Embedding Racial And Gender Diversity In State Mandated Common Assessments: A Policy Advocacy Document

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EMBEDDING RACIAL AND GENDER DIVERSITY IN STATE MANDATED
COMMON ASSESSMENTS: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
In the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education
National Louis University
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This document was created as one part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006). For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

Program Evaluation Change Leadership Plan Policy Advocacy Document

For the Program Evaluation candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the Change Leadership Plan candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the Policy Advocacy Document candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

Works Cited

6.20.16
A THREE-PART DISSERTATION:

AN EXAMINATION OF A SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAM AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DIVERSITY DEVELOPMENT

EMBEDDING DIVERSITY INTO THE CURRICULUM: FACILITATING CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS

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This work is dedicated with love to

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and

Kennedy Marina.

I love you both to the moon and back!
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this policy advocacy document was to promote the need to modify the Illinois School Code 5/27-20.4 to include language about a state developed, common assessment that focuses on past and current racial and gender diversity issues in the United States. It highlights the need for embedding past and current racial and gender diversity issues in the United States in the everyday curriculum. Additionally, this document discusses the positive impact this policy will have on students’ social and emotional learning skills.
PREFACE

Lessons learned in year three of my coursework centered around cultural awareness and policy advocacy. A diverse curriculum provides students with the tools to be empathetic, open-minded, and inclusive throughout their educational career and adult life and also has a positive impact on their social-emotional learning skills. Cook (2015) commented that, “Deficit-minded thinking results in the creation of curriculum and instruction that falls short of effective teaching and related educational opportunities” (p. ii).

When advocating for a policy change, it is vital to communicate effectively with all stakeholders and to ensure the new or modified proposed policy represents the best interests of all students. Professional development and trainings should be provided for those impacted to promote a positive culture and to garner buy-in from all stakeholders. The individual proposing the policy needs to recognize a need, have a vision statement, analyze the need, have an argument, have an implementation plan, provide an assessment of the plan, and create a summary statement for the proposed policy.
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SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT

Students in the predominantly White, affluent Galaxy school district can attend from Grades K–12 being taught very little history and current events that are racially and gender diverse. The majority of students in this district lack proximity to racial and gender diverse communities. Many students are not regularly exposed to the positive contributions racial and gender diverse people have made to improve society and everyday lives. A nondiverse curriculum can lead to believing inaccurate and negative stereotypes about racial and gender diverse people. Having a racial and gender diverse curriculum provides all students with the ability to be empathetic, open-minded, and inclusive throughout their educational career and into adult life. It also can have a positive impact on students social-emotional learning skills. Research indicates that strong social and emotional learning skills have a positive impact on student grades, peer relationships, and the life decisions students make. Additionally, social and emotional learning skills foster positive relationships for students with their peers, family members, and teachers (Dillard, 2016, p. 5).

Social and emotional learning skills also help students feel more confident about themselves as individuals—which is why it is important for curriculum to include diversity. Steele (2010) commented,

Use of diversity as a classroom resource rather than following a strict strategy of colorblindness fosters identity safety. Identity safe practices avoid cues that might instantiate a sense of stereotype threat in students and are, instead, aimed at making everyone in the class feel as valued and contributive regardless of their ethnic group or gender. (p. 180)
This researcher became aware of this particular policy issue once realizing the Illinois School Code 5/27-20.4 states the following:

Black History Study. Every public elementary school and high school shall include in its curriculum a unit of instruction studying the events of Black History, including the history of the African slave trade, slavery in America, and the vestiges of slavery in this country. These events shall include not only the contributions made by individual African-Americans in government and in the arts, humanities and sciences to the economic, cultural and political development of the United States and Africa, but also the socio-economic struggle which African-Americans experienced collectively in striving to achieve fair and equal treatment under the laws of this nation. The studying of this material shall constitute an affirmation by students of their commitment to respect the dignity of all races and peoples and to forever eschew every form of discrimination in their lives and careers.

The State Superintendent of Education may prepare and make available to all school boards instructional materials, including those established by the Amistad Commission, which may be used as guidelines for development of a unit of instruction under this section; provided, however, that each school board shall itself determine the minimum amount of instruction time which shall qualify as a unit of instruction satisfying the requirements of this Section. (Illinois School Code 5/27-20.4; IL General Assembly (2017)

This policy is written nebulously, which leaves school districts room to interpret it in many different ways; nor does the current policy hold school districts accountable for following through with robust curriculum about current racial and gender diversity issues. The current
policy from the Illinois School Code 5/27-20.4 states that public elementary and high schools need to include a unit about Black History and the history of slave trade along with slavery in America, but does not explicitly state how long the unit should be and its exact components. Additionally, the current policy stated, “. . . also the socio-economic struggle which African-Americans experienced collectively in striving to achieve fair and equal treatment under the laws of this nation,” which infers that African-American citizens are not continuing to fight for fair and equal treatment in the United States (IL General Assembly (2017). Members of the LGBTQ community are not mentioned in the current policy or any other policy—which is why they need to be added. (The terms LGBTQ and gender diverse are used interchangeably throughout this policy advocacy.) Ultimately, school districts will be able to adhere to the current policy without explicitly providing students with learning opportunities that will cultivate learning experiences about past and current race and gender diversity issues in the United States (http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/documents/010500050K27-20.4.htm).

I am recommending a modification of the Illinois School Code 5/27-20.4 to include a recommendation focusing on past and current racial and gender diversity. The new code would include the following language:

The State Superintendent of Education will prepare and make available to all school boards a state developed common assessment that focuses on past and current racial and gender diversity issues in the United States of America. The common assessment will be administered in the spring of every grade level from Grades 1–12.

This proposed policy will be effective in meeting the problem because it requires all districts to explicitly cultivate learning experiences about past and current race and gender diversity issues in the United States. A mandated common assessment will address the policy the
researcher is advocating be amended. Smith, Frey, Pumpian, and Fisher (2017), commented, “Efforts need to be made to promote students’ respecting, and interacting with, students from different backgrounds” (p. 22). Schools should be responsible for explicitly educating children about racial and gender diversity during lessons taught in the classroom.
SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED

The problem and its context will be defined more specifically in this section by analyzing five distinct disciplinary areas to bring fuller understanding to the problems involved. These five areas addressed and analyzed are: educational, economic, social, political, and moral and ethical.

Educational Analysis

Minority students spend almost all of their educational career looking out of curricular windows (Style, 1996). On the other hand, the majority of curriculum taught in schools allows White students to look into mirrors most of the time. “Students have to be present in a valued learning environment, and we have to address their social-emotional engagement and their opportunities to learn. This work starts with getting students in an integrated educational setting” (Smith et al, 2017, p. 19). Embedding racial and gender diversity in the everyday curriculum will provide all students with an opportunity to see through both windows and mirrors—students will learn about people and have experiences with people who look and live like them, as well as with those whom do not. Historical omissions and distortions contribute to the miseducation of everyone. In 2001, the United States Commission on Civil Rights issued the following statement: “Schools have a responsibility to educate their students; they should not use their influence to perpetuate misrepresentations of any culture or people” (Tatum, 2017, pp. 264–265).

Emily Style discussed the importance of students having both windows and mirrors as part of their everyday curriculum (1996). She points out how vital it is for students to have an opportunity to see themselves in the curriculum and as well as see others. Style (1996) stated the following:

Now, the common sense of needing to provide both windows and mirrors in the curriculum may seem unnecessary to emphasize, and yet recent scholarship on women
and men of color attests abundantly to the copious blind spots of the traditional curriculum. White males find, in the house of curriculum, many mirrors to look in, and a few windows which frame others’ lives. Women and men of color, on the other hand, find almost no mirrors of themselves in the house of curriculum; for them it is often all windows. White males are thereby encouraged to be solipsistic, and the rest of us to feel uncertain that we truly exist. In Western education, the gendered perspective of the white male has presented itself as ‘universal’ for so long that the limitations of this curriculum are often still invisible. (p. 4)

More often than not, students of color and members of the LGBTQ community are solely able to look through windows during the school day. As educators, it is our responsibility to provide all students with the opportunity to have both windows and mirrors during their everyday curriculum.

**Economic Analysis**

This policy would not cost the state or school districts an exorbitant amount of money—it would not cost more than one thousand dollars. The funding would primarily be for professional development and training for school district teachers. Teachers need to be trained on how to become culturally proficient and intentionally embed racial and gender diversity into their everyday curriculum. Utilizing a train-the-trainer model, school districts could save money while concurrently cultivating a sustainable professional development program.

School board members and administrators can take advantage of affordable webinars that are available from the National Black Council of School Board Members organization, such as *Teaching Accurate and Comprehensive Black History in America’s K12 Schools* ($50). These webinars use trained presenters to address how Black history lessons often skim the surface of
the realities of the Black experience throughout the life of our country and the contributions that Black Americans have made. Black history is often hard to discuss—making teachers and administrators uncomfortable—but the erasure of these truths prevent Black students from understanding the role their ancestors played in the creation, development, and success of America (https://www.nsba.org/services/national-black-council-school-board-members).

School districts should ensure they are compliant with the new state mandate—House Bill 3869—by ensuring all certified staff and those who work with students have Implicit Racial Bias training. “Implicit racial bias means a preference, positive or negative, for a racial or ethnic group that operates outside of awareness” (www.ilga.gov). As of July 1, 2017, the amended school code “requires in-service training for school personnel to include training on civil rights and in cultural diversity, including racial and ethnic sensitivity and implicit racial bias” (www.ilga.gov). The required training is to develop cultural competency, which entails understanding and reducing implicit racial bias—including affective, behavioral, and cognitive bias. According to Smith et al. (2017), “Staff education is a necessary precursor to publicly valuing diversity” (p. 21). Implementing teacher training demonstrates that educating a racially and gender diverse group of students is important to the people who work in the school and district.

A diverse curriculum that explicitly includes the many contributions minority people have made in this country can also positively impact our economy. Tatum (2017) stated,

Social science research has demonstrated that the cumulative effect of microaggressions assail the self-esteem of recipients, produce anger and frustration, deplete psychic energy, lower feelings of subjective well-being and worthiness, produce physical health
problems, shorten life expectancy, and deny minority populations equal access and opportunity in education, employment and health care. (p. 53).

The term microaggression is defined by psychologist, Derald Wing Sue (as cited in Tatum, 2017) as, “The brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group” (p. 51).

Eradicating the microaggressions that racial and gender diverse students encounter has the potential to increase the self-esteem and worthiness of those students, which could also shift access to education, employment, and health care opportunities.

**Social Analysis**

Adopting this policy will directly improve society in a nonthreatening manner because it will be part of the everyday curriculum and lessons found in school districts. This is a systemic change that needs to be made in order to minimize and eventually eradicate microaggressions.

Bringing racial and gender diversity into the daily curriculum of classrooms, especially predominantly White and heterosexual communities, has the potential to make race and gender diversity relevant to students in those schools. According to Pollock (2008),

Despite and perhaps because of such ideas, conversations about race are deeply necessary in such communities, both to get students thinking more critically about social issues and to prepare them to interact more successfully with peers of color when they leave. (p. 201).

Tatum (2017) shared, “Learning about racial issues in earnest and then speaking out about racial oppression was deeply connected to my speaking out about gender and queer
Having students examine and analyze the demographics of their school and community can be a springboard to integrating issues about race and gender diversity.

Increasing awareness about past and current racial and gender diversity issues can minimize stereotype threat. Steele (2010) defined stereotype threat as,

A standard predicament of life that springs from our human powers of intersubjectivity—the fact that as members of society we have a pretty good idea of what other members of our society think about lots of things, including the major groups and identities in society. (p. 5).

Tatum (2017) stated, Implicit bias may operate outside of awareness, hidden from those who have it, but the discrimination that it produces can be clearly visible to those who are disadvantaged by it” (p. 25). Instead of applying stereotypes to members of racial and gender diverse groups, students exposed to a curriculum that addresses racial and gender diversity will not allow stereotypes and biases to influence what they think about people prior to getting to know them.

The more students learn about racial and gender diversity in their classrooms, the more they will begin to value, respect, and appreciate what racial and gender diverse individuals have brought to society. Pollock (2008) believes, “Respecting such shared experiences and knowledge also involves appreciating the critical lenses that members of groups can offer—even as we highlight the diversity within groups and emphasize each person’s individuality” (p. xxi).

Gurung and Prieto (2009) stated that social and emotional learning skills for students will grow when they are regularly exposed to learning experiences embedded with racial and gender diversity throughout their educational career.
Political Analysis

The policy this researcher is advocating for is the beginning of a systemic change versus a nominal number of teachers doing it individually—which allows schools to address racial and gender diversity in the larger sense (Davis, 2016). Research showed that the vast majority of community members from the Galaxy school district are ready for these issues to be addressed because the community’s high school hosted an all-day diversity seminar that focused on race and racial issues in the United States. Although the high school’s seminar day was met with some resistance from a small group of community members, they received overwhelming support from the majority of community members (Dillard, 2017, pp. 18–19).

Teachers have the ability to foster an antibias classroom climate that is inclusive and makes all students feel as though they belong—especially when they are selecting posters and other items to decorate their classroom. Teaching Tolerance (2015) stated,

Teachers can bring anti-bias values to life by creating classroom environments that reflect diversity, equity and justice; encouraging students to speak out against bias and injustice; and using instructional strategies that support diverse learning styles and allow for deep exploration of anti-bias themes. (p. 2)

Tatum (2007) said, “In a race-conscious society, racial group membership has psychological implications. The messages we receive about assumed superiority or inferiority shape our perceptions of reality and influence our interactions with others” (p. 134). These values lay the foundation for antibias education, attitudes, and behavior, which cultivate students’ social emotional-learning skills.
With increases in protests in the United States from organizations such as #BlackLivesMatter and members of the LGBTQ community after the 2016 presidential election, it is evident that all citizens do not feel included in this country. According to Tatum (2017), “The postelection analysis of voting patterns revealed a nation divided along racial lines. Put simply, the majority of White voters chose Trump; the majority of voters of color, did not” (p. 63). Pollock (2008) believes that to “. . . counteract racial inequality and racism on a daily basis, educators need to keep inquiring in daily life: Am I seeing, understanding, and addressing the ways the world treats me and my students as race group members” (p. xiii). Asking these questions and embedding race and gender diversity in the everyday curriculum will empower educators to birth future generations of students who are free from biases and antiracism. “It is often through curriculum that we can prompt students to think hard about race. Create curriculum that invites students to explore complex identities and consider racial group experiences” (Pollock, 2008, p. 141).

**Moral and Ethical Analysis**

Although curriculum is generally viewed as purely academic, what is and is not taught and discussed in classrooms has a direct impact on students’ social and emotional learning skills. Building those skills are vital so students can be empathetic, inclusive, and respectful toward all members of society. Smith et al. (2017) commented a “Lack of respect can be displayed in many ways, and it can affect a wide range of students” (p. 23). With the 2016 election of Donald Trump as president of the United States and his *Make America Great* campaign slogan, the advocated policy is needed more than ever. Shortly after the 2016 presidential election, a concerned parent reached out to this researcher after some middle school students made insensitive racial jokes about minorities to their minority child. Beverly Tatum shared in her
book that schools across the country saw record numbers of racial incidences against minority students immediately following the 2016 election. Additionally, almost all of President Trump’s administration and cabinet consists of White men. Though White men have typically been in charge in the United States, Painter (2016) stated, “This time the white men in charge will not simply happen to be white; they will be governing as white, as taking America back, back to before multiculturalism” (p. 2). Explicitly cultivating learning experiences about past and current race and gender diversity issues in the United States would counteract attempts to eradicate multiculturalism and would foster empathy and inclusivity.

Teachers who bring both cultural understanding and self-awareness to the forefront in everyday curriculum has the potential to disprove stereotypes. “Whether positive or negative in content, stereotypes are hard to erase once they have been etched in our collective memories” (Tatum, 2017, p. 282). Furthermore, Tatum stated that recognizing the impact stereotypes have on us can truly be eye opening.
SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT

The primary goal of this advocacy policy involves having the state of Illinois adopt a state developed, common assessment that focuses on past and current racial and gender diversity issues in the United States. This can start with race, gender diversity, and human relations being embedded in daily lessons, followed by interdisciplinary units engaging students in collaborative learning opportunities and problem-based group projects (Smith et al., 2017). The secondary goal entails having a mandatory common assessment be administered in the spring to every student from Grades 1–12.

This policy has two main objectives. The first involves embedding racial and gender diversity into the everyday curriculum for students throughout their educational career as they matriculate from Grades K–12. The second objective involves positively impacting students’ social-emotional learning skills, which will provide them with the ability to be empathetic, open-minded, and inclusive throughout their educational career and adult life. As previously stated, this proposed policy will effectively address curriculum that lacks racial and gender diversity because it will require all districts to explicitly cultivate learning experiences about past and current race and gender diversity issues in the United States.

Stakeholders Related to the Policy

The stakeholders who would benefit from the implementation of the advocated policy are students, teachers, parents, community members, and others who would interact with students who have been exposed to a curriculum that has racial and gender diversity embedded in daily lessons. Guaranteeing that students are provided with an education that includes racial and gender diversity in their everyday lessons from elementary school through high school will cultivate an open-minded, empathetic, and inclusive generation of students in Illinois—which is
how the stakeholders will benefit. This and future generations of students will have the necessary social and emotional learning skills to confidently interact in various diverse settings and situations while fostering healthy relationships with individuals that do not look like them.

**Rationale for the Validity of the Policy**

It has become common to turn on the news or read social media comments with everyday citizens and politicians tearing anyone down that does not share their same point of view on an issue or topic. Children are like sponges and emulate what they see adults do and say. Buffet (2017), stated, “Bullying and violence in our schools is nothing new—but with hatred and divisiveness dominating the news headlines, their impact becomes even more acute” (p. 1).

Although some may argue that mandating teachers to administer another test to students contributes to the overtesting of students, the overarching benefits of this policy outweigh that argument. “We cannot ignore what is happening outside the classroom. Rather than shy away from the difficult issues, we have an obligation to confront them head on” (Buffet, 2017, p. 1). As stated in Section One, holding school districts accountable with a mandated state common assessment that is focused on racial and gender diversity issues forces teachers to provide students with learning experiences about past and current race and gender diversity issues in the United States.

There are times when school administrators must lead schools and districts in a direction that is atypical and do what is best for all children—even if it is something as uncomfortable as teaching about race and gender diversity. When leading, the administrator needs to be able to help their staff function in disequilibrium and tolerate the discomfort they may encounter; this is known as the productive zone of disequilibrium (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). As shown in Figure 1, “Within the productive zone, the stress level is high enough that people can be
mobilized to focus on and engage with the problem they would rather avoid” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 30). The study, conducted during this researcher’s change leadership plan, centered around the impact of embedding racial and gender diversity into the everyday curriculum. Therefore, this policy is necessary in order to ensure all teachers and school districts are enacting a racial and gender diverse curriculum in everyday lessons.

*Figure 1. The productive zone of disequilibrium.*
SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

Public education has delivered students an insufficient check, as it pertains to providing students with a curriculum that has racial and gender diversity issues woven throughout daily lessons taught by elementary and high school teachers. During the civil rights movement in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights activists fought to end prejudice, racism, and violence against African Americans in addition to the equal rights and respect for all United States citizens. Singleton (1997) stated, “Racism, more so than any other technical, social or pedagogical condition, prevents us from actualizing our professional and moral obligation to develop and liberate the innate imagination and intelligence of every American” (Singleton, 1997, p. 1). Although the 50th anniversary of Dr. King’s death was recently commemorated, racial tensions, gender discrimination, and police brutality against minorities continues to live and thrive in the United States.

Ongoing present day challenges have birthed 21st century mass social justice movements focused on race and gender. Many of the protests, marches, and hashtags’ movements were and continue to be prompted from racist, sexist, and insensitive comments made by Donald Trump, president of the United States of America. A noteworthy quote President Trump made stated, “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re sending people that have lots of problems and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists” (Burns, 2015; New York Times [Video]). As recent as January 2018, “Trump referred to Haiti and African nations as shithole countries, during a meeting with a bipartisan group of senators at the White House” (Vitali, Hunt, & Thorp, 2018 [Video]). In addition, the unceasing comments and tweets have supplied fuel to sustain the present-day race and gender social justice movements.
Knowing that hatred, racism, sexism, and discrimination are learned and not innate human attributes (Tatum, 2017), this policy has the ability to guarantee that all children would seamlessly learn about racial and gender diversity in all of their classes. Embedding racial and gender diversity in the everyday curriculum has the potential to give rise to a generation and future generations that would be open-minded, empathetic, and inclusive of all people. Social justice activists and those who desire to live in an inclusive country where all people are treated equal and respected as human beings would wholeheartedly embrace the notion of advocating to modify the Illinois School Code 5/27-20.4 to include the language from the vision statement.

It is safe to assume that White supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, and/or Traditionalist Worker Party would not support implementing the suggested policy plan. Many members of these organizations have openly supported the racist and insensitive comments made by President Donald Trump, such as those just mentioned—membership to these supremacist groups has also surged since President Trump took office in 2017 (Begley, 2018). These organizations and their members, “Have beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, faith, gender, and sexual identities” (Begley, 2018, p. 2). They have overtly promoted hatred toward minorities and gender diverse individuals and held marches in places such as on the University of Virginia campus in Charlottesville in 2017. Therefore, this researcher does not believe individuals who support or are members of organizations with a superiority mindset would be advocates of the policy she is proposing the state implement.

The policy advocating to be implemented promotes exactly what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights activists fought for in the past and what current social justice activists are fighting for presently. Taylor (2016) commented, “Ideas are fluid, but it usually takes
political action to set them in motion and stasis for the retreat to set in” (p. 50). All students will be taught about racial and gender diverse people, their culture, and the issues they face in every grade level throughout their elementary and secondary educational career. More importantly, this policy has the potential to be effective because it will require all teachers to ensure their lessons address racial and gender diversity. As stated in Section One: A curriculum that embeds racial and gender diversity in daily lessons has the ability to provide students with the ability to be empathetic, open-minded, and inclusive throughout their educational career and adult life.
SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

This policy advocacy asks state legislators to modify the Illinois School Code 5/27-20.4; thus, requiring all school districts ensure classroom teachers are embedding racial and gender diversity in their daily lessons. This policy would make it necessary for school districts and schools to evaluate their current curriculum, something that should already be ongoing. During this curricular appraisal, they would need to orchestrate a racial and gender diversity gap-analysis.

Initially, the state superintendent would call for a volunteer committee comprised of students, teachers, and administrators from various school districts throughout the state of Illinois. Individuals wishing to participate on this committee would respond to the state superintendent’s solicitation for racial and gender diversity committee members. Upon selecting a diverse representation of students, teachers, and administrators from different school districts and regions throughout the state, the state superintendent would charge the committee with developing a common assessment that focuses on past and current racial and gender diversity issues in the United States for Grades 1–12. The state superintendent would also instruct committee members to generate online resources for each grade level that would contain sample lessons for implementing racial and gender diversity into the curriculum for all content areas.

Starting in June, the committee members would meet monthly, in-person and virtually, for an entire year—working on the tasks assigned to them. They would break into subcommittees, dividing the responsibilities. As the committees completed various tasks (such as creating the online resources), they would pilot them in their respective buildings as a means of quality control. Upon completing the draft version of the grade level common assessments, the committee members would administer the assessments to their students, in an effort to collect
baseline data. After analyzing the data, the committee would make any necessary changes for the final draft of each grade level common assessment. All committee work would be complete by June of the following year—making each grade level common assessment on racial and gender diversity ready for schools at the beginning of the upcoming school year.

Professional development and communication with staff are critical components for this policy to be implemented properly. Therefore, the state superintendent should appoint and assign administrators to speak at districts throughout the state. Ideally, at the beginning of the school year (Institute Days), appointed administrators should go to school districts explaining the importance of this new state policy to all certified staff members—along with how teachers will be accountable for ensuring the policy is implemented with integrity. This would also be a good time to remind teachers about the state mandate ensuring all certified staff and those who work with students have *Cultural Competency and Racial Bias* training. The state mandated training is required for school personnel to include training to develop cultural competency—including understanding and reducing implicit racial bias and affective, behavioral, and cognitive bias.

In addition, on Institute Days, state appointed administrators would articulate to teachers the intended implementation timeline for the modified state policy. Since the common assessment will be administered in the spring, the state would have online resources for teachers and schools to access at the start of the school year. These online resources would contain ideas and sample lessons for implementing racial and gender diversity into the curriculum for all content areas. All information housed online would come from the state superintendent’s committee that created the common assessment. Ideally, teachers will be given time to collaborate and attend professional development workshops provided by organizations
throughout the school year and summer, so they can ensure that racial and gender diversity are embedded in their lessons.

*Facing History and Ourselves* is an organization offering professional development opportunities to teachers in the summer and throughout the school year. *Fostering Civil Discourse: Discussing Current and Controversial Issues,* along with *Teaching for Safe and Inclusive Classrooms: Integrating LGBTQ Voices into Humanities,* are professional development workshops teachers can take advantage of to support them with developing lessons that embed racial and gender diversity. For example, the *Fostering Civil Discourse: Discussing Current and Controversial Issues* workshop, “. . . explores how Americans define citizenship and membership in the early part of the 20th century and the echoes and legacies of this movement today” (FacingHistory.org, 2017, Chicago Professional Development Opportunities, p. 1).

*Teaching for Safe and Inclusive Classrooms: Integrating LGBTQ Voices into Humanities,* is interactive and focuses on the following:

Core themes of identity and membership and shares best practices for integrating LGBTQ topics into classroom curriculum. Connections between stereotypes, fear, and homophobia are explored. Strategies for creating classroom environments that respect students’ unique identities and help foster equity of voice are modelled.

(FacingHistory.org, 2017, Chicago Professional Development Opportunities, p. 1)

If the initial attempt to get the state to modify the Illinois School Code 5/27-20.4 proves to be unsuccessful, the researcher will work with the curriculum and instruction department in her current school district to implement the policy being advocated. From there, connecting with the curriculum and instruction departments at other school districts in the area would be ideal—in hopes that they too would adopt these same changes as the Galaxy school district. Heifetz,
Grashow, and Linsky (2009) believe, “You need patience and persistence to lead adaptive change” (p. 31). By starting small and documenting the success, I might be able to successfully persuade the state legislators to rethink modifying the Illinois School Code 5/27-20.4 to what I originally proposed.
SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN

In order for this policy to be implemented, it is necessary to have a policy assessment plan timeline consisting of action items to execute the plan. Utilizing the common nonstudent contact time, or common planning time teachers have, would be an effective and efficient use of the contractual time teachers are at work. Common planning time will be used for teachers to collaborate and share how they are embedding racial and gender diversity in their classrooms on a daily basis. A Google sheet will be emailed to all teachers, so they can explicitly document the things they are doing with their students. Formative assessment data focused on racial and gender diversity issues will be collected and analyzed to determine whether students are demonstrating growth in their various classes. In the spring, all teachers will administer the state developed, common assessment that focuses on past and current racial and gender diversity issues in the United States.

During the common planning time (when teachers have the same nonstudent contact period), teachers will meet with their colleagues and comprehensively share daily lessons that have racial and gender diversity issues embedded. Teachers will utilize their common planning meetings to ask and answer clarifying questions about the lessons for one another. In addition to individual teachers completing a lesson plan Google sheet detailing their lessons with racial and gender diversity embedded, they will also have a colleague record minutes from each common planning meeting (a designated nonstudent contact period to meet). Both the common planning meeting minutes and lesson plan Google sheets will be submitted to their respective building principals and office of curriculum and instruction. This will provide administrators with an avenue to guarantee all teachers are on the appropriate trajectory to implementing the new policy with integrity and concurrently maintain teacher and building accountability.
Furthermore, teachers will issue preassessments to students that include racial and gender diversity topics prior to teaching each unit. They will analyze the pre-assessment data and tailor their daily lessons to fill the gaps where students are in need of showing growth about racial and gender diversity issues. Assigning individual growth targets for each student will assist teachers in being prescriptive and intentional when teaching their daily lessons. Throughout each unit, teachers will monitor students’ progresses by formatively assessing them during the week. Teachers will collect postassessment data at the end of each unit to determine how much their students have grown. When meeting with their colleagues during common planning time, teachers will share with one another their individual students’ pre- and postassessment data—along with how they formatively assessed their students throughout the unit. This data will also be added to the lesson plan Google sheets shared with building principals and the office of curriculum and instruction as an additional piece of evidence for accountability to ensure the policy is being implemented.

Finally, in the spring, all students in Grades 1–12 in the state will take the state developed, common assessment that focuses on past and current racial and gender diversity issues in the United States for their respective grade level. The common assessment will be given on the same date statewide—just like all high school juniors in the state of Illinois take the SAT on the same date statewide. Test results will be delivered to each school within a three-week timeframe, which will allow schools and districts time to meet so they can analyze and evaluate their common assessment testing data. The ultimate piece of accountability for this common assessment will be that it counts toward 20% of every teacher and administrator’s end of year summative rating and will also be included as part of all Illinois school report cards. The overall policy assessment plan timeline described is shown in Figure 2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Timeline</th>
<th>Action Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Day of School</td>
<td>• Google sheet emailed to all teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During School Year—Ongoing</td>
<td>• Common planning meetings to discuss formative assessment data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers administer preassessments at start of each unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers administer postassessments at end of each unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Week of April</td>
<td>• Administer common assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Week of May</td>
<td>• Analyze and evaluate common assessment data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2. Policy Assessment Plan Timeline.*
SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT

This policy advocacy represents the best and most appropriate policy because many students are not regularly exposed to the positive contributions racial and gender diverse people have made to improve society and their everyday lives. Thus, the policy advocacy proposal requests the Illinois School Code 5/27-20.4 be modified.

A racial and gender diverse curriculum will provide all students with the ability to be empathetic, open-minded, and inclusive throughout their educational career and adult life. It is this researcher’s belief that this policy will help combat the negative stereotypes about minorities and members of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) community.

For the past 3 years, the focus of this doctoral work has centered around past and current racial and gender diversity issues in the United States and how they are not integrated in the everyday curriculum. The values of individuals who believe that all people should be treated equally and not feel or be treated as though they are inferior to White and/or heterosexual individuals are at the core of this policy. Individuals who uphold this belief see all people as human beings and desire to live in an inclusive, empathetic, and nonjudgmental society. This policy was inspired by research conducted for this program evaluation and change leadership plan about the impact social and emotional learning skills have when dealing with racial and gender diversity issues in the United States.

Research indicates that strong social and emotional learning skills have a positive impact on student grades, peer relationships, and the life decisions that students make (Vega, 2012). Social and emotional learning skills foster positive relationships for students with their peers, family members, and teachers. Additionally, social and emotional learning should address
diversity issues because social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student, citizen, and employee. When integrated across all subject areas and experiences outside of school, social and emotional learning skills are extremely valuable and impactful for children (Dillard, 2016).

Within the past three years, new research has been published on White racial illiteracy and the adverse effects of White privilege, which impact students in both behavior and academic success. The work of Robin DiAngelo (2012) explains the factors contributing to White racial illiteracy, which can help Galaxy school district learn more about how well we are equipping White students with the racial and gender diversity awareness needed to truly be inclusive members of society throughout the remainder of their educational career and beyond. Schools should be responsible for explicitly educating children about racial and gender diversity during lessons taught in the classroom (Dillard, 2017).

The implementation of this policy is consistent with the vision statement discussed in Section One of this paper. This researcher advocates that the Illinois School Code 5/27-20.4 be modified to include the following:

The State Superintendent of Education will prepare and make available to all school boards a state developed, common assessment that focuses on past and current racial and gender diversity issues in the United States of America. The common assessment will be administered in the spring of every grade level from Grades 1–12. (Illinois General Assembly, 2017)

This aligns perfectly with the importance of embedding racial and gender diversity into the daily lessons presented to students by their classroom teachers.
REFERENCES


