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The Potential Impact of Creating a Justice and Equity Credential on Student Achievement
and A&I Retention & Persistence

by

Jeremy J. Rupp

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctorate in Education.

Hamline University

St. Paul, Minnesota

May 2024

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To those who want to help all students make it through our fraught educational system, especially those serving in Achievement and Integration, you are beautiful.

To the very few educators who worked to see some good in me... thank you from the depths of my soul.

To all educators everywhere, I know the job is difficult. Never forget you are impacting real people with real emotions and real dreams... handle them with extreme care.

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the potential impact of introducing a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration (A&I) License on educational equity in Minnesota. Drawing on a comprehensive literature review and original empirical data collected through surveys and interviews, the study investigates the efficacy of credentialing and licensing frameworks in addressing systemic disparities in educational systems pointed at both students and practitioners of A&I. The findings underscore the critical need for targeted interventions to promote equity in A&I programming, highlighting the role of professional development, cultural responsiveness, and accountability in supporting staff retention and fostering equitable outcomes for all students. Through a grounded theory approach, the research identifies key themes and patterns emerging from the data, providing valuable insights into the challenges facing A&I efforts and the potential benefits of credentialing and licensing initiatives. The study also situates its findings within the broader context of educational equity in Minnesota, drawing on the work of scholars such as Darling-Hammond and Muhammad to underscore the transformative potential of credentialing and licensing frameworks in addressing the achievement and opportunity gap (AOG). Ultimately, the research contributes to ongoing discussions around the importance of systemic change in promoting educational equity, advocating for the implementation of credentialing and licensing initiatives as part of broader efforts to foster student success and ensure equitable access to educational opportunities for all students. By synthesizing theoretical insights with empirical evidence, this paper offers an understanding of the role of credentialing and licensing initiatives in enhancing educational equity in Minnesota and provides actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders invested in promoting equitable outcomes for all students.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview of the Chapter

One of the greatest disparities in our education system is often referred to as the achievement and opportunity gap (AOG) (Muhammad, 2015). Brightbeam (2020) went into depth describing what the AOG is, speaking to the two main areas where gaps are identified; achievement and opportunity. Mooney (2018) highlighted the importance of addressing opportunity instead of exclusively addressing achievement. While it is everyone's obligation to serve all students in our public schools and our students' constitutional right to an education, the state of Minnesota has a group of identified groups of A&I educators who specifically focus on addressing the AOG. The Minnesota Department of Education oversees the program of Achievement and Integration (A&I), and while all other educators, specialists, and administrators are required to possess a credential and a license to work in their respective fields, A&I educators are not. There is research validating that highly credentialed educators produce better outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This group of educators is held to a different set of standards than other educators, one that requires more extensive credentials and licensing (Minnesota Department of Education, 2024).

While I proceed through this chapter, it is important to establish one of the most operative words in educational efforts in our current structure: equity. This term means different things to different people, and often produces a variety of reactions upon its usage. Moving forward, I would like to establish what the word equity means for the sake of this research as a reference for the exploration of credentials and licenses serving

Minnesota's Achievement and Integration programming, largely grounded in addressing the AOG and commonly seen as an equity issue (Muhammad, 2015).

In the article, *The Term Equity in Education: A Literature Review with Scientific Mapping in Web of Science* (2020) by Jurado de Los Santos et al., the scientific community mapped the evolution of the term to its current understanding of equity within education. While synthesizing the robust and important research, the detailed delineation made by Costa et al. stated conclusively that

Acting under the principles of equity involves developing education policies that favor compensatory education, inclusive education, and equitable education. At the macro-political level of the school organization, this means that stakeholders must create legislation, regulations, and actions that make it possible for schools to develop these equity policies. This requires human, material, and technical resources, as well as the sharing of the ideology that these principles imply and which have been set out throughout the article. Only with a joint action of the different persons responsible for the education system can educational equity be achieved, favoring the integral development of students and their incorporation into society in their lifelong learning process. (p. 14)

According to this operational definition, education policies should favor compensatory education and require human, material, and technical resources to move toward the manifestation of equity within educational systems and structures. Further, only joint action by those in positions of power are capable of ensuring its progression. If those working in A&I are not positioned equally to the power of the structure, then the realization of equity within educational institutions will not happen (Costa et al., 2020).

Educational institutional power and position are fully symbiotic to credentials and licenses.

This brings me to the problem at hand. From my own life experiences and decades of years working within the field of educational equity advancement, it has become clear to me that those serving within the structure of Minnesota's Achievement and Integration programming are not positioned equitably within Minnesota's preK-12 system while those in A&I work to push for equity in addressing the AOG. In my estimation, this is problematic, especially when referencing Costa et al. and their findings surrounding the contextual and scientific understanding and underpinnings of educational equity. Within the state of Minnesota, credentials exclusively determine a person's capacity to rise in authority and institutional oversight. Equity, within this capacity, will act as a foundation for the conversation and research at hand and should be understood even as I share my own story. If those who are positioned with exacting specificity to address the AOG through the context of helping manifest educational equity and yet themselves are not positioned equitably to do this work, they are not capable of accomplishing this work (Costa et al., 2020). This is compounded by the fact that copious research shows high quality credentials and licenses increase positive student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2010). My personal story is driven by my own tangential experience with educational inequity, and is the driving force behind my decades of work, schooling, and research.

In this chapter, I share my research questions, positionality, and personal story including my personal work within Achievement and Integration (A&I) programming in Minnesota. I explain my journey into educational work starting with my own educational

experience as a student through my work as an Integration Specialist working under Achievement and Integration funding. Additionally, I share my thoughts and thought process on why I believe the idea of creating an A&I license should be explored. Describing my positionality, experiences and some of the preliminary research in comparative analysis, I draw a clear line for why one of the most important educational groups in the state of Minnesota (serving the AOG) deserves a thorough examination and evaluation in research and consideration to join the other public school professional educators and specialists in a process shown to increase positive outcomes for students, and recruitment, retention, and persistence for those working in Achievement and Integration in Minnesota's public schools. This draws me to the research questions poised to evaluate the potential merit of such a credential and license.

- *How might a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration license impact the outcomes of Achievement and Integration work in Minnesota?*
- *What impacts might it have on the outcomes of the achievement/opportunity gap ubiquity in professional practice and research, and staff retention and persistence?*
- *What might a culturally responsive credential and license look like?*

There are several potential implications to this research. First, a credential would create, like other specialist areas, a community-based revolving door of research in the field of A&I. Currently in A&I, disruptive innovation is the standard of practice. This continued research in various communities across the state may create more efficacious outcomes in A&I work, having vetted practice through the filter of research reform and the practice of ad-hocism as defined by Darling-Hammond (2006). Another implication

of this research is the potential direct impact made in the Achievement Opportunity Gap (AOG) across the state. With more research-based practices happening, the presupposition would be increased efficacy in outcomes, working to address one of the largest national disparities between high and low-performing groups, found right here in Minnesota. While there are a multiplicity of reasons for the potential implementation of a justice and equity credential and an achievement and integration license, one of the strongest reasons would be to create an aligned field of practice establishing baselines and foundations in cyclical research powered by practice. This is fundamental to educational practice and clearly absent with continuity in achievement and integration work/efforts.

With little to no research existing on a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement & Integration license in the state of Minnesota, this research topic has the capacity to greatly expand the body of knowledge surrounding the AOG. It has both in-state and national implications, creating case-study opportunities among many other pathways. While this research looks specifically at state-based Minnesota considerations, the potential follow-up research has vast and varied possibilities including an exploration of Title I adoption at the federal level.

Not limited to student outcomes, this research possesses the possibility of creating a new career field with increasing research, recruitment, retention, and persistence of those working in A&I. Randler, Luffer and Müller (2015) demonstrated in their research the power of structure within retention and persistence, showing a clear line toward value in credentialing and licensing. If results of the study and conclusion of real-world implementation happen, public schools in the state of Minnesota will benefit from

credentialed and licensed A&I staff being treated more equitably, paid more fairly, engaged more frequently (in credentialed groups they are not often included in), and retain and persist at much higher rates. This would inevitably lead to an increase in recruitment outcomes too. Prior research I have done called *Social Justice and Human Rights Educator Burnout* (Rupp, 2020) on social justice and human rights educator burnout (SJHREB) and how to intercept it, shows clearly that credentials and licenses increase recruitment, retention, and persistence for numerous occupations, with even higher percentages in educational fields. Milfont et al. (2008) echoed this through their research exploring overlapping and intersecting issues. With the multiplicity of potential positive impacts and the preexisting viability in related arenas, there remains a moral obligation of academic exploration, seeking to find through research if what is posited as indeed true. Friesen and Sarros (1989) worked early on in recognizing the reality of burnout, especially among educators. As AOG persists and expands (Minnesota Department of Education, 2024), attrition and burnout in the work of A&I are among the highest in industry (Gorski, 2019), and a synecdoche of research shows that credentialing and licensing in other fields shows strong promise in a comparative analysis of addressing all of these issues (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Grant and Gibson (2013) talked about the incredible importance of the work addressing the AOG with specificity to the arena of social justice in education, painting a clear picture of its historical relevance in the current world.

While understanding the culture of “othering” which happens in educational institutions surrounding those in diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) work, the non-existence of a credential and license compounds the “othering”. Guglielmi and

Tatrow (1998) showed clearly how this impacts educators, and there is a compounding impact on those within the field of A&I (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003). Further, while “othering” persists as a systemic issue for those working in DEIJ work, research supports the inefficacies of popcorn reform (Darling-Hammond, 2010) which is oftentimes a byproduct of not baselining best-practice, often driven out of the cycle ad hocism where practice drives research creating continuity and ubiquity in practice (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Certainly, there is a speculative consideration, that while there may be no single solution in addressing the AOG and the othering of those in DEIJ educational work through A&I, the possibility a credential and license possessed within the craft, may logically lead to a lessening of male-perceptive perspective and treatment. Addressing the AOG through A&I has additional merit for being addressed too. The potential negative health implications exist as a reality. Leiter et al. (2013) explored through a two-year study the health implications of burnout, impacted through credentials and licenses (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Maslach (1999; 2016) demonstrated thoroughly that the impact on institutional and occupational advancement within many fields is negatively impacted by the loss of veteran employees, often predicated on burnout, clearly drawing a line to credentials and its impact on institutional and professional advancement.

My Own Educational Story

Considering my own educational story and how the system failed me in many ways, the gravity of thought pulling me to the consideration of how ad hocism research inadvertently addressing the inefficacies of popcorn reform (often the result of not centering research institutionally) may have produced better outcomes in my own life, naturally leads me to consider how a credential and license may support others wandering

down a similar educational path. While I consider the vast implications and potential outcomes, I am compelled to proceed rooted in my own story as I was a casualty of the educational system. Pucella (2011) showed how educational systems are fraught with occupational fatigue. While there are large swaths of emerging research on the importance of mental health, social and emotional learning, and the importance of equipping educators to support emotionally sensitive learners like I was, there is still a deep need to give an equal platform for those doing this difficult work to fully support our public school learners (Leiter et al., 2013). It becomes vital to create a system that reinvigorates educators and restores zest for the work of A&I (Potter, 2009). Knowing that growth is still needed in this area, other professions such as A&I exist that are even more ill-equipped in training, knowledge, and structural continuity of ad hocism. I regularly reflect on this, which invariably catapults me back to my own story.

I was born in the fall of 1975 in Soldotna, Alaska, boarded a plane, and flew north at two-days-old to my newly-found adoptive parents in Glennallen, Alaska. My adopting parents were a medical missionary and a music teacher from Minnesota. My father had just harvested a trophy moose that he had to leave with his friends to carry out of the Alaskan wilderness so he could race back to meet me, his new son, as I had arrived a bit earlier than he had expected. This all happened only three months after my parents had returned to Alaska with my brother whom they had adopted from Bogota, Columbia. Over the next decade, my parents adopted a total of four kids. Two were from Columbia, one from Brazil, and I was from Alaska. None of us looked related and yet we became a very close and tight-knit family.

After some time had passed, my family returned to my parents' state of Minnesota and moved into a house in Shoreview. There I attended preschool and was eventually pulled from it due to my anxiety. Every day my mother would drop me off and I would cry the entire time until she picked me up. I feel like I can remember that place and remember it being chaotic and extremely loud.

At the early age of five, with a birthday in early September, I started school in the Mounds View public school system at Island Lake Elementary. I accelerated fast in school and as they started to separate students early during this time, I was put into more advanced groups. In first grade, I remember my teacher who loved frogs, and his classroom was decorated in the theme of frogs. I was a high-energy emotional child and one day I brought one of my favorite stuffed animal bean bag frogs to school. I was throwing it around because frogs jump and it was taken away and never given back to me. Although this may seem small, I remember it upset me and put a sour taste in my mouth for school. Unfortunately, as I look back on my school years I see this seemingly small event as the catalyst for losing a love of learning.

At the end of first grade, my parents moved us to Kenya, East Africa. There I was left at boarding school in Kijabe, Kenya at a school called Rift Valley Academy. This was a missionary boarding school and although it was an excellent school, my recent first-grade frog experience coupled with my highly emotional self and some other relevant factors had me start down a path of educational disdain. My parents moved to Uganda while my brother and I attended boarding school in Kenya. Although there were many good things about this experience, my high energy, lack of ability to focus, and strong emotions quickly got me into a lot of trouble.

With a lack of understanding and empathy, my intrinsic motivation for learning tapered off very quickly, and by fourth grade, I no longer cared about doing well in school. This carried through almost the totality of my educational experience, even manifesting early on in my first attempt at graduate school. With my boarding school placing a high value on academic rigor and surrounded by students who all seemed to be committed to overachieving, I felt a deep alienation to my school that ultimately filled me with hurt and anger. I was constantly getting into trouble and only connected with a couple of staff members over the totality of my K-12 schooling experience. During my time in high school, I had only connected with two other students, also sharing similar feelings to perspectives on our school.

I have deep gratitude to my parents who helped push me through the K-12 experience and made college a non-negotiable. Although I did not make it through the system unscathed, I made it through nonetheless and enrolled at Northwestern College in Roseville, Minnesota. Even though I did not enjoy my K-12 schooling experience, Northwestern provided an environment full of rules, something that felt familiar and comfortable to me. This was important as I was alone in the Midwest while I began college. My brother was attending school in New York and the rest of my family was back in Kenya. All of the students I had attended high school with were scattered all over the world and the connectivity of the internet was limited to dial-up modems and limited email access. Additionally, the Twin Cities was a familiar place and all the factors of my college experience helped me to thrive socially.

Eventually, one of my sisters came to the same college I was attending and we made it a point to take classes together for fun. It was during this time that I saw a unique

style of American ignorance show its ignorant face. As my sister is Latino and our college was predominantly White, almost every professor in every class we took together asked my sister outing and embarrassing questions, essentially asking my sister to answer for the entire Latino population, an early and common mistake made within the context of white privilege. This coupled with my observations and experiences in youth work made it clear to me that America suffered from something that was just being named, white privilege.

After cramming four years of college into six, I found myself working as a YMCA Camp Director in West Saint Paul. Although I developed angst and contempt for educational institutions, I held a deep affinity and empathy for youth in the system struggling with similar systemic institutional shortcomings that I experienced. I wanted nothing to do with school work at the time and had majored in psychology in my undergraduate schooling. Working at the YMCA allowed me to connect and work with students and communities that were also, in some regard, alienated by our educational institutions, but I was not required to enter any schools.

After working at several grassroots nonprofit community youth organizations, I saw a job posting in a Sunday newspaper that made my heart skip a beat. Osseo Area School District was hiring for a position I had never heard about before and by the very name, resonated with me instantly to my core: “Cultural Liaison”. According to the job description, this position would work between two elementary schools, one in Maple Grove and one in Brooklyn Park. Maple Grove was an affluent and predominantly white community, while Brooklyn Park’s population was mostly BIPOC and lower-income. I knew from my journey and employment that Brooklyn Park was a community where our

schools were failing. The primary point of this position was to help reduce the achievement gap in BIPOC communities.

At the time, I was working as a behavioral specialist in North Minneapolis serving families through teaching toddlers who had identified behavioral or developmental challenges. This job was a labor of love and required that I work two other additional jobs to pay my bills. Fortunately, I was extended an interview and acquired the job in a Twin Cities school district. This job was a relatively large pay increase but still only paid a percentage of what similarly qualified teachers in the district were paid. I accepted the position and was quickly onboarded with additional struggles the position was facing.

In one school district where I worked, there were eighteen Cultural Liaisons and two Coordinator positions. The welcoming of this new department was not a warm one, and the position I was hired into was responsible for two schools from which the former employee had just been let go. On my very first day in one of the schools, I was invited to participate in a field trip to General Mills, where our school was participating in a mentorship program. After a small tour of the school, I was told it was time to leave for the field trip and I boarded the bus with the other students. The principal at the time invited me to come to ride with her in her vehicle along with the assistant principal. I accepted. I sat in the back seat of the car and was welcomed by dead silence. I was trying to carefully figure out what to say when my thoughts were interrupted by the principal who said almost verbatim that she wanted me to know that I had nothing to offer the students that they did not already provide for them. I simply answered that I wanted to help the students, families, and community in any way I could, and I quickly realized that

my work with the administration and staff was going to be much harder than the difficult work I already knew was awaiting me with the students.

We were a unique department within the district. Our monies at the time came from Achievement and Integration funding (which was called “Desegregation Funding” at the time). The eighteen Cultural Liaisons came from diverse former professional walks and almost all of us left our work for this work, knowing the importance and purpose these positions intended to address. We were not unionized, only a couple were former educators, and in our group of eighteen, only two of us were white. Although a significant amount of planning had gone into the preparation and rollout of this department, nothing could have addressed the implicit bias that was waiting to be unleashed on our group.

I worked diligently in the role for five years and won over the admiration and support of those two principals who had attacked my purpose and person that very first day. That job taught me eternal lessons and cemented in me my passion for the work I have done now for twenty-two years. During my time there, I sat on the negotiations committee, furthering my learning regarding the vast inequities that plagued a group that intended to bring equity to our communities. Twenty-two years later, working in a different district, I can tell you that the genesis for the pushback our department received in this school district has only changed in minor ways. I understand that every district has a different culture, but I also understand that in any organization the temperature is often set by the leaders and institutional policy.

I finished my ninth year in my current school district this past fall after having worked a decade in higher education focused on BIPOC access, retention, and

persistence. I have a bachelor's degree, and a master's degree, and I am currently finishing my doctorate program. I still see a blatant lack of respect and treatment offered to the group I have worked with and although I have earned the respect of the building and district staff, this group is still not treated equitably, even as we work under the title "Office of Education Equity". Lastly, and very importantly, this group is paid about 40% less than similarly qualified district professionals (ISD709, 2024). This includes teachers, psychologists, social workers, speech and language pathologists, and numerous other professional groups.

All of these factors add further to the support of a credential and license. While there are vast implications looking correlatively on student outcomes, there are additional impacts on recruitment, retention, and persistence of professionals working in the field of A&I and are most certainly implicated by a lack of ad hocism, equitable tenure, and the capacity for traditional retention efforts often found in steps and lanes, increasing in meaningful and equitable capacities, the earning potential and hierarchical advancement of those in A&I. As an educational leader and a departmental head overseeing roughly 150 staff, nine programs, and a compounding \$8MM revenue-generating budget, the clarity of inequitable, divergent, and disparate systems of credentialing, licensing, and systems embedded for recruitment, retention, and persistence located under the same governmental institution is stark and unfortunate. This lack of clarity surrounding inequitable, divergent, and disparate systems is exacerbated by those A&I intentions to serve, and the metrics the state holds A&I programming to. Might a credential and license in this field serving over half a million students help address these issues? Logic begs the research questions and exploration, at a minimum.

To participate at the table, in leadership groups, and be embedded equally in the Minnesota public school system seems logical at its foundation. While the AOG in Minnesota widens, how does it serve our structural system to not fully embed a department (A&I) focused with laser-exacting precision, those addressing metrics and supporting communities that have been at the forefront of inequitable outcomes spanning decades and geography? While the research still needs to be done, my own narrative, rooted in personally high emotion and a troubled schooling experience, becomes an educational leader's catalyst for the further exploration of an A&I credential and license. It may help serve our students and A&I educators better.

Creating An Achievement And Integration License

I have struggled with the knowledge during the totality of my career that education institutions profess hypocrisy surrounding equity. Educational institutions profess the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion as cornerstones of educational values, yet treat their professionals working in this space inequitably. My Master's capstone was called *Social Justice and Human Rights Educator Burnout and How to Intercept It* (Rupp, 2020). One of my key findings was that retention of social justice and human rights educators are paramount in progressing to a more equitable educational system and decreasing the achievement gap. Across the board, fair pay and equitable treatment are fundamental in intercepting occupational burnout in general (Rupp, 2020).

Achievement and Integration specialists in Minnesota school districts work for equity and are unfortunately treated inequitably. In my current school district, there are almost the same number of Integration Specialists (the title of those working at building sites under Achievement and Integration funding) as Speech and Language pathologists.

In many situations, Integration Specialists are paid nearly half of what a Speech and Language Pathologist makes while having longer contract calendars. This is reflective of almost every other group of specialists within our district.

Each specialist that currently exists in our schools is there because of a need that was shown creating barriers to learning and achievement (MDE, 2024). How is it that after 25 years of Achievement and Integration work, the work of equity has not been equally identified as a licensable necessity? It is unquestionable that the work A&I does addresses one of the most heinous and systemic inequities within our educational system, creating national educational campaigns and funding to address an issue that has a name synonymous with education itself, the Achievement Opportunity Gap. The need for addressing the AOG is made blatantly clear through countless research, including that of Darling-Hammond. *The Flat World and Education* (2010) captured a fairly large-sized cross-section of this work and acts as a synecdoche to the greater body of research.

After my many years of love given to my field, fighting for educational equity, and being surrounded by some of the best people I know working toward the same end, I can say with abject clarity that it is time to create a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license, making permanent the funding for districts to address educational equity issues. We know that educational outcomes have racial implications (Muhammad, 2015). There is seemingly unending research showing that the designation of a person's race impacts the potential educational outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2010). How long must a persistent educational problem persist in Minnesota before it receives the full institutional support that is needed to address the inequity? Symbiotically, it is time for colleges and universities to create degree programs

that make this possible. There was a time not too long ago when a Master's in Speech and Language Pathology did not exist. The need was shown, the educational positions and programs were created, and its existence in school districts was quickly normalized. In the recent Minnesota court case, *Cruz-Guzman vs. State of Minnesota*, Minnesota's only Black Justice, Chief Justice Hudson, issued her own separate dissent. Chief Justice Hudson followed the long history of Redlining (housing segregation) in the Twin Cities (Dernbach, 2023). This goes back to *Booker v. Minneapolis Schools I* and will be looked at later. Chief Justice Hudson further identified "...racially restrictive housing covenants and discriminatory housing finance policies. She explained that residential segregation has persisted over the decades and continues to cause de facto racial segregation in schools" (Dernbach, 2023, par. 14). Chief Justice Hudson went on to talk about segregation within schools saying,

When schools become racial silos, students lack the opportunity to deconstruct racial biases and forge lasting social bonds. I would hold that the de facto segregation in Minneapolis and Saint Paul public schools is sufficient, standing alone, to establish a violation of the Education Clause. (Dernbach, 2023, par. 14)

Almost all educators are required to acquire CEU's that include equity coursework. Hamline University itself has embedded the issue of equity as foundational in its curriculum and instruction. With the movement of social justice in America and Minnesota acting as a flashpoint for racial bias, I can imagine almost no better reaction than validating a quantitative and qualitative educational need as thoughtfully creating a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license and permanency in positions within our schools across the state, and hopefully the country.

Certainly, the full viability of a credential and license is embedded in the research questions in what is being explored. While academics and addressing the AOG is key, even the health of A&I practitioners is on the line (Yan, 2020).

I have had countless conversations with sharp minds including those with decades of experience in both education and social justice and human rights education. Equitable treatment for social justice and human rights educators is an educational necessity. In the past year, the inequities that plague our educational system (and Minnesota above most states) have been significantly exacerbated through COVID 19, drawing even further illumination on the need for this significant, important, and meaningful work.

There is an overarching understanding that when you increase the wellness of one group, all groups will inherently do better. Some have used the analogy of a rising tide which raises all ships. This applies to education as much, if not more, than other areas of life. As we look to the future and consider the vast implications of educational outcomes and see the perpetuation of inequity saturating our educational structures leading to stark disparities in almost every area of life including health and wealth, it is our moral obligation to address the inequities. Education exists in part (if not in whole) to create spaces for the positive development of self determination. Perpetual reflexivity in our educational structures is a mandate of moral consciousness and epistemic contextualism demands that educators view with scrutiny our systems in an effort to constantly increase equity for the sake of learners' lives. Epistemic contextualism speaks to our individual attributions often called “attributor contextualism” (Celikates & Flynn, 2023) and identifies the importance of the context behind attributors. Ingesting and synthesizing this idea, it becomes blatantly apparent that systems developed to provide a service with such

vast implications on self-determination must be consistently scrutinized and if systemic systems failure is identified, these systems must be fixed for moral righteousness' sake. If a group of people are being held back by the system, everyone is being held back. Systemic educational injustice thematic in its injustice means that not changing or rebuilding the system is morally foundational. Not participating in the reconstruction or adaptation of this system ensures complicity in it. If a branch or department of a system is found to be inequitable, especially when addressing systemic educational inequities, whatever those systems-based institutional inequities are, must be amended or reconstructed. Inequity among those addressing inequity is a compounding inequity and is at its core, a human moral failure requiring collective action. Collective action to injustice in part, is collective action to injustice everywhere, helping us all do better as opposed to just some.

Chapter Summary

While the consideration of educational equity remains at the forefront of many people's efforts, it is imperative that the namesake of educational equity maintains such treatment to itself as a means of ideological purity, and pursues educational equity in a way that is permeated in equity. The questions driving this research which intend to pursue the ideals of educational equity are;

- *How might a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration license impact the outcomes of Achievement and Integration work?*
- *What impacts might it have on the outcomes of the achievement/opportunity gap, ubiquity in professional practice and research, and staff retention and persistence?*

- *What might a culturally responsive credential and license look like?*

It is my intention to parse out the various facets that would help to further define and prove the viability for creating an Achievement and Integration license. Although on the front end, I do not see this as a “silver bullet”, I am confident that if this came to fruition, it would help make huge strides toward decreasing the elusive achievement gap. Imagine for a minute what our schools would look like, feel like, and accomplish if all of the other specialists in all of our public school buildings across the state did not require graduate degrees or licenses. Social workers' efforts are supported through their credentials and license. Psychologists' effectiveness is supported through their credentials and licenses. According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), Speech and Language Pathologists learn their craft and gain their expertise through their credentials and licenses (2024). While a credential and license is not always required for competency, it is the standard of practice among public school specialists as demonstrated through the requirement and efforts surrounding credentials and licenses.

The inequities I encountered in my own educational journey as shared in my story are the platform for my life's work. Twenty-five years of my life have been dedicated to serving marginalized communities because of my own marginalization. My master's, a state-level educational policy fellowship, a national education policy fellowship, and now my doctorate all have the same purpose: educational equity. If we can do things more effectively we should. If we can help more people meaningfully, we should. In education, quality credentials and licenses increase outcomes for students, recruit and persist staff at statistically higher levels (Darling-Hammond, 2010), and can result in reducing profoundly impactful educational ad-hocism. These are practices in all specialist fields in

Minnesota, except A&I. The research that lays before me intends to closely examine these curiosities and find out if these questions of my perseverance have merit. I am here today in spite of inequity and intend to muster what I must to change a system that serves all equitably.

Equity holds paramount importance within our educational systems, as education holds the transformative power to equalize opportunities for disenfranchised communities beyond their completion of public schooling. Without a unified commitment to upholding best practices and ensuring that all individuals engaged in this vital work are afforded equitable opportunities to thrive and serve their communities, we risk perpetuating systems of oppression embedded within the educational framework. In doing so, we squander a critical opportunity to effectively narrow the achievement gap and substantiate the verbal support often extended to this cause with the equitable tools necessary for tangible progress. Paulo Friere in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) said it well, “Looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future” (p. 84).

Chapter Two is a literature review of the history of achievement and integration, its beginnings, where it is today, and an exploration of credentialing and licensing. Chapter Three will explore the research paradigm, theoretical framework, data collection tools, and data analysis. Chapter Four will present the research findings. Chapter Five will present the summary, implications, and conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Overview of the Chapter

The literature review and eventual research will consider the questions:

- *How might a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration license impact the outcomes of Achievement and Integration work?*
- *What impacts might it have on the outcomes of the achievement/opportunity gap, ubiquity in professional practice and research, and staff retention and persistence?*
- *What might a culturally responsive credential and license look like?*

There are large levels of research validating that highly credentialed educators produce better outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2010). One of the greatest areas of disparities in our educational system is often referred to as the achievement and opportunity gap (AOG) (Muhammad, 2015). While it is everyone's obligation to serve all students in our public schools and our students' constitutional right to an education, in the state of Minnesota, one identified group of educators is intended, in large part, to solely address the AOG; Achievement and Integration. The Minnesota Department of Education oversees the department of Achievement and Integration (A&I), and while all other educators, specialists, and administrators are required to possess a credential and a license to work in their respective fields, A&I staff are not. A&I educators dedicated to the AOG are not held to the same standards of other experts when research backs the importance of credentials and the process of licensing (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Furthering the efforts and the work with A&I addressing the AOG requires retention and persistence (Espeland,

2006). While there are a multiplicity of reasons to even give consideration for the work of A&I, working smart on top of working hard matters for those in A&I work (Betoret, 2006).

This chapter explores the premise behind how creating an A&I (Achievement and Integration) license might impact the work of A&I. While this work has been going on for decades, researchers such as Downey and Condrón (2016) spoke to the importance of reevaluation of schools and inequality, considering that precedent should not always perpetuate practice. This includes a brief history of A&I within Minnesota where comparative analysis is used, assessing teacher licensing, other specialists, and a small selection of other state-sanctioned licensed groups. Using comparative analysis, exploration of educator credentials and licenses are examined and how they impact student academic outcomes, continuity in research-based practice, engagement of students and classroom management, and teacher recruitment, retention, and persistence. Additionally, there is further exploration on the impact of not having a credential and license on A&I burnout (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski, 2019), exploring Social Justice and Human Rights Educator Burnout (SJHREB).

A History of Achievement & Integration in Minnesota

In this section, the history and origin of A&I are explored detailing the procession from its inception to its current state of affairs. Starting with A&I and its beginnings, a look at the history and litigation that had Minnesota's court system take over Minneapolis schools explores the beginning of A&I. Following the accounting of the litigious origin, an exploration of A&I from 1997 to our very recent history is considered. Finally, A&I in

the current iteration is looked at and referenced to Minnesota's Office of the Legislative Auditor is explored, examining the office's findings from both the 2005 and 2022 reports.

A&I and Its Beginnings

Minnesota has a long and arduous history surrounding educational equity (Grunewald & Nath, 2019). For over 70 years there has been a legal tug-of-war to provide equitable opportunity in the state's public educational system, with its stark disparities in educational outcomes. This battle has not only been about academic achievement, but also other outcomes of inequitable educational opportunities such as financial prospects and health impacts (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998).

A number of documents tell the legal story of Achievement & Integration within Minnesota, but none so thoroughly as Heilman's 1994 research, *Booker v. Special School District No. 1: A History of School Desegregation in Minneapolis, Minnesota*. Although this document does not speak on issues post-1994, almost thirty years ago, it is a comprehensive and detailed outline showing the legal and arduous journey that Minneapolis Public Schools took toward more racially equitable schools that still have not been achieved, and in fact the gaps have widened (Grunewald & Nath, 2019).

On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled unanimously in *Brown v. the Board of Education* that racial segregation violated the 14th Amendment, which prohibits the states from denying equal protection of the laws to any person within their jurisdiction (U.S. Const. amend. XIV). This set in motion battles within many states to pursue educational equity, allowing for the fair educational opportunity of all, including on the basis of race. As educational systems are based independently within states, each state has undergone its own battle to secure its citizens' rights in a way that is not

discriminatory. Minnesota, indeed, has its own unique stories and hardships as we continue to strive toward an educational system that is truly equitable.

Segregation within Minneapolis schools preexisted *Brown v. The Board of Education*. *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537, was a landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision ruling that racial segregation laws did not violate the U.S. Constitution as long as the facilities for each race were equal in quality, a doctrine that came to be known as "separate but equal". The segregation within Minneapolis' schools was a direct result of both residential segregation, caused in part by the racialized housing practice of redlining, and policies implemented by Minneapolis schools, "relating to the size and location of schools, attendance zones, enrollment and transfer policies and teacher assignments" (Heilman, 1994, p. 129). The impact of these policies manifested in vastly polarized schools, both racially and socioeconomically, resulting in large disparities in funding and opportunities, contributing to and exacerbating other disparities across multiple fields.

While redlining was happening in Minneapolis public schools at this time, it was also happening elsewhere; across the United States of America. Redlining had become a seaming standard of practice creating a phenomenon known as white flight. While redlining was the practice of real estate, white flight was the practice of the community tied to the reactionary real estate practice, moving entire white communities out of one community and further into the next ring suburb. *Race the Power of an Illusion* (Adelman, 2003) demonstrated significantly through comprehensive research how this impacted communities across the country, including Minneapolis, Minnesota.

For example, according to Heilman (1994), in 1964 Minneapolis schools added seven new classrooms to Field Elementary to keep the school as an identifiable Black

school in South Minneapolis, while adjacent schools were 100% White. The following year, Minneapolis schools added two portable classrooms to Field Elementary, while two of the bordering White schools were under-enrolled. This action, in concert with many other actions, added to the copious number of undeniable actions taken by Minneapolis schools beckoning for justice through litigation. In addition, Heilman (1994, pp. 130-131) detailed several bold and racist comments made on the applications of teachers of color seeking employment within Minneapolis' schools. Examples include, "a fine physical specimen," "big fat colored woman with seven kids," "a dark-complexioned colored boy with a red vest," and "we can find better-colored candidates" (p. 130). Heilman reported that these findings led to the federal government interceding and theoretically putting a stop to these practices.

Beyond the hiring process, teachers of color experienced their own oppression and segregation, even when hired as equally credentialed teachers within Minneapolis schools. Dr. Joyce Jackson (Heilman, 1994), who was hired by the district in the 1950s, was offered classroom placement serving special education students. After she started, every Black student in the school was assigned to her classroom and it was detailed for serving the "educable mentally retarded" (p.130). These practices persisted and eventually resulted in litigation.

On May 24, 1972, United States District Judge Earl R. Larson determined that Minneapolis Public Schools were in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment in *Booker v. Special School District* (as cited in Heilman, 1994). According to Heilman, it was undisputed that Minneapolis Schools were segregated by race. This was shown through largely disparate enrollment demographics. Minneapolis Schools had three elementary

schools that exceeded seventy percent of minority students, while the entire district had less than ten percent of Black students (Black being the largest minority population of the district at the time).

Tied to this were direct actions from the district that had perpetuated racial segregation. The *Booker Decision* was a cornerstone in Minnesota educational equity litigation (Heilman, 1994). The plaintiffs contended that Minneapolis Schools, their leadership, and the school board had impeded strides toward racial and educational equity within their schools. Judge Larson agreed. The decision included mandates for bussing, along with other requirements which were highly controversial at the time. Part of the legal mandate issued from the court was that no public school was to exceed 35% minority students.

Continuing the attempts to remove court oversight on integration, the district engaged the Eighth District Court of Appeals to discontinue oversight. One month after the conclusion of oral arguments, the court unanimously affirmed Judge Larson's decision. The Eighth District Court of Appeals denied the motion and subsequently, the district filed with the United States Supreme Court as a matter of principle (Heilman, 1994). According to Heilman, Board member Olson stated that the appeal to the United States Supreme Court was intended so as to allow the district to run its own affairs, and not Judge Larson. In the fall of 1979, the United States Supreme Court issued an order refusing to review the district's contention for removal of judicial oversight.

From 1971 to 1981, White enrollment in Minneapolis schools decreased from 58,000 to 29,000, almost decreasing by half and minority enrollment increased from 8,700 to 13,000 (an increase of 67%). At the time, *The Minneapolis Tribune*, one of the

largest local publications, said that racially isolated schools within the district were history. Although no quantitative data exist to state with abject certainty the reasons for the demographic shifts, the narrative remains that it was in large part due to the desegregation of the district. In 1982, as they had previously promised, Minneapolis Schools submitted a long-range desegregation/integration plan to span the next four years.

On June 8, 1983, Judge Larson dissolved his order mandating judicial oversight of the district stating that he was

...convinced that the majority, if not all, of the School Board and the Superintendent and his staff, will support the constitutional rights of the students and will respect the rights of all of our citizens, including students, to the equal protection of the law as required by the Constitution. (Heilman, 1994, p. 172)

After eleven years of the court overseeing compliance from the *Booker Decision*, Johnson relinquished the court's jurisdiction over Minneapolis schools, with the hope the district would comply with the Constitution's 14th Amendment. This history is in part responsible for where we are today. The resistance that brought school segregation to the nation's forefront in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 has continued to be a lightning rod, evoking continual antipathy for integration as shown in Heilman's report. The litigation battle for American citizenship to receive equal protection under the law is in part, an arduous and long-fought process, with stories like this not just mirrored throughout the state, but mirrored throughout the country.

This case is the precedent and foundation for the creation of what is now known as the Department of Achievement and Integration. While the case is significant

historically, it matters extensively to the relevancy of the persistent issues that remain for the lion share, the same today as seen in comparing a 2005 and 2022 Minnesota government OLA report. While there is much more accountability in structure and legal recourse, the systemic inequities surrounding *Booker v. Special School District* persists and the department which has evolved into the current department of Achievement and Integration deals as an atypical entity, with parameters of profession remaining highly incongruent with other PreK-12 specialists, and as such, efficacy and full systems integration.

A&I 1997-Present

Leaping forward almost fifteen years, the battle to manifest what was promised through law remains. Although many strides have been made toward increased equity with regard to equal protection under the law, including Achievement and Integration programming existing in 177 of the 327 school districts in the State (Minnesota Department of Education, 2024), the disparities in our educational structure are clear and inarguable with the AOG widening (Grunewald & Nath, 2019). In spite of two consecutive programs housed in the Minnesota Department of Education (Minnesota Department of Education, 2024), and guaranteed by Minnesota statute 124D.861 (2023), the struggle to obtain educational equity in opportunity persists.

Based on Rule 3535 and a change rooted in the settlement of the NAACP in 1999, Minneapolis Public Schools and eight suburban districts created *The Choice is Yours*, a program that buses thousands of low-income Minneapolis children to suburban schools at state expense. This movement was significant for it led to the eventual audit performed by the Office of the Legislative Auditor, conducted in 2005.

In 2005, the Office of the Legislative Auditor (Office of the Legislative Auditor, 2005) released its findings from a reappraisal of what was called at the time *Minnesota's School Integration Revenue Program*. Judith Randall, who was credited with the research, also penned the later 2022 OLA report (Office of the Legislative Auditor, 2022). Established in 1997 by the Minnesota Legislature, the program provided about \$79 million in the fiscal year 2005 to eighty qualifying school districts. According to the OLA (Office of the Legislative Auditor, 2005), "The Integration Revenue program, a component of the K-12 education funding formula, provides funds to certain school districts for integration-related activities" (p. 15). About two-thirds of the funding came from state aid and the other third from local property tax levies. In the auditor's opening letter, penned by James R. Nobles (Office of the Legislative Auditor, 2005), the committee called for an increase in accountability and sought increases in efficacy in programming and stated:

We found that state law does not set a clear purpose for the program and, as a result, school districts spend integration revenue on a wide range of activities. To achieve measurable results and greater accountability, we think the program's purpose and expenditures should be more focused. We also recommend that the Department of Education's oversight authority be strengthened and the program's funding formula reformed. (Office of the Legislative Auditor, 2005, p. 1)

In the school year 2013-2014, Minnesota's Integration Revenue Plan was replaced by the Achievement and Integration Program.

The purpose of the Achievement and Integration (A&I) program is to pursue racial and economic integration, increase student achievement, create equitable

educational opportunities, and reduce academic disparities based on students' diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds in Minnesota public schools.

(Office of the Legislative Auditor, 2022, para. 1)

This was all foundational for the work of Achievement & Integration within the state of Minnesota, seeing its state-level inception starting back at *Booker v. Special School District No. 1: A History of School Desegregation in Minneapolis, Minnesota*. The historical continuation of this all brings up to where A&I is now.

A&I Today

While advances had been made in the work being done in A&I, the OLA saw a persistent need for programmatic definition and continuity. According to Prather (2021), nationally White people graduate on time at a rate of 85%, while in Minnesota, just 58% of Black students graduate on time; this is 10% lower than the Black student national average and 27% lower than the White national average. While there have been tremendous strides in programming and services offered to Minnesota students of color addressing the achievement/opportunity gap, the manifestation of the inequities academically is serious and stark. It is interesting to note that although the Minnesota Department of Education spends millions of dollars each year on A&I programming, even one sample population examined in comparison to the majority shows large disparities in academic achievement.

According to the Minnesota Department of Education, an A&I programming plan must be submitted to the Minnesota Department of Education every three years. This government-created format is used by all 177 districts to describe in some detail the ways in which the funding will be used and additionally identify the metrics to which a district

will be held accountable. Apart from the baseline requisites Minnesota Department of Education has set, each district has the latitude to meet those requirements in any way a district sees fit. Those working in the field of A&I are not required to have a credential or even possess a college degree. While some districts create independent guidelines that require their own professional standards, A&I does not. This separates all of those working in A&I from all other specialists who require credentials and licenses, according to the Minnesota Department of Education (2024).

In consideration and synthesis of the requirements in all their varied forms throughout all of the districts that provide A&I services, it is important to note the delineation that all other specialists serving in Minnesota's PreK-12 system require specific credentialing and license, while those in A&I do not (Minnesota Department of Education , 2024). Credentialing requirements can be found online at Minnesota's Department of Education's credential and licensure requirements for educators and school specialists (Minnesota Department of Education PELSB, 2024). All other professionals serving in Minnesota public schools are under statute and rule, most often guided by a credential and a license to ensure proficiency and ubiquity of practice (Minnesota Department of Education PELSB, 2023). PELSB stated their vision and mission statement as, "Mission: Ensuring all Minnesota students have high quality educators in their schools. Vision: To ensure equitable education practices through high licensure standards, quality educator preparation programs, and stakeholder engagement" (Minnesota Department of Education PELSB, 2024, para. 1). While this vision and mission applies to all professional educators receiving a credential and license, those serving in A&I are exempt from these requirements and have no standard of practice held

through credentialing and licensing, accountable to the State and PELSB. The purpose of A&I as stated by the Minnesota Department of Education states,

The purpose of the Achievement and Integration (A&I) for Minnesota program is to pursue racial and economic integration, increase student achievement, create equitable educational opportunities, and reduce academic disparities based on students' diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds in Minnesota public schools. (Minnesota Department of Education, 2024, para. 1)

There is no common or ubiquitous standard holding those who pursue the A&I purpose professionally to best-practice, current research, or contemporary policy. With the objectives of A&I outlined by Minnesota Department of Education, and juxtaposition of A&I to other similar PreK-12 professions such as school counselors, school psychologists, school speech and language pathologists, school principals, and other professions, there is clear lack of continuity, expectation, and standard, bringing A&I into alignment with Minnesota's standard of practice in credentialing and licensing, shown to be highly efficacious through copious amounts of research; *id est*, Darling-Hammond's *The Flat World and Education* (2010).

Importantly, after twenty-four years of programming and funding, the disparities in A&I remain as problematic now as they were then, with the AOG increasing (Grunewald & Nath, 2019). Educational professionals serving Minnesota's students are called to be doing all they can to ensure highly qualified individuals are serving our communities (MDE, 2024) and answering to the 14th Amendment, rooted in the equal protections clause. While they are being called to do this work, they are being called to do, but not being given the same tools that all other educators and educational specialists

are given; credentials and licenses rooted in research and honed through use.

Brown v. The Board of Education was almost seven decades ago. United States District Judge Earl R. Larson had the courts assume the authority of Minneapolis schools fifty-one years ago, eighteen years after the Supreme Court decision. Minnesota has been grappling legally and systematically with educational inequity for sixty-nine years; fifty-one of those years have had state legal precedent, yet still, the inequity exists. As noted by the State auditor in 2005, uniformity and specificity in spending *Integration Revenue* dollars needed reform “to achieve measurable results and greater accountability” (Randall & Chein, 2005).

In 2022, the Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) released another report with the summary titled, *Summary, Minnesota Department of Education’s Role in Addressing the Achievement Gap*. Judith Randall, one of the two authors for the 2005 OLA report and the primary signatory on the 2022 report, stated that Minnesota has one of the largest achievement gaps in the nation and A&I is set to address these gaps, yet on a fundamental basis has not even defined the achievement gap, nor provided clarity in its work with specificity to the achievement gap, and has little accountability to the monies and programming happening in the state meant to, in part, help decrease the achievement gap which has persisted and even widened. The OLA made several recommendations to the department and to the Legislature. Randall’s summation of the OLA’s worries were merited. In spite of an annual budget for A&I in 2021 of \$107,083,035.40, the achievement/opportunity gap has continued to widen (Grunewald & Nath, 2019).

There have not been concerning reports like this for Minnesota school social workers, speech and language pathologists, school counselors or other educational

professionals serving in Minnesota's schools. While educators and educational professionals have specific credentialing and licensing standards, there are none for those pointed with a specific directive to help address the achievement gap, helping to provide expert and researched-based guidance for the practitioners of A&I work and their \$107,083,035.40 budget.

Thinking about the history of A&I to the present day, it is important to juxtapose the ideas of credentialing and licensing in A&I to other professions and specialists, showing in a comparative analysis why Minnesota credentials and licenses certain professions.

Credentialing and Licensing in Minnesota

The Minnesota government oversees through credentialing and licensing hundreds of state programs housed in forty-nine state agencies, and there is no guidance in credentialing and licensing required for those serving some of our states' most at-risk students, even when millions of dollars are allocated and spent each year on programming and staffing. Every single credentialed and licensed entity under the forty-nine agencies presents a mission and/or vision statement detailing in some capacity how the license intends to prevent harm, while identifying the credentials needed to even apply for a license. For example, the mission and the vision of Minnesota's cosmetology state license states:

Mission: The Board's core mission is to constantly strive to serve and care for our licensees, applicants, and the public by being committed to public protection, superior service, excellence, and continuous improvement. Vision: The Board is dedicated to public protection while encouraging industry development.

(Minnesota Board of Cosmetology, 2024)

According to the state of Minnesota government website, cosmetologists in the state of Minnesota have a required 1,550 hours of training (38.75 weeks). In 2021 Minnesota's state legislature detailed the difference between barbers and cosmetologists, who carry separate licenses from different governing boards. While cosmetologists have almost an entire school year of training, in some districts no credential or license is required to serve some of our most hegemonized populations, adding to sepulchral educational equity.

Minnesota A&I is bound by Minnesota statute, guided by Minnesota rule, and there is no credential and license to qualify the practitioners of this work, who are participants working toward goals that have been part of our educational structure for almost seventy years. The requirements and work set by practitioners of A&I have parallel alignment with other professions including school counselors, school administrators, school social workers, and school psychologists. The standards of practice in A&I follow suit with the standards in other PreK-12 professions which require licensing. Credentials and licenses, in part, help to delineate continuity in practice and guarantee certain outcomes and the lack of credentialing and licensing in Minnesota is concurrently met with a lack in performance metrics showing increases in learning gaps. A&I serves hundreds of thousands of Minnesota students receiving important services that address the achievement/opportunity gap and do not require a credential or license.

Licensing and Its Impact on Teachers and Teaching

According to the Minnesota government (2024), Minnesota teachers receiving a Tier 4 license in the state must complete all of the following: a Bachelor's degree for all

subjects, completion of a teacher preparation program, passing scores on content and pedagogy, passing scores on board approved skills exam, complete three years teaching in Minnesota, concluding with their most recent professional evaluation not needing an improvement plan. On average a Tier 4 license takes a Minnesota teacher around eight years to complete. This exhaustive design is not without merit. In spite of these rigorous standards, students of color in Minnesota continue to fall further behind in a widening achievement/opportunity gap.

There has been a copious amount of research focused on the needs of diverse demographics within the classroom and yet educational outcomes remain disparate. In research conducted by Goldman and Gilmour (2020), they stated that “more training is needed to ensure the necessary skills are acquired to teach this heterogeneous group of students...” (p. 560). Goldhaber et al. also concluded in their 2015 research called, *Uneven Playing Field? Assessing the Teacher Quality Gap Between Advantaged and Disadvantaged Students*, that:

Our findings provide comprehensive, descriptive evidence that every measure of teacher quality—experience, licensure exam score, and value-added estimates of effectiveness—is inequitably distributed across every indicator of student disadvantage— FRL, URM, and low prior academic performance—at virtually every school level. (p. 304)

Both the need for an increase in teacher training for heterogeneous groups, and the equitable distribution of those teachers receiving the higher credentialing is in part, a fact of educational research and its findings, contributing to Minnesota's widening achievement/opportunity gap. Goldhaber et al. (2015) also found that in-district transfers

show patterns of highly qualified teachers leaving disadvantaged schools, with a preference of employment where perceived better working conditions exist. Additionally, Goldhaber et al. (2015) found that principals often reserved favorable classroom assignments for teachers with greater classroom success and higher exam licensure scores (p. 305).

Boyd et al. (2013) found through their study called, *Analyzing the Determinants of the Matching of Public School Teachers to Jobs: Disentangling the Preferences of Teachers and Employers*, a two-sided matching model was consistent with their hypotheses that schools prefer to hire teachers with stronger qualifications and teachers prefer schools that are closer to home, and for White teachers, fewer minority students (p. 24) going on to say that although this may appear predictable, it contradicts findings from other research, estimating hedonic wage equations for teacher labor markets (p. 24). The system prefers highly qualified teachers and consistently places and/or moves highly qualified teachers into districts, schools, and communities that consistently outperform low income communities of color. Although correlation does not equal causation, research continues to support that increased credentialing increases positive outcomes.

Research shows school systems are not recruiting highly qualified teachers in high needs and disadvantaged schools in spite of hedonic wage practice (Jacob & Lefgren, 2005). Jacob & Lefgren (2005) showed that principals extract or deny the placement of these highly qualified teachers within high-needs schools and highly qualified teachers wanting to leave disadvantaged schools for working conditions that are perceived as “better” and also so they can live closer to home and other various reasons as cited by Jacob & Lefgren (2005). Jacob & Lefgren (2005) found that “the quality of

the teacher in the classroom is the most significant school-based determinant of the academic growth of the children in that class. And yet the schools and students that most need the best teachers do not have them” (p. 51). Darling-Hammond has found over decades of research, and summarized in the 2010 book, *The Flat World and Education*, that teacher credentialing is one of the strongest predictors of classroom success and student achievement, and that our highest-need students receive the least-credentialed services. Darling-Hammond opened the book stating, “quantitative analyses indicate that measures of teacher preparation and certification are by far the strongest correlates of student achievement in reading and mathematics, both before and after controlling for student poverty and language status” (p. 1). The need for highly qualified educators matters and its impact is inextricably linked to student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

This need for highly qualified educators is not just limited to classroom teachers. The qualifications of each specialist working within the walls of our public school matter, and are, for the most part, a top priority of our educational structure and practice (Muhammad, 2015). Consider social workers. The Minnesota government oversees the licensing of social workers and social workers who perform therapeutic services within our schools are mandated to carry a credential and a license. The mission of Minnesota’s social work profession states,

The Board of Social Work holds social workers accountable by ensuring that licensed social workers are qualified, professional, ethical, and accountable. It does this initially through the examination and licensure process and, on an ongoing basis, by license renewal: continuing education: supervision

requirements to ensure continued competence: and through the complaint resolution process when professional standards are not met. (Minnesota Government, 2024, para. 1)

The reason this mission statement matters is embedded in the importance and severity implicated in the outcomes of social work. To perform therapy independently as a licensed independent clinical social worker (LICSW) in Minnesota, one must complete a Master's in social work (62 credits); 360 hours of training in six different clinical areas; 4,000 to 8,000 hours of supervised postgraduate practice with 200 of those hours supervised by a LICSW; or another board-approved supervisor. Of the hours required, 1,800 of those hours must be in direct clinical contact with clients. After all of this, an application for licensure must be submitted to the Board of Social Work for review. If this is approved, the applicant will then take the ASWB clinical exam, which is \$260 dollars and 170 questions. Finally, after the many steps toward a LICSW, the Board reviews the applicant's submission and subsequently approves or denies licensing (Minnesota Government, 2024). This is a state-level requirement too, not to mention national standards of practice through the National Standards of Social Workers.

In contrast, those providing the work of Achievement and Integration, with their roots in the U.S. Constitution under the 14th Amendment (Heilman, 1994), have no credential or license comparable to that of a social worker, in spite of often strong similarities in the work delineated by their vision and mission statements, often serving students with similar risks. Some school districts that provide A&I services directly to students do not even require a bachelor's degree. The A&I process and work is done 177 different ways in 177 Minnesota school districts, with no standard for credentialing and

licensing qualifying the expertise of those serving some of our most at-risk students, families, schools, and communities (Minnesota Department of Education, 2024). There is no narrative qualifying those doing the work as there are with other professions such as social work. To receive A&I funding a district must show some level of need that finds its history in national and state litigation, including *Booker v. Minneapolis Schools I*. A plan must be delineated from a district receiving funds and a district must qualify through the guidelines imposed by the state, but no requirements are made for A&I practitioners.

Teacher research shows a need for highly credentialed educators and the impact on credentialing within classrooms and communities. Social work research has shown the need for license oversight and has created rigorous standards within its practice to ensure the best possible outcomes for its clients and communities. The need for highly qualified and licensed professionals is replicated with school speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, nurses, psychologists, and all other professionals working within our schools where the stakes are high. Does the work of *Achievement and Integration* have lower stakes meriting less qualified specialists? In spite of decades of inequitable achievement and integration, and clearly ineffective practice and policy, a group of professionals whose stated mission is “to pursue racial and economic integration, increase student achievement, create equitable educational opportunities, and reduce academic disparities based on students' diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds in Minnesota public schools” (Minnesota Department of Education, 2024), is somehow exempt from this societal practice of importance in knowledge, guidance, and accountability of credentialing and licensing.

Credentialing and licensing are foundational to multiple professions, and require

time and proof of knowledge and skills. An education credential takes over four years on average and a clinical social worker's credential can take over six years. In addition, each of those credentials then requires a license to provide services in the state of Minnesota. Credentials and licenses matter. In Minnesota electricians are licensed, plumbers are licensed, contractors are licensed, doctors are licensed, social workers are licensed, psychologists are licensed, and cosmetologists are licensed. In fact, the state of Minnesota independently oversees licensing for forty-nine agencies, which oversees innumerable state licenses. Each licensing agency within the state of Minnesota qualifies the reason for the licensure.

While speech and language pathologists (SLPs) in Minnesota schools provide services to approximately 20,000 students under a specific SLP credential and school license (similar to social workers in both requirements and applications), those working in Achievement & Integration programs serve over half a million students in the state with no state standard, credential, or license required. With the achievement and opportunity gap widening, students considered disadvantaged in our schools are clearly not receiving the highly qualified teachers that are so very important to their academic and social developmental success.

Why have we not created a system where professionals who provide direct support services to our most disadvantaged students require a credential and license that are equal to the gravity of their impact? One hundred and seventy-three school districts receive A&I dollars and programming with a fiscal year budget in 2021 of \$107,083,035.40. Over half a million students are directly being impacted by a group that intends to serve the needs of those students through racial and economic integration,

increasing student achievement, creating equitable educational opportunities, and reducing academic disparities based on students' diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds (Minnesota Department of Education, 2024), yet no credential or license is required. One school district receiving over \$1,700,000.00 does not even require a bachelor's degree for those practitioners providing direct support focused in part on academic achievement. Although a bachelor's degree does not directly ensure competency, credentialing and licensing is intended to lay a baseline of practice. Through qualitative inquiry there is an emerging narrative that speaks to the potential exclusions that may happen through a credentialing process. While these potential exclusions could exist, the normative standard of credentialing and licensing remains a standard of practice to ensure the efficacy of practice (Minnesota Department of Education, 2024). Further, there are possibilities to intercept negative exclusions in the case for A&I, including the consideration of culturally responsive credentialing and licensing. Surely there is a need to make sure those practitioners are providing that support through expert knowledge and action, guaranteed by standards rooted in research and administered through a culturally responsive credential and license.

In a system synonymous with inequitable distribution of resources, and where research shows resounding continuity from the experts on credentialing, licensing, and its positive impacts on our students (Darling-Hammond, 2010), the standard of care for those purposed to specifically serve some of our most vulnerable students and communities has no requirement for a credential and license. The United States of America guarantees equal protection under the law through the Fourteenth Amendment and A&I states,

The purpose of the Achievement and Integration (A&I) for Minnesota program is to pursue racial and economic integration, increase student achievement, create equitable educational opportunities, and reduce academic disparities based on students' diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds in Minnesota public schools. (Minnesota Department of Education, 2024, par. 1)

There is clear delineation between standards where A&I does not require a credential and license and the other specialists and educators in Minnesota's PreK-12 system do.

When considering all of the factors including a system that is both dominated by credentialing and licensing, and that same system providing copious amounts of research supporting measurable outcomes from highly credentialed and licensed practitioners in various educational fields, it leads to a logical pathway and exploration of looking into the potential implications of creating a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement & Integration license. Those in the work of A&I serve some of the most at-risk children and communities based on statistics from the Minnesota Department of Education (2024). Considering the research and its findings in similar fields surrounding credentialing and licensing, the demography of those being served by A&I, mission of A&I within Minnesota Department of Education, and widening AOG, it beacons an investigation into the research and research questions.

- *How might a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration license impact the outcomes of Achievement and Integration work in Minnesota?*
- *What impacts might it have on the outcomes of the achievement/opportunity gap, ubiquity in professional practice and research, and staff retention and persistence?*

- *What might a culturally responsive credential and license look like?*

Summary

Having taken a look at other fields, and the efficacy credentialing and licensing has, overviewing the history and context of achievement and integration in the state of Minnesota, Chapter Three looks to set the stage for the research that intends to explore the implications of creating a credential and license in Justice and Equity and achievement and integration. The research questions will be explored through a qualitative methodology employing surveys and interviews. chapter 3 lays the groundwork For the research at hand.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction and Overview of the Chapter

In Chapter 3, I delved into the methodological framework of this research, focusing on how a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration license might reshape Achievement and Integration (A&I) work in Minnesota. This study, therefore, sought to elucidate whether a structured credentialing process, akin to those in other specialized educational fields, could serve as a catalyst for enhancing the efficacy of A&I programs in Minnesota. This chapter serves as an epistemological guide, underlying the research's significance and situating it within a broader educational context. Emphasizing the synergy between research questions and methodology, it lays out a detailed approach tailored to explore the efficacy of student learning and employee dynamics in A&I programming. The guiding questions aimed to probe the influence of such credentials on the achievement/opportunity gap, professional practice, and staff retention. Utilizing a grounded theory approach kept the process open to follow the course of the surfaced findings. The research aimed to investigate the potential increase in efficacy for both student learning and employee recruitment, retention, and persistence within Minnesota's Achievement & Integration (A&I) programming. The guiding research questions are:

- *How might a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration license impact the outcomes of Achievement and Integration work in Minnesota?*

- *What impacts might it have on the outcomes of the achievement/opportunity gap, ubiquity in professional practice and research, and staff retention and persistence?*
- *What might a culturally responsive credential and license look like?*

The exploration was rooted in a profound understanding of the Achievement and Opportunity Gap (AOG) as highlighted by Muhammad (2015) and the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE, 2024), setting the stage for a comprehensive inquiry into the potential transformative impacts of these credentials within Minnesota's educational framework. In his research *Overcoming the Achievement Gap Trap* (2015), Muhammad conducted a comprehensive exploration of educational equality within classrooms. He meticulously examined past and current policies aimed at narrowing the achievement gap. Furthermore, he delved into the prevailing mindsets that conflicted with schools' missions to ensure equal academic opportunities, shedding light on the psychological impact these mindsets had on students. In concert with Muhammad, Rodgers (2010) spoke to the incredible importance of supporting activist work further elucidating the impact on the psychology of those embedded within the work, focusing on key components such as managing emotions, tying it into the impact of addressing the AOG. Rettig (2006) accentuated similar findings in speaking toward activism persistence; key in the work of A&I.

Muhammad (2015) also offered insightful strategies for adopting a transformative mindset, liberating both educators and students from negative academic performance expectations. Within the research, he thoroughly investigated the multifaceted factors influencing achievement inequality and highlighted the critical role of mindsets and

frameworks in addressing the achievement gap. Muhammad enriched his research with real-world case studies from three schools that had achieved remarkable results by embracing the principles of the liberation mindset. Additionally, he presented a framework for assessing a school's commitment to values such as responsibility, advocacy, and equality, providing educators with diagnostic surveys and rubrics for effective assessment and decision-making. Schaufeli and Buunk (2003) supported Muhammad's findings and the impact it bears on those working within A&I, providing an overarching review emphasizing critical components embedded within the work of A&I. Considering the depth and breadth of the findings and the objectives/metrics set by Minnesota Department of Education for A&I programming, an evaluation of proposing a credential and license to ensure efficacy within the implementation of some of the suggested directional efforts seems logical being cognisant of educator preparation juxtaposed to the academic requirements for those working in A&I.

Laying out the methodology, framework/paradigm, setting and participants, data collection methods and analysis, ethical considerations, IRB and participants, and conclusion, Chapter Three set the stage for the research, preparing the pathway to discuss the findings in Chapter Four.

Research Methodology and Rationale

Given the novel nature of this research area and almost no prior research existing with specificity for an A&I credential and license, a grounded theory approach was most suitable. Grounded theory is a qualitative method that enables the study of particular phenomena or processes and also possesses the capacity/ability to discover new theories based on collecting and analyzing real-world data (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

Creswell (2009) defined grounded theory as “...a qualitative strategy in which the researcher derives, a general, abstract theory, a process, action, or interaction, grounded, and the views of the participants in a study” (p. 229). This approach was ideal for remaining open and adaptable, allowing the research findings to emerge organically without being influenced by preconceived notions, to deeply understand the Achievement and Integration (A&I) dynamics in Minnesota.

Grounded Theory was chosen for its suitability in studying phenomena where extensive prior research is limited, such as the A&I program's potential impact. Grounded theory allows for the emergence of theories based on real-world data, making it ideal for exploring the practicalities of introducing a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration license. The focus was on generating insights into the program's impact on educational disparities, professional practices, and the efficacy of A&I work (Creswell, 2009). This approach aligned with the transformative aspirations of Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory, emphasizing the need for societal change and addressing systemic disparities in education (Capper, 2019).

Research Framework/Paradigm and Rationale

The research was driven by the need to address the Achievement and Opportunity Gap (AOG) in Minnesota, a challenge vividly illustrated in Gruenwald and Nath's (2019) depiction of educational disparities. The theoretical basis of this research drew from Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory, reflecting a commitment to social justice and transformative educational practices. Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory emphasize the need for social change and empowerment of marginalized groups. According to the Celikate & Flynn,

Refers to a family of theories that aim at a critique and transformation of society by integrating normative perspectives with empirically informed analysis of society's conflicts, contradictions, and tendencies. In a narrow sense, "Critical Theory"... refers to the work of several generations of philosophers and social theorists in the Western European Marxist tradition known as the Frankfurt School. (Celikate & Flynn, 2023, para. 1)

Critical theory formed the backbone of this research paradigm, focusing on aligning best practices to enhance the effectiveness of A&I work and its impact on practitioners. This paradigm was chosen due to the lack of pre-existing research in A&I and the critical nature of addressing the AOG within a social justice context. Critical Theory is fundamentally about fostering social change and empowering marginalized and oppressed groups, heavily relying on qualitative methods like interviews and observation for data collection (DePoy & Gitlin, 2016).

The qualitative component, underpinned by Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory, aimed to explore the socio-cultural dimensions of A&I work and its alignment with broader educational practices and policies in Minnesota. This theoretical grounding was vital, given the lack of extensive prior research in this specific area and the need to address the AOG within a context of social justice (Capper, 2019; DePoy & Gitlin, 2016). In tandem, it further sought to address the potential tangible impacts of an A&I credential and license on student learning outcomes, professional development, and staff retention, as detailed in the research questions. This approach aligned with the perspectives of Darling-Hammond (2010), who emphasized the importance of credentials in enhancing educational outcomes in student learning.

A comparison of A&I work with other fields within Minnesota's public schools was crucial, using existing research as a foundation for this study. Despite the abundance of research on credentials and licenses within the PreK-12 public school system, there is a notable gap in research specifically targeting credentialing and licensing for Minnesota's A&I programming. This gap is significant (as demonstrated by Gruenwald & Nath, 2019) considering the pivotal role of A&I in addressing some of the most challenging and impactful AOG issues in Minnesota (Muhammad, 2015). This research, therefore, was not just an academic exercise but a step towards social change, making critical theory an appropriate and sensible choice for understanding the context and potential impact of the study. While the employment of critical theory was the overarching basis for the research paradigm, implementing and utilizing critical race theory, as a critical theory subset, remains a tangible inclusion for the research paradigm.

Critical Race Theory (CRT), a subset of critical theory, was particularly relevant here. CRT provides a nuanced understanding and delineation of issues in educational leadership and helps in assessing the legitimacy and effectiveness of racial policies and practices (Capper, 2019). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2023), Critical Race Theory (CRT) "...examines the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law" (p. 3). This traverses to CRT as a critical subset theory in that while copious amounts of educational research exists speaking toward the importance of credentialing and licensing, the research at hand aimed to examine equality, legal reasoning, and principles surrounding constitutional law pertaining to a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license.

CRT was used to examine the lack of credentialing/licensing as a means to uphold practices that inherently produce inequitable outcomes for BIPOC students, rooted in its epistemic contextualization, as a means of assessing the legitimacy and effectiveness of racial policies. If one is to assess a policy that engages conceptually and ideologically, issues surrounding race, the CRT is the framework to use, as that is in many capacities, its reason for being. Further, CRT is a framework supportive of the research of Scott and Alexander (2018) when researching efficacy in recruiting and retaining Black male educators.

With the AOG continuing to disproportionately impact communities of color and perpetuate systemic institutional racism, the application of CRT within the research paradigm was both logical and necessary. This approach was essential due to the unique nature of A&I programming in Minnesota and its role in tackling AOG issues, as highlighted by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE, 2024) and other foundational works.

Setting and Participants

The setting for this research was the diverse educational landscape of Minnesota, focusing on its Achievement and Integration (A&I) programs. Utilizing surveys and interviews, participants engaged in surveys administered through Google Forms, followed by Google Meet recorded interviews that delineated the potential impacts of creating a Justice and Equity credential and an achievement and integration license. Participants were current and former practitioners of A&I located throughout the state of Minnesota and were of varying ages and were inclusive of all genders. The participants were selected through a purposive sampling strategy, targeting current and past

practitioners directly involved in A&I work. This approach ensured a representative sample that accurately reflected the state's demographic diversity and the structural relevance of the A&I programs. This included the use of email lists and contacts through A&I networks for survey distribution, employing Google Forms with a Likert scale for survey administration, and organizing online interviews via Google Meet. Each participant was made fully aware of the implications and processes surrounding the interviews, and an opportunity for feedback and support was provided post-interviews. This meticulous planning ensured the systematic collection of data, essential for the study's success.

Sampling Strategy

This section describes the process of contacting all 177 school districts with Achievement & Integration (A&I) programming. From these, fifty completed surveys were collected, representing half of the A&I districts. The surveys aimed to assess program outcomes. Additionally, from those who consented to further participation in the survey, three interviewees were randomly selected. These interviews, designed to not exceed one hour each, provided deeper insights into the survey findings. purposive sampling method, focusing on selecting individuals with direct experience or expertise in Achievement and Integration work. The strategy was designed to ensure a diverse and representative sample, reflecting varied perspectives within Minnesota's A&I community. The sampling process was crucial for gathering meaningful and relevant data, contributing significantly to the study's overall validity and effectiveness. By engaging with a variety of stakeholders from different school districts and demographic backgrounds rooted in geographical diversity, the study aimed to capture a

comprehensive view of the perceived impacts and challenges of implementing a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration license within the Minnesota educational framework.

A focused, randomized sampling strategy was employed to select participants for interviews. Working to create a diverse pool of participants, A&I programs and staff were targeted from across the state, working to ensure geographic diversity is included in the overall assessment.

Data Collection Methods

This section delves into the strategies for data collection, focusing on surveys and interviews. Surveys were aimed at A&I experts and practitioners, assessing the viability of credentialing and licensing in specialist roles within the PreK-12 system. These surveys evaluated the impact of an A&I credentialing license across various domains like student achievement and staff retention. Interviews were structured to deepen understanding, informed by survey responses, aiming to extract detailed insights and personal experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This dual approach ensured comprehensive data collection, addressing the research questions effectively.

The study followed a structured procedure beginning with participant recruitment, progressing through data collection via surveys and interviews (see Appendix A and B), and culminating in data analysis. This process was clearly outlined, including timelines, settings, and necessary materials to ensure a systematic approach to data collection.

Surveys

Utilizing email lists and contacts through A&I networks, surveys were sent out to potential participants including necessary information surrounding the process, risks, and

supports (see Appendix A). I utilized a Likert scale since it provided a range for the respondents to select (Fink, 2017). Surveys were administered through Google Forms. Included in this process, the survey invited participants who were interested to request joining the interview stage of the research process. The questions that were used can be found in the indices.

The Likert scale, as described by Fink (2017) claimed that respondents “are asked to tell how closely they agree or disagree with a statement” (p. 52). Utilizing this method of data collection, quantitative data was harvested to help identify through A&I practitioner expertise and relay their expertise to juxtapose the potential implications of creating a Justice and Equity credential and an achievement and integration license. Using the Likert scale a system of questions for the surveys were developed and are listed in the appendices (see Appendix A).

Interviews

Following the surveys, interviews were conducted with a sample population having been determined from interested participants of the surveys. Utilizing the lists of interested participants, dates and times were established for online Google Meet interviews, allowing comprehensive state-wide geography and demography to be included in the research.

Each participant was made fully aware of the implications and processes surrounding the interviews through the invitation process detailing the interview procedures and potential implications. An opportunity and contact information was provided to allow for contact after the interviews were completed, providing feedback and the option of support depending on the impact of the process on participants.

The first tool for data collection were surveys, designed to gather insights from experts and practitioners in A&I and related fields. These surveys focused on evaluating the perceived impact of an A&I credential and license across various domains such as student achievement, professional practice, staff recruitment, retention, and cultural responsiveness. The survey questions, developed to align with the study's critical and grounded theoretical frameworks, were crafted to elicit clear, concise, and relevant responses.

The first data collection tool involved surveys targeting experts and practitioners in A&I. These surveys were designed to assess the viability of credentialing and licensing in specialist roles within the PreK-12 system. Working toward objectivity in the interview process, I was aware of potential bias that I have as a veteran employee of A&I (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Due to this, extra caution was taken to avoid leading questions and the negative impact they could have on the interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The potential for leading questions to positively impact the interview process remained, as thorough understanding of the work created a hyper-nuanced understanding of policy and process and its manifestation in practice (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The questions aligned with the rationale behind other specialist credentials and licenses, aiming to uncover potential values or challenges in implementing such a system in A&I. Sample populations from across the state were selected, ensuring diverse and comprehensive input.

Building on the survey data, interviews served as the second data collection method. These interviews delved deeper into the nuances of the potential impact of an A&I credential and license.

Consistent demands for the social sciences to produce generalizable knowledge may involve an assumption of scientific knowledge is necessarily universal and valid for all places and times, for all humankind from eternity to eternity. In contrast, pragmatist, constructionist, and discursive approaches conceive of social knowledge as socially and historically contextualized modes of understanding and acting in the social world. (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 295)

The format and structure of these interviews were informed by the survey responses, aiming to extract detailed insights and personal experiences that complement and enrich the data gathered from the surveys.

The participant selection for this study involved a purposive sampling method, focusing on individuals with direct experience or expertise in A&I work. Utilizing contacts obtained through Minnesota Department of Education's A&I network, surveys were sent to the 177 participating A&I district leaders/coordinators from across the state and subsequently shared with participating staff. Further opportunity for participation was reached through the A&I network, allowing former A&I staff to participate also. This strategy aimed to ensure a diverse and representative sample that reflects the varied perspectives within Minnesota's A&I community. The study followed a structured procedure beginning with participant recruitment, progressing through data collection via surveys and interviews, and culminating in data analysis. This process was clearly outlined, including timelines, settings, and necessary materials to ensure a systematic approach to data collection.

Utilizing email lists and contacts through A&I networks, surveys were sent out to potential participants including necessary information surrounding the process, risks, and

supports. A&I networks are the 177 school districts that implement A&I programming, their supervisory leadership, and those doing the work with those district's schools. Following the surveys, interviews were conducted with a sample population having been determined from interested participants of the surveys. The survey contained a question allowing participants to opt in for an interview. Utilizing the lists of interested participants, dates and times were established for online Google Meet interviews, allowing large geography and demography to be included in the research.

Each participant was made fully aware of the implications and processes surrounding the interviews. An opportunity and contact information was provided to allow for contact after the interviews were completed, providing feedback and the option of support depending on the impact of the process on participants.

Data Analysis

The analysis focused on identifying major themes and patterns that arose from the data. Given the open nature of grounded theory and the absence of pre-existing research, the analysis was conducted with an emphasis on objectivity, ensuring that personal biases do not influence the interpretation of findings. The analysis process involved coding the interview responses, focusing on their relevance to the feasibility and implications of implementing a Justice and Equity credential and an A&I license. Brinkmann and Kvale when speaking to the viability of data harvested from interviewing, Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) concluded "we have argued that qualitative research can lead to valid descriptions of the qualitative human world and that qualitative interviewing can provide us with valid knowledge about our conversational reality. Research interviewing is thus a knowledge-producing activity" (p. 341).

The analysis involved a systematic coding process, aimed at identifying key themes and patterns emerging from the survey and interview data. This phase heavily leveraged software tools for qualitative data analysis to ensure a rigorous and unbiased interpretation of the findings. Utilizing ChatGPT the findings of the data were analyzed and compiled, identifying emerging themes that arose and working to delineate through the support of open AI, how grounded theory manifested these themes and identified the further analysis of data qualifying through expert input, the viability of a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license.

Utilizing grounded theory, the data harvested sought to identify and elucidate themes and patterns. Utilizing ChatGPT, these themes and patterns created the construct under grounded theory for further data analysis and understanding. Building on the survey data, interviews served as the second data collection method. These interviews delved deeper into the nuances of the potential impact of an A&I credential and license, aiming to extract detailed insights and personal experiences that complement and enrich the quantitative data gathered from the surveys.

Ethical Considerations

This section underscores the commitment to ethical standards throughout the research process. It highlights the adherence to informed consent, confidentiality, and data security, in compliance with institutional review board guidelines. Special attention was given to the potential for resurfacing trauma among participants due to the sensitive nature of the research topic and the often correlated personal backgrounds to those working in A&I with institutional ostracizing (Muhammad, 2015). Measures were put in place to ensure participants are aware of this possibility and have access to appropriate

resources. This careful consideration of ethical aspects emphasized the study's integrity and respect for participant welfare.

Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and data security, were stringently adhered to throughout the study. One of the considerations to highlight surrounding the unique and nuanced demography involved in the research was a careful examination of the potential impact of resurfacing trauma as a result of exacerbation due to topical impact. Making sure that those participating in the surveys and interviews both had the potential awareness brought to them and resources available to them should the resurfacing of trauma have happened.

Institutional Review Board and Participants

In this section, the process of participant selection and the role of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) are detailed. It covers the strategies for recruiting participants, including reaching out to current and past practitioners in the field of Achievement & Integration (A&I). Efforts were made to secure a representative sample reflecting Minnesota's demographic diversity, with a focus on ensuring the structural relevance of A&I programs in the research. The research was approved by the IRB and Hamline University, following the protocol as detailed in the IRB submission and approval process.

Chapter Summary

This chapter systematically laid the groundwork for the forthcoming research into the potential impacts of implementing a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration license within Minnesota's educational framework. It intricately wove together the theoretical underpinnings of critical theory and critical race theory with a

mixed methods research design, emphasizing the goal of addressing systemic disparities in education. The detailed methodology, including the design of surveys and interviews, set the stage for a comprehensive investigation into how such a credentialing system could influence student achievement, professional practice, and staff dynamics in Achievement and Integration programs addressing the research questions:

- *How might a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration license impact the outcomes of Achievement and Integration work in Minnesota?*
- *What impacts might it have on the outcomes of the achievement/opportunity gap, ubiquity in professional practice and research, and staff retention and persistence?*
- *What might a culturally responsive credential and license look like?*

The methodology aligns with the research as it brings to bear a synthesizing of Muhammad (2015), MDE (2024), and Darling-Hammond's (2010) findings in a comprehensive mixed methods process elucidating findings through firstly surveying the expert practitioners of A&I and then engaging in an interview process, manifesting the outcomes identified through a grounded theory approach.

As this study transitioned into the actual research phase, the focus shifted from theoretical exploration to practical application. The forthcoming research engaged with A&I practitioners, harnessing their experiences and insights to gauge the real-world implications of the proposed credentialing system. This next phase aimed to illuminate the nuances of A&I work, uncovering critical insights that could guide future policy and practice in Minnesota's educational landscape. The intent was not just to contribute to the academic discourse but also to offer tangible solutions for enhancing educational equity

and efficacy in Minnesota's schools, especially for marginalized communities. This transition marked a pivotal step in turning theoretical frameworks into actionable knowledge, aiming to bridge the gap between research and practice in educational equity through ad hocism.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain understanding from expert practitioners of Achievement and Integration (A&I) about what potential impacts might exist if a Justice and Equity (J&E) credential and an A&I license were created in Minnesota addressing the research questions:

- *How might a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration license impact the outcomes of Achievement and Integration work in Minnesota?*
- *What impacts might it have on the outcomes of the achievement/opportunity gap ubiquity in professional practice and research, and staff retention and persistence?*
- *What might a culturally responsive credential and license look like?*

It was critical to consider the framework for those doing specialist work in Minnesota's pre-K-12 school systems to define and understand a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license. All specialists working within Minnesota in school systems must have credentials specific to their expertise and a license that permits them to work within Minnesota public schools. An example would be someone who works within the context and effort surrounding social work. Depending on their credential level, a social worker gains different rights and privileges of student engagement and, additionally, is required to have a public school license that accompanies their credentials, often a master's degree, which provides the definition of boundaries of social work within Minnesota Public schools.

The idea of a Justice and Equity credential is comparable to that of other specialists such as social workers, speech and language pathologists, audiologists, school counselors, school psychologists, etc. The Achievement and Integration license will be the license that goes along with specificity towards the Justice and Equity credential, granting both the credential on the license and a comparative capacity to all the other specialists serving in Minnesota Public schools.

This chapter provides results from the quantitative data provided through the survey results seeking expert opinion on the potential impact of creating a J&E credential and an A&I license. Interviews followed the surveys employing qualitative data, which was collected and assessed. Employing a grounded theory approach was critical in forming the process by which the data was analyzed, allowing for the originality and newness of the research to give space for themes to emerge unencumbered by a preexisting data analysis process. The space allowed through a grounded theory approach permitted both quantitative and qualitative data to produce emergent themes. Grounded theory involves generating theories through systematically gathering and analyzing data, primarily through coding processes that identify themes, concepts, and patterns. Creswell (2009) defined grounded theory as "...a qualitative strategy in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory, a process, action, or interaction, grounded, and the views of the participants in a study" (p. 229). This approach helped to remain open and adaptable, so that our research findings emerged organically without being influenced by preconceived notions, and deeply understanding Minnesota's Achievement and Integration (A&I) dynamics.

Data Collection Summary

This study's data collection involved two primary methods, surveys, and interviews to understand the impacts of introducing a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration License in Minnesota. Surveys preceded the interviews and invited survey participants to offer their voices and input for the interview process. As delineated with the IRB, the process was followed closely, using a carefully crafted strategy to reach out to professionals in A&I work across the state. Furthermore, embedded within this process were efforts to engage frontline A&I workers, administrators in A&I, and even those retired from the field. Building toward increased efficacy, reach, and impact, attempts were made to collect data from those more newly employed in A&I work through senior veterans of the field and practice. Surveys were distributed using email lists from Achievement and Integration networks, designed to gauge perceptions on the viability of credentialing and licensing in PreK-12 systems across domains like student achievement and staff retention.

A focused, randomized sampling strategy was employed to select participants for interviews, seeking to deepen insights from survey responses. Ethical considerations were paramount, with informed consent, confidentiality, and data security rigorously maintained throughout the study's progression from participant recruitment to data analysis. Keeping in mind the diversity of programming and participants, careful efforts were made to ensure interview participation, providing representation from urban, suburban, and rural school districts. The dynamic nature of A&I work demanded this type of geographical equity in voice and representation to secure potential differentiation that may have existed due to demographical divergence. Systematically, great effort was

made to craft a pool of candidates for both the interviews and the surveys that provided as comprehensive of a voice as possible, which worked to emerge meaningful data used to support the research.

I created a data table to demonstrate the collective diversity of voice exemplified in this study. Later, we further broke demographic characteristics into tables and figures to show their various categories. Table 1 (see Appendix C) identified and organized the role of the respondents, general categorization for years of experience within the field, gender, and geographical identification. It was delineated that broad representation from the 177 school districts receiving A&I revenue was paramount in surfacing a collective voice to accurately represent the epistemic variation plausibly linked to demographical diversification. The table lends an overarching description of some of the respondents' key identity characteristics, solidifying the variety and representation provided by the respondents.

Survey Data Analysis

Surveys were administered using Likert scales and short answer options. A Likert scale was used for scaffolding questions, getting to the core of the research questions, drawing from the expert practitioners of A&I their input surrounding the potential creation and implementation of a J&E credential and an A&I license. Likert scales are scales that allow respondents to rate a response on a numerical basis, often having a lower number indicate a polarized response to the highest number and increasing or decreasing as the numbers increase. The survey data analysis was supported and performed by utilizing technological tools such as Google Forms, ChatGPT, ClaudeAI, and personal data analysis using spreadsheets through data analytics and the creation of

data tables. While the survey data was quantitative, the prescribed surveys had a qualitative theme, drawing on personal expertise and experience and allowing for some narrative.

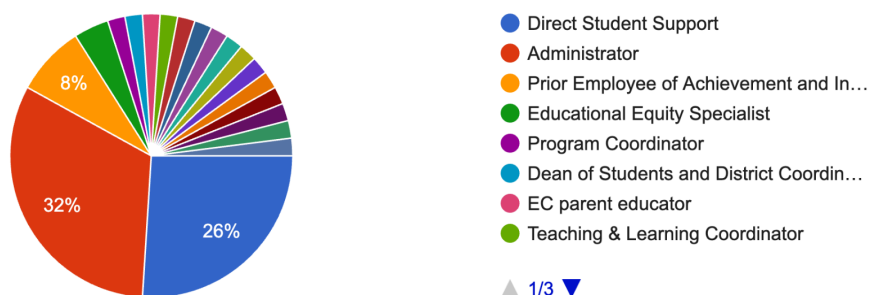
I received a broad response across demography in both years of service and positional placements, and this provided a dynamic representation of respondents and worked to collectively give as wide a voice as possible. Figure 1 demonstrates the diversity of respondents for positional placements. Summarizing the responses, the vast majority of respondents fit into on the major identified ares of A&I. These areas included direct student support, administrators, and former employees of A&I. Further analysis of respondents show that respondents selected other, often identifying their specific title within the work of A&I. Considering the depth and breadth of experience within the work of A&I, the integration of these diverse roles accentuates the viability of the respondents and provides a substantial scope of professionals within the A&I work and positional placements.

Figure 1

Respondent's Role in Education

Please select your role in the field of education:

50 responses



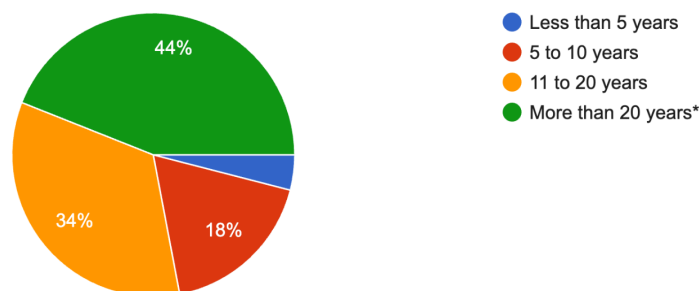
Further providing representation were the years of service in the field of education. While considering the subject and seeking input from A&I experts in the field, it was imperative with this research to secure as broad of a voice as possible. Figure 2 shows that significant experience in voice was leveraged, adding to the significance of collective input and expert opinion. One must understand that, while there was no credential or license that qualifies someone as an expert, it was essential to appreciate a standard of expertise leveraged through years of experience within the field with specificity to service in A&I work. Collectively, there was a great response in representation among time spent in the field of A&I work, demonstrated by Figure 2.

Figure 2

Respondents Years of Experience in Education

How many years of experience do you have in education?

50 responses



The largest group of respondents, 44%, logged twenty or more years of experience, those serving from five years through twenty years represented a total of 52%, and 4% of respondents logged less than five years. While it was essential to have the full spectrum of representation in years of service, it was epistemologically supportive of the research

to have such a strong voice in representation among those with such notable amounts of experience.

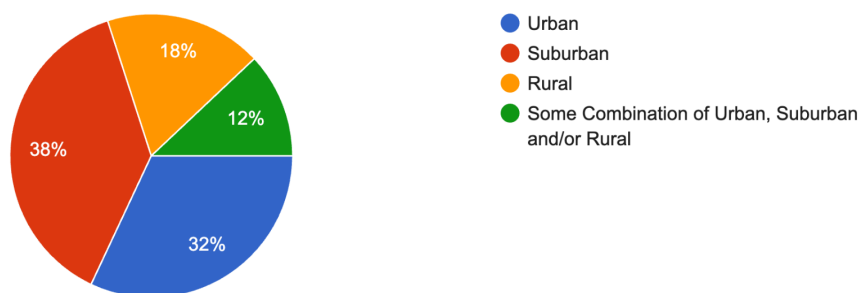
Working with persistence to ensure representation in school district types, significant efforts were made through the network release of the survey to ensure broad district-type involvement focused on urban, suburban, and rural participants with an additional category of some combination of urban, suburban, and rural. Figure 3 identifies respondents' geographical placement within the state of Minnesota. The funding model for A&I often funds larger and more urban districts more significantly, while rural districts typically receive much less funding and support (Minnesota Department of Education, 2024). However, there has been a change happening in rural communities. According to its legislative definitions, A&I serves protected class citizens, which includes Black, Indigenous, Asian, and Latinx Americans. While this list is not exclusively comprehensive, a sizable demographic change was happening in rural Minnesota with a significant increase in protected class residents. This change created the need for an equitable approach to giving voice and support to those serving under A&I in rural Minnesota.

A rural voice was raised through pointed efforts surrounding the critical issue of considering a J&E credential and an A&I license. Figure 3 highlights the success of this. Urban respondents came in at 32%, suburban at 38%, rural 18%, and some combination of urban, suburban, and rural at 12%. Figure 3 demonstrates the variety of participants geographically within the state of Minnesota, demonstrating solid geographical representation.

Figure 3

Type of School District Respondent Works In

How would you describe the school district you work in:
50 responses

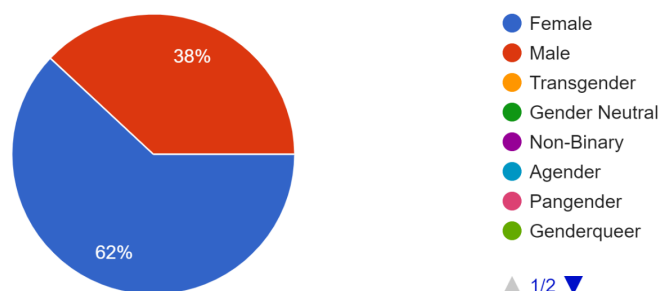


The need for further demographic diversity was exemplified by seeking broad representation in gender identity. A comprehensive gender identity list was provided allowing respondents to share, (including omission and other) and the research to capture diversity in gender response. Figure 4 identifies respondents gender diversity. While the list for gender identity was comprehensive, the survey produced a result of 62% female respondents and 38% male. Considering the implications of this research and its overarching potential impact, it is noteworthy that gender responses were limited to two genders.

Figure 4*Respondent's Gender Identification*

How do you identify:

50 responses



The key to the survey data was to gather expert opinions about the potential impacts of creating a J&E credential and an A&I license. To secure specific delineation from the respondents, five-point Likert scales were administered, working to identify which way respondents leaned towards versus giving too much space for ambiguity in survey results. Throughout the questioning, “1” represented the antithesis of the concept being put forward, while “5” was full appraisal and support of the concept.

Out of the gate, the question asked drove to the perceived effectiveness that a J&E credential and an A&I license would have the overall effectiveness of A&I work in Minnesota. Fifty percent of the respondents came in favorable with 77% having neutrality or some degree of positivity toward its impact. Figure 5 shows what respondents said and identified regarding the effectiveness of a credential and license. Information garnered from each question came from such a diverse group of respondents. On the scale, 1 represents those who do not believe a J&E credential and an A&I license

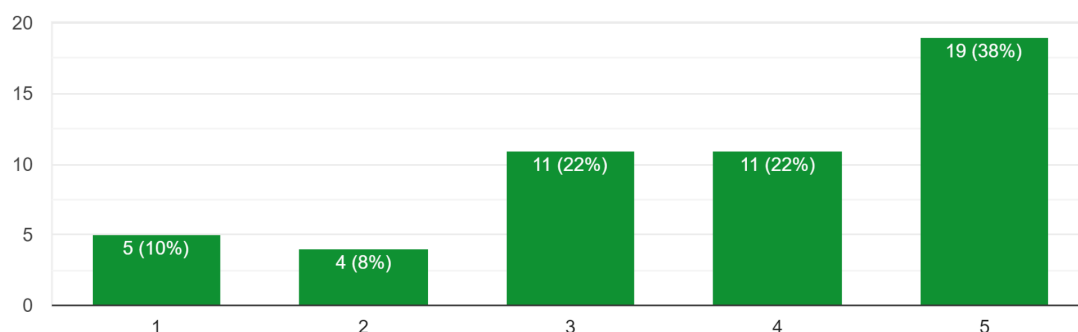
would significantly impact effectiveness, whereas 5 indicates that a credential and license would have a significant impact.

Figure 5

Impact of a J&E Credential and an A&I License on A&I Effectiveness

The combination of a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration License would enhance the effectiveness of Achievement and Integration work in Minnesota.

50 responses



Next, I synthesized the short answers from the follow-up question, “Please explain more about your prior answer from the statement, ‘The combination of a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration License would enhance the effectiveness of Achievement and Integration work in Minnesota.’” The responses to the questions revealed a diverse array of opinions. Some participants saw the credentials as a means to enhance the effectiveness of Achievement and Integration work by creating more opportunities, fostering consistency, and improving professional development. Quantifying the responses, 81% of respondents reported some level of positive impact foreseen through the creation of a J&E credential and an A&I license. One respondent stated,

...this could be a crucial component in closing the achievement gap that we see in Minnesota. We have a very unique educational climate in this state, our homogeneous societies do very well in our education system. Our more diverse communities really struggle. I think that anything that can add more support to this conversation would be beneficial.

The other 19%, expressed concerns about the potential barriers these credentials might introduce, such as limiting access for BIPOC individuals and exacerbating existing staff shortages. With regard to exacerbating staff shortages one respondent stated,

I like the idea of having higher levels of training for people in A & I work. However, we already have a hard time finding qualified applicants. Adding additional training and licensure requirements will likely decrease the pool of candidates even further. If these requirements are in place, we would probably not be able to find staff to do the work.

A theme emerged for the need for a broader systemic change beyond credentialing, emphasizing practical application and lived experiences over formal education alone. Twenty-two percent of respondents either exclusively mentioned this or included it in a greater and more comprehensive response. One respondent stated,

Professional development is always beneficial. I think adding support, training and consistency for the people doing this work is a positive, but I think that broader systems and networks of people within our systems need this training too...not just the people in this field. This training should be embedded in all fields.

Another respondent stated,

...it is important to approach this work not just from a reactive, discipline approach, but having these credentials represented in all stages of the education system, i.e in curriculum design, student-facing education settings, administration, intervention specialists, facilities support.

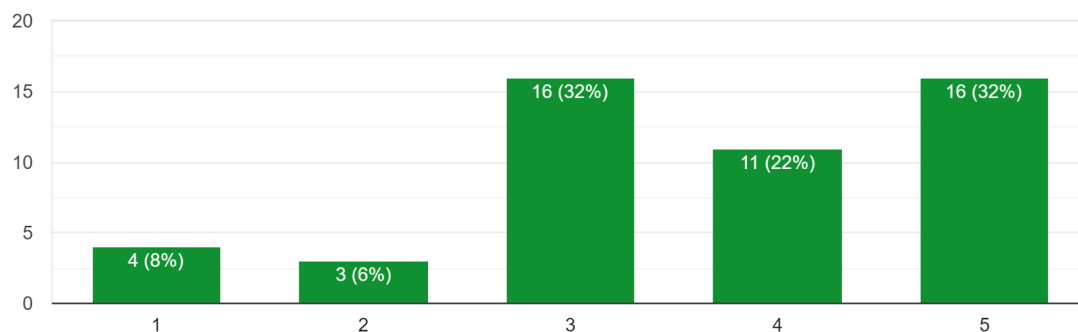
This mixed feedback highlights the complexity of implementing such credentials and the importance of carefully considering the varied needs and perspectives of educators and communities involved in Achievement and Integration work.

The next point of delineation made by Figure 6 was the consideration of a J&E credential and an A&I license's ability to impact the achievement and opportunity gap in both professional practice and research. Addressing the statement "Holding a Justice & Equity Credential alongside an Achievement and Integration License would positively influence my ability to address the achievement/opportunity gap in professional practice and research" respondents were given the opportunity to answer one through five. Those who believed that the credential and license would have low to no impact answered using the number one, whereas those who thought it would have a significant impact answered using a five. Looking at the top three tiers in neutrality to the affirmative from the Likert scale results used with this question, 86% of respondents replied with neutral to positive feelings toward the credential's impact. Of that 86%, about 63% were favorable to very favorable regarding the potential impacts of the J&E credential and the A&I license.

Figure 6*J&E Credential and A&I License Impact on Addressing the AOG*

Holding a Justice & Equity Credential alongside an Achievement and Integration License would positively influence my ability to address the achievement gap in professional practice and research.

50 responses



One of the key considerations that was explored in this study surrounded the consideration of what a J&E credential and an A&I license was the potential impact of A&I staff retention and persistence. Most specialists who possess a credential and license and work within Minnesota public schools are placed on salary steps and lanes, incrementally increasing pay for years of service and additional educational accomplishments. Furthermore, these credentials allow those possessing them to improve their positional leadership as they move through the system, allowing them to pursue building-wide and district-level leadership positions, including superintendency. The progression of licenses often moves from classroom teacher to principal, director, and superintendent. Others with degrees and licenses practicing in other fields such as social work may make similar moves throughout the system. Regardless of progression through the system, a license supporting direct student contact is where the journey can begin.

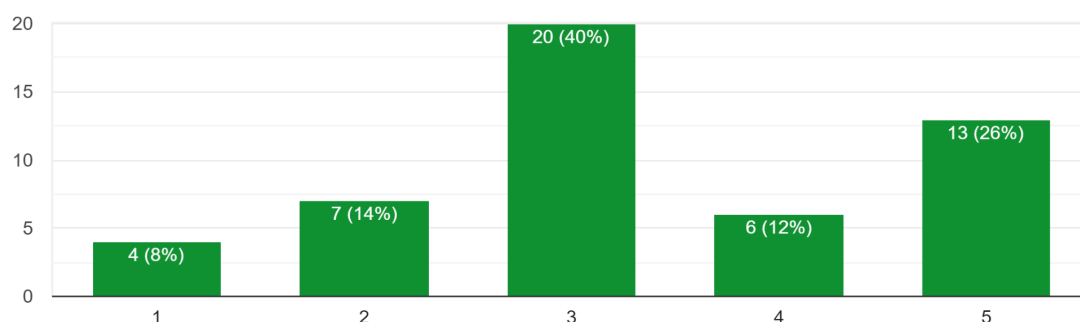
With this in mind, some of the survey and interview questions sought to drive and determine from the expert practitioners of A&I impact a credential and a license might have on staff retention and persistence within the field. Figure 7 addressed this by looking closely at respondents' input regarding the impact of retention and persistence in the field of A&I. Considering this, 38% of respondents felt that it would have a moderate to significant impact on retention and persistence while 22% felt that it may not impact retention and persistence.

Figure 7

Impact of Credentials on A&I Staff Retention & Persistence

The combination of these credentials would positively impact staff retention and persistence in the field of education.

50 responses



The next area explored in the line of questioning embedded in the survey was topically exploring the impact of a J&E credential and an A&I license on validating the work of A&I. Figure 8 identifies the outcomes of this question. At 72%, the response came in believing that a credential and license would validate A&I work and efforts. Those respondents strongly agreed a credential and license would positively impact the

validation of the work in A&I. Those believing that it would likely not impact the validation of the work came in at 14%.

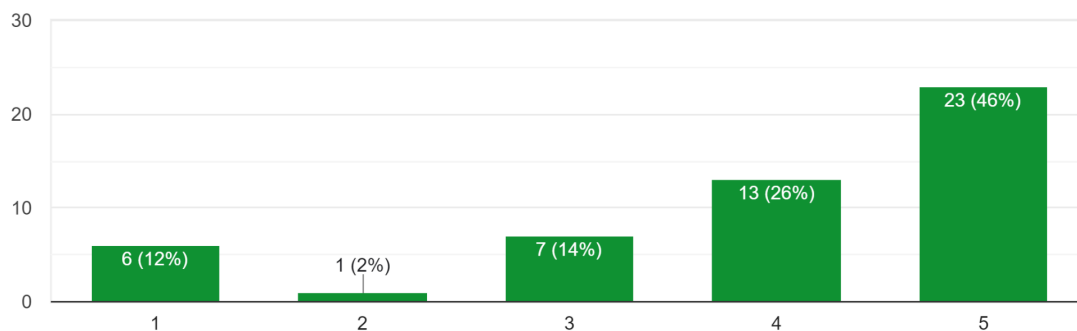
While it was significant that the respondents believed a J&E credential and an A&I license might significantly increase the validation of the work, there is likely room for more research to be done in this area. A scaffolded question connected to the line of questioning focused on retention and persistence, Figure 8 sought to elucidate expert opinions surrounding some of the overarching implications of creating a J&E credential and an A&I license.

Figure 8

Impact of J&E Credential and an A&I License on A&I Validation

A credential and license in J&E and A&I would help validate the work of A&I.

50 responses



Next, for consideration in delving into the implications of creating a J&E credential and an A&I license was the consideration of adding a credential and license that would add a cycle of research serving the practice and support of A&I. Ultimately, those that practice in our public schools within specialist roles, and classroom teachers, participate in continuing education. Part of this practice often includes the participation of

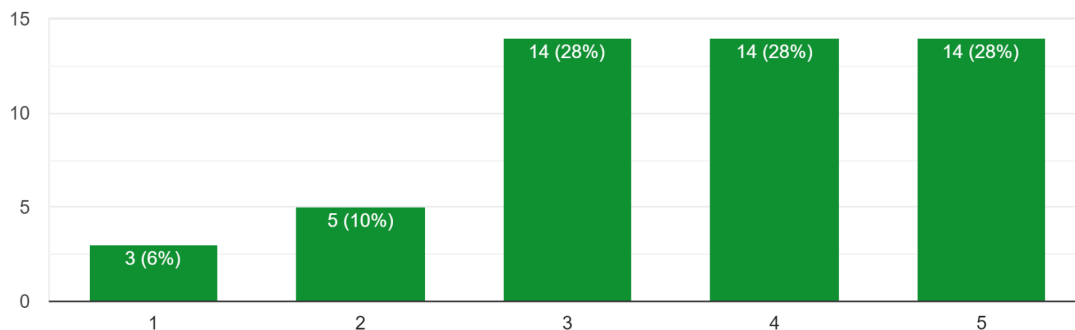
pursuing advanced degrees. These advanced degrees often include active research in the field of academia to which the specialist serves. With this in mind, and further having a comprehensive understanding of the A&I state-wide district planning process on a three-year cycle, it was of interest to the researcher to explore what the experts thought. Would a J&E credential and an A&I license specifically add to the cycle of research serving and supporting the active practitioner efforts of those serving in A&I?

Figure 9 summarizes this. Importantly, while some of the responses have raised concern about aspects surrounding a J&E credential and an A&I license, there was overwhelming support surrounding what the credential and license would likely accomplish in the cycle of research. The significance of this point was that the design of a specialist license and educators license most often includes an intended and embedded cycle of research, very often on the local level. While Minnesota persists with some of the most disparate statistics regarding the AOG, actively and locally researching these issues is paramount if Minnesota education hopes to decrease the AOG. While research is most certainly happening, the compounding of that research and density of the research may dramatically increase if there was centrality of focus, given through those pursuing a J&E credential and an A&I license. Respondents of this survey agreed. Of those surveyed, 56% believed that it would add to this cycle, strongly believing that it would indeed impact research.

Figure 9*Impact of a J&E Credential and an A&I License on Research Cycle in A&I*

A credential and license in J&E and A&I would add a cycle of research serving the practice and support of A&I.

50 responses



Working further into the survey and results, a line of questioning was developed and administered to address the potential creation of a J&E credential and an A&I license. When beginning this research, one of the important points of consideration that arose surrounded unintended consequences. The worry was that a newly added credential and license may add to the already extremely complicated labyrinth of the educational system another hoop for admittance into the exclusive club of what we know as educational professionals.

Seeking to disrupt the possible gatekeeping and unearthing expert understanding, exploring the potential of a culturally responsive license became important. In the survey as demonstrated through Figure 10, respondents were asked to assess if a J&E and A&I credential and license were created, whether it should incorporate relevant prior work experience, making it culturally responsive (such as non-profit youth work). Notably, 59.2% of respondents gave this question the highest mark with 67.4% having some

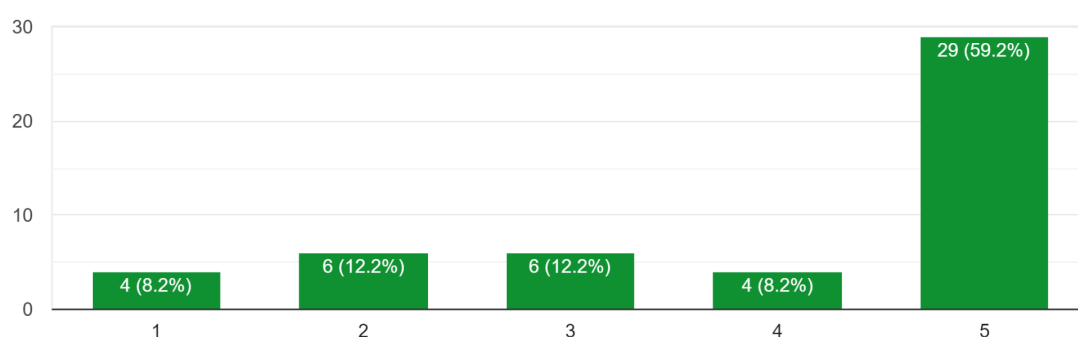
favorable response to the inclusion of a culturally responsive license, should it be created. Those feeling that a credential should not include a culturally responsive aspect came to 20.4%.

Figure 10

Incorporation of Cultural Responsiveness on a J&E Credential and an A&I License

If a J&E and A&I credential and license were created, it should incorporate relevant prior work experience, making it culturally responsive (such as non-profit youth work).

49 responses



While the practice of A&I currently does not possess a state-mandated credential and license to do the work, the narrative often is that people find the profession through other community-based organizations and employment, including youth non-profit organizations. The value added from those coming from these arenas is powerful and supportive of the work, holding connections throughout the community and having triangulation in support and support networks. Sometimes schools employ many educators from outside communities, and anecdotally the connection brought by those serving in A&I have been significantly helpful in a broader community effort to support students with needs. Including the respondents, the epistemic impact of a culturally responsive credential and license carried resonance through the potential validation of

community work practiced either within the communities the license may serve, or in parallel experience. This validates to some extent that value of including community work in a meaningful way into a potential credential and license, giving credence to the strength brought through community work injected into a credential and license.

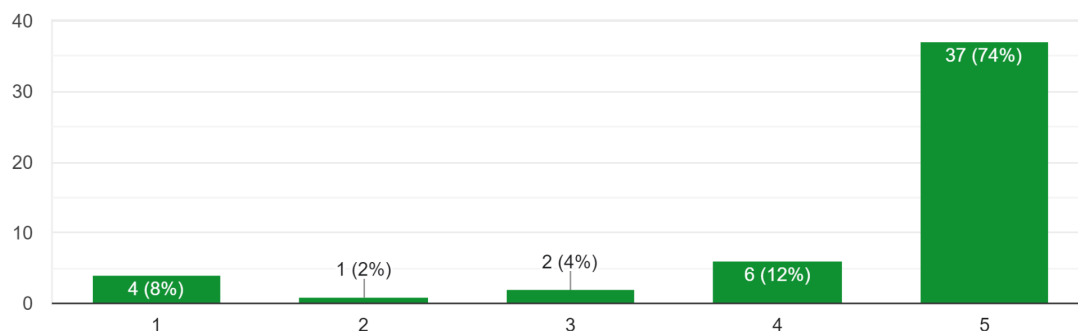
Following the consideration of including relevant work experience into a J&E credential and an A&I license, respondents were asked to address if a culturally responsive credential should include coursework on diversity, inclusion, and culturally relevant teaching practices. Figure 11 demonstrates that respondents overwhelmingly supported this notion with 74% of respondents offering the strongest support of this idea with 86% having some favorable feeling toward including coursework on diversity, inclusion, and culturally relevant teaching supporting a credential and license.

Figure 11

Incorporation of DEI & Culturally Relevant Teaching Practices in Credentialing

A culturally responsive credential should include coursework on diversity, inclusion, and culturally relevant teaching practices.

50 responses



Closely knit to the prior question, respondents were asked to consider if a culturally responsive license should require ongoing professional development in

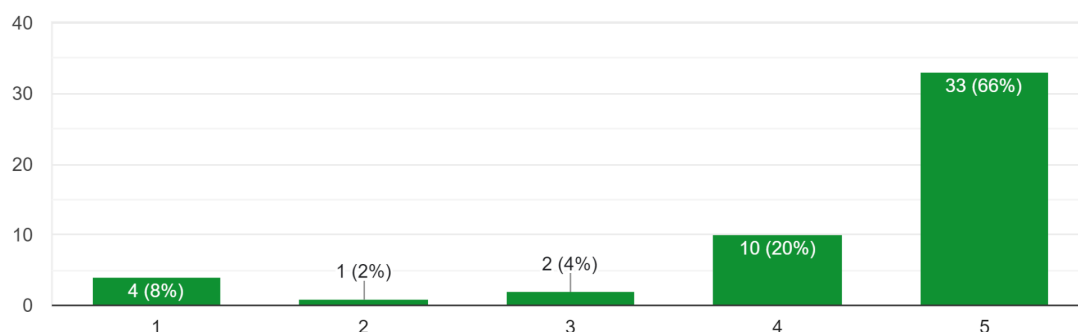
culturally responsive teaching and equitable practices, mirroring classroom teachers and other academically licensed professions which all require continual professional development. Demonstrated in Figure 12 this question was designed in close connection with the prior question, 66% of respondents gave this question the highest valuation with 86% having some favorable inclination toward a culturally responsive license requiring ongoing professional development in culturally responsive teaching and equitable practices. Those respondents feeling that it should not include elements of cultural responsiveness came to 10% of respondents.

Figure 12

Inclusion of Ongoing Professional Development in a Culturally Responsive License

A culturally responsive license should require ongoing professional development in culturally responsive teaching and equitable practices.

50 responses



Respondents were asked if they believed a culturally responsive credential and license would be helpful to promote equitable and inclusive education and participation in the field of Achievement and Integration. In Figure 13 respondents showing some favorability to this totaled 68%, feeling strongly to very strongly about its helpfulness in

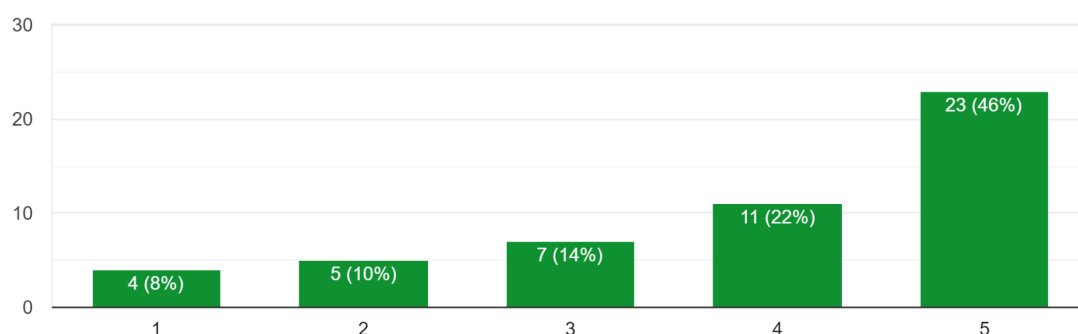
promoting equitable and inclusive education and participation in the field of Achievement and Integration.

Figure 13

Impact of a Culturally Responsive License on Equity & Inclusion within A&I

I believe a culturally responsive credential and license are helpful to promote equitable and inclusive education and participation in the field of Achievement and Integration.

50 responses



At the end of the survey, respondents were given the opportunity to make final comments. The survey respondents provided a range of insights on the potential impact of Justice & Equity Credentials and Achievement & Integration Licenses. Themes emerged around the potential for these credentials to open professional doors, enhance involvement and relevance, and create a tiered system for professional development and compensation. Fifty-nine percent of respondents fell into this category. While 59% of respondents were supportive, some of those respondents offered caution and care in creating a J&E credential and an A&I license. One respondent stated,

I feel like although I am doing a lot of what others are doing that have a license, having the credentials just opens up more doors and you feel like you are actually involved and relevant to the school, district, families and students you serve.

Another respondent focused on these positive themes stated,

If a credential were to be based largely around real world experience, I think it would be beneficial and it would be even better if this were some sort of tiered credentialing where people could be hired at a certain level and do PD to attain hiring tiers and better pay.

One of the respondents was positive about the learning, but overarchingly cautious and offered an articulate answer,

I believe every professional benefits from relevant training and development, and Achievement Integration could benefit from professional networks, consistency, research, and guidance. If my district required me to get this license at my own expense, I could not afford to do so at this time. I think one flaw of our system is siloing equity work and assuming equity champions will be able to make transformative changes to outcomes without transforming entire systems. I worry a little that creating this credential gives the impression that equity is the work of one or few.

Concerns were voiced about the efforts possibly benefiting a small group and the preference for collaborative learning environments over individual coursework. Eight responses (approximately 29.63%) fit within the first framework, which focused on concerns about efforts potentially benefiting a small group and a preference for collaborative learning environments over individual coursework.

Respondents also highlighted the risk of credential requirements diminishing staff retention, especially in rural areas, and the potential barriers to entry for BIPOC individuals. Nineteen responses (70.37%) aligned with the second framework, which

addressed concerns about credential requirements diminishing staff retention, especially in rural areas, and the potential barriers to entry for BIPOC individuals.

The need for comprehensive, system-wide equity training and the recognition of lived experiences alongside formal education were emphasized. I quantified the responses in relation to the framework focusing on the need for comprehensive, system-wide equity training and the recognition of lived experiences alongside formal education, to the 27 responses. This framework encapsulated two main identified themes:

- **Comprehensive, System-wide Equity Training:** Emphasized the importance of integrating equity training across all levels and areas within an organization or system to ensure widespread understanding and implementation of equity principles.
- **Recognition of Lived Experiences:** Highlighted the value of acknowledging and incorporating individuals' lived experiences, alongside formal education, as valid and significant contributions to their expertise and understanding of equity issues.

Given the responses, I categorized and quantified them according to these two themes:

- **Responses Advocating for Comprehensive Equity Training:** Included comments advocating for system-wide approaches to equity training, rather than isolated or individualized efforts.
- **Responses Valuing Lived Experiences:** Comprised remarks that emphasized the importance of recognizing lived experiences as critical to understanding and addressing equity, alongside or even in lieu of formal educational credentials.

Based on the categorization related to the framework emphasizing comprehensive, system-wide equity training and the recognition of lived experiences alongside formal education:

- Ten responses (37.04%) advocated for comprehensive, system-wide equity training. This indicates a significant portion of the feedback underscores the importance of integrating equity training across all levels and areas within systems to ensure widespread understanding and application of equity principles.
- Seven responses (25.93%) highlighted the value of recognizing lived experiences as crucial to understanding and addressing equity, alongside or even instead of formal educational credentials. This reflected a recognition of the importance of diverse perspectives and experiences in enriching equity initiatives.

These quantifications suggested a strong emphasis among the responses on the necessity of a holistic approach to equity training across entire systems and the incorporation of lived experiences as a valuable complement to formal education in understanding and implementing equity principles.

The feedback underscores the complexity of implementing such credentials, pointing to a need for careful design that addresses access, affordability, and the broad inclusion of diverse educational professionals. One respondent stated, “I am concerned that making this a requirement will actually result in less employee retention, especially in rural areas that may not have easy access to the training required.”

Throughout the survey responses, there was significant interest in the development of a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement & Integration License. Yet, a consistent theme advocated for careful and deliberate consideration in

their creation. This approach aims to ensure that such credentials not only support the overarching goals of Achievement and Integration but also effectively serve the diverse needs of students, families, and communities, embodying a commitment to elevate the integrity of this work. To further embellish this point, there was a theme sewn throughout the survey that the work of A&I is truly everyone's work and while a J&E credential and an A&I license may be beneficial, it should not be merely limited to those serving specifically in A&I. This sentiment was captured well by the respondent who stated,

While I fully support the fields of study around Justice & Equity Credentialing and an Achievement and Integration Licensure, I feel this work is central to all of our work as educators, such that everyone should be required to demonstrate and understanding of these concepts and practices, rather than just a few individuals interested in the topic.

The survey results illuminate a nuanced perspective on the potential impacts of introducing a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement & Integration License in Minnesota. There is a notable consensus on the credentials' ability to validate and professionalize Achievement and Integration work, underscoring the importance of addressing educational equity and the achievement/opportunity gap. However, concerns about accessibility, particularly for BIPOC individuals and those in rural areas, pointed to the need for inclusive and comprehensive implementation strategies. The feedback underscored the potential of these credentials to foster professional development and systemic change, while also highlighting the necessity of addressing barriers to ensure equitable access and impact.

Thematic Analysis of Interviews

The themes identified from the transcripts highlight the complex landscape surrounding the introduction of a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement & Integration License. The three interviewees offered varying perspectives on how such credentials could standardize and professionalize Achievement and Integration work, ensuring accountability and emphasizing cultural competence and responsiveness. The shortest interview was a little over forty-five minutes while the longest interview exceeded an hour and a half. However, the themes also underscored significant challenges, including potential barriers to implementation and concerns about inclusivity and accessibility for educators from diverse backgrounds. Insights from these themes suggested that while there is optimistic support for the credentials' potential to enhance educational equity, careful consideration must be given to their design, implementation, and the ongoing support required to ensure they meet the needs of all stakeholders in educational settings. Addressing these themes comprehensively can provide a roadmap for developing credentials that are both effective and equitable, contributing positively to the landscape of education focused on justice and integration. Table 2 provides an overview of the three interviewees and contextualizes the rest of the interview assessment providing an anchor point.

Table 2*Synthesis of Interviewee Demographics*

Interview ee #	District Type	Years in the Field	Role	Synthesis of Support
Interview ee 1	Urban	More than 20	Direct Student Support	Extremely Supportive of Credentials with almost no reservation
Interview ee 2	Rural	More than 20	Administration	Supportive but with caution, care, and strong investment in design.
Interview ee 3	Suburban	5-10 Years	Direct Student Support	Extremely Supportive of the credential and license and believes that the practitioners need it to be effective and accountable for their work.

A quote was selected for each interviewee capturing their overarching thoughts on the creation of a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license. Each of the quotes was selected by careful thematic examination of the interviews and used as a summary and synthesis of their overarching ideology permeated through each of their independent interviews.

Table 3*Synthesis of Interviewee's View on a J&E Credential and an A&I License*

Interviewee	Notable Quote
Interviewee 1	Understand there's no right way to do this, but it needs to be done the work needs to be done and this license and this component of a license needs to be infiltrated in every single aspect of your teaching career, especially in those schools and those urban districts in places where kids are
Interviewee 2	More meaningful goals and outcomes set with more consistent data sought may be across the field. One of my concerns in our A&I program is that it's difficult to set measurable goals. Also, in our state's A&I program, there isn't really a consistent set of goals across the state that we're working toward. It's very local, which to some extent, I think local is really good in this scenario because every Community is different, but it's also different because We're all using different methods of evaluating our goals. And so, at the end of the day, the Department of Education doesn't really have any universal information that they can use to say this is having a positive impact or this is how it's having an impact across the state. And so I do feel if we had more people with the credentials and more of a mindset about how to approach that. It could be really valuable because I do believe the work is very important. And I know that it makes a positive impact on the lives of the students that we work with. And it makes a positive impact in communities. But it's hard to tell our story of how that's happening because we don't know how to gather the data and have it be meaningful across from one Community to the next.
Interviewee 3	I've been trained in the world and not in school, which I would love to be trained in, but I noticed that they don't read anything. They're just making up stuff as they go instead of trying to gain more knowledge. So I feel like if they have a license, then they'll be more knowledgeable about what they're doing. And again, they'll be held accountable.

Summarizing the three interviewees and their contextual understanding was key in further evaluating the emergent themes and properly digesting each interviewee's essential information. Interviewee 1 was a veteran of the field with over twenty years of experience. Interviewee 1 was a professional whose role is described as direct student contact and has worked in some of Minnesota's largest school districts. As a person of color, Interviewee 1 believed that employing a J&E credential and an A&I license is essential to the work for both the learning of students and for the efficacy of effort and professional practice of the employee.

Throughout the interview, Interviewee 1 emphasized and reemphasized their unwavering support to such and idea sharing that with her decades of professional experience married with their own personal experience as a student, the extrapolative understanding of the implications and importance of such a credential may be foundational to more fully supporting our learning communities across the board and demography. The interviewer asked Interviewee 1 if they thought a J&E credential and an A&I license would make a difference in the Achievement Opportunity Gap. Interviewee 1 responded,

Absolutely 100 times full because when you start to see it's the education and it's that education that's going to start changing. The lives of these students when you start education... it's that rich... getting ahead of myself ripple effect. You're taking the teachers and you're training them and they're being introduced to new strategies to help reach their child. Teachers don't go into teaching because they hate children. Teachers go into teaching because they love children...

Interviewee 1 continued to signal over and over again about the importance of such a credential and a license, pointing to what training in education is all about; helping children and communities learn.

Interviewee 2 supported creating a J&E credential and an A&I license; however, Interviewee 2 offered more caution on several fronts. Interviewee 2 had over twenty years of experience and was currently a district-level administrator. Interviewee 2 worked in a rural district and showed a significant level of dedication to the work of A&I. They expressed some frustrations with the work in rural communities due to some of the bifurcation they experienced and even more concern for the difficulty presented in hiring people in rural communities within A&I, including wages.

Again, Interviewee 2 was very supportive, but with contextual cautious optimism and caveats, mostly rooted in the potential gatekeeping that might happen with such a credential and license. Interviewee 2 made comments of caution multiple times surrounding the difficulty of finding people to do the work of A&I in rural areas and wanted to emphasize and ensure that if such a credential and license were to be realized, that the design not exacerbate accessibility for recruiting people to the field of A&I. Further, Interviewee 2 mentioned on multiple occasions that part of the credential's value is its ability to provide more equitable pay and retain those in A&I longer knowing how public school credentials are designed and integrated into steps and lanes. Interviewee 2 stated,

I do think that there's value in having the credential and that it would be very valuable for people too for collegiate level learning and growth in the area of justice and equity. I think that those insights would be very valuable in our local

programming and things, and I can see that there could be a place for a licensure as well. I think that with both of these it does increase the perceived value that other people might place on the work that you do and its impact. I think that unfortunately probably means that it also relates to the wages that people are paid for the work that they do, that if you have that credential it may allow you to garner a higher wage, and if you have the higher wage, you're more likely to stay in the field longer. Unfortunately in a lot of nonprofit settings and this diversity and equity work and justice work the pay isn't as solid or consistent, and so people end up leaving because they need to just put their families first, even though their heart might be in the work it's difficult to continue in it long term and honestly it was part of my own journey...

Regarding the difficulty in recruiting people to the work in A&I with rural communities, Interviewee 2 stated,

I do have a concern that a requirement of some sort of credential could result in us not being able to keep people in the field or attract people to the field because they don't have the credential, it might make hiring more difficult. So it just depends on what the credential is that's required.

Summarizing Interviewee 2, who worked as a rural district administrator, the concern emerged that adding credentialing to the work of A&I may add to what is already difficult work in hiring people in rural communities for the work of A&I. Interviewee 2 mentioned on several occasions throughout the interview that recruiting and retaining people to the work of A&I in rural communities was difficult because in their community

there are very few people who have the professional capacity to work such roles and creating a credential and license may exacerbate that difficulty.

When asked if a J&E credential and an A&I license may help reduce the Achievement Opportunity Gap, Interviewee 2 stated,

I do think that it could have an impact. Especially, if it's within our school systems in the A&I programs. Significantly, I think it could have an impact because you would be able to have someone locally helping with professional development of educators around issues of justice and equity as well as achievement and integration and that the more informed and trained our staff are the better we can provide those services to students. I also believe that if we have someone with the credentials at the table at an administrative level they may get to address the concerns that are systemic issues, and that if we can get to the heart of some of our systemic issues that we could see some significant improvements in student achievement. But as long as we continue with some of the same systemic things because we don't think outside the box or choose to look at things differently. It's really hard to bring about different results.

What Interviewee 3 was addressing was a theme that emerged in their interview.

Ultimately, Interviewee 2 identified that one of the major interceptors to progress in the work of A&I was systemic institutional issues, often perpetuated by district policy or administration. Thinking about credentialing and licensing, Interviewee 2 propounded that while there is benefit to credentialing and licensing in the work of A&I, Interviewee 2 identified credentialing and licensing potentially carrying more significant impact with administrative positions. Ultimately, this was a result of Interviewee 2 synthesizing that

issues presenting themselves to be antithetical to progress in A&I in rural communities were often linked to district and administrative barriers, lending credentialing and licensing for administrators as a key component in addressing systemic barriers in the progress A&I sets to address.

Moving to synthesize Interviewee 3 and their responses, it was important to understand the contextual situation for Interviewee 3. Interviewee 3 worked in a suburban school setting and is a person of color who has worked their way up from paraprofessional work to their current position providing specialist-level support to students under their district's A&I funding and programming. Interviewee 3 expressed a lot of frustration with their district stating that there is a significant amount of placating and a continual otherizing of their work and efforts. Interviewee 3 stated in numerous ways how they felt people within their district did not take them seriously and how they believed some of that went back to others who this person worked within their district in A&I and that some of those employees in A&I seemed to have little to no idea what to do to support their students, families, and communities in A&I work and often that translated into what appeared to Interviewee 3, a notable lack of effort. Interviewee 3 believed that these actions by colleagues accentuated implicit bias within other educators whom Interviewee 3 described as skeptical about the work and efforts of A&I in the first place. Interviewee 3 stated that being credentialed and licensed helps you understand your profession better and gives others a similar understanding of you as an expert in a profession starting,

I feel like if you are licensed, then you will know your stuff.... It's like being a counselor. When someone hires you they hire you because of your stuff and

they're gonna hold you accountable and the state's gonna hold them accountable.

So we'll have a better outcome.

While Interviewee 3 stated confidently that a J&E credential and an A&I license would most certainly impact student outcomes, Interviewee 3 also stated in no uncertain terms that the credential and license would impact perception by their educational peers interdepartmentally. Regarding holding her A&I peers in the field accountable and related to Interviewee 3's worries of perception, Interviewee 3 stated, "If there is some sort of licensure, it will be a way of holding districts and people accountable for getting the work done." While Interviewee 3 held a strong and positive perspective on the potential J&E credential and an A&I license, Interviewee 3 was very clear that such credentials and licenses needed to be culturally responsive. Interviewee 3 went into extensive detail about their lived experiences within their school district and provided numerous real-world examples of why culturally responsive credentials and licenses were necessary.

Assessing the data from the interviews, I employed a grounded theory approach for coding and identifying themes in the interview data. This involved meticulously reviewing interview transcripts to note initial codes, phrases, or ideas participants mentioned that appeared significant. These initial codes were then grouped into six broader categories to discern patterns and themes within the data. This iterative process allowed for the refinement of themes as more data were analyzed, ensuring that the emergent themes accurately reflected the participants' experiences and perspectives related to the potential impacts of creating a Justice and Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration License. The six themes identified through this process

were Accountability and Professionalism, Cultural Competence and Responsiveness, Consistency and Standardization in Practices, Barriers and Challenges to Implementation, Impact on Staff Retention and Persistence, and Role of Cultural Competence and Diversity Training. These themes captured the overarching responses by the interviewees, highlighting overarching responses and conversational topics thematically.

Accountability and Professionalism

Moving through the six themes that emerged, I looked first at accountability and professionalism. A recurring theme was the belief that a credential and license system would introduce a level of accountability and professionalism to achievement and integration work. Interviewees suggested that formal training and certification would ensure individuals are knowledgeable and committed to equity and justice in education. Accentuating this and focused on what was perceived as seemingly haphazard efforts, Interviewee 3 stated,

Most definitely. I mean right now there is no consistency people. Like I said, they're just making it up as they go... the district that I'm in. God. There's nothing consistent about what we do. It changes from year to year from day to day depending on who's angry. So yes, I think this will be great because it will be consistent. It'll be the same expectations.

All three Interviewees made some or multiple mentions surrounding accountability and professionalism. Essentially, the interviewees collectively and compoundingly expressed both a concern for some accountability and professionalism that had existed in other professionals and additionally weighed in accentuating the impact of credentials and licenses on the perception of an educational professional. Multiple mentions were made

about the learning that happens with credentialing and licensing. Further comments were made about how credentials, in some or many capacities, give credence to professional perception. Interviewee 3 stated,

First people would take Equity and achievement seriously because right now to me working in a school district, working in different school districts. It's just words on a piece of paper. So no, I don't feel like anyone is taking it as seriously as they should.

Cultural Competence and Responsiveness

The next of the six emergent themes addressed was cultural competence and responsiveness. There was a strong emphasis on the importance of understanding and integrating diverse cultural experiences into educational practices. Interviewees highlighted the value of lived experiences, cultural knowledge, and community work in contributing to a more equitable education system. Regarding cultural competence and responsiveness, Interviewee 1 stated,

Yes, and I do. The issue that I face is to me you can't do anything else with the child academically until you understand their culture. So it stops the train. It doesn't work without the gas and this gas is unleaded and the gas we need is the premium.

Interviewee 1 mentioned throughout the interview in many varied capacities that cultural competence and responsiveness was critical to the work of A&I. Interviewee 1 identified Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, traversing the pyramid toward educator understanding of the students they work with; culture, life-situation, and overall capacity of a student as

fundamentally foundational in the ability our educational system and educators to teach our students and our students ability to learn.

Consistency and Standardization in Practices

Consistency and standardization in practices were next of the six emergent themes being addressed. Interview transcripts reflected a desire for more consistent, standardized approaches to achievement and integration work across different districts. A credentialing system was seen as a way to unify practices and ensure practices are grounded in evidence-based research. Addressing consistency and standardization in practices, Interviewee 2 stated,

...also that in our state's A&I program, there isn't really a consistent set of goals across the state that we're working toward. It's very local, which to some extent I think is really good in this scenario because every Community is different, but it's also different because We're all using different methods of evaluating our goals. And so at the end of the day the Department of Education doesn't really have Any universal information that they can use to say this is having a positive impact or this is how it's having an impact across the state. And so I do feel if we had more people with the credentials and more of a mindset about how to approach that. It could be really valuable because I do believe the work is very important. And I know that it makes a positive impact on the lives of the students that we work with, and it makes a positive impact in communities. But it's hard to tell our story of how that's happening because we don't know how to gather the data and have it be meaningful across from one community to the next.”

Interviewee 2 presented perhaps the strongest voice surrounding consistency and standardization in practices, yet all three interviewees strongly mentioned this as both an internal and external issue. Internally, a lack of consistency and standardization in practices had led to witnesses of those performing the work of A&I to seem, at times, seemingly arbitrary efforts with students and school systems. Unsystematic practice and lack of continuity in practice was perceived by all three interviewees as prohibitive to progress. Externally, a lack of consistency and standardization of practices was perceived by interviewees to impact their understanding of both perception from other educators and inclusion of those within A&I in both student-based supports and administrative inclusion with decision-making bodies.

Barriers and Challenges to Implementation

Following consistency and standardization in practices, barriers and challenges to implementation thematically emerged as one of the themes. While supportive of the idea, interviewees also express concerns about potential barriers to implementing such a system, including the impact on current professionals in the field, the risk of excluding minority voices, and the challenges of designing a credentialing system that is both inclusive and rigorous. Discussing barriers and challenges to implementation, Interviewee 2 stated,

... and so I do think at the higher levels of this work. It would be a valuable piece and it would contribute to persistence and retention at the more direct service levels of the field. I do have a concern that a requirement of some sort of credential could result in us not being able to keep people in the field or attract

people to the field because they don't have the credential. It might make hiring more difficult. So it just depends on what the credential is that's required.

This theme was the most pronounced theme of resistance to a J & E credential and an A & I license among interviewee respondents. Across the board these interviewees understood the difficulty of recruiting educators, and further accentuated a compounding difficulty to recruiting educators to the field of A&I. While this concern was expressed, it was met with the postulation of some positive impacts a credential and license may provide, so long as somehow the possibility of barriers and challenges was met by meaningful solutions. This moved into the next emergent theme, impact on staff retention and persistence.

Impact on Staff Retention and Persistence

When considering the theme of an impact on staff retention and persistence, there was an underlying belief that a credentialing system could improve staff retention and persistence, particularly among BIPOC educators, by legitimizing the work and potentially leading to better compensation and support. Bandura (1977) spoke to this in his writings focused on human impact and change in human psychological development. This is exemplified when Interviewee 2 stated,

... because achieving the credential and potentially a license would bring some respect and credibility to the position. And would enable a person to be able to garner a higher wage. And if you're able to garner the higher wage, you're more likely to be able to persist and remain in the field. You're not going to leave for better pay somewhere else. Pay is not everything in this field. A lot of people go

into this field for passion so I'm not trying to say that that's not important but people still have to be able to support their families.

Each of the interviewees demonstrated this theme in their responses, and there seemed to be a strong feeling of what a credential and license and J&E and A&I might accomplish for staff retention and persistence. Bandura (1986; 1997) accentuates this when speaking to issues surrounding human behavior and motivation. Each interviewee leveraged their own story on this matter, stating in no uncertain terms the impact this could have. While interviewees made mention of this on the impact of the ability to meet student need in addressing the AOG, a strong emphasis was given toward the impact of retention and persistence focused on professional perception and wage equity. To this point, Interviewee 2 highlighted their fundamental need and consideration to stay in the work due to the inability to support their family because of the low wages. Using a workaround, Interview 2 was able to add an additional field of work to help supplement their salary; described as a necessity to stay in the field of A&I.

Cultural Competence and Diversity Training

The final theme which emerged in the interview process was the role of cultural competence and diversity training. All interviewees agreed on the critical role of cultural competence and diversity training within the credentialing process, arguing that it's essential for addressing the achievement opportunity gap and ensuring equitable education for all students. Interviewee 1 stated, "It ultimately goes back to the teacher. So we want teachers that are highly trained in how to do these things. So there has to be cultural pedagogy that goes into a license." Pushing back to Interviewee 1, mention of the need to have this training was paramount stating that a student cannot learn if the

educator professionals do not know and understand their students and families they serve. Interviewee 3 mentioned that while formal training surrounding cultural competence and diversity training, real-world experience was also essential. Interviewee 3 stated,

...because you know nothing about the communities. You cannot help and a lot of times when we go to college we don't have to do any type of community work at all, and if you don't do that, you have no understanding. So I think they should do community work. I think they should have to go into, just my opinion, homeless shelters and even maybe hospital settings just to learn more about what's going on.

This point that was made was both powerful and practical, accentuating the importance of cultural competence and diversity training, giving it real-world experience. Interviewee 3's point here truly encapsulated this concept and its emergence across all interviewees, tied seamlessly to Interviewee 1 and the effort made to describe how Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs brings to bear the importance of working up toward self-actualization, rooted in this instance in relational, cultural, and diversity understandings.

This thematic analysis of the interview data has led to a deep understanding of the complexities involved in introducing a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement & Integration License. Through a grounded theory approach, I have identified six pivotal themes that offer a comprehensive view of the potential benefits and challenges of such credentials. My thematic summary encapsulated the essence of these findings, emphasizing the importance of a nuanced approach to their implementation. This rigorous analysis not only contributed significantly to the discourse on educational equity

but also serves as a foundational step for future research and policy development in this critical area.

Overview of the Data Analysis

Overarchingly, synthesizing both the quantitative and qualitative data it was found that the survey and interview data on the Justice & Equity Credential and Achievement & Integration License using grounded theory reveals several key insights. Respondents broadly recognized the potential of these credentials to enhance educational equity and justice. Concerns were raised about potential barriers these credentials might introduce, particularly for educators from underrepresented groups and in rural communities. Effective implementation strategies highlighted included ensuring accessibility, integrating diverse experiences into the curriculum, and involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders in development and evaluation processes. Utilizing this synthesis an optimism toward these credentials' impact on educational practices was clear. A strategic approach to a potential J&E credential and an A&I license development and implementation is crucial for fostering inclusivity and equity in education among other identified areas of need within the field. Synthesizing the collective findings from both the surveys and the interviews the emergent themes are:

- The perceived necessity of credentials and licenses for A&I practitioners for accountability and professional recognition, highlighted from the interviewee's points surrounding internal accountability and external professional validation.
- The potential impact of such credentials on educational equity, including the achievement/opportunity gap.

- The importance of culturally responsive practices within the credentialing process, giving professionally relevant experience a part in the credentialing and licensing process.
- Challenges and barriers to implementing these credentials, such as existing educational inequities and systemic resistance, including themes such as demography and geography; identity and locale.
- Suggestions for the structure and content of a culturally responsive credential and license program, incorporating facets identified such as using real-life experiences, removing potential financial barriers to a credentialing and licensing process, and ensuring the inclusion of shared life experiences.

Specific to the survey on the impact of a Justice & Equity Credential alongside an Achievement and Integration License in Minnesota education revealed these key themes:

- A general support for the initiative with emphasis on its potential to validate the work in Achievement and Integration.
- The ability the potential credentials have to promote professional practice, and address achievement gaps.
- Concerns were raised about potential barriers for BIPOC individuals entering the field and the need for broader systemic changes.

The findings clearly recognized the value of a J&E credential and an A&I license while highlighting the importance of comprehensive, systemic approaches to truly enhance educational equity and integration, not only limited to the efforts of A&I.

Utilizing the interview results and a grounded theory approach in analyzing interviews about the impact of a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration license in Minnesota revealed these key themes:

- Importance of Credentialing and Licensing: Participants highlighted the potential value of a Justice and Equity credential and Achievement and Integration license to formalize and standardize A&I work, suggesting it could increase accountability, professionalism, and recognition in the field.
- Challenges in Current A&I Work: There were concerns about the need for standardized qualifications for A&I professionals, which may impact the effectiveness and consistency of A&I programs across Minnesota.
- Culturally Responsive Education: The need for culturally responsive training and education within the credentialing process was emphasized, suggesting that understanding diverse cultural backgrounds is crucial for effective A&I work.
- Impact on Achievement and Integration Outcomes: Participants expressed optimism that a credentialing system could improve outcomes by ensuring practitioners are well-equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills.
- Implementation Concerns: While supportive of the idea, some interviewees raised concerns about implementing such a system, including potential barriers to access and the importance of including lived experiences and non-traditional qualifications in credentialing criteria.

Synthesizing data from surveys and interviews reveals consensus on the Justice & Equity Credential and Achievement & Integration License's potential to elevate educational equity. However, distinctions emerged: survey respondents broadly endorsed

the initiative, emphasizing its potential to validate and professionalize A&I work, while interviews provided more profound insights into the necessity of credentialing for standardization, challenges in current A&I practices, and the critical role of culturally responsive education. Concerns about implementation and access barriers, particularly for underrepresented groups, were highlighted, underscoring the need for inclusive, strategically developed credentials to enhance education equity and integration truly.

Conclusion

Given the detailed content I have shared, I synthesized the findings from both surveys and interviews in response to my research questions, highlighting the key insights and implications of the proposed Justice & Equity Credential and Achievement & Integration License. The data suggested a cautious optimism among educators and A&I practitioners about the potential of these credentials to enhance educational equity, address the achievement/opportunity gap, and improve professional practice. Key themes include the need for culturally responsive credentialing processes, the potential for increased accountability and professionalism, and concerns about barriers to implementation. Furthermore, insights emphasize the importance of inclusivity in credentialing to avoid exacerbating existing inequities. These findings offer an understanding of the complexities of implementing such credentials, suggesting a strategic, inclusive approach is essential for their success and positive impact on educational equity and integration in Minnesota.

The survey and interview data synthesis provided a comprehensive understanding of perspectives on the proposed Justice & Equity Credential and Achievement & Integration License. Surveys offered quantitative insights into general attitudes and

perceptions, capturing broad trends and levels of support among a diverse array of education professionals. Interviews, on the other hand, provided depth, allowing for the exploration of nuanced opinions, personal experiences, and detailed suggestions for implementation. Together, these methods enriched the analysis by balancing statistical breadth with the richness of personal narratives, enabling a multidimensional view of potential impacts, challenges, and the crucial components of a culturally responsive credentialing process.

Moving into Chapter Five, I reframed the research and research questions and set the stage for what all of the findings practically mean. I illuminated and demonstrated the findings of the research results in a synthesis, bringing to a culmination the summary and impact of the research and research results.

In conclusion, Chapter 4's quantitative and qualitative data analysis has illuminated the critical perspectives of educators and experts on the potential impacts of establishing a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement & Integration License in Minnesota. The findings underscore the necessity for intentional, culturally responsive credentialing and licensing mechanisms to enhance educational equity and improve outcomes within the Achievement and Integration framework. As I transition to Chapter 5, I synthesize these insights within the broader context of existing literature, explore their implications for policy and practice, and propose directions for future research. This final chapter aims to encapsulate the study's comprehensive contributions to educational equity, articulating a clear path forward for stakeholders to consider in their ongoing efforts to close the achievement and opportunity gaps in Minnesota's educational landscape.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter serves as the culmination of this dissertation, synthesizing the insights gained through a comprehensive exploration of the potential for a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement & Integration License in Minnesota's educational system. The study was driven by critical inquiries into how such credentials might impact Achievement and Integration work, the achievement/opportunity gap, and professional practices, including staff retention and persistence.

Employing a mixed-methods grounded theory approach, the research drew upon diverse perspectives through surveys and interviews, ensuring a rich understanding of the subject. This chapter aims to integrate the findings from previous chapters, offering a decisive analysis that bridges theoretical frameworks with practical implications. After setting the foundation with an overview of the educational and equity landscape in Chapter 1, delving into historical and comparative analyses in Chapters 2 and 3, and presenting the empirical findings in Chapter 4, we now turn to discuss the overarching conclusions, implications for practice and policy, and directions for future research. This chapter articulates a coherent narrative and weaves threads of inquiry together to illuminate the path forward for enhancing equity and justice in education through credentialing. While I move forward to accomplish the outline put forward, it is critical to understand that the sharing of my story, review of the correlative literature, setting of the methodological framework and research paradigm, and results of the research have all been rooted in the research questions:

- *How might a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration license impact the outcomes of Achievement and Integration work in Minnesota?*
- *What impacts might it have on the outcomes of the achievement/opportunity gap ubiquity in professional practice and research, as well as staff retention and persistence?*
- *What might a culturally responsive credential and license look like?*

Chapter 1 introduced the research topic of exploring the potential impacts of introducing a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement & Integration License in Minnesota's educational landscape. It outlined the significance of addressing the Achievement and Opportunity Gap (AOG) within the state's educational framework, highlighting the need for transformative measures. The chapter discussed the foundational concepts of justice, equity, and integration, contextualizing them within the broader discourse of educational policy and practice. Moreover, it articulated the research questions to investigate the potential effects of these credentials on student outcomes, professional practice, and staff retention. By providing this conceptual framework, Chapter 1 set the stage for a comprehensive examination of the proposed credentials' implications in subsequent chapters.

My narrative was intricately interwoven with the themes delineated in Chapter 1 of the research. As elucidated through my shared experiences and journey, it became apparent how my individual story correlated with the broader context of educational equity and achievement. My narrative served as a microcosm encapsulating the challenges and opportunities prevalent within the educational landscape, thus reflecting the intricacies inherent in navigating systems characterized by privilege, access, and

opportunity. At the same time, part of my positionality may not traverse all facets sought that A&I programming seeks to address, but those that do provide a springboard and a throughline driving my entire professional and educational pursuits aimed at issues finding their foundation in concepts such as diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. By situating my experiences within the framework delineated in Chapter 1, a more profound comprehension emerged regarding the structural barriers and systemic inequities that underpin educational outcomes. Consequently, my narrative not only enriched the research by furnishing real-world insights but also underscored the exigency and significance of addressing these issues to ensure equitable access to quality education for all students with the capacity to serve all students.

Chapter 2 delved into a thorough literature review, contextualizing the research within existing scholarship and theoretical frameworks. It explored the historical and theoretical underpinnings of educational equity and the Achievement and Opportunity Gap (AOG), drawing from seminal works by scholars such as Darling-Hammond and Muhammad. The chapter examined the significance of credentialing and licensing in education, highlighting their role in professional development and quality assurance. Additionally, it discussed the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing specialized credentials and licenses, particularly in the context of Achievement and Integration (A&I) programs. By synthesizing diverse perspectives from the literature, Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive understanding of the research landscape, laying the groundwork for the empirical investigation conducted in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 also focused on sharing the origins of A&I within the state of Minnesota. Using Heilman's comprehensive compilation of history up to 1994, Chapter 2

drew the historical context to our current state in A&I, starting from Minnesota's legal battles, which detailed the court cases involving Minneapolis Public Schools. A clear line was drawn through Chapter 2, showing the historical context and academic expert opinion as it relates to the history of A&I and the importance of addressing the AOG through a copious amount of research supportive of the impact of quality credentialing and licensing.

Chapter 3 outlined the methodology adopted to explore the impacts of a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement & Integration License on Achievement and Integration work in Minnesota. It employed a grounded theory approach to uncover how these credentials might influence the achievement/opportunity gap, professional practice, and staff retention and persistence. Further, it employed the use of critical theory and critical race theory as an epistemological foundation, understanding its inextricable necessity guided by the researches contextualization. Through surveys and interviews with A&I practitioners, the chapter set a comprehensive foundation for the research, emphasizing ethical considerations and the importance of a diverse sample. This methodological framework facilitated the investigation of critical themes in Chapter 4, bridging theoretical exploration and practical application in educational equity.

Chapter 4 presented the empirical findings of the research, focusing on data collected through surveys and interviews regarding the potential impacts of introducing a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration License in Minnesota. The chapter highlighted vital themes that emerged from the analysis, including accountability and professional recognition, cultural competence and responsiveness, consistency and standardization in practices, challenges to implementation, and the

importance of professional development and support. Both survey and interview data underscored the necessity of such credentials to enhance educational equity, address the achievement/opportunity gap, and support professional development.

Differences between survey and interview responses provided nuanced views on implementation challenges and the importance of systemic change beyond credentialing. Overall, Chapter 4 provided valuable insights into stakeholders' perceptions and experiences regarding the proposed credentials, offering a foundation for further discussion and analysis in subsequent chapters.

Major Learnings

The comprehensive synthesis of both quantitative and qualitative data from my research underlines a significant consonance of six fundamental insights and learnings, reflecting a robust consensus on the strategic imperatives necessary, surfaced from the study, for the implementation of a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement & Integration License in Minnesota. This section revisits these six major learnings, integrating the emergent themes from the cross-analysis to present an understanding that enriches our comprehension of the broader impacts of these potential credentials. Additionally, three independent themes/learnings are highlighted, found independently pronounced in the interviews, noteworthy to the collective major learnings from the research.

Results Emerging from Both Surveys & Interviews

Emerging as the first major learning from across the scope of both surveys and interviews was accountability and professional recognition. Across both surveys and interviews, there is unanimous recognition of the necessity for structured accountability

and professional recognition through formal credentials. According to the research, establishing a credentialing system would bring about a standardization that not only enhances professional practice but also validates the commitment of A&I practitioners toward educational equity.

According to the research findings, the second major learning was cultural competence and responsiveness. A core finding is the universal acknowledgment of the value of culturally responsive practices in education. This significantly emphasizes incorporating lived experiences and cultural understanding within the credentialing process. This theme resonates deeply across the data sets, suggesting that any effective credentialing system must be rooted in cultural competence to effectively address diverse educational environments.

The third of the six learnings emerging from the research was consistency and standardization. There is an intense desire expressed for consistency and standardization in A&I practices. Respondents from both methodologies highlighted the potential of a credentialing system to establish consistent, evidence-based approaches that would facilitate uniform practices across districts, thereby enhancing the efficacy and integrity of A&I initiatives. Consistency and standardization possess a benefit for both learners and practitioners within A&I work and domains.

The fourth major learning from the research results manifested as challenges and barriers. While there is optimism about the benefits of credentialing, there are also significant concerns about potential barriers to its implementation. These include exclusivity, cost, and systemic resistance, which could hinder the accessibility of the credentials, particularly for BIPOC individuals and educators in rural areas.

For practitioners of Achievement and Integration work, both data sets spoke powerfully to the need for professional development and support. Both data sets indicated that credentials could be pivotal in supporting ongoing professional development and offer structures for better compensation and career progression. This is a critical factor in improving staff retention and addressing the professional isolation often experienced by A&I practitioners.

Finally, the sixth major learning emerging from the research with abject clarity is equity in education. There is a shared belief that introducing a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement & Integration License should be central to promoting educational equity and addressing the achievement/opportunity gap. This theme underscores the necessity for these credentials as tools of professional development and catalysts for broader systemic change. While my research demonstrates a definitive need for this within the construct of Achievement and Integration work specifically, woven throughout the results was the imperative expressed that the work of addressing the AOG and the efforts explicitly made by those in Achievement and Integration work are the work of all educators and that while there is a place and platform for a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license, the key components surround diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, belong to all educators.

Major Learnings from Interviews

Integrating independent themes from the interviews three subset major learnings emerged. Firstly, interviews brought to bear a specific major finding focused on an emphasis on lived experiences. Particularly highlighted in interviews, integrating lived experiences and cultural knowledge into educational practice is crucial. This suggests that

formal credentials should focus on more than just academic prowess but also on the rich, contextual experiences educators bring to their roles.

The subsequent major learning that emerged with strength through the interviews was the desire for consistency in evaluation methods. This theme, more pronounced in interviews, aligns with the call for standardization but also points towards a need for uniform evaluation methods to assess the impact and effectiveness of A&I work across various districts.

Lastly, while the surveys did highlight the importance and impact of credentials, the interviews provided a notable difference in the pronounced view of credentials and license impacts. Interviewees provided more profound insights into how credentials might influence professional practice, suggesting that beyond formal recognition, these credentials could enhance respect and credibility and potentially lead to better compensation, contributing positively to staff retention and persistence.

Thinking about the major learnings, we move to forward-looking considerations. The major learnings from this research articulate a compelling argument for the establishment of a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement & Integration License. These credentials are envisioned not just as tools for enhancing professional standards and practices but as essential instruments for embedding the principles of equity, justice, and inclusivity into the fabric of Minnesota's educational system. This approach recognizes the intrinsic link between educational equity and broader social justice imperatives, urging a collective shift towards more inclusive educational practices that acknowledge and harness diverse experiences and perspectives within our communities, recognizing that practitioners in the field of Achievement and Integration

see inherent value and potential for both students, families, communities, and educational professionals and practitioners of Achievement and Integration. Plyer (2006) addresses the persistence of social justice activism and provides contextual understanding to creating institutional capacity. This kind of structure can be embossed through the structural implementation of credentials and licenses providing capacity in institutional impact and endurance.

In summary, this refined understanding of the major learnings, enriched by a thorough cross-analysis, not only fortifies the basis for advocating these credentials but also enhances the strategic framework for their development, aiming to ensure that they serve as effective levers for systemic change and equity in education. This synthesis positions the research to move forward, grounded in a comprehensive and critically evaluated body of evidence.

Revisiting the Literature

Chapter 2, the literature review, offered a comprehensive synthesis of existing scholarship surrounding educational equity, credentialing, and achievement and integration (A&I) efforts. Drawing from a diverse array of scholarly sources, including Darling-Hammond (2010), Muhammad (2015), and Gruenwald and Nath (2019), among others, the review illuminates the multifaceted nature of the achievement and opportunity gap (AOG) and its implications for educational practice.

Further, Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive assessment of the origins of Achievement and Integration in Minnesota, cited on the chronology provided by Heilman (1994), providing comprehensive contextualization leading up to 1994. Identifying *Brown v. The Board of Education* and *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537, broader

identification of the historical contextualization was made. In addition to these landmark court cases the change in rule 3535 and the settlement of the NAACP in 1999 was touched on, further illuminating the historical development of Achievement and Integration in Minnesota. This section laid the foundation for understanding, giving extensive depth and scope to the birth of what is currently understood in the State as Achievement and Integration.

The literature underscored the critical need for targeted interventions, such as credentialing and licensing initiatives (Darling-Hammond, 2010), to address systemic disparities and promote equitable outcomes. Furthermore, the review highlighted the transformative potential of such initiatives, as evidenced by Muhammad's (2015) exploration of educational equality within classrooms and Gruenwald and Nath's (2019) depiction of educational disparities. These insights resonated with the overarching themes and findings elucidated in Chapter 4, particularly regarding the importance of accountability, cultural responsiveness, and professional development in A&I programming.

Moreover, the literature review set the stage for a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in implementing credentialing and licensing frameworks, thereby informing the subsequent analysis and discussion presented in Chapter 4. Through rigorous examination of relevant scholarship, Chapter 2 provided a solid foundation for advancing scholarly discourse and practical interventions aimed at promoting educational equity and fostering student success.

In Chapter 4, the findings underscored the significance of introducing a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration (A&I) License to enhance

educational equity in Minnesota. These findings find support in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, particularly in the work of scholars such as Darling-Hammond (2010) and Muhammad (2015), who have highlighted the critical need for targeted interventions to address systemic disparities in education married to the historical contextualization of Heilman (1994). Darling-Hammond's research emphasizes the importance of professional development and support for educators in promoting equitable outcomes for students. This aligned with the findings in Chapter 4, which highlighted the role of professional development in enhancing A&I programming and supporting staff retention.

Additionally, Muhammad's (2015) exploration of educational equality within classrooms provided valuable insights into the challenges facing A&I efforts and the potential benefits of credentialing and licensing initiatives. Muhammad's work underscored the importance of cultural responsiveness and accountability in addressing the AOG, themes echoed in the findings of Chapter 4. The introduction of a Justice & Equity Credential and an A&I License is positioned to foster cultural competence among educators and promote accountability in A&I programming, thereby contributing to more equitable outcomes for all students.

Furthermore, the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 shed light on the transformative potential of credentialing and licensing frameworks, as evidenced by the work of Gruenwald and Nath (2019). Their depiction of educational disparities underscored the urgency of implementing targeted interventions to address systemic inequities in education. The findings in Chapter 4 reinforced this urgency, emphasizing the need for systemic change beyond credentialing to ensure equitable access to educational opportunities for all students. By aligning with the insights gleaned from the literature,

the findings of Chapter 4 underscored the importance of introducing credentialing and licensing initiatives as part of broader efforts to promote educational equity and foster student success.

Implications

As the effort and work surrounding this dissertation project starts to move toward the close, it is now time to consider the implications. Chapter 1 was where the story and groundwork were laid; Chapter 2 was where the literature review, including the historical contextualization, was established; Chapter 3 was where the stage was set for the actual research to be done; and then, in Chapter 4, the results were shared. Considering the results of the research and real-world implications, I will now take a focused view of these implications with a focus on policy, practice, and future A&I program development.

It is imperative when considering the real-world implications to maintain a level of practicality and realism. As a person who has engaged in learning about Minnesota's education policy at a significant level, I understand, to some degree, the level of effort needed to materialize new policy at the state level. With that in mind, I set to what I believe are meaningful, thoughtful, and practical outcomes rooted in the research findings and in my knowledge base. While these implications are significant and likely challenging to employ, they possess a sense of considerable urgency, knowing that many of our students are actively being failed by the Minnesota educational system.

While education should possess the capacity to act as the great leveler, empowering learners with the capacity for self-determination, the evidence is clear that groups based on specific demography within Minnesota fail disproportionately. Public schools fail some groups at a higher rate and much more significantly than other groups,

most often Minnesota's communities of color. With that in mind, it is vital that whatever suggestions are put forward aim to serve those fully whom our system continually fails.

Implications on Policy

While seemingly straightforward, the implications of the results and research surrounding educational policy are accentuated by the sepulchral tone of our educational systems, policy, and policy failure. In consideration of educational policy, the overarching purpose of policy in general, and the current results of this research being put forward, the area of research set out to be explored at the onset of this research seems manifest. Creating a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license for those working within Achievement and Integration is a policy logic that possesses definite promise when considering the literature review and results of this study.

In an attempt to validate the respondents from the survey and those who engaged in the interview process, it is imperative to mention that while the creation, through a policy of a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license for those in the work of Achievement and Integration seems like a logical move to take, I would be remiss to not mention the importance of embedding the construct and a logical framework of a Justice and Equity credential, and an Achievement Integration license within all educator credential and licenses within Minnesota. This is in alignment with both the literature and this research project's findings and outcomes.

When considering the creation through a credential and license policy, it is notable that the construct and framework for this work already exist. Similar to other fields of specialists within Minnesota's educational system and landscape, historical moves have been made to increase the credential and license requirements as the need

was blatantly apparent. Through the process of grandparenting current practitioners into such a credential and license and the construction and implementation of a potential credential and license, an implementation process could potentially follow suit, reflective of other specialists in Minnesota mirroring what was accomplished in their onboarding process.

If a policy was indeed created supporting a credential and license in the work of Achievement and Integration, it would be paramount that embedded within that policy supporting the credential and licensed efforts were made to intercept any of the negative and unintended consequences shared by participants in both the survey and interview process, in other words, insuring that the construct of the credential and license was not restrictive but supportive to people coming from communities of color and rural communities. In policy, employing a culturally responsive credential and license, efforts could be made to specifically identify and aggregate through a rubric evaluation process validating motion in and toward a credential and license. While further examination and study awaits the potential credential and license, extensive consideration and effort in evaluation will be needed maximize the outcomes of the credential and license while not creating versions of gatekeeping.

With some funding, already pre-existing further funding could be allocated to support the efforts of those moving through the credential license process. Considering the copious amount of financial resources spent on an annual basis in the state of Minnesota for educational system and structure, it seems a nominal platitude that additional funding would be added with specificity towards supporting some of Minnesota's highest disparities and demographics in disparities in academic performance

and graduation rates. Through the support of the policy, enactment, and financial support tied to the policy and enactment, the implications of practice find themselves in the light for consideration.

Creating a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license for both student-based practitioners and administrators would be reflective of Minnesota's current modeling and supportive of both the literature and research results from this research. Running the credentialing and licensing through Minnesota's Department of Education and aligning its implementation with the department of Achievement and Integration, grandparenting current practitioners into the credential and license, and creating a well-thought out and structured culturally responsive credential and license process and program would additionally be reflective of the evolution of other Minnesota educational specialists and the process taken by others. This is backed by the literature, this current research study, and supported historically by other specialists serving in Minnesota's school system.

Implications on Practice

When considering the implications of this research surrounding the conceptual understanding of practice, it is an intellectually solid and logical draw to consider the results of other field specialists as they move toward the policy and funding stream, supportive of their effort and work. School counselors, social workers, psychologists, speech and language pathologists, audiologists, and other specialists were all at once not core participants in the educational system structure. The need was identified and seen as entirely relevant to the effort and work supporting our learners; thus, the policy was created, and the practice of those various specialties was enacted.

The robust nature of many specialists in their practice within our school systems has irrefutable evidence of the support lent based on each of their specialties. The identified reasons for their extra academic support and social-emotional learning and support are known well now by educators as imperatives to augment student learning and increase positive outcomes. Creating a policy, credential, and license in support of those serving in Achievement and Integration doing the work of justice and equity has a base-level logic to it, supported by literature and this research. The practice, as it would manifest through the employment of a credential and license, is significant, reflective of other practitioners and specialists within the field of education, providing extra support to learners, families, and communities. The implications towards practice could be significant. The entire budget for achievement and integration throughout the state is approximately \$70.2 million. Ramping up the financial investment and services provided in practice to those doing the work of achievement Integration could have a significant impact on student outcome, rooted in the traversable knowledge of what the literature says in the practical implications of the outcomes from other practitioners and other fields.

While I would not suggest by any means that the funding for A&I should be reflective of other specialists' funding, special services in Minnesota public schools currently come to approximately \$23,200,000,000.00 annually (Minnesota Department of Education, 2024). While this includes many programs, special services serves roughly 147,000 students. With the stark data acknowledging academic failure by Minnesota's public schools to our students of color, Minnesota serves approximately 283,515 students of color annually, approximately 136,515 more students than special education, and a

notable 0.30% of the special education budget. Investing in A&I shows clear precedent set by the expenditure of special education. It is not surprising, although disheartening, that those working in the field of equity are not rendered equitable funding and support from the State Understanding in no uncertain terms that general funds serve all of our students and are largely supportive of our students of color within our educational system and structure, it is undeniably statistically significant that our system is failing our students of color possessing one of the largest disparities in the nation (Grunewald & Nath, 2019). With this in mind, it is logical that those serving in the work of Achievement and Integration, dedicated with specificity towards serving protected class students, including our students of color, should be given the support necessary to thrive in our educational system.

The implications to practice surrounding the findings of this research study would suggest that, while Achievement and Integration play an important role in Minnesota's education, landscape, and system, there is a tremendous need and justification for significantly increasing its reach and scope supported through policy, imbued in practice, And reflective of those serving other populations are system perpetually fails.

The Future of Achievement & Integration Development

Considering the implications for future Achievement and Integration program development, it becomes abundantly clear that there is a need for a significant increase in service and in efficacy. While ramping up numbers to support students may be helpful and beneficial in some capacities, this research has shown in many ways, irrefutably, that there is a significant need to consider meaningful credentials and licenses for both the support of student and student outcomes and staff retention and persistence.

The future of Achievement and Integration programming should have a significant amount of weight placed in its consideration and support, knowing that as demography trends continue to change and the population of students of color increases in the state of Minnesota (Grunewald & Nath, 2019), the failure of service often seen through our education system and structure does not perpetuate or increase but instead becomes a foundation and platform and example for the nation at large for what highly efficacious educational systems and structures look like in their support for our students of color. The point of our educational systems and structures is to give its citizens the capacity for self-determination, critical thought, and analysis, as well as the ability to meaningfully engage as humans, contributing to the greater good of society.

The future considerations and implications of Achievement and Integration programming should be designed and reflected in such a means and capacity that there is no hesitancy in the perception and practice of those participating in Achievement and Integration programming. While it is every educator's job to support all of our learners and every educator's job to know how to serve their students, having a pre-established entity that has specificity towards serving our students of color and ramping up the effort in Achievement and Integration is logical and according to the literature and research results, should most certainly make a notable difference (Smedley, 2001). Achievement and Integration may become a synecdoche of the capacity for more extraordinary service in our educational system to our students and communities of color, providing a robust and powerful framework for educators.

The OLA identified on two separate occasions (2005 and 2022), spanning decades, a need for more oversight and additional directional development among A&I

programming. As stated as primary areas of concern, the OLA had focused and connected findings, much of which might be addressed in an increase in continuity of programming and practice (Office of the Legislative Auditor, 2005; Office of the Legislative Auditor, 2022). This runs in symbiosis with both the literature and research results indirectly in as much as it applies to the construct and framework developed through a credential and licensing process. Married with the statistical knowledge of Minnesota's AOG, academic peer-reviewed literature, and the results of this research study, the future of Achievement and Integration programming in the state of Minnesota possesses tremendous capacity in service as an educational construct and institution to help address the AOG meaningfully. Through the creation and equipping of a culturally responsive and intelligently designed Justice and Equity credential and Achievement and Integration license, the findings asked to be addressed by the OLA from both 2005 and 2022 may be addressed.

Culturally Responsive Credentialing and Licensing

Recognizing the symbiosis between the literature and research results, creating a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license is logical. Creating this credential and license in a culturally responsive way is also supportive of the literature and research results. The design of a well-thought-out culturally-responsive, credential and license possesses the capacity not only to avoid potential unintended consequences, such as gatekeeping, but also possess the capacity, if well designed, to increase educator engagement in our educational institutions through employing more people from underrepresented communities with fewer barriers and fewer restrictions, endowing, greater capacity, supports, and the ability to impact student outcomes and staff

retention and persistence effectively. Bresó et al. (2011) and their research support this surrounding increasing engagement and enhancing performance, drawing on key concepts of motivation traversing to retention and persistence, addressing concepts such as occupational burnout through credentialing (Maslach, 1999; 2016; Maslach & Gomes, 2006).

When considering the teacher and specialist licensing process in Minnesota it exclusively works through higher education institutions and Minnesota's PreK-12 system. Creating a culturally responsive credential and license may possess the capacity for additional investment into a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license. If a credential and license were indeed culturally responsive, it might make room for an increase in community collaborations with Minnesota school systems and schools. There are many large and small community organizations that serve Minnesota students both before and after school. Some institutions work with Minnesota students all summer, and some programming, such as early childhood programs, may run in tandem with Minnesota schools. Those who work in such institutions carry a wealth of knowledge and experience brought from these institutions, often working to support students in a multiplicity of ways. Marrying this with a credential and license for Achievement and Integration may possess some powerful attributes.

When considering the potential creation of a culturally responsive credential and license, and in consideration of the incorporation into that credential and license, you create a community-based pathway of credentialing and licensing into our Minnesota schools. Many non-profits serving Minnesota's youth are starting points of employment for many community members. My own journey started in this way. Working with the

YMCA, Salvation Army, and a number of other youth-serving organizations, I eventually found my way into Minnesota's schools, serving under the framework of Achievement and Integration. I noticed a significant amount of professional practice divergence from one person to the next within my work. Having been formally trained in my bachelor's degree in marriage and family psychology, I possessed a decent understanding of child development and practice.

Working in the various organizations leading up to my work in Achievement and Integration, it became apparent to me that while I had made my way into this work, which included academic training to support youth, not everyone I worked with in Achievement and Integration had received that training. Sometimes, the lack of training was evident. Furthermore, I was eventually pushed out of the work in Achievement and Integration, even while I did not want to be. This was largely driven from my salary being comparatively so small due to not being placed on equal steps and lanes as other educational specialists. After moving to a different department, my salary instantly doubled. Knowing I had a burning desire to research and explore more fully the implications and potential outcomes of creating a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license, I signed up for my doctorate program. My single-minded focus was to research and explore if what I was wondering was indeed true. Early in the doctoral program, it became evident to me that I needed to find a career that allowed me to do the important and good work I wanted to do but also have a position and career where I could manage my finances.

Leaving Achievement and Integration work was supremely difficult for me as it was something I had worked in and had a passion for, spanning decades. I certainly had

noticed the vast diversity of service offered by those serving in A&I and had additionally noticed that retention of those in A&I was often fleeting, while only a select few stayed the course out of a deep desire to continue in the work of A&I. One particular person I have known throughout my career stands out. As a licensed teacher, this individual elected to stay in the work of A&I, knowing their tremendous capacity to positively impact the lives and academics of those they served through A&I. This individual made approximately 40% less than their similarly credentialed classroom teachers and specialists. The work of those in A&I is expert work, done by experts serving a tremendous number of needs within our schools.

Creating a culturally responsive credential and license is a multifaceted way, supported through both the literature and this research's findings, to provide both better support in addressing the AOG in Minnesota's schools and to create a meaningful and important pathway of professionalism in the work of Achievement and Integration, leading to retention and persistence in the field. Validating correlative professional work, implementing academic learning, employing versions of A&I student-teaching hours, and creating a pathway for lifelong professional practice in Achievement and Integration are just some other benefits that would manifest through the creation of a culturally responsive credential license.

The implications of the possibility of creating a culturally responsive Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license in the state of Minnesota are huge. Real people, our system is failing. Real people providing service in our system would be served. If history has taught me anything, it is that humans are in constant and desperate need of accountability surrounding the issues of justice and equity and, within

our schools, achievement, and integration. Human systems are famous for commonly only serving a small portion of its populace. Credentials and licenses crafted in these veins would have the capacity to be applied to a limitless list of industry, business, and organizational applications. Starting in our schools makes sense. The literature says it makes sense. These research findings say it makes sense. Having the ability to participate in an educational system where you have the best shot at self-determination and success makes sense. While I move on to the studies limitations section, I finish this section on implications with this; the implications of the creation of a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license are huge. The implications are huge.

Limitations

When considering the research at hand, the research questions, and the research participants and process, it is important to examine the possibility of limitations within the research. According to Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018),

...any research attempt inevitably carries limitations and delimitations regarding its underlying theories, study design, replication potential, shortcomings in data collection and questionnaire design, insufficient subgroups or data for robust statistical analysis, narrow time span for data collection, lack of consideration for seasonal differences and missing data, causal relationships, measurement errors, study setting, population or sample, ethical parameters, data collection/analysis, result interpretations and corresponding conclusions. Delimitations require challenging the assumptions of the researchers and openly exposing shortcomings that might have been better tackled. Some authors cite study limitations solely because it is required by journal policy. (p. 1)

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018) then went on to state that part of the academic research process should include open and extensive reporting of any limitations, delimitations, and assumptions that emerge to improve the research findings and support accurate interpretations. Thoughtful and intentional effort is required through this process, taking care to reflexively understand and ensure that the results presented have an accurate view and scope, working toward the most objective understanding of the research results.

With specific consideration of the research subject at hand, exploring the potential creation and implications of creating a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license on student performance outcomes, the AOG, and staff retention and persistence, careful measures were taken to recruit expert practitioners within the field, working diligently to ensure broad representation from those working within A&I from across the state of Minnesota. While much effort was put into securing broad representation, an unforeseen element in the research participants arose.

Achievement and Integration serves 177 school districts within the state of Minnesota, and the districts that it serves range from the largest district in Minnesota to some very small districts. In an effort to include broad representation and voice, it was imperative that rural school districts were included in the interview process, ensuring that the possibility of variation in voice due to geographic locale was given an opportunity for expression. Using a focused randomized sampling strategy, survey participants who had expressed interest in the interview were broken into three major groups in an effort to secure geographical diversity in voice: urban, suburban, and rural. Employing the focused randomized sampling strategy, the participant chosen to represent the rural voice in the rural communities held two positions. While the rural interviewee was the district's lead

Achievement and Integration administrator for the district they served in, they were also the district's lead Community Education Director.

While this reality may not impact the study and results of the study, it is notable to mention being aware that this study intended to carefully examine those working in the professional context of Achievement and Integration. Interestingly, it came to bear that this participant elected to include Community Education into their professional pursuit as a means of maintaining a liveable wage. While this does present a limitation to the study, it is noteworthy that in some capacities, this becomes a revalidation of some of the research findings, accentuating the findings surrounding credentialing and licensing as a means and tool for retention and persistence within the field of Achievement and Integration.

Future Research

When considering the potential areas for future research and using future research to additionally support the limitations of this study, it is apparent that focused areas of research study exist where research and researchers might dissect and study the potential for creating a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license separately in each geographical domain presented in this study; urban, suburban, rural, and districts which possess all three geographical domains within one (urban, suburban, and rural).

Creating varied studies surrounding these geographical domains would allow the research subject to be meaningfully parsed into its various geographical subsections and allow for geographical juxtaposition, illuminating the possibility of any substantial geographical difference. Elaborating further, while this study examined the three major

domains (urban, suburban, and rural), an independent examination may be able to set up the research in such a way that issues surrounding single people employed in multiple capacities within a district might receive a closer examination. Furthermore, it would allow for some of the geographic areas to correlate potential differences in student impact and staff retention and persistence through a more focused study looking more narrowly at specific demography and its possible variation in relation to geography. With the intent of the work of Achievement and Integration and its historical context set from Minneapolis Public Schools, it may possess research significance looking to the possible variation of need in service through Achievement and Integration across Minnesota's geographic domains.

Another area of directional study in which this research might build is the exploration of long-term impacts, should a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license come to fruition. While the purpose of Achievement and Integration may be synthesized as an educational entity aimed at addressing the AOG, it is historically sound that not much progress has been made in regard to closing the AOG. While those working in A&I are by no means solely responsible for the closing of the AOG, should a credential and license come to reality, it would be of extreme importance and curiosity to examine the potential impacts of such a credential and license on student outcomes and staff retention and persistence.

Communicating the Results

When considering the communication of results from this research, I will primarily share the results through the digital commons at Hamline University. As a dissertation project, this is the foundational way in which I believe this research should

be primarily shared and it allows access through numerous capacities, giving other researchers the opportunity to access this research and potentially use it as a springboard for their own research.

Further, I plan on sharing the results of my research with educational policy advocates. A result of this research was a solidification of the need to create a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license. The actionable result of this research and the ethical obligation at hand is the dissemination of this information in meaningful and powerful capacities to those who possess the ability to turn important research into action. With a deep desire to positively impact the AOG and do my part to work toward helping our educational institutions equitably serve all learners, action toward this direction levels epistemologically.

I am considering sharing this information through presentations. The primary group I am considering this with are those who work in school districts laboring under the banner of Achievement and Integration. It is important that those who do this critical work have this research available to them to both support and validate their efforts. Most specialists within our public schools have a constant stream of research surrounding their subject area coming at them at a fast clip. It is an unfortunate reality that those working diligently under the efforts of Achievement and Integration may see little to no research supporting their efforts with specificity to their departmental labor.

Finally, I plan on sharing the results of my research study with the Minnesota Department of Education's Achievement and Integration department. Having completed this research and gained knowledge supports additional contextual understanding and knowledge for those working within Minnesota's Achievement and Integration work.

While not exclusively known, when consulting with those currently working as the state leaders in Achievement and Integration, it was mentioned to me that to the best of their knowledge, no research has been conducted surrounding this subject matter. With that knowledge in hand, and the critical and important work being done by those in Achievement and Integration, it seems logical and morally important that the results of this research be disseminated to those in Achievement and Integration. Additionally, this dissertation will be available on Hamline University's Digital Commons.

Conclusion

Schools should be for all people, regardless of identity. Chapter 1 shared my own journey and struggles and set the stage for what has become in many ways, my life's work; doing what I can to help schools be for all people. In a democracy and society where so much of a person's self-determination is set so early in their life through the institution of school, it is a moral imperative that we as a society do whatever must be done to explore and evolve what our academic institutions are to give each student who walks through our doors the most equitable shot at success. Achievement and Integration is in part, an institution set at working toward these ends. While the inception and creation of Achievement and Integration is progress in the correct direction, my own time spent serving within the institution raised questions. These questions raised through my time working in A&I are the manifestation of this research project and find their roots in my own life starting back in kindergarten where a teacher punished my joy of learning because of who I was and who I am. My identity continued to work against me throughout my schooling, making school one of my profound enemies. Like many, my struggles turned into my purpose, and as far as academics go, have brought me to the

pinnacle of academic pursuits. The totality of this project and pursuit of my educational doctorate are driven out of a foundational desire for me to do what I can to ask questions and research answers to make school a place for all learners.

According to the research, credentials and licenses matter. The creation and implementation of intelligently created credentials and licenses matter. One of the most significant areas of disparities in our educational system is often referred to as the achievement and opportunity gap (AOG) (Muhammad, 2015). While it is everyone's obligation to serve all students in our public schools and our students' constitutional right to an education, in the state of Minnesota, one identified group of A&I educators are intended in large part to address the AOG specifically. The Minnesota Department of Education oversees the Achievement and Integration (A&I) program, and while all other educators, specialists, and administrators are required to possess a credential and a license to work in their respective fields, A&I educators are not (Minnesota Department of Education, 2024). Research validates that highly credentialed educators produce better outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The educators explicitly dedicated to the AOG are held to different standards than other experts when the literature and this research backs credentials importance and the process of licensing.

Ninety-six percent of respondents logged a minimum of at least five years in the field of A&I with 78% having logged ten or more years. Sixty percent of respondents believe that a Justice & Equity credential and an Achievement & Integration license will enhance the effectiveness of A&I efforts with only 18% believing it would not. Fifty-four percent say it will help in addressing the AOG with only 14% believing it would not help. Fifty-six percent say it will increase the cycle of research with 16% feeling it would not

help. Thirty-eight percent say it will increase retention and persistence of those working in the field with 72% of respondents saying it will validate the field of A&I. Interviewee 1 stated, “Understand there's no right way to do this, but it needs to be done, the work needs to be done and this license and this component of a license needs to be infiltrated in every single aspect...”

Given the detailed content I have shared, I synthesized the findings from surveys and interviews in response to my research questions, highlighting the key insights and implications of the proposed Justice & Equity Credential and Achievement & Integration License. The data suggested a cautious optimism among educators and A&I practitioners about the potential of these credentials to enhance educational equity, address the AOG, and improve professional practice; including retention and persistence within the field. Key themes include the need for culturally responsive credentialing processes, the potential for increased accountability and professionalism, and concerns about barriers to implementation. Furthermore, insights emphasize the importance of inclusivity in credentialing to avoid exacerbating existing inequities. These findings offer a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of implementing such credentials, suggesting a strategic, inclusive approach is essential for their success and positive impact on educational equity and integration in Minnesota.

The survey and interview data synthesis provided a comprehensive understanding of perspectives on the proposed Justice & Equity Credential and Achievement & Integration License. Surveys offered quantitative insights into general attitudes and perceptions, capturing broad trends and levels of support among a diverse array of education professionals. Interviews, on the other hand, provided depth, allowing for the

exploration of detailed and extensive opinions, personal experiences, and experienced-based suggestions for implementation. Together, these methods enriched the analysis by balancing statistical breadth with the richness of personal narratives, enabling a multidimensional view of potential impacts, challenges, and the crucial components of a culturally responsive credentialing process.

Chapter 4's quantitative and qualitative data analysis has illuminated the critical perspectives of educators and experts on the potential impacts of establishing a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement & Integration License in Minnesota. The findings underscore the necessity for intentional, culturally responsive credentialing and licensing mechanisms to enhance educational equity and improve outcomes within the Achievement and Integration framework addressing the AOG. Further, the research showed that creating a Justice and Equity credential and an Achievement and Integration license would positively impact those working with Achievement and Integration with specificity to retention and persistence.

While looking for ways to more comprehensively and effectively serve all of Minnesota's learners, it is understood that there is no silver bullet for equity in education. Making efforts where and when we can push our educational construct and structure to provide better and broader support for our students, families, and communities is a moral mandate of education. Every student who walks through the doors of a Minnesota school deserves the best chance at self-determination and the ability, through our educational system, to live a full life, contributing meaningfully to society. Those who labor in the name of equity and justice serving under Achievement and Integration within Minnesota's schools deserve to be supported and set in a structure that demands equity

and justice in their professions as they work to address one of our country's most unfortunate injustices, the Achievement and Opportunity Gap.

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Appendix A

Surveys

Quantitative Survey Questions

Revised Quantitative Survey Questions

Integration license impact the outcomes of Achievement and Integration work in Minnesota?"

*Would you like to participate in the interview process?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

1. To what extent do you believe that a Justice & Equity Credential would improve the outcomes of Achievement and Integration work in Minnesota?

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

2. To what extent do you believe that an Achievement and Integration license would improve the outcomes of Achievement and Integration work in Minnesota?

☐ Strongly Disagree☐ Disagree☐ Neutral☐ Agree☐ Strongly Agree

For the question: "What impacts might it have on the outcomes of the achievement/opportunity gap, ubiquity in professional practice and research, and staff retention and persistence?"

3. How likely do you think that implementing a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration license would reduce the achievement/opportunity gap in Minnesota?

☐ Not Likely at All☐ Slightly Likely☐ Neutral☐ Likely☐ Very Likely

4. To what extent do you think these credentials would encourage greater ubiquity in professional practice and research related to Achievement and Integration work?

- ☐ Strongly Discourage
- ☐ Discourage
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Encourage
- ☐ Strongly Encourage

5. How likely is it that these credentials would improve staff retention and persistence in Achievement and Integration roles in Minnesota?

- ☐ Not Likely at All
- ☐ Slightly Likely
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Likely
- ☐ Very Likely

For the question: "What might a culturally responsive credential and license look like?"

6. In your opinion, what features or components should a culturally responsive credential include? (Open-ended question)

What specific aspects should an Achievement and Integration license have to ensure cultural responsiveness? (Open-ended question)

These survey questions aim to gather insights on the potential impact and effectiveness of the proposed credentials on Achievement and Integration work in Minnesota, as well

as their influence on addressing the achievement/opportunity gap, professional practice, research, staff retention, and cultural responsiveness.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Interviews: Building on the survey results, interviews with select candidates will delve deeper into the subject. The interview questions, informed by the survey responses, will aim to uncover critical insights into the impacts of credentialing and licensing in A&I. These interviews will be conducted online, with a focus on respecting participant anonymity and privacy, following protocols approved by the institutional review board.

For the question: "How might a Justice & Equity Credential and an Achievement and Integration license impact the outcomes of Achievement and Integration work in Minnesota?"

1. Can you elaborate on your survey responses regarding the potential impact of a Justice & Equity Credential on Achievement and Integration work in Minnesota?
2. What specific outcomes or changes do you anticipate?

3. Similarly, can you provide more details on your survey responses regarding the potential impact of an Achievement and Integration license on Achievement and Integration work?
4. How do you envision these credentials influencing outcomes?

For the question: "What impacts might it have on the outcomes of the achievement/opportunity gap, ubiquity in professional practice and research, and staff retention and persistence?"

5. Mentioned in the survey, these credentials could potentially reduce the achievement/opportunity gap. Could you explain how you believe this reduction would occur and any challenges or barriers you foresee?
6. Regarding the ubiquity of professional practice and research, can you describe what changes you expect to see in the field of Achievement and Integration if these credentials are implemented?
7. Staff retention and persistence are crucial aspects. How do you think these credentials might affect the retention and persistence of professionals in the Achievement and Integration field, and why?

For the question: "What might a culturally responsive credential and license look like?"

8. In your opinion, what specific components or criteria should be included in a culturally responsive Justice & Equity Credential?

9. Could you provide examples or suggestions for how an Achievement and Integration license can be designed to ensure cultural responsiveness?

10. Based on your experience and expertise, what role should cultural competence and diversity training play in these credentials?

Appendix C

Table 1

Demographics and Background of Participants

	Role	Years of Educational Experience	Gender	Area
1	Direct Student Support	5 to 10 years	Female	Rural
2	Administrator	More than 20 years	Male	Rural
3	Program Coordinator	11 to 20 years	Female	Rural
4	Dean of Students and District Coordinator for A & I and G/T	More than 20 years	Male	Rural
5	Administrator	More than 20 years	Female	Rural
6	Administrator	5 to 10 years	Male	Rural
7	Administrator	More than 20 years	Male	Rural
8	Administrator	More than 20 years	Male	Rural
	Administrator	More than 20 years	Female	Rural
9	Direct Student Support	11 to 20 years	Male	Some Combination of Urban, Suburban and/or Rural
10	Direct Student Support	11 to 20 years	Male	Some Combination of Urban, Suburban and/or Rural
11	EC parent educator	11 to 20 years	Female	Some Combination of Urban, Suburban and/or Rural
12	Prior Employee of Achievement and Integration work	More than 20 years	Male	Some Combination of Urban, Suburban

				and/or Rural
13	Direct Student Support	11 to 20 years	Female	Some Combination of Urban, Suburban and/or Rural
14	Administrator	More than 20 years	Female	Suburban
15	Administrator	More than 20 years	Female	Suburban
16	Prior Employee of Achievement and Integration work	Less than 5 years	Female	Suburban
17	Teaching & Learning Coordinator	More than 20 years	Female	Suburban
18	Educational Equity Specialist	5 to 10 years	Female	Suburban
19	Educational Equity Specialist	5 to 10 years	Female	Suburban
20	Instructional Coach and Equity Teacher Leader	More than 20 years	Female	Suburban
21	Administrator	More than 20 years	Male	Suburban
22	Achievement and Integration Coordinator	More than 20 years	Male	Suburban
23	MLL teacher	11 to 20 years	Female	Suburban
24	Administrator	More than 20 years	Female	Suburban
25	Teacher and AVID coach	11 to 20 years	Female	Suburban
26	Direct Student Support	More than 20 years	Female	Suburban
27	Prior Employee of Achievement and Integration work	11 to 20 years	Female	Suburban
28	Equity and Inclusion Director	More than 20 years	Female	Suburban
29	Direct Student Support	5 to 10 years	Female	Suburban
30	school board member	Less than 5 years	Female	Suburban
31	Direct Student Support	5 to 10 years	Male	Suburban
32	Prior Employee of Achievement and Integration work	More than 20 years	Male	Suburban

33	Direct Student Support	5 to 10 years	Female	Urban
34	Direct Student Support	11 to 20 years	Female	Urban
35	Administrator	More than 20 years	Female	Urban
36	Administrator	5 to 10 years	Male	Urban
37	Teacher/Department Head	5 to 10 years	Female	Urban
38	Direct Student Support	11 to 20 years	Male	Urban
39	Direct Student Support	11 to 20 years	Male	Urban
40	Student advisor	More than 20 years	Female	Urban
41	Administrator	11 to 20 years	Male	Urban
42	Direct Student Support	More than 20 years	Female	Urban
43	Administrator	11 to 20 years	Male	Urban
44	Direct Student Support	11 to 20 years	Female	Urban
45	Direct Student Support, supporting teachers who implement the curriculum I design for them.	11 to 20 years	Female	Urban
46	TOSA for Dept. of Alt. Ed. -Math Curriculum	More than 20 years	Female	Urban
47	University-level financial aid	11 to 20 years	Male	Urban
48	Administrator	11 to 20 years	Male	Urban
49	Administrator	More than 20 years	Female	Some Combination of Urban, Suburban and/or Rural