Influence 100 Cohort 5 Year 1 Report: Appendices

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Appendix A: Cohort 5 FY24 Programming Overview

The first year of programming for Cohort 5 included an online orientation session; an in-person kick-off day; monthly day-long sessions (three in-person site visits and three online sessions); quarterly online meetings with fellows, superintendents, and school committee members; and the end-of-year Partners in Equity Leadership Conference, all facilitated by DESE and TLA. With the exception of the site visit sessions, all other sessions involved a mix of presentation and large- and small-group discussion/activity.

In addition to session content, DESE encouraged superintendents to offer mentorship and shadowing opportunities to Influence 100 fellows. District implementation of mentorship varied. Pre-work assigned to fellows outside of sessions included book chapter readings, review of school district materials (e.g., vision statements, strategic plans), and tasks related to an action research project each fellow will complete within their district.

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| **Month** | **Session Overview** | **Format** |
| September 2023 | **Orientation session** for fellows, superintendents, and school committee members | Online, 2 hours |
| October 2023 | Cohort 5 **Kick-Off Session** @ DESE | In-person, full day |
| November 2023 | **Quarterly District Meeting #1**: Fellows, superintendents, and school committee members | Online, 2 hours |
| November 2023 | **Site visit #1**: District strategic plans; moving to a more equitable school  Joint session with Cohort 4 | In-person, full day |
| December 2023 | **Online Session #1**  Topics: History of racial inequity in education in Massachusetts, introduction to action research project | Online, full day |
| January 2024 | **Site visit #2**: The role of the superintendent in supervising principals; the principal as a lever for change  Joint session with Cohort 4 | In-person, full day |
| January 2024 | **Quarterly District Meeting #2**: Fellows, superintendents, and school committee members | Online, 2 hours |
| February 2024 | **Online Session** **#2**  Topics: Equity leadership self-assessment, culturally responsive school systems, RIDES assessment, action research project (problem of practice) | Online, full day |
| March 2024 | **Site visit #3**: The role of the central office team in moving a district strategy forward  Joint session with Cohort 4 | In-person, full day |
| March 2024 | **Quarterly District Meeting #3**: Fellows, superintendents, and school committee members | Online, 2 hours |
| April 2024 | **Online Session #3**  Topics: Debriefing site visits, UMDI fall interview report, action research project (theory of action) | Online, full day |
| May 2024 | **Partners in Equity Leadership Conference** | In-person, full day |

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| **Appendix B**  Influence 100 Interim Brief:  Fall 2023 Interviews with Fellows  Influence 100 Cohort 5 |
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| **December 22, 2023** |

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## Overview

This brief presents analysis of UMDI’s fall 2023 interviews with six Influence 100 fellows from Cohort 5. The interviews were intentionally scheduled to take place prior to fellows’ first full-day meeting as a cohort. At the time of the interviews, only an online orientation meeting had taken place (facilitated by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE] and The Leadership Academy [TLA]). Thus, we attempted to capture fellows’ reflections at a baseline point at the beginning of their program participation.

In this brief, we summarize the prominent themes and messages we heard from this sample of Cohort 5 fellows relevant to 1) their expectations and hopes for participation, and 2) their background experiences and skills as they started out in the program, specifically those related to the three focus skills identified by DESE and TLA (described in Methods Notes). It is important to keep in mind that this brief does not represent the experiences of *all* Cohort 5 fellows, nor does it represent a complete picture of the six fellows who participated in interviews.

The first four pages of this brief include summaries of key findings and analytic reflections, and notes on methods. The remainder of the brief delves into the details of our findings. We have chosen to include quite a bit of detail, as well as verbatim quotations from fellows, because these details and articulations help to mark the baseline sentiments and understandings of fellows before program engagement. Thus, they will be useful in reflecting on change at later points in the program and in the evaluation process.

## Key Findings

This section summarizes the findings that are described in greater detail in the sections that follow.

#### Fellows’ expectations and hopes for the Influence 100 program

* Fellows have high hopes and expectations for the program. Fellows described motivations for participating in the program that ranged from immediately-applicable and personal-level impacts to long-term, community-wide outcomes. These included:
  + Tangible outcomes for students and families
  + Practical knowledge, increased impact, and professional advancement
  + Increased understanding of the superintendency
  + A supportive and strategic community/network
* Fellows sought belonging and authenticity in their Influence 100 experience. They wanted a program designed with an understanding of the realities they face as BIPOC leaders and equity-focused leaders. They hope for a collaborative experience where they can bring their “authentic self,” develop connections, feel valued, and have opportunities to self-reflect and receive feedback.
* Fellows expressed a variety of questions and concerns that were often particular to their own situations. These included concerns about the program’s ability to ensure personalization and attention to individual trajectories; support and access to meaningful learning opportunities in fellows’ district settings; and real impact on fellows’ standing in their district and beyond.

#### Culturally responsive leadership skills – fellows’ strengths and growth areas

* Fellows are starting the program with **rich backgrounds and competencies**, bringing an array of knowledge and expertise from professional and personal experience—and building their culturally responsive leadership skills from a base of first-hand knowledge.
* The fellows we interviewed conveyed that a **culturally responsive mindset is firmly established for them.** Furthermore, within their realms of authority, they feel comfortable drawing attention to inequity and taking action to suggest and model more equitable practices.
* **Affecting change in others**, broadly, was an area where fellows sought the most development in terms of their culturally responsive leadership skills.
* **Strategic communication skills were referenced by many fellows** as among the skills they wanted to develop for a range of situations (e.g., to build capacity, to change systems, to advocate for resources, to navigate political challenges).
* Fellows identified a **need to develop skills for navigating and working within existing power structures. Some also expressed a tension** between identifying the work they need to do themselves (as BIPOC leaders)and highlighting the need for work from others who are benefiting from the system as it is.

## Reflections and Insights

In this section, we share some reflections on the program that emerged through our analysis of the interview data.

* **Fellows have ambitious expectations for the program, and the facilitation team might consider various strategies for acknowledging and managing those expectations.** For example, the facilitation team could review key components of the program logic model and acknowledge its limitations with fellows. Interview findings suggest that fellows have many expectations that are well aligned with program goals (e.g., learning about superintendency, building skills and connections)—and also some expectations that might be mis-aligned with program goals, capacity, or timeline (e.g., hopes for impacts on district practice and student outcomes). Data from past years prompted similar reflections about expectation management, related to fellows’ hopes for DESE capacity to influence district engagement and, more broadly, practices for hiring. Facilitators might share program history and explain how the current program focus—on preparing culturally responsive leaders—reflects a recognition of the limits of DESE control.
* **Participating fellows are in different roles, and on different career paths in terms of superintendency.** This is likely to affect how they engage with the Influence 100 curriculum. Some of the focus skills will feel more relevant to some fellows than to others, and fellows may need guidance understanding how to apply learning goals to their individual roles and situations.
* **Some of the aspects of culturally responsive leadership reflected in the three focus skills are specific to superintendency and not within the scope of fellows’ current positions**. In the cohort sessions to-date, program activities have been framed for fellows as opportunities to assume a hypothetical role as a superintendent. As such, fellows may need opportunities to map their current roles onto the role of a superintendent to gain a better understanding of which growth areas reflect their current positional authority and which reflect a need for skill building, and where the two overlap. It will be helpful for fellows to be clear about skill gaps that may persist or emerge with increased positional authority. Fellows may also need support identifying ways to practice skills that are generally outside the scope of their current positions.
* **Fellows identify as advocates for equity in schools and have experience speaking up and speaking out, yet they continue to prioritize development of communication skills.** Fellows’ commitment to advocacy and willingness to make unpopular decisions are strengths. At the same time, fellows identify communication skills as a growth area because they are aware that their messages are not always received well by their colleagues. Fellows are likely to appreciate session time dedicated to this topic, including opportunities to learn from each other and from the facilitators, who can relate to the challenge and share from their own experience.
* **When fellows talked about their strengths and challenges as culturally responsive leaders, a lot came up about the mental and physical demands of the work.** Care for self and family was a significant concern that was expressed consistently in the interviews. Fellows’ articulation of this concern as well as their reactions during the interview suggest that they would value acknowledgement of the demands of this endeavor and opportunities for emotional processing in the course of the program.
* **Fellows made clear that an important consideration in developing educational leaders of color is the additional burden they are carrying of parenting children of color in the Massachusetts educational system.** Impressions from cohort sessions are that many fellows are parents of younger children, and this could be an important source of connection for fellows and possibly a session topic, providing the opportunity to share challenges and successful strategies related to parenting specifically children of color while fighting inequities in the school systems.

## Methods Notes

The UMDI team drafted the interview protocol after discussion with DESE. DESE reviewed the protocol with the TLA facilitators and approved it in September 2023. The interview protocol is in Appendix A. Each interview lasted about 1 hour and was conducted and recorded via Zoom.

#### Sampling

UMDI invited and interviewed six of the 20 fellows in Cohort 5. Given the small size of the interview pool, we aimed to maximize diversity in a way that reflected the broader cohort, but we did not attempt to compose a representative sample. In selecting the fellows to invite for interviews, the UMDI team considered 1) position, 2) district size, and 3) region. DESE did not provide data on fellows’ demographics. The UMDI team used publicly-available information from web searches to compose an invitation list that broadly reflected the overall cohort. The names of fellows who were invited to participate in interviews have been kept confidential and are only known to the UMDI evaluation team. To maintain this confidentiality, we are not sharing descriptive information about interviewed fellows. Interviewed fellows were sent a preliminary draft of the findings to review for confidentiality.

#### Fellows’ engagement

During the interviews, fellows were engaged, and their responses indicated that they put thought and care into the interview questions before and during the interviews. Fellows demonstrated a willingness to reflect deeply on the questions and share openly in their responses. Fellows expressed appreciation for the opportunity to reflect and give input at the outset of their two years with Influence 100.

For some of the fellows, the interview questions raised emotions, as the interview topics are not ones that can be talked about on an abstract or theoretical level. Fellows are in their positions as educational leaders because of personal commitments to the possibility of positive change within education—often rooted in personal experiences, both positive and negative. Reflecting on their experiences and skills can mean revisiting incidents of pain and injustice.

#### Analysis

Analysis of interview data included both inductive and deductive coding of Zoom-generated transcripts (all quotes were verified by the evaluation team). We used interview structure and focus skills (described below) as guides for coding and also captured emergent themes. Quotes have been lightly edited for clarity (e.g., to remove filler words and false starts).

The focus skills identified by DESE and TLA are:

* Act with cultural competence and responsiveness in interactions, decision-making, and practice.
* Build the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities in the school.
* Confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with minoritized populations.

Each of the three focus skills has associated actions that are articulated in the *Superintendent Actions* and *Equity Leadership Dispositions* resources created by The Leadership Academy. [[1]](#footnote-2),[[2]](#footnote-3) We referenced several of these actions in the interview questions when we asked about each of the focus skills, though we did not ask fellows to reflect on the specific actions individually.

During our analysis, for each focus skill we considered the actions from the two resources in relation to what we heard from fellows about their existing strengths. This framework supported our analysis of fellows’ existing strengths related to the three focus skills. Fellows provided evidence of their strengths by discussing relevant examples from their professional experience. We analyzed fellows’ responses for growth areas and learning goals they identified, and categorized these into themes within a relevant focus skill area.

Findings – Detail

These findings are organized into two main sections.

In Section 1 (pp. 7–11), we report on fellows’ baseline thoughts about the program, as they anticipated their first cohort session. This section includes summaries of fellows’ reasons for participating and their hopes and concerns about the program experience.

In Section 2 (pp. 12–23), we summarize fellows’ reporting on their culturally responsive leadership. The section focuses on fellows’ descriptions of their existing strengths and growth areas in the three focus skill areas identified by DESE and TLA.

# Section 1: Fellows’ Expectations and Hopes for the Influence 100 Program

We began each interview with questions about why fellows chose to participate in Influence 100, what they hoped to learn or gain from the program, how they would describe their learning style, and any concerns or barriers they anticipated to participating in the program. This section gives an overview of fellows’ responses and describes the priorities they conveyed. Specific learning goals are explored further in Section 2.

## Key Themes: Fellows’ expectations and hopes for program experience

* **Fellows have high hopes and expectations for the program.** Fellows described motivations for participating in the program that ranged from immediately-applicable and personal-level impacts to long-term, community-wide outcomes.
* **Fellows sought belonging and authenticity in their Influence 100 experience.** They wanted a program designed with an understanding of the realities they face as BIPOC leaders and equity-focused leaders. They hoped for a collaborative experience where they could bring their “authentic self,” develop connections, feel valued, and have opportunities to self-reflect and receive feedback.
* **Fellows expressed a variety of questions and concerns that were often particular to their own situations.** These included concerns that the program would have inadequate personalization and attention to individual trajectories; that they might not receive enough support—or be given the access they desired—in their district settings; that their participation in the program might not impact their standing (because of lack of district commitment or program clout); or that they might continue to be dismissed and marginalized (within their district and within educational spaces more generally), despite their participation.

### Reasons to Participate in Influence 100

Fellows described motivations for participating in the program that ranged from immediately-applicable and personal-level impacts to long-term, community-wide outcomes. We grouped their responses into the following categories:

* Tangible outcomes for students and families
* Practical knowledge, increased impact, and professional advancement
* Increased understanding of the superintendency
* A supportive and strategic community/network

Along with these outcomes, fellows expressed interest in participating in a program that is specifically designed with their identities and circumstances in mind.

The following sections describe the most prominent and consistent messages we heard from fellows regarding reasons to participate.

#### Tangible outcomes for students and families

When fellows talked about why they are participating in Influence 100, and the returns on their investment that would make it worthwhile, they referenced tangible outcomes for students and families. Fellows want to know that after they participate in Influence 100, students’ experiences in school will change for the better. For example, one fellow referenced bringing their learning back to their district “so that at the end of the day, our students of color, and especially our newcomers, will really have the chance to have better lives in the future.” Another fellow is participating in the program to “have the tools to be able to have conversations that can better impact all students and make sure all students are having a fantastic experience in schools.” Another fellow framed the “promise” of Influence 100 this way:

“When we produce Influence 100 candidates, and when they are done with our program, you can rest assured your students will move. And I don't know that it's possible or fair to even make that promise. But that's just in my mind what I would like to be the case.”

#### Practical knowledge, increased impact, and professional advancement

Fellows also emphasized tangible outcomes for themselves, professionally, among their reasons for participating. They reported wanting to build skills and qualifications that would enable them to both 1) be more effective in advancing equity in their current positions and 2) move into positions with greater influence or authority. Fellows referenced interest in both “hard” and “soft” skills as well as balancing research-based/theoretical knowledge with practical knowledge, or “work on the ground.”

“I feel like I was not able to have, from my role, an impact on equity issues in our district and thought that Influence 100 was one avenue, working more closely with the superintendent, being able to participate in meetings that normally I would not be asked to participate with could be helpful. I also just selfishly wanted to have my own professional development [… including] a group to really think through issues […] and try to figure out ways to really make change […] in the district I'm working for.”

Some fellows made it clear that they are hoping the association with a reputable program will add to their professional credibility and reduce the gatekeeping they experience as individuals with equity agendas and often identities that are poorly represented among Massachusetts educational leadership. One fellow experienced regular “scrutiny of my resume or my qualifications or my credentials,” and wondered, “Will the program provide the credibility that's needed for upward mobility?”

#### Increased understanding of the superintendency

With an eye toward career advancement, fellows want to build understanding and skill related to educational leadership. Fellows seek to increase their understanding of 1) the greater context of education policy and practice in Massachusetts, and 2) the expectations and daily requirements of being a superintendent. They also expressed a desire to build their management skills. Finally, navigating the “politics” of being a superintendent is a central concern among fellows, especially as this relates to equity work in predominantly white communities.

The selection of quotations below illustrates fellows’ learning goals related to educational leadership at the superintendent level.

“[I] certainly want to advance my career. […] So, looking for ways to understand sort of the greater context of Massachusetts education in particular. And having a fellowship opportunity like this ­­— working alongside the people who are really the decision makers, policy makers is important. […] What are policies that are being evaluated? How are certain things structured that lead to practices in schools? How do we go from sort of the theory to the practice?”

“I think it's important to know the how, the daily requirements, the policies. The ABCs of running a school system. The expectations that come to that role. To be fully immersed in a role, to even shadow someone and witness what it really takes to be a superintendent. […] And also reflecting, do I really know? Do I have what it takes, really to be in that space?”

“I wanted to expand my educational knowledge when it comes to leadership, management, and potentially expanding my leadership repertoire. […] I would like to learn more about myself and again expanding my influence, if you may. […] Thinking about what I could potentially get from the program, I would like to learn, maybe potentially at statewide, or even a nationwide sort of leadership.”

“I definitely want to learn how to better navigate multiple stakeholders at the district leadership level […]. So really, growing my skill set in navigating those stakeholder groups and really having a deep and rich knowledge about improving student growth.”

#### A supportive and strategic community/network

As they anticipated their two-year experience in Influence 100, fellows indicated that they look forward to building connections with other educational leaders who have a similar commitment to equity. For some fellows, the hope was to be in an intentional space to share and learn practices and strategies from “like-minded people”—particularly a space with “a high level of intentionality around what it means to be an equity-driven leader.” Others hoped to develop trusting professional connections to which they might turn for support in the future as they pursue leadership positions that promise to be difficult and “lonely”—especially for BIPOC leaders.

“I hope for a group of professionals that I will develop bonds with that will […] be long lasting. […] I know that if I did at some point decide to pursue an assistant superintendency or superintendency role, that having those folks that you've already built those bonds with, and that trust with would be really, really important, because they're very lonely roles.”

“I was looking for a space where I could have more explicit conversations about race, racism, and racial equity – especially through a leadership lens. […] I was also looking for a space where I could continue to learn […] within [my district] and also broaden my perspective beyond this one community and be in a space with like-minded individuals who share similar vision and values.”

#### A program designed with them in mind

Fellows expressed interest in participating in a program designed with a genuine understanding of what is particular and significant about their identities and experiences and the realities they face as BIPOC leaders and equity-focused leaders. In the case of one fellow, this was expressed as skepticism:

“I'm thinking, what is this program, really? […] I just wonder if there may be blind spots as to the nuances of being a leader, a leader of color, a female leader of color in an urban district or not an urban district. […] That's what I've been thinking about since orientation, is this something that is meant for someone like me?”

### Desires for Program Experience

In the interviews, fellows were asked about their learning style and were invited to discuss their preferred methods for delivery of curriculum. Though their responses varied, fellows consistently expressed interest in interactive and collaborative learning activities, and opportunities for intensive, immersive, and hands-on engagement. Fellows emphasized the importance of feeling that they can bring their “authentic self” to the learning environment, that their participation is invited, and that their contributions are valued. Opportunities for self-reflection and self-assessment, and opportunities to receive feedback from others are important to fellows. In relation to the theme discussed above, fellows are looking for a learning environment that promotes supportive and long-lasting “bonds” or relationships with other cohort members.

One fellow expressed a desire for Influence 100 to be a culturally responsive space, in the sense that the mindset within the program would be to see beyond lived experience, to continuously look for additional ways to see things, and to have “the understanding that there might be more to it than we realize.” As this fellow said, “holding space for thinking about things from multiple views and multiple perspectives.”

Another fellow expressed the importance of “center[ing] and celebrat[ing]” fellows’ existing assets—some of which cannot be taught—within their districts and the Influence 100 program. This fellow suggested the potential role of fellows as facilitators and teachers in Influence 100 programming (echoing a recommendation made by fellows in the winter 2023 focus groups).[[3]](#footnote-4)

### Concerns about Program Experience

At the time of the interviews, as they anticipated the start of Influence 100, fellows expressed a variety of questions and concerns that were often particular to their own situations. This section is an attempt to capture the range of concerns on fellows’ minds, rather than to depict the overall sentiment of the sample.

#### Group format

We heard a concern that the size of the group and the cohort focus might result in inadequate personalization and individualization, with insufficient attention “targeted specifically for making sure that you get from where you are to other opportunities.”

#### District support and accountability

Fellows worried that mentors and current administrators might be restricted in their ability to provide support to fellows by confidentiality, time, and other considerations. Likewise, some fellows were concerned about district leadership commitment, including consistent superintendent and school committee member participation, especially when there are anticipated changes in leadership.

“Too often people don't have time to show you the ropes […]. You're not invited into the ways of handling matters that can be confidential. So that is a concern. […] It's being in the kitchen, [seeing] how things are made. […Knowing] those spices matters.”

Fellows wondered if districts would or could be held accountable by DESE for ensuring that learning is meaningful for fellows. Would districts be provided with specifics—step by step requirements—for what they need to do to support and develop fellows? One fellow expressed the desire for districts to announce fellows and openly endorse their involvement in Influence 100, emphasizing and promoting the program and opening the way for fellows to learn. Fellows also wanted to be sure that their districts were committed to developing them as equity leaders, and that participation in Influence 100 was not just a diversion, “to satisfy my critique and kind of disruptor personality in the workspace.”

#### Exclusion

Based on previous experience, fellows expressed concern about being taken seriously and being given access to learning opportunities. “Too often people just look at me. They just see me or my beautiful skin tone or my accent. They just hear that, and they think not to take me seriously,” one fellow offered. Fellows wanted to be sure that Influence 100 will not be another space where leaders of color have their expertise dismissed or undervalued.

Section 2: Culturally Responsive Leadership Skills – Fellows’ Strengths and Growth Areas

We asked fellows to self-identify their areas of existing strength and areas for growth related to culturally responsive leadership skills—first in general and then in reference to the three focus skill areas. Fellows shared examples of situations where they had applied culturally responsive leadership skills or noted opportunities to build additional skills. This section summarizes their responses, characterizing the types of situations fellows referenced and identifying the areas where the fellows we interviewed indicated more or less experience.

For analytical purposes, we have attempted to group fellows’ examples into the three focus skill areas—using as guides the actions articulated in *Superintendent Actions* and *Equity Leadership Dispositions* resources created by TLA (see footnotes 1 and 2 in the Methods section). Notably, the boundaries between these skill areas are porous and there are many areas of overlap between them.

## Key Themes: Fellows’ culturally responsive leadership skills

* Fellows are starting the program with **rich backgrounds and competencies**, bringing an array of knowledge and expertise from professional and personal experience—and building their culturally responsive leadership skills from a base of first-hand knowledge.
* Fellows conveyed that a **culturally responsive mindset is firmly established for them**, and within their realms of authority they feel comfortable drawing attention to inequity and taking action to suggest and model more equitable practices.
* Fellows noted **existing strengths** that supported their culturally responsive leadership practice, including personal characteristics, leadership strategies and skills, and academic training.
* **Affecting change in others**, broadly, was an area where fellows sought the most development in terms of their culturally responsive leadership skills.
* **Strategic communication skills were referenced by many fellows** as among the skills they wanted to develop for a range of situations (e.g., to build capacity, to change systems, to advocate for resources, to navigate political challenges) across all three focus skill areas.
* Fellows identified a **need to develop skills for navigating and working within existing power structures. Some also expressed a tension** between identifying the work they need to do themselves (as BIPOC leaders)and highlighting the need for work from others who are benefiting from the system as it is.
* Participating **fellows are in different roles, and on different career paths** in terms of superintendency. Each fellow we interviewed talked about their efforts to improve equity in the here and now, and what they need to be more effective in their current role. The fellows differed in how directly they referenced an anticipated superintendent position as they talked about skills and strategies they hope to develop.[[4]](#footnote-5)

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| Supportive skills and strengths: Lived experience, personal characteristics, leadership practices, and academic trainingReal-life knowledge and personal experience Almost universally, fellows began discussing their existing strengths related to culturally responsive leadership by referencing their own identities and the real-life and real-world knowledge and personal experience that enables them to understand student experiences. They referenced their racial identities, immigrant identities, socioeconomic identities, and parent identities, and shared that they understand first-hand the hurt that structural racism causes. They felt well-equipped to provide counternarratives to deficit statements and views. Fellows conveyed how their convictions about and commitment to equity are based on their own experiences and their dreams for their children and family members. A big part of their existing strength, they noted, is their personal connection. They bring their heart to their work.  “We are expert because we have the lived experience, we're able to navigate addressing a system while still participating in it and making it work for the people that it's not meant to work for while training and teaching and supporting our families and our children to navigate it better than we did.” Personal characteristics and leadership practices Outside of the three specific focus skill areas, fellows referred to personal characteristics and leadership practices that support their culturally responsive leadership. These included personal characteristics such as being a good listener.  Fellows named leadership habits such as taking responsibility; engaging in continual analysis, reflection, and feedback; understanding the value of using data to drive instruction and harnessing the power of data to support change; considering the humanity of all; building and working as a leadership team and investing in shared leadership; and maintaining that all staff are responsible for all students being safe and cared for.  Fellows also noted skills closely tied to equity work, such as having cultural humility and being mindful of the populations they’re serving; ensuring that families feel they belong and have a voice; and understanding access issues and empowering others.  Finally, fellows referenced the strengths of academic backgrounds, including educational leadership training and equity training, and equity-focused leadership experience. |

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| Reality check: Self-care/self-protection and sustainability of work When fellows talked about their strengths and challenges as culturally responsive leaders—across all three skill areas—a lot came up about the mental and physical demands of the work. Care for self and family was a significant concern that was expressed consistently in the interviews.  “As a measure of self-care, for my own personal and mental and physical safety, I have to be very aware of what I'm putting my body through for the sake of saving and helping and supporting and teaching.”  “If you want to groom superintendents of color, there has to be an understanding that it comes with a heavier price to pay in terms of the direct racism that you get as being the person in charge, as well as the fact that there’s a different level of care that you have to provide to kids of color.”  In the interviews, fellows talked about empowering and supporting their own families, specifically their children who are experiencing racial trauma within the community as the fellows are trying to do this work. As one fellow described,  “While I'm [at home and] trying to turn off shifting the mindset of my colleagues, I now have to figure out how to empower and support my [child], who […] shared with me that [at school] he was told that his skin is inappropriate because it reminds somebody of poop.”  Another fellow reported,  *“The amount of times that I have to go to school to actually fight, I mean, such horrible bias that is so evident, you know, for my—even my own children. It's unbelievable.”*  Some fellows recounted making career choices that allowed them to establish boundaries that are essential for self and family care. In the same way, they referenced learning to step back from specific situations within any position when the emotional demands become too high. These decisions are themselves taxing, as fellows feel deeply what is at stake for students if they let something go. |

## Focus skill: Acts with cultural competence and responsiveness in interactions, decision-making, and practice.

The fellows we interviewed conveyed that a culturally responsive mindset is firmly established for them, and they are well-accustomed to acting with cultural competence and responsiveness in interactions, decision-making, and practice in their work as educational leaders. Notably, some fellows indicated that the topic of cultural responsiveness sounded initially like a topic better suited to white educators. As people of color with many years of experience in school systems in Massachusetts—as students, parents, and professionals—these fellows expressed not having the luxury *not* to be culturally responsive. Some fellows of color indicated that they have awareness and sensitivity inherent to being educators of color, but they recognize that there are also areas in which they need to be intentional and develop additional skills to be responsive to cultures different from their own.

### Existing Strengths

In the interviews, fellows provided moderate to strong evidence of most of the actions associated with this focus skill, including:

* *Partner with families, staff, and communities to ensure fair treatment and equitable access to all academic, social and emotional opportunities*
* *Pay close attention to voices that are absent from conversations and actively seek them to gain their perspective*
* *Actively seek and make use of diverse perspectives in decision-making*
* *Prioritize and support culturally responsive practice as a foundational element of professional practice*

There was some, but minimal, evidence of these actions:

* *Encourage risk-taking and create spaces to engage in open dialogue about race and address hard-to-discuss topics*
* *Leverage relationships with system leaders to increase the prominence and legitimacy of an equitable school for all minoritized populations as a primary goal of the school*

For these two actions, the minimal level of evidence was related to limitations on fellows’ authority within their current roles. For example, rather than being able to *create* space or *leverage* relationships, some fellows noted that they could *request* space or introduce the idea that space is needed and dialogue is appropriate, or *suggest* that an equitable school for all minoritized populations should be a primary goal of the school.

Examples of evidence provided by fellows relevant to this focus skill included:

* Providing school materials and communications in multiple languages and via video
* Inviting parent input and leadership for planning culturally-relevant school events
* Connecting personally and regularly with a parent from a group whose voices tend to be absent in the district
* Recommending, modeling, and/or setting expectations of culturally responsive practices
* Holding regular sessions with staff focused on asset mindset
* Discussing with teachers differing perceptions of trauma and disability in students of different races (using the example of a recent incident between two students)
* Hiring staff who reflect the culture of the student body
* Building a team that can be a cultural resource and provide honest feedback (e.g., culturally-matched advisors among the leadership team)
* Inviting translators/interpreters to present to staff on their role and contribution to the district
* Attending special education team meetings to support parents in advocating against services that reflect racial stereotyping and deficit thinking on the part of school personnel
* Bringing attention to unintended consequences

The following quotation is from a fellow describing a situation where they brought to district leaders’ attention unintended consequences and the need to be proactive around equity.

*“Current [and past] data shows us […] that when we start talking about test scores […] there's often a gap between our white and Asian students and our black and brown students. And for parents who are going to be getting [literacy scores] for the first time, it's going to bring about a lot of feelings on the part of black and brown families in particular, who have historically been told that their brains are not the same size as white people's brains, that the children […]. So what work do we need to do to make sure that they are well positioned to be able to ask questions about this data, know what the district is going to do to attack some of these inequities and gaps that they're going to see? We can't just send them a piece of paper that says their children are two grade levels behind, and that's kind of it.”*

### Growth Areas

While fellows conveyed competence and confidence in this focus skill area, they also noted that through Influence 100 they hope to gain additional skills that will help them be more effective in applying their existing cultural competence and responsiveness. For example, they would like to build additional skills to help others understand their equity vision, and to articulate and advocate for the needs of marginalized groups—to “amplify others’ voices.”

One fellow reflected on the challenge of not “shut[ting] down the conversation” when raising equity concerns or pointing out inequities. This fellow expressed interest in developing skills to continue to invite other perspectives while advocating unapologetically for equity.

## Focus skill: Purposefully builds the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities in the school.

While fellows have developed their own culturally responsive practices, building the capacity of others to do equity work has proven more challenging, in some cases due to direct resistance and in other cases because of the limitations of fellows’ current positions and their related access and authority. Many of the actions associated with this skill area imply some positional authority, and fellows who were not building leaders discussed the challenges of attempting to build the capacity of others without that clear authority.

### Existing Strengths

Fellows provided minimal or moderate evidence for the actions under this focus skill. Some of the actions are happening at the building level, where fellows have direct influence with staff. It appears to be harder for those in district positions.

There was moderate evidence provided by fellows of the following:

* *Create the conditions and common language for regular courageous conversations around equity*
* *Provide structured and consistent professional learning opportunities to develop and deepen culturally responsive building and system leadership*

Examples include conducting learning walks in their building, providing feedback to teachers, and scheduling regular professional development discussions focused on data and equity. For other fellows, current work involves raising equity issues and initiating conversations where common language does not yet exist or has not been accepted.

There was some but minimal evidence of the following:

* *Initiate and promote productive dialogue and collective work on issues of inequity for all minoritized populations*

While fellows certainly are initiating and promoting dialogue, their descriptions suggest that it may not yet be productive, and the work may not yet be collective. Reasons for this are discussed in detail in the Growth Areas section for this skill. Also, fellows are focused on some but not all minoritized populations.

There was minimal evidence of the following:

* *Build the capacity of system and school building leaders to learn and practice language and behaviors that are responsive to differences across lines of race, ethnicity, language, class, religion, ability, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and other aspects of identity*

School building leaders are working with their staff to learn and practice responsive language and behaviors, such as when they highlight data that show different consequences for boys of color within the school. For fellows in district level positions, access to and authority with staff varies, in some cases limiting their ability to provide learning and practice opportunities for others. As is discussed below, fellows also face resistance to implementation of responsive practices.

### Growth Areas

Fundamentally, fellows would like to develop skills to empower and motivate parties to improve student learning outcomes. They recognize the direct link between educational inequities and suppressed student learning, and they want their educator colleagues to identify and disrupt inequities so that all students can learn. Fellows are highly sensitive to the challenge of implementing meaningful change within a system that “was only built for certain folks to succeed.” They recognize that building the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities begins with mindset work—shifting attitudes—because no amount of skill will be adequate in a “mindset of racism and bias.”

Our analysis suggests that positional authority is highly relevant to fellows’ experiences with building the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities, and it varies depending on fellows’ roles. Across roles, the growth areas fellows identified fall into the categories of working strategically with colleagues, including managing fragility, and navigating tensions between stated priorities and an actual willingness to change.

#### Barriers related to positional authority

All the fellows we interviewed talked about their efforts and purposefulness in attempting to change others’ mindsets and behaviors related to equity. However, as aspiring superintendents, fellows reported experiencing barriers related to their positional authority (or lack thereof). Because of this issue of access, fellows sometimes expressed ideas about building the capacity of others but felt they hadn’t had the opportunity to assess their own skills in this area.

Depending on the fellow’s position—school leader or district-level administrator—their role in building others’ capacity varied, and this affected how they talked about their strengths and growth areas related to this skill. Fellows who are school leaders are more likely to be directing a team of staff and making decisions about professional development, as well as having a more direct influence on school culture.

For some fellows in district-level or central office positions, authority is ambiguous. Fellows described having to maneuver cautiously not to “step on toes” or further alienate themselves while still asserting themselves enough to perform the equity-related work they set out or were hired to perform. Some fellows described not having consistent structures in place for their involvement across administrative teams or school buildings, and having to insert themselves into more and less responsive groups without backup from upper administration regarding their authority.

“I have to be very much taking the initiative […], creating the role and what it should be for those who are willing to be pushed in that way, and really just kind of finessing people that are not ready to have a conversation, that flat out tell me, I'm not their supervisor, so I can't tell them what to do, and [I receive] little support from supervisors to derail or reverse or undo that thinking.”

“The growth that I have to do […]. It's just kind of finding that balance between taking a step back [for family and self care] and inserting myself in ways in which I know could be helpful, even if it may step on toes. I feel like, for the good of the kids, I need to find where that happy place is—that happy balance of not doing someone else's job, but of helping the district to better utilize the skills that I bring.”

#### Working strategically with others

Fellows also indicated interest in building skills related to furthering an equity agenda effectively, which they recognize means working delicately with others. They would like to increase their skills in considering the context or setting, who else is present, and other factors that can affect whether their message leads to change or resistance. Fellows talked about wanting to have skills to gauge appropriate expectations for change and how hard to push for change, and skills to judge when they had laid the right groundwork to move forward – for example, when sufficient practices of collaboration had been established to proceed with collaboration around equity specifically.

Fellows recognize that they need to do things differently with educators who are “willing to be pushed in that way” and those who aren’t ready to have hard conversations. They recognize a need to develop skills to build capacity in these different groups simultaneously. On the one hand, they want strategies to maximize the impact of colleagues who are “primed and ready to go,” and strategies to “identif[y] those others to help lead the work.” On the other hand, fellows also have experience with direct resistance to culturally responsive education and equity, and they want to develop skills to build capacity among those who resist. Part of this, as one fellow expressed, is recognizing that “resistance can be very loud,” and making sure not to “los[e] sight of the great work you’re trying to do for fear of the loud people getting louder, because I think they’ll always be loud.”

##### The politics of superintendency

Fellows recognize that there are complex and challenging political realities in being a superintendent. They indicated that they see managing these “politics” as essential to surviving as a superintendent. Attending to politics is closely intertwined with the action of building the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities as a superintendent. Fellows are very interested in developing their skills and competencies related to navigating politics, including interfacing with school committees, unions, and the larger community.

##### Managing fragility

In the interviews, fellows made it evident that they want to develop their ability to manage the tension between striving to develop professionally around communication and delivery and acknowledging that others also have to change. They recognize the core nature of strategic communication skills as a leadership skill to bring people together to confront inequities. At the same time, they expressed weariness at the amount of work it takes to be heard and taken seriously in systems structured to benefit those already in power. As one fellow discussed, “I have a difficult time calibrating what piece of this I need to really work on […] and what pieces do other people have to own about what they're bringing to the table.” Reflecting on a desire to be strategic in advocating for equity, the fellow posed the question, “What piece of this just simply needs to be said, and people need to be ready to hear it, because we've already waited hundreds and hundreds of years?” A common sentiment among fellows is, “I'm not trying to hurt anyone's feelings, but I am trying to make sure that what we need to do for kids is kind of getting out there.” Purposefully building the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities presupposes learning how to manage “fragility” among colleagues and community members.

#### Managing tensions between stated priorities and actual willingness to change

Along with their awareness of allies and resisters, fellows see the tension between stated district priorities and the actual willingness of a community to change systems and shift privilege. Purposefully building the capacity of others around equity includes helping them to confront their internal contradictions. Fellows indicated that they recognize they need skills to manage tension and help others manage tension between understanding history and systems and taking individual responsibility to disrupt those systems. As one fellow said, “Yes, it is history. It's not necessarily your fault. But what is your role in impacting the thing that's historical, but that you benefit from?” This dynamic can be especially difficult to navigate and requires specific skill given power structures that fellows face in their current roles and will still face as superintendents working with school committees, communities, and deeply established norms.

Fellows feel challenged to deliver their message skillfully and strategically, even to those who are generally on board. They described interactions with educators who are committed to helping students where careful redirection was still needed to reinforce attention to equity. Over-scaffolding was one example of culturally responsive intentions that ended up reinforcing low expectations. In another example, educators who were excited about a new “tool” or initiative related to culturally responsive instruction needed to hear the difficult message that what is really needed is the “hard work of going into the classrooms of those folks that we know are of concern in using our existing tools.” Fellows also shared experiences where there was tension between supporting teachers and supporting students. Advocating for students around equity can mean bumping up against other leaders or administrators who are advocating for their staff. Fellows are aware of these delicate complexities and seek to build their skills to strike the necessary balance in order to increase the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities within these contexts.

## Focus skill: Confronts and alters institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with minoritized populations.

Fellows provided many examples of confronting institutional bias in their current roles. How far that confrontation extends into “altering” varies, in part based on the role the fellow is in. Fellows recognize room for growth in developing their existing equity work to a district leadership level, where they can confront and alter institutional practices on a district scale.

### Existing strengths

The examples fellows shared indicate a strong commitment to not just seeing inequities, but also taking action to address them. Fellows work hard to make a difference, because they are closely in touch with how damaging institutional biases are.

Fellows provided strong evidence of the following actions:

* *Confront behavior that openly or covertly promotes or sustains inequity, colorblindness, and deficit-thinking*
* *Identify and name practices and interactions, including micro-aggressions, that are based on race or culturally biased assumptions*
* *Investigate existing policies and practices to ensure they prioritize student needs and are designed to produce equitable outcomes*
* *Regularly engage in conversations with stakeholders about racial equity and access, even in the face of risk and pushback*

Fellows provided moderate evidence of the following actions:

* *Regularly examine disaggregated data with the system leadership team and school building leaders for evidence of inequity*
* *Establish high expectations (performance and behavioral) for adults and students in our school(s), regardless of identity or background*

Examples of evidence provided by fellows relevant to this focus skill included:

* Interrupting or working to shift deficit thinking, including by providing direct feedback when a teacher’s over-scaffolding in a classroom reflected low expectations for students
* Providing feedback and suggestions for interventions with students and communication with families following racist incidents in schools
* Having “high demand, high support” as a mantra
* Being willing to “lose friends” and have tense relationships with colleagues after advocating for equity
* Being okay with making hard decisions
* Examining data, referring to data, and helping colleagues to interpret data in an equitable way, including to dispel ideas that groups of students—as opposed to teachers and schools—are responsible for low test scores

The following quotations depict, in fellows’ own words, scenarios in which they took action related to confronting and altering institutional biases.

*“One of the things that we're promoting this year is asset-based language. […] We did a great analysis really of, ‘Okay, here's an example of deficit versus asset-based language. And let's be mindful. Let's be conscious of what we're communicating to kids verbally and even nonverbally.’ And so really getting teachers to […] be able to point to themselves and recognize, ‘Wow! Why, I didn't realize when I said that that that's really deficit based.’”*

*“I guess courage and ability to make the decision, even if it's not going to be popular. A lot of educators, they are afraid to make the decision because they're going to be blamed for it. In my case, I don't shy away from making decisions.”*

*“I'm pretty secure within myself, so I don't feel the need that I have to be liked or have friendships in a professional arena. It's great if I do, but if I don't, I'm totally fine with that. […] I'm not going to kind of spare your feelings at the expense of children.”*

*“Something people might say is, ‘The bilinguals are tanking our scores.’ […] I would take that opportunity to reframe and say, ‘Could it be that the data is showing us that teachers lack the skill set in teaching students who are non-American at birth?’”*

*“It was very clear early on that our BIPOC students, specifically our black boys, were being targeted by staff, specifically for behavior. […] And while addressing the work that had to be done with staff, there's also a lot of work to be done with families, with all families. Because there were a group of white families who were using their privilege in a toxic way to create narratives about their white students’ black and brown classmates and trying to make decisions about their educational future that really were none of their business. And so holding that line was really important.”*

### Growth Areas

Fellows expressed eagerness to learn what it means to advance their work confronting and altering institutional bias to a district level, and that is part of why many are participating in Influence 100. As they develop these skills, fellows are interested in opportunities for practical application and practical experience: they want to learn things that are “immediately […] actionable” (as opposed to theoretical).

“[I am interested in] learning more about the superintendency and specifically how, in that leadership role within education, can you enact change through a racial equity lens. I have ideas about what that looks like at a school level, and I'm interested in learning more what that looks like at a district level.”

The growth areas that our analysis identified for confronting and altering institutional bias fall into the categories of communication and language and strategic assertiveness, including advocating for resources and responding to personal and systemic bias.

#### Communication and language

Communication and language featured heavily in fellows’ discussions of confronting and altering institutional biases. The skill of delivering a message effectively overlaps with the other focus skill areas and relates directly to how fellows want to grow and prepare themselves to confront and alter institutional biases. In their current work, fellows experience that their attempts to “confront and alter” are stymied when communication breaks down.

In their current roles, confronting and altering institutional bias often entails fellows providing feedback on practices and policies they observe. This can mean bringing attention to something that is widely accepted as appropriate operating procedure but is in fact resulting in inequitable opportunities or outcomes, or detailing the specific aspects of an instructional practice that need to be amended. Fellows find that *what* they say and *how* and *when* they say it is crucial, and they would like to expand their skills to communicate messages in ways they can be heard, while not letting up on their point—skills to get a message across that will actually improve equity and help students. One fellow referred to the “right” approach, and elaborated:

“I sometimes struggle with communicating the need for culturally responsive approaches and teaching with some of my white colleagues and getting them to understand why this is important. […] Having those sensitive conversations sometimes could be daunting, depending on who I'm talking to. […] And so I would like to learn more strategies for how to initiate those conversations and ensure that I'm using it as professional development opportunities for staff to grow.”

Another fellow explained, “If I don't get across my message accurately and appropriately, then it's not going to land in the way in which I would want it to land. And more importantly, it's not going to lead towards hopefully people considering what I'm putting out there.” Fellows acknowledged that this is primarily an issue when communicating with white colleagues. The fellow continued, “there's just such a line that you're always kind of—I don't have to be on that line when I'm in a group of people of color, because it's just like there's more of a level of understanding.”

##### Advocating for multi-lingual learners

Several of the fellows in Cohort 5 have multilingual backgrounds. In the interviews, this was referenced in relation to fellows’ sensitivity to the experiences of multilingual learners and families. At least one fellow referenced it in relation to communication skills, having experienced that not being a native English speaker was a source of exclusion in professional situations, and could interfere with their effectiveness confronting and altering institutional biases and advocating for equity. Fellows want to develop their communication skills to improve the likelihood of being listened to and taken seriously, and to prevent situations where others take advantage of their language vulnerability, which can occur around the conflict and pressure that often accompany discussions of equity. As one fellow described, “I know that when I'm on the other side of conflict resolution, or negotiation, people will use it, especially if they know that I am a multilingual person. People use that weakness as a way to distract where I'm going.” This fellow went on to say, “I’d like to learn more how native English speakers really think quick-wittedly when it comes to times of pressure.” In line with this sensitivity, this fellow identified a growth area that involves building skills to address the privileging of native English speaking in education, and ensuring that multilingual learners have access to academic disciplines with lower language demands.

#### Confronting bias without upsetting your bosses

Fellows readily identify where they need to intervene to prevent students from being “harmed,” but depending on their role, assuming the authority for that intervention can be challenging. A distinction between building principals and district administrators was evident again here. One fellow articulated a sentiment that was common across several interviews when they said, “I think probably an area of growth for me is inserting myself in spaces where I've been given the message either explicitly or implicitly, that no, that’s someone else's arena.” This can be especially difficult when fellows are experiencing the relentless demands of equity work, and having their authority continuously questioned or undermined. “There are times that I feel exhausted by the work. And I just say, ‘Well, oh, foolish people, if you don't want my help…then let the chips fall where they may,’” this fellow described.

##### Advocating for resources

When thinking about confronting and altering institutional bias, fellows noted their desire to advocate for the resources (e.g., funding, personnel) and/or structures that would support actual change. Tied up in this desire is fellows’ concern that equity positions and initiatives may not reflect a genuine commitment on the part of district leadership. For example, some fellows in equity-focused positions noted their experience performing the job of a whole team on their own. One fellow said, “It is impossible, but for some reason I make it work.” Another asked, “Why is it not a team of people […] who can really extend the reach and make further impact?” Fellows know they need skills to call out when the allocation of resources belies the claim of a commitment to improving equity.

##### Navigating racism and bias

To confront and alter institutional biases, fellows sometimes find themselves needing to address outright racism and bias directed at them. Some fellows identified that a growth area is the skill of not letting things go unaddressed when addressing them feels like going down to the same level. “I never want to go that low with anyone,” one fellow said. Less blatant but more pervasive is the issue of systemic racism and privilege discussed under the second focus skill (building the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities). Confronting and altering institutional biases as educators of color who are not yet superintendents involves, to paraphrase one of the fellows, being able to work on behalf of students within a system that isn’t set up for someone like you – but from which your bosses benefit. As future superintendents who currently occupy positions with less authority, fellows identify room for growth and skill-building related to managing this tension. They want to “[do] right by students and families” by confronting inequities, while “trying not to upset your bosses, [who] are a product of this system that they benefit from.” On a basic level, fellows are concerned with developing skills to disrupt and challenge institutional bias—to “confront and alter”—without putting their jobs on the line. On a higher level, fellows recognize the paradox of being committed to confronting and altering a system that many around them are directly or indirectly invested in keeping just as it is.

## Influence 100 Fall Interview Brief – Appendix A: Fall Interview Protocol

Influence 100 Interviews with Cohort 5 Fellows – Fall 2023

**Introduction**

Thank you for joining me today for this interview about Influence 100.

As a reminder, I work for the UMass Donahue Institute (aka UMDI). UMDI is an independent, third-party organization that DESE contracted to conduct an evaluation of the Influence 100 program.

This is the first of two interviews for the Influence 100 evaluation this year. The second will be in the spring. The purpose of these two interviews is to help DESE better understand fellows’ experiences and growth, particularly through hearing from you about program strategies that are more effective or less effective in supporting your growth and learning. This information will help DESE facilitate and improve the program.

For this first interview, my team’s goal is to gather a sense for where Cohort 5 fellows are as you enter the program, so that we can share this with DESE. This includes: what you expect, where your existing strengths are, and what you hope to learn.

We will not be reporting to DESE on you as an individual, but instead will be reporting what we learn across all the fellows we interview. We will report the information from these interviews confidentially in a brief we’ll submit to DESE in late December.

We will give all interviewees an opportunity to review a draft of the findings before we send them to DESE, to confirm that we’ve protected your confidentiality and reflected your thoughts. We will send you a draft in early December and give you about a week to review and respond. We understand that you are very busy, and reviewing what we send will be optional, but appreciated.

In the spring, a member of the evaluation team will reach out to schedule a second interview. In that interview, we will ask you to reflect on the program so far and where and how you think you learned the most.

Other notes:

* Today’s interview will be no longer than 1 hour and we will finish by XX.
* In the interest of staying within our allotted time, I may occasionally need to ask you to wrap up your thoughts on one question so I can move us to the next question.
* Some of the questions are complex. If you have the questions document available, it might be helpful for you to have it pulled up so you can see the questions while we talk. I can also attach a copy in the chat. And I can repeat questions any time.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we get started?

**Recording**

* We would like to record this interview for note-taking purposes only. We will not share the recording outside the UMDI Influence 100 evaluation team and we will destroy the recording after we have finished our notes.
* Ask permission to record, turn on recorder.

Interview Questions

**General Thoughts About the Program**

I’d like to start with some questions to get your thoughts about the program as you are starting out.

1. Please tell me a little bit about why you are participating in Influence 100.
2. What would you say are the top 2 or 3 things you hope to learn or gain from your participation in Influence 100?
3. How do you describe your learning style? What types of activities fit your learning style the best?
4. Do you have any concerns, or anticipate any barriers as you start off in the program?

**Culturally Responsive Leadership Skills**

Now, I’m going to shift gears a bit. As you know, a key goal of the Influence 100 program is to develop educational leaders with culturally responsive leadership skills. The Leadership Academy defines *A Culturally Responsive Leader* as a leader who recognizes the impact of institutionalized racism on their own lives and the lives of the students and families they work with and embraces their role in mitigating, disrupting, and dismantling systemic oppression. We understand that everyone is starting this program from a somewhat different place, and so I would like to ask you some questions about your experiences and skills related to culturally responsive leadership. I’ll start with some general questions and then I’ll ask about a few areas that DESE and TLA will emphasize this year.

First, the general questions:

1. In terms of culturally responsive leadership skills, what would you say are your existing strengths?
2. Could you share an example of an experience you had that would illustrate your strengths?
3. On the flip side, what would you say are your key areas for learning and growth in terms of culturally responsive leadership skills?
4. Could you share an example of an experience you had that you’d like to handle differently, with additional skills?

**DESE and TLA Focus Areas**

Thank you. Now, I’d like to ask more specifically about the three key dispositions or skill areas (from among the six Equity Leadership Dispositions) that DESE and TLA will emphasize this program year. They are:

* Act with cultural competence and responsiveness in interactions, decision-making, and practice.
* Build the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities in the school.
* Confront and alter institutional bias of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with minoritized populations.

These are Dispositions 3, 4, and 5 in the Equity Leadership Dispositions document. I know you might have touched on these areas in your earlier answers, but I will ask these questions anyway, in case you have other reflections. We’re interested in what has gone well for you and where you have struggled in these areas.

This next section includes more complex questions and so it might be helpful for you to be following along in your own copy of the questions.

Thinking about the first focus area, “Act with cultural competence and responsiveness in interactions, decision-making, and practice”:

1. Could you share an example of an occasion when, as an educational leader, you took action to elevate or include voices and perspectives that had been marginalized or absent from conversations or decision making? Some of the kinds of actions for this focus area include:
   1. Making note of voices that were absent from conversations and/or decision-making,
   2. Inviting voices that had been absent to share their perspectives,
   3. Incorporating diverse perspectives to inform your decision-making, or
   4. Evaluating the intended and unintended consequences of decisions on all affected groups.

* Could you share an example from your experience?

The second focus area is, “Build the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities in the school.”

To clarify this focus area, I’ll share a few of the kinds of actions listed in the materials you received. Then, I’ll ask you to share about your own experience.

1. Creating conditions and common language for regular courageous conversations around equity.
2. Providing space, tools, and support for staff to reflect on their own beliefs, biases, assumptions, and behaviors.
3. Providing structure and consistent professional learning opportunities to develop and deepen culturally responsive teaching practice.
4. Building the courage and capacity of leaders to willingly confront issues of equity.
5. This focus area is about building the capacity of others to do equity work. Can you share an example that illustrates where you are in terms of the skills required to do this (to build the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities)?

The third focus area is, “Confront and alter institutional bias of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with minoritized populations.”

1. There are likely many examples of occasions where, as an educational leader, you have encountered these kinds of institutional bias. Is there one occasion you could share that gave you insight into your skills for confronting or altering institutional bias?

On that occasion:

* 1. How did you respond?
  2. What was the outcome?
  3. Did you have the skills you needed to confront the practices or interactions effectively?
  4. What additional skills might have enabled you to confront the practices or interactions more effectively?

**Wrap Up**

1. Is there anything else you want to share about your experience as you’re entering the Influence 100 program?

Thank you for your time today. Someone from the evaluation team (me or my colleague) will be observing in the Cohort 5 monthly sessions, so you’ll see one of us regularly. At some point in the early spring, we’ll let you know that we’re starting to schedule spring interviews and you’ll be getting a request for your availability for a second interview.

## Influence 100 Fall Interview Brief – Appendix B: Focus Skills and Associated Actions

Table 1 lists the three skills identified by DESE and TLA as the focus for Cohort 5, and the actions associated with these skills compiled from (1) *Culturally Responsive Leadership, A Framework for School & School System Leaders* (<https://www.leadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Culturally-Responsive-Leadership-Actions-2020.pdf>) and (2) *Equity Leadership Dispositions* (<https://www.leadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Rebrand-Version-Equity-Leadership-Dispositions.pdf>).

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| **Table 1: Focus Skills and Associated Actions** |
| ***Focus Skill: Acts with cultural competence and responsiveness in interactions, decision-making, and practice.*** |
| **Actions**   * + Partner with families, staff, and communities to ensure fair treatment and equitable access to all academic, social and emotional opportunities   + Actively seek and make use of diverse perspectives in decision-making   + Pay close attention to voices that are absent from conversations and actively seek them to gain their perspective   + Evaluate the intended and unintended consequences of decisions on all stakeholder groups   + Encourage risk-taking and create spaces to engage in open dialogue about race and address hard-to-discuss topics   + Facilitate system-level meetings that include open discussions about the impact of racial and cultural differences on adult perceptions of student ability   + Prioritize and support culturally responsive practice as a foundational element of professional practice   + Leverage relationships with system leaders to increase the prominence and legitimacy of an equitable school for all minoritized populations as a primary goal of the school   + Actively seek to learn about the identities and communities of students in our school(s).   + When decisions are being made, push the decision maker to question which groups are benefitting or being left out, and why. |
| ***Focus Skill: Purposefully builds the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities in the school.*** |
| **Actions**   * + Initiate and promote productive dialogue and collective work on issues of inequity for all minoritized populations   + Create the conditions and common language for regular courageous conversations around equity   + Build the capacity of system and school building leaders to learn and practice language and behaviors that are responsive to differences across lines of race, ethnicity, language, class, religion, ability, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and other aspects of identity   + Build the courage and capacity of system leaders to willingly confront issues of equity and access that impede student learning   + Provide the space, tools, and support for system and school building leaders to reflect on their own personal beliefs, biases, assumptions, and behavior, especially those associated with who have been historically minoritized   + Provide structured and consistent professional learning opportunities to develop and deepen culturally responsive building and system leadership |

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| **Table 1: Focus Skills and Associated Actions** |
| ***Focus Skill: Confronts and alters institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with minoritized populations.*** |
| **Actions**   * + Confront behavior that openly or covertly promotes or sustains inequity, colorblindness, and deficit-thinking   + Identify and name practices and interactions, including micro-aggressions, that are based on race or culturally biased assumptions   + Ensure that system and school building leaders’ communication, collaboration, and decision making reflect the system’s mission, vision, and values grounded in equity and access for all students   + Ensure that system and school building leaders have the resources and tools to consistently use disaggregated data to identify inequities in student opportunities and outcomes   + Regularly examine disaggregated data with the system leadership team and school building leaders for evidence of inequity   + Investigate existing policies and practices to ensure they prioritize student needs and are designed to produce equitable outcomes   + Purposefully build the capacity of others to examine their own assumptions, beliefs, and personal biases.   + Establish high expectations (performance and behavioral) for adults and students in our school(s), regardless of identity or background.   + Regularly engage in conversations with stakeholders about racial equity and access, even in the face of risk and pushback. |

Appendix C: Spring 2024 Interview Protocol

Influence 100 1st Year Fellows (Cohort 5) – Spring 2024 Interview Protocol (Final 2/23/24)

**Introduction (5 minutes)**

Thank you for joining me today for this second interview about Influence 100.

This is our final interview for the Influence 100 evaluation this year. As a reminder, the purpose of these interviews is to help DESE better understand fellows’ experiences and growth, particularly through hearing from you about program strategies that are more effective or less effective in supporting your growth and learning. This information will help DESE facilitate and improve the program.

Again, we will not be reporting to DESE on you as an individual, but instead will be reporting what we learn across all the fellows we interview. We will report the information from these interviews confidentially in a final report we’ll submit to DESE in June. That report will also include data from focus groups with fellows who have not been part of the interviews. DESE will decide how the report is disseminated.

In our first round of interviews, we gave all interviewees an opportunity to review a draft of the findings before we sent them to DESE, to confirm that we had protected your confidentiality and reflected your thoughts. This time, because the findings will be integrated into a report covering a larger amount of data and therefore will be in summary form, we are confident that confidentiality will be protected. However, if you would like a chance to review our draft before it goes to DESE, please let us know by email. You have my email from our correspondence about this meeting.

* Today’s interview will be no longer than 1 hour and we will finish by XX.
* In the interest of staying within our allotted time, I may occasionally need to ask you to wrap up your thoughts on one question so I can move us to the next question.
* Your participation in this interview is voluntary. If at any point you want to end the interview, you can just let me know. You can also let me know if you’d like to skip any of the questions.
* Please take a moment to open the Focus Skills Table (emailed in advance and available now in the chat). Some of the questions will ask you to refer to the list of actions associated with the focus skills.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we get started?

**Recording**

* We would like to record this interview for note-taking purposes only. We will not share the recording outside the UMDI Influence 100 evaluation team and we will destroy the recording after we have finished our notes.
* Ask permission to record, turn on recorder.

Interview Questions

**Opening (7 minutes)**

As we get started, let me outline the structure for this interview: I’ll start by asking for your general reflections on the program, then we’ll dive into talking about the three focus skills and where and how you feel you did or didn’t experience growth this year. Finally, I’ll give you a chance to share any thoughts on program aspects that felt less effective and to provide feedback for program improvement.

As a member of Cohort 5, you have completed most of your first-year sessions as a fellow in the Influence 100 program. With that in mind, let’s start with a general assessment of your experience in the program.

1. On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being “failed to meet any expectations” and 10 being “exceeded all expectations,” how would you rate the extent to which the program has met your expectations?
2. Could you please share an example that illustrates how the program met or did not meet your expectations thus far?
3. On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being “I often skipped the pre-work and multitasked during session activities” and 10 being “I took the pre-work and independent work seriously, gave my undivided attention and sincere effort to the session activities, and reflected on my experience between sessions,” how would you rate your level of engagement with the Influence 100 program, including session pre-work, independent work, and session activities? (this is a judgement-free zone)
4. Could you share one factor that helped you stay engaged in the program this year, and/or one factor that presented a key challenge to your engagement?

**Focus Skills (33 minutes)**

The main focus of today’s interview is to hear from you about your growth in the three focus skill areas that have been emphasized in Influence 100 this year. For each of these skills, we’re interested in knowing (a) if you feel like you’ve experienced growth this year and (b) if so, what aspects of the Influence 100 program were most helpful in facilitating that growth? We understand that there is overlap between these skills, but we’re going to ask about them one at a time for analytical purposes.

**The next few questions address the first focus skill, *Acts with cultural competence and responsiveness in interactions, decision-making, and practice.*** Please take time to review the list of actions associated with this skill (in the table provided) while considering your answers. [10 minutes]

1. Thinking back to where you were in terms of this skill when you started Influence 100 last fall, how would you rate your level of growth in this skill area? Please use a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is minimal growth and 10 is extensive growth.
   * If rating of 1 or 2, replace next two questions with “Tell me about how you chose that rating.”
2. Please share an example that illustrates how you have grown in this skill areaas you’ve thought and learned about being a Superintendent in the program this year.

Probe: What have you learned that would shape the way you approach this now versus before participating in Influence 100?

1. How did the program activities and/or program structure facilitate your growth in this skill area? Please share a specific activity or aspect of the program structure that stands out to you as facilitating or supporting your growth in this skill area.

**The next questions address the second focus skill, *Purposefully builds the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities in the school.***Please take time to review the list of actions associated with this skill (in the table provided) while considering your answers. [10 minutes]

1. Thinking back to where you were in terms of this skill when you started Influence 100 last fall, how would you rate your level of growth in this skill area? Please use a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is minimal growth and 10 is extensive growth.
   * If rating of 1 or 2, replace next two questions with “Tell me about how you chose that rating.”
2. Please share an example that illustrates how you have grown in this skill area as you’ve thought and learned about being a Superintendent in the program this year*.*

Probe: What have you learned that would shape the way you approach this now versus before participating in Influence 100?

1. How did the program activities and/or program structure facilitate your growth in this skill area? Please share a specific activity or aspect of the program structure that stands out to you as facilitating or supporting your growth in this skill area.

**The next questions address the third focus skill, *Confronts and alters institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with minoritized populations.***Please take time to review the list of actions associated with this skill (in the table provided) while considering your answers. [10 minutes]

1. Thinking back to where you were in terms of this skill when you started Influence 100 last fall, how would you rate your level of growth in this skill area? Please use a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is minimal growth and 10 is extensive growth.
   * If rating of 1 or 2, replace next two questions with “Tell me about how you chose that rating.”
2. Please share an example that illustrates how you have grown in this skill area as you’ve thought and learned about being a Superintendentin the program this year*.*

Probe: What have you learned that would shape the way you approach this now versus before participating in Influence 100?

1. How did the program activities and/or program structure facilitate your growth in this skill area? Please share a specific activity or aspect of the program structure that stands out to you as facilitating or supporting your growth in this skill area.

**Now I want to give you an opportunity to share what was less effective or not effective** at all for you in terms of developing the focus skills. [3 minutes]

1. What aspects of the Influence 100 program activities and/or program structure (if any) felt superfluous, ineffective, or just did not support your growth in the three focus skills?

**Other Reflections (10 minutes)**

1. Thinking beyond the Influence 100 program activities and program structure for a moment: Are there any other experiences or factors that particularly shaped your growth or interfered with your growth in the three focus skills?
2. Looking ahead to next year, what do you feel will be important for the program to provide in terms of your skill-building in preparation for a superintendent position?
3. What suggestions do you have for program improvements, either for your second year (next year) or for the first year for future cohorts?
4. [If time] Is there any significant new understanding you have of the superintendent role that you have not yet shared that resulted from your participation in Influence 100?

**Closing (5 minutes from end)**

1. Have we missed anything in our conversation that you would like to add about the Influence 100 program or its impacts?

Probe: Are there any other stories or examples you can share that illustrate the impact of the program either on your growth as an equity leader or on your understanding of the superintendent role?

The following table lists the three skills identified by DESE and TLA as the focus for Cohort 5, and the actions associated with these skills compiled from (1) *Culturally Responsive Leadership, A Framework for School & School System Leaders* (<https://www.leadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Culturally-Responsive-Leadership-Actions-2020.pdf>) and (2) *Equity Leadership Dispositions* (<https://www.leadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Rebrand-Version-Equity-Leadership-Dispositions.pdf>).

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| ***Focus Skill: Acts with cultural competence and responsiveness in interactions, decision-making, and practice.*** |
| **Actions**   * + Partner with families, staff, and communities to ensure fair treatment and equitable access to all academic, social and emotional opportunities   + Actively seek and make use of diverse perspectives in decision-making   + Pay close attention to voices that are absent from conversations and actively seek them to gain their perspective   + Evaluate the intended and unintended consequences of decisions on all stakeholder groups   + Encourage risk-taking and create spaces to engage in open dialogue about race and address hard-to-discuss topics   + Facilitate system-level meetings that include open discussions about the impact of racial and cultural differences on adult perceptions of student ability   + Prioritize and support culturally responsive practice as a foundational element of professional practice   + Leverage relationships with system leaders to increase the prominence and legitimacy of an equitable school for all minoritized populations as a primary goal of the school   + Actively seek to learn about the identities and communities of students in our school(s).   + When decisions are being made, push the decision maker to question which groups are benefitting or being left out, and why. |

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| ***Focus Skill: Purposefully builds the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities in the school.*** |
| **Actions**   * + Initiate and promote productive dialogue and collective work on issues of inequity for all minoritized populations   + Create the conditions and common language for regular courageous conversations around equity   + Build the capacity of system and school building leaders to learn and practice language and behaviors that are responsive to differences across lines of race, ethnicity, language, class, religion, ability, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and other aspects of identity   + Build the courage and capacity of system leaders to willingly confront issues of equity and access that impede student learning   + Provide the space, tools, and support for system and school building leaders to reflect on their own personal beliefs, biases, assumptions, and behavior, especially those associated with who have been historically minoritized   + Provide structured and consistent professional learning opportunities to develop and deepen culturally responsive building and system leadership |
| ***Focus Skill: Confronts and alters institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with minoritized populations.*** |
| **Actions**   * + Confront behavior that openly or covertly promotes or sustains inequity, colorblindness, and deficit-thinking   + Identify and name practices and interactions, including micro-aggressions, that are based on race or culturally biased assumptions   + Ensure that system and school building leaders’ communication, collaboration, and decision making reflect the system’s mission, vision, and values grounded in equity and access for all students   + Ensure that system and school building leaders have the resources and tools to consistently use disaggregated data to identify inequities in student opportunities and outcomes   + Regularly examine disaggregated data with the system leadership team and school building leaders for evidence of inequity   + Investigate existing policies and practices to ensure they prioritize student needs and are designed to produce equitable outcomes   + Purposefully build the capacity of others to examine their own assumptions, beliefs, and personal biases.   + Establish high expectations (performance and behavioral) for adults and students in our school(s), regardless of identity or background.   + Regularly engage in conversations with stakeholders about racial equity and access, even in the face of risk and pushback. |

Appendix D: Spring 2024 Focus Group Protocol

**Influence 100 – 1st Year Fellows (Cohort 5) Focus Group Protocol**

(Final 2/23/2024)

**Opening [7 minutes]:**

Thank you for taking this time to speak with us about your experience with Influence 100 from your perspective as first-year fellows in the program. Your feedback in this focus group and other aspects of the evaluation will help improve the Influence 100 fellowship and help those outside the program understand its impacts.

Before we get started, I’m going to share a few introductory notes to provide context for this conversation.

**First, let us introduce ourselves:**

My name is Jackie Stein, and this is my colleague Jordan Abbott (whom you’ve met in your cohort sessions). We work with the UMass Donahue Institute (UMDI), an independent, third-party organization that was contracted by DESE to conduct an evaluation of the Influence 100 program. This focus group is part of an ongoing evaluation of Influence 100 that started in the second year of the program.

**Next, some information about the purpose of this focus group, our confidentiality practices, and logistics.**

**Purpose:** The DESE team is interested in your perspectives as fellows because they want to deepen their understanding of fellows’ experiences in the program, specifically as they relate to the skills DESE is focusing on. We want to note that the session surveys administered by TLA are separate from the UMDI evaluation, and you should not hesitate to repeat information you provided in those surveys here; in fact, we encourage you to do so if it fits in with the discussion.

**Confidentiality:** We want this to be a space where you can share honest feedback. Our team willkeep your identities confidential, and we ask that you each also keep any information shared here, as well as who is in this focus group, confidential.

UMDI has a strong history of working with and protecting confidential information. Findings and quotes from the focus groups will be de-identified and integrated into a year-end report on the program that we will provide to DESE. DESE will decide how the report is disseminated.

With your permission, we will record this session, for note-taking purposes only. Only the UMDI team will have access to the recording.

If you would like an opportunity to review our findings *before* we share them with DESE to confirm that your identity has remained confidential, please send an email to me or Jordan after we’re done today. We will remind you of this option in a follow-up email.

**Some logistics:**

* This focus group will last no more than one hour and will end by XXX.
* We have many topics we would like to cover and so we are going to keep things moving! To be sure we can hear from everyone, please help us by keeping your responses succinct. One of us will stay on for 15 minutes after the focus group ends if you have additional comments.
* This is meant to be a discussion and we encourage you to respond to the ideas you hear from each other. We are interested in different points of view. Feel free to respectfully agree or disagree with what other people say.
* Please feel free to use the chat, being as specific as possible if you are referencing a comment in the discussion. We will save the chat as part of our collected data.
* Please leave your video on, if possible—and share non-verbal feedback such as nodding etc. so we know if you agree with something that was said. Having visual cues is important and helpful to us.
* Your participation is voluntary. You can leave at any time, and you can skip any question.

**Okay, I’m about to start the recording and dive into the questions:** Before I start the recording, do you have any questions for us?

***May I have your permission to record this conversation?*** Ok, I am turning on the recording, and we will begin the focus group. [Turn on recording]: I am here with Influence 100 fellows from Cohort 5 for a Zoom focus group. Today is XXX. Now that the recording is running, do I have your permission to record? Please nod, give a thumbs up, or provide some other confirmation. Thank you.

**Focus Group Questions – Cohort 5 (First Year)**

Let me start by giving you a sense of how we plan to structure this time with you:

First, we’ll ask a general question about your program experience using an anonymous poll, and we’ll ask for examples. After that, we will spend the bulk of the time talking about the three focus skills. We’ll save time at the end to ask for your suggestions for program improvement and anything key that we’ve missed. Just a reminder: Please add your voice if you tend to be quiet and please make space for others if you tend to talk.

**Program experience (8 minutes)**

As fellows in Cohort 5, you have completed most of the first-year sessions for the Influence 100 program (four in-person sessions, three online sessions, and three quarterly district meetings to-date). We’d like to start with a general assessment of your experience in the program. First, we’ll use an anonymous poll and then we’ll ask you to share examples that come to mind.

1. POLL: On a scale from 1 to 10—with 1 being “did not meet any of my expectations” and 10 being “exceeded all of my expectations”—how would you rate the extent to which the program has met your expectations? (As you’re completing this, be thinking about examples, because we’ll ask you for that next)

[Share poll results.]

1. Now, could you please share an example that illustrates how the program thus far has been consistent with or different from your expectations? Who would like to start?

[Encourage but do not require everyone to provide an example. “Would anyone else be willing to share an example?”]

**Focus skills (30 minutes)**

Next, we’d like to talk about how your participation in Influence 100 has impacted your culturally responsive leadership skills so far; specifically, the three skills that have been this year’s focus. We will prompt you to review the list of actions associated with each skill (in the table provided) while considering your answers.

As a reminder, the three skills are:

* *Acts with cultural competence and responsiveness in interactions, decision-making, and practice*
* *Purposefully builds the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities in the school*
* *Confronts and alters institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with minoritized populations*

For **each** of these skills, we’re interested in knowing (a) if you feel like you experienced growth this year and (b) if so, what aspects of the Influence 100 program were most helpful in facilitating that growth? We understand that there is overlap between these skills, but we’re going to ask about them one at a time for analytical purposes. We want to focus initially on what was effective, and later we’ll make space for you to share feedback about what felt ineffective or superfluous.

First skill (9 minutes)

**Let’s start with the first skill, *Acts with cultural competence and responsiveness in interactions, decision-making, and practice*.** Please take a moment to review the actions associated with this skill in the table provided.

1. Think about your skills related to these types of actions before joining Influence 100 and now. Do you feel that you’ve grown in this skill area? If so, how did Influence 100 facilitate that growth?

🡪Probes: Was there a specific activity or aspect of the program structure that stands out to you as facilitating or supporting your growth in this skill area? What was valuable about that activity?

1. Still thinking about this skill area, would anyone like to share an example of a situation that you handled differently than you would have before participating in Influence 100?

Second skill (9 minutes)

**Now, let’s talk about the second skill, *Purposefully builds the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities in the school*.** Please take a moment to review the actions associated with this skill in the table provided.

1. Think about your skills related to these types of actions before joining Influence 100 and now. Do you feel that you’ve grown in this skill area? If so, how did Influence 100 facilitate that growth?

🡪Probes: Was there a specific activity or aspect of the program structure that stands out to you as facilitating or supporting your growth in this skill area? What was valuable about that activity?

1. Still thinking about this skill area, would anyone like to share an example of a situation that you handled differently than you would have before participating in Influence 100?

Third skill (9 minutes)

**Next, let’s talk about the third skill, *Confronts and alters institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with minoritized populations*.** Please take a moment to review the actions associated with this skill in the table provided.

1. Think about your skills related to these types of actions before joining Influence 100 and now. Do you feel that you’ve grown in this skill area? If so, how did Influence 100 facilitate that growth?

🡪Probes: Was there a specific activity or aspect of the program structure that stands out to you as facilitating or supporting your growth in this skill area? What was valuable about that activity?

1. Still thinking about this skill area, would anyone like to share an example of a situation that you handled differently than you would have before participating in Influence 100?

**Suggestions (10 minutes)**

1. When you think about learning the three focus skills and preparing to become a superintendent, what aspects of the Influence 100 program activities and/or program structure (if any) felt superfluous, ineffective, or just did not support your growth?
2. Do you have any suggestions for how Influence 100 can better prepare fellows to be successful superintendents?

🡪Probe: For example, were there any factors external to the program that supported your growth that Influence 100 might be able to incorporate?

1. [if time] Could you share one factor that helped you stay engaged in the program this year OR presented a key challenge to your engagement? Anyone can jump in.

🡪Probes: What was hard? What is working for you?

1. Think about the impact of Influence 100 on your growth as an equity leader or on your understanding of the superintendent role. Are there any other stories or examples we haven’t discussed today that illustrate that impact?

**Wrap up (5 minutes from end)**

1. Have we missed anything in our conversation that you would like to add about the Influence 100 program or its impacts?

Thanks so much for your time. We’re officially ending the focus group and you are free to go. We will stay on for a few minutes if anyone has any final thoughts they want to share.

The following table lists the three skills identified by DESE and TLA as the focus for Cohort 5, and the actions associated with these skills compiled from (1) *Culturally Responsive Leadership, A Framework for School & School System Leaders* (<https://www.leadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Culturally-Responsive-Leadership-Actions-2020.pdf>) and (2) *Equity Leadership Dispositions* (<https://www.leadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Rebrand-Version-Equity-Leadership-Dispositions.pdf>).

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| ***Focus Skill: Acts with cultural competence and responsiveness in interactions, decision-making, and practice.*** |
| **Actions**   * + Partner with families, staff, and communities to ensure fair treatment and equitable access to all academic, social and emotional opportunities   + Actively seek and make use of diverse perspectives in decision-making   + Pay close attention to voices that are absent from conversations and actively seek them to gain their perspective   + Evaluate the intended and unintended consequences of decisions on all stakeholder groups   + Encourage risk-taking and create spaces to engage in open dialogue about race and address hard-to-discuss topics   + Facilitate system-level meetings that include open discussions about the impact of racial and cultural differences on adult perceptions of student ability   + Prioritize and support culturally responsive practice as a foundational element of professional practice   + Leverage relationships with system leaders to increase the prominence and legitimacy of an equitable school for all minoritized populations as a primary goal of the school   + Actively seek to learn about the identities and communities of students in our school(s).   + When decisions are being made, push the decision maker to question which groups are benefitting or being left out, and why. |

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| ***Focus Skill: Purposefully builds the capacity of others to identify and disrupt inequities in the school.*** |
| **Actions**   * + Initiate and promote productive dialogue and collective work on issues of inequity for all minoritized populations   + Create the conditions and common language for regular courageous conversations around equity   + Build the capacity of system and school building leaders to learn and practice language and behaviors that are responsive to differences across lines of race, ethnicity, language, class, religion, ability, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and other aspects of identity   + Build the courage and capacity of system leaders to willingly confront issues of equity and access that impede student learning   + Provide the space, tools, and support for system and school building leaders to reflect on their own personal beliefs, biases, assumptions, and behavior, especially those associated with who have been historically minoritized   + Provide structured and consistent professional learning opportunities to develop and deepen culturally responsive building and system leadership |
| ***Focus Skill: Confronts and alters institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with minoritized populations.*** |
| **Actions**   * + Confront behavior that openly or covertly promotes or sustains inequity, colorblindness, and deficit-thinking   + Identify and name practices and interactions, including micro-aggressions, that are based on race or culturally biased assumptions   + Ensure that system and school building leaders’ communication, collaboration, and decision making reflect the system’s mission, vision, and values grounded in equity and access for all students   + Ensure that system and school building leaders have the resources and tools to consistently use disaggregated data to identify inequities in student opportunities and outcomes   + Regularly examine disaggregated data with the system leadership team and school building leaders for evidence of inequity   + Investigate existing policies and practices to ensure they prioritize student needs and are designed to produce equitable outcomes   + Purposefully build the capacity of others to examine their own assumptions, beliefs, and personal biases.   + Establish high expectations (performance and behavioral) for adults and students in our school(s), regardless of identity or background.   + Regularly engage in conversations with stakeholders about racial equity and access, even in the face of risk and pushback. |

Appendix E – Fellows’ Suggestions

During the focus groups and interviews, fellows provided both direct and indirect suggestions for improving their experiences in Influence 100 and ensuring the value and impact of the fellowship. The prominent themes reflected in fellows’ suggestions are discussed throughout the body of the report, and we did our best to capture fellows’ ideas related to program *content* in the What Fellows Missed section. **In this appendix, we share the suggestions from fellows related to program *structure* in more detail**. Suggestions are loosely grouped into the following categories, with some overlap: program administration and facilitation, session format, site visits, action research project, mentoring, cohort, and support for the job application process.

## Program administration and facilitation

**Clearer expectations.** “Be very explicit and clear in terms of expectations with the cohort participants. I think a lot of the things that are questionable about the program, or have been challenging, or even the feedback, the criticism that other members have expressed— If they do that, I think that'll really […] allow participants to know foundationally what's expected. And then, they could build from there […]. I understand the need for flexibility, but I do think there needs to be some clarity around just the bare minimum expectations. When this is all said and done, this is what we expect from you, and this is what you can expect from us. So that that relationship— that's already on the table. We know what we're signing up for.”

**More** **“precise” focus on specific skills.** One fellow suggested that facilitators demonstrate what a target skill looks like, using tools such as video clips. This fellow also suggested introducing case examples for group discussion and incorporating collaborative problem solving, leveraging the expertise of the facilitators.

**Differentiated approach.** One fellow suggested that facilitators do more to get to know fellows and their existing skillsets so “they can build on the skills that many of us are already bringing to the program and add on to it.”

**Coaching.** “I think coaching would be a really great addition to this program,” one fellow offered.

**Accountability partners.** Based on a previous experience, one fellow recommended instituting “accountability partners” and/or “critical friends groups” within the Influence 100 program.

**National models.** One fellow suggested exploring and presenting models of successful equity leadership in education from sources outside Massachusetts.

**More of Darcy’s lens as a former superintendent.** One fellow said, “I would want more of Darcy and Darcy's lens as a former superintendent. I feel like we get some of Darcy, but it's mostly the facilitators. They're great […] but they haven't been superintendents. I feel like with Darcy's lens of being a superintendent—superintendent and of color—we get some of the stories once in a while, but I don't know that I get the practical […]. I do want that sort of practical experience, that lens that she would use to problem solve as a superintendent, the challenges that she may have faced as a superintendent. Tearing apart a case study and having her feedback. […] When Darcy has been doing more of the facilitation, I have found those conversations to be the most interesting and rich discussions that we've had. And then, when it's facilitated, I feel like there's a script that folks are going through, and we're following the script. We're going to get it done. But I haven't felt the same level of authenticity.”

**More time to discuss texts.** One fellow said she had read the texts provided on the first day of the program “and thought they were fantastic.” She suggested giving fellows the opportunity to collectively “unpack, digest, [and] review” the texts and “think about in what ways we are leveraging what we read about to apply to our specific areas or departments.”

**Maximize the potential of Quarterly District meetings**. Fellows valued having dedicated time with superintendents and school committee members during quarterly district meetings, but many felt these opportunities were not used as productively or intentionally as they could be.

* One fellow suggested “more intentional, targeted, and specific” activities during these meetings.
* Another fellow suggested, “If [superintendents] brought case studies from their own experiences, if they brought scenarios — even if it's not necessarily equity-focused, just about the work and the role, I think that would be helpful.”
* Some fellows suggested building in more facilitation/structure for breakout sessions.
* One fellow emphasized the importance of clear prompts and guidelines for providing feedback: “Whatever prompt we're given being a little bit more structured in terms of who’s supposed to give feedback and when and for what purpose would help drive some of those conversations” and establish “more of a growth opportunity.”
* One fellow stressed the importance of superintendents and school committee members understanding their purpose assisting the fellows and suggested “really helping to prompt the superintendents and school committee members of the lens that they should be looking at this in terms of support for us.”

## Session format

**More time to work together in person, aside from site visits.** Fellows suggested building in more in-person opportunities to discuss readings and professional goals and to develop connections within the cohort.Some fellows regretted that aside from the opening session, the only time Cohort 5 had to themselves was during the virtual sessions.

* One fellow said, “I feel like there hasn't really been a lot of time to really work with the cohort except remotely, and I wish that there was more time to actually have some of those deep conversations.”

**Minimize online sessions, maximize in-person time.** While fellows agreed with holding Quarterly District Meetings virtually, some objected to the virtual full-day sessions.

**Create smaller groups.** One fellow proposed breaking the cohort into small groups for 1- 2 hour sessions with a facilitator or representative from DESE for “a more intimate, individualized opportunity to ask questions, [get] suggestions” and receive in-session mentoring.

* This fellow identified that some members of the cohort didn’t follow “traditional pathways to [get to] where we currently are” and suggested that they could benefit from personalized advising to identify and address any gaps in preparation or qualifications.

**Include food!** “Food is important for me. And actually, most BIPOC people. Food just connects people,” a fellow said.

## Site visits

**Use site visit days to create opportunities for mentorship.** At least one fellow suggested pairing fellows with superintendents from different districts and utilizing site visit days for shadowing. This fellow proposed scheduling time for fellows to share and reflect with the cohort after these visits.

**More opportunities for interaction with superintendents in host districts,** to “compare notes” and have “back and forth discussion.”

* One fellow said, “I'd like to talk to some superintendents and really hear more about the position, what they're involved in, what are the things they find great joy in, what are the things [that are] harder for them. […] I'd love to hear more about what it is like to be in a superintendency.”

## Action research project

**Provide more in-person time to work on action research projects.** One fellow suggested allocating in-person session time to the action research project, enabling fellows to observe and learn from each other’s work.

**Provide more clarity around the action research project.** Fellows are especially interested in gaining clarity regarding the expected end product or deliverable. As one fellow put it, “Just really be explicit about, by the time this program is done, you will produce X, Y and Z. In this format.”

## Mentoring

**More accountability for districts and district leadership support of fellows.** “I don't know how we would accomplish this, but I think that there has to be less leverage and power in the hands of the districts. If the program is designed to equip and empower historically marginalized professionals, the model has to be such that the fellows themselves are the ones that hold the leverage and the power.” Fellows are concerned that districts can “sign off” for fellows to participate in Influence 100, but then not follow through with participation and support.

**Connect fellows with superintendents outside their own district.** Some fellows suggested that the benefits of this approach would include removing problematic power dynamics, increasing access to relevant experiences, and raising the likelihood that mentors would be interested in and committed to fellow development.

**Provide specific guidelines and/or a checklist for superintendents and fellows to track their work together.** Fellows suggested that this could assist superintendents in fulfilling their mentoring commitment. The checklist could specify the particular activities a fellow should have the opportunity to observe or shadow.

## Cohort

**Facilitate additional opportunities for fellows to build relationships within the cohort and across cohorts.**

* Some fellows wanted additional in-person time with cohort 5 to discover and understand the strengths within the group.
* In the fall interviews, fellows told us they were looking forward to getting to know the other fellows in their cohort. “I feel comfortable with the relationships that I've developed,” one fellow said during a spring interview, “and I would still like the opportunity to get to know other fellows in the program more.”
* Some fellows indicated that the current program structure does not support opportunities to get to know the rest of the cohort. “I think those relationships have to be cultivated, and I think they have to be intentional moves to continue to build that space in the room. […] The opportunity to talk candidly with everyone in the room […] needs to happen more often.”
* One fellow proposed offering additional meetings between sessions as an option. “Because I feel like I learn so much from my cohort, I wish I had more time, even in a smaller subgroup of folks, to meet in between our meetings.”
* One fellow suggested creating affinity groups within and across cohorts. “It feels like it's a natural space to create other spaces for folks who never get a chance to be in the same room to build relationships.” The fellow noted, “I was struck with this cohort how many women are from the Caribbean. That's very unique for me, so that would have been interesting.”
* Some fellows found it challenging to build relationships with Cohort 4 because of intermittent contact. One fellow suggested using intentional groupings to maintain consistent contact with the same people across sessions. This fellow also recommended allocating structured time during these joint sessions for fostering relationships.

## Support for the job application process

**Provide information and practice opportunities to prepare fellows to apply for superintendent positions.**

* One fellow suggested “interview practice, resumes — just the technical tools to prepare folks for superintendency hiring.” This could include helping fellows develop a concise but descriptive “blurb that folks can use on their resume” to describe their participation in Influence 100.
* This fellow also suggested that Influence 100 facilitate opportunities for fellows to hear from superintendents and school committees about what they look for in a resume. “Real, practical applications” and tips, the fellow suggested, acknowledging the concern that applicants who are people of color may face stricter scrutiny or a higher likelihood of being dismissed for superficial reasons.
* As another fellow put it, “In thinking about the hiring season, maybe some of us are actually thinking about applying for superintendencies, and maybe carving out opportunities to engage in dry runs, or figuring out what you should be saying, or what you should avoid. That would also be really helpful.”

1. TLA reference documents: (1) *Culturally Responsive Leadership, A Framework for School & School System Leaders*, <https://www.leadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Culturally-Responsive-Leadership-Actions-2020.pdf>, (2) *Equity Leadership Dispositions*, <https://www.leadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Rebrand-Version-Equity-Leadership-Dispositions.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Please see Appendix B for a table that compiles the actions from the two TLA documents for the three focus skills. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. See *Influence 100 Evaluation – Winter 2023 Focus Group Summary* (5/31/2023) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. The interview questions were not framed in terms of how fellows would need to grow to manage a superintendency; rather, they asked fellows to identify areas for growth related to culturally responsive … … leadership in general and related to the three focus skills areas. Some responses indicated that fellows were identifying gaps between current skills and the skills they anticipated needing to be superintendents. Other responses focused on areas for growth to support the challenges and demands of current roles. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)