



## Results from the First-Year Evaluation of the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute



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The five largest school districts began working with the Urban League of Greater Madison and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction three years ago to develop strategies for promoting equitable education opportunities for students of color. Their efforts resulted in the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute. The Institute is designed to empower principal leaders as change-agents, to address the educational opportunity gaps between students of color and White students. This initiative focuses on developing the knowledge, skills, and tools of school leaders in the Green Bay Public Schools, Kenosha Unified School District, Milwaukee Public Schools, Madison Metropolitan School District, and Racine Unified School District to lead for equity within their schools and districts.

A mixed-methods evaluation, conducted by the Office of Socially Responsible Evaluation in Education at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, explores five questions regarding its implementation and impact this year:

1. What is the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute?
2. To what extent are the needs and assets of the persons who participated in the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute aligned with its goals?

3. To what extent is the implementation of the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute done with fidelity and quality?
4. What did participants learn about equity?
5. What impact did participants have on equity in their school this year?

### Key Findings

1. In its first year, the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute successfully developed and implemented the processes designed to prepare school administrators to promote equitable education opportunities for students of color.
2. Principals and coaches appreciated the opportunity to work with and learn from each other about ways to promote equity.
3. The facilitation and content were viewed by participants as effective and useful.
4. Participants successfully applied their learning to their schools through capstone projects.

# Key Findings

## Q1: What is the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute?



The Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute seeks to disrupt the status quo that promotes inequitable educational opportunities for students of color, and thus bring about transformational change in Wisconsin. Principal participants engage in professional learning, facilitated by the New York City Leadership Academy (NYCLA) and supported by 4AM Consulting, along with district-embedded equity coaching. During the professional learning series, principals learn from activities, videos, and readings, engage in group discussions and role play, and identify an equity problem of practice within their schools to address with an action plan. Principals' equity problem of practice and action plan serve as the year's "capstone project", for which they present the results to other principal participants, for feedback, at the conclusion of the professional learning series.

We developed a program theory for the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute that includes a theory of change and a theory of action in the form of a logic model (see Page 3). The theory of change describes the current situation that the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute seeks to address and how change is expected to occur. The logic model inputs, outputs, and outcomes describe what the program does and what immediate, intermediate, and long-term outcomes are expected to result. The immediate outcomes include principals increasing their understanding about racism in education, examining their implicit biases, building a learning community, practicing skills for leading conversations about racial equity, and learning to identify inequitable practices and policies and strategies for addressing them.

Although the program focuses on school administrators as the change agents within the current structure, it is unlikely that they alone will be able to create transformational change. Such transformational change requires buy-in and action on the part of stakeholders across all levels of education, including: state agencies, district leadership, school leadership, school staff, families, students and communities. To account for the complexity of addressing institutional and structural racism in an educational system, we include Foundational Factors for Establishing Educational Equity in the logic model that are necessary for the program to achieve its long term goals, but that the program does not address directly. These are listed in the logic model.



## **Q2: To what extent were the needs and assets of the persons who participated in the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute aligned with its goals?**

*The characteristics of participating principals and their schools suggest a close alignment between their needs and the goals of the initiative.*

District administrators recruited principal participants. Most selected early career school principals who they identified as likely to follow through on the commitment and likely to benefit from the opportunity. Some of the districts sought volunteers. Some districts recruited specific principals because of their previous reputation as equity leaders, while others principals who would benefit from development in this area. This selection process led to some confusion by participants who were unclear as to why they had been selected and what they were expected to do as a result.

The resulting 27 principal participants were diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, gender, and experience. Eight were Black/African American, two were Hispanic/Latinx, one was multi-racial, and 16 were White; 19 were female; 16 had five or fewer years of experience as a principal.

Their schools were racially diverse with six comprised of over 75% Black/African American students and fourteen with 25% or fewer White students. Student achievement (in all but one school, fewer than 25% of Black students were proficient in ELA or Math) and average suspension rates (42% Black v. 8% White) indicated significant racial performance disparities.

## **Q3: To what extent was the implementation of the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute done with fidelity and quality?**

*Nearly all principals and coaches completed the training and attended nearly all of the sessions.*

Twenty-six principals completed the training. Eight principals attended all eight sessions and 14 seven of eight. Of the nine equity coaches, six attended all four training sessions and three attended two training sessions.

*Principals and coaches felt the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute included effective content and was facilitated well.*

On the year-end survey, all but one participant either *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* with the statement "The facilitation of the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute has been effective (organized, clear, and engaging)". All *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* that "The Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute content has been effective/valuable". Six suggested they had some difficulty keeping up with the required work.



***Principals appreciated the opportunity to network and collaborate with other principals across all five districts.***

Principals expressed repeatedly that they valued the opportunity to learn from each other and that they rarely are provided that opportunity. All indicated on both the mid-year and year-end surveys that the collaboration was useful and they were comfortable sharing their experiences with each other.

## Q4: What did participants learn about equity?

***Principals completed the training with a strong understanding of their own biases and how racism impacts education.***

All of the principals indicated on the year-end survey that they *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* that they understand their implicit biases and its impact on their leadership; that their participation increased their understanding of the effect racism has on their students; and that they can identify behaviors they engage in that contribute to racial inequity in their schools.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement (20 principal responses)

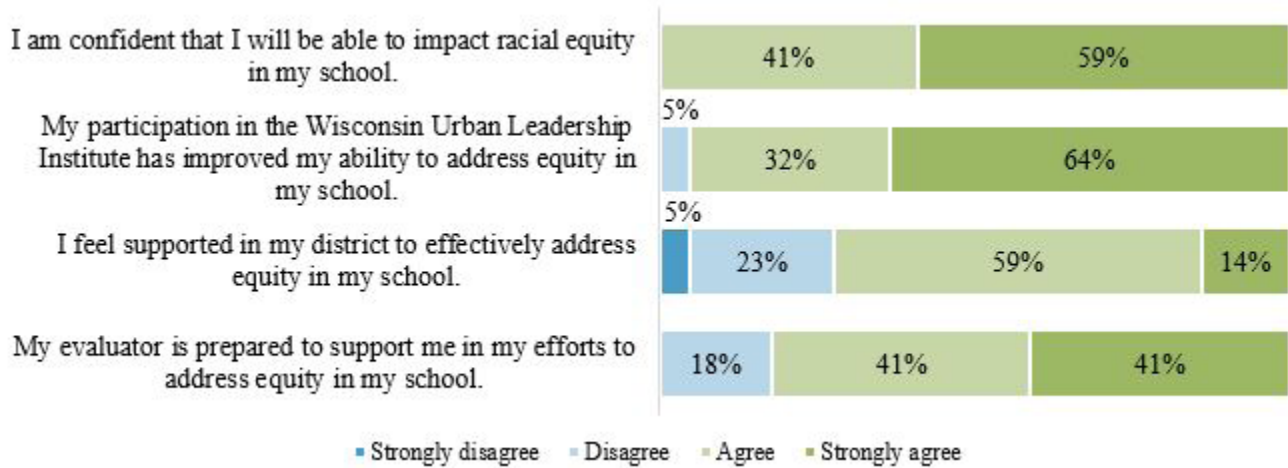


***Principals completed the training with greater confidence that they have the skills necessary to promote equity in their school.***

All principals *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* they are confident they will be able to promote racial equity in their schools and all but one *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* that participation in the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute improved their ability to do so. Further, most reported finishing the program understanding how to recognize inequitable practices and policies, how to develop strategies to address them, and how to document their efforts.

Principals were clear, however, they needed district support to successfully improve equity in their school. This qualifier for the ultimate success of the initiative emphasizes the importance of addressing the Foundational Factors outlined in the Logic Model.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement (22 principal responses)



## Q5: What impact did participants have on equity in their school this year?

***Participants already started to apply their equity skills, by leading conversations about racial equity with school staff.***

While it is still early to expect changes to have occurred in schools, participants already began to apply what they learned to their schools. On the year-end survey, all but one principal reported leading at least one racial equity conversation with their staff and many (73%) used an Equity Walk-Through Tool, provided as part of the training, at least once to help guide their conversations. All but one participant *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* that they built new skills to lead conversations about racial equity with their staff as a result of their participation.

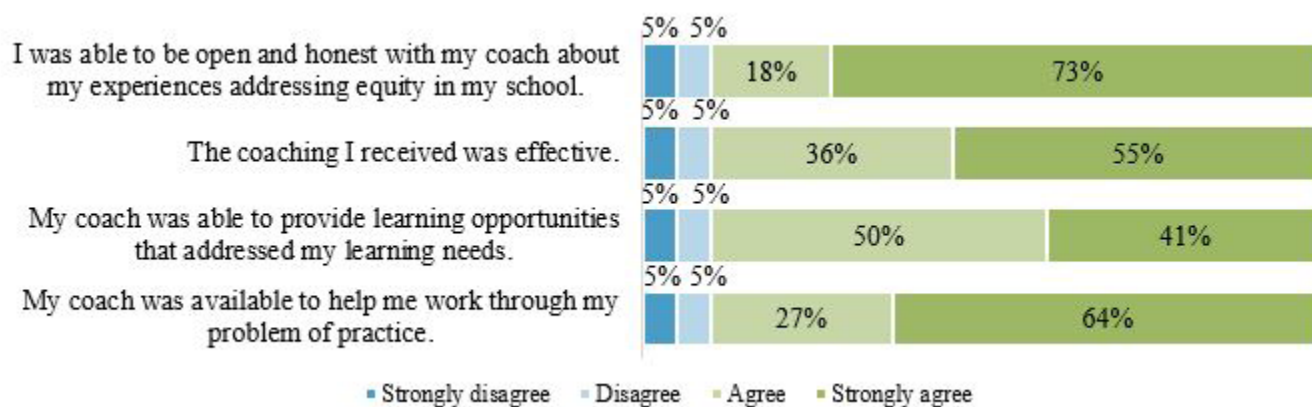
Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement (22 principal responses)



***Equity coaches effectively supported principal efforts for promoting equity in schools.***

On the year-end survey, all but two principals *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* they were able to be open and honest with their coach, that the coaching was effective, and that their coach provided them with learning opportunities and support for their problem of practice. The evaluation found some indication that the coaching model in one school district was less effective than in others, suggesting the initiative may benefit from greater oversight of the coaching role and specificity regarding who is appropriate for serving as a coach.

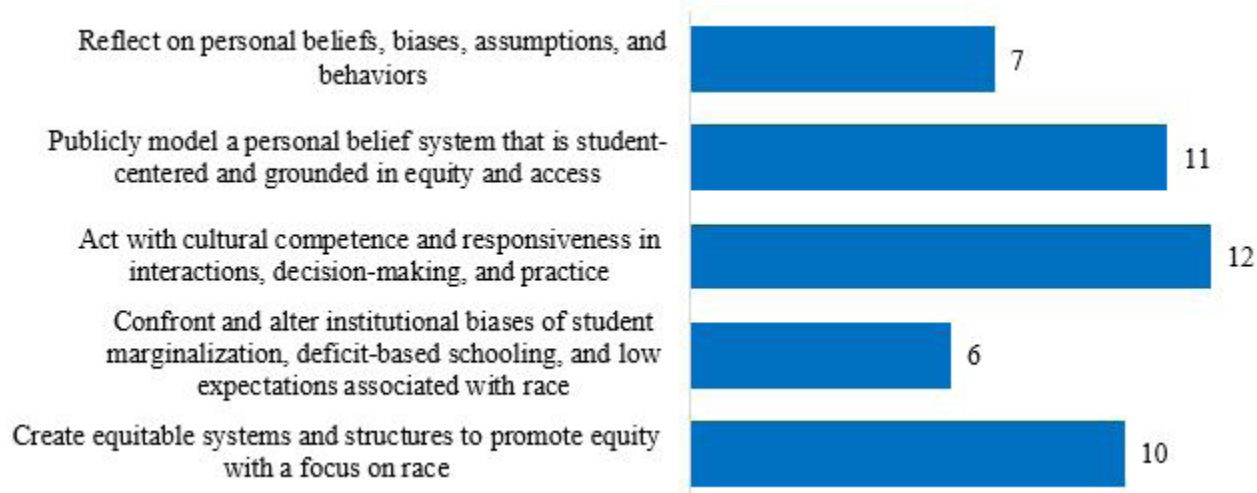
Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement (22 principal responses)



### *Participants successfully applied their learned equity knowledge and skills through Capstone Projects designed to address an equity-related problem of practice in their school.*

All participants successfully completed and presented the results of their capstone project. The focus areas for these projects addressed several aspects of equity.

Principals focusing on each of the five equity leadership dispositions (23 principals total)



On the year-end survey, most principal respondents (90%) indicated that the capstone project helped prepare them to develop strategies and document their efforts and most coaches (86%) indicated that the capstone project helped them coach principals to do so.

A principal presenting their capstone project.





# Example Capstone Projects

## ***Self-growth Capstone***

One principal reflected on her efforts throughout the school year to become an equity leader in her school. She shared her personal story about why racial equity is important to her in one of her staff meetings, researched bias, took the Race Implicit Association Test from Project Implicit to identify her own racial biases, read Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain by Zaretta Hammond and was attending a district equity training. Additionally, this principal received positive feedback from staff about the equity-related resources she shared in her weekly staff newsletter and was working collaboratively with other principals in her same zip code to develop a common walk-through tool for use across their schools.

## ***Capstone Examining School Data by Race or Language***

The disproportionate suspensions of African American and Latino males led one principal to pilot an empowerment group in his school, the Black and Latino Manhood Academy. The initiative focused on young men of color to increase attendance and decrease suspensions. The young men in the program developed self-advocacy skills using twelve guiding principles. The average attendance rate across the participants increased by 3% and the average suspension rate decreased by 11% over the previous year.

## ***Capstone Weaving Equity into School Policies***

One principal identified that the policy against hats within her school was being implemented disproportionately to discipline students of color wearing do-rags, while not being enforced against students wearing baseball hats or hoodies. She found that students wearing do-rags were concerned with the appearance of their hair. She decided that enforcing the hat policy was a wasteful use of school resources and time and should no longer be enforced. She was surprised by the pushback that she received from staff about the change and has used the opportunity to reflect on how she will handle policy changes in the future. Her school experienced a decrease in discipline referrals after she communicated the policy change.

## ***Capstone Leading Staff to Embrace and Promote Racial Equity***

One principal developed an equity walk-through tool that her leadership team used during the school year. The tool helped the team gather data and provide feedback to teachers about practices such as student engagement, greeting students, and hosting a morning meeting. The team tracked the data over time and found improvements in the data by June 2019. Although the principal experienced significant staff vacancies, she was still able to gather staff feedback on the walk-through tool and implement it within the year to encourage staff to embrace equitable practices within their classrooms.

## ***Capstone Engaging Families Equitably***

To increase a sense of belonging and engage families in student learning, one principal sought to build trusting relationships with families. To this end, the principal reached out to families for their feedback on how the school could better engage them and created opportunities to inform families about their child's learning. The principal formed a parent focus group with representation across student groups to gain their input. Additionally, the school hosted family events during the school day three times throughout the year for families to come into classrooms alongside their children to understand what they were learning; family attendance increased at each consecutive event. The school also hosted welcome events for families of kindergarteners and first graders. The school increased the response rate to their parent survey by more than 30 percentage points over the previous year (from 9% to 40%) and the principal plans to host additional family events next school year. The principal recommended that the district consider relocating family engagement coordinators in the schools from their current positions within the district office to help all schools implement similar strategies.



# Recommendations

The following recommendations build from the successes of the past year, to improve the experiences for future participating principals and coaches, and to lay the foundation for maximizing the initiative's impact on educational equity for students.

***Develop processes to promote consistent, effective coaching across all districts.***

While most participants felt their coaches were helpful, some of the principals in one district suggested otherwise. As the initiative expands to additional principals, it will be important to have consistent processes and practices across all participating districts.

***Ensure that potential participants understand why they are being selected to participate and what time commitment is required.***

Although by the end of their participation, nearly all principals expressed a deep appreciation for being provided the opportunity to participate in the Institute, early on, some participants were uneasy about the reasons they were selected and surprised by the amount of work their participation required.

***Engage principal evaluators in the Institute early in a principal's participation.***

During the course of the program, some principals indicated they were not feeling supported for implementing their equity learning by their district and their evaluator. The initiative learned this during the course of its implementation and immediately began a process of engaging principal evaluators so they would understand the purpose and goals of the project. These efforts improved the support provided to participants back in their districts.

***Work with districts to explore ways to ensure the Foundational Factors promote equity in each district.***

Identify a process to assess the extent that the Foundational Factors are promoting or inhibiting racial equity within each school and district and work to improve the areas that are deemed insufficiently supportive of transformational change. Further, leverage the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute so that districts may learn from each other for creating a context that promotes equity.

***Expand peer-to-peer learning beyond their participation in the training.***

Allow for even more peer learning and sharing in the professional learning series and ensure that cohort members stay engaged with one another into the second year and beyond.

***Establish a shared framework for creating a sustainability plan in the second year of the program and beyond.***

It may be helpful to understand the various ways in which principals approached securing buy-in from their staff, such as by building a coalition of equity champions, utilizing their leadership team, or prioritizing those staff members identified as most in need of intervention and the relative effectiveness of each approach.

***Define and prioritize shared goals across collaborating agencies and organizations.***

Given the unique collaboration of agencies and organizations overseeing the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute, it will be necessary to define and prioritize shared goals. One helpful framework for similar collaborations is collective impact. This process could begin by creating a shared equity vision across all five districts.

# Next Steps

## ***Develop a Best-Practices Toolkit for guiding principals through their Capstone Projects.***

The initiative is creating a best practices toolkit from the capstone project presentations for future participants, as well as other principals across the state, to learn from. This toolkit should prove useful in providing participants greater direction for how to begin addressing equity in their school.

## ***Start working with the second group of participating principals.***

The next cohort of principals has already been selected and attended a kick-off event. Further, coaches have been recruited and trained before the start of the school year. This timeline is much earlier than the previous year and reflects an understanding that the training should encompass the whole year.

## ***Continue to engage principals who have finished the training.***

In part due to the value participants gained from their learning community, the 2018-19 cohort will continue to work together in 2019-20. Consistent with the original program design, principals will continue to receive equity coaching. The first cohort will participate in some number of trainings provided to the second cohort. This will give them the opportunity to stay connected with each other and will give principals in the second cohort the opportunity to learn from the experiences of these principals.

## ***Integrate the goals of the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute and Educator Effectiveness System.***

All Wisconsin school and district administrators understand that to be an effective principal, you have to be effective at addressing equity.

## ***Continue the evaluation to document the extent that the Institute leads to sustained improvements in schools and racial equity for students.***

We will follow up with participants, conduct school visits, and analyze school outcomes data. We will also continue to evaluate the implementation and impact with additional cohorts of principals.



# Evaluation Process

The Office of Socially Responsible Evaluation in Education (SREed) at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee is working with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) at the University of Wisconsin Madison to evaluate the implementation and impact of the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute. We employ a variety of evaluation methods to provide the DPI, program planners, and participating districts with actionable information regarding to promote more effective implementation and greater potential impact on equity for students of color.

Complex systems theory informs our approach to the evaluation of the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute. While typical educational interventions are bound by a time and place that focuses and limits evaluation activities, the success of the Wisconsin Urban Leadership Institute in meeting its objectives of addressing student equity will be dependent on a myriad of individual, microsystemic, mesosystemic, and macrosystemic factors. The overarching goal throughout the project will be to identify what is and is not working, regarding the project's implementation and equity impact objectives, while simultaneously exploring explanations for why it is or is not meeting its equity objectives across the different ecological levels of the project.

The information presented in this brief reflect work done during the 2018-19 school year, the pilot year for the Initiative. During this year, we engaged in the following tasks:

*Observations of Wisconsin Urban Leadership activities* – An evaluation team representative was present at nearly all trainings and Initiative events. This work served to provide the evaluation with a deeper understanding of the Initiative's activities and their impact. Further, this work helped develop trust between participants and the evaluation team.

*Mid-year and End-year surveys of participants* – Participants were asked to share information regarding their experiences by completing surveys at the mid-point and end of the program.

*Analysis of Capstone Projects* – The topics and results of the Capstone Projects were coded for content and summarized to determine what principals focused on during their participation.

*Logic Modelling* – The evaluation team worked closely with the Initiative's developers to better understand the process through which it would reach its objectives. The resulting logic model depicts the resources needed to operate the program, Inputs, the Activities of the program and participants, Outputs, and the benefits derived, Outcomes. Additionally, the logic model includes Assumptions about how the program will work. These expectations are explored through the evaluation to verify that they are impacting the program as intended.

*Interviews with participants* – The evaluation teams conducted interviews with participants from each district represented in the project. These helped gain a deeper understanding of their experiences working to address equity in their school and district.



# Acknowledgements

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WEERP conducts rigorous and relevant research to inform the efforts of Wisconsin Educators to improve educator effectiveness and achievement for all students.

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