Obstacles and Supports Along the Career Paths of Asian-American District-Level Leaders

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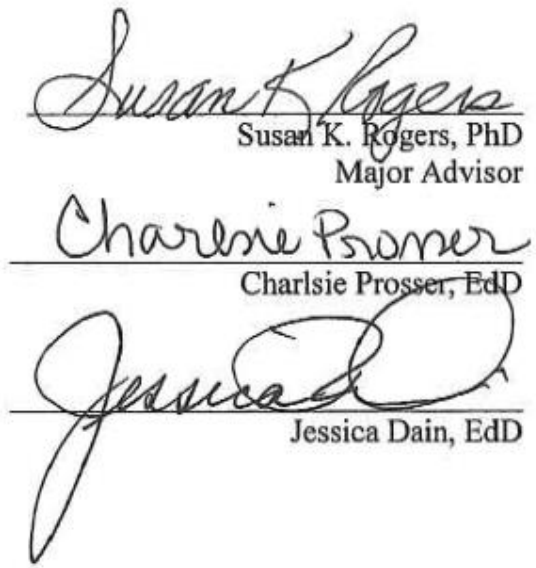

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Abstract

The overwhelming majority of K-12 district-level administrators in the United States has historically consisted of White male leaders (Sullivan, 2019). The proportion of White male administrators at the district level is in sharp contrast to the racial and cultural diversity represented within the U.S. population and in its schools. While racial minorities represent a very small segment of district-level administrators nationwide, Asian Americans comprise a minuscule portion of that already small segment (Sullivan, 2019). In 2023, little research was found exploring the career advancement paths of Asian-American district-level administrators, specifically research that delves into the obstacles and supports they experienced while advancing to district leadership. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences in the career advancement of current or former Asian-American district-level administrators to identify internal and external obstacles to advancement, internal and external supports to advancement, significant positive professional experiences, significant negative professional experiences, and the perceived impact of Asian stereotypes on their professional experiences. Through interviews with four current and former district-level administrators, the researcher identified six key findings that emerged from their responses:

1. The participants' career advancement paths to district-level leadership were not planned.
2. Balancing principles, priorities, and self-perception presented significant internal obstacles during the participants' career advancement paths.

3. Professional and political conflicts presented significant external obstacles and negative experiences during the participants' career advancement paths.
4. The participants' influence and experiences as change agents served as significant internal supports during their career advancement paths.
5. The participants referenced family support, mentorship, and professional networking as essential external supports during their career advancement paths.
6. Asian stereotypes and prejudices have influenced others' perceptions of them as leaders.

The implications of this study include prioritizing recruiting diverse candidates, supporting promising Asian-American educators to develop a potential pipeline to diverse leadership, providing meaningful mentorship support for Asian-American district-level leaders, and providing opportunities for Asian-American district administrators to serve as change agents. Recommendations for future study include a more targeted exploration of how stereotypes, prejudices, and racism have impacted the professional experiences of Asian-American district-level administrators, along with examining the dynamics of effective mentorship support for Asian-American district administrators.

Dedication

First, to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ: Thank you for giving me the abilities and opportunities to teach, lead, and impact others to become better versions of themselves. I hope to stand before you one day and hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

To my incredible wife, Ashley: Thank you for always believing in me and supporting me on this crazy journey. Thanks for putting up with all my long days as a teacher, my long nights as a principal, and the countless hours of coursework and writing to become Dr. Nguyen. This accomplishment is just as much yours as it is mine. Thank you for being my anchor through more difficult moments than I can count. Being your husband is a far greater title than any other I will ever carry. I love you with everything that I am.

To my amazing son, Lucas: I hope this inspires you to pursue your gifts and talents all the way through to the end. Always finish what you start, even when you do not want to. You owe it to God and to the world to fully realize the gifts you have been given. I do not doubt that your accomplishments and impact will far surpass mine. Thank you for inspiring me to see this process through to the finish. I love you more than you can imagine. This was for you. Thank you for the privilege of being your dad.

To all the teachers, mentors, and colleagues who inspired me along the way. Thank you for helping me to realize the life-altering impact we can have as educators. I hope the work you have inspired me to pursue will far outlive my career as an educator. There are far too many of you for me to name, but please know that all of you contributed toward this milestone in my life.

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Finally, I want to thank my family, especially my wife, Ashley, and my son, Lucas, for being the inspiration for it all. I hope I made you proud.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

According to a Pew Research analysis of U.S. Census Bureau statistics, Asian Americans comprised the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group between 2000-2019, increasing from approximately 10.5 million to 18.9 million (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Despite the increase within the U.S. Asian-American population, there is still a significant underrepresentation of Asian Americans in district-level school leadership, which was illustrated in the *2018-19 American Association of School Administrators Superintendent Salary & Benefits Study* that included six participants who self-identified as Asian American among 1,433 total respondents (McCord & Finnan, 2019). In 2022, little research existed that explored the career advancement paths for Asian Americans aspiring to district-level leadership, specifically focusing on obstacles and supports experienced along their paths. Consequently, this shallow body of research leaves knowledge gaps in this area that have implications for potential policy and action for hiring and retention practices. Studies focusing on Asian-American administrators have explored topics such as the impact of cultural values on career selection (Chan-Nauli, 2018), intersectionality of gender and race (Labao, 2017; Peters-Hawkins, 2017), leadership styles (Liou & Liang, 2020), and hyperawareness of race in spaces of White bureaucracy (Victorino, 2020); however, these studies almost exclusively focused upon administrators at the building level. Exploring the career advancement paths of Asian-American district-level administrators could potentially identify obstacles or deterrents to upper-level leadership. Further study in this area could also identify supports that assisted Asian-American district-level administrators in their career advancement.

Background

Asian Americans have historically been underrepresented in the field of K-12 education relative to their proportion of the overall U.S. population, with data from the 2017-2018 school year indicating that as little as 2% of U.S. public school teachers identify as Asian (Schaeffer, 2021). This trend becomes even more pronounced when examining the percentage of Asian Americans represented among building principals and even more so in district-level leadership. In 2023, little research exists exploring the career advancement paths of Asian-American district-level leaders.

Investigating studies on related topics revealed research that has examined perceptions of Black and Hispanic educators who have attained various leadership roles in education. Tyson (2016) cited potential barriers to the principalship for Black educators, which included local influence, lack of role models, lack of mentors, lack of professional networks, relational conflicts with stakeholders, and the pressure of expectations for aspiring Black leaders. Randolph (2015) studied perceived barriers to the high school principalship among Black female educators. Randolph (2015) cited race, gender, lack of knowledge surrounding unwritten district policies and procedures, dynamics within the school community, lack of opportunities, political dynamics, and lack of support from other Black female administrators among the most frequent and noteworthy responses to the study. Fernandez (2013) studied the career advancement experiences of secondary-level Hispanic principals in suburban districts. Fernandez's (2013) participants also emphasized the importance of mentor support to navigate the path toward career advancement as Hispanic leaders. FanFan (2022) conducted a notable study that examined the path to the superintendency for leaders of color. FanFan (2022)

identified some of the obstacles facing aspiring superintendents of color, including the glass-ceiling effect.

While these studies might be helpful in making connections to the experiences of Asian-American district-level leaders and their career advancement paths, in 2023, no body of literature exists that examines these unique experiences. To better understand these paths and the potential obstacles that can impede this journey, more research should be conducted to explore the perspectives of the relatively few Asian Americans who have pursued this path. This body of research could yield productive insights into diversifying the currently White-dominated field of district-level leadership.

Statement of the Problem

In 2023, little research existed that examined the experiences of Asian-American district leaders in their career advancement journeys, which poses challenges to identifying possible obstacles to entry and supports for aspiring Asian-American district-level administrators. Castro et al. (2018) reiterated findings that the demographics of educational leadership during their study consisted of mostly White administrators. The researchers also emphasized some of the benefits of culturally diverse leadership, which include drawing a more diverse teacher candidate pool, improved overall student academic performance, higher expectations for students of color, higher attendance rates for students of color, and higher levels of culturally competent practices within the school. A greater understanding of the experiences of Asian-American administrators could help districts recruit and retain a more diverse workforce within educational leadership and potentially produce greater educational outcomes for all students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences in the career advancement of Asian-American district-level administrators by examining their general career advancement paths. Through interviews with current and former Asian-American district-level administrators, this researcher gathered insights regarding internal and external obstacles to career advancement, internal and external supports to career advancement, significant positive professional experiences, significant negative professional experiences, and the perceived impact of Asian stereotypes on their professional experiences. Participants' responses were examined to identify potential commonalities and differences in experience and the resulting implications for hiring and retention practices.

Significance of the Study

Identifying obstacles and supports to Asian-American career advancement in educational leadership, particularly at the district level, will help contribute to the body of literature and research in this area. The findings of this study could also contribute to specific recruitment and retention strategies to attract Asian-American district-level administrators, leading to greater diversity within educational leadership. Additionally, studying Asian-American advancement in educational leadership could provide connections and parallels to the experiences of other minority groups pursuing the same career path.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study were to focus on the lived experiences of Asian-American district-level administrators as they aspired to district-level leadership roles.

The study was structured as a qualitative study during the spring of 2023. The participants in the study were delimited to be current or former Asian-American district-level administrators. The geographic delimitations for study participants included the entirety of the United States.

Assumptions

Lunenburg & Irby (2008) defined assumptions as "postulates, premises, and propositions that are accepted as operational for purposes of research [which] include the nature, analysis, and interpretation of the data" (p. 135). One of the assumptions made regarding this study was that the participants correctly understood the interview questions and communicated their responses accordingly. Another assumption was that the participants truthfully conveyed their career advancement experiences. A final assumption was that the interpretation and coding of the participants' responses accurately captured their perceptions and experiences.

Research Questions

To identify obstacles and supports experienced by Asian-American district-level administrators, the following research questions were developed:

RQ1

How do Asian-American district-level administrators describe their career advancement paths?

RQ2

What internal obstacles have Asian-American district-level administrators faced in their career advancement paths?

RQ3

What external obstacles have Asian-American district-level administrators faced in their career advancement paths?

RQ4

What internal supports have Asian American district-level administrators benefited from in their career advancement paths?

RQ5

What external supports have Asian American district-level administrators benefited from in their career advancement paths?

RQ6

What positive professional experiences have significantly impacted Asian-American district-level administrators' career paths?

RQ7

What negative professional experiences have significantly impacted Asian-American district-level administrators' career paths?

RQ8

How have Asian stereotypes impacted Asian-American district-level administrators' career advancement paths?

Definition of Terms

To establish a common conceptual understanding of key terms utilized in this study, it is necessary to define essential terms. The following definitions are provided for this purpose:

Asian American

Ruiz et al. (2022) stated that the term "Asian American" is a pan-ethnic term used to describe the population of approximately 22 million people living in the United States who trace their ethnic backgrounds to more than 20 countries in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent.

Career Path

According to the Society for Human Resource Management (2022), career paths encompass different forms of career progression, including traditional vertical career ladders, dual career ladders, horizontal career shifts, and career progression outside the initial organization.

Culture

The term "culture" encompasses shared patterns of behaviors, interactions, cognitive constructs, and group identity that can include language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music, and arts (Pappas & McKelvie, 2022).

District-Level Administrator

"District-level administrator" is a term that refers to educators working within school districts, such as superintendents or other staff members who typically manage finances, assessments, or other specialty areas from the district vantage point (American University, 2020).

Glass Ceiling

According to Johns (2013), the "glass ceiling" is a metaphor that refers to the invisible and artificial barriers that prevent women and minorities from

advancing to management and executive positions within a company or organization.

Model Minority

"Model minority" is a label made popular during the 1960s, frequently in reference to Asian Americans, to describe minority groups who have attained high levels of educational and financial success compared to other groups (Ruiz et al., 2022).

Prejudice

The APA (2022) defined prejudice as a preconceived, negative attitude toward another person or group of people formed in advance of experiences with that person or group.

Racism

The APA (2022b) defined racism as a form of prejudice that assumes members of particular racial categories have distinctive traits that make some racial groups feel inferior to others.

Stereotype

The APA (2022c) defined stereotype as a set of generalizations about the characteristics of group members or social categories that can simplify perceptions and judgments but are frequently exaggerated, negative, and resistant to revision despite contradictory evidence.

Organization of the Study

This research study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 included the background of the study, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance

of the study, delimitations, assumptions, research questions, and the definition of terms essential to the study. A review of the literature is presented in Chapter 2, which includes an overview of Asian immigration to the United States, Asian-American stereotypes and discrimination, and Asian-American representation in K-12 education and leadership. Chapter 3 includes a description of the methodology used in this study, including the research design, setting, sampling procedures, instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis and synthesis, reliability and trustworthiness, researcher's role, and limitations. The study's findings are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study, the findings related to the literature, and the conclusions.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

This chapter presents an overview of different aspects of the Asian-American experience in the United States, which presents a complex tapestry of success and victimization, opportunity and obstacles, and self-determination and fatalism. These conflicting concepts shape the landscape in which Asian-American educators find themselves, a landscape that is greatly influenced by historical and social context. Examining the Asian immigrant experience in the United States provides a framework for viewing the accompanying racism and discrimination toward Asian Americans that soon followed (Lee, 2015b). The emergence of stereotypes steeped in this racism gave way to concepts such as the model minority myth and obstacles such as the Asian glass ceiling, which impacted social and occupational opportunities for Asian Americans. Understanding the cultural values that govern career choice and the ramifications those values have for Asian Americans entering the educational field is critical to gain insight into the still farther-reaching impact on Asian-American district leaders. An analysis of these factors could assist in providing a backdrop to identifying potential internal and external obstacles to Asian Americans advancing to district-level school leadership.

Asian Immigration to the United States

Even with the broad range of cultural and ethnic diversity within the label, examining Asian-American history in the United States reveals two themes that reach across subgroup barriers: opportunities and obstacles. Though the time periods and circumstances of each immigrant wave differ, each group brings with them the hopes of pursuing a better life characterized by the virtues of freedom and self-determination the

United States symbolizes. However, when unexpected barriers confront those hopes, the resulting experiences of Asian immigrants and their descendants present a complex narrative of success and limitations that question whether the American Dream is truly available to all.

Chinese Immigration to the United States

The first record of Asian immigration to the United States can be traced to the mid-eighteenth century; however, the first major wave of immigrants consisted of the Chinese "coolies" who provided a labor source to work in gold mines, railroad construction, and sugarcane plantations (Varma, 2004). According to Takaki (1998), Chinese immigrants seeking fortune during the California gold rush were met with anti-Chinese sentiments and legislation as early as the 1850s, as White miners lobbied politicians to enact policies and taxes to deter immigrant miners, particularly the Chinese. By 1870, Chinese workers, predominantly men, composed 20% of California's labor force, making them vital to establishing infrastructure and industry in the developing American West (Asia Society, n.d.). During that time, Chinese laborers found work in railroad construction, initially garnering praise for their industriousness, ultimately composing 90% of Central Pacific Railroad's workforce by the late 1860s (Takaki, 1998). Chinese immigrants also found work in factories, canneries, fisheries, and fields, ultimately proving essential to multiple industries in the American West (Lee, 2015b). Employers who hired Chinese labor used exploitive practices, paying them far less than White workers would earn, resulting in a caste-based labor force that would permanently subordinate them to the White establishment (Takaki, 1998).

The increasing presence of Chinese contract laborers created the perception of an economic threat to White settlers in the region, stirring an increasingly aggressive anti-Chinese movement (Okihiro, 2001). Astute politicians of the time period capitalized on the anti-Chinese platform, which led to the passage of discriminatory legislation, the most famous of which was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was the first significant restrictive immigration law and the first to restrict a group of immigrants based on their race and class, casting the Chinese as a specifically undesirable group based on the concept of race (Lee, 2002).

By the turn of the 20th century, the Chinese were of the same social station as Blacks in America, with many of the same racist caricatures applied to both groups (Takaki, 1998). The contrast between the optimistic hopes of fortune and independence and the harsh reality of hatred and discrimination was stark. Another cultural conflict arose as first-generation immigrants raised their children in their newly-adopted home country. While parents wanted their children to uphold cultural and familial traditions, their American-born children often adopted many of the views and customs of the Western culture surrounding them, creating a disconnect between generations that left neither group with a sense of belonging in the landscape of American culture (Takaki, 1998). According to Lee (2015b), many Chinese Americans expressed disenchantment with the land that once embodied so much hope. In many ways, the experiences of Chinese immigrants represent a pattern shared by subsequent Asian immigrant groups as they were viewed as strangers, threats, and perpetual foreigners (Takaki, 1998).

Japanese Immigration to the United States

Following the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, large numbers of Japanese immigrants arrived on the West Coast, where they replaced the Chinese as cheap sources of labor (Asia Society, n.d.). Takaki (1998) states that in the two decades following the Chinese Exclusion Act, the number of Japanese immigrants in the U.S. went from approximately 2,000 to over 72,000, with many of the first arrivals working as replacement farm laborers and railroad workers due to the halt on Chinese immigration. Lee (2015b) highlighted the awareness of first-generation Japanese immigrants, known as *issei*, on assimilation as a means of opportunity in their new homeland. Lee described how issei leaders encouraged their countrymen to adopt American dress, customs, holidays, and other cultural norms to gain acceptance and access to economic opportunities they were not likely to receive if they were perceived as outsiders. Despite these efforts, acceptance in the United States proved to be elusive for Japanese immigrants. According to Takaki (1998), issei and second-generation Japanese, referred to as *nisei*, seemed to inherit many of the experiences of racism and prejudice directed at the Chinese who came before them. Lee (2015b) pointed out that, due to Japan's military and economic power, Japanese immigrants were viewed as a greater threat than the Chinese immigrants that preceded them. Lee (2015b) described the fear-mongering against the Japanese, going as far as to suggest that the immigrant populations were a colonizing force from Japan sent to take over the West coast of the United States. Lee (2015b) stated that it was from this context that the concept of the "Yellow Peril" was popularized. Takaki (1998) described the efforts of White laborers throughout California for an extension to the Chinese Exclusion Act, which was set to expire in 1902, to include

Japanese immigrants, citing them as a menace to the economic and American societal fabric. The passage of the Gentleman's Agreement in 1907 restricted Japanese immigration to the United States (Okihiro, 2001). Efforts were made within the California legislature to pass laws that would deny Japanese immigrants from owning land (Takaki, 1998). Hopes of gaining status as U.S. citizens were extinguished with the 1922 U.S. Supreme Court ruling of *Takao Ozawa v. United States*, when the court ruled against the plaintiff, deeming him ineligible for naturalization due solely to his race (Lee, 2015b).

The resistance Japanese immigrants experienced proved to be demoralizing to some and galvanizing to others. According to Lee (2015b), some Japanese returned to Japan, giving up hopes of success in America; other Japanese were resolute in their decision to stay, determined to establish themselves as a productive and upstanding presence in the United States. Takaki (1998) described how ethnic enclaves of Japanese immigrants formed in communities throughout California, which created avenues for Japanese-owned businesses to flourish, creating jobs within the immigrant community and providing havens for cultural and psychological security. Takaki described how first-generation issei continued to emphasize cultural assimilation to second-generation nisei while still holding to their cultural roots. This cultural assimilation included pursuing higher education in hopes of establishing credibility and accessing opportunities. As Takaki described, the aspirations of Japanese immigrants were met with a different reality, as the highly-educated nisei tended to feel disconnected from their Japanese culture, rejected by their adopted American culture, and left with few opportunities for advancement within American society.

Korean Immigration to the United States

Lee (2015b) stated that Korean immigrants began an exodus from their homeland in the early 20th century, mostly in an attempt to escape the harsh rule of Japanese Colonialism, which resulted in an influx of Koreans in Hawaii as well as the mainland United States. Koreans faced many of the same struggles as the Chinese and Japanese immigrants who preceded them; however, as immigrants escaping political persecution, they brought with them experiences of trauma previous immigrant groups did not (Lee, 2015b). On the mainland, Korean immigrants found low-paying work primarily in agriculture and other menial and service-related occupations (Takaki, 1998). In Hawaii, dreams of high wages and idyllic living while working on sugar plantations evaporated when Korean workers arrived to find low pay, extreme working conditions, competition with other Asian immigrants for jobs, and harsh treatment from their employers (Lee, 2015b). As Korean immigrants began living in clustered communities, they formed ethnic enclaves like the Chinese and Japanese before them served as support networks and centers for nationalism and cultural pride in response to Korea's status as a conquered nation (Takaki, 1998). As with other Asian immigrant groups, Koreans faced rampant racism and discrimination as they were deemed to be economic threats, which ultimately led to policies limiting their ability to immigrate to the U.S. (Lee, 2015b). Also similar to other Asian immigrant groups, second-generation Koreans faced conflicts with fully assimilating into American culture; while they did not share their parents' nationalistic or cultural pride, they also were not able to find acceptance in White-dominant culture, effectively causing them to attempt to exist between two cultures that never felt like their own (Takaki, 1998).

Indian and South-Asian Immigration to the United States

Indian and South-Asian immigrants began immigrating to the United States at the start of the 20th century in much smaller numbers than Chinese and Japanese immigrants, with many taking similar jobs in railroad construction, farm work, and other manual tasks during a time when immigration from China, Japan, and Korea was restricted (Lee, 2015b). Like Asian immigrant groups before them, South-Asian immigrants were hired to do hard labor for extremely low pay in harsh living environments (Takaki, 1998). Because anti-Asian sentiments were at their peak, the new South-Asian immigrants became the new targets for hatred and discrimination, labeled as the "Hindu invasion" despite representing a diverse array of religions, cultures, and beliefs (Lee, 2015b). Following a similar pattern dating back to Chinese immigration, once the new South-Asian immigrants were identified as a danger to the economic and cultural interests of White-dominant society, policies restricting immigration soon followed. By 1917, immigration from India and other regions of South Asia was effectively banned (Lee, 2015b). Though the pattern of experience was similar for South Asians as for their Asian immigrant predecessors, they had fewer support networks. Their significantly smaller numbers did not allow for the formation of the sustaining ethnic enclaves that Chinese, Japanese, and Korean immigrants relied upon, making their struggles more isolating by comparison (Lee, 2015b).

Filipino Immigration to the United States

The Filipino immigration story is unique compared to other Asian immigrant groups, as the Philippines were under U.S. control prior to the waves of immigrants arriving in America. Establishing U.S. sovereignty in the Philippines was contentious and

costly, culminating in the three-year Philippine-American War that cost the lives of 4,500 American soldiers and upwards of one million Filipinos, who died from war, starvation, and disease (Lee, 2015b). By the turn of the 20th century, the Philippines were under the control of the United States, and the process of enculturating Filipinos was underway. President William McKinley famously stated that, after praying for "light and guidance," he felt God's guidance that it was America's duty to "educate" and "uplift" the Filipino people from their low station (Takaki,1998). Before long, American teachers, missionaries, and officials had an active presence in the Philippines to influence America's "little brown brothers" in explicit attempts to civilize whom they identified as a primitive people group (Lee, 2015b). Living in an American colony exposed Filipinos to ideas and aspirations they had never considered. Lee (2015b) stated that their American-provided education gave Filipinos a sense of optimism regarding the virtues, freedoms, and upward mobility offered within the idealized vision of the United States, which motivated large numbers of Filipinos to pursue the American Dream by migrating to America. That optimism was met with the same reality other Asian immigrants experienced. The characterization of Filipinos as uncivilized impacted how they were received when they came to America and became the next supply of cheap Asian labor (Lee, 2015b). The Filipino immigrants soon found themselves as the latest target of hatred and discrimination for being perceived as a labor threat, while White men targeted Filipino men for engaging in interracial relationships with White women (Takaki, 1998). Despite the conflict they faced, Filipinos continued to immigrate freely to the United States due to their status as U.S. nationals as residents of an American colony. At the same time, other Asian countries were barred from access to the United States, more than

56,000 Filipinos migrated to the U.S. between 1900 and 1930 (Lee, 2015b). Having designation as U.S. nationals did not mean Filipinos received preferential treatment, as Filipinos, like other Asian immigrants, were not eligible for naturalization (Takaki, 1998). They were also the targets of policies limiting their presence in America. Specifically, the Tydings-McDuffie Act, passed in 1934, declared the Philippines a commonwealth with a promise of independence after ten years; this legislation also changed the status of Filipinos from U.S. nationals to aliens and limited annual immigration from the Philippines to 50 (Lee, 2015b). Soon after, the U.S. passed the Filipino Repatriation Act, which granted the opportunity for Filipino-born individuals living in the United States to return to their home country at the expense of the U.S. government, under the condition that they never return to the United States again (Lee, 2015b). Even with the appearance of enhanced status under American sovereignty, Filipino immigrants of the early 20th century experienced the common theme of being considered perpetual strangers in their adopted home.

Vietnamese and Southeast Asian Immigration to the United States

The arrival of Vietnamese and other Southeast-Asian immigrants occurred under circumstances significantly different from the previous waves of Asian immigration. For these most recent immigrant groups, their migration to the U.S. was related to war and political strife rather than an effort to seek economic opportunity (Takaki, 1998). The first wave of Vietnamese immigrants arrived shortly after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. The initial refugees were generally well-educated and, due to French colonization in Vietnam, somewhat familiar with aspects of Western culture (Kula et al., 2021). By the end of 1975, more than 130,000 Vietnamese refugees lived in the United States (Takaki,

1998). Kula et al. (2021) underscored the significant downgrade in the standard of living and professional status the first wave of Vietnamese refugees experienced in America compared to their generally comfortable circumstances in their home country. Still, the U.S. rhetoric surrounding the humanitarian efforts could be characterized as self-serving and congratulatory, as President Gerald Ford referred to the efforts to resettle the refugees as a "mission of mercy" to rescue the "helpless" refugees, all while celebrating America's "heritage as a charitable and compassionate people" (Lee, 2015b, p. 325). The resettlement efforts brought additional waves of Vietnamese immigrants, with the later arrivals generally coming from more rural backgrounds, with less formal education, and far more psychological trauma than the first wave (Kula et al., 2021).

Along with refugees from Vietnam, post-war immigration from Southeast Asia also brought Laotian, Mien, Hmong, and Cambodian refugees. Refugees from these areas came to the U.S. as the result of political conflict in Laos and Cambodia that were peripheral to the Vietnam War but ultimately became entangled in the larger conflict as the North Vietnamese and United States armies expanded the theatre of the war to include these strategic supply line nations (Takaki, 1998). At the conclusion of the Vietnam War, Laos was controlled by the North Vietnamese-supported Pathet Lao Faction's violent regime. At the same time, Cambodia was under the bloody and vindictive rule of the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot (Takaki, 1998). Laotian, Mien, Hmong, and Cambodian refugees fled to the United States to escape the violence and oppression. These immigrants faced significant challenges, as they almost exclusively hailed from rural backgrounds with few marketable skills (Lee, 2015b). For the Hmong, assimilating to American culture was especially difficult, as they came from a preliterate

culture in which written language was a relatively new concept (Takaki, 1998). For these refugees, what awaited them in America were poverty-stricken neighborhoods and underperforming schools, which led to higher rates of poverty, dropouts, and crime (Lee, 2015b).

For Vietnamese and Southeast Asian immigrants, they faced the common backlash faced by other Asian immigrant groups. Though their arrival in the U.S. was directly linked to American military involvement in Vietnam, Americans were not entirely invested in the humanitarian effort to resettle these refugees, with many experiencing "compassion fatigue" that ultimately gave way to resentment, discrimination, violence, and the belief that these new refugees were a burden on American society (Lee, 2015b). For the latest group of Asian immigrants, the hopes for a new life away from political turmoil were soured by the reality of a new home country that did not welcome them with open arms.

Asian-American Stereotypes and Discrimination

Seemingly from their arrival on American shores, Asian immigrants have faced racism, discrimination, and stereotypes that have impeded their ability to attain all aspects of the American Dream (Takaki, 1998). Cultural sanctions have been enforced against Asian Americans across generations through formal policy or social stigma; some of these, particularly prior to the Civil Rights era, were blatantly racist actions (Ceniza-Choy, 2022). In the latter half of the twentieth century, benign, accepting portrayals of Asian Americans have led to inaccurate generalizations of a diverse people group that overlook deep inequities within American society (Lee, 2015b). Examining these

complex stereotypes and discriminatory actions is necessary to identify how these long-standing structures impact Asian Americans today.

Mainstream Discrimination and Racism

An overview of Asian-American history in the United States reveals systemic discrimination and racism confronting the newly arrived immigrants almost immediately, as their presence disrupted the predominantly White population of the American West. Lee (2015b) asserts that the belief in the idea of Manifest Destiny was steeped in the concept of White superiority, which immediately created conflict for Chinese immigrants, whose noticeable differences excluded them from the White-led goal of westward expansion. According to Lee, the arrival of Chinese laborers marked them as an economic threat and a danger to the cultural and moral fabric of the American west. Lee indicated that Chinese female prostitutes of the era were portrayed as pollutants to the racial purity of the predominantly White region. Chinese men were depicted as sexual deviants who violated White women while bending traditional gender roles by accepting jobs typically associated with women, such as cooking and cleaning. With this surrounding context, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was an unsurprising reaction to the perceived social dangers posed by the Chinese. Even with the passage of anti-Chinese legislation, violence and harassment were common during the era, as Chinese settlements were often targeted by White mobs (Lee, 2015b). Restrictions on Chinese immigration continued into the twentieth century. One notable location severely limiting Chinese entry into the United States was Angel Island Immigration Station located in San Francisco (Asia Society, n.d.). Compared to Ellis Island, the immigration station at Angel Island was far more restrictive to incoming immigrants, subjecting them to humiliating

medical examinations and terrifying interrogations (Lee, 2015b). Even after enduring these conditions, many hopeful immigrants were detained for extended periods or deported back to their homelands (Asia Society, n.d.).

Japanese immigrants had a similar experience to the Chinese laborers who came before them, providing valuable labor only to be met with hatred, violence, and cultural exclusion, ultimately resulting in discriminatory legislation (Lee, 2015b). The Japanese were also viewed as a political threat, as they hailed from a nation that wielded a degree of political and military might within the Pacific, which raised concerns about national security in the first decades of the twentieth century (Okihiro, 2001). The belief that Japanese Americans posed a threat to the nation grew exponentially in the wake of Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor and the immediate entry of the United States into World War II. In the months following the events at Pearl Harbor, the relocation and internment of Japanese Americans were underway, with approximately 112,000 removed from their homes on the West Coast to internment camps throughout the country (National Archives and Records Administration, 2022). According to these records, the prisoners lived in barracks and inhospitable conditions, under close surveillance for the duration of the war, in what the U.S. government deemed a "military necessity."

Subsequent groups of Asian immigrants experienced similar discrimination. As early as 1924, nearly all Asian immigrants were denied citizenship and naturalization, prevented from marrying Whites, and prohibited from owning land (Asia Society, n.d.). During the same period, depictions of Asians in popular culture featured dehumanizing images of uneducated, uncivilized people who brought disease and immorality to American culture (Ceniza-Choy, 2022). Discriminatory immigration legislation remained

in place until 1965, with the passage of the Hart-Celler Act, which created more equitable immigration processes for immigrants from countries throughout the world and had the unforeseen impact of dramatically increasing Asian immigration (Ceniza-Choy, 2022). One year after the passage of the Hart-Celler Act, the Asian-American population was estimated at one million; that number more than tripled by 1980 to an estimated 3.8 million (Varma, 2004). The wave of Asian immigrants after 1965 brought increasing numbers of skilled and educated individuals (Pew Research Center, 2013). Many in this new generation of Asian immigrants arrived in the U.S. to pursue or complete their education in fields such as science or engineering, which would often lead to permanent residence in the U.S. due to employment opportunities and job demand (Varma, 2004). This increase in Asian immigration did not enhance American receptiveness or acceptance. By 1975, during the first wave of post-Vietnam war refugee resettlement, poll numbers indicated that 54% of Americans believed Southeast Asian refugees should not be admitted to the United States (Lee, 2015b).

More than 40 years since the last major wave of Asian immigration to the United States, an anti-Asian sentiment still exists, as was demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic when early speculation that the virus emerged from a Chinese lab led some to direct their anger at all Asians. Abrams (2021) stated that Asians' status as perpetual foreigners in the eyes of many Americans made them easy targets for blame, anger, and aggression during the pandemic. Abrams identified detrimental psychological effects for those impacted by this discrimination, including increased anxiety and depressive symptoms. Along with acts of violence, racism directed at Asians during the pandemic increased on social media. Potter (2022) summarized a University of Utah study

providing evidence that anti-Asian hate language on Twitter surged during the early months of 2020 at the start of the pandemic. Potter stated that, while the numbers gradually decreased, the usage of anti-Asian hate language in 2022 is still higher than pre-pandemic numbers. As indicated by the cultural climate following the COVID-19 pandemic, a perception of Asian Americans as threats to the American way of life is still present in the minds of some.

Cultural Stereotypes Applied to Asian Americans

Asian-American cultural stereotypes can be linked to the concept of Asians as a homogenous people group. Kula et al. (2021) suggest that the problem of masked diversity creates inaccurate generalizations when studying Asian Americans. Joo et al. (2016) stated that a surface-level examination of Asian culture may yield common links, such as a belief in hard work in connection to educational success, which can be linked to first and second-generation immigrants' belief in self-sufficiency. Joo et al. (2016) established a connection between Asian immigrants' higher educational attainment relative to other immigrant groups and their influence on their children's educational attainment. However, creating generalizations beyond a superficial examination of Asian cultural values can be problematic. Kim (2010) challenged the concept of Asian values, citing the heterogeneity and diversity within the Western construct of Asian identity. Kim (2010) further stated that generalizing Asian values and setting them at odds with so-called Western values requires overlooking broad swaths of Asian norms and cultural expectations. Kim (2010) listed some of the traits most commonly associated with Asian values: reverence for family, filial piety, respect for elders, responsibility to family and parent welfare, communalism, and respect for a hierarchal authority structure. Despite

common perceptions and generalizations, Kim's (2010) findings suggest significant variance among sub-populations of Asians concerning these values.

The Model Minority Myth

One frequently-cited stereotype is that of Asian Americans serving as a model minority. The highly-prevalent and celebrated traits of work ethic, persistence, and assimilation often associated with Asian Americans have been referenced as the keys to their apparent success as a racial group, leading to high levels of educational attainment and social mobility, attributes, and status markers compatible with traditionally White culture (Okihiro, 2014). Park (2008) identified parallels between the Asian model minority myth and American Puritanism, which elevated work ethic and self-reliance to the status of moral virtue. The popularization of the model minority myth can be traced from the era of World War II through the Cold War, with the concept achieving greater exposure in mainstream media and culture during the 1980s, when the rise of Asian Americans as a success story became a popular narrative (Lee, 2015b).

While benign on the surface, the model minority myth has been criticized as insidious and harmful to Asian-American equality. According to Okihiro (2014), using the model minority myth to place Asian-American success on equal footing with that of White Americans is inaccurate, overlooking the reality that Asian Americans have been subject to barriers, obstacles, and limitations to educational and occupational opportunities similar to other racial minority groups have experienced. Okihiro also proposed that the model minority myth has proven harmful to other racial groups, claiming that the inaccurate image portrayed by the model minority myth has been weaponized to chastise and discipline other racial groups and their apparent lack of effort

to achieve greater levels of success. According to Okihiro, the model minority myth creates a societal dynamic for Asian Americans that both praises their apparent success while failing to grant them full access to acceptance within the American cultural mainstream, ultimately providing the guise of upholding Asian culture while providing a solidification of White-dominant culture as the norm.

Some have challenged the model minority myth as a concept perpetuated by a White-dominant society that serves a social and political agenda. Lee (2015a) proposed that popularizing the idea during World War II and the Cold War served American purposes by creating a model ideal for Asian Americans and other racial groups to curtail threats to national security and the dominant culture, as opposed to extolling the virtues of Asian culture. Ng et al. (2007) purported that this purpose also helped perpetuate the model minority concept through the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, celebrating the typically mild-mannered Asian stereotype in contrast to the activism of Black Americans and other minority groups of the era. Ng et al. (2007) suggested that these depictions of Asian Americans created tensions with other racial minority groups, further isolating them within the American mainstream. This narrative can yield destructive outcomes even for those it appears to celebrate. According to Hsin and Xie (2014), Asian-American youth exhibit challenges to the perceptions of widespread academic success, as illustrated by lower rates of positive adjustment and social engagement than their White peers. Furthermore, Hsin and Xie (2014) stated that these experiences could lead to greater parental conflict for Asian-American youth due to high educational expectations placed upon them, and they might feel internal pressure to perform at the same level as their Asian-American peers.

Another criticism of the model minority myth is the portrayal of Asian Americans as a homogenous people group, which minimizes the diversity of cultures and experiences within such a broad categorization. Using such a generalized term has been criticized as problematic, reducing the complexity of an entire continent of people to a generic, pan-Asian monolith (Xu, 2021). A close examination of the Asian-American demographic in the United States reveals several apparent paradoxes that contradict many aspects of the model minority myth. Lee (2015b) highlighted the prevalent issues of poverty, unemployment, underemployment, and low levels of academic achievement experienced by many Asian Americans. Lee (2015b) further asserted that the overly simplistic view of the model minority myth fails to acknowledge persistent racism and inequities that still marginalize Asian Americans, keeping them far from attaining status as "honorary Whites." Lee (2015b) supported this assertion by citing U.S. Census data, which indicate Asian Americans are overrepresented at both ends of the spectrum of education and socioeconomics, with the number of Asian Americans with college degrees and those with less than a ninth-grade education surpassing the respective statistics for the overall U.S. adult population. In a Pew Research study, Ceniza-Choy (2022) examined the incomes of Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians between 1970 and 2016; Asian Americans replaced Blacks as the racial group with the greatest expanse of income inequality (Ceniza-Choy, 2022). Joo et al. (2016) indicated that Asian-American students who do well academically have access to higher-quality schools. In contrast, lower-achieving Asian-American students attend underperforming schools, which is consistent with achievement data across racial groups. Liang (2020) stated that Southeast Asian

immigrants are more likely linked to poverty, low educational attainment, substance abuse, youth pregnancy, delinquency, gang activity, violence, and economic instability.

Yang (2004) stated the destructive implications of uncritically accepting the model minority ideal within the school setting, which can result in overlooking critical matters such as language proficiency, broken communication systems between the school and families, implicit biases, discriminatory practices, and student feelings of alienation and disconnectedness from school culture. Park et al. (2015) suggested that the model minority myth has been used to minimize the concept of systemic racism and inequity, promoting a false narrative of social mobility that is available to those willing to claim it. Unquestioningly assuming the truth of the model minority myth overlooks major inequities and obstacles to significant populations of Asian Americans who do not share in this prosperity narrative. Ng et al. (2007) asserted that Asian-American racialization simultaneously perpetuates two ostracizing images: that of the perpetual foreigner and that of the model minority. Neither of these leads to full acceptance within dominant White culture.

Asian-American Gender Stereotypes

Asian-American men and women have both been the subjects of gender stereotypes. Chong and Kim (2021) trace the feminization of Asian men to the first Chinese immigrants in America, the vast majority of whom were men who lived together in a community of cultural outsiders, many of whom did work that was considered effeminate, and who were forbidden by laws and social mores from engaging in romantic relationships with White women. Chong and Kim also attributed the feminine perception of Asian-American men to the historical treatment of Asians as a vulnerable group

subject to Western imperial domination. Lu and Wong (2013) and Chong and Kim (2021) also identified the model minority stereotype as a main contributor to the perception of Asian American men as diligent, compliant, and unassertive, in stark contrast to the alpha male exemplar typically held as embodying masculine traits. Lu and Wong (2013) interviewed a sample of Asian-American men regarding the concept of hegemonic masculinity in American culture. The respondents indicated common themes of stress resulting from internal and external perceptions of their inability to conform to these Western concepts of masculinity.

Asian-American women are also impacted by gender stereotypes. According to Lee (2018), Asian women have typically been associated with two opposing images: the delicate, hypersexualized, submissive China Doll or the harsh, cold, threatening Dragon Lady. Lee (2018) further emphasized that both depictions exoticize and dehumanize Asian women. Mukkamala and Suyemoto (2018) studied a sample of Asian-American women and their experiences of gender discrimination; the participants indicated common experiences that included feelings of invisibility, sexual objectification, and characterizations of submissiveness, specifically connected to a lack of leadership potential. Labao (2017) juxtaposed the contrasting stereotypes of Asian-American women as "geishas" and "dragon ladies" with the White, male-centric ideal of leadership in Western culture, indicating that these characterizations adversely affect the perceptions of Asian-American women as organizational leaders. Liang and Peters-Hawkins (2017) suggest that stereotypes of Asian-American women as submissive and quiet subvert the influence of those in educational leadership roles and limit the advancement of those seeking positions in leadership. For Asian-American men and women, outside

perceptions of their respective gender identities impact their own self-perception and interaction with the dominant culture.

The Asian-American Glass Ceiling

Glass ceilings within the context of corporate organizational hierarchies are metaphors that refer to barriers faced by qualified women and minorities seeking career advancement (Lockert, 2022). Many of the studies surrounding glass ceilings have focused on gender inequality, with relatively little attention given to Asian-Americans' challenges to career advancement, as they are perceived to be an overrepresented group with regard to education and professional accomplishment (Varma, 2004). The misleading aspects of the model minority myth might prove problematic when analyzing the glass ceiling as it applies to Asian Americans. Data analysis of leadership structures in major American industries shows that Asian Americans are underrepresented in managerial roles relative to their educational attainment and presence in the workforce (Nunes, 2021). Perceived cultural differences and implicit biases are among the reasons researchers cite for this effect, often referred to as the "bamboo ceiling" when applied to Asian Americans (Lu et al. 2020). According to Park et al. (2015), Asian Americans are often considered poor candidates for leadership due to a perceived inability to fully assimilate into the White-dominant culture, despite apparent educational and economic successes celebrated within the model minority stereotype.

Varma (2004) offered insights into the glass ceiling phenomenon as it applies to Asian Americans, which reveals an underrepresentation of Asian Americans in positions of management, administration, and executive leadership across fields, from higher education to the corporate world. This underrepresentation occurs, as Varma illustrates,

despite high levels of academic attainment for populations of Asian Americans. According to Varma, research analyzing institutional barriers to Asian-American representation in managerial roles is shallow, with greater attention given to cultural differences between Asian Americans and White-dominant culture as explanations for statistical underrepresentation. Some proposed reasons for the barriers to Asian-American promotion into managerial leadership roles include the perception of language and communication difficulties; however, Varma (2004) referenced studies completed by the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, which found limited English proficiency among foreign-born Whites was not problematic for their career mobility, indicating a potential bias against Asian Americans in this regard. Additionally, Varma cited other potential biases that could perpetuate the glass ceiling effect for Asian Americans, including relegating them to more technical roles instead of managerial positions due to the perception of inadequate social skills to operate within traditional White cultural norms and contexts. According to Varma, this may result from biases that depict Asian Americans as incapable of addressing unpredictable problems that require quick thinking and risk-taking. Varma illustrated the destructive outcomes of these biases and resulting obstacles, stating that while Asian Americans do not view themselves as incapable of serving in managerial positions, they are not optimistic about attaining such roles. As a result, they may not apply for these positions, which perpetuates the glass ceiling effect.

Other research supports Varma's findings of inherent barriers and biases that impact Asian American advancement into management and leadership roles. Sy et al. (2010) found that Asian Americans are often viewed as technically competent and seen favorably in the professional environment but are not viewed as having prototypic

leadership skills when compared to the leadership perceptions of Whites. Furthermore, Sy et al. (2010) also showed Asian Americans being perceived as better suited for more technical roles and less suited for jobs in sales, which require an encompassing skill set that relies heavily on social acuity and communication, skills frequently associated with leadership potential. Asia Society (2017) surveyed Asian American professionals to identify significant challenges to professional advancement. The key barriers identified in the study included perceptions of Asian cultural values as professional liabilities. These barriers include a high value placed upon collectivism, placing the good of the group ahead of an individual's need for recognition. These barriers can hinder promotion in American culture, which rewards those who can effectively market their skills and accomplishments. Additionally, the Asian cultural norm of deference to authority and power structure can result in Asian-American employees complying with leadership rather than speaking up or offering input for improvements, which can create the perception of being unengaged or uncommitted. Gee et al. (2015) studied the underrepresentation of Asian Americans in Silicon Valley's top companies and identified factors that may account for the discrepancy. Among these included Asian cultural norms and behaviors are seen as leadership weaknesses, a lack of executive role models from a common cultural background, and an inability to translate technical competency toward a perception of executive leadership potential. Gee et al. (2015) cited data within the study to illustrate the lack of Asian American representation in executive leadership. Aggregate 2013 employment data for Google, Hewlett-Packard, Intel, LinkedIn, and Yahoo showed that while 27.2% of their professional workforce consisted of Asian Americans, only 13.9% of their executive staff consisted of Asian Americans. Based on the work of

Varma (2004), Sy et al. (2010), Asia Society (2017), and Gee et al. (2015), the prevalence of biases and stereotypes against Asian Americans appear to be factors toward ascendancy toward leadership roles.

Asian Americans in K-12 Education and Leadership

The relative absence of Asian Americans in K-12 education, even compared with other underrepresented racial minority groups, is a phenomenon for which little explanatory data currently exist. This underrepresentation is even more pronounced when examining school and district leadership, which comprise an increasingly larger percentage of White candidates at each level. Examining the limited body of data available on this topic in 2023 serves as a starting point for identifying potential reasons for Asian Americans' low representation in the field of education, particularly in district leadership.

Asian American Representation in K-12 Education

A lack of racial and cultural diversity among teachers in public education has long been considered a problem. Data from a Pew Research study conducted during the 2017-2018 school year indicate that 79% of the public-school teachers identify as non-Hispanic White, 7% identify as Black, 9% identify as Hispanic, 2% identify as Asian, and less than 2% identify as American Indian, Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, or of two or more races (Schaeffer, 2021). In an analysis of the data, Schaeffer (2021) juxtaposed the relative lack of diversity to an increasingly racially and culturally diverse student population, indicating that only 47% of public-school students were categorized as White during the 2018-2019 school year. The findings of the Pew study also indicated that the overall

diversity of the U.S. population continues to grow at a pace that exceeds the slowly diversifying teacher workforce.

The overall trend of Asian Americans in education shows an increase over the last 30 years, with the number of Asian American teachers in the 1987-1988 school year more than tripling by the 2017-2018 school year, growing from approximately 21,000 to 75,000 during that timeframe (Schaeffer, 2021). Still, Asian Americans are significantly underrepresented in the teaching profession, especially given the number of Asian Americans who pursue higher education (Ng et al., 2007).

Gordon (2000) conducted a study to identify the reasons Asian Americans are reluctant to enter the teaching profession. Among the findings from Gordon's study, the reasons included spoken and unspoken pressures from parents, family, and their cultural community to pursue careers with high earning potential and status. Respondents cited the high value placed on respect for and adherence to elders' advice, creating a sense of responsibility to enter professions that enhance familial status, such as engineering or medicine. Another factor identified in Gordon's research was the high esteem given to educators, particularly in Chinese culture. Educators are venerated for their knowledge and virtue, causing reluctance for some to enter the profession due to fears of inadequacy. Gordon (2000) also found that respondents expressed concerns about working outside of their comfort zones in the challenging conditions of the classroom environment and the related emotional vulnerability associated with such a role. One of the findings common among respondents in Gordon's (2000) study was that the participants did not see a strong benefit in Asian teachers working with Asian students, which led to them not feeling compelled to enter the profession. Ng et al. (2007) found that entrance into

professions such as engineering, computer science, medicine, and hard sciences gives Asian Americans opportunities to build careers based on mastering objective skills and knowledge, which minimizes the effects of social and cultural differences that can serve as barriers to career paths such as education.

Asian-American Representation in Building Leadership Roles

Schaeffer (2021) indicates that the diversity among school principals is similar to the racial demographics of teachers, with 78% of principals identifying as non-Hispanic White, 11% as Black, 9% as Hispanic, and 1% as Asian. Like the slowly diversifying teacher workforce, these statistics indicate a slight increase in diverse leadership. Like many topics related to Asian Americans in K-12 education, there is a lack of research into potential reasons for the underrepresentation of Asian Americans in building-level leadership roles. Chan-Nauli (2018) examined the impact of Asian cultural values on the career choices of Asian-American principals, with some of the emergent themes being the prevalence of Asian parents encouraging high-earning, high-status career paths such as medicine, law, and engineering. A majority of Chan-Nauli's respondents indicated that their parents discouraged a career in K-12 education due to low pay and a lack of status associated with a career in education.

The limited literature on this topic reveals common themes of Asian-American administrators using their experiences with prejudice to influence their approach to leadership. Liou and Liang (2020) explored the impact of Asian-American administrators' personal experiences with systemic inequities upon their leadership as a means to combat deficit models of understanding student achievement, particularly among students of color and other marginalized groups. Liang (2020) also illustrates a

focus on social justice in the leadership philosophies of Vietnamese-American female principals.

Research on Asian American leadership at the building level has also produced insights into the issues of intersectionality, specifically regarding gender and race. Labao (2017) gathered perspectives from Asian-American female administrators about the impact of racial or gender stereotypes on their personal and professional experiences. Common themes from the participants in Labao's study included the importance of mentorship support and intentional visibility and networking to offset the resistance experienced from negative racial and gender stereotypes. Labao's participants also expressed common experiences of having their leadership and authority questioned based on perceptions of their race or gender. The participants in Labao's study expressed concerns about the impact these common experiences could have on the pipeline for Asian-American and female leadership representation in education. Liang and Peters-Hawkins (2017) also highlighted the need for mentors and affirming support for Asian-American female administrators to encourage them to pursue career advancement into leadership roles.

In the absence of comprehensive research into this topic, an examination of the experiences of other racial groups regarding barriers to building-level leadership could provide value, insights, and parallels to the Asian-American experience. Tyson (2016) highlighted barriers for Black educators to the principalship, which included a lack of supportive figures and external conflicts. Tyson (2016) also presented the adverse effects of race and perception on the leadership of his participants, who indicated the need to prove their competence to students, parents, and staff members before being accepted as

capable leaders. Randolph (2015) expressed similar experiences in studying Black female administrators, who cited a lack of formal support systems, racial stereotypes, and gender stereotypes as obstacles to advancement and perceived legitimacy as leaders. Wells (2013) also highlighted the challenges of the intersectionality of racial and gender stereotypes for Black female principals, citing the importance of mentorship and support networks in navigating these obstacles to leadership. Black (2012) provided insights into the experiences of Black male principals, further reiterating the need for mentors and support networks. Black's study participants also highlighted a heightened awareness of the scrutiny placed upon their leadership and competence. Black's (2012) participants referenced negative racial and gender stereotypes associated with Black males, such as anger and aggression, as negatively reflecting others' perceptions of their leadership.

An examination of research into the experiences of Hispanic principals reveals similar themes and challenges. Fernandez (2013) provides perspective from Hispanic secondary principals in suburban settings. Common themes from Fernandez's respondents included doubt about their career paths, perceptions of challenges to their leadership and authority, and the importance of mentors and support networks in adjusting to the principalship. Torres-Falk (2011) studied the experiences of Hispanic female principals to identify challenges and obstacles to their career advancement paths. According to Torres-Falk's (2011) respondents, one of the obstacles to pursuing the principalship included a lack of encouraging support networks throughout their high school and college years, which influenced their self-perception as potential leaders. Respondents also expressed prejudice experienced within predominantly White communities and negative perceptions of their legitimacy as leaders as other obstacles.

Torres-Falk's (2011) respondents also echoed the need for mentorship and support networks for Hispanic female administrators.

Santiago (2008) also studied the experiences of Hispanic female administrators, who reiterated the challenges of additional pressure and scrutiny placed upon them related to job performance and legitimacy as leaders, experiences of prejudice within the role of principal, and systemic inequities related to racial stereotypes. Santiago's (2008) respondents also stated the crucial importance of support networks, including mentors, district support, familial support, and influential educators. Carrillo (2008) studied the experiences of Hispanic principals in California, citing discrimination based on race or culture, leadership scrutiny, and gender discrimination as the primary obstacles experienced by participants in the study.

Asian-American Representation in District Leadership Roles

The racial demographic for district-level administrators nationwide is not readily available. The American Association of School Administrators conducted a study that produced data from over 1,400 voluntary participants, of whom 89.9% identified as White, 3.3% identified as Black, 2.7% identified as Hispanic or Latino, 1.2% as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 0.4% as Asian (Sullivan, 2019). Because the survey participation was voluntary, it is difficult to generalize about the findings and apply them to superintendent demographics nationwide; however, the findings do indicate the overall trend that school superintendents are disproportionately White and do not reflect the diversity of their constituents in the classroom or the communities they serve.

In 2023, little research existed to provide deep insights into the reasons for the underrepresentation of Asian Americans in district-level leadership roles. Chee (2004) examined the experience of Chinese-American superintendents in California. Chee's participants identified several common barriers to advancement, which included a lack of Chinese-American professional role models, a White male-dominant culture in education, discriminatory practices within career advancement paths, ethnic and racial stereotyping, and a perceived lack of administrative and communication skills.

Kang (2022) studied current and former superintendents who identify as Asian American to gain perspectives from their career advancement experiences in a White-dominant field. Several recurring themes arose from the interviews conducted in Kang's study. The respondents indicated the importance of forming authentic relationships with stakeholders to overcome misperceptions that could be applied to them as Asian-American leaders, help ease leadership transitions, and develop a strong leadership team (Kang, 2022). Kang's respondents also stated the importance of resilience and preparation to offset systemic inequities and others' perceptions of White superiority. As was the case in other studies that focused on school and district administrators of color, Kang's respondents also emphasized the importance of mentorship and professional networks, which helped the respondents in their career trajectory while also creating avenues of advancement for future Asian-American leaders. The participants in Kang's study also stated the importance of a clear sense of values and self-belief to sustain themselves as extreme minorities in the field of K-12 superintendency.

Keo (2020) offers perspectives from her experiences as a child of Hmong immigrants who became a state-level educational leader. Keo wrote of her feelings of

inadequacy while navigating an educational system not designed for her success to continually feel a need to prove herself among other educational leaders. Keo's experiences, though only written from her perspective, are consistent with the experiences of numerous Asian Americans throughout American history seeking success within a culture that never seems to be fully theirs.

Identifying potential parallels between the experiences of other minority groups in pursuing district leadership could provide insights into the plight of Asian Americans aspiring to these roles. FanFan (2022) provides perspectives pertaining to advancement to the superintendency for leaders of color. The participants in FanFan's study were four Black superintendents in Massachusetts. Emerging themes from the respondents' experiences included encounters with the glass-ceiling effect, which created systemic obstacles for the respondents in their respective career paths. FanFan indicated that these could be difficult to disrupt, as power dynamics within a field that is concentrated highly among a single group, in this case, White males, tend to prioritize self-preservation for the dominant group. FanFan's study emphasized the importance of mentorship and personal support networks for superintendents of color, aiding in a successful and sustainable transition into the role. Respondents in FanFan's study unanimously agreed that race impacted their path and current role as superintendents, as all cited experiences with multiple forms of racism and microaggressions.

While Kang (2022) and Keo (2020) offer insights into Asian Americans' experiences in district and state-level leadership, a comprehensive understanding of common barriers and supports to advancement for Asian Americans aspiring to the superintendency is lacking. Connections from studies similar to the work conducted by

FanFan (2022) may not provide direct correlations to the Asian-American experience in pursuing district-leadership roles. Additional study is needed to gain a deeper perspective on this topic. Identifying possible barriers and supports could assist in recruiting Asian American views and voices to the collective body of district-level leadership.

Summary

In seeking to understand why Asian Americans are nearly absent from the collective body of school district-level administrators, it is necessary to examine the complex contextual layers that could potentially contribute to the present reality. In examining the history of Asian immigration to the United States, a common narrative emerges regardless of the nation of origin or time period. This common narrative depicts a group of foreigners seeking to build a new life in a country celebrated as a land of opportunity, yet consistently encountering resistance, prejudice, and obstacles instead.

In examining the destructive stereotypes and discriminatory practices Asian Americans experienced throughout American history, common themes emerge. Whether the stereotypes appear on the surface to be positive or negative, all can have detrimental outcomes for Asian Americans. While the model minority trope appears to be a celebration of Asian American success, an examination of the low numbers of Asian Americans in executive leadership roles suggests that the success story is not yet celebrated at all levels of organizational leadership.

Finally, when examining the lack of Asian Americans in district-level leadership, questions arise about why this is the case. Several factors could influence Asian-American underrepresentation in the field, including disengagement with the historically White-dominated culture in American public education, limiting images created by

cultural and gender stereotypes, concepts associated with the glass-ceiling effect, and cultural influences on job choice. There are generally no simple answers for complex experiences multiplied across a large and diverse group. However, examining the history and context surrounding the current state of Asian Americans in district-level leadership gives a degree of insight into the many facets of this problem. To gain a deeper perspective, gathering first-hand insights from Asian-American district administrators who pursued a career path against the statistical and cultural norms is essential. Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the methodology and design for this study, which seeks to provide deeper insight into the barriers and supports experienced by Asian-American district-level administrators.

Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine the career advancement experiences of Asian-American district-level administrators through interview questions that explore obstacles, supports, positive professional experiences, and negative professional experiences administrators have encountered during their career paths. Participants' responses were used to identify common themes and experiences among participants. Included in this chapter are a description of the research design, sampling procedures, instruments utilized, data collection procedures, data analysis and synthesis, measures taken for reliability and trustworthiness, the researcher's role, and study limitations.

Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological research design was utilized for this study. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative studies are best suited for exploring the meaning individuals or groups apply to social or human problems. As described by Lunenburg and Irby (2008), phenomenological research is dedicated to clarifying specific phenomena through the eyes of the study's participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) described phenomenological research as identifying common meanings between participants' lived experiences with an observed concept or phenomenon. The core of phenomenological research is grounded in constructivist theory, which posits that individuals seek to create meaning and understanding within their lived contexts, leading to complex and layered views (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The methodology used in this study was interviewing. Based on the criteria for qualitative interviews stated by Creswell and Creswell (2018), interviewing should

involve open-ended and generally unstructured questions intended to elicit the views and opinions of the study's participants. According to Bloomberg & Volpe (2019), interviewing as a methodology is a primary method for data collection in qualitative research because it offers the potential to elicit rich responses from participants and probe for additional information and clarification if needed. The research questions listed in Chapter 1 were addressed by open-ended, semi-structured interview questions that pertain to the lived experiences of Asian American district-level administrators.

Setting

The research site for this study encompassed the entire United States due to the limited pool of potential participants: Asian-American district-level administrators. A very limited number of possible participants were available to the researcher regionally. The need to expand the setting for the study nationwide was possible through databases and professional organizations containing contact information for potential participants.

Sampling Procedures

For qualitative studies, purposive sampling is almost exclusively utilized to describe the topic of inquiry in-depth (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). For this study, the researcher also used snowball sampling to select participants. Snowball sampling consists of finding a few participants with characteristics relevant to the study and asking them to refer other potential participants who share the same specified characteristics to participate in the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Participants in this study consisted of current and former district-level school administrators who identify as Asian-American.

Purposive sampling was utilized to identify the first participants through internet searches for Asian Americans holding positions as superintendents and other roles in district-level administration. The researcher emailed these potential participants and shared an overview of the study and its purpose. Follow-up phone conversations occurred as needed to answer any additional questions about the study that the potential participants had. Those who opted to participate were informed that interviews would be scheduled during January 2023. Snowball sampling was then utilized, as the initial participants were asked to refer other current or former Asian American district-level administrators who could participate in the study. The researcher then contacted these administrators to inquire about their interest in participating in the study. The researcher gradually accumulated sufficient participants utilizing this snowball sampling method.

Instruments

Interviewing has been described as an attempt to understand the world from the perspective of another person, resulting in a greater understanding of their lived experiences and associated meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the researcher utilized interviews as the instrument for gathering data about the lived experiences of Asian American district-level administrators. The researcher drafted interview questions in alignment with the study's research questions. The drafted interview questions were then shared for peer review. No changes were recommended from the peer review. See Table 1 for a complete listing of the study's interview questions and the corresponding alignment to the study's research questions.

Table 1

Research Question and Interview Question Alignment

Research Questions	Aligned Interview Questions
RQ1. How do Asian American district-level administrators describe their career advancement paths?	**IQ1.** Describe how you decided to pursue a career in education. **IQ2.** What was your motivation for choosing this career path? **IQ3.** Tell me about your transition from the classroom to district-level leadership.
RQ2. What internal obstacles have Asian American district-level administrators faced in their career advancement paths?	**IQ4.** What are some internal conflicts (e.g., conflicting priorities, hesitation, etc.) you have experienced during your pursuit of a career in education? **IQ5.** What internal conflicts have you experienced during your pursuit of a career as a district-level administrator?
RQ3. What external obstacles have Asian American district-level administrators faced in their career advancement paths?	**IQ6.** What are some external conflicts (e.g., family pressure, racial prejudice, etc.) you experienced during your pursuit of a career in education? **IQ7.** What external conflicts have you experienced during your pursuit of a career as a district-level administrator?
RQ4. What internal supports have Asian American district-level administrators benefited from in their career advancement paths?	**IQ8.** What internal supports have you benefited from (e.g., religious faith, cultural values, etc.) during your career advancement journey?
RQ5. What external supports have Asian American district-level administrators benefited from in their career advancement paths?	**IQ9.** What external supports have you benefited from (e.g., mentors, family, etc.) during your career advancement journey?
RQ6. What positive professional experiences have significantly impacted Asian American district-level administrators' career paths?	**IQ10.** What positive professional experiences have significantly impacted your career path? How did these positive experiences impact you?
RQ7. What negative professional experiences have significantly impacted Asian American district-level administrators' career paths?	**IQ11.** What negative professional experiences have significantly impacted your career path? How did these negative experiences impact you?
RQ8. How have Asian stereotypes impacted Asian American district-level administrators' career advancement paths?	**IQ12.** How have Asian American stereotypes impacted your career advancement path? **IQ13.** Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your professional experiences?

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to beginning the study, the researcher submitted a request form to the Baker University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval of the proposed study. The Baker University IRB approved the study on December 5, 2022 (see Appendix A). After obtaining approval to begin the study, the researcher began identifying and contacting potential participants via email solicitation (see Appendix B). The researcher then conducted interviews and data collection with the study's participants.

The researcher contacted participants for the study to review the purpose of the study, confirm each participant's willingness to participate voluntarily, and schedule interviews. Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher sent an informed consent form to each participant electronically via email to sign and return. The consent form reviewed the purpose of the study, stated the form and format of the interview, sought permission to record the interview, reviewed that the participant would be taking part voluntarily, and stated that the participant could refrain from answering questions or discontinue their participation at any time (see Appendix C). The researcher collected a signed consent form from each participant and saved them electronically in a digital file.

After contacting each participant and obtaining consent forms, the researcher conducted individual interviews with potential follow-up interviews as needed for clarity of responses. The participants had the opportunity to share their experiences regarding their career paths toward district-level leadership, elaborating on obstacles experienced and supports received during their professional journeys. The interviews were conducted through the online meeting platform Zoom, with the interview itself recorded in audio format using the researcher's iPhone, utilizing the app *Voice Record Pro*. The recordings

were reviewed and transcribed to ensure accuracy. After the interviews were transcribed, a copy of the transcript was sent to each respective participant for review. The researcher thereby utilized member checking to verify that the transcriptions accurately captured what the participant intended to say. Once the transcripts received final approval from the participants, the transcript files and the interview recordings were stored electronically in a digital file for reference throughout the analysis and synthesis portion of the study.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stated that one of the most challenging aspects of qualitative research is managing the large volume of data that was collected and presenting the findings in a meaningful way, which are completed by identifying significant patterns within the data and constructing a framework to communicate the essence of what the data reveals. Distilling the data in this manner will benefit those seeking to understand the study and those who may want to replicate the study in the future (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Creswell and Creswell (2018) presented a five-step process for analyzing qualitative data: organizing and preparing data for analysis, reading the data, coding the responses, describing emerging themes, and representing the emergent themes.

For the first step of this process, the researcher organized the interview recordings as digital files prior to the transcription process. The researcher reviewed and transcribed the recordings verbatim utilizing the transcribing software *Trint*, including any significant mannerisms, pauses, inflections, or other non-verbal cues as appropriate. Member checking was then utilized as transcripts were shared with each participant for feedback and an additional measure to ensure accuracy.

The next steps involved reading and coding the data to identify meaningful patterns of ideas. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) suggested reading interview transcripts closely and noting significant and recurring ideas, some of which may not appear significant until later in the data analysis process. The researcher read and annotated the interview transcripts according to emergent ideas repeated across interviews. The emergent ideas were further distilled into succinct codes to connect participants' common thoughts and focus on key aspects of the data.

These distilled codes were used in the next step of the process: describing emerging themes. Creswell and Creswell (2018) summarized this step as using the established codes to generate themes representing key findings within participants' responses. The researcher in this study utilized the codes generated in the interview transcripts to identify thematic connections among the participants' responses.

The final step in the process involved articulating the emergent themes. This representation can take the form of a narrative passage, visuals, figures, or tables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, the researcher made connections through the emergent themes and wrote a detailed analysis of the study's findings, underscoring the commonalities among the lived experiences of the study's participants during their paths to district-level leadership.

Reliability and Trustworthiness

The matters of reliability and trustworthiness in a qualitative study produce unique challenges compared to quantitative studies. According to Shenton (2004), the key components regarding reliability in a qualitative study include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The researcher took several steps to

enhance the reliability and trustworthiness of the current study. Conducting an audit of interview questions used in the study was a step taken to ensure higher levels of credibility. Interview questions were submitted for peer review to ensure alignment with research questions and unbiased, accurate wording. Based on feedback, appropriate minor revisions were made to the interview questions. Another measure taken concerning the concept of credibility was the use of member checking to gather feedback from participants. The transcript was shared with each participant for review to ensure their responses reflected their thoughts as intended. The respondents each approved their respective transcript with no changes made. The researcher also attempted to address transferability and dependability through a detailed description of the study's methodology. In addressing the matter of confirmability, the researcher engaged in reflexivity. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), reflexivity involves the researcher disclosing biases and viewpoints from the outset that could influence the study so the reader understands the position from which the researcher undertakes the inquiry.

Researcher's Role

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that because qualitative research is inherently interpretive in nature, the researcher's background, gender, history, culture, biases, and other aspects of self-identity can shape the interpretations formed during the study. It is important for the researcher to acknowledge how an individual's background can influence the manner in which they interact with the participants, responses, and findings of a qualitative study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). At the time of the study, the researcher was employed as an assistant superintendent in the Kansas City metropolitan area. The district was located in a suburban area of Kansas City, Kansas, which was one

of the fastest-growing districts in the state. As an Asian American of Vietnamese descent, the researcher had the experience of being the only Asian American student in education courses throughout his undergraduate studies, two master's programs, and a doctoral program. In addition, throughout the researcher's career in education, he has been the only Asian-American teacher or administrator in any school where he was employed. The researcher attempted to remain unbiased and impartial throughout the research process. Interview questions were submitted for peer review and revised based on feedback to avoid leading participants to skewed responses. In addition, the researcher was cognizant of maintaining an unbiased demeanor during interviews, interactions with participants, and data analysis.

Limitations

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) defined limitations of a study as factors that affect the interpretation of the study's findings and the extent to which those results can be generalized; these limitations fall outside the scope of the researcher's control. One of the limitations of this study was a relatively small population of Asian American district leaders who could serve as potential participants in the study. Another limitation was the nature of each participant's interview responses, which are subject to the participant's memory, honesty, biases, and interpretation of events.

Summary

This chapter provided a description of the qualitative research design utilized in this study. Explained in this chapter were the research design, sampling procedures, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis and synthesis process, measures

taken for reliability and trustworthiness, the researcher's role, and study limitations. Chapter 4 contains the descriptive statistics and the detailed findings of the study.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of Asian-American district leaders' career advancement paths, internal and external supports experienced during their career advancement, internal and external obstacles experienced during their career advancement, significant positive and negative professional experiences during their career advancement, and the impact of Asian stereotypes on their professional experiences. Presented in this chapter are the findings gathered from four interviews with current Asian-American district-level administrators. Prior to a detailed discussion of the findings and themes that emerged from the study, an overview of demographic data for the study's participants is presented. This demographic overview is accompanied by the process by which the participants were contacted and invited to participate in the study. Next, the themes that emerged from the participants' interview responses are discussed in relation to the study's research questions. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the findings from the study.

Demographic Data

The researcher contacted 16 current or former Asian-American district-level administrators via email. Initially, the researcher identified 12 potential participants through internet searches of state education databases. These 12 received solicitation emails and a list of the interview questions for the study. Of these 12 potential participants, four responded and agreed to participate in the study. The remaining eight initial contacts received two additional emails, but none responded. The four participants of the study referred four additional contacts to the researcher, who then sent solicitation

emails to the new set of potential participants. None of the new contacts responded to the initial email. The researcher sent a second solicitation email to the four new contacts, to which two responded to indicate that they did not believe their job roles met the criteria of the study. The final sample size for the study was four participants. For phenomenological studies similar to this one, Cresswell and Cresswell (2018) suggested three to 10 participants as an appropriate number of interview respondents.

Of the four participants, three were female, and one was male. Three of the participants lived on the west coast of the United States, while one participant lived in the southern United States. The four participants held different roles at the district or county level, including a superintendent, director of early learning, chief of accountability services, and director of educational equity. Two participants hold doctoral degrees, while the other two hold master's degrees.

Results of the Qualitative Data Analysis

The researcher interviewed the four study participants in January 2023. After conducting the interviews, transcribing the audio recordings, and submitting the transcripts to the participants for member checking, the researcher reviewed each transcript in detail to identify common themes that recurred throughout the participants' responses. The researcher utilized the open coding process described by Bloomberg & Volpe (2019), which includes highlighting key words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs from the participants' responses and using tentative, descriptive labels to categorize the highlighted passages, with the understanding that the labels will likely evolve and change throughout the analysis process. Using these tentative labels, the researcher constructed a spreadsheet to organize the tentative labels and their initial alignment with the study's

research questions. Utilizing this organizational framework, the researcher copied the participants' responses related to each label so that passages pertaining to each label were arranged in the same rows. The researcher reviewed the completed spreadsheet to identify and consolidate related or redundant labels into overarching findings that emerged from the participants' responses. In total, six findings emerged from the study:

1. The participants' career advancement paths to district-level leadership were not planned.
2. Balancing principles, priorities, and self-perception presented significant internal obstacles during the participants' career advancement paths.
3. Professional and political conflicts presented significant external obstacles and negative experiences during the participants' career advancement paths.
4. The participants' influence and experiences as change agents served as significant internal supports during their career advancement paths.
5. The participants referenced family support, mentorship, and professional networking as essential external supports during their career advancement paths.
6. Asian stereotypes and prejudices have influenced others' perceptions of them as leaders.

These findings served as common areas of experience within the diverse career advancement paths of the four participants. In the following sections are the participants' reflections on how the themes identified in these findings impacted them as they worked toward careers in district-level administration.

Finding 1: The Participants' Career Advancement Paths to District-level Leadership Were not Planned

Finding 1 addresses the study's first research question (How do Asian-American district-level administrators describe their career advancement paths?). In their interviews, the participants articulated very different paths to their current roles. Three of the four participants did not enter college with plans to pursue a career in education.

Administrator 1 began her career in an entirely different field. Administrator 1 recounted her path to education, stating, "I was in the corporate sector, and I wasn't entirely fulfilled with what I was doing." She added, "I really wanted to be, you know, do more in terms of being with community and just really having more of an impact on the world, frankly."

Administrator 2 also took an unplanned path toward a career in education, recalling,

> I definitely did not think that I was going to become an educator in terms of a teacher and moving into an administrative role … I was going to go into the science realm and ended up moving into education.

The defining event that made her choose to pursue education was student mentoring. She said,

> I started mentoring, and I really loved mentoring kids. … I had gone into that mentoring program, and I just felt like I had a purpose to be able to, like, mentor and support and educate young folks. And so, because I was able to see that I was making an impact, it really drew me into taking more education classes. And so, I ended up taking more education classes and just really fell in love with it.

Administrator 3 also started college pursuing a major other than education. His path toward education came from feedback from a professor who steered him away from his initial path of study.

> I was a journalism broadcast major. … and then a professor at [the college] told me, 'You should quit because there's no room for Asian people on television. And we already have Connie Chung, who is our token Asian person.' And so, I took that advice. … So, my mom was a teacher, and I knew nothing else, so I became a teacher.

Administrator 4 was the only participant who planned to pursue a career in education from the beginning of her college years. She referenced her positive experiences in school as a primary motivator for entering education. Reflecting on her decision to become a teacher, she stated,

> I love to learn and enjoyed attending school at a younger age and often times would not want to ever miss school because of my amazing teachers. … And so, I have always dreamt about being an educator and a teacher. … I can't think of any other career.

Despite the variety of roles and paths to education among the study's participants, one commonality that emerged from their interviews was that none of them entered education with explicit plans to become a district-level administrator. While the participants had different experiences, one commonality that emerged from their respective ascendancies to district-level leadership was the pattern of high levels of success creating new, and at times unexpected, career opportunities. Each participant

experienced different rates of progression through the systematic hierarchy often found in public education.

The advancement path for Administrator 1 resulted from staffing shifts within her school district, which was a large, urban school district in a major metropolitan area. Her previous experience in the corporate world made her a unique candidate for a district role managing demographic and finance work. Her path to district leadership was an accelerated one, taking her from the classroom to the district office. Recounting her experiences, she said,

> So, I very much chose being a teacher. And the path after that, I would say, was probably less chosen as much as it was, you know, the opportunities happened … And then after that, I would say it was all, it was less planned. I never planned to be where I am today. It just so happened that there was a state receivership in [the district] at the time. They were looking for somebody with a strong financial background that also had a credential …But I would say it was definitely less planned. … It's a one-in-a-million chance that I got. …It really was a matter of timing.

Administrator 2 described her advancement to district-level administration as a more progressive process in which she was a classroom teacher, instructional coach, assistant principal, building principal, and eventually attained a director role. She articulated her advancement path as being defined by seeking new challenges. Reflecting on her career path, she stated,

> I felt like I was in a bubble, right? Like, you know, you get to a point where you're like, "I've been there. I've done that. What more or what else can I do to

> contribute?" And so, I felt like that was where I was at in the school that I was teaching in. And then. … when there's different transitions with, like, leadership roles and different models that are happening, you're like, "Oh, maybe this would be the time for me to also transition as well."

Administrator 3 described his path to becoming a superintendent as defined by repeated instances of dissatisfaction with his immediate supervisors, believing he could perform each role better were he afforded the opportunities. The sense of frustration started at the building level and continued with each step of advancement in roles. Administrator 3 described his experiences of frustration, stating,

> As a beginning teacher. … the principal that I had was just a dictator and a micromanager, and I think everybody hated their job. And I thought, "You know, if I were ever a principal, I would do it differently. I would listen to people, you know, to have meetings differently." And that's what made me pursue my [administrator] credential and the principalship.

For Administrator 3, this motivation led to him pursuing an opportunity to serve as assistant superintendent and, ultimately, superintendent.

Administrator 4 described her experience as a process of hard work and gradual advancement. After 16 years as a secondary-level English teacher, she was an assistant principal in two districts before becoming an elementary principal. On her transition to district-level leadership, she reflected, "I really felt that I worked hard in my role as an administrator at the campus level. And, so therefore, I had an opportunity to apply, which I did, and interview [for Director of Early Education]."

Despite different routes to entering education and varying timelines for career advancement between the participants, the commonalities that led to Finding 1 were that none of the participants identified district-level leadership as a goal they planned for early in their careers. By virtue of success at each step of the educational hierarchy, the participants were presented with opportunities for promotion which, in turn, created other opportunities.

Finding 2: Balancing Principles, Priorities, and Self-perception Presented Significant Internal Obstacles During the Participants' Career Advancement Paths

Finding 2 addresses the study's second research question (What internal obstacles have Asian-American district-level administrators faced in their career advancement paths?). In discussing the internal obstacles they experienced, the participants indicated three primary areas they shared: principles, priorities, and self-perception. Within these three areas, the participants expressed significant internal conflicts that arose and impacted their professional lives.

One significant internal obstacle was balancing their principles about education and ensuring they aligned with their professional roles. Administrator 2 discussed growing up as a child of Vietnamese immigrants, experiencing poverty, and attending under-resourced schools. As she reflected on her career path, which took her to more affluent districts, she experienced internal conflicts regarding the community she served in her leadership roles. Administrator 2 questioned herself,

> Is this the right fit for me? Like, should I go and be where there's a lot more Vietnamese students? So that way I'm supporting these families, right? Versus being in a population where there's a lot more families that don't look like me, or

> don't have the same experiences like I have. Like, should I be going to a school district like where I grew up or have more Title I schools?

Administrator 4 discussed how her principles conflicted with the nature of her current role as a district director. As a classroom teacher and building-level administrator, she had a more direct influence on serving students and staff. In her new district-level role, opportunities to work closely with students and staff members are infrequent, which has caused her a degree of internal conflict as she tries to reconcile her duties with her passion. Administrator 4 noted,

> Now that I'm in this district-level administrative position, I'm not with a staff, and I am not with students as much as I love. And so, I do have a heart for the campus life, and I do have a heart in place for taking care of my own staff and my students. And so that has been an internal conflict for me, oftentimes, because right now, in my position, I see things in a very different view, and my role is very different. And so, I still long for the opportunity to be with a staff and be with students more so than I am now.

Along with struggles pertaining to personal principles, balancing priorities has proven difficult for the administrators in the study. All the participants discussed the challenging and, at times, consuming nature of their administrative roles. However, some participants went into greater detail regarding their difficulties balancing personal and professional priorities. Administrator 1 relayed her struggles with balancing priorities, stating

> There's a lot of stress, I would say, in the central office arena. So, you know, we're all anxious, and we all want to do a good job, but there's too much to do, and you don't know how you're going to do it all.

Administrator 3 expressed similar sentiments, saying,

> I wanted to take the next step to be able to achieve a doctoral degree. I went. … for my doctorate, was a full-time principal, and, you know, newly married, and trying to make everything work. And so, I wasn't able to do any of those particularly well because there were places where they consume time. So, I ended up getting divorced and kicked out of the doctoral program. … I struggled with, I guess, priorities and how to allocate time in pursuit of an advanced degree, career promotion, and also family life.

Additionally, a third internal obstacle was mentioned by three of the participants: self-perception. Administrator 1 discussed how her identity as an Asian-American female caused her to feel the need to prove her legitimacy as a leader. This need manifested itself in several ways, including her manner of dress.

> I learned very early in my career that the fancier I dressed, the more respect I was going to command. And so, to this day, if you see me at a board meeting that is very high stakes, I will be dressed to the nines because I just learned that was something that was armor, and something that people took me more seriously when I was, you know, really, really dressed up. … I don't want to be in that box. And yet, I know that that stuff matters.

Administrator 2 recounted an incident during which a maintenance worker commented on her youth, suggesting that she was too young to be a principal. Her reaction reflected an internal struggle to prove her legitimacy.

> Oh, okay. Well, do I have to, like, read off my, like, list of accomplishments on my resume? To let you know that this is why I'm here in this role? … And so, it's always something where I feel like I always have to prove myself in this particular role. And it, you know, it can be good in a sense, but then it can be very draining in a sense, because then you always feel like you have to be on all the time.

Administrator 4 also communicated a need to prove herself early in her career as an Asian-American English teacher. Despite her challenges, she saw them as a motivating factor that ultimately aided her career advancement. She recounted her experiences of feeling the need to prove herself early in her career.

> Yes, there's always a sense of needing to prove myself as an English teacher. And so that was a motivating factor that when I had challenging parents that wanted to question the way I grade, that wanted to question how I taught, it was, you know, I tried to steer away from it as being a personal attack on who I am as an Asian American. But nevertheless, those experiences provided me with an opportunity to grow and really provided me with the motivation to being the very best English teacher that I could be on the campus.

The responses that ultimately formed Finding 2 reflect the internal conflicts that burdened the participants during their careers.

Finding 3: Professional and Political Conflicts Presented Significant External Obstacles and Negative Experiences during the Participants' Career Advancement Paths

Finding 3 addresses research questions three (What external obstacles have Asian-American district-level administrators faced in their career advancement paths?) and seven (What negative professional experiences have significantly impacted Asian-American district-level administrators' career paths?). All participants indicated external obstacles and negative experiences as significant factors in their career advancement paths. The most frequently referenced experiences were professional conflicts with supervisors and colleagues, along with political conflicts in the work environment and neighboring community.

Administrator 1 shared her experiences with professional conflicts, specifically during her time in her previous district. In that district, which was a large, urban district with significant struggles, Administrator 1 worked with several ineffective supervisors who cultivated an unhealthy, toxic work environment. She reflected on these experiences and their impact.

> I've had some just horrendous managers. … I've had managers that have been completely inappropriate. I had managers that are bullies. I have had managers that are incompetent. I've had managers that are, you know, like narcissistic. I have had managers that really, like, had no business being a manager.

In addition to having a negative impact on her professionally, working with these supervisors also shaped her leadership style by providing examples of management styles

she would work hard to avoid. Administrator 1 described the formative effect these negative experiences had on her as a leader, saying,

> I interacted with a lot of different leaders, and I learned very, very quickly how I wanted to be as a leader and how I did not want to be as a leader. And, in fact, I would say what was probably more striking for me is how I didn't want to be. … I saw a lot of things and I learned and I really would keep a running log in my mind about I never want to, you know, have this kind of impact on people, or I would never want to speak to somebody in this way. … I try really hard and I always check my own self to [ask] … how am I behaving as a leader? And how do I want people to see me?

Administrator 3 encountered professional conflicts from a different vantage point as a district-level administrator. Lawsuits and accusations of discrimination from former employees weighed heavily on him. His reflections on these experiences indicate the toll they took on him. He recounted,

> I've been sued in federal court. Twice. Once as an assistant superintendent, and once in my current role, and also then had lawsuits against me three times by employees that weren't performing that I removed posts as principals based on discrimination and gender, which were completely false. But having to go through five lawsuits in the last 12 years is draining, and it's hard.

Also mentioned among the external challenges faced by the participants were political conflicts, which took the form of tensions within their organizations and friction with the community. Administrator 1 discussed how political infighting within the district could impede progress and function within the organization. When she became a new

district-level administrator, she observed the institutional inertia and resistance of those who have long been part of the system. Trying to overcome that mentality within her district was a challenge, which she recounted in her experiences:

> So, you have, like, the people who have been there … and they are very entrenched in their ways. And then you have these new people who are coming in that are telling, you know, the people who've been there how to do something better, you know, and that never ends well. And so, there was nothing but external pressure. I mean, it was years of, you know, pressure cooker situations and really hard.

Administrator 1 went on to explain in greater detail how deeply this political dysfunction ran:

> I was surrounded with people who had been there for decades, and people who wanted to be in the central office for whatever reason, like, you know, weren't given that opportunity. And so, a lot of the external pressure was, I felt like, and it wasn't felt, I mean, it was said directly to my face because it's very much [the district's] culture, that I didn't belong. That, you know, that I was too young. I didn't know what I was doing. I'd never been a principal. "How can you possibly understand this?"

Administrator 2 expressed similar challenges as she transitioned into district-level leadership. As a building principal, she stated feeling a greater sense of autonomy to make decisions and act as circumstances necessitated. However, as a district-level administrator, the layers of bureaucracy impeded her ability to affect change in the ways she desired. She recounted her experiences of navigating these barriers to action:

> I think the hardest for me, something that I tried to grapple with is that I don't have that control anymore. At a school site as a principal, you have that control to be able to communicate when you need to communicate, to be able to call meetings when you need to be able to call meetings. But whereas in this particular role, I may be answering to, like, the superintendent, or I might be answering to the assistant [superintendent] or executive director, or I need to ask for permission to do certain things.

She further discussed this lack of autonomy as a reality she needed to adapt to establish the importance of her role, even if it was not at the pace she prefers:

> Sometimes you're being told what to do or "voluntold" what to do, and so then you just sort of have to carry it out. And so, there are times where I feel like I've been voluntold a lot. So, I was, like, trying to navigate that as well. But I definitely see that there was a role that was needed … We have to work on strategic directions and really push things out so people can see that this director position is important.

The political challenges expressed by the participants were not limited to the organizational structures of their respective districts. Three participants referenced the political dynamics of society at large, infiltrating their local communities and creating hardships for their leadership. This shifting and increasingly polarized political landscape has created difficult terrain for leaders to navigate.

Administrator 3 discussed the complex political makeup of the community he serves, which is a blend of strong conservative and liberal voices. His efforts to implement innovative, career and postsecondary-focused initiatives in his district are met

with different types of resistance from the community. He described the challenges he has faced in district-level administration in greater detail.

> In the assistant superintendent level, a lot of the external pressures were around politics, and learning to navigate and create inclusive language and be relative to both sides of the aisle, Republican and Democrat in the communities I served. One was very affluent, but very liberal. And where I am right now is very conservative, extremely right, with a liberal workforce. And those pressures are hard. I think I do them well, but I think, in general, our profession … that people are questioning everything that we put in front of kids, like "That shouldn't be part of school." And then you have parent groups, parents for this, parents against this. You know, it's like those are the pressures we are dealing with.

As the director of educational equity within her district, Administrator 2 expressed similar conflict within her community regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. She views her role as one that involves confronting and addressing longstanding philosophies and practices that do not serve all students equally. In the current political landscape, she has experienced significant resistance to her work, which she described in reflecting on the topic:

> It's very easy in this department for people to do a Public Records Act request because they didn't like something in the LGBTQ world and they want all the paperwork or the plans for it. Or anything that you're doing equity, you know, like "Why are you doing that? There's nothing wrong with our district," right? And so, I feel like there's a lot of things that we want to dismantle, but we also need to bring people in to hear about it and listen to their stories. And so, really

> trying to open up people's minds and, you know, their ears to what's really going on and not be very passive about it … Because we are touching all the very hard topics, that it can be draining at times … Sometimes, it's like, "Why am I doing this?" You know? Like, "Why did I decide to do this particular role?" Or, "Am I going to get the same support next year?"

The respondents in this study expressed their experiences regarding professional and political conflict and the realities these issues have created in their leadership roles. Whether the obstacles come in the form of individual relational conflict or systems-level resistance, the desire to effectively lead and implement positive change can be significantly opposed by these problems. As indicated by the participants' responses within this theme, their leadership is predicated on finding ways to progress despite these obstacles.

Finding 4: The Participants' Influence and Experiences as Change Agents Served as Significant Internal Supports During Their Career Advancement Paths

The fourth finding that emerged from the study focuses on the purpose and gratification the participants experienced in their role as change agents for their respective districts. This finding addresses the study's fourth research question (What internal supports have Asian American district-level administrators benefited from in their career advancement paths?) and sixth research question (What positive professional experiences have significantly impacted Asian-American district-level administrators' career paths?). The participants repeatedly referenced the aspects of their roles that have fulfilled their career paths despite their serious challenges.

Administrator 1 referenced her impactful experiences upon entering education after leaving the corporate world. Her teaching career took an unexpected detour as she took a position teaching in a third-grade Cantonese bilingual classroom, as she intended to become a high school math teacher. The experience as an elementary teacher proved to be significantly impactful, creating an overarching sense of purpose for her. She reflected on the gratification she experienced as a much-needed change agent within that community:

> What I really loved about it is that most of the families who had students who had children in our school could not speak any English. And so, as a result, they could not fill out any forms. And they didn't understand a lot of what was happening in the school. … [The parents] always came to find me, to talk to me, to ask how their students were doing. And it really made me interested and passionate because I realized that, you know, that was a lifeline for them. And so, they would come and they would ask me not just about, you know, their student's well-being, but they would come and I would help fill out job applications. I would help fill out forms that they needed in order to get services. And so that was really my impetus for being in education. And to this day, I'm still really impacted by those years.

Administrator 2 cited a similar sense of gratification in her current role. Though she referenced the opposition she continually faced in pursuing equity work, she also discussed how the impact she is making serves as a primary means of internal motivation to persevere through challenges. She expressed this sense of motivation in reflecting upon her current role:

> I know that there were so many different things that we have to do in order to support all of the students within the district, and especially those that have been underserved or have not been on the radar within our district. And so, I knew that jumping into this particular position, that it was not an easy one. If I jumped into a different position, I think it would have been an easier position to fulfill and to be able to, you know, go home and sleep at night … As a director, I'm seeing things through many different lenses, and it's also my lived experiences have helped me see things that others might not see … And then sometimes I wonder, like, how can I mold this to make it successful for other people that will come in, because I know that I'm not going to be here forever in this particular role, but I want to make sure that it's successful.

Administrator 2 also discussed the long-range aspect of addressing inequitable practices within any organization. While the deep impact that results from the work motivates her, she indicated an awareness that the process would require patience and time.

For Administrator 3, the most fulfilling career experiences came from working to provide better life outcomes for the students and families within his district. As a principal tasked to improve test scores and quantitative student achievement, he faced a personal dilemma when he saw higher assessment scores among his students but unimproved life circumstances upon graduation. He recounts the challenges he encountered, along with the gratification that came with being a change agent within that community:

> Watching the kids matriculate out of high schools, even though they were performing well on the test, they're still getting pregnant in high school, still

> going into generational gangs, still dropping out. What I realized with the help of my teachers was that we weren't changing any life outcomes in the pursuit of raising test scores. We weren't changing the kids' lives … [I] started to really listen to the parents and what we are doing. And what should we be doing?

Through listening to parents, Administrator 3 decided to allocate funds toward extracurricular opportunities and student support instead of simply focusing on interventions and tutoring. The results were impactful, as he reflected on the outcomes:

> What we saw was parent happiness and pride. We saw students light up to come to school because these amazing, you know, typically out-of-school experiences, they would get during the school day. And the performance improved, even though they weren't focusing on academics.

These experiences helped form his vision as a leader who focuses on different goals for the students in his district. His focus on post-secondary success was evident in his reflection:

> We can actually help kids self-actualize and find their strengths, interests, and values, and aim that at a career, aligned with who they are, rather than trying to get them to conform to one set of metrics to get into college … Our goal posts in our community is not graduation and college entrance. It's self-awareness and gainful employment and interconnectedness … That's what gets me out of bed every morning.

Administrator 4 also cited her work supporting staff, students, and parents throughout the district as some of the most impactful and gratifying work in her career. As the Director of Early Learning in her district, much of her work involves supporting

curriculum and instruction in early childhood and elementary and assisting parents with enrollment to benefit fully from district services. She expresses the rewarding nature of these interactions:

> Currently, in my role right now, I am taking care of the whole district. And so, I take care of all Pre-K families, Pre-K curriculum. And then it also transfers to K, one, and two curricula as well. And so, I am constantly in contact with staff, with principals, and particularly with families who are Vietnamese, because I can translate and help them through the enrollment process. … And so those are just the different things that have really and truly impacted my life as an educator. But they're all about people.

Administrator 4's role enables her to support her community at the entry point of her district. Her efforts produce a ripple effect that impacts the entire district by setting the foundation for the instruction and programs that will follow.

All four participants indicated that the intrinsic supports that motivate them as leaders stem from experiences in which they served as change agents. Despite widely varying backgrounds, the commonality in their responses relates to making tangible contributions that yield positive outcomes for others. Administrator 3 summarized, "Being able tangibly to see the fruits of the labor. The impact … that's gratifying."

Finding 5: The Participants Referenced Family Support, Mentorship, and Professional Networking as Essential External Supports During Their Career Advancement Paths

The experiences that emerged to form Finding 5 derived from the interviews relate to the external support each from which the participants benefited during their career advancement paths. This finding addresses the fifth research question in the study:

What external supports have Asian American district-level administrators benefited from in their career advancement paths? In addressing the topic of external support, the participants frequently referenced the importance of familial support, mentor support, and professional networking as critical to their success as district-level administrators.

One of the primary sources of external support mentioned by the participants was family members. The path to gaining family support varied within the group, as some experienced it from the beginning of their educational careers, while others eventually gained it after initial skepticism from their families. Administrator 1 recounted the high level of family support she received after deciding to leave the corporate world. Her father was a university professor, which helped her parents to be more accepting of her choice to make a dramatic career switch into teaching. Reflecting on the experience, she recalled,

> I don't personally feel like I had a lot of external pressures. I was lucky. I think I'm not the norm in this, but my parents were supportive … I mean, my mother did have a little bit of like, "You want to be a teacher?" … I think that there very much is a stereotype that exists that … when your parents are immigrants and mine are and have worked so hard, like, they want to see you in a high-paying job. They want to see you really successful. And I was lucky in the sense that I didn't have that. Like they were like, "Okay, you want to be a teacher? You go be a teacher."

Administrator 2 experienced a longer path to parent support for her career choice. As the child of immigrants, she had pressure to pursue a high-earning career, as evidenced in her description of her parents' expectations. She recalled,

> My parents wanted me to become a doctor. That's just every parent's dream to have their kids become either doctors or lawyers. And so, I ended up going into school pursuing, you know, biology, thinking that that's what I was going to do.

After experiencing academic setbacks early in her college years, she identified education as a better fit for her interests. Upon making the change, her parents were initially skeptical but eventually grew to be supportive of her choice. She reflected on the process to acceptance and support.

> My parents were like, "What? You're going to be a teacher?" And I said, "Oh, trust me on this one. I'm going to be a teacher. Don't you worry." You know, they didn't understand at the time. They were just like, "Oh, you know, it's not as prestigious, doesn't make as much money," all of those different things … Internally, you know, there was just a lot of, like, fear, disappointment, guilt that I had because I didn't pursue what was expected of me. And, you know, growing up in a Vietnamese family, you definitely have a lot of, you know respecting the elders and making sure that you're listening and being obedient, all of those different things. … And I think, as I continued on in my teaching path and then my educational career, then they were able to at least tell me that they're proud of me.

Administrator 4 also shared the experience of being the child of immigrant parents, but her more direct path to education was met with immediate support from her parents. She shared her parents' difficulties in building a new life in the United States as well as their deep belief in education as being a vehicle for opportunity. When she

decided to be a teacher, her parents were supportive from the outset. She recalled her parents' rationale for supporting her decision:

> As immigrants to America from Vietnam, my parents are very proud of me for becoming and educator. I was raised in a nail salon, and the last thing my mom ever wanted me to do is to pursue a career in the nail business, and actually to be in business altogether. … They truly are so very proud of me for pursuing a career in education because it's something that they truly value. Both of my parents didn't finish high school. … therefore, being the first child in the whole family to have graduated from college meant a great deal to them. And for me to pursue more of education was also a big deal for them as well.

In addition to family support, the participants in the study referenced mentor support as a key component to their success. This support took various forms, from formal mentorship assignments to colleagues and supervisors offering advice and guidance. Even with the variety of mentor relationships the participants experienced, all participants considered this personal support structure as essential to their career advancement.

Administrator 1 cited the help of other leaders at the district level as a critical connection to helping her make the rapid transition from being a classroom teacher to a district administrator. Much of the support centered on navigating the systemic and political structures of the district. She said she attributes that mentorship support to her success:

> I would say the biggest things is that I happened to meet people along the way that were very much invested in my growth and my professional well-being. I

> happened to meet a deputy superintendent who was, you know, much more experienced and seasoned than I was. And he taught me a lot about, you know, how to navigate situations. I've met other people along the way that were the same thing. … I was not very good at seeking out help.

Administrator 2 shared her experiences working with a district mentor who helped her grow in her capacity to lead professional development and envision goals for equity work in the district. As a result of this mentoring support, she felt better able to transition into her current director role, stating, "I felt like I was able to really work on some skills that I didn't really work on before in my other roles." She also referenced mentors who pushed her to extend herself and pursue challenging opportunities:

> I had a mentor that I still connect with. She retired from education but ended up going into the private sector, and she has always been one that is encouraging and always really checking in to see where I'm at or what I'm doing. … And I feel like throughout my career, I've always had people that rooted for me. They would call me in and make me apply for things that I wasn't quite thinking about or not quite ready for.

Administrator 3 also shared experiences with a former supervisor who made a deep impression on him and his leadership style. Through observing this mentor, Administrator 3 added to his leadership skill set and had applicable skills that would translate to his career advancement. He described the impact of this mentoring relationship:

> My first superintendent that gave me my first principalship was my best mentor of all time. You know, took me under his wing and walked me through every

> process. And even though I ended up leaving the district, he's always been a mentor me and an incredible leader, too. So, I got to watch him and learn from how he handled conflict and diffused situations and was able to not personalize when people were angry with him. Those are skills that I don't think I could have learned without his example.

Administrator 4 discussed mentors that assisted her at every stage of her educational career. She started her teaching career in one of the largest school districts in the country. She received mentorship from her fellow teachers and principals, eventually leading her to pursue a career in administration. It was during this phase of her career that she received advice that she still recalls years later:

> I was extremely blessed with principals who guided me while I was an assistant principal. And I remember one principal in particular at that time. She was not my principal yet, but she, when just having a conversation with her, she told me "Your first principal as an administrator will make you or break you." And she was completely right. And so, ironically, she became my principal.

The final area of external support frequently mentioned by participants was networking support. Across interviews, participants frequently referenced the importance of building relational connections both inside and outside of education. These professional relationships help to build partnerships, develop ideas and innovations, and lead to overall leadership growth.

Administrator 1 recalled her experiences working in a large district and the numerous connections she was able to make being a part of that system. Even when those

relationships were with people outside of the district, the synergy that developed was highly beneficial:

> You met a lot of people. I mean, either in the system that were working for the district or you met them as partners or community activists or whatnot. And so, you built a network that was unparalleled. … When it came to, you know, looking for a different job or like meeting to get something done, I was able to reach out to people that I already knew. … It becomes very clear who's well-connected and who's not.

Administrator 1 also referenced the importance of being mindful of the highly interconnected nature of these professional networks:

> I talk about, like, the network as being large, and it is. But the network is also very small. … Everybody talks and we all know one another. And so, if you at all are going to be in this for a long period of time, every single interaction that you have with somebody matters. And so, there is no interaction that you have where your reputation is not going to get back to somebody. And you're going to need that somebody somewhere down the line.

Administrator 2 also expressed the importance of her opportunities to network with professionals outside of education. For her, the connections, new learning, and expanded perspectives were highly beneficial to her own work. She described some of the opportunities that came as part of a leadership cohort she joined:

> There's only two of us within the school district, and the rest of the members are people from outside. They are either lawyers, they might work for planning, or the city, might be the mayor, right? And so, then you're able to meet with people and

> see people from a different perspective … And so, to be able to be in that space, to hear from those that are not in just the education realm, and then have these conversations that go in many different directions, that I wouldn't have even thought about, I think has been really insightful and really helpful … I don't think we as educators get a lot of those opportunities where we go into our outside circles. We're like probably more internal.

As a superintendent who strives to be forward-thinking, Administrator 3 highly values networking. In his experience, networking is an opportunity to engage in thought partnerships that help generate new ideas or refine existing practices. He described the value of networking in his professional growth:

> All over the country, I have so many people that have helped me advance an idea, or build my network, or connect me to somebody else that gave me an opportunity. And, I mean, I couldn't on all my fingers and toes count all of them, but there have been a ton of people that, along the way, I have learned from and that helped me.

Finding 5 connected the recurring idea stated by the participants throughout their interviews: none of them felt they could have traversed their career paths alone. All participants emphasized the importance of being intentional about cultivating these support systems. Whether the external support came from family members, mentors, or professional acquaintances, all participants felt that these external support systems increased their leadership capacity, ultimately impacting their career trajectories positively.

Finding 6: Asian Stereotypes and Prejudices Have Influenced Others' Perceptions of Them as Leaders

Finding 6 emerged when participants articulated their experiences of how Asian stereotypes and prejudices have impacted their career paths, specifically in how others perceive them as leaders. This finding addresses research question eight: How have Asian stereotypes impacted Asian-American district-level administrators' career advancement paths? From trying to combat commonly-held stereotypes about Asian culture to experiencing tokenism, all participants communicated instances when their racial identity impacted how others viewed them.

Administrator 1 stated her belief that the Asian stereotype of being docile, compliant, and passive impacts the way others view Asian-American leaders:

> Sometimes I feel like an organization will hire an Asian-American leader because they will think, "Okay, well, they'll just maintain the status quo. They won't do anything different. They'll do what we say they should do, and that we can basically control the narrative and that we can be just the same as we always have been."

Administrator 1 also discussed her perception that Asian Americans are viewed as uncharismatic, weak communicators incapable of serving as the face of an organization:

> I think there's also a stereotype that Asian Americans, and women in particular, are not good presenters and are not good speakers and are not good storytellers … I also think that the storytelling one is the closest to my heart. Just because so much of presenting and being in a higher-level position is about storytelling. And so, if we aren't seen as storytellers, then I think there's really a ceiling which we

> hit because people don't see us in a higher capacity. … I would say the other one is that we're just good with numbers, that we can crunch numbers, but I would say that this is kind of related to the storytelling. Like we're good at being behind the scenes, and we can do things and make reports and do the numbers correctly, but we're not the people out in front, that there's somebody else that's, like, glossy, that is more polished. … We've actually done the work behind the scenes, but are not good enough to be out in front.

Administrator 2 also described experiences when she perceived others as having diminished expectations of her due to her racial and cultural identity. Specifically, she discussed assumptions others seemed to make about her based on her appearance as well as her name:

> I think that people, when they see my name, also, they look at it and they're just like, "Oh, you know, I wonder if it's a he or she. Or is this person going to speak English or not speak as well." And so, I think that when they meet me or when they have conversations with me, they definitely have a different impression or different outlook.

Administrator 2 also expressed a sense of heightened awareness that she is almost always the only Asian-American administrator in most professional settings. Being such a rare figure, she felt she carried additional burdens in her role. She stated,

> I've, like, got to count out how many people of color there are versus those that are not. You just sort of see yourself, you're standing in a room and you like, You're one of the "others." Like, they're not very many of you. … You might be one of the only or one of the few within your department or within your school

> site. And so sometimes there's that burden that you carry because you might be, like, the one that they turn to, to answer all the questions about race or, like, about incidents that occur, and you might not want to answer all those questions.

Administrator 4 shared an experience when parents questioned her qualifications as an English teacher due to her race. She recalled,

> I can remember very clearly that I had parents even raise their eyebrows that as an Asian American, I'm teaching their child English. And so, I did experience a little bit of that. Nevertheless, I am very thankful that I have always proven them wrong.

Administrator 3 did not recall any experiences in which racism or prejudice negatively impacted his career as an administrator; however, he did recall situations when the perceived novelty of being an Asian-American superintendent appeared to be the primary criteria for opportunities he received. He recalled instances when this seemed to be the case:

> I don't think [race] played any real positive or negative in terms of my educational career. … But I do feel that I've been invited to certain things because of my ethnicity. I do think that it's gotten me a seat at the table because people want to have, you know, an African-American and a Latino and, oh, there's an Asian superintendent, too. Yeah, as you look around, I think, "Okay, that's very, very intentional. There's one of each of us." … I'd hate to be chosen because I was Asian, but I think sometimes when people are looking to build a diverse panel of speakers or, you know, a diverse lineup of leaders, that it's gotten me some opportunity. Maybe. I mean, I could be wrong.

Though race and prejudice impacted the participants in different ways and to different extents, all participants shared experiences of how their racial identity was connected to others' perceptions of them as leaders. For some participants, these experiences highlighted perceived inequities for Asian-American leaders, while others used their experiences to motivate them to prove stereotypes wrong. The concepts of racism and stereotypes as they apply to each participant's lived experiences are complex but could carry significant applications to understanding how these concepts apply to Asian-American district administrators overall.

Summary

Presented in this chapter were the findings of interviews conducted with four Asian-American district-level administrators based on interview questions tied directly to the research questions for this study. The responses of the participants articulated their experiences regarding their individual career advancement paths, internal and external obstacles experienced during their careers, positive and negative personal and professional experiences during their careers, and perceived impacts of racism or stereotypes during their career advancement paths. From these responses, six key findings emerged based on recurring themes and concepts expressed by the participants. In Chapter 5, a study summary, findings related to the literature, and the conclusions are provided.

Chapter 5

Interpretation and Recommendations

The previous chapter presented the findings from four interviews with Asian-American district-level administrators. Chapter 5 builds upon the findings presented in the previous chapter, providing interpretations and recommendations. This chapter begins with a summary of the study, which includes an overview of the research problem, purpose statement, research questions, methodology of the study, and major findings. The next section provides findings related to the literature pertaining to the topic of study. Chapter 5 closes with the conclusions, which include the implications for action, recommendations for future study, and concluding remarks.

Study Summary

The following sections provide a summary of the study. First will be an overview of the problem, which provides context to underscore the central issue at the heart of the study. Next is a presentation of the study's purpose statement and research questions. The next section includes an overview of the research methodology utilized in the study. Finally, the section concludes with the major findings of the study.

Overview of the Problem

Asian Americans are the fastest-growing racial group, according to data from the 2020 U.S. Census (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Despite this growth, Asian Americans are underrepresented in district-level school administration, as evidenced by a study conducted by McCord and Finnan (2019), in which only 0.4% of the superintendents who participated in the study identified as Asian American. Even with this disparity in 2023, little research exists examining the career advancement paths of Asian-American district-

level administrators. The results of this research could be potentially beneficial in identifying possible obstacles that serve as barriers to Asian Americans pursuing district-level leadership. Research could also assist in identifying support systems that have helped Asian American district-level administrators advance to their roles in leadership. Castro et al. (2018) underscored the heavy prevalence of White administrators in education while citing the many benefits of diverse leadership. Additional research surrounding Asian-American district-level administrators could contribute to more effective hiring and retention practices that could bring tangible improvements to school performance and student achievement, particularly in diverse school environments.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences in the career advancement of Asian-American district-level administrators by examining their general career advancement paths. Through interviews with current and former Asian-American district-level administrators, this researcher gathered insights regarding internal and external obstacles to career advancement, internal and external supports to career advancement, significant positive professional experiences, significant negative professional experiences, and the perceived impact of Asian stereotypes on their professional experiences. Eight research questions were posed to address the purposes of the study.

Review of the Methodology

This study was structured as a qualitative phenomenological research design. The researcher constructed open-ended, semi-structured interview questions that were utilized in the interviews. The setting for the study encompassed the entire United States due to

the extremely limited number of Asian-American district-level administrators available to serve as potential study participants. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, purposive sampling was utilized to identify potential participants. The researcher also attempted to utilize snowball sampling to identify additional study participants; however, the additional referrals the researcher acquired did not produce any additional participants. After identifying the study's participants, the researcher conducted interviews by video using the online meeting platform Zoom or telephone, with the interview recorded in audio format. The audio files were then transcribed. The transcripts of the interviews were shared with each respective participant to review for accuracy. After the participants reviewed the transcripts and confirmed they were accurate, the researcher analyzed the interview transcripts, identifying common themes within the responses. From these themes, the researcher identified six major findings.

Major Findings

After analyzing interview transcripts and implementing open coding to identify themes across participant responses, the researcher identified six major findings that emerged from the interviews. The findings that emerged from the study came from four participants with diverse backgrounds and varied paths to district-level leadership. The analysis revealed parallels in the experiences of the four participants and indicated similarities to existing literature regarding district-level administrators from other racial minority groups.

Finding 1 in the study revealed that the participants' path to district-level leadership was not planned. Finding 2 revealed the balancing of principles, priorities, and self-perception as common internal obstacles the participants experienced during their

career advancement. Finding 3 described professional and political conflicts as major external obstacles and the sources of negative professional experiences for the participants. Finding 4 identified the opportunity to serve as change agents to be a major internal support to the leaders in the study. Finding 5 highlighted the importance of family support, mentorship, and networking relationships as crucial external supports for the participants. Finally, Finding 6 indicated that Asian stereotypes and prejudices influenced the perceptions others had of the participants' leadership.

Findings Related to the Literature

In 2023, little research existed that highlighted the challenges and supports Asian-American-American district-level administrators experienced during their career advancement paths. What little literature that was available almost exclusively examined Asian-American administrators at the building level, with study foci that ranged from the influence of cultural values on career choice (Chan-Nauli, 2018), the intersectionality of gender and race (Labao, 2017; Peters-Hawkins, 2017), perceptions of leadership styles (Liou & Liang, 2020), and hyperawareness of race in White-dominated leadership structures (Victorino, 2020). In the absence of extensive research related to this study's topic, the researcher considered the study's findings alongside the notable studies that explored Asian Americans in district-leadership roles (Chee, 2004; Kang, 2022), superintendents of color (FanFan, 2022), implications of stereotypes for Asian-American leaders, and the career advancement paths for administrators of color (Black, 2012; Fernandez, 2013; Santiago, 2008; Torres-Falk, 2011; Tyson, 2016; Wells, 2013).

This first finding related to career advancement paths was unique compared to the existing research on Asian Americans in district-level leadership. None of this study's

four participants planned to pursue district-level administration at the start of their careers. Not only were their paths to their current roles generally unplanned, but for three of the four participants, their entry into the field of education was not planned when they began college. Except for Administrator 4, the participants either shifted majors or entered education from a different sector altogether. Three of the four participants referenced low pay as a hesitation for entering teaching. Administrator 1 said,

> I mean, the pay, that was the biggest thing. I did a lot of analysis about whether or not I could afford it. You know, I was on a corporate track, and I definitely could have stayed in a very much more safe place.

Administrator 4 stated a similar sentiment:

> We all know that educators do not get paid a lot of money. … As an undergrad in college, I worked for a business corporation, and there were opportunities for me to consider business as my field. And it was offered for me to go in that route, and that the corporation would pay for my education.

Low pay as a potential deterrent to considering a career in education is consistent with the work of Gordon (2000), who indicated a sense of responsibility among the study's Asian-American participants to pursue high-paying careers that enhanced familial status. Chan-Nauli's (2018) study regarding the cultural impact on career choice for educators indicated that participants' parents discouraged a career in education due to this perception of low pay and status.

Another common theme in all four participants' responses was the concept of opportunities for advancement occurring due to a pattern of success and excellence in smaller roles. Administrator 2 summarized this sentiment, saying,

> In education, we just have to go through all these, like, moves in order to move into the district office role. And so, I knew that I wanted to get into administration. I just knew that I also had to take these other leaps and bounds.

The participants' experiences regarding career advancement are consistent with findings from Kang (2022), who delved into the career reflections of Asian-American superintendents, which included gaining experience through challenging opportunities that prepare aspiring leaders for bigger roles. Participants in Kang's (2022) study indicated that these experiences may not always be desirable. However, they provide platforms for future leaders to excel and expand their skill sets to become viable candidates for upper leadership roles.

The study's second finding articulated the internal obstacles created by struggles to balance principles, priorities, and self-perception. This finding was consistent not only with research concerning Asian-American district leaders but also with educational administrators in general. One of the recurring themes contributing to Finding 2 was the challenges participants felt in balancing principles and values with their roles as district-level leaders. This sentiment echoed one of the key findings from Kang's (2022) study of Asian-American superintendents, who expressed the importance of articulating core values to navigate the conflicts inherent with high-level leadership.

Another recurring thought that participants in this study stated was finding a balance between professional and personal priorities, which proved difficult given the stressful and consuming nature of their roles as district-level administrators. In Chee's (2004) study of Chinese-American superintendents, the participants expressed a similar difficulty in finding work/life balance, expressing that their jobs infiltrated their personal

lives regularly. Balancing personal and professional priorities was also a key finding in Torres-Falk's (2011) study of Hispanic female principals and Wells' (2013) study of Black female principals, suggesting that this challenge expands across demographic lines.

A third recurring theme that comprises Finding 2 was the participants' common perception that they needed to prove themselves as educators and leaders. This sentiment was expressed in Black's (2012) study of Black male principals in Texas, who referenced a common experience of being placed under a high level of scrutiny, which resulted in a heightened sense of stress. Similarly, Tyson's (2016) study regarding the impact of race and perceptions of Black principals in Georgia indicated a recurring theme of participants' perceptions of needing to prove their legitimacy as leaders to skeptical and biased school and community populations. Santiago's (2008) research into Hispanic female principals indicated a recurring perception of participants feeling the need to prove themselves as leaders in the face of gender and racial biases against them.

The third finding identified professional and political conflicts as a major source of external obstacles and negative experiences for participants. This finding emerged from participants' responses indicating professional and political conflicts inside and outside their districts that created external obstacles and negative experiences during their career paths. This finding is consistent with experiences expressed in existing research. Black's (2012) study participants indicated that political dynamics and conflict were perceived obstacles to their career advancement. Chee (2004) stated that the Chinese-American superintendents who participated in his study indicated acquiring political savvy as a key skill to navigate the complex political conflicts inherent to the

superintendency. Tyson (2016) stated how negative perceptions of Black male principals created challenging political and relational terrain for his participants to navigate.

The fourth finding identified positive influence toward change as a major source of internal support for participants. The ability to enact lasting, impactful change was a primary motivator for all four participants and a driving force for their career advancement journeys. Their experiences aligned with findings in related research and literature. Kang's (2022) study of Asian-American superintendents presented a key finding that stressed the importance of building relationships among stakeholders to overcome racial differences and implement meaningful change. Black (2012) recounted his participants' experiences of serving as transformational leaders motivated by their work leading and supporting school cultures characterized by professional learning and student achievement. Fernandez (2013) stated that one of the primary drivers of motivation for the Hispanic secondary principals in his study was the ability to have a greater sphere of influence to impact significant change in their schools and districts. Santiago's (2008) research participants, which consisted of Hispanic female principals, expressed a desire to provide an impact that transcends the classroom, creating life-changing outcomes for students, teachers, and parents. Torres-Falk (2011) stated a strong sense of purpose among participants to serve as a positive influence for students, parents, and the community, serving as an advocate to support those who faced obstacles to resources and support due to poverty or language barriers. Wells (2013) stated that leading for equity and social justice was one of the primary motivators for the Black female principals in her study. The frequency of these findings suggests that influence

and impact may be among the primary motivators for administrators at the building and district levels.

The fifth finding identified crucial external support systems. The participants referenced the importance of family support, mentorships, and professional networking as critical elements of their career advancement. This finding largely supports the vast majority of literature reviewed for this study. Almost all the qualitative studies involved the participants discussing some combination of familial, mentorship, or networking relationships as being significant in their career advancement journeys.

Family support was a significant factor mentioned by most of the participants in this study, and this sentiment was a recurring theme in related literature on this subject. The Chinese-American superintendents who participated in Chee's (2004) study indicated that family support was a significant factor in their career paths. All respondents in Fernandez's (2013) study of Hispanic secondary principals cited family support as a major reason for their career advancement and success. The Hispanic female principals studied by Santiago (2008) frequently stated that family support rooted in deep cultural reverence for familial connection was a grounding element for their career advancement. Torres-Falk's (2011) study regarding Hispanic female educators repeatedly stated the importance of a close personal support network, including family, friends, and spiritual leaders.

Another element mentioned by all four participants in this study was the importance of professional mentors. In Kang's (2022) study, the only theme that emerged from each Asian-American superintendent was the importance of professional growth through coaching and support networks. Black (2012) also identified mentorship as a key

element for advancing Black male principals in his study. All four participants in FanFan's (2022) study also stated that having a mentor is essential for leaders of color. Fernandez (2013) and Santiago (2008) reiterated the importance of mentorship guidance and support for the Hispanic administrators participating in their studies. The participants in Torres-Falk's (2011) study indicated that supportive mentors did not have to come from the same cultural background to be helpful. Wells (2013) distinguished between problematic and helpful mentors based on her participants' experiences. The participants in Wells' study stated that negative experiences with problematic mentors stemmed from non-targeted, compliance-based support, whereas helpful mentors provided guidance and advocacy for the new leaders under their watch.

Themes from the research of Chee (2004) and Torres-Falk (2011) provided evidence for the importance of forming professional networks with other administrators. However, one aspect of Finding 5 that appeared to be unique to the four participants in the current study was the importance of professional networks outside of education and through professional learning networks that span the United States. This concept was not directly mentioned in any studies the researcher reviewed. The shifting dynamics of collaboration may push interactions to include partnerships between school districts and entities outside of education, along with an increasing prevalence of virtual networking and thought partnering.

The sixth finding related to the study's participants recounting how Asian stereotypes and prejudices impacted others' perceptions of them as leaders. This particular finding parallels some of the existing research, but there are also significant differences. Kang's (2022) study of Asian-American superintendents reinforced the

notion of others underestimating the abilities of Asian-American administrators. One of the emergent themes from Kang's research was the repeated concept that Asian Americans need to work harder and longer to be equal to their White counterparts to offset the perceived deficits inherent to them in the eyes of others. This theme is consistent with Varma's (2004) research that suggests Asian Americans are relegated to technical roles instead of visible leadership positions due to perceptions of deficits in leadership capacity. Sy et al. (2010) supported similar conclusions, indicating that Asian Americans are viewed as less suited for roles that require strong communication skills and social engagement. By contrast, of Chee's (2004) study participants, four out of eight listed ethnic and racial stereotyping and discrimination as external barriers to ascending to the superintendency. Examining studies that focus on other racial minority groups also demonstrates a mix of parallels and contrasts to Finding 6. Black male principals who participated in Black's (2012) study communicated a perception that others would expect them to fail to confirm pre-existing biases and prejudices to apply those concepts to all Black male administrators. Tyson's (2016) research regarding the perception of race and its implications for Black principals in Georgia indicated that race generally yielded negative impacts for the leaders in the study, with the principals perceiving that others generally assumed them to be less qualified to perform the job. Tyson's participants also stated that demonstrations of assertive leadership were often reframed to coincide with angry, aggressive Black stereotypes. FanFan's (2022) participants shared experiences of having to maintain composure in blatantly racist encounters to avoid the stereotype of being an angry person of color. Santiago (2008) expressed how the Hispanic educational leaders in her study perceived extensive amounts of prejudice in their various roles,

feeling that others assumed them to be less capable of succeeding in their roles or best suited for very specific roles that involved being bilingual, but not well-suited for much else. Torres-Falk's (2011) research results illustrated the perceived hostility from predominantly White communities directed at Hispanic female administrators. As might be expected, the unique, complex, and highly personal perceptions surrounding experiences with racism, prejudice, and stereotypes provided a high degree of variance regarding how these experiences impacted career advancement for the educators who participated in these studies.

Conclusions

This section provides conclusions drawn from this study regarding obstacles and supports the participants experienced in advancing to district-level leadership. This section includes the implications for action and the recommendations for future research. This section will close with concluding remarks regarding the study.

Implications for Action

Based on the research of Castro et al. (2018), diverse leadership among school administrators promotes higher levels of diversity within teacher candidate pools, academic achievement, expectations for students of color, attendance rates for students of color, and culturally responsive teaching practices. With these outcomes potentially tied to leadership diversity, recruiting and supporting diverse leadership at the district level is essential. This imperative is also within the context of high turnover in district-level leadership nationwide. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, mounting political conflict, teacher shortages, and the resulting stressful working conditions, an estimated 26% of superintendents plan to leave their jobs (Boudreau, 2022). With this contextual

backdrop, the challenge is two-pronged: recruiting and retaining diverse leaders long-term. Given the findings from this study and their alignment with findings from the research, several recommendations are appropriate for increasing the number of Asian-American district-level administrators within the field.

First, purposeful recruiting of diverse candidates is needed. Extending recruiting efforts to include a more diverse candidate pool is important, as having a diverse teaching staff is an entry point to having more diverse leadership. Also, recruiting teachers from other career sectors could increase diversity within education. One of the administrators who participated in this study made a career shift from the business world after being compelled to pursue what she saw to be a more meaningful path. Three of the four administrators did not consider education as their initial career path upon entering college. Having avenues to access potentially strong educators, especially Asian Americans who may not have initially considered education, could yield productive returns.

Second, supporting Asian-American teachers with leadership potential from within the district could create a pipeline to strong district-level leadership. All four participants in this study benefited from their talents being recognized and the resulting opportunities provided to them. These opportunities allowed them to hone their knowledge and skill sets to prepare them for bigger roles and increased responsibilities. Recognizing and developing Asian-American educators could also be a productive means of diversifying leadership.

A third means of increasing Asian-American leadership at the district level is to intentionally provide mentorship support. While informal mentorship relationships may

occur, it would be a wise investment from school districts to provide formal mentors who give targeted, personalized support to Asian-American district-level administrators. The resounding feedback from almost all the studies regarding racial minorities in administrative roles states the importance of mentor support in the long-term success of these leaders. Any plan to increase diversity in leadership needs a mentorship component built into its framework.

A fourth action that could increase Asian-American representation in district-level leadership is to be purposeful in providing opportunities for Asian-American educators to serve as change agents within their roles. All four participants in this study stated that the most fulfilling aspect of their roles comes from creating meaningful change for those they serve. Providing the latitude for district-level administrators to make this type of impact requires a degree of autonomy to make decisions, which can conflict with the bureaucratic structures often associated with district-level leadership. If retention of district leaders is a high priority, finding ways to ensure their work stays personally meaningful will be important.

Finally, a key aspect of increasing the representation of Asian Americans in district-level leadership roles is to expand the capacity of district leaders to understand leadership qualities from a more diverse perspective. A recurring theme among the study's participants and research about Asian Americans in leadership indicates that the White-normative bias toward leadership qualities dismisses many Asian Americans from consideration because they do not meet those cultural norms. Corrective action may require increased cultural awareness and sensitivity training for district and building-level leaders. Given the apparent bias toward White-normative leadership traits, many

promising leaders may miss opportunities simply because their skill sets may not fit that mold.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to identify obstacles and supports Asian-American district-level administrators experienced during their career advancement paths. While the participants expressed a variety of obstacles and supports, most of the experiences they shared seem to be common experiences for administrators across racial groups. Experiences that include balancing priorities, struggling with self-perception, working through professional and political conflicts, being motivated as change agents, and leveraging support networks seem consistent with the experience of most district-level administrators, as evidenced by the parallel experiences described in other research studies. Insights that were uniquely connected to the participants' experiences as Asian Americans were mainly expressed in their responses to the interview question, "How have Asian-American stereotypes impacted your career advancement path?"

As a result, one topic for future study could include delving more deeply into more specific questions regarding how stereotypes, prejudices, and racism have impacted the career experiences of Asian-American district-level leaders. Questions could focus on how these factors have impacted their relationships with students, parents, staff members, supervisors, and community members. Research into these topics could provide a more multi-faceted perspective of experiences with racial bias.

A second topic for future study could include the dynamics of effective mentorship support for Asian-American district-level leaders. Given the unanimous agreement regarding the importance of mentor relationships, identifying the specific

characteristics of supportive mentors could provide insights into the needs of Asian-American district leaders. A deeper understanding of this area could assist with supporting and retaining Asian Americans in these roles.

Concluding Remarks

The results of this study provided additional insight into an area where little research currently exists in 2023: the lack of representation of Asian Americans in district-level leadership. Identifying common obstacles and supports experienced by this study's participants contributes to the collective body of knowledge surrounding the career advancement of Asian Americans in district-level roles. The findings from this study could provide doors through which future researchers can walk to explore and provide greater insights into how educational leaders can diversify administrators at all levels to better reflect the communities they serve and provide additional perspectives toward the goal of creating the best, most inclusive learning and working environments for all.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Baker University IRB Approval Letter

BAKER UNIVERSITY
Own Confidence

Baker University Institutional Review Board

December 5th, 2022

Dear John Nguyen and Susan Rogers,

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your project application and approved this project under Expedited Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Please be aware of the following:

1. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
2. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
4. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
5. If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.
6. If this project is not completed within a year, you must renew IRB approval.

If you have any questions, please contact me at npoell@bakeru.edu or 785.594.4582.

Sincerely,

Nathan D. Poell

Nathan Poell, MLS
Chair, Baker University IRB

Baker University IRB Committee
Tim Buzzell, PhD
Nick Harris, MS
Scott Kimball, PhD
Susan Rogers, PhD

Appendix B: Participant Email Solicitation Letter

Email Request for Participant Interview

Date

Dear Colleague,

My name is John Nguyen, and I am a doctoral candidate at Baker University. You are receiving this email as an invitation for your participation in a study that I am conducting to complete my dissertation at Baker University. The study that I will conduct relies on input and information from Asian-American district-level administrators. The focus of the study will be seeking input into their experiences of career advancement, specifically regarding obstacles and supports they have encountered in the process.

Your participation in this study will involve one semi-structured interview which will consist of the questions attached to this email. The time estimated to complete the interview is approximately 30-60 minutes. I will conduct interviews using Zoom, Facetime, or a phone call according to your preference. Your interview will be recorded and transcribed using an audio recording software. To ensure validity of your statements, post-interview, I will perform a member check that will allow you an opportunity to comment on the transcription and indicate any needed adjustments. Your participation is completely voluntary, your name will be kept confidential, and all responses will be anonymous. No participant can be identified in my reports or publications. Additionally, you may opt out of any questions to which you are not comfortable responding.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please contact me using the information below. Should you have any questions about this request, please reach out, and I will be happy to assist you. You may also contact my major advisor, Dr. Susan Rogers, at srogers@bakeru.edu or (785) 230-2801. Your participation would be valued and appreciated. Thank you for considering.

Sincerely,

John Nguyen
Baker University Doctoral Student
(913) 901-6443 (Cell)
johntnguyen1@stu.bakeru.edu

Appendix C: Participant Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Please read this consent form carefully before you decide to participate in this study. The researcher will answer any questions prior to you signing this form.

Research Study Title:
Obstacles and Supports on the Career Advancement Paths of Asian American District-Level Leaders

Purpose of the Study:
The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of career advancement for Asian-American district-level administrators. Through interviews, insights will be gathered regarding internal and external obstacles to career advancement, internal and external supports to career advancement, significant positive and negative professional experiences, and the impact of Asian stereotypes on professional experiences.

Potential Risks of Participating:
None anticipated

Potential Benefits of Participating:
This study's research could provide insights to assist with recruiting, hiring, and retaining Asian-American district-level administrators.

Compensation:
None

Confidentiality:
The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Participants' identities will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. No personally identifiable information will be used.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating. Participants may also refuse to answer any of the interview questions they choose.

Right to Withdraw from the Study:
Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Whom to Contact with Questions about the Study:

- John Nguyen (Email: johntnguyen1@stu.bakeru.edu; Phone: 913-901-6443)
- Dr. Susan Rogers, Associate Professor, Baker University (Email: srogers@bakeru.edu; Phone: 785-230-2801).

Agreement:
I have read the consent procedures described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the consent procedures, and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: _____ Date: _____