

“WE KNOW WHAT’S RIGHT FOR KIDS”: WASHINGTON STATE EDUCATORS FOR RACIAL JUSTICE SPEAK UP AND SPEAK BACK

A report prepared for the WEA

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INTRODUCTION

A. Project Description:

The overall goal of this report for the Washington Educator Association (WEA) is to provide a snapshot of the perspectives of mainly public school educators of color¹ and especially educators with a commitment to and investment in racial justice. The reason for this focus was due to the WEA's recognition of being a white lead organization and their request for us to document the voices of those who they have understood to be most underrepresented in their organizational structure and decision-making.

We asked these educators about their understandings of educational justice – what it means to them as well as what they see as barriers and ways forward to reach it – and their journeys and experiences to and within their roles. We learned about 1) how they view themselves as different kinds of educators, 2) their ideas of viewing and doing education differently, 3) their experiences of racism and discrimination, 4) their perspectives regarding unions 5) the variation that existed among them and 5) the ideas they had to make improvements in their own schools, districts and the state.

When speaking over zoom to Neil, Maria, Romina, and Marco, four paraeducators of color in Eastern Washington during the peak of the pandemic in mid-August 2020 about their experiences and desires for themselves and the kids they work with, what stood out most was the following: they all had an unwavering confidence in their knowledge of the kids they worked with and what they needed, as expressed by Romina when she said “we know what’s right for kids”. This was evident throughout the conversation with them, and other educators interviewed for this report. These

¹ We use the term “of color”, recognizing that it is an imperfect descriptive term and especially fails to acknowledge anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity, and for many Indigenous peoples it is not a term in which they feel included. We were unable to interview any Indigenous people for this report.

educators also made strong connections between knowledge of their students and their own similar life experiences. In addition, they mostly expressed a commitment to not judging the kids in White, Eurocentric standardized ways while looking for ways for students to show their competence and learning in other holistic and differentiated manners where their voices would be listened to.

Like most states in the country, the number of educators of color and of Indigenous backgrounds in the state of Washington is troublingly low; the 2019-2020 OSPI Report Card put the percentage of teachers of color at 12%. Although definitely not exhaustive of all educators and all kinds of educators of color in the organization, 42 educators were interviewed for this report during the period of remote teaching and learning/Covid from August 2020 to February 2021. The study participants included 16 teachers, 9 paraeducators, 2 counselors, 1 school psychologist, 7 principals, 3 bus drivers, 1 custodian and 3 office staff from 12 districts across various geographical regions of the state. Of these 42 educators, 26 identified as Latinx, 8 as African American, 3 as White, 4 as Asian American, and 1 was originally from Oceania. The interviews (see Appendix A for interview questions, which were modified to some extent, depending on the interviewees) were a mix of 60-120 minute sessions in either focus groups or one-on-one interviews. Interviews were conducted over zoom and were transcribed. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify themes and patterns, which were the basis of the findings and recommendations of this report.

B. Relevant Literature and Framing :

There has been significant documentation in both the academic literature as well as in policy reporting that has corroboratively supported the immense value especially for students to have teachers of color in their classrooms and schools. The main arguments include the alignment, racially, culturally, linguistically and/or in terms of life experiences that many students of color experience with teachers of color as well as their ability to serve as role models and the greater likelihood of them being advocates for their students (Carver & Thomas, 2016; Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2016; Villegas &

Irvine, 2010; Quioco & Rios, 2000). Additionally, it is important to note their importance vis a vis the potential harmful effect that white teachers, especially those who are not aware of their whiteness and the harmful effects of whiteness, can have on their students of color (Downey & Ainsworth-Darnell, 2002; Sleeter, 2001; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). The presence of teachers of color as well as their knowledge and life experiences have also been shown to be of importance to the experiences of white students (Cherng & Halpin, 2016) who are currently the most segregated group of students in the country (Orfield et al., 2016).

At the same time, it would be unwise to brush all teachers of color with a broad stroke (Philip, Rocha & Olivares-Pasillas, 2017) and simplistically posit this as the only policy decision that can attend to improving the educational experiences of students of color (Philip & Brown, 2020). Moreover, as Philip & Brown (2020) make clear, the focus cannot only be on their recruitment and retention without changing the nature of schools and school systems so that they can be supportive spaces where racial justice is centered and these educators have power to make changes.

Although in this report, educators in different roles were interviewed, it is important to acknowledge that there are separate bodies of literature on these various subgroups of educators of color; mainly, school leaders/principals, paraeducators, and teachers, of course, and to some degree, counselors and school psychologists. What was especially compelling about interviewing all of them for one study was to clearly see and be able to document some of the important overlaps in terms of their experiences and vision. It was also illustrative to witness the difficulties in terms of the hierarchies some experienced in the system, due to their roles; this was especially the case for non-certificated staff, mainly transportation, clerical, and custodial staff.

Seeing the perspectives of these educators as (counter) stories (Kohli, 2009; Sleeter, 2017) is in line with one of the most important tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT), which underscores the value of experiential knowledge both as a way for people of color to speak from their own experience but also to draw on and use these experiences as a way to make shifts in policies and practices.

FINDINGS

The six main findings that came through from the interviews conducted were the following: (1) they saw themselves as different kinds of educators; (2) their views of education tended to be more holistic and interconnected to other societal issues; (3) they had many experiences with racism and other forms of discrimination, also in their own roles and positions (4) many wanted their unions and the WEA to play a more active role in educational and racial justice; (5) there was some variation among the educators we interviewed, especially those in different geographical locations; and (6) many had either seen or desired some positive movement in terms of educational justice in their professional experiences so far. Here, we provide more specificity for each of the findings.

1. *“If they are not getting the life they deserve, that means I am not getting mine”:
Ways of being different kinds of educators*

Across the board, all the educators of we spoke with saw themselves as being different kinds of educators in that they had backgrounds and ways of establishing connections with students of color that they did not see mainstream white educators, for the most part, as having. In addition, many saw their work to include challenging the dominant system in place in public education.

What was most striking was the responsibility they felt towards children. A Latinx teacher from Longview expressed the depth of the connection with the quote above by saying that if kids were not able to get the life that they deserved, that she would not be able to get hers. A Latinx principal from Eastern Washington expressed ““I try to be a role model as much as I can. I mean, I am a role model. I go around. I talk. I try to show the kids.”

Most of the educators we spoke to saw themselves as understanding the kids personally and deeply because of their own similar life experiences. This ranged from

teachers who grew up bilingual (“it’s part of my own story”) or who shared similar stories in their own families of immigration and deportation or who had parents working two jobs. Another Latinx principal from Eastern Washington provided a direct expression of this by commenting that “you don’t want to be a token but you understand the obstacles, you understand the pain.” Both the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and the circumstances related to Covid as they were affecting families were present for several educators. Along with others we interviewed, a Latinx teacher in Seattle Public Schools (SPS) spent a lot of time describing the difficulties families were experiencing during Covid; how many parents had been laid off and the whole “bureaucracy” that ensued with parents having to fill out forms to request hotspots for internet connections.

Additionally, mostly because of their own life and professional experiences that they described as being challenging, many had critical perspectives of schools and education, especially due to their assimilative nature. This also contributed to them feeling that they were different kind of educators. A Latinx teacher active in the race and equity work in his district and with the WEA described his perspective in the following way:

I think that part of that barrier is that the point and purpose of education has always been that it has always been workforce training. It’s always been assimilation into the dominant culture.... our teachers can’t be 80% white, they just can’t be, but they are....how do we make schools places where our students of color go in and see themselves represented...we need more teachers of color but you need to create a system in which they’re welcome, in which they can engage.

The kinds of systems (and “system/systems” was a term that was used a lot) mentioned, and that many were critical of in terms of the barriers these systems created, included testing/assessment for the kids and for teachers, the lack of internet

access for families, poor district training, ineffective school boards and larger ones such as the legal system, the employment system, and the prison pipeline.

Many of the educators provided numerous stories about their agency and advocacy in attempting to challenge the system, ranging from new ways of teaching, to being engaged in race and equity work for the WEA to raising issues with their administrators. A number of them expressed the feeling that they were a minority in “always bringing things up” at their schools, ruffling feathers and being in opposition to the status quo. Latinx principals in Eastern Washington spoke about ways of supporting their communities. One talked about how he got rid of the traditional PTA and created a space for Spanish speaking parents with a goal of “training parents to infiltrate the system” and another said he could move to the west side (of the state) where people think like him but he stayed in Eastern Washington because he felt it was “important to push back against people who think our kids don’t deserve a second chance.”

2. *“How can we help create who you are going to be when you are grown up?”:
Different ways of viewing and doing education*

Strongly related to the theme of seeing themselves as different kind of educators was one of viewing education beyond meeting academic goals and standards, especially standards set by a “White supremacist system” as described by a Latinx principal in Eastern Washington.

The quote above was juxtaposed against what a Latinx male educator described as a capitalist focus around “what are you going to be when you grow up” which he described as the purpose for which education had always been viewed. There was a strong desire by educators across roles (principals, teachers, paraeducators, counselors, custodial staff) for the inordinate focus on academics in schools to be shifted. One Latinx principal in Eastern Washington who grew up there, articulated how he asked his teachers to “get off the throttle of academics...I want people to understand the community” while an Asian American counselor in SPS talked about wanting less of a focus on content and testing. The one custodial staff that we interviewed from a district

near Olympia had a particularly nuanced understanding of students, and communicated that “as long as we work for school districts that only take an academic approach to success instead...what I believe is a holistic approach, we are doing a huge disservice to those kids.”

Although the definitions of educational justice varied across the kinds of educators and geographical locations, something that stood out for many was how they saw educational justice going beyond schools and it being interconnected with other dimensions of society; in other words, many saw that educational justice could not be achieved without other forms of injustice being corrected. Two teachers active in the race and equity work for the WEA expressed that in the following way: “You can’t have it without changing the system completely, including capitalism so one has to change the material conditions.” Additionally, many mentioned access to the internet and working class families work schedules as an additional hardship for families, a form of injustice that teachers, mainly in SPS, articulated as being related to housing inequity. A Latinx dual language² teacher observed the following:

educational justice boils down to housing markets and districting within our district...I'm new to Seattle. I don't know it that well, but the reason that I think the North End looks so different than the Central District and looks so different than the South End is because of historic redlining and because of this inherited wealth that exists so distinctly in the Seattle area....And I don't understand that.

The group of Latinx dual language teachers in SPS that I spoke to during the same interview saw this as a particular problem for dual language programs where neighborhoods with these programs were changing, especially in relationship to not having the same number of Latinx families they once had because housing had become

² Dual language is a kind of bilingual educational program where students are learning content in two languages (one of them being English), and often half of the students will be predominantly English speakers while the others will be speakers of the other language. The most common form of dual language program is Spanish and English.

more expensive. In response, another teacher during the same interview mentioned a radio show where an interviewee put it in the following aphoristic way: “gentrification is the new word for colonization.”

3. *“They wash you away”*: Experiences of Racism and Discrimination

Although many of the educators we spoke to demonstrated a considerable amount of fight in speaking about themselves as different kinds of educators as well as in their views of education and educational justice, they also shared many painful experiences with racism and various forms of discrimination. These were both experiences they had in their childhood as well as more recent ones related to their professional roles.

In each of the job categories – paraeducators, teachers, principals, office staff, transportation staff, and custodial staff, the educators talked about not being treated well as educators of color. When speaking with two Latinx teachers from two smaller districts in the state, one of them spoke about how a teacher pronounced her name “Iris” and then the other teacher whom I interviewed said “they wash you away...your mother called you Irees and everyone calls your Iris..I have seen that happen.”

A significant amount of the discrimination that the educators – except for principals - we spoke to expressed was in terms of their job status and perceived lack of power. Teachers spoke about it mainly in terms of principals; for example, a Latinx teacher from SPS talked about an incident when she had provided information about a particular student but the (white) principal ignored her and she followed that up by adding that, “Just because I'm a teacher and I don't have that status of being anything else. When teachers of color speak, they don't listen.”

At the same time, educators with lower status roles expressed even greater feelings of discrimination. All nine paraeducators spoke of their frustration in not being listened to and taken seriously by teachers even if a number of them felt they had a deeper connection with and authentic caring for the students than their teachers. In fact, they all expressed their concern that students were not getting the support they needed by teachers. In a conversation with three paraeducators from Eastern Washington, one of

them, Marco, described their feelings of being regarded as lesser than in such an apt way:

Just there's so many things that happen that you just see as a para, that you want to change, but you can't. Because as Neill said, and as Romina said, we're paras, we're looked down on because we don't have that teaching certificate...but yet kids talk to us, they let us know what they need to learn, they let us know things, yet [teachers] don't adapt to it. That's troublesome, in my opinion.

Office staff, custodial staff and transportation staff all spoke very strongly about the lack of recognition they experienced and their desire to be viewed as educators on an equal footing as certificated staff. One of the bus drivers spoke about being the “lowest in the totem pole.” The custodian we spoke with described a time she was speaking to some students and then they all asked her why she was not their teacher and she responded in the following way:

The worth of a person that's not based on how much they earn or what their title is. We all have the opportunity to be teachers. We all have the opportunity to motivate others or inspire others. It's just that we have to find the opportunities. And I can safely do that when I'm in a school setting as a custodian without having to have a piece of paper that certifies that I have a doctorate or a degree, or even a teaching certificate. I can have teaching moments.

Additionally, office staff clearly felt that they were being treated differently, and lacked both a career pathway to move up professionally, and also in their day to day work expectations, particularly during Covid, when they were required to come to the school regularly. An office staff in Federal Way articulated her challenges and her hopes in the following way:

I think that a lot of it has to boil down to how people view and assume different job classifications, almost like a hierarchy in a way. And again I haven't been in education a long, long time and I don't have a background as far as academics in education, so all that I've known has been from my personal experience, and it seems as if the hierarchy of importance is you have the teacher and everything else supports the teacher and is underneath the teacher, which technically we are support staff, true, but you have to look at it as a whole. We all connect to be able to make that classroom run smoothly, and if we look at it from a whole then you have more equity inside the building, inside the district state wide to be able to support our kids better.

4. *“Wonder bread and country crock”: Perspectives about unions*

One of the questions we asked all the educators was their opinion about and their engagement with the WEA at the state level and through their local associations. All the educators except for school principals were positive about teacher unions, including one teacher who said the union helped her get her college degree when she was living in another state. At the same time, in Yakima, where all staff had what they referred to as their own unions including principals, the principals were pleased with their own union, which one principal said “helped a lot with compensation.” However, among many of the educators we spoke to, for those who were more attuned and even engaged with the WEA and their district unions, there was a strong desire for the union to move from its traditional roots to values and changes that embraced racial equity.

The quote above was from a Latinx male teacher from a district north of Seattle and who had been heavily involved with trying to change what he viewed as the status quo at the WEA. He expressed that salaries, collective bargaining and healthcare were the bread and butter of unions but he called this derogatorily the “wonder bread and country crock” since he believed that the union should be focusing more on supporting changes for racial equity, such as extensively reaching out to and creating support systems for educators of color. He also expressed that the leadership in WEA and the

recent changes they had made felt very positive, such as the creation of the new WEA center on racial, social and economic justice.

However, he and an office staff in a district south of Seattle who was involved with the WEA (and whom we interviewed separately) spoke about wanting the WEA to do more outreach, especially with educators of color although this could only be done successfully if the stances they were taking were communicated and understood as championing the interests of educators of color. He spoke in particular about an equity audit of the whole WEA organization that they were supposed to do four years ago and that the WEA still hadn't done. It came from a pivotal RA (representative assembly) meeting in 2017 which was mentioned by five educators of color involved in the race and equity work in the WEA, where a number of educators of color challenged the WEA during the RA to make a more serious commitment to its racial justice work. He concluded by stating that "It really needs to be done, an objective cleaning of house" and that the internal work of changing the organization had to be completed before doing the outward facing work.

Most of the principals we talked to had more critiques of teacher unions, naturally, than teachers and other educators. Many of these critiques have been raised numerous times, appearing also in mainstream media and reports (Cowen & Strunk, 2014). Two frequently mentioned critiques include the difficulty of firing teachers who have been found to be harmful to children, and the difficulty of hiring and keeping new teachers due to seniority. A White female principal in Eastern Washington expressed her frustration ("I was floored") at the union who was defending the job of a teacher in her anti LGBTQ stance when she kept refusing to use the correct pronouns with students. Another Latinx male principal spoke of having to fight the union who was protecting a teacher who would not show up to class. A few teachers also expressed that the union would need to center "the interests of the kids" and "promote racial justice" and by doing that, teachers should not be protected over children. Two Latinx principals in Eastern Washington discussed how they wished for a less confrontational relationship with the teachers' union and to hire "bilingual, young, exuberant candidates...but they

never get a chance to get into your building.” The custodial staff I spoke with also expressed her own frustrations about getting passed over other people for the same role and believed that “competence over seniority” should be the deciding factor for a job, which she felt the union was not necessarily dedicated to.

5. *“The legal system, employment system, opportunities here, it’s still the good old boys”*: Differences between districts and among educators

It is important to make clear that although most of the educators we spoke to shared values about the importance of racial and educational justice, and had similar experiences in their youth and their current professional roles, there was also some variation among educators. The quote above was from an interview with a Latinx principal in Eastern Washington who expressed how difficult it was to get closer to racial and educational justice when police were arresting Latino males at a higher rate within a system upheld by the “good old boys”. This was also voiced by a paraeducator who grew up in Yakima and remembered how racist she felt Yakima was when she was growing up. Educators of color in Eastern Washington talked a lot about the difference between, for example, East Pasco and West Pasco, as well as East Yakima and West Yakima, where the western parts were more affluent and where the schools were considered to be “better.” However, one teacher mentioned how she moved her son from a school in West Pasco to East Pasco where he would be supported and treated better and be more seen as a student of color.

In comparing the responses of teachers, especially those in Eastern Washington with the rest of the educators we interviewed, most notably SPS, the responses were different both in terms of their definition of educational justice and in their understanding of and engagement with their local union and the WEA. The teachers in Eastern Washington that we interviewed were more likely to define educational justice as being about “access for all” and “an equal playing field for students” while both the principals in Eastern Washington as well as the staff generally in SPS, spoke about

educational justice as being more about historical and material injustices that needed to be corrected and where transformational change had to happen.

Many of the teachers that we interviewed in SPS had been involved in the race and equity work in the district and expressed frustration that not enough was being done in the district and the union, and that being nice was being “prized” over making more radical changes. An Asian male school psychologist in SPS felt that the union “doesn’t go to bat for racial equity” and it “doesn’t go to bat for educators of color.” We had an especially troubling and confirming conversation with an assistant principal of color in SPS who had spent three years working on and pushing her school staff’s racial justice learning but was met with some resistance by older white male teachers and her white male principal who did not sufficiently stand up for her, which caused her to leave her position and the school district altogether; she did not find the union helpful at all during this process. The union space seemed less supportive to many than the Ethnic Studies space in SPS, which one biracial female teacher felt was less hierarchical and more BIPOC centering. In Yakima, the work that the superintendent had been doing in addressing race was spoken about with much appreciation, especially by the mainly Latinx principals. Therefore, the school leaders of color there seemed to feel more supported than school leaders of color in SPS. In SPS, the race and equity work, some of it which lived within the union but not entirely, seemed more robust among teachers as compared to principals, although far from being close to satisfactory for teachers. Because their local unions were not engaged in race and equity work, the teachers we interviewed in Eastern Washington did not even see it as a possibility for their union to take on this work.

In addition to geographical variation, there were many who felt that the public education system was too hierarchical in how certain roles were positioned over others, with principals being at the top, then teachers, counselors, paraeducators, and then office staff, custodial staff and transportation staff. This hierarchy was also seen reflected in the local associations and the WEA, causing one Latinx male educator from a

district north of Seattle to ask, “How do we break apart a hierarchical structure like WEA, and make it more of a communal structure?”

6. *“If we really put the learning, and the guiding of learning back more into student hands, I think that we would start to see shifts”:* Positive movements

In this last finding, we would like to provide some positive movements experienced or witnessed or at least desired by the educators we spoke to. One of them was trying to center students and families and handing more power to students as described by a female white educator in SPS involved in the race and equity work, in the quote above. She went on to describe that she would welcome more decision making to be handed to students by also explicitly “saying the power of learning is really with you. I’m just here to guide it..... And telling them that that is us sharing the power of the classroom” as she said she tries to do now in her classrooms. Many educators we spoke to described creating a trusting environment, especially for children and families of color, where they could see themselves in their teachers, their books, their curriculum and also the languages spoken by the staff in their school. Ethnic Studies, which had been initiated in SPS and some other school districts was mentioned by many, especially staff in SPS, as a potential mechanism for this to happen.

Another positive development that educators in Eastern and Western Washington mentioned were dual language programs. Although they described this in positive terms, the Latinx dual language teachers in SPS that I spoke to were very aware of the inequity of dual language programs serving white families rather than being focused on serving Latinx students and families, while in Eastern Washington, the dual language teachers expressed a need for more training for teachers and staff.

Although many felt that there was still much to do, educators who had been involved with the race and equity work with the WEA and their own local associations were intentional about explaining how much they had contributed to that work. A number who had been involved in the burgeoning center for racial, economic and social justice described that initiative as being positive as well as their work in helping the WEA

be the first state educator union to pass a BLM resolution. Those who understood this as work that could be taken up by associations expressed that they would like the WEA to take more bold action in terms of their racial justice work. For example, a Black female office staff member from a district south of Seattle felt that the WEA should be making anti-racist training, such as Diamond Law training, a requirement for white staff. Many also expressed that they wanted anti-racism to be more of an explicit focus in their own local universities. A counselor of color in SPS said that she had attended the Edmonds union's first educators of color conference and noted that there was not the equivalent in SPS and a number of other districts, either.

A dimension of public schooling that a number of educators, especially counselors and school psychologists felt needed to be shored up were social and support systems for children and families. For example, the excessive and unrealistic case load of counselors, especially in middle and high schools, is a well-known problem (Woods & Domina, 2014) and the desire to have this reduced as well as adding case managers, mental health professionals and social workers was expressed. One counselor of color in SPS articulated that counselors could do a lot and were focused on more than what students' grades, and specifically on "what's going on with students." However, she was frustrated about not being able to do that due to both their large caseloads and what they felt to be a lack of an authentic partnership with teachers. She felt that counselors were in the middle position where they had the administration's ear and opportunities to collaborate with teachers. For example, she described doing the following:

challenging a teacher and asking, "You sent this lovely email to this student. He's at a C, you're pushing him to a B, but here's also this student of color who's missed your class and maybe they're at a D, hovering over a C. Where's that communication?"

Increasing the number of school counselors and their ability to partner with teachers to support students of color seemed to be important opportunities. Some

districts had a director for school counselors which was the point person for all counselors, and this seemed to be a step in a more positive direction for supporting them as professionals, especially, the counselors of color.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, what was most remarkable about conducting all these interviews and listening to the stories was how committed all the educators were about changing schools and changing education especially through a racial justice lens. This translated into not only their care for students and families but also in drawing on and using their own life experiences as a foundation for their vision and care.

By and large, most of the educators interviewed for this study viewed education beyond that of students' academic achievement with many decrying this excessive focus as being a distraction or actually potentially harmful when it was set as a target to meet for students of color. When asked what an ideal world would look like for their students of color, they described a world where students would be safe and cared for in ways where their mental and physical health and personhood were protected, nourished, and sustained.

The four main recommendations from the findings of this study are the following:

The first is that the view on what education is and should be must move from one that is focused on assimilative practices such as standardized testing, assessment, and traditional curriculum to a more holistic and interconnected understanding and vision of education. There was a hope expressed by many that students and their needs would be placed at the center and these needs should be defined beyond school and with a view of students as whole people. Adding more support staff (of color) and providing them supports in schools and districts, such as counselors and mental health professionals would provide material support for such a shift.

The second recommendation is to envision a larger change in the system/systems which would include the educational system as well as its connections to other societal needs for students and families. Educators that we spoke to seemed to be fatigued by what seemed to be surface and piece meal changes such as attempts to recruit teachers of color rather than attempting to change systems of support for them. A key change that many seemed to desire was a movement from the hierarchical organization and decision-making of educational systems and organizations, including the WEA, to one that was communal and horizontally structured.

A third recommendation is to view *all staff* as being educators for students, and not solely those who are teachers and principals and to some degree, counselors – especially, paraeducators as well as office, custodial and transportation staff. It was clear that many of these staff had very strong and close connections to and insights into students, seeing them in other contexts, in addition to their classrooms. These educators felt that treating these staff with respect and providing them opportunities for career and professional development pathways as well as ways to partner more strongly with teachers and principals would lead to better and more just outcomes for themselves and students.

A fourth strong recommendation is for unions including the WEA to go to bat for racial equity more strongly and wholeheartedly and to go beyond what has been the traditional role of unions, which in some cases have protected educators who have been racist and oppressive in their classrooms. Educators who knew that unions could play such a role felt that the WEA had to be more courageous in taking such a stance if they genuinely wanted to be a driver for educational justice in the state. Although it was clear there were some different perspectives and experiences of educators in different positions across the state, the educators of color who understood that unions could play this role, clearly wanted more bold action in terms of racial justice from the WEA and their local unions. If local unions and the WEA could, without reservations, center concurrently the work of racial justice as well as reaching out to, engaging and

supporting educators of color, this would be the most powerful recommendation to come from this study.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

1. Let's start off by you telling me about your work as a teacher:
 - a. What is your role, including at your school, and tell me about the students you mainly work with.
2. As you know, this is a project about understanding the challenges to educational justice and possibilities for getting more closely to it in Washington state. Is there a definition of educational justice that you feel comfortable with and what is it?
 - a. What do you see as the major challenges and ways to address educational justice especially for students and families of color/intersectionally oppressed? (split into two – challenges and ways to address)
3. The next couple of questions are about educational justice and the role of a teacher.
 - a. To what extent do you see the teacher's (individually or as a group) sphere of influence in terms of addressing challenges to educational justice?
 - b. Are there examples you can share that you or a group of colleagues have worked on in addressing such challenges?
4. The next couple of questions are about educational justice and the role of administration.
 - a. What are examples of your *school administration* being part of both the challenges in furthering educational justice and being part of the ways to address these challenges? (split into two-challenges and ways to address)

- b. What are examples of your *school district* being part of the challenges in furthering educational justice and being part of the ways to address these challenges?
5. This is definitely a particular moment in history in terms of educational justice especially for teachers and schools due to COVID and the BLM movement.
 - a. What are your views of how each has affected students and families of color/intersectionally oppressed?
 - b. What are your opinions of how your admin and the district has handled the COVID-19 Pandemic?
 - c. What are your opinions of how your admin and the district has spoken to/worked with the BLM movement?
6. Please tell me more about your experiences with the union as related to educational justice
 - a. How have you felt your local union has contributed to both the challenges and ways to meet the challenges related to educational justice? Examples?
 - b. What about the Washington Education Association?
7. End with.....In an ideal world, what would the schooling experiences of your students (esp students of color/intersectional oppressed) look/be like? What needs to happen to achieve this ideal?
8. Anything else you would like to add?