NJASA Leadership & Diversity Committee Meeting Notes
Tuesday, October 13 – 9:30-11:15

- **Welcome –** Dr. Sandra Diodonet & Dr. Asia Michael – Co-Chairperson
  Dr. Asia Michael and Dr. Sandra Diodonet co-chaired the meeting, welcoming attendees and introducing Dr. Laurie Newell. who brought greetings from NJASA leadership.

- **Welcome on Behalf of the Officers** – Dr. Laurie Newell, NJASA Treasurer
  Dr. Newell welcomed everyone to the meeting on behalf of all of the NJASA officers. She thanked the committee members for being dedicated to this initiative.

- **NJASA Update** – Dr. Richard Bozza, NJASA Executive Director
  Dr. Richard Bozza, NJASA provided updates on key issues including the school funding task force, healthcare legislation, and certification requirements, noting that the task force includes representatives from various organizations but lacks NJEA participation.

- **Legislative Update –** Judy Rattner, NJASA Associate Executive Director
  Melanie is preparing testimony for the Joint Committee on the Public Schools so she was not able to join us today. Judy discussed ongoing work on certification bills and healthcare bills and committee developed tools, while. Sandra proposed requiring pre-service teachers to graduate with endorsements in special education or ESL in order to address staffing challenges in urban districts. Judy also reminded people to keep the Pass the Trash revisions on their radar.

  Here is the link to the article that generated the topic for discussion at the joint committee.

  - False-hope-why-nj-high-schoolers-aren't-ready-for-college

- **Opening Activity–** Dr. Sandra Diodonet

  The group was asked to share their first job and to share what they learned that they use in their leadership role today. Some of the lessons learned were: working in baby store and learning about different religions and the importance of being respectful of differences; serving food at a camp and observing class differences and using that lens as a leader today; lifeguard experience and connection to competitiveness; working with his father's porta-potty business and the importance of everyone's role in an organization; and working at a brain injury facility where she learned everyone has different needs.

- **Breakout Activity–** Dr. Sandra Diodonet

  Sandra introduced a discussion about culturally responsive school leadership and its five strands, with participants directed to breakout rooms for further discussion which focused on these 2 questions.

  - How am I contributing to or reproducing oppression in my organization? What information can help me see this more clearly?
  - Am I aware of the histories and experiences of communities I serve? Have I found a way to incorporate this in how we envision leadership and reform?

  Each group shared their insights. Group 1 - discussed the responsibility of leaders to integrate equity work into all systems, even when political dynamics shift. Group 2 - highlighted the importance of understanding community history and demographics to effectively support diverse student populations. Group 3 - emphasized the need to ensure all students are seen and supported, particularly in navigating the "gray areas" of policy application. Group 4 - shared personal stories about supporting diverse students and the importance of creativity in maintaining an inclusive environment. Sandra concluded by summarizing key takeaways, including the importance of integrated and intentional equity work and ensuring all students and staff are supported.

- **Presentation –** Dr. Nelyda Perez**,** NJASA Past President and Superintendent of the Matawan-Aberdeen School District

  The Shape of Suburban Leadership: Principals' Perceptions of CRSL in Elementary Schools: Implications for Superintendents and District Leaders

  Dr. Nelyda Perez presented her dissertation research on "The Shape of Suburban Leadership," examining how principals in elementary schools define and implement culturally responsive leadership in rapidly changing suburban communities. The study found that while principals personally understood the importance of culturally responsive leadership, they often lacked formal training and faced structural barriers including limited resources, funding constraints, and inconsistent professional development. Perez identified key themes including personal constructions of CRL, implementation challenges, and the need for adaptive leadership to sustain the work, concluding with recommendations for district leaders to build relational infrastructure, formalize CRL practices, protect leaders and staff, co-design with families, and prepare leaders for real conditions. The presentation is attached to the email.

- **NJ ALAS Report**

  NJ ALAS is hosting a conference on November 13 at Kean University. Sandra encouraged each district to send a representative**.**

- **NJ Alliance of Black Superintendents Report**

  Laurie and Asia shared that they held their first meeting last month and talked about a vision. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 10/20 at the Fall Conference. They also indicated that they are planning a gala in the spring.

- **NJ Strive Report**
  Charity Camela updated on NJ STRIVE's rebranding to "New Jersey Statewide Recruitment of Visionary Educators" and recent professional development activities.

- **School Boards/NJASA Conference –**

Tuesday, October 20, 2026

School Administrator Residency Program Mentor Update

(Open to NJASA Certified Mentors Only)

8:30am – 9:30 am – Rm 412

Regional Superintendent Recognition

10:45 – 11:30 am – Exhibit Hall

NJ Alliance of Black Superintendents Meeting

(Closed Meeting/Invitation by NJABS only)

10:45 – 11:30 am – Room 412

Women in Ed Leadership

1:00 – 2:00 pm – Rm 411

Leading Together: Women in Governance, Administration, and Educational Leadership

Wednesday, October 21, 2026

Board of Education Support of Executive Coaching, Building Better Teams and Leaders

9:00am – 10:00 am – Rm 412

NJASA Executive Committee

Open To All NJASA Members Only

11:30am – 1:00 pm – Rm 411

Great Schools New Jersey

2:30 pm – 3:30 pm – Rm 411

- **Topics/Books Currently of Interest**
  Sandra shared the following book:
  https://www.abebooks.com/9781943920211/Educating-Hispanic-Latino-Students-Opening-1943920214/plp

- **Upcoming Meetings – should one of these meetings be in person?**
    - **Thursday – 12/3 – Committee Mtg – 9:30 – 11:00**
    - **Tuesday – 2/9 – Committee Meeting – 9 :30 - 11:00**
    - **Tuesday – 4/20 – Committee Meeting – 9:30 – 11:00 PLAN FOR THIS MEETING TO BE IN-PERSON**
- **Final Thoughts/Concerns**

"One Vision – Our Voice"

The mission of the New Jersey Association of School Administrators, the unifying professional association of school leaders, is to ensure a superior statewide system of education by influencing and effecting educational policy, regulations and legislation; and by maximizing the capacity and effectiveness of school leaders through professional development programs and support services.

The Shape of Suburban Leadership: Principals' Perceptions of Culturally Responsive School Leadership in Elementary Schools

Implications for Superintendents and District Leaders

"Are our systems changing as quickly as the students and families we serve?"

Nelyda Perez, Ed.D. | NJASA Leadership & Diversity Committee

Every Child Needs a Champion

“Kids don't learn from people they don't like.”

— Rita Pierson

For me, culturally responsive leadership begins here: creating schools where every child has someone who sees them, believes in them, and helps them know they belong.

Why I Chose This Research

The question was both professional and personal.

Personal Experience

“I am a product of perseverance, culture, and opportunity, but also lacked a sense of belonging. I often wonder how different my experience might have been if I had truly felt seen, heard, and connected.”

— Nelyda Perez

Professional Context

As a district leader, I wanted to understand how leaders create belonging as suburban communities change.

Research Focus

The study asks what culturally responsive leadership actually looks like in practice not simply how it is defined in theory.

The Problem

Suburban schools are changing rapidly and leadership systems must respond.

Demographic change

Suburban communities are experiencing racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic shifts.

Leadership preparation

Research cited in the study suggests suburban elementary principals may feel underprepared to address systemic inequities, cultural disconnects, and social-emotional needs.

Research gap

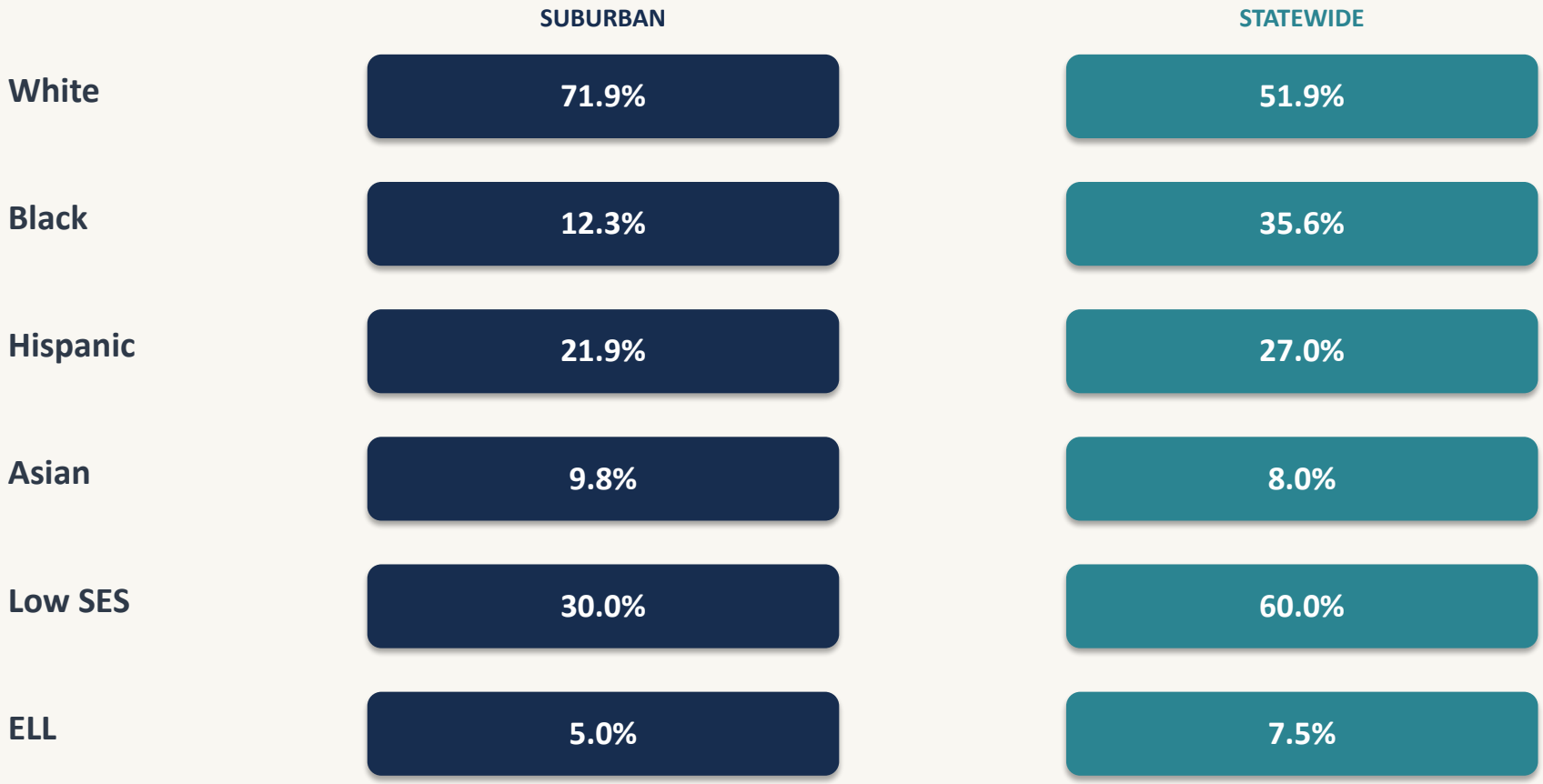
Much of the CRL literature has centered on urban settings; suburban elementary leadership remains comparatively understudied.

Purpose

Explore how suburban elementary principals define, experience, and implement culturally responsive leadership.

Suburban Districts Are Changing

Demographic context used in the defense: suburban enrollment compared with statewide enrollment



The key issue is not comparison alone—it is whether district systems are prepared for continuing demographic change.

Change Over Time Was Part of Participant Selection

The study intentionally focused on districts demonstrating demographic shifts.

Year-to-year review

District and school report cards were reviewed for year-to-year demographic comparisons.

What counted as change

Participating districts had experienced shifts in race, ethnicity, language, and socioeconomic status.

Why this mattered

The sample was designed to capture leaders working inside changing suburban communities—not suburban schools in the abstract.

Important distinction

The defense provides current suburban/statewide percentages, but does not report one aggregate longitudinal percentage of change across all participant districts.

Research Questions

Definition → practice → barriers

CENTRAL How do suburban elementary school principals define, experience, and implement CRL practices within the context of their school communities?

01 How do suburban elementary principals define and perceive CRL within their professional and school contexts?

02 What practices do suburban elementary principals employ to enact CRL?

03 What challenges do suburban elementary principals encounter in their efforts to implement CRL?

How Participants Were Selected

Basic qualitative design with purposeful sampling

Step 1 • Identify context

Invitations were sent to districts identified as suburban in the Northeastern state studied.

Step 2 • Confirm demographic change

District/school report cards were reviewed; selected contexts demonstrated demographic shifts.

Step 3 • Recruit broadly

Multiple contact points were used, including professional associations, networks, and community partnerships.

Step 4 • Consent & interview

Principals who agreed and consented completed approximately 60-minute semi-structured Zoom interviews.

Who Participated

12 elementary principals from PK–12 suburban public school districts

12

Principals interviewed; all led PK–5 elementary schools.

9 years

Average principal experience.

75% White

Participants were evenly distributed by gender.

District size

41% medium, 41% large, 16% small districts.

School size

Average school enrollment: 425 students; range 250–600.

Data sources

Semi-structured interviews + district/school report cards; descriptive and in-vivo coding; triangulation.

What the Principals Told Me

Four themes emerged across the 12 interviews

1 Personal constructions

Moral and relational leadership; sociocultural experiences as the foundation of equity orientation.

2 Systemic practices

Building capacity for equity-centered practice; inclusive climate and family engagement.

3 Contextual constraints

District policy and community pressures; structural and organizational constraints.

4 Adaptive leadership

Advocacy and protective leadership; reflective, relational, incremental leadership.

Theme 1: Individual and Personal Constructions of CRL

CRL was defined through relationships, dignity, fairness, listening, access, and empathy.

“The vibe that I really try to put forth in the climate and culture is that you belong. You are here... And if you feel like you don't belong, let us know, and we'll help figure out why.”

— Dori

“Every kid deserves the same amount of love, attention, and education. Period. End of story.”

— Kate

Theme 2: Enacting CRL Through Systemic Practices

Curriculum

Diverse texts, culturally reflective materials, and intentional attention to gaps in learning.

Climate

Restorative, trauma-informed, and culturally inclusive practices that reinforce safety and belonging.

Family engagement

A shift from one-way communication to multilingual, accessible, reciprocal partnership.

Staff capacity

Targeted professional learning, feedback, peer learning, and deliberate work to shift deficit thinking.

Theme 3: Contextual Constraints Shaping CRL

Participants described structural, organizational, and sociopolitical barriers.

Key Perspective

“If you don't protect the people doing the work, they won't do it because they won't feel safe... but we need a policy to protect anybody who's doing this work.”

— Robert

Capacity

“We only have two people who speak Spanish in my building with a lot more than two students.”

— Elena

Resources

Funding, staffing, time, transportation, and program cuts created direct access challenges.

Mindset

Entrenched habits and “this is the way we've always done it” limited responsiveness.

Community pressure

Misinformation and national political discourse complicated local implementation.

The Classroom of 2060 Is Already Here

Changing demographics are reshaping suburban schools—and the systems designed to serve them.

SUBURBAN CHANGE

- Suburban communities once viewed as racially and economically homogeneous are serving increasingly diverse student populations.
- Urban migration and changing housing patterns are contributing to these shifts. (Frey, 2020)
- The changes include race, ethnicity, language, and socioeconomic status—not simply enrollment growth.

LOOKING TOWARD 2060

- More than half of U.S. children age 16 and younger are already from racially or ethnically minoritized groups.
- Population projections point toward a U.S. in which no single racial or ethnic group constitutes a majority by 2060.
- That future is already sitting in many of our suburban classrooms today.

Leadership Implication

The question is not whether suburban schools are changing. It is whether our leadership, staffing, programs, resources, and policies are changing with them.

Theme 4: Sustaining CRL Through Adaptive Leadership

Key Perspective

“I never think that I have all the answers and have it all figured out with this specific topic.”

— Jonah

Reflect

Leaders continually examined bias, assumptions, and their own decision-making.

Relate

Authentic, consistent—not performative—presence built trust.

Advocate

Principals acted as buffers and champions for students and staff.

Move strategically

Participants described patient, incremental change grounded in core values.

The District-Level Shift

From leader-dependent work → system design

RELATIONSHIPS

Build shared language and trust

EXPECTATIONS

Embed CRSL in strategic plans, goals, evaluation, curriculum, and leadership routines

PROTECTION

Provide clear policy, civility expectations, legal support, and administrative backing

PARTNERSHIP

Treat families as co-designers, not recipients

RESOURCES

Align staffing, communication, transportation, and programs to student need

SUSTAINABILITY

Design practices that survive leadership transitions

What This Research Reinforced for Me as a District Leader

Stay true to yourself

Bring your lived and professional experiences with you—but widen the lens to the entire district.

It is okay to say no

Listening does not require agreement. Consistency and fairness matter more than universal approval.

Relationships need boundaries

Be visible and approachable while protecting the time, confidentiality, and role clarity needed to lead.

Know your non-negotiables

Honesty, respect, integrity, professionalism, and student-centered decision-making anchor difficult moments.

Leadership Action Framework

Six Moves for District Leaders

01

Build relational infrastructure

Trust and shared language before major structural reform.

02

Formalize CRSL

Move expectations from individual belief into district systems.

03

Protect leaders & staff

Create clear policies and support when work becomes contested.

04

Co-design with families

Remove linguistic, logistical, and cultural barriers.

05

Prepare leaders for real conditions

Develop adaptive leadership, reflection, and resistance-navigation skills.

06

Audit coherence & resources

Examine where staffing, access, programs, and communication do not match current student needs.

A Question for District Leaders

If culturally responsive leadership is relationally built but systemically sustained, what must we change at the district level so every school can deliver belonging, access, and opportunity?

The work cannot live in one leader. It must live in the system.

Leadership Reflection: Where Is Your System?

Consider whether culturally responsive leadership is dependent on individuals or embedded in the district.

DEPENDENT

Does this work change depending on which principal or administrator is leading?

ALIGNED

Do schools share expectations, language, resources, and accountability?

PROTECTED

Do staff and leaders know the district will support them when the work becomes difficult?

SUSTAINABLE

Would the practices continue through leadership transition, budget pressure, or community conflict?

What is one move that would shift your district one step closer to sustainability?

The Work Lives in the System

“Suburban schools must move beyond access to true belonging ensuring every student is not only present, but seen, valued, and empowered.”

Our responsibility is to build the conditions where that work can endure ***regardless*** of who is leading.

Thank You