LEADERS OF COLOR: HOW LEADERS OF COLOR DESCRIBE THEIR LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES AND HOW THEIR IDENTITIES PLAY A ROLE IN THEIR LEADERSHIP VALUES, BELIEFS, AND PRACTICES

Chair: Sharon Kruse

Building leadership has been studied for decades (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2010; Levin & Bradley, 2019; Portin et al., 2003) and effective leaders have been shown to support student learning and development (Leithwood et al., 2004; Portin et al., 2003; Seashore Louis et al., 2010). In the face of an increasingly diverse student population, school districts have recognized disparate academic achievement between White students and students of color (de Brey et al., 2019). In turn, districts have sought to address this issue by hiring effective leaders of color. This qualitative study explored the lived experiences and counterstories of leaders of color in urban schools in the Pacific Northwest through semi-structured interviews. It sought to understand how these building leaders describe their successes and challenges and identified their values, beliefs, and practices. The study found that leaders who represent diverse perspectives report that they connect with and empower students with diverse backgrounds in ways that are different than their White colleagues, endeavoring to better meet the needs of students and the community. Additionally, this study connected their values, beliefs, and practices with their identities and background experiences. The importance and relevance of relationships with others (e.g., students, families, community, and staff) was an important theme. These leaders described conditions for which they feel a sense of belonging and provided recommendations for how they can be better supported by districts. Their narratives, insights, and accomplishments were relayed with resiliency, tenacity, and pride.