and apologize and learn from that is a valuable characteristic, I think.

**Principal Logan**

**Motivation and Meaning of Social Justice**

Principal Logan is a White male, who has been in education for 15 years, with five of those years as principal. Before becoming a principal, he joined the Teach for America Program where he taught second and fourth grades in an urban charter public school. He also worked for five years at a company doing curriculum development. When he left that company, he founded his own company doing online and in-home tutoring services with students. Later, he
worked as a blended learning teacher in a charter public school again. From there, he moved to another place, where he became a blended learning director for a network of charter public schools. Finally, he became principal of pre-K through fourth grade at a charter public school where he served for three years. Currently, he is the principal at an elementary charter public school that has about 220 students, of which 40% are free and reduced lunch.

When asked about his motivation to become a principal, he replied:

The reason I chose to be a principal was because I’m very motivated by the idea of this very prestigious international baccalaureate program. How do I prove that we can make that work and be accessible for the kids we serve at our school? Both of the kids who come from low-income households and haven't had that exposure but also children of color. That to me was what motivated me to take this job.

In the same vein, he added:

One of the biggest reasons I chose education as my career and my profession is because I always felt as though at the end of the day, the quickest way, not the easiest way but the most impactful way I could measure the ways in which I am changing people's lives and ultimately impacting the world is through education. So, to me that is what I do every day.

Principal Logan described what comes to mind when he hears the phrase social justice issues as follows:

I hear social justice and I hear about systemic issues that I think are rooted in racism and prejudice. So, I think of incarceration rates, I think of drug policy, and I think of discrimination in housing and hiring practices. When I think of social justice, I think a lot about education, because that's why I manage education, because I think education is
very inherently in social justice work. Social justice to me means the ways in which individuals because of their race, their ethnicity, their culture, their beliefs, their sexuality, their orientation are treated inherently differently either by individuals as part of the system, and that's what comes to mind when I think social justice.

**Social Justice Issues Faced**

Differing student needs is an issue that Principal Logan identified in his school as he shared:

Now you have a concentration of children of color, children from lower-income backgrounds, children who suffer from trauma, and other issues within our school. And that disparity is very apparent when you look at across a number of different lenses. So, academic achievement across schools, hiring practices, suspension rates, where parents choose to go. All of it is very apparent when you see this system at that level.

As part of this Principal Logan identified issues related to low socioeconomic status as he noted:

Parents of color are more likely to be working in manufacturing or retailing or food service positions that have different schedules, requires weekend work, doesn't have benefits, isn't consistent and they impact the students. And on that, when it comes to who I'm staying with tonight, who were sleeping with parents, working paycheck to paycheck versus my more fluid parents having nine to five jobs.

Principal Logan also said he faces trauma issue related to SES in his school as he noted:

Trauma can take a lot of different forms for our students. So, we recognize that if a child is coming from a lower-income household and they may or may not always have a solid meal every night to eat, they may or may not have multiple uniforms to wear clean clothes. Maybe they didn't get a good night's sleep because they're staying at someone
else's house. Mom had to get them up early because she has a different shift time today.

All of those impacts of coming from a lower-income household creed, kind of a baseline level of trauma.

He also indicated SES is related to systemic racism as he shared:

[Other parents] salary positions, they get benefits, there's a different level of stability and I think there are some racial components to how that falls out. And it's hard to sit here and say this kid versus that kid. But systemically, I can see that there are differences that would be part of it. So, I definitely think we are dealing with the impacts of a racist system on a daily basis.

In the same context of racism, Principal Logan added income inequality that he deplored:

We've talked a lot about systemic racism. I don't know that I've done the best job defining it, but I think a very concrete example for me is the fact that a town of 50,000 people has four distinct school districts. Like that to me is a very obvious example. I will say that one that has made the issue the most worrying, both as an educator and as a person and a parent is income inequality. The ways in which families who don't have, I feel as though they are falling further and further behind.

Another social justice issue he identified was related to a school curriculum not meeting the needs of students as he shared:

A systemic issue right now is, I have pre-K programming here in my building that is run by the grade school readiness program at the state level and it's awful. I don't think the curriculum they use actually helps low-income students get ready to be competitive with their kindergarten peers. That's a systemic issue that really upsets me because we are more and more in the state of Michigan growing out our early childhood education,
which I'm very passionate about. But, if the curriculum you use doesn't actually help those kids get ready to be successful in kindergarten and make up those steps that they fell behind, it doesn't actually do any good.

Principal Logan also found that in addition to SES, parents’ marital issues and substance consumption impact students’ education as he shared:

And that varies from kid to kid. On top of that besides the trauma of being from a low-income family, we have children whose parents are not on the same page. There's parental strife, their families going through divorce. There are families where we have students whose parents suffer from substance abuse issues.

He added:

I think the conversation in our district tends to focus around trauma that is inherent within lower-income households. And I think that's an important piece to keep in mind. Even with my more affluent kids, there is other sorts of trauma that they bring as well that we are trying to be mindful of.

Additionally, Principal Logan faces discipline issue that leads him to sanction students in his school as he shared:

As of today, for the whole school year, we have suspended six child children and each of those children was suspended for one day of school. Out of the six, we've suspended, only one we suspended twice. He actually got a day in. All of them are boys. And then if you think of five different unique children, two of those kids that were suspended were White kids. Three of the kids that were suspended were Black students. I don't know the actual numbers, but I would suspect that my suspension rates are significantly lower than the other schools in my district.
In terms of discipline, Principal Logan also described different types of acts that he sanctioned as he noted:

All six suspensions that were issued today, every single one of them was due to hitting. There was no other reason. So, kind of the line we draw as a school, as physical harm. If you caused their child's significant physical harm, you get a suspension. So, in those cases, I can go through the instance that we had one student who kicked a staff member and then called her a pretty terrible name. We had another student who punched another student and left a mark. Another student's two instances where students stabbed each other, another student with a pencil on purpose left a mark.

Furthermore, after describing different discipline acts perpetrated by his students, Principal Logan provided a justification for the sanctions he applied with them.

I don't think that I'm not naive enough to think that suspending that kid from our school actually changed their behavior. For me, the value of this suspension is more communicating to other students and staff that there was a line when it comes to safety that we will not cross. And there are just certain things you cannot do regardless of your exceptionality, regardless of your background, regardless of the trauma you bring. We know we're going to love. Our goal is lifting every child up, but at the end of the day, if you hurt someone else on purpose, you get a suspension.

Finally, Principal Logan identified the lack of transportation as a crucial issue for him to address as he shared:

Transportation is an issue because this is a magnet school. We don't offer busing. Part of the reason we have this rising tide effect about students who are here is part of the application process to get into this school. The application was literally five questions,
child's name, age, birth date, address, phone number. That was it. We didn't ask about behavior. We didn't ask about academics. Parents applied, we pressed a button on a lottery system and we drew names.

Challenges in Addressing Social Justice Issues

Principal Logan found that addressing socioeconomic situation is a challenge for him as he shared:

I would tell you that the biggest challenge for me lies more on the socioeconomic path. So, serving students who have come to our school either as four-year-old and five-year-old and don't have enough, they have not, don't have established routine. They don't have the same security with housing and with food and with clothing that more affluent families have. They probably have not had the same experiences, the same exposure as those kids when it comes to playing with others, academics, things like that.

Principal Logan also noted: “It's hard to apply systemic solutions when every child has individual needs.”

Additionally, Principal Logan found that he had challenges hiring teachers of color for his school as he noted:

Unfortunately, in the state of Michigan particularly, there's a really significant deficit in regard to finding teachers of color. So, my teaching staff, even though my building right now is about a third White, a third Black and a third Latino, my teaching staff, I have one teacher of color and I have nine White teachers. So, there is inherently an education piece that has to happen for us in regard to unpacking and opening our eyes in regard to the system.

Principal Logan said another challenge has been handling different situations equally tough as he noted:
I have to balance both. I have to worry about how we're lifting students up and supporting them in their situations while also doing academic growth. That balance can be very challenging because it makes it seem like great like I've helped kids, kids are happy. But kids might be happy and healthy. Are they learning? That, I still have to prove them doing that.

As far as funding challenge is concerned, Principal Logan deplores the influence of the education system on it as he shared:

I would argue that most of my challenges are systemic. Systemic in the sense of the systemic racism and inequity. My parents and kids face systemic in regard to funding. How my school is funded versus others or how schools are funded. Systemic in terms of how achievement is measured in regard to my kids, the students we serve here versus how students are served in other schools.

**Strategies to Address Social Justice Issues**

Principal Logan enumerated different ways of addressing social justice issues, such as restructuring, welcoming students, providing food to students, doing reflective recess, and planning future strategies.

In order to address trauma, Principal Logan introduced some new things in the school as he shared:

This is a brand-new school, so I have the benefit of being able to create a culture, a structure, and a system right out of the gate. I'm not necessarily handicapped by previous practices. So, I was able to hire people that are like-minded in regard to working with lower-income students, supporting students with trauma backgrounds or have behavior issues.

He added:
Every classroom in our building has a calming corner and when students are upset or frustrated and they just need to like have their own space, they are welcome to walk over to that space and calm down. They can squeeze some things, but it's their space to kind of just calm. And that is a trauma informed practice. The idea that this set of continuing to punish a student or harp on a student or push them to the point of explosion, how do we give them a place where they can calm down and then teach them some strategies for how to use that. That's another example of a trauma informed practice.

Concerning SES issues, Principal Logan partially addresses them by providing food to needy students in different ways as he described:

   My school, schools in our district are Title 1 to every child regardless of income level gets free breakfast and free lunch. If you're in our aftercare program, which is also free, they send you home, you have supper before you leave, and we also have some other ancillary programs where students get food bags through operation fit and they can take those home on Thursdays. So, food scarcity I think is less of an issue for most of our families.

   In the same vein he uses another strategy that consists of providing clothes to students as he shared:

   But we've had to have supports in place for families who can't afford uniforms, or they've run out already or they can't clean them regularly. So, we ordered extra uniforms that we probably had, I would estimate five families so far this year that we've had to give uniforms and stuff to kind of help them out, which is actually a pretty small number. I've usually had to do a lot like exclusionary practices. Well, we don't exclude kids because of
uniform. Let me give you an example. So, if a child comes to school, not in uniform, we don't send them home. We make it work for the day.

In order to address discipline issues, Principal Logan uses reflective recess and a specialized person to work with students.

Like we do remove students from class. If there's a significant behavioral issue and we'll have a restorative conversation, we'll try and figure out what's going on. We do have a process called reflective recess where if you have had continued behavior problems in the morning, you will go see our bear cat coach and you will do your lunch and recess with her. And so, you eat with her, she talks about what's going on. And then you have an alternative recess. So, it's not with your friends, but you will exercise, or you will do something.

Finally, Principal Logan plans on providing transportation to his students next year as he noted:

They also recognize I have to find a way to get my kids to school because I don't offer busing at this time. And part of the reason I don't is because it was a financial constraint for year one. We are talking about offering busing next year and I still think 90% of my kids will still probably get picked up and dropped off every day because many parents live all over the city.

**Training on Social Justice Issues**

In terms of training related to social justice issues, Principal Logan implied that he was enough prepared during his university studies as he shared:

I've had a string of trainings that have helped me to unpack and understand this. So, I think back to my time at the university where I was a sociology major and I was first learning about these issues and how they impacted my peers of color. I think back to my
time as a resident advisor at the university and some of the diversity training, I got there. Here I was a White kid from a small town who could never go to college and I didn't know a lot of these things. I think through the school of education at the university, my lens was expanded. And then, on top of that with the Teach for America program and the additional training we got, I think just the hands-on experience of working primarily in schools that are lower-income and serve children of color has blended consequential.

He added that he had benefited from professional development issues as he noted:

I think my master's degree, which was through the graduate school of education was great in regard to specifically addressing these issues, the national equity project, I attended a training with them in February with some other colleagues from my city. And I don't necessarily think that training was that phenomenal, but I do think part of my responsibility as a White educator is to keep sharpening my lens.

**Support in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Logan acknowledged the supports he receives from other people such as other principals, his students, students' parents, his supervisors, and his family as he shared:

I think the other principals in this district are very like-minded. I think we also have to collaborate with one another instead of that push pull as a school leader. I think I have a lot of peers that I can run those sorts of things by. I think even though sometimes it can become contentious, we have really great dialogue as network leaders in school leaders around these sorts of questions and what that looks like. I mean if I sense some dissonance or there is an issue, I have no problem asking that question or going to get feedback or pushing back on something.

Principal Logan also receives support from his students to address issues in his school but he mentioned that it is not substantial as he noted:
The young students that we serve, they usually don't have a lot of input. What it ends up being is, students usually have very candid conversations with us around what they're struggling with, why they're acting out today, why they're tired, why they're mad, come on in. That tends to be like their contribution is trying to develop a relationship where they trust us enough to be candid about what they're struggling with.

However, Principal Logan appreciates the support from students’ parents, mainly a tiny group he usually consulted as he shared:

I have a select group of parents here who I think are very passionate about social justice and they chose this school because they're invested in the transformation taking place at the school. So, I have a kind of a small cadre of parents that when I have a social justice question, I will go and get their feedback.

The support received from superiors is also important because it includes many things as Principal Logan noted:

I think at the macro level they help with like data tracking because we do a lot of data gathering at the district level about who we are suspending from school, who was performing what like academically even how this cohort is performing versus that cohort. I think I have not been able to take full advantage of lots of tools, resources, practices, and strategies that they have developed or they're trying to develop to use. And so, I feel like they are very helpful much when I need something or I'm trying to figure that out, they have my back.

Additionally, Principal Logan said all his family contributes with helpful ideas to help him address social justice issues as he shared:
My immediate family; my brother, my sister, my mother, my dad, it can vary. I think generationally there's a gap between my brother and my sister and I, we all have different perspectives on social justice issues, but we're all pretty progressive. I would say because my sister and my brother both worked in social services. I work in education, so I think we're pretty progressive in that regard.

Finally, Principal Logan said whenever he is stuck on an issue, he resorts to the people he enumerated below to find solutions as he shared:

If there are things here in the school building, my first resource tends to be my internal leadership team. So, that comprises my bear cat coach who oversees behavior, my instructional coach, my psych coordinator, and then my secretary. They're kind of my immediate, if something is off or there's an issue that's big that we need to talk about that's impacting a student or impacting our school, that tends to be my first line of people I will call. My second line tends to be my district transformation coach or my supervisor.

**Shaping of Purpose and Leadership Lessons Learned**

Principal Logan mentioned that leading people has enabled him to learn two things as he shared:

I have constantly been learning that because I'm a White male, I have blinders on what will always be there, and I have to continually work to push them away that I have to model that for my teachers and staff both in terms of choices and words I choose, but also their learning, their growth, their implicit bias and how they continue to break down their own barriers. I've learned about not confusing empathy with the White guilt and inadvertently lowering the bar of expectations for lower-income kids and children of color, that's a very easy trap to fall into.

Finally, he said:
I've learned some really important lessons about hiring right and trying to hire teachers of color or at least hiring teachers who have similar mindsets and similar value systems. I've learned a lot of important lessons about how to communicate with and support students who have issues at home, who come from trauma backgrounds. And this is, I'm speaking both of students from lower-income homes and students of color. I mean every day I make 10 mistakes at least, and I'm grateful to have a team and a staff that we can reflect and be vulnerable and talk about and figure out how to do better the next time.

Principal Biker

Motivation and Meaning of Social Justice

Principal Biker is a White male, who has been in education for 15 years, with two of those years as principal. Currently, he is the principal at a high school that has about 1700 students, of which 60% are free and reduced lunch, and 45% are White.

Principal Biker said his motivation for becoming a principal was to improve education, as he noted: “I want to effect change in education, that's the main factor.” He said that when he hears the word social justice issues, many things come to mind as he shared: “Civil rights, diversity, the rights of marginalized people, inequality, and the need for equity.”

Social Justice Issues Faced

Concerning social justice issues occurring in his high school, Principal Biker, first noted he has identified some differences in student achievement and in discipline based on race, as he shared:

My school has some significant gaps in student achievement. There are also some gaps in terms of discipline, but the most significant gap is the gap in achievement between African American male students and other cohorts of students. And, as a school, it is a
focus of ours to try to close that gap and the evidence of that gap is graduation rates, which are significantly lower for the African American students.

LGBTQ+ students’ issues were also voiced as a concern Principal Biker shared: “We also have issues of students that are in the LGBTQ+ community, particularly students who are transgender or identify as transgender and making sure that they have equal access opportunity here in the school.”

He also said that students’ huge differences in socioeconomic status have been a crucial issue as he noted: “We do have an issue, of course, which is just so present in the school. Obviously, it's the socioeconomic divide here in our high school that never reaches the wealthiest neighborhoods and also some of the poorest ones.”

When asked about the contributing factors to social justice issues, Principal Biker replied that they are educational and historical as he shared:

How our school education system has been set up. I mean, something as simple as the fact that we don't have gender neutral bathrooms becomes an issue for transgender students. The fact that historically, we've had a homecoming king and queen, but how does that relate to students who identify as LGBTQ+? Those stereotypes don't always work for those students. The fact that when you walk into an advanced placement classroom (AP), the vast majority of students are White, and when you walk into a repeat classroom, the vast majority of students are of color. So, those are problematic. It's how education is structured; K-12 needs to be revamped.

According to Principal Biker, social justice issues signify lots of consequences for our future as he shared: “The meaning is that there's inequality, people do not have a level playing
field and unfortunately, the future impact of that is going to affect people for the rest of their lives.”

**Challenges in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Concerning the challenges he faces, Principal Biker deplored the situation of some male African Americans who are lagging behind their peers in the academic field as he shared:

I think balancing, knowing that in this school I can look at an African American male student, and an African American female student, and know that she probably has on average, her cohort of students, who will have a 30% greater chance of graduating than the African American male. That's the most challenging because it's so unfair and it's hard to live with, and it's something that we need to challenge. We have to actually change the whole structure of education to really wrap our arms around African American males.

Principal Biker also identified a transportation challenge that is caused by the students’ socioeconomic situations as he shared:

Being able to manage the haves and have nots can be a delicate game. But, knowing that we have to provide equity, so, we have to be able to lift those students who may not come from the high socioeconomic status. So, things like all students now have free access to the city bus. So, to provide mobility to all students regardless of class, is a really important thing that we're working on this year. I think we're addressing it, but there is still a massive gap that we need to close between socioeconomic groups.

Addressing poverty has also been a challenge that Principal Biker identified as he shared:

With poverty I believe comes increased stress mentally. So, if we had access to more mental health specialists in the school, that would be a benefit. Unfortunately, I have four guidance counselors who serve 1700 students. So, their case loads are well over fifty. So,
for them to give time and dedication to each child they need is very difficult; so those additional resources would be really beneficial.

In his reply concerning the origins of such challenges, Principal Biker indicated two things: poverty and resistance to change, as he shared:

Well, poverty just exists. I mean, it's in the community and then the challenges of resistance to change. I think that's just human nature to be expected. But I think now that it's been going on for so long and it really isn't change, it's kind of what we're doing now.

**Strategies to Address Social Justice Issues**

In order to address an LGBTQ+ issue in his school, Principal Biker did not work alone, he utilized an existing organization, and he involved teachers as he shared:

We have a very prominent Gender and Sexuality Alliance Club or GSA club here at the school and they promote a lot of activities for inclusiveness with the staff. About a year ago we went through a full day professional development on LGBTQ+ issues and how to be more welcoming in their classroom. Last school year I sent a cohort of teachers out for a train-the-trainer model. And this year we plan to infuse more of those inclusive strategies that teachers can use to include LGBTQ+ students into their classrooms.

As far as discipline is concerned, Principal Biker and his personnel are seeking means to improve the situation in the school as he noted:

My administrative staff and I are constantly reviewing discipline data and looking at the fact that we haven't a proportionate amount of particularly African American males who face suspension detention. And we are conscious with all of our actions. How can we reduce that? This year we are hiring a fulltime restorative justice conflict mediator who we hope can help be more proactive addressing needs, particularly among African American males to help reduce suspension and discipline rates.
When asked how well his strategies are working, Principal Biker said he was optimist while admitting that there is still much work to do as he shared:

We're still collecting data on how these are working, and new ones are being rolled out. So, I think culturally responsive education, which has been going on in public schools for a couple of years now, I think that has really initiated conversation and teachers are being much more reflective on their practice. And, we have seen an uptick in graduation rates of some marginalized communities, but I think there's still work to do.

**Training on Social Justice Issues**

Principal Biker has received significant training in his career as he noted:

I've had a lot of professional development in my time here as an educator on culturally relevant and culturally responsive education. I've gone through training to actually be a trainer of it. So, a train-a-trainer model.

In the same vein, he added:

A big focus of our professional development for staff last year was looking at data from state standardized tests and looking at mechanisms to close; having teachers develop strategies within their departments of how to close gaps. We've also been offering professional development on culturally responsive education, culturally relevant education with the idea of giving teachers the skill sets to better connect with students, from other ethnic groups, since the majority of our teachers are White, middle class educated.

**Support in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Biker started discussing the supports he receives by noting the support provided by his staff as he shared:
The staff are very open-minded, so they give me support. I think even though change is difficult, and this is a newer topic for teachers, they give me an open mind, which I appreciate. Teachers implement trainings that we give them in their classrooms.

He also indicated that other principals are very helpful to him as he shared:

All principals in the school district, we are tight knit in a union, so we meet monthly. And, just this morning I've texted my colleagues at the alternative and the other high school in town. So, we talk quite frequently and give each other support.

Concerning students, Principal Biker appreciated how they supported him in his leadership as he noted:

I have a student advisory council that I meet with monthly to get feedback, so I can hear what they're thinking. And then I can also convey the rationale as to why I do what I do. And I think that's a benefit.

Furthermore, Principal Biker reported that he has benefited from the support from students’ parents through the connection he establishes with them as he noted:

Very supportive, very open-minded, very liberal families. At this school, I have a parent advisory council that meets monthly. I also have an informal coffee with parents monthly in which I invite them to come in and give me feedback on what we're doing here in the school.

Additionally, Principal Biker mentioned different supports received from his supervisors as he shared:

Those above me provide a lot of support. They provide time with my staff, they provide some funding, and they provide training as well for me. So, we get a lot of that support from our central office.
Concerning the support received from his family, Principal Biker acknowledged without commenting that it was strong as he said: “My family's my bedrock, so I get plenty of support from them.”

Finally, Principal Biker said in case of specific issues he usually seeks support from his subordinates to better address them as he noted: “I refer to my administrative team. I have four assistant principals and myself who essentially run the school, and we huddle quite frequently on issues of social justice.”

**Shaping of Purpose and Leadership Lessons Learned**

As a school leader, Principal Biker has experienced social justice issues and challenges in his position and they have shaped his sense of purpose and approach to leadership:

My purpose is to do right to kids and to make sure that kids are able to graduate in four years. And, me being an advocate for social justice, I think makes that job more possible. If I didn't believe in social justice, I would be okay letting a lot of kids not have that opportunity and I'm not.

Finally, he said he had learned some things from leading people as he shared:

The lesson is, you have to make it personal. So, for every person, there are things that they value and if you can tap into what they value, I mean, it may be their own children. So, I have a staff that's probably 70% White middle class, but if I can relate the struggles that a marginalized group may have to their life and see how it could impact them, that's where that change happens to get people to recognize the importance of social justice.
Principal Bicoastal

Motivation and Meaning of Social Justice

Principal Bicoastal is a White male, who has been in education for 12 years, with four of those years as principal. He began his career as a high school and middle school social studies teacher. He taught at the high school level for four years and at the middle school level for two years. After that, he went back to school full time to earn a master’s degree in educational leadership and then was a principal for three years before moving across the state to serve in his first year as a principal at a high school that has about 1,000 students, of which 87% are free/reduced lunch, and 49% are White, and 48% students of color. His reflections are based on his experience at both his previous and current schools. Principal Bicoastal described his motivation for becoming principal as follows:

I can trace this back all the way to being a senior in high school. I knew that I wanted to help others in some way, and I figured the most grassroots way to bring about change would be by focusing on things via education. I felt like if you really want to make impact on a school as a whole, you need to become a principal, and I felt I could do so and benefit students, the staff, and the community because my overall passion is the success of children.

When he was a high school student himself, Principal Bicoastal compared his education to that of other students in the city he lived as he noted:

I found out that education was not similar to what I had experienced in my upbringing and that many of the communities that were serving families and students of poverty were not getting the same education. Those things were really frustrating for me because
I saw education as being the wave with which to improve yourself, improve your engagement within society as well as your economic benefits for your life.

**Social Justice Issues Faced**

Principal Bicoastal said when he hears the phrase “social justice issues,” equity and access come to his mind as he noted:

I think about social justice as equity and access. We know that what’s equal isn’t necessarily what's best, but sometimes for those that are not getting the most of what they need in order to put them on a competitive playing field with other people around them or other people across their communities or across their state or across their country or even globally, it's all about trying to give them what they need to optimize their future potential. When I think about social justice, I also think about access because many people do not have access to the means with which to improve themselves and to improve their communities.

After describing what came to his mind concerning social justice issues, Principal Bicoastal said he has faced many of these issues in his school mainly due to the lack of access to resources, such as transportation, high quality foods, high quality teachers, and funding as well as LGBTQ+ student issues, students’ socioeconomic situations, and discipline issues.

As far as transportation is concerned, Principal Bicoastal said some of his students lack access to it as he shared: “Our school district doesn't provide transportation and so students had to figure their own way out and how to get to school.”

Another social justice issue Principal Bicoastal deplored has been the lack of access to high quality foods as he described:

Our students had issues with access to high quality foods and nutrition, many of our families lived within what they label as being a food desert where the only thing around
them if anything is the food you get from a gas station or a convenience store rather than fresh fruits and vegetables and grains and high-quality protein that you'd get at a grocery store.

Principal Bicoastal also deplored the lack of high-quality teachers in his school as he shared:

“We know that the greatest predictor in student achievement is having a high quality, high effective adult in front of kids.” And he added: “Finding high quality individuals to staff our building. We did not have, and because we were a school district that was in debt, we were not able to be competitive with other neighboring school districts.”

Additionally, Principal Bicoastal identified low funding issue in his school and described it as follows:

When you have all of those things at one time in one school and we’re only being paid $7,900 or $7,800 per student, we’re incredibly underfunded and under supported with which to meet the needs of our students.

Principal Bicoastal has also faced the issues regarding LGBTQ+ students in his school as he shared:

Where is the acceptance within students who identified as LBGT and Q+? We had teachers who didn't, it was a lack of understanding about that community and I inherited some staff that were fairly outwardly vocal about students who identified as LGBTQ+. So, that was a major issue where they were not given the same opportunities and the same attention and the same support from some of those adults in the building.

Furthermore, students’ socioeconomic situations prevail in the school and Principal Principal Bicoastal does not overlook them as he shared:
We have to change the mindset that if kids are not with us in school, then how are we able to support all of their needs if we know that our students are coming from backgrounds and communities that are not necessarily supportive where, by no fault of their own, their parents or their grandparents or their family members are.

Finally, Principal Bicoastal indicated that discipline is another issue he has dealt with in his school as he shared:

We had issues with school and student discipline and philosophies about how best to keep students in school and prevent them from going from that school to prison or from that school to greater issues or greater concerns pipeline where if they're not in school, they're not learning.

After enumerating and describing different social justice issues going on in his school, Principal Bicoastal described the factors that contributed to their existence by sharing:

Broadly, I think that there's a lot of extremist viewpoints in our society that are led by someone that doesn't necessarily align or try to understand people that don't fit into a traditional package as our world and as our country become more and more diverse.

After sharing the above view, Principal Bicoastal added another factor that has contributed to social justice issues: “It was a unique situation but not so much, I think that it's ongoing because I don't think people necessarily want equality, they just say it.”

Principal Bicoastal made meaning of social justice through an educational perspective as he shared:

It's bringing the right attention in the right ways to make that change. I do think that educationally we are at this significant crossroad where the longer we keep going down this path, the more inequitable schools are going to become.
Challenges in Addressing Social Justice Issues

Principal Bicoastal reported that he has faced a number of challenges in handling social justice issues, such as lack of understanding and conversations, lack of willingness and quickness of actions, undermining actions, socioeconomic status, politics, upsetting the status quo, and paying high salaries.

I think the biggest challenge is just understanding and having those critical conversations. I think a particular challenge is being relentlessly focused and driven on what those issues are and knowing that without someone being an advocate for kids and for our community is crucial.

Principal Bicoastal also said the lack of people’s willingness to really support the school also has been a challenge for him as he noted:

Through our elected officials, through community leaders, the same people that are able to generously donate things to help kids, the same ease of access and understanding is not there for people that through a policy or through a procedural standpoint, are not able to do things as quickly or they're unwilling to do things as quickly.

Additionally, Principal Bicoastal deplored parents’ actions that did not promote the school district progress as he noted:

I think being on the same page with the school is really important for our families. Oftentimes, we found we were a little bit logged jammed in some of our efforts that parents were undermining the direction that the school district needed to go.

Parents’ living in poverty and not being able to become engaged, is another issue that impacts the school as Principal Bicoastal described:

It's difficult in areas of poverty to get a large investment from parents’ group. So, for us to educate families about what we're doing for their kids is challenging because many of
those families are not able to get to school. They're not disengaged because they're working, they can't take time off of work, but they don't have an abundance of time with which to invest themselves because they’re elsewhere out of need.

Principal Bicoastal did not minimize politics that also constituted a challenge in addressing social justice issues as he shared:

I think politically, it's difficult to address issues of a socially just nature because that does require us to upset the current status quo. What's challenging is the power structure.

I think it's in place with our elected officials, as kids and children and communities are only a talking point during elections.

Furthermore, Principal Bicoastal identified breaking the status quo as a real challenge as he explained:

When it comes down to actually needing to do the things that need to be done to help support our communities, our families, and our students, that means upsetting the current status quo. And that means that some people that have gained, may not have as much gain as what they want and in order to help those that need the most support, I think that is a particular challenge for us.

Finally, Principal Bicoastal found that paying high salaries to the school personnel has been challenging as he shared:

You can't blame people for having to look out for their economic best interests. However, it's very difficult to find people to work for reduced salaries and working with some of the neediest of kids with whom education serves other issues that we looked at of a social justice nature.
Talking about the origins of challenges, Principal Bicoastal did not hesitate to share this point of view:

Challenges just come from histories of not acknowledging that there's a challenge. I think that when decisions and policies are made, they're oftentimes made to benefit those that are already benefiting, not those that could use the support.

**Strategies to Address Social Justice Issues**

In order to address social justice issues Principal Bicoastal has faced in his school, he utilizes various strategies, such as creating online classes, serving breakfast and lunch, looking for national grants, improving hiring practices, creating an LGBTQ+ and allies club, looking for donations, and using PBIS.

In order to address his students’ transportation issue, Principal Bicoastal utilizes an online course strategy as he described:

We would have then looked at students who had transportation issues and say, all right, if you have an issue getting to first hour, then let's put you into an online class that would be facilitated by a teacher. So, that way you have access to that class, you can then hopefully pass your class without any sort of issues.

As far as access to high quality food issue in school is concerned, Principal Bicoastal utilizes this strategy:

When we looked at things like equal access to food in opening up free breakfast and lunch for all of our students, we used to serve that food out of the cafeteria and students come in through the door.

Concerning the lack of access to high quality teachers, Principal Bicoastal emphasizes teachers’ competencies in his hiring practices as he noted:
It was really important for us to align our hiring practices with some of those important competencies for what we were looking for and adults to support our kids. We tried to be as positive as we possibly could be with what our achievements were within the school and we did some really amazing and incredible things.

Principal Bicoastal’s strategy addressing the funding issue consists of looking for donations as he shared:

We looked at national grants that were supporting some of our mission, vision and values as a school district and as a school. So, we connected with the National Institute for Justice as we looked at diversionary practices for student support.

As far as bullying and harassment of LGBTQ+ students within the school were concerned, Principal Bicoastal addressed them this way:

We created an LGBTQ+ and allies club that was facilitated by a person who specialized in issues within that community and support within that community who works at some local agencies that help support our students that way. So, we brought good people in with whom to give them that support.

Regarding discipline issues, Principal Bicoastal includes other stakeholders to make improvement as he noted: We got connected with MIBLSI, the Michigan Integrated Behavior and Learning and Support Initiative through the state of Michigan. And, we implemented Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS), because we knew that our kids needed to be positively reinforced for things they were doing well versus always being punished for things that may be not going so hot for them.

Referring to the outcomes of the above discipline reduction strategy, Principal Bicoastal acknowledged that they have worked well as he noted:
After we began getting into PBIS from September to November time period or September to December, rather from without PBIS to our first year doing it, our behavior referrals dropped by almost 40%. So that was a significant piece for us.

**Training on Social Justice Issues**

When asked if he received any social justice leadership training, principal Bicoastal replied:

Through my formal training with my educational leadership degree, there's transformative leader, there's servant leader or there's social justice leader, and it was a lens with which some people can present their job and conduct their job.

And he added: “But as far as having conversations about what to do in a socially just world and how to create that, that wasn't anything that's been explicitly taught ever, but it was more just a frame or a lens of thinking.”

**Support in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Principal Bicoastal said he has received supports from various stakeholders of his school to address social justice issues, such as teachers, other principals, parents, his family, and other sources. Below is a description of how teachers supported him:

Teachers largely tried to understand what some of these topics were. We had some staff that would get involved in some committee work to look at collected data with fidelity, to make sure that the things that we were putting in place support our kids and were actually working.

The support from other principals has been also important and Principal Bicoastal acknowledged it as he shared:

We do not have much of a network of support with principals outside of our district because not many districts have some of the similar challenges that we do. We have to
rely very tightly on our group of administrators within the district that I am working in to be supportive of each other and to have honest conversations about what is and what is not working.

Principal Bicoastal also appreciates the support parents have given him as he noted:

With our parent communities, I would do monthly parent round table sessions where, they could come in and ask questions or seek understanding about hot button issues that were important to them. Our parents are a critical part of our students’ success because as issues or concerns arise or changes arise, we want them to be understanding of things that are going on in the school.

Additionally, the support that Principal Bicoastal received from his supervisors has been significant to acknowledge as he noted:

I was fortunate to work with a superintendent who was a fierce advocate for underserved populations. And so, what I needed as a leader was the support from high quality social workers and school counselors and administrative team and teachers and hall supervisors. Furthermore, principal Bicoastal praised his wife’s support by sharing:

If she doesn't understand what I'm doing or why I'm doing or how I'm doing it, then, it creates an environment of, not mistrust but misunderstanding. So, her support is super important for what we need to do. And she's smart, so she looks at social issues and raises them and we have thoughtful conversations about how best we get these addressed.

Finally, Principal Bicoastal said he usually turned to other people he enumerated below to address social justice issues:
I first looked to some of my colleagues as thought partners; I looked to the superintendent as how we need to operate within the current channels and procedures to address an issue, but then it's also being aware of looking outside the box as well.

**Shaping of Purpose and Leadership Lessons Learned**

Concerning how his experiences with social justice issues and challenges shaped his sense of purpose and approach to leadership, Principal Bicoastal stated:

I identify as a social justice leader because someone has to be aware of the issues that are out there. And then try to do the best that they can to have them confronted for their kids, families, and their teaching staff.

As regard to the lessons learned from leading people, Principal Bicoastal said the most important thing is possessing various skills as he noted:

When you lead for change, I think that you have to be able to cultivate a culture of understanding. I think you have to be able to find people, acknowledge people. You have to be able to work with and for and serve people to be able to be their best selves. They can be their best selves to others. But when you take on these challenges and opportunities of social justice, you have to create an environment of understanding.

Finally, he said relying on oneself matters a lot in the principal’s role to succeed and shared: “I think that you need to be at your best self as a leader so that way you can serve those with which you are leading.”

**Chapter 4 Closure**

All participants narrated their experiences with social justices, the strategies they utilize to address them, and the challenges the face addressing them. Overall, they feel they learned many things through the journey of leading schools and are now left to apply them in their
leadership practice to improve education. Chapter 5 focuses on the themes and categories that emerged from the inductive analysis.
CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter presents the themes and categories that emerged from interviews with 12 school principals in a Midwestern state, as to how they experienced social justice issues and challenges in their schools. I captured data through interviews and documents and analyzed it through an interpretative framework. Demographic data from participants provided some interesting insights about their education and principalship experiences. As profiled in Chapter 4, all participants had at least 10 years education experience; all have at least a Master’s degree and three also have a Ph.D.

As I analyzed data, I identified seven themes and 20 categories: (1) principals experience social justice issues concerns; (2); principals face barriers in addressing social justice issues (3) principals create strategies to address social justice issues; (4) principals experienced specific social justice training; (5) Principals received internal support; (6) principals received external support (7) principals use their experiences to shape their purpose and approach to leadership. These seven themes were developed based on the central research question and sub-questions of my study.

In order to be considered a category, at least six of the 12 principals provided data that spoke of that issue. My categories revealed information provided by three to five principals. In this chapter I offered each category, as supported by direct quotes taken from the participants’ narratives and documents. Table 2 summarizes the themes and categories that emerged from this study and shows the participants, which offered information regarding these issues
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes and Categories</th>
<th>Moses</th>
<th>Peter</th>
<th>Tina</th>
<th>Alice</th>
<th>Jay</th>
<th>Allen</th>
<th>John</th>
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<th>Steve</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme One:</td>
<td>Most principals experience social justice issues concerns</td>
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<td>Category 1.</td>
<td>Most expressed concerns with bullying and other violence</td>
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<td>Category 2.</td>
<td>Most experienced concerns with racism</td>
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<td>Category 3.</td>
<td>Most experienced concerns with SES-related issues</td>
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<td>Category 4.</td>
<td>Half experienced concerns with gender identity issues</td>
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<td>Theme Two:</td>
<td>Principals face barriers in addressing social justice issues</td>
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<td>Category 5.</td>
<td>All principals experienced barriers in addressing social justice issues</td>
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<td>Theme Three:</td>
<td>Principals create strategies to address social justice issues</td>
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<td>Category 6.</td>
<td>Many provided food to students to address social justice issues</td>
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<td>Category 7. (emerging)</td>
<td>Some used strategies regarding gender identity</td>
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<td>Category 8. (emerging)</td>
<td>Some worked with students to address social justice issues</td>
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<td>Category 9. (emerging)</td>
<td>Some noted their strong stance concerning bullying and fighting</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Category 10.</td>
<td>Some worked with other adults to address social justice issues</td>
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<td>Theme Four:</td>
<td>Principals experienced specific social justice training</td>
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<td>Category 11.</td>
<td>Most did not receive specific training on social justice issues in their university programs</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Category 12.</td>
<td>All received some professional development or have other resources</td>
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<td>Theme Five:</td>
<td>Principals received internal support</td>
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<td>Category 13.</td>
<td>All reported received support from other principals</td>
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<td>Category 14.</td>
<td>Most received support from their supervisors</td>
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<td>Category 15.</td>
<td>Many received support from their staff</td>
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<td>Category 16.</td>
<td>Half received support from their Students</td>
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<td>Principals received external support</td>
<td>Most received support from their students’ parents</td>
<td>Most received support from their families</td>
<td>Many received support from other sources</td>
<td>Principals use their experiences to shape their purpose and approach to leadership</td>
<td>All used their experiences to shape their purpose and approach to leadership</td>
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Theme One: Principals Experienced Social Justice Issues Concerns

Data collected from interviews indicated that all 12 participants experienced some social justice issues regardless of the type of school they are leading. However, it was clear the degree of social justice issues and the frequency of their occurrence vary from one school to another. The analysis of the participants’ interviews revealed four themes under the Social Justice Issues Experienced category: (1) most participants shared they experienced racism issues, (2) most participants reported discipline issues (bullying/violence and others in their schools, (3) many shared they experienced SES related issues, and (4) many reported experiencing gender identity issue.

Category 1. Most Expressed Concerns with Bullying and Other Violence

Nine participants shared their experiences with discipline-related social justice issues, including bullying, as well as physical violence in their schools.

Five of these principals spoke of bullying that now includes both in-person verbal and physical abuse. The verbal form of bullying is the one that Principal Moses described, and he also pointed out how social media is contributing to it: “Sometimes, it’s verbal. Sometimes it’s physical. Sometimes, it can be non-verbal with looks. Sometimes, it is over the social media stuff. Sometimes, it could be like emails kids send to each other.” Similarly, Principal Steve pinpointed social media in his description as he shared: “A lot of social media stuff. Mostly, there is rarely face-to-face bullying anymore. It is largely done on apps that are outside of the school setting and then that stuff trickles back into the school.”

Principal John also identified verbal bullying in his school: “We’re dealing with bullying. It is happening verbally where a lot of students are making fun of each other. They’re really sitting there commenting on clothes or the appearance.” Additionally, Principal Allen talked a lot
about bullying and shared: “Bullying comes in different ways and there is a difference between bullying and bothering. Bullying is ongoing. It is something we told students to stop.” According to Principal Alice, bullying is also rampant in her school, and as opposed to other principals, she indicated that it is a new phenomenon as she noted: “I don't know if by definition of bullying; it's very new, but we do have student discipline issues, conflict.”

Other principals noted other discipline-related issues in their schools. Principal Bicoastal voiced: “We had issues with school and student discipline and philosophies about how best to keep students in school and prevent them from going from that school to prison or from that school to greater issues.” Furthermore, Principal Peter said he identified violence as an issue in his school: “When we actually started looking at our data, what we noticed is, our White kids tended to wrestle, our Black kids tended to hit.” While describing violence going on in her school, Principal Holly mentioned microaggression perpetrated by the students and she shared one example: “We had a situation last year where a student punched another student off campus, not on campus but we had to deal with it within the school because we're such a small community.” Similarly, Principal Logan indicated that he dealt with many cases of students’ violence among themselves and towards the school personnel as he noted: “In those cases, I can go through the instance that we had one student who kicked a staff member and then called her a pretty terrible name. We had another student who punched another student and left a mark.”

Finally, Principal Jay did not specifically describe violence-related cases he dealt with in his school, but he reported male students’ behavioral issues as he noted: “If we're talking about the young men at my school, they exhibit a number of significant behavioral problems which affect their academics. Many of my teachers wanted me to suspend them when they misbehaved.
I refused to do so.” Of note is that within my data collection. Principal Jay was the only one who clearly singled out male students concerning discipline issues in his school.

**Category 2. Most Experienced Concerns with Racism**

Nine participants revealed that racism is one of the dominant social justice issues they frequently face in their schools. Principal Moses said: “When I hear the word social justice, I, being a Black man, I hone in on issues of race and what we deal with as it varies in our society.” Principal Tina affirmed racism exists in her school, and she also spoke about how she and her personnel should address it: “We have racism in this world. And I’ll say this again, to the credit of the district I’ve worked for, we have started looking at culturally responsive education.” Principal Peter’s narrative revealed the issue of race as follows: “I may be reflecting on what happened on Friday night this weekend. We had a number of students from our two high schools that were using social media to communicate some pretty-hurtful statements, some of which had to do with race.” In his response, Principal Jay described how demographic composition reinforces racism in his school as he noted: “In my school the teaching staff is largely White, and the student clientele is largely not White so it is also working within an environment that is very conservative.” In the same vein, Principal Allen elaborated on racism and his main points were that racism is manifested in many ways, it is intentional, and it is also related to power as he noted, and he ended by putting a question: “Racism is about power. So, once you start attacking the anti-bias, anti-racist culture of those who are in power through race, can you truly address racism?” Principal Holly also voiced racism prevailing in her school, with one salient point to mention is this: “We’ve had situations where the White students would call the people of color by their same names. So, like the idea that people of color within our community all are the same, which isn’t true.” Furthermore, Principal Logan vividly explained in his school, racism that prevails in school is linked to the political system as he noted: “We’ve talked a lot about
systemic racism. I do not know that I’ve done the best job defining it, but I think a very concrete example for me is that a town of 50,000 people has four distinct districts.”

Among the nine principals who voiced that they experienced racism in their schools, Principal Steve and Principal John mentioned it, but did not go into much detail. Principal Steve acknowledged the existence of racism among others in his school without describing it as he noted: “I think the primary one that comes to my mind is, with regard to social justice, the work that we try and do is about race and ethnicity.” Similarly, John reported that racism is an issue in his school, but he did not elaborate on it, she simply said: “We have some issues of race in my school.”

**Category 3. Most Experienced Concerns with SES-Related Issues**

Nine participants reported dealing with various issues related to students’ socioeconomic status issues. Of these, most focused on concerns related to low-income family issues. The overall SES divide is mentioned by Principal Biker as he shared: “We do have an issue, of course, which is just so present in the school. Obviously, it’s the socioeconomic divide here in our high school that never reaches the wealthiest neighborhoods and also some of the poorest ones.”

Principal Moses said he identified socioeconomic status as an issue facing his school and offered specific examples: “Something else that comes to my mind would be the issue of homelessness. We deal with homelessness in this district and with it in this building and we have at the city level and the district level.” Similarly, several principals described alarming food and clothing issues in their schools. Principal Bicoastal shared:

Our students had issues with access to high quality foods and nutrition, many of our families lived within what they label as being a food desert where the only thing around them if anything is the food you get from a gas station or a convenience store rather than
fresh fruits and vegetables and grains and high-quality protein that you'd get at a grocery store.

Principal John described a similar food issue evidenced with statistical data in his narrative: “We're looking at about 92% of students who come from poverty. And so, with that brings a whole gambit of concerns. A lot of students are not coming with proper clothing or proper food.” Principal Allen similarly noted that SES substantially affects students’ education as he noted: “You have a child who hasn’t eaten, you can't educate them the same way as a child that you have to provide food for them. It's, not really available at home.”

Principal Alice also points out the concern of low SES students having less essential stuff, as well as their families having less voice, as she noted:

In my school, probably we have more issues with the demographic of economically disadvantaged students who may come with less, I guess less voice sometimes because they may not have the families that have the time to center around following up on [things] I guess unfortunately.

In his narrative about SES, Principal Logan mentioned the issue of trauma that is emerging in lower-income families and that this is affecting students in his school:

Maybe they didn't get a good night's sleep because they're staying at someone else's house. Mom had to get them up early because she has a different shift time today. All of those impacts of coming from a lower-income household creed, kind of a baseline level of trauma.”

Principal Jay describes another type of SES issue he faces in his school as he complains about the poor-quality infrastructure as he noted: “The continuing struggle with access, I mean
for example, my school has leaking roofs and they wouldn’t get fixed. So, I am just again going back to equal access and equity of resources.”

At the other end of the income spectrum, Principal Peter talks about student concerns for those who are from more affluent families:

We have a lot of families who have two parent incomes. As a result, we have kids who have a good deal of money and a good deal of unsupervised time. Those two things: more money and unsupervised time are from my perspective a recipe for drinking alcohol.

Category 4. Half Experienced Concerns with Gender Identity Issues

In total, six of the 12 principals specifically voiced they had experienced gender identity issues in their schools. Principal Bicoastal expressed a concern about how some of his staff views LGBTQ+ students in his school as he noted: “I inherited some staff that were fairly outwardly vocal about students who identified as LGBTQ+.” As for Principal Biker, he complained about the lack of adequate facilities to satisfy transgender students’ needs in his school as he noted: “How our school education system has been set up. I mean, something as simple as the fact that we don’t have gender neutral bathrooms becomes an issue for transgender students.” Principal John also voiced “We've some issues of gender identity. We've some concerns with bullying.”

Interestingly several principals identified gender identity issues in their schools, but noted that overall, such issues were not really a big concern. Principal Allen enumerated different gender identities existing in his school and said the school just should accept LGBTQ+ students as he shared: “Well, I have students who are lesbian. I have students who are gay. I have students who are bisexual, transgender. So, we deal with it.” Additionally, Principal Peter discussed emerging gender identity issues, such as hormone therapy and gender transition, as he shared:
Gender and gender differences or issues of homosexuality, that is better than it was 10 years ago. For example, we have three students right now who are working through hormone therapy and also surgeries to transition from one gender to another gender. In the same vein, Principal Moses noted that transition from one gender to another is a phenomenon going on his school, but he did not describe how it is processed, as opposed to Principal Peter, as he shared: “We have young people trying to figure out who they are. So, one student that is a female may identify as a male. You may say that you may have a male and they're saying, I identify as a female;” but he did not voice that was much of a concern in his school.

**Theme Two: Principals Face Barriers in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

Under this theme, I identified one category related to the barriers that principals face while attempting to address social justice issues in their schools.

**Category 5. All Principals Experienced Barriers in Addressing Social Justice Issues**

All 12 participants voiced one or more barriers as they worked to address social justice issues, including resistance to change, political influence, lack of knowledge regarding racism, and balancing things. Resistance to change by various stakeholders was a barrier identified by three principals. Principal Jay voiced that his efforts alone cannot suffice to improve schools, so he is trying to engage other stakeholders: “I think, just changing people's mindset about school is my biggest challenge because when people are used to a certain way and you're trying to change how they think about things, you either get pushback or resentment or acceptance.” Principal Alice also voiced that her actions to bring change has met resistance and mistrust as she shared: “I think it's hard for families that feel like the school has not been a good place for them. I think it's hard to change that mindset, if they feel like school cheated them or they feel like school did them wrong.” Similarly, Principal Biker indicated he faces resistance to change challenges, but
was pragmatic about it: “The challenges of resistance to changes, I think that's just human nature to be expected. But I think now that it's been going on for so long and it really isn't change, it's kind of what we're doing now.” Similarly, Principal Peter indicated that dealing with those points of views opposed to his actions is challenging for him:

The challenge we face is, really, just good people disagree. That is to say, when we have to deal with any particular situation, we have to be prepared to know that there are members of our students, premier members of our community, and members of our parents who are going to have different values.

Similarly, Principal John noted parents’ misunderstanding of various issues: “The biggest challenge is actually communicating with parents over this and a lot of the parents do not want to hear and are not open to hearing those types of things. They didn't need to hear about what the kids are doing or whatever.”

In comparison to other participants, Principal Bicoastal thinks that when politics interferes in education, things may not go well. That caused him to complain about the political challenge he faces in his school, and he pointed out people in power who want to keep things status quo: “I think politically, it's difficult to address issues of a socially just nature because that does require us to upset the current status quo. What's challenging is the power structure. I think it's in place with our elected officials.”

Another barrier that principals face in addressing social justice issues is having to really educate individuals on issues related to gender identity; this was specifically mentioned by two principals: Principal Moses voiced: “I would say more challenging is helping students and staff do with the issues pertaining to sexuality and people's life style choice, helping them be sensitive, increase their awareness, how do we help students?”
Principal Steve described the challenge he faces in his school as follows:

I think the transgender one was difficult because the learning curve was so big. It took a lot of reaching out and consulting people who are well versed in the issue to educate us on what that looks like in a school setting.

Several principals noted that inherent racism has been a barrier when attempting to address social justice issues. Principal Tina voiced that she feels this personally as she shared: “I think the challenge that I face is the fact that I'm a woman of color or a minority. What the challenge is there's a person, there could be a perception. Well, I'm saying this because this is just.” Similarly, Principal Holly shared:

We have a few teachers who are people of color and they want to effect change within our organization. Their basic complaint is, in order for people of color to be successful here, they have to be indoctrinated within White culture. They're saying that people who don't have White culture and aren't able to code-switch those children wouldn't feel safe here.

In the vein, Principal Logan indicated barriers to addressing social justice issues include racism and inequity, as connected to his school funding as he shared: “I would argue that most of my challenges are systemic. Systemic in the sense of the systemic racism and inequity. My parents and kids face systemic in regard to funding. How my school is funded versus others or how schools are funded.”

Finally, Principal Allen shared another barrier to overcoming social justice issues, which is balancing things to assure the normal functioning of his school as he noted: “The big issue with addressing social justice issues is to identify balance because trying to build a safe school
with the intention and the purpose of educating kids in the academic end of the day. That's my duty.

**Theme Three: Principals Create Strategies to Address Social Justice Issues**

Under this theme, the analysis of the narratives revealed one major category and four emerging ones, with the major category being that many participants shared that they provide food to students as a strategy to address social justice issues. The four emerging themes are: five participants utilize disciplinary sanctions to address bullying and other violence issues; five participants support gender identity in their schools; four participants involve students in addressing social justice issues; and four participants involve paraprofessionals in addressing social justice issues in their schools.

**Category 6. Many Provided Food to Students to Address Social Justice Issues**

Eight participants indicated they serve food to students at least once or twice a day in their schools, while Principal Tina makes a difference by serving free food three times a day, as she noted: “One group might need a food pack where another group doesn't. So, we try to support in that way. When I say food pack, I mean the student is eating at the school, they can have up to three meals.” Principal Steve also said he provides free food to students in his school, and he supported his point with statistical data before comparing his school to many others concerning food provision as he shared: “We give some benefits of food at school. No foods price issue here; 50% of our kids qualify for free lunch. So that's quite a bigger number than the other middle schools. A lot of our kids do take advantage of that.” As for Principal Moses, he also voiced that many of his students qualify for free meals:

We're like number one middle school in the district in terms of percentage of free and reduced lunch. So, it's cool now because like now if I'm in elementary and middle school, all students can eat for free breakfast and lunch.
Principal Allen also expressed his satisfaction for being among schools that received financial support from the government to provide free breakfast and lunch to students as he shared: “This year we were fortunate enough that we were given a grant, all the middle schools and the elementary schools where breakfast and lunch were free for all students.” Similarly, Principal Alice said in her school, she uses a program to support students with free breakfast and lunch as she noted: “We do have the breakfast program and the lunch program in the summertime though, we don't have that going on. So, that's a concern during non-school times, how our families are getting some of their services.” Additionally, Principal Logan reported serving free breakfast and lunch to all students in his school. However, the difference from the other schools is the extra food that his school offers to another category of students at home as he shared: “My school, schools in our district are Title 1 to every child regardless of income level gets free breakfast and free lunch. If you're in our aftercare program, which is also free, they send you home, you have supper before you leave.” Furthermore, Principal Bicoastal reported serving free food to students in his school by describing the process, as he noted:” When we looked at things like equal access to food in opening up free breakfast and lunch for all of our students, we used to serve that food out of the cafeteria and students come in through the door.” Finally, Principal John indicated that he provides free food in his school as he shared: “We have a motto. We can only control what we can control. And so, the main things that we talk about or tackle is, we provide food. We provide free breakfast. The entire building receives that free breakfast.”

Category 7. (Emerging). Some Used Strategies Regarding Gender Identity

Six participants shared specifically that they address gender identity issues by supporting LGBTQ+ students or transgender students who are rejected by their peers. Principal John’s strategy to support gender identity issues in his school involves providing adequate facilities to students as he shared:
The main thing that we are dealing with is, we have one bathroom in each classroom. So, the kids do not need to worry about having to use those bathrooms. We do have a one communal bathroom and children who are struggling with that just tend to avoid those ones and just use the ones in the classrooms.

Principal Allen also mentioned facilities in providing safe a place for students to relax as he shared:

If a child wants to be referenced as he or a young man, they are referenced as such. You allow a person to be who they identified as, giving them safe space or safe place. If they feel that there's a need for them to vent or converse with someone, give them the opportunity this.

Principal Peter mentions emotional support as he provided the example of a male student who is transitioning from his natural gender to a new one: “That student had some difficult times with his dad as a result of this transition. But here at school it's been calm. That student has a lot of support to help him work through that transition.” Similarly, Principal Moses reported supporting gender identity by involving students and their parents as he shared: “The other area of gay individuals that used to be gay lesbian transgender, we work with students and families and embrace that to help them, so they know that here at this school you do have a home.”

Two principals specifically mentioned formal clubs as support. Principal Biker noted: “We have a very prominent Gender and Sexuality Alliance Club or GSA club here at the school and they promote a lot of activities for inclusiveness with the staff. About a year ago we went through a full day professional development on LGBTQ+. A club to support LGBTQ+ students also exists in Principal Bicoastal’s school as he noted how it works:
We created an LGBTQ+ and allies club that was facilitated by a person who specialized in issues within that community and support within that community who works at some local agencies that help support our students that way. So, we brought good people in with whom to give them that support.

Category 8. (Emerging). Some Worked with Students to Address Social Justice Issues

Four principals noted how they involve students in helping to address social justice issues in their schools. Principal Jay works very closely with his students by creating an initiative that reduced suspensions, as he noted: “As a leader, I created a voice group that I facilitated, I led as a mentor and that significantly reduced the number of suspensions.” Similarly, Principal Alice used student leadership to help to address social justice issues in her school as she noted: “We really try to get them leadership roles. So, it's not the have-nots, it's all. So, our goal is to really try to get students involved in the school with making decisions.”

Students also play an important role in addressing social justice issues by reporting to principals what they observe in their school, as noted by Principal Allen: “Really, we try to empower our students to feel comfortable with reporting and the main thing is to get them in a position where they report. Once they report, we investigate.” Principal Steve reported involving students as well, and he added that in his school, qualified school personnel contributes to solve social justice issues as he noted: “We do have a very good network of how kids can report incidences that are going on. And then we have a great counseling staff who helped do some restorative practices in inappropriate situations.”

Category 9. (Emerging). Some Noted Their Strong Stance Concerning Bullying and Fighting

Four among the 12 participants specifically noted they sanction students who violate school regulations by bullying their peers or who engage in fighting. Principal John indicated
how rigid his school is in terms of sanctioning students who bully their peers as he noted: “We have a zero tolerance to bullying, so we're really addressing that quickly and that if they're starting to make fun of kids or we really tackle that and hand out some appropriate consequences for what's going on.” Principal Allen also said that in his school, bullying is based on racism, and he described the steps he follows as he noted: “A blatant form of racism that we may deal with, we first try to educate kids on what they're saying. After we make the attempt to educate them, sometimes, we have to get to a point where we have to punish them.” Bullying prevails in Principal Holly’s school also and while describing it, referred to the example of one student who caused her to apply a sanction affecting the whole school as she shared:

We had a student who was making a joke, someone heard the joke and then misunderstood that it was a joke and then suddenly and even misunderstanding his words.

So, he ended up going around the entire school saying that this kid was a pedophile, which wasn't true. So, we as a school, we ended up canceling classes.

Finally, Principal Logan indicated that he sanctions students as well when they violate rules as he noted: “The idea that this set of continuing to punish a student or harp on a student or push them to the point of explosion, how do we give them a place where they can calm down.”

**Category 10. Some Worked with Other Adults to Address Social Justice Issues**

Four principals specifically voiced they rely on other adults in their schools to help address social justice issues. Principal John shared: “We've provided a social worker that they can just sit there and kind of talk with and communicate with. We've worked with families, we've worked with community mental health that allows them to come in.” Similarly, Principal Logan resorted to other people who assisted him in addressing social justice issues as he shared: “I'm not necessarily handicapped by previous practices. So, I was able to hire people that are like
-minded in regard to working with lower-income students, supporting students with trauma backgrounds or have behavior issues."

Principal Alice reported she has some part-time support: “I have a behavior coach two days a week and then I'm the other three days. We have what we call minor and major referrals we try with our seven habits. It's really a path.” Finally, Principal Biker also noted: “This year we are hiring a fulltime restorative justice conflict mediator who we hope can help be more proactive addressing needs, particularly among African American males to help reduce suspension and discipline rates.

**Theme Four: Principals Experienced Specific Social Justice Training**

Under this theme, the analysis of the narratives revealed one category indicating that most of the participants did not receive specific training on social justice issues within their university programs, while three of them noted they received some.

**Category 11. Most Did Not Receive Specific Training on Social Justice Issues in Their University Programs**

When asked about formal training regarding social justice issues, most principals indicated they had not received such training in their formal university degree programs.

Principal Holly noted: “Actually, I didn't have anything through my university training for social justice at all. She said her background was history, and she enumerated some of the courses she took, such as women’s history, Japanese history, African history, and Black American history. Her colleague, Principal Jay also did not recall having taken any specific social justice classes as he noted: “In my program, there were no real formal classes about it. We had one multicultural class, but it was really kind of a historic class and not about current events or social justice. That term wasn’t widespread.” However, he said he took a fascinating social justice policy class that focused on discrepancies, achievement gaps, and opportunity gaps.
Furthermore, Principal Moses shared briefly that he had not received any specific social justice training in his university program because his background was curriculum and instruction and educational leadership. He mentioned that he had acquired strong experience and received huge social justice trainings in his leadership to handle issues.

Principal Steve expressed his dissatisfaction for having missed the opportunity to learn about social justice issues in his university program, and he wondered why that did not exist in that university, as he noted: “From the education and degree related side of things, I can't recall a class or a training around these issues? I think it should be something that should be part of every teacher and administrator prep program in the country.” This implies Principal Steve finds social justice training crucial for his function as school like other school leaders.

Principal Tina also noted that she had studied educational leadership, but she had not received any specific social justice training in her formal university program, despite the need: “In the training, we didn't talk about this stuff. This stuff has been talked about in my profession. And I think it has because there's the need.” It would be helpful for her to receive this training to acquire a solid background in social justice issues.

In the same vein, Principal John said he neither received specific social justice training in his university program, but he had learned about it in a different way as he shared: “Exposing different ideas, different cultures, different values and primarily through dialogue. Sometimes, it did happen through media of some sort like a visual media, but it was primarily through dialogue and just communication and just kind of evidence-based.”

Principal Allen also said he had not received specific training on social justice issues in his university program: “I had one class within all of my years of professional education training that was a panel of homosexual people and we were charged with asking them questions, that
was it.” Additionally, Principal said in his university program, there were instructional leadership meetings and secondary principal meetings that trained him on different topics but not specifically on social justice leadership.

Finally, Principal Peter and Principal Biker only talked about tremendous professional development trainings they received in their career, but they did mention specific social justice training received within their university programs.

Only three of the 12 principals mentioned they had received at least some training within their formal university programs. Principal Bicoastal shared that he had received social justice training within his formal university training program: “Through my formal training with my educational leadership degree, there's transformative leader, there's servant leader or there's social justice leader, and it was a lens with which some people can present their job and conduct their job.” Principal Logan also reported receiving social justice training in his university program:

I've had a string of trainings that have helped me to unpack and understand this. So, I think back to my time at the university where I was a sociology major and I was first learning about these issues and how they impacted my peers of color.

Similarly, Principal Alice shared she received social justice training within her university program: “I think when it comes to that, now I'm in my doctorate program. I mean I just had a great course that really addressed inequalities and being in a leadership through diversity.”

**Category 12. All Received Some Professional Development or Have Other Resources**

All 12 participants shared they had benefited from professional development training on social justice issues while in their leadership positions. Principal Biker said during his career he had received significant training as he noted: “I've had a lot of professional development in my
time here as an educator on culturally relevant and culturally responsive education. I've gone through training to actually be a trainer of it. So, a train-a-trainer model.”

Principal Steve reported that he appreciated the contribution of professional organizations that helped him to learn about some specific social justice issues as he noted: “From a professional development standpoint, there are various professional organizations that most administrators belong to and we lean on them quite a bit to provide that training. So, they've done training around title IX laws and LGBTQ+ issues.” Similarly, Principal Peter reported having some remarkable social justice training through professional development as he shared:

The work we did with the Office of Civil Rights, that's hugely helpful and that was really informed by the letters and information they sent to us over time. Another area where professional learning has been really helpful is us looking at trying to work.

For many, their social justice training focused on the issues related to poverty. Principal John said he had learned about social justice concerning culture and poverty as he noted: “I worked in another school district where they were dealing with very similar issues, but I worked on it as a teacher front. So, we did cultural awareness training. We also dealt with some poverty trainings.” His colleague, Principal Alice, also mentioned that she had received professional development training focusing on poverty as she noted: “We've talked, at my different districts about poverty but some of the old work that was out there on poverty was really being challenged that it's not good practice because it continues.”

For others, the key focus has been on equity. Principal Jay noted: “We had a lot of training around instructional strategies to do so, but it wasn't necessarily under the umbrella of social justice. It was under the umbrella of equity and providing our kids an equitable chance.” In
her narrative, Principal Tina mentioned equity among other points of social justice she learned about, as she shared: “We just talked about equity, race, and accessibility to education, privilege and more, just all of those kinds of topics. And then of course, we align that with the populations that we serve from my staff.”

Some training focused specifically on issues related to racism. Principal Moses said: “I have gone through a good handful of trainings dealing with social justice issues, healing of racism, various trainings to help increase our awareness as we're serving our children. So, I probably had, I would say I've received more information.” Principal Holly expressed her satisfaction concerning social justice training by comparing herself with other colleagues who did not receive it enough as she shared:

I did have probably more understanding than a lot of my peers who went through the school. Since I've been here, I did do the two-and-a-half-day ERACCE anti-bias training. That was a big piece of really digging in deep and looking at systemic racism in the U.S.

Principal Allen also acknowledged receiving professional development through his district as he shared: “My district has provided us with culturally responsive education. My district has provided us with training for how to care. My district has provided us with restorative practices, a safe and civil schools training positive behavior support training.”

Finally, some noted that what training they received does not go deep enough. Principal Logan shared: “I attended a training in February with some other colleagues from my city. And I don’t necessarily think that training was that phenomenal, but I think part of my responsibility as a White educator is to keep my lens.”

Principal Bicoastal also acknowledged having received professional development, but he indicated that it did not dig deeper into social justice issues as he shared: “As far as having
conversations about what to do in a socially just world and how to create that, wasn't anything that's been explicitly taught ever, but it was more just a frame or a lens of thinking.”

**Theme Five: Principals Received Internal Support**

I have identified four categories under this theme concerning the internal support principals receive to address social justice issues they face in their schools: all principals reported receiving support from other principals, most reported receiving support from their colleague principals and supervisors, many reported receiving support from their staff, students and parents. Most received support from their families, and half of them reported receiving support from other sources.

**Category 13. All Reported They Received Support from Other Principals**

All 12 principals noted that they received great support from other principals within and from outside their districts. Principal Tina indicated that working with other colleagues enabled her to better address social justice issues in her school as she noted: “We talk about it in principals’ meetings as well. So, in our district, it's not just on certain levels, it's across the board because we represent multiple ethnic backgrounds as well and administration.” In the same way, Principal Steve described how learning from other principals is an efficient way to address social justice issues as he shared:

Absolutely, we often talk about what's going on in our schools and because more often than that, if the issue hasn't happened in another school, it's gonna happen. So, the way that we handle things needs to be somewhat similar.

Principal Bicoastal voiced the value of his network within his district: We do not have much of a network of support with principals outside of our district because not many districts have some of the similar challenges that we do. We have to rely on group of administrators. In a similar manner, Principal Biker shared: “We are tight knit in a union, so we meet monthly. And,
just this morning I've texted my colleagues at the alternative and the other high school in town. So, we talk quite frequently and give each other support.” As far as Principal Jay was concerned, he indicated that other principals support him by allowing him to learn from them through observing them and getting their feedback as he noted: “The idea is immediate, you get on from other principals. You kind of pay attention to what they are doing. You go and you observe their schools and you see what they are doing if they're not doing what's working.”

Several specifically talked about working with principals from outside their districts. Principal Peter noted: “We meet twice a year in Okemos, Michigan. In fact, we all get together, we have a big white board. We throw out all of our problems that we're dealing with. And then, around the table, we all talk about how each of us is trying to do better.” Dialogue and networking also enable principals to improve their strategies, as Principal Logan shared: “We have really great dialogue as network leaders in school around these sorts of questions and what that looks like. I mean if I sense some dissonance or there is an issue, I have no problem asking that question.” Similarly, Principal Moses indicated that connecting with other principals is essential for him to receive strong support as he noted “We always connect with other principals, so there is a lot of support.”

Additionally, Principal Alice reported receiving support from other principals not only through in person meetings, but also at distance using technology as she shared:

I'm part of [a state association] though, which is our state’s elementary middle school principals’ association and pretty active in that. And so, discussions through either on Twitter or just good old email, talking with other principals across the state as well as principals here in my city.
Three principals noted that they have one specific principal who serves as a mentor in reference to these issues. Principal Allen Principal, Principal Holly, and Principal John reported receiving strong support from one colleague each as Principal Allen shared: “Other principals, I could think of one in particular who was pretty much my go to. If I have an issue, I give him a phone call and if he doesn't know the answer, he can often get me to somebody.” Principal Holly gave the example of her colleague who always supports her as she shared: “When I have a particularly difficult problem, I reach out to him and he helps me process through, like different options of what I can. So, that's been a really great source of support.” Finally, Principal John said he mostly contact a colleague of his when he faces an issue: “There's a lot of times where I'll just call up the other high school principal, and he and I would sit there and just process an issue that we might be working on together.”

Category 14. Most Received Support from Their Supervisors

Ten principals said their supervisors help them better address social justice issues they encounter, and Principal Bicoastal quoted his direct supervisor as follows: “I was fortunate to work with a superintendent who was a fierce advocate for underserved populations. And so, what I needed as a leader was the support from high-quality social workers and school counselors and administrative team.” Similarly, Principal John expressed his satisfaction for being lucky to work with a supervisor who assists him: “I'm very fortunate to have a very supportive assistant superintendent that I can talk with on a daily basis, and she can help me process some of these issues that might be arising and the best course of actions.” The support Principal Steve receives from his supervisors is also tremendous as he described it, starting by his direct supervisor: “My direct boss is the assistant superintendent of instruction, he's been very helpful. Our communications director has been incredibly helpful. If it is working through any negative media that may come out of any of our schools.” In his narrative, Principal Allen implied that his
supervisors support him in many areas but not only in solving social justice issues as he shared: “They provide us as I said before with the multi-tiered systems of support training, the culturally responsive education training, the trauma informed care, dealing with students’ special needs.”

He also specified that in terms of social justice, his director of student services is the strongest support compared to other superiors he noted: When I run across it and I don't feel like I can tackle or handle it myself, it's usually when there's a social justice issue and I think of these particular things, I would turn to my director of student services. She's very versed, she's very sharp.

Additionally, Principal Logan, appreciated the role his supervisors play in helping him solve social justice issues as well as academic ones he faces as he noted:

I think at the macro level they help with like data tracking because we do a lot of data gathering at the district level about who we are suspending from school, who was performing what like academically even how this cohort is performing versus that cohort.

When asked about support, Principal Tina also answered that her supervisors support her in many areas like Principal Logan as she shared: “Our direct supervisors provide support as well as always. We are looking for ways we can best support our students. That whole being not just the academic piece, recognizing the emotional and the social piece plays an integral role.”

Principals sometimes lack time to focus on social justice issues because of the pressure from their supervisors requiring them to fill administrative duties, but Principal Biker revealed that he is lucky to have supportive supervisors who do not do the same to him as he shared: “Those above me provide a lot of support. They provide time with my staff, they provide some funding, and they provide training as well for me. So, we get a lot of that support from our central office.” Establishing a regular contact with one’s supervisors is key to principals to keep them posted and
get their support, and this is what Principal Moses does with his supervisors as he shared: “Every day, my supervisors, I have them on speed dial. I call or send the text and they are right there on the spot with sending in any assistance that I need. I'm thankful for that.” Like Principal Moses, Principal Alice implied that calling is important for sharing her concerns or seeking support from her supervisors to address issues as she noted: “Oh, my people, my administrators are very supportive. I feel like I can call when I have an issue. This isn't someone's feeling. This has come up and I guess we've tried to collaborate together to find solutions.” Finally, Principal Holly said the same thing concerning being in touch with supervisors as she indicated that it helps her to get their support, and she referred to one of them who did more to her:

   I do have a board of directors, so, if I have a problem, I will reach out to the members of the board of directors. One woman who's on the board of director, she just retired. She was an HR for a school district.

**Category 15. Many Received Support from Their Staff**

Seven participants shared they receive a strong support from their administrative staff to address social issues that occur in their school. Principal Biker appreciates his staff for what they are doing to support him as he noted: “The staff are very open-minded, so they give me support. I think even though change is difficult, and this is a newer topic for teachers, they give me an open mind, which I appreciate.” Dialogue is essential for keeping people on the same page in an organization and that is one of the strong points that Principal Tina notices concerning her staff as she noted: “I think they do a good job. If they have questions, they bring questions to me or to the group dialogue or wonderings or concerns or how can we, so those kinds of questions will come up.” Principal Alice also thinks her staff is doing well to support her in solving social justice issues in her school as she noted:
I feel like my staff, I have what we call our lighthouse team, our leadership team and especially, after taking a course in my doctorate program about it, I shared that with some of my teachers that we probably should be doing a better job of this year, paying attention to it.

As far as Principal Jay was concerned, he affirmed having received support from his staff, but he did not describe what they do as his colleagues did. On the contrary, Principal Peter described the quality of his staff and the huge support he receives from them to successfully solve social justice issues as he noted:

I think the biggest part of how the staff helps me is that right now we have a very experienced staff. We have had to deal with many clashes dealing with social justice issues. So, their experience helps us keep conflicts from boiling over.

Additionally, Principal Moses indicated that working together with his staff enabled him to determine the degree of support they provide him with as he shared: “I'm always trying to work with them on different things and pull ideas from them and get their feedback. And the areas of continuous growth or improvement that we've identified together. They are always supportive.”

Finally, Principal Steve also indicated that working together with his staff is successful because it is based on trust among them as he noted: “I think they trust me in how we are going to move forward through some things. We work very hard to build the culture where it is ok to be wrong, it is ok to challenge each other on things.

Category 16. Half Received Support from Their Students

Five of the principals specifically mentioned that they receive support from their students in addressing social justice issues. Principal Steve gave credit to his students as they are the key informants to him in his school, and he explained how they help solve issues as he shared:
“They're usually the ones that tell us there's an issue and we want them to, we encourage them to come to us and tell us what's going on and how we can help. They're the best people to ask.” In a similar manner, Principal Biker experiences it in his school as he noted: “I have a student advisory council that I meet with monthly to get feedback, so I can hear what they're thinking. And then I can also convey the rationale as to why I do what I do.”

Principal Alice also said she receives support from her students and also made an important point regarding the general belief that students are troublemakers in all school as she noted: Sometimes students can be quite the cause of problems, but in some places, students also contribute to find solutions. Our lighthouse team, we also have a student lighthouse team. So, they are like our student leadership team and we have a think box. Leadership can start at younger age too, because Principal Peter’s statement implies that there are future leaders among his students. This is justified by their contribution with their brilliant ideas to help him address issues in his school as he shared:

We get most of the support from our students. Most of our best ideas I think over time have come from our students over time. And so that is a huge part of our community giving us that feedback, and this is hugely important.

Finally, Principal Logan indicated that student contribution in solving issues enables him to establish strong relationship with them and to better understand their situations as he shared:

“Students usually have very candid conversations with us around what they're struggling with, why they're acting out today, why they're tired, why they're mad, come on in. That tends to be like their contribution is trying to develop a relationship.”

**Theme Six: Principals Received External Support**

Under this theme I have identified categories from the participants’ narratives concerning the support they receive from external sources to address social justice issues in their schools:
most participants reported receiving support from their students’ parents and most reported receiving support from their families and other sources.

**Category 17. Most Received Support from Their Students’ Parents**

Eight of the participants said they receive support from their students’ parents. Principal John’s appreciation shows that in his school, students’ parents strongly support him as he described it: “Primarily most of the parents are very supportive. They are first a little surprised by it, but then they are very supportive, very cooperative, willing to communicate, willing to walk through things and really get to the bottom of it.” In a similar manner, Principal Peter shared: “Our parent community is overall supportive. When we have difficult situations by and large, parents help our kids sort through the emotional and values differences that happen.” Additionally, Principal Logan mentioned that the support received from parents is huge and helps him to solve social justice issues as he shared: “I have a select group of parents here who I think are very passionate about social justice and they chose this school because they’re invested in the transformation taking place at the school.” Some mentioned more organized parental forums. Principal Bicoastal voiced: “With our parent communities, I would do monthly parent round table sessions where, they could come in and ask questions or seek understanding about hot button issues that were important to them. Principal Biker expressed similar support he receives from parents through an advisory council:

Very supportive, very open minded, very liberal families. At this school, I have a parent advisory council that meets monthly. I also have an informal coffee with parents monthly in which I invite them to come in and give me feedback.

Principal Tina and Principal Moses also mentioned broader community support, involving parents and grandparents. Principal Tina shared: “Well, that’s kind of what I was saying with all the community support that’s built within which provides opportunities for our
students.” The same point was made by Principal Moses to mean that his parent community support him in his school as he reported their voice: ‘Hey, you tell us what you want and we’ll help you out.’ In the same vein, Principal Jay specified that grandparents support him as he noted: “I got a lot of support from parents in particular fathers. And the best support I got was from grandparents.”

**Category 18. Most Received Support from Their Families**

Nine participants said they receive support from their own families. Principal Tina reported getting support from her husband to improve her leadership skills as she noted: “Well my husband works in education as well, so he and I, we tend to have matchy stories, I'll have a story, you'll have a story and we kind of help one another and remind ourselves of, so we kind of build each other up with regards to that.” Similarly, Principal Bicoastal and Principal John praised their wives’ qualities that enable them to support them in solving social justice issues as Principal Bicoastal shared: “Her support is super important for what we need to do. And she's smart, so she looks at social issues and raises them and we have thoughtful conversations about how best we get these addressed.” And Principal John shared:

My personal family, the main way, honestly my wife is so I'm married and have four kids and my wife, she just is a sounding board. She just listens and just listens to me if I just need to get it off my chest.

Principal Allen also voiced his wife enables him to better deal with issues in his school as he shared:

She is often an additional resource for me. She's very well aware. She's trained in average childhood experiences. So, she's able to open my mind, and free my mind on some new things that I could do in order to mitigate the effects.
Several talked about other family members being supportive. Principal Steve recognized getting support from his children who contribute with their ideas as he noted: “I think getting a viewpoint from someone who is outside of this school is valuable. They provide different perspectives and having my own kids, they have their own perspective on how things should be handled and dealt with.” Principal Biker noted support from his broader family as he shared: “My family’s my bedrock, so I get plenty of support from them.” Additionally, Principal Logan listed all his family members whose support contribute to strengthen his leadership skills to solve social justice issues as he shared: “My immediate family; my brother, my sister, my mother, my dad, it can vary. I think generationally there’s a gap between my brother and my sister and I, we all have different perspectives on social justice issues, but we're all pretty progressive.”

Understanding someone’s situation is also an important moral support that recomforts them, and this is the case of Principal Holly whose family help her to overcome stress after spending all her time dealing with issues at school as she noted:

The biggest thing my family does to help me to really solve any of the problems here is, they understand that I work a lot. And they also know that sometimes I bring the stress home with me, and they're willing to listen to me, and just be supportive.

Finally, Principal Alice indicated that in her school, the support she receives comes from her big school family, and she described it as follows: “We also have a family lighthouse team. So, there's a staff lighthouse team, a student lighthouse team. Last year we did what we call a family synergy night where we brought community members, stakeholders in.”

**Category 19. Many Received Support from Other Sources**

Six of the 12 participants shared that they receive support from other sources to address social justice issues in their schools. Among them, Principal Moses, Principal Tina, and Principal Jay identify reading various resources as an important source of support that reinforces their
capabilities of addressing social justice as Principal Moses noted: “I think there is a lot of support from reading power through professionals and like I going to conferences, workshops and support from various agencies.” And, Principal Tina said her growth results from reading as well and shared: “I'm close to all my brothers and sisters, but this one brother, we talk a lot. He'll pitch me different material to read and look just in my own growth.”

Principal Jay also considers reading an important source to upgrade his social justice skills, and he also adds watching TV can help as he noted: “In terms of other things, it's reading. You watch a TV show where you see somebody doing amazing things at a particular school and then just kind of figuring out why can't you do it here?”

Others mentioned various organizations. Principal Peter likes getting information directly from other people to solve social justice issues as he noted: “I think we've made really good strides. So, for example the Office of Civil Rights has been really informative particularly over the last three or four years concerning social justice issues.” Similarly, Principal Holly identifies other people who can support her personnel with training to enhance their social justice skills as she shared: “Probably the biggest thing that would help right now is, we have four teachers who haven't been trained in anti-bias training through ERACCE. Getting them trained would be really helpful just because sometimes teachers accidentally create problems.”

As far as Principal Alice was concerned, she wants to diversify the source of her support instead of counting on her staff only as she shared: “I've mentioned to my admin team recently that I'm trying to get, like my family lighthouse team, they were all White women, so I want to try to get a diverse group both socioeconomically race, all of that.”
Theme Seven: Principals Use Their Experiences to Shape Their Purpose and Approach to Leadership

The analysis of the participants’ narratives revealed one category that all principals shared their experiences about how leading people has shaped their sense of purpose and approach to leadership under this category.

Category 20. All Used Their Experiences to Shape Their Purpose and Approach to Leadership

All 12 principals shared their experience about how leading people shaped their sense of purpose of and approach to leadership. Principal Holly indicated in her narrative that leading people shaped her approach to support teachers to succeed in solving problems as she shared:

I think my number one job is to support the teachers so that they can support students. And I feel like if we are approaching these problems well, students are going to gain skills that they will take out into the community.

As far as Principal Allen was concerned, his leadership approach consists in supporting people too, but he did not mention teachers as he noted: “Your approach may be educating the person in tolerance or not necessarily even tolerance. I don't like the word tolerance because it's like, why do you have to tolerate me? It's support. It's acceptance, it's driving.” However, Principal Steve feels that leading people shaped his purpose on behalf of his students as he stated: “I see my role specifically with social justice issues as being, it's my job to make sure every kid in this building feel comfortable.” Principal Biker also has a purpose oriented toward social justice and student academic success as he shared: “My purpose is to do right to kids and to make sure that kids are able to graduate in four years. And me being an advocate for social justice, I think makes that job more possible.”
In the same context, Principal Bicoastal implied that his leadership approach aims to do the best for students and parents as he noted: “I identify as a social justice leader because someone has to be aware of the issues that are out there. And then try to do the best that they can to have them confronted for their kids, families.” Principal Jay’s purpose is not so different from his colleague Principal Bicoastal’s purpose since he considers equity for the best of students as he stated: “What I value is that every child under my care has an equitable shot. They have that I provide an environment and opportunities for every single child to succeed regardless of what they look like.” Additionally, Principal Tina indicated that leading people shaped her purpose to do better, but she did not specify if this is to students only or to everyone as she noted: “I think my shaping, in a great way, in a very meaningful way, I guess is what I want to say. Because we can allow things to make us bitter or better and I choose better.”

However, Principal Peter and Principal John’s purpose is listening, which differs from those of their colleagues focusing on students only as Principal Peter shared: “I think what my experience has taught me is to hold my tongue, to be careful about what conclusions I draw. Because when we do that, then we can actually listen. And when we listen, I think people feel respected.” Principal John also emphasizes the importance of listening to people in order to succeed in solving problems as he noted: “When being in this role, you have many hats that you need to fulfill and you just need to make sure that you’re listening to the entire story, both sides of the story before you make a judgment” Principal Logan’s point is that leading people enables him to value empathy for the poor students of color as he shared: “I’ve learned about not confusing empathy with the White guilt and inadvertently lowering the bar of expectations for lower-income kids and children of color, that’s a very easy trap to fall into.” Furthermore, Principal Alice indicated that leading people shaped her purpose to get what she needs from their
mind to improve her leadership as she noted: “I'm trying to make sure that I continue to learn more, continue to try to think of the other person's perspective and then bring that to my building.”

Finally, Principal Moses thinks that doing his job correctly is a way of complying with his leadership function as he shared: “As a principal, I have to do a better job because there's so much other stuff that we're required to share and I have to make sure that's done.”

Chapter 5 Closure

The analysis of this study identified seven themes and twenty categories. This study found that principals face multiple social justice issues such as, racism, gender identity, bullying and other violence, and socioeconomic status (SES)-related issues. They also face many challenges which are: resistance to change, political influence, lack of knowledge concerning racism and balancing things. In order to overcome these challenges, principals use different strategies, such as providing food to needy students, sanctioning disciplinary acts perpetrated by the students, involving staff, students, and paraprofessionals in solving social justice issues they face.

The study also found that almost all principals did not receive specific social justice training in their university programs. Only three of them mentioned having received social justice training. Principals solve social justice issues using skills and experience acquired through professional development in their leadership position. Additionally, findings indicated that principals receive support from multiple stakeholders, such as staff, other principals, supervisors, students, students’ parents, families, and other sources to solve social justice issues. Finally, the study found that principals willingly shared how their experiences with social justice issues shaped their purpose and approach to leadership as school leaders.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter focuses on answering each of my five research questions of this study using themes that emerged from the data collected from 12 principals. While interpreting the findings of this study, I connect them with previous literature as reviewed in Chapter 2. Additionally, I make recommendations for educational leaders in general and principals in particular who are dealing with social justice issues in the Midwest state, and I offer my orientation for future.

Analysis of Research Questions

This study used interpretivism theory to understand social justice issues that principals face in their schools. Interpretivism posits that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty 1998). This theory provided a foundation for describing and understanding my participants’ experience with social justice issues, and it guided my research questions and my analysis.

Research Question 1

My first research question was: What social justice issues principals are facing in their schools. My study participants enumerated multiple social justice issues they are facing in their schools. These issues include bullying and other violence, racism, SES-related issues, and gender identity issues.

The participants described bullying and other violence as crucial issues that prevail in schools (Category 1). Bullying is generally manifested physically but it has taken other forms nowadays, such as the verbal one. Principals reported that bullying is difficult to address because the bullies use various uncontrollable means to perpetrate it. For instance, cyberbullying is online and can be perpetrated out of the school environment. This situation makes principals think that
addressing bullying should also involve paraprofessionals, parents and students as well to succeed. Many principals mentioned that they had involved those people who have the skills to help them overcome bullying and other violence issues in their schools.

Another social justice issue that I found in schools is racism that my study participants identified as poignant and ongoing (Category 2). The participants hate to hear about it because they think it is an old issue that will not be eradicated from the society. They indicated that racism exists in almost all schools and it is manifested in different ways. I found that students are also using social media to communicate racial threats to their peers. The participants revealed that racism is reinforced by the changing demographic composition in schools (i.e., schools are becoming more and more diverse now). More specifically, the study participants mentioned that racism is more accentuated in schools with large White student populations in comparison to others. They added that racism is systemic and often strongly linked to politics. As the study participants described, this phenomenon appears as a contributing factor to the achievement gaps and exclusion in schools. For instance, when some schools are well-equipped but others are not, their achievements are not similar.

Socioeconomic (SES) related issues are also crucial and prevalent in schools described by many study participants (Category 3). Schools located in areas with high concentration of low-income families, have students who lack food and clothing, and principals have to do their best to meet their needs in order to keep them in their schools. Principals reported that in addition to food provision, they have to provide counseling services to those students because some deal with trauma. Additionally, I found that the poor quality of infrastructure in schools constitutes a social justice that principals face. They complained that students who study in dingy classrooms have lower achievement levels.
Furthermore, principals I interviewed identified homelessness and trauma that affect their students. They reported that homeless students and those who deal with trauma cannot sleep well. Consequently, they are imbalanced and cannot participate actively in class activities like their classmates.

Finally, gender identity issues are ongoing in schools where I interviewed principals (Category 4). Those principals reported that gender issues exist in their schools, but they are not so crucial as they were 10 years ago. Yet, in some schools, principals said LGBTQ+ students are still not well viewed by some staff and students. Others noted they still have difficulties accommodating LGBTQ+ students with adequate facilities in their schools (e.g., neutral bathrooms for transgender students).

Although the literature identified segregation and discrimination as crucial social justice issues, principals did not clearly identify them as current issues in schools (although racism is still a lingering related concern). This is an indication that some things are clearly improving in many schools, although plenty of social justice issues still remain as voiced by these principals.

**Research Question 2**

My second research question was: What challenges do principals face in responding to these issues, and how do they address these challenges? I found that all principals face various challenges in their schools (Category 5). These challenges include political influence, educating people concerning gender identity, resistance to change, addressing racism, and building safe schools.

My study participants identified political influence as a major challenge they face because they said people in power interfere in their business. They quoted the elected officials by saying those people want the status quo and they want to impose their will. Educating people, mainly staff and students, concerning gender identity is also a challenge for principals. Principals
notice that some staff members and students view gender identity in a negative way. For this reason, they want to make those two groups sensitive and increase their awareness to support LGBTQ+ students, but they find it so hard.

I also found that another challenge that principals are dealing with is resistance to change by other school stakeholders. It is challenging for them to bring change in schools to improve education as they want because their staff and communities sometimes resist their initiatives. They said the strong reason why people oppose change is to stick with the status quo mainly the same mindset and the same system set in place. Additionally, I found that other stakeholders, such as staff, students, and parents disagree with principals on issues regarding schools because they do not understand them well. Furthermore, Principals reported that communicating is challenging for them mainly with parents. In fact, they noted that some parents usually hate to hear principals saying bad things about their children’s behaviors at school. Those parents support their children even in situations where the students are clearly wrong; some parents do not view criticisms and sanctions against their children as positive ways of educating them.

Furthermore, some principals voiced that addressing racism is challenging for them because they said racism is systemic in their country. For instance, they noted that in terms of funding, some schools might receive it more than others based on implicate bias built into funding and policies. Finally, principals reported that building safe schools to assure good academic achievements for all students is challenging for them.

**Research Question 3**

My third research question was: What training on social justice have such principals received in their leadership preparation programs, or via professional development? I found that most participants of my study did not receive specific training on this subject during their university programs (Category 4). This constitutes a huge gap for them because in the field, they
encounter many social justice issues they should better know how to address for the sake of their students. Some principals mentioned they acquired skills and gained experience by actually running their schools on how to successfully solve social justice issues they face.

My study also found that the participants acquired social justice skills, experience, and competence through professional development opportunities, such as seminars, training sessions, and conferences. Those training opportunities were offered by their professional organizations for educators in schools, and districts, across the country. Principals appreciate such professional development because it helped them become more culturally responsive, and better able to train others on social justice issues as well.

Overall, most principals were unhappy that their university programs did not prepare them to better handle social justice in their schools. For who did receive some social justice training in their programs, they expressed their happiness for having that opportunity. But only a few noted that their university graduate programs taught how to address inequalities and to lead diverse schools.

**Research Question 4**

My fourth research question was: What supports do principals experience from other principals, families, students, and others in dealing with social justice issues? My study participants received support from other principals, their staff, their supervisors, families, students, students’ parents, and other sources. They reported that other principals offer them tremendous support by advising and giving them feedback on social justice issues (Category 13). They implied that in order to better solve social justice issues in their schools, they emphasize working collectively over working individually. Therefore, they organize weekly and monthly meetings at the district level to discuss issues going in their schools. In general, meetings are also
great opportunities for them to know each other and seek advice and share experience among
them for improvement. Principals I interviewed also receive support from their colleagues
through networking and dialogue using technology. For instance, twitter, email, and telephone
serve them to reach out to each other across their districts, their state, and their country when
they face issues.

Staff in general strongly support principals in addressing social justice issues in their
schools (Category 15). Principals appreciated the remarkable support concerning conflict
resolution in which the staff substantially contribute because they cannot succeed in it alone.
Another support given by the staff is providing principals with ideas and advice enabling them to
overcome social justice issues in schools. Additionally, the staff support principals in building
school culture that promotes tolerance and overcomes challenges to keep schools in good shape.
The last support principals mentioned is trust they received from their staff. They said whenever
the staff gets stuck on important questions or concerns, they work to find solutions together.

Principals did not overlook the support received from their supervisors to address social
justice issues (Category 14). They said supervisors provide them with staff when they need to fill
the gaps in their schools. I also found that supervisors support principals in solving problems
when they get stuck and they need help. In the same vein, principals noted that supervisors help
them take preventive actions and process problems that might pop up as well, and overall help
principals in dealing with students’ specific needs efficiently. It is also worth mentioning that
supervisors help principals in tracking social justice related-data at the district level. Finally,
supervisors offer tremendous training that boost principals’ capabilities to overcome social
justice issues in schools.
Principals also reported that students support them as well in various ways related to social justice issues (Category 16). They said students provide them with information because they might hear and see what is going on among themselves and within the school before them. They also said students contribute to solve problems because they are well positioned to talk to their peers who cause trouble in schools. The interview with principals enabled me to find out that in some schools, students are organized in their advisory councils that work closely with principals to maintain stability. I also found that students support principals with their feedback and valid ideas on issues they face from day-to-day. Finally, principals said students support them through candid conversations with them to help them improve decision-making.

The support received from students’ parents is also remarkable, as described by some principals (Category 17). They reported that when they face difficult situations, some parents intervene to help students sort through the emotional and value differences that happen. I found from the interviews that parents who serve on advisory councils are very cooperative and supportive. Such councils meet monthly to discuss important issues and seek solutions or give feedback to principals. Another point to note is that not only do some students’ parents support principals, but principals said they appreciate many grandparents also for their remarkable support.

Additionally, principals’ families provide them with important support to address social justice issues (Category 18). Principals said they usually have thoughtful conversations about social justice issues with their partners to find best solutions. This has been possible because some have family members possess social justice backgrounds and work experience in this field. Additionally, families offer different perspectives to principals concerning how they can handle
social justice issues. Finally, my study found that families support principals by helping them overcome stress, as they work under pressure due to their leadership position.

Furthermore, I found that principals receive support from other sources that help them address social justice issues in their schools (category 19). These resources include reading, watching TV, professional organizations, and advice from various individuals. In order to reinforce their social justice leadership capabilities, principals read various materials that open their mind. Television is also another important support for them because it enables them to view what other people and take away from it.

Finally, I found that principals reach out to professional organizations to get support, as they provide them with information and strategies to address social justice issues. In their narratives, principals cited the Office of Human Rights as an example in this area. They did not ignore individuals who received anti-bias training support by training their personnel to prevent or solve problems in schools.

**Research Question 5**

My fifth research question was: How do principals’ experiences with social justice issues and challenges shape their sense of purpose and approach to leadership as principals?

Principals shared that their experiences with social justice issues and challenges shaped their sense of purpose and approach to leadership in various ways (Category 20). I found that various experiences shaped principals’ purpose and leadership to support staff and students to successfully solve problems. Another purpose is educating people about various issues to help create cohesion in their schools. Principals also reported that the experience of leading their schools shaped their purpose to make students comfortable to promote their education. My study also indicated that principals’ purpose and approach to leadership focuses on supporting justice for all students and help them graduate.
Additionally, my study participants noted that their purpose is to provide an environment of opportunity for every student in their school. As leaders, principals reported that their experiences shaped their purpose to listen and be respectful to people and careful about drawing conclusions or making judgment. Furthermore, I found through the interviews that principals’ experiences shaped their purpose to value empathy for students of color for their inclusion. Finally, principals said their purpose is to request what they need from people by learning how they think and how they act.

**Relationship of Results to Existing Studies**

Chapter 2 offered significant existing literature related to social justice issues. This section now summarizes how my findings are in alignment with previous research, as broken down by key social justice topic areas.

**Segregation and Discrimination**

There is a vast literature about segregation. Authors like Ray et al. (2016) and Stroub and Richards (2013) found that segregation has declined over time in response to federal government actions aimed at equal rights and racial equality, but that its negative impact continues. Others (e.g., Banerjee & Rowley, 2018; Benner & Graham, 2013; Brown et al., 2010; Cogburn et al., 2011; Murray-Johnson & Guerra, 2018; Ropac, 2017; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Sorouri, 2017; Vega et al., 2015) conducted studies on discrimination in the U.S. and across the world.

The principals in my study did not mention these issues specifically in their interviews. However, they did mention concerns with racism, gender identity, bullying, and SES-related issues that are issues connected to earlier segregation issues. Truthfully, as an international student, this finding of my study surprised me. Before conducting my study, I heard a lot about discrimination in conversations about the U.S., and thought it to still be a reality for
principals today. It may still be there, but those terms are no longer being used by principals to describe these issues.

**Race-Related Issues**

Some previous research like Vincent and Tobin (2011) found that non-White students, in particular African American students, tend to be more frequently excluded (i.e., suspended or expelled from school at a disproportionate rate compared to all other ethnicities. Webb et al.’s (2018) study revealed race-based stigmatization (e.g., concerns over Black students acting White). Some of my study participants mentioned expulsion in their schools, but they did not identify any group of students that are more affected than others. I also did not find evidence of racial stigmatization in my study. Most principals mainly identify gender-based stigmatization that affects LGBTQ+ students in their schools.

**Bullying and Other Violence**

There are numerous previous studies on bullying that my results aligned with. For example, Cook et al. (2010) found in their study that bullying in schools has been a popular topic in public debate surrounding school legislation and policy. My study confirms these findings as the majority of principals I interviewed identified bullying and other violence as ongoing issues in their schools. Al-Ali and Khulood (2001) also found that bullying includes face-to-face confrontation like hitting, damaging, kicking, and other types of physical harm or even online. My study confirms this study because I found that bullying is manifested in the same ways described above. Principals I interviewed deal with students who bully their peers physically, verbally with insults and other bad words, and use social media to threaten them. Those principals complained that the nonverbal and online forms of bullying are not visible, so difficult for them to control.
Some previous research looked at bullying and its connection to race. For example, Connell et al. (2012), Schneider et al. (2012), and Connell et al. (2015) all found that there were no differences in overall reporting cyberbullying or school bullying by race and bullying victimization by race/ethnicity. Similarly, my study did not find evidence of bullying based on race in schools where I conducted interviews. The participants identified cyberbullying and other forms in their schools, but they did not specify that it was based on race. This is different than what was found by Vitoroulis et al. (2016), who found that European Canadian students reported more social victimization than non-European Canadian students, while non-European Canadian participants reported more physical, cyber, and bullying perpetration than European Canadian participants.

Raynor and Wylie (2012) and Bickmore (2011) found that principals and students addressed bullying using various strategies. My study confirms these findings in that principals used various strategies to address bullying in their schools. They have conversations with the bullies and they involve many stakeholders, such as administrative staff, teachers, students, and others to fight bullying.

**SES-Related Issues**

Previous research clearly revealed social justice issues related to SES, with some of my findings in alignment (e.g., principals work to provide additional support for such students), but not with others (e.g., that low SES students are discriminated against). For example, Rey et al. (2017) found that the distribution of students by school type indicated a high concentration of low-income students in public schools, and those students were discriminated by their peers because of their status. Igah’s (2018) findings also revealed that African American and Caucasian students identified as low SES tended to be associated with having accompanying risk
factors, and consequently being more excluded than other students. Min and Goff (2016) found that lower SES families benefit from the additional supports offered by their schools.

On the one hand, my findings confirm such previous studies because I found that most principals I interviewed experience socioeconomic (SES) related issues in their schools. They deal with many disadvantaged students who face issues of homelessness, food, and clothing. They also experience poor-quality infrastructure and funding issues that affect learning conditions in their schools. These schools support students in many ways to help them study in decent conditions. They provide free food to students, they support those who are LGBTQ+ and are stigmatized by their peers and some staff. Additionally, those schools support student organizations and involve them in problem-solving to assure normal functioning of their schools.

On the other hand, my study does not support these findings in that low-income students are not discriminated by their peers based on their status, but mostly on their gender identity and other factors.

**Gender Identity**

Previous research had revealed ongoing social justice concerns related to gender identity issues, and this was true in my study as well. For example, Kosciw et al. (2012) found that LGBTQ+ students reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and they reported most commonly avoiding school bathrooms and locker rooms because they felt uncomfortable in those spaces. My study findings confirm this study. I found that the participants I interviewed deal with gender identity issues in their schools as well, in that their LGBTQ+ students often still experience lack of comfort and feelings of insecurity.
Challenges in Addressing Social Justice Issues

Previous research offers some information on the challenges principals face in addressing social justice issues, and my findings align with some (e.g., concerns with change) and not others (e.g., ineffective staff).

For example, Thehoaris’ (2007, 2010) findings revealed that principals faced resistance to change from their staff, the community, the school district, and beyond. My study confirms these findings. I found that all principals I interviewed identified many challenges in their schools and many of them mentioned resistance to change. A telling example was Principal Biker who implied that resistance to change is an irresolvable issue, as he shared: “The challenges of resistance to changes, I think that’s been going on for so long and it really isn’t change, it’s kind of what we’re doing now.”

On the other hand, Slater et al. (2018) found that principals can face many challenges, including ineffective staff. Yet, my study contradicts these finding, in that none of my study participants mentioned ineffective staff in their interviews. While talking about the support they receive to address social justice issues in their schools, most of them described their staff as being effective and supportive. They praised them for their devotion to fill their duties well. Those principals were surrounded by their staff with whom they can communicate and spend time together.

Social Justice-Related Training

Previous research noted that lack of a social justice focus within formal administrator preparation programs, and my results support these findings. For example, Miller and Martin’s (2015) and Rayan and Katz’s (2007) findings showed that a consensus among all of the study participants indicated that minimal emphasis was placed on their preparation course work to
prepare them for leading in culturally diverse schools with social justice. My study strongly supports these findings.

I found that most of my study participants did not receive social justice training in their university programs. They wished they had received this training to acquire adequate knowledge and skills about social justice issues. However, they indicated that practice and leadership experience have built their skills to successfully address social justice issues they face. They also acknowledged that professional development substantially enhances their social justice skills in particular and improves their professional career in general.

**Social Justice Support**

There was a vast literature that covered theories, definitions, concepts and other aspects of social justice, but not the support principals might receive from other school stakeholders to address social justice issues they face in schools. Therefore, my findings related to the significant support that principals receive from other school stakeholders to address social justice in schools can be viewed as new findings.

Such support comes first from their administrative and teaching staff as these people are their subordinates and work together with them. Principals also receive support from their colleagues who are also experiencing social issues and challenges in their schools and share their ideas with them. The support received from supervisors is also important and enables principals to overcome social justice issues. Another support comes from students who willingly commit to help principals solve discipline-related issues. Additionally, principals receive support from students’ parents to address social justice issues. Furthermore, they receive support from their families without whom they cannot succeed in assuming their leadership responsibilities. Finally, other resources, such as reading and watching television constitute important support that principals receive to enhance their social justice skills.
Overall Previous Research Connect Summary

Table 3 summarizes the key findings from my study as connected to the literature summarized in the previous sections.

Table 3

*Major Findings Linked to Previous Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Findings</th>
<th>Previous Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most principals experienced concerns with bullying and other violence (Category 1).</td>
<td>Confirms and supports previous research that bullying is a major concern (e.g., Al-Ali &amp; Khulood, 2018; Calbom, 2012; Cook et al., 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most experience racism in their schools (Category 2).</td>
<td>Confirms and supports previous research that racism is still visible (e.g., Byrd &amp; Chavoux, 2012; Hope et al., 2015; Khalifa, 2015; Ray Fisher et al., 2016; Tabane &amp; Human-Voguel, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most experienced concerns around socioeconomic status (SES)-related issues (Category 3).</td>
<td>Confirms and supports previous research that SES-related issues still exist in our schools (e.g., Igah, 2018; Min &amp; Goff 2016; Rey et al., 2017).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half experienced concerns with gender identity issues (Category 4).</td>
<td>Confirms and supports previous research findings that LGBTQ+ students may still feel unsafe at school, and there is still stigma concerns, as well as physical plant issues like adequate rest room facilities (e.g., Kosciw et al., 2012; Pizmont-Levy, 2016; Russell et al., 2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All experienced barriers in addressing social justice issues (Category 5).</td>
<td>Confirms and supports previous research that principals still face barriers (Day &amp; Prunty, 2015; DeMatthews &amp; Mawhinney, 2014; Slater et al., 2018). and there is still resistance to change (Theoharis, 2007, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many provided food to students to address social justice issues (Category 6).</td>
<td>No previous research found.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some used strategies regarding gender identity (Emerging Category 7).</td>
<td>No previous research found.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some worked with students to Address social justice issues (Emerging Category 8). No previous research found.

Some worked with other adults to address social justice issues (Emerging category 10). Confirms previous research on principals’ efforts to address bullying (e.g., Bickmore, 2011; Raynor & Wylie’s 2012’s).

Most did not receive specific training on social justice issues in their university programs (Category 11). No previous research found.

All received some professional development or have other resources (Category 12). No previous research found.

All or many received support from other principals (Category 13), their supervisors (Category 14), their staff (category 15), their students (category 16), their students’ parents (category 17), their families (category 18), and other sources (category 19). No previous research found

All shared used their experiences to shape their purpose and approach to leadership (Category 20). No previous research found

**Implications for Future Studies**

This qualitative study sought to understand and interpret social justice issues and challenges principals experience in their schools in a Midwest state. This study provided principals with an opportunity to describe their day-to-day experiences related to social justice issues and their concerns as leaders. This study also provided more profound insight into social justice issues and challenges principals face in addressing them.

Gathering more information about social justice issues in different schools would be valuable for policy makers who envision to improve education quality through decent learning conditions and efficient school leadership.
For instance, additional research could be carried out emphasizing the development of strategies to enable principals to overcome social justice issues as they evolve according to society. Enabling principals to efficiently address social justice issues would be an asset for schools where these issues are more crucial because they constitute strong barriers to their progress.

Findings from this study have contributed to the existing of literature that addressed social justice issues that principals face. However, there is still areas that I did not explore in this study. For these reasons, future study could even explore how and what principals could do to effectively prevent and crack down social justice issues in schools.

**Recommendations**

Almost all my study participants willingly agreed to participate in this study to share their experiences and challenges related to social justice issues. They expressed their commitment to improve learning conditions by addressing social justice issues that cause bottlenecks to students’ progress and education in general. These recommendations are based on the findings concerning social justice issues and principals’ views, and they do not reflect my personal opinions.

**Recommendations for Education Leaders**

In order to build social justice skills in principals, higher educational leaders should integrate social justice programs in their university programs throughout the country to prepare them. Developing tailored social justice programs for principals would increase their leadership capabilities and their strong contribution to education development in the country. In addition to the existing programs that prepare new principals, it is also important for universities to organize regular professional development for their graduates in-service to refresh their social justice skills.
**Recommendations for Principals**

It is important for principals to organize a student, and parents’ general assembly every each school year to discuss social justice issues with them and agree on how they can handle them together to improve the situation in schools. The reason is that some individuals may understand social justice issues in different ways and interpret principals’ decisions in different ways, so they may not support them. Additionally, principals should also regularly sensitize parents concerning their children’s education in general and ask them to commit their time to educate their children how to do social justice by following values, such as nonviolence, respect, acceptance of others, empathy, and tolerance. Finally, principals should take advantage of the existing relationships with parents to clearly communicate and establish mutual understanding among them to guide students in the same direction for their success.

**Summary and Concluding Thoughts**

This study sought to understand and interpret principals’ experiences with social justice issues and major barriers they face in address them. I collected from 12 principals, using semi-structured interviews in one Midwest state. Findings indicate that principals experience multiple social justice issues and they face various barriers in their efforts to address these issues. The principals in this study they are social justice warriors, addressing many issues on a daily basis. They experience ongoing resistance to change, and can at times feel overwhelmed by the social justice issues they face. Most importantly, in order to succeed, such principals must receive adequate training within their university programs, and continue to receive the needed support and understanding, district, and community stakeholders.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Recruitment Letter Scripts (e-mail, phones, etc.)

Recruitment Letter Scripts (e-mail, phone, etc.)

Hello, my name is Djimtibaye Otalbaye, I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership, Research and Technology at Western Michigan University (WMU), working with Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer as my Chair.

I would like to invite you to participate in a request study designed to explore school principals’ experiences dealing with social justice issues in their work as school leaders. This study may be an opportunity for you to help deepen our knowledge and understanding of your profession, with a special attention to experiences, social justice issues, and strategies you utilize to overcome them.

I am looking for potential participants who meet the following criteria: they are principals from public schools of the great Kalamazoo and have at least two years-experience. To participate, you have to agree to be interviewed. Participation will involve an in-depth interview that will be audio recorded at a convenient time for you in a private room at your workplace, or other location of your choosing. All information will be kept confidential and the interview will last approximately an hour.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me, Djimtibaye Otalbaye, by email: Djimtibaye.otalbaye@wmich.edu and provide your name and phone number; or telephone me at (269) 568-1696. I will contact you by email or by phone to review the details of the study and your interest in participating. A date, time and location will then be identified for the interview.

Thank you very much for your consideration

Sincerely,

Djimtibaye Otalbaye
Appendix B

Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form - School Principals
Western Michigan University
College of Education and Human Development

Principal Investigator: Dr. Louann Biorlein Palmer
Student Investigator: Djeimitbaye Otalbeye

Title of Study: Exploring Principals’ Experience with Social Justice Issues in Their Work as School Leaders

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled, Exploring Principals’ Experiences with Social Justice Issues in Their Work as School Leaders. This project will serve Djeimitbaye Otalbeye’s dissertation project for the requirements of Ph. D. in educational Leadership, concentration: Organizational Analysis. This consent form will explain the purpose of this research and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read carefully this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
The purpose of this study is twofold: (a) It is designed to describe and interpret how principals make meaning of their experiences and professional challenges in dealing with issues of social justice and equity. In gathering this information, we hope to have a better understanding of high school principals’ social justice issues in their work. (b) The study also aims to find out what school principals do to overcome these leadership issues.

Who can participate in this study?
You can participate in this study if you are (1) a school principal in the great Kalamazoo area (2), you are between the ages of 28 through 75 years; (3) you agree to be interviewed and recorded/audiotaped.

Where will the study take place?
Interviews will take place in a private office or conference room at the participant’s workplace.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
The interview that will last between 35-45 minutes. Several weeks following the member check, I will e-mail you an individual interview summary and I will ask you to read this summary and respond to the e-mail with feedback about the summary. If you take the interview and do the member checking, you will have a total time commitment ranging from one hour to one hour and 45 minutes.
What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
Before interviewing you, the student researcher will ask you to sign the consent form document. Next, the student researcher will ask you to take part in a face-to-face interview. During this interview, the student researcher will ask you to describe your experiences and social justice issues you face as a principal in your school. Besides, he will ask you to tell what you do to overcome these social justice issues and what supports you get from other people (family, teachers, staff, other principals, and your supervisors). At the end of the interview you will be asked to fill a background information form.

What information is being measured during the study?
In seeking the ways in which we can find out what social justice issues school principals are facing in their positions and their daily experiences, I will interview school principals to collect data that is representative of current situation in their position. In gathering and measuring this data, we hope to have a better understanding of school principals’ social justice challenges in the U.S.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?
I will anticipate minimal risks to you while participating in this research. Expected risks include feelings of discomfort in recalling or revealing information during our interview. In case you experience strong emotional responses during the interview, I will make a referral to appropriate professionals in your area, at your request. You will be responsible for the cost of counseling if you choose to seek it.

What are the benefits involved in participating in this study?
There are no direct benefits to the participants in this study. However, participating in the study may provide you with an opportunity to express your feelings, professional viewpoints, and experiences related to social justice issues. By describing your social justice issues you may face in your position and by sharing your lived experiences, you will help other principals to better understand what to do to overcome these leadership challenges. You may help happy to be a part of this process because your experiences and opinions matter. You may gain knowledge enabling you to make improved decisions regarding school leadership and social justice issues in your setting. The information you provide may be used to contribute to the research literature on school leadership and to increase the understanding of helping other principals become better leaders. The results may have benefits for your educational career.

Are there any costs associated in participating in the study?
There will be no costs associated with participating in this study.
Is there any compensation associated with participating in the study?
There will be no compensation associated with participating in this study. Participation is strictly voluntary.

Who will have access to the information collected in this study?
Djimtilaye Otelbae will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding pseudonym. The principal investigator is the other person to access the information collected. Finally, the participant will also access the information through the member checking of the interview transcripts.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?
You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer at 269-387-3596 or you may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent form document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please print your name

Participant’s signature
Appendix C

Interview Questions


Date: 

Location: 

Pseudonym: 

Hello, (Pseudonym), this is Djimtibaye Otalbye. As agreed, the purpose of our meeting today is to discuss social justice issues you face in your school. The main goal of this research is to explore your experiences with social justice issues, and the strategies you utilize to solve social justice issues.

Thank you for consenting to participate in this research study. During this interview, I will be asking you open-ended questions about social justice issues you face. The interview will be recorded for the accuracy of this study. Before we begin, if you have any questions you can ask me.

The central question guiding this study will be: How do principals experience and respond to social justice issues when leading their schools? Specific research questions include:

I) What social justice issues are principals facing in their schools?

Please tell me how many years you have been an educator, and what made you decide to become a principal.

1). When you hear the phrase “social justice issues” what types of things come to mind?

2). What social justice issues are you currently facing, or have faced, as principal in your school?

3). Which of these issues has been the most challenging?

4). What conditions contribute to these issues?

5). What meaning do you make of these social justice issues?
II) **What strategies do principals utilize and what challenges do they face in responding to those social justice issues?**

6). What strategies do you utilize to address each of these social justice issues?

7). How well have your strategies worked? / Which of your strategies worked better?

8). What challenges do you face in responding to these social justice issues?

9). Where do these challenges come from?

III) **What training on social justice have such principals received in their leadership preparation programs, or via professional development?**

10) What specific training related to social justice issues either within your university principal preparation program or subsequent professional development have you had?

IV) **What supports do they receive from other principals, families, and others in dealing with these issues?**

11). What support do other people (staff, teachers, other principals, students, parents, supervisors, and family) provide you to help handle social justice issues? Who do you most turn to in seeking advice on how to handle a given issue?

12). What else could help you better address social justice issues apart from these supports?

V) **How do their experiences with social justice issues and challenges shape their sense of purpose and approach to leadership principals?**

13). How do your experiences with social justice issues and challenges shape your sense of purpose and approach to leadership as principal?

14). What lessons have you learned in reference to leading people to address social justice issues?
Appendix D

HSIRB Approval Letter

Date:       June 11, 2018

To:         Louann Bierlein Palmer, Principal Investigator
            Djintibaye Otalbaye, Student Investigator for dissertation

From:       Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re:         HSIRB Project Number 17-09-30

This letter will serve as confirmation that the changes to your research project titled “Exploring
Principals’ Experiences with Social Justice Issues in Their Work as School Leaders” requested in
your memo received June 8, 2018 (to remove principal investigator Patricia Reeves; to add
principal investigator Louann Bierlein Palmer) have been approved by the Human Subjects
Institutional Review Board.

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western
Michigan University.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You
must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval
if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any
unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this
research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for
consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination:          October 10, 2018