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"It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint": The Implementation and Outcomes of a Yearlong Racial Justice Intervention

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Although scholarship documenting the effects of racism on educational outcomes is extensive, less empirical research has been done on interventions designed to mitigate racism and racial bias in schools. Based on case studies of two elementary schools, we have found that educators participating in a yearlong racial justice program demonstrated a deeper understanding of their own racial biases, developed a shared language to identify and name different forms of racism, and reported greater confidence to disrupt racist incidents in their schools. In one site, however, inconsistent leadership and resistance from a vocal White minority limited the program's potential to change schoolwide practice. In the other site, educators reported changes in curricular materials and changes to disciplinary decisions, but widespread organizational change will likely take longer than a single school year. Drawing on these findings, we discuss implications for anti-racist interventions in other educational contexts as well as recommendations for studying their efficacy.

Keywords: *anti-racism, critical race theory, K–12 teaching, professional development, race, racial justice, racism, school leadership*

Systemic racism has long plagued American society and the experiences of minoritized communities who live in the United States. Recent events, however, have shined a spotlight on the human cost of systemic racism, awakening demands for racial justice in ways that we have not witnessed in decades. Over the last 2 years, we witnessed the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery at the hands of police, while the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected the health, lives, and livelihood of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities. We observed how Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders increasingly became targets of racial violence and how the children of immigrants suffered separation from their families at the borders. And on January 6, 2021, we witnessed a mob of insurrectionists barge through the U.S. Capitol building—many adorned with swastikas—to stop a lawful election.

In the wake of these events, several organizations and corporations were compelled to make public declarations against systemic racism (although whether meaningful action will follow remains to be seen). Several national education and youth-based organizations were among them, including the American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2020), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT, 2020), and the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD, 2020). Additionally, a growing number of K–12 districts has invested resources to address systemic racism in their own schools (Gewertz, 2020). For many districts, this work has entailed providing anti-racist professional development (PD) to educators aimed at addressing racial bias, yet much of the research on this type of PD shows largely short-term effects (Forscher et al., 2019; Lai et al., 2016) and sometimes unintended consequences that reinforce stereotypes and discrimination (Kulik et al., 2007). Moreover,

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much of the existing research on more sustained anti-racist efforts primarily focuses on change at the individual level and less on organizational change (McManimon & Casey, 2018; Pennington et al., 2012).

To address these gaps and expand our understanding of anti-racism efforts in schools, this article draws on two case studies that explore the implementation and outcomes of a yearlong racial justice program. More specifically, we ask (a) how, if at all, does participation in a yearlong racial justice program develop the racial perceptions and dispositions[1] of school leaders and teachers; (b) how, if at all, does participation in such a program influence change in schoolwide practices or policies; and (c) how do school conditions support or limit the potential of a racial justice program from producing organizational change? This study contributes empirical data to the scholarship on anti-racism interventions, illustrating the promise and the limitations of such programs. It also provides valuable insights for scholars and practitioners about the processes entailed in racial justice work and the conditions that support and mitigate these efforts in schools.

Anti-Racist Interventions Across Fields

Outside education, anti-racist interventions have shown some potential in addressing individual biases. In the field of social work, for example, Singh (2019) has explored the outcomes of anti-racist education, finding that participants shifted away from colorblind attitudes toward critical awareness of systemic racism. Evidence from the medical fields also shows that race-based diversity training can be effective in increasing the multicultural skills of practitioners and ultimately improving client outcomes (Smith & Trimble, 2016; Soto et al., 2018). A meta-analysis of 260 independent studies across a variety of organizational settings, including education, finds that diversity training experiences were associated with significant change in participants' attitudes toward and greater social skills in interacting with diverse groups (Bezrukova et al., 2016). Another review of 65 studies finds that diversity trainings were linked with significant increases in multicultural competence (Kalinoski et al., 2013).

However, the outcomes of anti-racist interventions may be short-lived, fail to produce change beyond attitudes, or result in unintended consequences that are antithetical to their aims. For example, some research shows that positive outcomes that appear immediately after an intervention do not result in long-term reductions in bias or sustained change in behavior (Forscher et al., 2019; Lai et al., 2016). Other programs have demonstrated partial success in increasing critical consciousness but not in producing change in practice (Cross et al., 2018). Additionally, these efforts can lead to dominant groups perceiving themselves as victims of exclusion and discrimination and/or produce false beliefs that underrepresented groups are less competent and need assistance to succeed (Dover et al., 2020). In other words, these programs may reinscribe unequal social relations and power hierarchies (Alemanji & Mafi, 2018) or backfire and produce more prejudice and stereotyping behaviors than before the intervention (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Legault et al., 2011). Moreover, engaging in this work without proper support may also lead individuals to become disengaged or leave the institution that provided the training (Devine et al., 2002; Fils-Aimé, 2020).

Anti-Racism Programs With K–12 Educators

Less empirical research has been done on the implementation and efficacy of anti-racism training within school environments. In one study on in-service teachers, Pennington et al. (2012) develop and review a yearlong PD that was designed to reposition Whiteness and make visible how Whiteness influences participants' teaching. Focusing on two White teachers, they observe that these individuals became aware of how their White identities affected their relationships with students. Two other studies of long-term interventions with fewer than 10 teachers show similar findings (McManimon & Casey, 2018; Schneidewind, 2005), illustrating how sustained PD focused on anti-racism increased educators' critical consciousness and enabled them to apply a racial lens to their own practice. Research on anti-racist interventions for pre-service teachers demonstrates that courses can be effective in developing critical consciousness, knowledge of individual and institutional racism, and capacity for anti-racist work (Hill-Jackson, 2007; Ohito, 2016; Riley et al., 2019; Shah & Coles, 2020). However, much like the literature related to in-service teachers, this research focuses largely on change within the individual without analyzing the transfer to classroom practices, teacher-student interactions, or school policies. Our study thus builds upon current literature by focusing on individual and organizational change as well as the contextual conditions that support both over time.

Theoretical Framework

We use critical race theory (CRT) and racial justice (RJ) frameworks to understand the opportunities for (and barriers to) change among individuals, organizations, and the interactions between them. CRT provides a theoretical approach to understanding the pervasiveness of racial inequities in multiple dimensions of society (Bell, 1992), including education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In this study, we draw more specifically from two CRT tenets—*Whiteness as property* and *critique of liberalism*—while acknowledging that they are inseparable from the broader context of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The first provides a lens through which to examine policies and practices that center

Eurocentric approaches and fail to consider the needs and resources of students of color, their families, or communities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Examples include White-dominated curricula, racialized discipline policies, and deficit views that exclude students of color from advanced courses. The *critique of liberalism* tenet allows us to identify how schools perpetuate colorblindness, the neutrality of the law (or beliefs in meritocracy), and incremental change (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). In schools, colorblindness is upheld by educators who claim not to notice the race of their students; myths of meritocracy are reinforced by discourse around testing and school achievement; and the speed of progress toward racial justice is often determined by the comfort of White staff. Although these tenets each speak to unique dimensions of how racism manifests in schools, they are also useful to consider in conjunction. For example, White supremacy is upheld through colorblindness, race-neutral policies, and resistance to change. Conversely, upholding *Whiteness as property* in schools (e.g., positioning White perspectives as universal) reinforces assumptions that school policies are race-neutral.

The application of these tenets—especially as they may work to reinforce each other—allows us to understand inherent challenges in achieving racial justice in schools. At the same time, CRT can provide educators the lens through which to recognize and name racism—a critical first step in empowering individuals to disrupt racism at the organizational level (Galloway et al., 2019; Kohli et al., 2022). For example, interventions that address racial bias among educators have been shown to undermine larger systemic inequalities within schools, including special education referrals (Klingner et al., 2005), discipline policies (Gregory et al., 2014), and family engagement (Montoya-Ávila et al., 2018). In this way, CRT provides an analytic foundation to observe the persistence of racial inequities *and* areas of growth toward racial justice at the individual and organizational levels. However, although this foundation establishes a relationship between shifting individual mindsets and effecting organizational change (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), we also incorporate RJ frameworks to speak more directly to the mechanisms between individual growth and organizational change.

Our description of RJ frameworks is derived from theoretical work on racial justice in education and in organizations more broadly (Garces & Gordon da Cruz, 2017; Jayakumar & Adamian, 2015; National Education Association [NEA] Center for Social Justice, 2021; Ray, 2019). These frameworks seek to push beyond diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts that focus on individual trainings alone to describe a systems approach to organizational impact. They illustrate a set of complex mechanisms at the individual and organizational levels that occur simultaneously and develop over time. These include (a) developing educators' critical consciousness, (b) employing shared language and skills to identify and disrupt acts of racism, and (c) changing school-level policies that shape teachers' daily work (Garces & Gordon da Cruz, 2017; Jayakumar & Adamian, 2015). Similarly, NEA Center for Social Justice (2021) lays out a three-pronged approach that attends to awareness (e.g., beliefs, values, or vision), capacity building (e.g., behaviors, norms, or practices), and actions (e.g., structures, processes, or budgets), while highlighting organizational "levers" (e.g., data, governance, or senior staff) to help create transformational change. Rooted in the belief that transformation is relational (Jayakumar & Adamian, 2015), this work argues that developing staff's racial lens and leveraging their collective commitments to racial justice can produce change in organizational policy/practice. Simultaneously, organizational change can help shift individual mindsets and reinforce norms and agreements among individuals. These conceptualizations position racial justice within educational organizations as an outcome and a process—a useful lens to identify how educators in our sites may drive schoolwide change and how change in school-level policy can support individual change (Diem & Welton, 2020).

Together, CRT and RJ frameworks allow us to examine (a) change among individual educators' racial lens and practices, (b) change among schoolwide policies or practices, and (c) how individual and organizational change relates to and influences each other (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Ray, 2019). We aim to speak to these theoretical principles by providing empirical data that shed light on how these interactions occur in practice, the barriers to their realization, and the processes by which racial justice in schools can be supported over time.

The Intervention: Racial Justice in Schools

Racial Justice in Schools (RJIS)—a program developed and implemented by a nonprofit organization that partners with schools—aims to disrupt racism in schools by developing educators' skills to (a) understand multiple forms of racism through historical and structural lenses, (b) examine how they manifest in schools, and (c) collectively act to produce organizational change. RJIS was designed to address what other scholars have identified as the shortcomings of other anti-racist programs in schools, including a brief time frame (Forscher et al., 2019), the absence of ongoing support (Villavicencio, 2021), a one-size-fits-all approach (Onyeador et al., 2021), and inattention to schoolwide policies (Leonard & Woodland, 2022). The program team implements RJIS in schools over the course of a school year in five phases (see Figure 1). The program includes five key features to help participants acquire new understandings about race and strategies to develop practices grounded in racial justice:

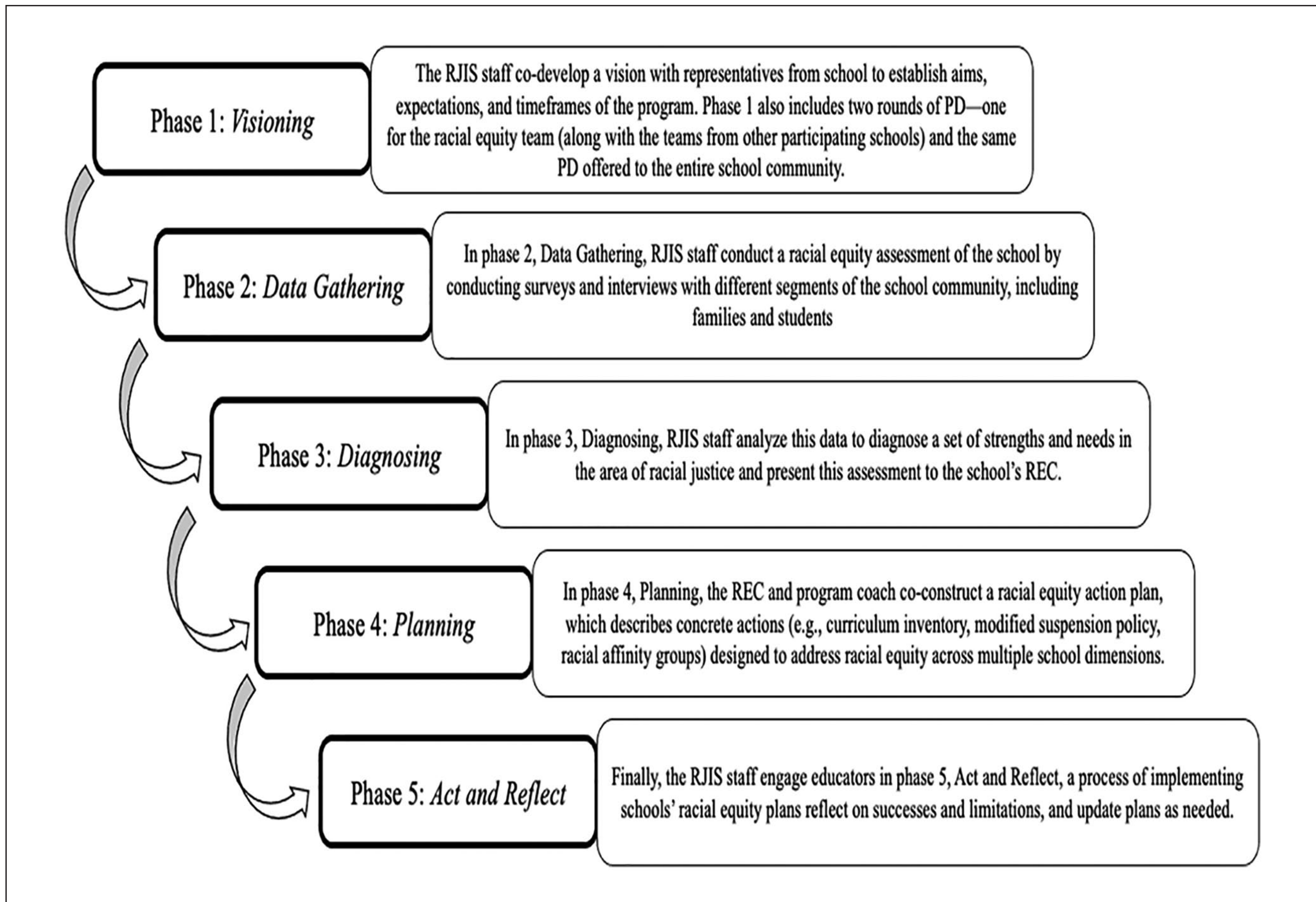

FIGURE 1 *Racial Justice in Schools' Implementation Phases*

Professional Development (PD) for all school leaders, teachers, and staff designed to develop educators' racial lens and their analysis of how racism manifests in schools.

Racial Equity Committee (REC) comprising a group of eight to 10 school leaders, teachers, and parents who oversee RJIS implementation within their school.

Racial Equity Assessment (REA) conducted by RJIS staff via surveys and interviews with teachers, parents, and students to identify areas of strength and needs related to racial equity.

Racial Equity Action Plan, cocreated by the REC and RJIS staff, describes concrete actions designed to address racial equity across multiple school dimensions.

Ongoing Coaching, provided by RJIS coaches, includes one-on-one sessions for up to three school leaders and ongoing support/resources for the REC.

Methods

We used case study methodology to develop an understanding of how RJIS was implemented and its influence on educators' racial dispositions and schoolwide practices (Creswell & Clark, 2017). This approach prioritizes exploration over verification and depth over breadth—critical in investigating potential change in deeply rooted ideologies and complex organizational structures. Grounded in CRT and RJ frameworks, our data collection and analysis captured change in mindsets and beliefs about racism in schools among individuals and the mechanisms between individual and organizational change (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Sites and Participants

The RJIS program team used an application process to select individual schools interested in participating. Given that buy-in helps prevent an intervention from backfiring (Devine et al., 2002), the program leaders used a written application and a subsequent interview to assess a school's commitment to improving racial equity.[2] Based on this process, the program leaders selected six schools to participate in RJIS during the 2018–2019 school year. Of the six schools, three agreed to participate in our study, but we excluded one site due to an atypically small student enrollment (260). Our study sites—Spring Gardens Elementary

TABLE 1
Characteristics of Case Study Schools

	Spring Gardens Elementary	Westbridge Elementary
Borough	Queens	Brooklyn
Neighborhood demographics	69% Asian 4.5% Black 15% Latino 9.5% White 2% Two or more races	35% Asian 2.5% Black 46.5% Latino 14.5% White 1.5% Two or more races
Grades	PK–3	PK–5
Student enrollment	476	469
Student demographics	85% Asian 2% Black 10% Latino 3% White	15% Asian 0.5% Black 80% Latino 5% White
Students with disabilities	11%	20%
English language learners	55%	36%
Performance data	89% English language arts 86% Math	75.6% English language arts 68.4% Math

Source. NYC Department of Education.

and Westbridge Elementary[3]—varied with respect to student demographics and geographic location (see Table 1). Within each school, we used purposive sampling to select participants who oversaw RJIS implementation, including program coaches, principals and assistant principals, and REC members (see Table 2). Further, non-REC teachers, representing multiple grade levels, content areas, and years of experience, participated in focus groups to explore the program's influence on the larger school community.

Data Sources

We relied on three primary data sources: interviews, observations, and documents (see Table 3). In each school, we conducted (a) two 60-minute semistructured interviews with the principal and assistant principal (AP), (b) two 45- to 60-minute focus groups with the school's REC and a group of three to five non-REC teachers, and (c) two 60-minute interviews with the program coaches. Drawing on CRT, our interview and focus group protocols were designed to capture implicit and explicit changes to educators' racial lens (e.g., new understandings of racism or acquired language to identify racism in their school) and shifts in their school's practices/policies (e.g., departing from Eurocentric curriculum or changing unjust discipline policies). By remaining open-ended and embedding multiple probes, the protocols also allowed us to capture responses that espoused colorblind perspectives or positioned school policies as racially neutral (see instruments in Supplemental Appendix A). We conducted a total of 24 interviews and focus groups with 39 individuals across both school sites and from the program team.

We also conducted observations to understand the program's implementation and influence on educators' racial dispositions and schoolwide policies/practices. In each school, researchers observed two PDs and four REC meetings (including the REA presentations). Researchers used detailed field notes to record the observed activities, settings, and participants. In total, we conducted approximately 32 hours of observation across school sites. Finally, the research team reviewed documentation related to the RJIS implementation, including schools' applications to RJIS, PD curricula, REC meeting agendas, notes from each program coach, and schools' racial equity action plans. Document analysis triangulated what we learned from interviews and observations and highlighted the extent to which the program influenced organizational change.

Positionality

Three of the authors were members of the research team conducting this study and collected data in both sites, while one author supported our analysis, interpretation of the data, and writing. The research team did not have relationships with RJIS or the school sites prior to being selected as research partners. Our position made it possible to mitigate participant bias and elicit more critical perspectives of the program than had we been the purveyors of RJIS. As a multiracial ethnic team (i.e., Black, Latinx, and White), we were conscious of how our own racial identities might influence participants' responses (Tinker & Armstrong, 2008); thus, we spent time at both sites, and—when possible—the same participants were interviewed by different researchers at different times. We also drew on our own

TABLE 2
Participant Demographics

School	Participants	Demographics
Spring Gardens	Principal	White male
	Assistant principal	Vietnamese/Chinese American female
	7 REC members (in addition to school leaders)	Asian American female (Grade 3)
		Indian American female (parent coordinator)
		Mexican American female (K teacher)—left for maternity leave
		White female (Grades 2–3 special education)
		White female (special education, SETSS teacher)
	4 Non-REC members	Asian American female (Grade 3)
		Asian American male (pre-K)
		White female (science 1-2-3; ESL-K)
		White female (Grade 2)
	Program coach	White male
Westridge	Principal	White female
	Assistant principal	White female
	7 REC members (in addition to school leaders)	Asian American female (parent)
		Asian American female (Grade 2)
		Southeast Asian male (Grade 4)
		Latinx female (Grade 2)
		Latinx female (social worker)
		White female (pre-K)
		White female (parent)
	3 Non-REC members	White female (Grade 1)
		White female (Grade 4 teacher)
		White female (EL coordinator)
	Program coach	Dominican male

Note. ESL, English as a second language; REC, Racial Equity Committee; SETSS, Special Education Teacher Support Services; EL, English Learner.

racialized experiences and perceptions in the creation of our protocols and codebook, the application of the codebook, and the interpretation of the data. Weekly meetings throughout data collection and analysis allowed us to leverage our collective insights to produce a deeper understanding of the responses to the program and the complex processes of individual and organizational change.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with reading the entire corpus of data, producing brief reflection memos, and formulating a codebook as a team based on a combination of our research questions, theoretical frameworks, and emerging patterns in the data. Our codes were designed to capture multiple forms of racism (e.g., *interpersonal* or *institutional*), implicit dynamics (e.g., *emotional burden for staff of color* or *resistance*), and concrete actions to create racially justice organizations (e.g., *curriculum, discipline*, or *hiring*). Researchers engaged in multiple rounds of coding to calibrate our definitions and understandings of codes, refine/finalize the codebook, and assess interrater reliability (see Supplemental Appendix B).

Researchers then coded all data using Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis program. To address our research questions, we engaged in second-cycle analyses of all the coded data outputs, generating subcodes to capture shifts in educators' perceptions and practices that disrupted or upheld racism in their classrooms and school. Subcodes included *changes in mindset/practice, common language in naming racism*, and *confidence in disrupting acts of racism*. Following multiple rounds of second-cycle coding, researchers wrote analytic memos connecting our research questions to the patterns across both schools and to unique patterns within each school for a comparative analysis. These memos became the basis for our findings.

Findings

In the following sections, we describe change at the individual and organizational level across both schools. In sum, our analyses show that educators in both schools developed new and richer understandings of race and racism consistent with CRT (e.g., the ubiquity of racism in schools or the ways meritocracy and colorblindness are embedded in practice). Teachers also described gaining a shared vocabulary to talk

TABLE 3
Data Collection

	Interviews with school leaders	Interviews with program staff	Focus groups with REC members	Focus groups with non-REC members	Observations of PD sessions	Observations of professional meetings
Spring Gardens	4	4	2	2	2	4
Westbridge	4	4	2	2	2	4

Note. PD, professional development; REC, Racial Equity Committee.

about race and the confidence to disrupt incidents of racism in their schools. However, we found evidence of organizational change only at Spring Gardens—with less engagement beyond individual shifts at Westbridge. To help explain conditions that supported or impeded organizational change, we used a cross-case analysis to present differences in the schools' leadership, responses to resistance, and organizational capacity.

Shifting Mindsets and Beliefs

Change in mindsets and dispositions, as theorized in the literature, is an important precursor to taking actions consistent with racially just practice (Freire, 2018; Jayakumar & Adamian, 2015; Kishimoto, 2018). At both schools, we saw evidence that educators demonstrated historically grounded knowledge of race and deeper understandings of racism in society and schools through their participation in RJIS. For example, participants frequently referenced the "Four I's Model" of racism[4]—a framework introduced during PD. As one Westbridge educator shared, "The Four I's: I think that part for me personally . . . that put everything into perspective. That one stuck with me, and I think about it all the time." This teacher articulated that PD provided her with a framework to understand various forms of racism and the language to characterize racial dynamics. Other educators also internalized definitions of racism discussed in PD. One Spring Gardens teacher explained, "Minorities, by definition, can't be racist. There has to be a power component to it. . . . People in power are the ones that made up these policies and laws, and that's why . . . it's benefitting . . . them." This framing reflected a new understanding of racism as being the combination of racial prejudice and power versus individual bias, as many staff had previously articulated. Staff members also described the ubiquity and manifestations of White supremacy in schools (including colorblindness among teachers) and the need for curricula that reflect their students' racial identities as concepts they had found particularly valuable to their work. These findings reflect how RJIS helped develop race-conscious lenses among participants to analyze *Whiteness as property* within schools (i.e., curriculum and instruction), how colorblindness is embedded in White supremacy (CRT's *critique of liberalism*), and potential approaches for addressing both (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Another outcome that school members attributed to their participation in RJIS was the development of a shared language to discuss race and equity in schools. For example, Principal Warren at Westbridge explained, "Giving common language to a group of educators within the school, going back to that common framework. Hopefully, most of us can talk about what institutional or interpersonal racism is. I think creating that common language is really important." By providing participants with common language, RJIS lowered the barrier of entry for educators to engage in difficult conversations about race. One teacher described, "[RJIS] gave me the vocabulary I needed to voice my concerns and frustrations." Shared language and frameworks for racial analysis allowed participants to identify racist practices and to name them in ways that could be widely understood, further reinforcing educators' evolving mindsets and dispositions. These findings are consistent with RJ framework principles, which emphasize how shared understandings can support constructive and collective conversations about race and racism (Garces & Gordon da Cruz, 2017).

Moreover, the consistency and ongoing nature of RJIS reinforced key learnings from the initial PD throughout the academic year, allowing participants to work through their own resistance and previously held beliefs. For example, Principal Williams (a White male) at Spring Gardens shared that he struggled with some PD content at first but was able to shift his perspective over time. He elaborated:

> The term *White supremacy* was very hard for me in August because I came into it with a different understanding of the term. It was shocking in that moment to hear the term. . . . I needed some time to digest it. When we came back around to it, I was able to look at the work a little differently and had that time to reflect on it.

Having time to process and being given multiple opportunities to engage with the concepts allowed Principal Williams to move through his initial resistance. While PD was an opportunity to plant seeds, those seeds required consistent nurturing throughout the school year to grow. This process is consistent with existing literature, which shows that short-term trainings do not afford the same possibilities for growth (Forscher et al., 2019; Lai et al., 2016). It also echoes tenets of RJ frameworks, which posit that creating sustainable change requires reflexivity and continual learning (Freire, 2018; NEA Center for Social Justice, 2021).

Shifting Behaviors and Practice

Throughout our study, we also analyzed whether and how educators' new mindsets and dispositions translated into change in their behaviors and practices. For example, many educators articulated shifts in racial consciousness in terms of their teaching and relationships with students. A Westbridge educator described:

> I've thought about . . . which students am I praising more? Which students am I reprimanding more often? What does that say about me and my biases in the classroom? I think that's actually done wonders for kids who I didn't have as good a relationship with. It has actually changed a lot for some of them.

This teacher's racial consciousness allowed her to recognize that her bias may influence how she interacts with her students—whom she praises and whom she reprimands—while noticing improved teacher-student relationships as an outcome of changing her practice. Other teachers across schools reported that their increased awareness pushed them to critically reflect on their classroom materials. Teachers began to consider not only the racial and cultural representations of their texts but also the nature of those representation (e.g., depictions beyond oppression and hardship). They worked to decenter Eurocentric instructional materials (*Whiteness as property*) and integrate inclusive, affirming texts for students of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Another outcome that school members at Spring Gardens attributed to RJIS was increased confidence in naming incidents of racism and demonstrating the agency to disrupt it. As described in RJ frameworks, confidence is part of capacity building (especially as a community) toward advocating for racial justice (NEA Center for Social Justice, 2021). For instance, an Asian male teacher at Spring Gardens recalled a racist remark made by a student about a Black child. The teacher nervously confessed that prior to RJIS, he would have noticed it but "swept it under the rug" to avoid conflict. Having developed some confidence around identifying and naming racism, this teacher was primed to confront the incident more directly by talking about it openly with his class of third graders, identifying the harm that was done and explaining why those words were unacceptable. He explained:

> I . . . feel a little bit braver to try and tackle some of these issues that arise. I think that previously, I would always shy away from them or didn't know how to talk about it. I think that now, I know that as a school, we're trying. I feel a little bit more open, that if I got stuck, I can go to a colleague and say, "What should I do? How can I talk about this?"

His comments spoke to multiple dimensions of the change process. He noted, for example, that he was a "little braver" and that the school was a "little bit" more open—not that he or the school had become transformed overnight but that he and his colleagues were slowly building the skills and the "muscle" to practice disrupting racism in real time. Another key element in what he shared was the ability to speak with other colleagues, highlighting the importance of this effort being schoolwide versus targeting a few teachers. RJ frameworks further emphasize the importance of collective understanding to effect organizational change (Garces & Gordon da Cruz, 2017; Jayakumar & Adamian, 2015).

One of the most powerful examples of exercising confidence to disrupt racism was an instance in which a White female teacher at Spring Gardens stood up to the principal to advocate on behalf of a Black male student who was being considered for an emotional disability (ED) designation. Black boys tend to be underrepresented in certain special education designations, such as autism, but overrepresented in others, including ED (Fancsali, 2019). Based on her interactions with the child, she believed that the referral was racially motivated and inappropriate. She was compelled to act and challenged the principal to rethink his perception, describing:

> There was a meeting between the principal and the guidance counselor to push the family [to evaluate him], and I said, "[Isn't] this what we're working on? This is a little Black boy who is not showing any area of concern. We haven't talked about him in terms of being violent, being a danger to himself. I think that we're doing him a disservice. It's a mistake to push his parents into it. As a White male principal, you trying to talk his mom into doing something is using your power over her. I think that's a mistake."

Even though she was successful in changing her principal's mind, confronting him—especially by highlighting his race and power—was still difficult. She explained, "It was still uncomfortable for me to confront my boss, but I wouldn't have done this 6 weeks ago, last year, 10 years ago. [RJIS] definitely empowered me and [has] given me the language." RJIS afforded this teacher the language and confidence to block a designation that might have further alienated an already marginalized student, illustrating how individual growth can influence decisions at multiple levels (NEA Center for Social Justice, 2021).

Shifting Organizational Routines and Structures

RJ frameworks (and some of our own data) suggest an interconnected relationship between individual and organizational change. However, despite change in the mindsets and behaviors of several educators within these schools, we saw less evidence of how these shifts produced organizational change—at least within our study's time frame. In fact, only in Spring Gardens did we observe any change in schoolwide policies/practices; racial justice efforts at Westbridge did not move beyond classroom practices for individual educators. One school-level change that Spring Gardens staff described was revision of the school's vision

statement. The statement now explicitly names "ending racism" as part of the school's mission, lists "racial equity" as the first of its five core values, and refers to "utilizing CRT perspectives" to foster racial equity. These explicit nods to racism and racial equity are important signals to the staff, district, families, and external partners about the school's priorities and commitments. Further, they help set organizational norms that can, in turn, influence educators' dispositions and practice (Ray, 2019).

Aligned with their commitments, Spring Gardens adopted two tools to create more equitable classrooms. The first is an equitable classroom observation checklist for principals and teachers to use during classroom observations. Spring Gardens also provided PD to staff about the design and implementation of the Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard (Peoples et al., 2021), which teachers used to assess and revise their English language arts (ELA) curriculum. These tools serve as organizational structures and routines that can be used to sustain racial justice efforts (NEA Center for Social Justice, 2021; Ray, 2019). Finally, Spring Gardens staff offered the PD workshop for parents and families, which was attended by almost 40 family members. Taken together, these actions represent important organizational change designed to improve racial equity at this school. Although not as robust as the changes envisioned in the school's racial equity plan (which included expanding leadership roles, changing hiring practices, and involving the union), these steps indicated larger shifts that were beginning to take place at Spring Gardens, but they need additional time to be fully realized. In other words, evidence of organizational change at Spring Gardens reflected only initial changes in a longer process of decisions to come. Thus, we posit that widespread organizational change will likely take longer than a single school year. As one of the program's leaders reflected on the work of developing anti-racist schools: "It's a marathon, not a sprint."

Apart from some surface-level curricular changes and one additional racial-equity question on their interview protocol at Westbridge, we did not observe organizational shifts in routines, structures, or norms (Ray, 2019). At this level, we witnessed the most differences in racial justice processes and outcomes. Below, we use a cross-case analysis to understand some of the conditions that may have shaped this variation.

Conditions That Supported and Limited Change

To identify conditions that promoted or limited individual and organizational change, we examined school features that were salient and clear points of divergence based on our coding. Although many differences existed between the sites (see Table 1), three of the five most frequently used codes were *leadership, resistance*, and *prior to RJIS* (see coding frequencies in Supplemental Appendix B). Subsequent analysis showed that leadership and resistance played prominent roles in the implementation of RJIS, while differing in notable ways when comparing sites. Further, analysis of the *prior to RJIS* code revealed important differences between schools' existing capacity, which also seemed related to the efficacy of RJIS at each site. Our small sample size and research design do not allow us to draw generalizable conclusions about which factors positively influence racial justice efforts (nor does it account for other factors influencing teacher change), but we offer here our best interpretation of the available data to shed light on the in-school conditions that facilitated or hindered implementation at these two school sites.

Committed and Courageous Leadership. Consistent with research showing the prominent role that school leaders play in the efficacy of any school programming (Grissom et al., 2021), we found that the level of the leadership's commitment to developing an anti-racist school was an important factor in ensuring the program's influence on staff and schoolwide practices. The Spring Gardens principal and AP showed a high level of commitment to the program's goals and courage to face teacher resistance. Commitment does not require expertise or comfort. As described above, Principal Williams admitted to his unease in the initial PD, but because he was dedicated to advancing racial justice, he was able to process his discomfort over time and rethink prior assumptions. His racial consciousness was bolstered by the leadership of his AP, an Asian American woman with prior anti-racism training. As a united front, Principal Williams and Assistant Principal Pham presented the importance of this work and a resolute stance to pursue its aims in the face of resistance. Pham explained:

> [We keep saying that] we're moving forward in this work. . . . This train is leaving. At some point, you need to get on board. You are a teacher of children of color, and if you're not engaging in this work, you're not servicing their needs, then you can choose not to be here.

Her statement made clear the leadership's willingness to let go of teachers who were not engaged in the school's racial justice efforts rather than halting the program because of their discomfort. Aligned with CRT's *critique of liberalism*, their stance also challenged the notion of incremental change (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). That is, Pham did not privilege the timelines of individuals who would hinder progress toward racial justice for the school as an organization; the speed of this work was not determined by the vocal minority.

At Westbridge, Principal Warren (a White woman) was perhaps even more enthusiastic about RJIS than was Principal Williams at the outset. She admitted to reading books on anti-racism and scheduled several one-on-one conversations with the school's RJIS coach as the program started. However, she was less successful in engaging her

AP to take an active role in the program. Although Williams and Pham received coaching from their program partner and regularly met together to strategize about RJIS, Warren generally assumed a kind of solitary leadership in this work, believing that her role as the principal required a higher level of competence in understanding and practicing racial equity. As a result, when Principal Warren left the school unexpectedly in the middle of the school year, AP Thompson (a White woman) admitted that she felt poorly equipped to lead RJIS or face the resistance among teachers. She was also at a disadvantage in not having played a substantial role in RJIS before her transition to interim principal. She described:

> I feel like I walked into the meetings mid-year, and it felt like we were in a very, very preliminary stage, where people didn't feel ready to roll out these conversations. They didn't feel ready—[and] it felt late. It felt like, okay, now we're at the starting point, but the year's over.

In our observations of Thompson in REC meetings, she seemed uncertain of her role and hesitant to speak up, especially when teachers on the REC were unhappy with the REA. She seemed more committed to maintaining copacetic relationships among the staff than to sustaining the work of the program. To be fair, this approach may have been prudent to take on as an interim principal amid an unexpected transition into her new role. It did, however, mean that no one in a leadership role was communicating to staff that racial justice was a priority, nor was anyone facing the resistance from White staff.

Responses to Resistance. In both schools, a small but vocal minority of White teachers challenged aspects of the initial PD and questioned the need for the program. Reflecting patterns of White resistance that have been documented in prior research (Matias, 2014; Picower, 2009; Yoon, 2012), these educators manifested their resistance through espousing colorblind ideology (*I treat all kids the same*), rejecting the existence of racism in their schools (*We don't have a problem here*), and describing their own experiences in ways that dismissed the impact of racial discrimination (*I grew up poor*). These instances represent conscious and unconscious moments that Yoon (2012) describes as Whiteness-at-work. One Westbridge teacher further highlighted:

> There were a few very vocal staff members who . . . on a census would identify as White and present as White and would say, "Oh, I don't think I have White privilege because I had a lot of friends who were Dominican growing up," or "I don't think I have White privilege because I didn't grow up in a wealthy area." If you're walking in this mindset of "Oh, it didn't really exist for me," I think it's harder to make change.

Our findings show that this type of resistance, consistent with other research (DiAngelo, 2018; Gorski, 2019), negatively affected the morale of staff who were invested in RJIS and the potential for the program to take a greater hold in the school. That is, these processes at the individual and interpersonal levels were inseparable from how schools organize for racial justice (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011).

Although resistance may have limited implementation at both sites, Spring Gardens benefited greatly from the commitment of its leadership and the support of its program coach, Bill—a White male with 30 years of teaching experience. Bill spent considerable time working independently with White resisters to provide separate spaces for them to articulate their frustrations. He described:

> I heard them out . . . and the metaphor I'm using is—I have this truth to offer, this clear water. I want to fill up their glass with this clear water of truth. Well, if their glass is full of muddy water, they need an opportunity to pour it out first, so better they should pour it out on me. I'm not their everyday colleague. That's what's been happening, and so I hear them out, and I offer them some alternative ways of looking at things and just accept and expect a lack of closure.

Bill thus played an essential role in identifying and understanding the nature of White resistance and was well skilled in addressing some of their concerns. As a White person who had spent years confronting and publicly sharing his own racial biases, Bill was able to draw on his own experience and model taking responsibility. For example, when he visited a classroom one day, he mixed up the names of two boys of color. He shared, "Only afterwards did I reflect that that was a racial microaggression, and I talked about it with the REC. We talked about how I would address the kids and address the harm I'd done"—thus demonstrating the importance of remaining accountable to one's actions despite good intentions.

Westbridge also worked with a program coach—Jose, a Dominican male with decades of experience leading antiracism training. Although Jose provided a number of resources, members of the REC described his coaching style as more hands-off in contrast to how staff described Bill's role. One White teacher was particularly frustrated by what she perceived as a lack of support in navigating the resistance that she was experiencing from her colleagues. She recalled that the advice she received from Jose was that staff members "sit with their discomfort," but she argued:

> You can't make people sit with discomfort, anger, and frustration and all these feelings without having professional people there to guide you through that process. I didn't think it was appropriate for them to say to this untrained group of people who were looking for guidance, "No, you're going do this by yourself. You'll be fine."

But things weren't fine; some teachers rejected the notion of White privilege and affinity groups and voiced their disapproval of the program overall. Without explicit tools (or external support) to address this resistance from the staff, the school's approach was to minimize it to restore collegiality

and preserve positive relationships among the staff, thereby maintaining the status quo (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The divergence in the schools' responses to resistance suggests that school leaders should be prepared to encounter initial resistance and obtain support from individuals skilled at addressing White resistance in ways that do not derail the organization from pursuing its racial equity goals (Onyeador et al., 2021).

Organizational Capacity. A third feature that played a role in RJIS implementation was the staff's capacity to establish and engage in new programming. By many measures, Spring Gardens is a high-functioning school; its academic reputation is strong, staff turnover is low, the principal and AP have been leading the school for a decade, and the school has successfully implemented other innovative programming related to curriculum and instruction. These were favorable organizational conditions in which to engage in a racial justice program. As a result, Spring Gardens created a strong REC team comprising experienced teachers, preserved time for the REC to meet regularly, and established racial affinity groups—organizational routines that promoted individual growth (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). The school's coach, who described the school as "muscular," noted how effectively the staff were able to set agendas, make plans, and put them into action.

This level of organizational capacity was not apparent at Westbridge. The sudden loss of the principal was clearly disruptive to the program's implementation, especially because she seemed to be the person most invested in this work. Even before her departure, however, various aspects of the program seemed to falter. The REC failed to hold even one meeting from November to February, and when they did meet, not all members attended. Affinity groups were derailed by a few teachers who did not want to participate, and the school leadership offered no active guidance to adequately address their concerns. When we observed the last REC meeting in May, the members expressed interest in incorporating a racial equity discussion at the last PD session of the year. However, that meeting was only attended by three members, so they were limited by what they could accomplish and settled on a few *optional* readings. Although the commitment of individual staff members is critical to organizational change, it may not be sufficient without other structures and resources in place to create robust and sustainable transformations.

Discussion and Implications

Using CRT and RJ frameworks, we aimed to explore how a racial justice program influenced change within individuals and, subsequently, how schools organized for change. Our findings illustrate that participating educators demonstrated a deeper understanding of their own racial biases, developed a shared language to identify and name forms of racism, and reported greater confidence to disrupt racist incidents. RJ frameworks suggest that these changes in racial consciousness and behavior might also contribute to organizational change (Jayakumar & Adamian, 2015; NEA Center for Social Justice, 2021). Indeed, we observed how leaders at Spring Gardens collectively mobilized school members to disrupt racism at multiple levels and how organizational routines, structures, and norms reinforced individual growth (NEA Center for Social Justice, 2021; Ray, 2019). However, we found less evidence of organizational change at Westbridge. Our analysis reveals that inconsistent leadership, resistance from a vocal White minority, and limited organizational capacity seemed to have stunted the program's potential to effect schoolwide change. CRT's *critique of liberalism* helps us understand that despite the development of some individuals, incremental change and maintenance of the status quo can inhibit organizational transformation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Together, our frameworks help us make sense of the change and stability that we observed at multiple levels, while our empirical data speak to the theory by making visible the mechanisms involved in and interactions between individual and organizational change.

Our findings also provide actionable insights for educators committed to racial justice. First, effectively implementing an anti-racist intervention requires strong support from leadership. The leaders' role in engaging in this work, while communicating uncompromising commitment to racial justice in the face of resistance, is instrumental toward enacting change at the organizational level (Khalifa et al., 2016). Moreover, we posit that the robustness and sustainability of this work may require multiple school leaders or levels of leadership (e.g., district leaders) who are invested in advancing racial justice and willing to personally and professionally organize around this work (Ray, 2019). This is an important implication, considering Principal Warren's attempt to single-handedly lead efforts, and demonstrates that larger collectives are critical to creating self-sustaining organizational systems that are racially just (Jayakumar & Adamian, 2015; NEA Center for Social Justice, 2021).

Second, educators should expect some degree and various forms of resistance to racial equity work, ranging from quiet withdrawal to outright rejection (Onyeador et al., 2021). According to CRT's *Whiteness as property* tenet, these responses spawn from dynamic ideologies that uphold White supremacy and contribute to the permanence of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). School leaders should prepare by ensuring that they have adequate resources and support to help school members work through resistance. At Spring Gardens, positioning the White RJIS coach to work with White resisters had two benefits: (a) it limited the centering of White voices by addressing resistance in separate, dedicated spaces; and (b) it ensured that the emotional labor

involved in navigating resistance did not fall on faculty of color. This consideration is important, as the emotional burden of addressing resistance, especially if hostile, can derail individual engagement and collective efforts to promote racial justice (Gorski & Erakat, 2019).

Third, a school's existing organizational capacity plays an important role in successfully implementing racial justice programming, while unfavorable professional conditions can limit its efficacy (King & Bouchard, 2011; Ray, 2019). High principal and staff turnover, for example, is a barrier toward creating sustainable organizational change. Staff unaccustomed to a culture of inquiry, collaboration, and learning will also struggle with the deep reflection and collective action required by racial justice work. Low levels of performance may create an environment that is highly scrutinized and leaders who are hesitant to divert attention away from test scores. A combination of these factors will limit staff's ability to implement most new programs with high levels of fidelity, let alone one that requires ongoing engagement and practice.

Even with the most favorable conditions in place, a challenge inherent in this work is the length of time it takes to make meaningful change. As our data suggest, the development of racial consciousness among individuals who may be less familiar with these concepts may require repeated exposure in different modalities to shift perceptions and beliefs (DiAngelo, 2018; Pennington et al., 2012). It may take additional time or skill building for individuals to use a racial equity lens in their own practice and the commitment of multiple members to reexamine and reimagine schoolwide policies. However, the time it takes for educators to individually and collectively mobilize is also time in which students of color experience racism, lose opportunities to learn, and become harmed by operating systems of oppression within their schools. As CRT's *critique of liberalism* would suggest, there is a tension between the urgency for change and the time required to achieve it (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Future research is critical to further understand how to disrupt notions of incremental change.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the use of comparative case studies yielded rich data about the intervention and its outcomes, the design was limited in ways that highlight future directions for research. First, given the complexity in understanding the development of racially just educators (Jupp et al., 2016; Shah, 2021), we suggest that future studies capture multiple measures of program impact on teachers and students. Pre-/post-surveys with educators, for example, could provide more information about changes in racial knowledge and dispositions, while pre-/post-classroom observations could further illustrate changes in pedagogical approaches and interactions with students. These may pair well with qualitative interviews and focus groups that uncover underlying experiences and processes of change.

Second, to fully understand the impact of racial justice interventions, it is critical to collect data on students' experiences and their socioemotional and academic outcomes. Pre-/post- surveys of students could assess changes related to perceptions of a school's racial climate, teachers' expectations, feelings of belonging, and opportunities to explore/express racial identity. Focus groups with students could also develop our understanding of how they might be experiencing the direct and indirect impacts of the program. Administrative data, such as disciplinary decisions and suspensions; access to higher-level coursework; attendance; and grades may also provide evidence of whether and how racial justice programming is translating into observable practices and policies that actually make a difference for students. Ultimately, these data would help capture *system-level changes* serving to disrupt racism and promote racial equity in schools.

Conclusion

Systems of education must contend with the damage that they inflict on students of color and seek ways of meeting demands for equity, inclusion, and justice for students who have been historically underserved. Our study of a yearlong racial justice intervention within schools illustrates the potential for sustained PD and coaching to influence teachers' racial dispositions, cultivate confidence to disrupt racism, and begin to advance racial justice through schoolwide policies/practices. At the same time, this work is inherently challenging, time-consuming, and likely to be met with resistance. Even in a school with committed leadership and a high level of organizational capacity, producing and sustaining organizational change may be more like a marathon than a sprint. Creating racially just organizations requires that districts and schools reject quick fixes and invest in efforts that can be sustained over time.

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Open Practices

The data and analysis files for this article can be found at https://www.openicpsr.org/openicpsr/project/165441/version/V1/view

Notes

1. *Racial dispositions* are defined as the ways in which educators *act* based on their racial beliefs to address racism and bias (Villegas, 2007).

2. Program leaders asked about schools' motivation for participating, previous engagement with equity efforts, and their readiness

for racial equity work. Each program leader generated a set of notes describing each school's strengths (e.g., *They have some awareness of how racism manifests within their community*) and areas of concern (e.g., *I got the sense that some teachers expect a quick fix*), using these notes to *recommend* or *not recommend* a school for RJIS.

3. Pseudonyms have been used for sites and participants.

4. Definitions of racism provided in the professional development: ***Internalized racism*****:** The acceptance and affirmation of a racial hierarchy with Whiteness at the top. It includes internalized White superiority and internalized racial oppression of people of color. ***Interpersonal racism*****:** Verbal or nonverbal communication and/or actions by those with racial privilege (White people) that consciously or subconsciously harm, discriminate against, isolate, and/or minimize the experiences of those without structural power (people of color). ***Institutionalized racism*****:** Policies and practices that perpetuate a cycle of racial inequality and are promoted overtly or subtly by institutions. ***Ideological racism*****:** White supremacy—a historical and institutionally perpetuated system of ideas and beliefs that exploits continents and nations and oppresses people of color.

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