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Closing School Climate Gaps at Elm City Montessori School

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Abstract: Despite the accomplishments of the Civil Rights movement, students from racially and socioeconomically marginalized communities continue to attend schools whose climates are hostile to their needs — educators have made students argue the “pros and cons” of imperialism, disproportionately punished their BIPOC students, and failed to challenge the racism that Black students endure (“Stories,” n.d.). Unfortunately, there is no one-size-fits-all solution that integrated schools can adopt to ensure all students feel welcomed, respected, and heard. Through interviews, survey data, and classroom observations, this capstone identifies school climate needs, namely as they pertain to resources, relationships, and restorative disciplinary practices, at one integrated PreK3-8 school, Elm City Montessori School (ECMS) in New Haven, Connecticut. This capstone concludes that while ECMS effectively honors and celebrates its diversity, the school should evaluate the allocation of curricular resources, build stronger ties to the New Haven community, and proactively support student mental health. The findings suggest that the ECMS should, in addition to adopting other reforms, invest more in LGBTQIA+ books and work alongside local advocacy groups to help achieve these goals. While this capstone is not generalizable, its findings show that all integrated schools must continue to critically assess if diversity within their buildings translates into a welcoming or hostile space.

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Introduction

In September 1957, hundreds of white citizens and members of the Arkansas National Guard blocked Black 15-year-old student Elizabeth Eckford from entering the front of Little Rock Central High School. They stood in her way, hurled racial slurs at her, screamed for her to be lynched, and stopped her from entering the school (Lebeau, 2004). Eckford could not make it inside. She eventually had to take the bus back home in defeat.

Three years later, federal marshals escorted Ruby Bridges, a six-year-old Black girl, into William Frantz Elementary School. Like Eckford, she was met with slurs and death threats. Appalled by her presence, white parents pulled their children out of Bridges' class and teachers refused to teach her class. She was left with no classmates and one teacher who generously moved from Boston to teach Bridges ("The Giant Footsteps of a Little Girl," 2002; Brunson Day, 2016). While the attacks may look different than they did for Bridges or Eckford, marginalized students far too often still face vitriol, hate, and adversity when attending integrated schools today. And I have seen this reality in my K-12 education.

I attended School Without Walls, a public magnet high school in Washington, D.C. affectionately known as "Walls" that was split about 50-50 between white and minority students during my time there (see Figure 1). My experiences at Walls during my sophomore year gave birth to this capstone. Walls took pride in fostering, not just racial, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity. However, buried underneath many glowing D.C. Public Schools press releases, top-notch test scores, and a prestigious partnership with George Washington University, the school hid deep-seated racial tension. During my sophomore year at Walls, a student published a series of Instagram posts likening Black people to monkeys. The posts prompted the

school administration to offer remarks condemning the incident and create a toothless school climate committee that, to the best of my knowledge, did not spur any meaningful change. Soon, tense encounters with students of different races occurred, culminating in a situation where a Black student pepper-sprayed a white student off campus. During the same school year and my senior year, swastikas were found in school bathrooms (Stein, 2018). Also, during the same school year, my AP World History teacher insisted that imperialism was a “net gain” for developing nations, a comment that many of my peers and I found to be insensitive. I felt as if disdain for marginalized groups was explicit.

School Without Walls 2016-17 Demographics

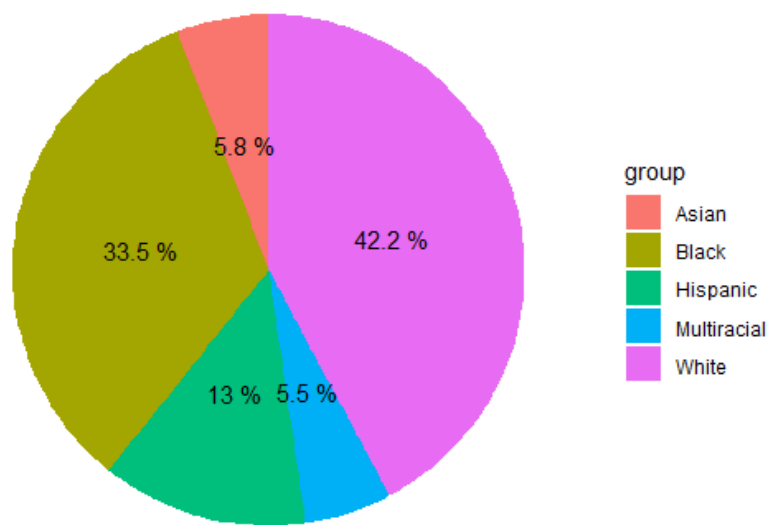


Figure 1. School Without Walls 2016-17 Demographics¹

I also felt as if contempt for marginalized groups was implicit. Black students sat in the cafeteria for breakfast while white students sat by the stairways. Asian and Latino students often

¹ Student enrollment comes from the 2015-16 School Without Walls equity report. This school year was my sophomore year, which saw significant racial tension. You can find the report here: https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/2015_Equity_Report_DCPS%20School_School%20Without%20Walls%20HS_1.pdf

split their time between the two groups. We also noticed that non-AP classes were loaded with BIPOC students while their AP counterparts were full of white students, which some of us understood as a reflection of the school administration's underlying assumptions about our intelligence. Reflecting upon my four years at Walls, it is clear that there was a racial school climate gap. That is to say, my white peers felt more respected, welcomed, and heard at Walls than my BIPOC peers. Because of what I observed Walls, whenever I hear about other integrated schools' diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts to make BIPOC students and other marginalized people feel more comfortable, I am immediately skeptical.

Like my alma mater, Elm City Montessori School (ECMS) — a PreK3-8 public school located in New Haven, Connecticut that features multi-age classrooms (ages 3-6, 6-9, 9-12, 12-15) (“About Us,” n.d.) — is committed to fostering a diverse student body; Dave Weinreb, ECMS’s Magnet School Resource Teacher, said that the school wants to “reflect the identities and communities of New Haven. Broadly speaking, it’s not just a place for some, it’s a place for anyone.” Figure 2 shows that during the 2022-23 school year, ECMS is diverse — no single racial group composed more than 36 percent of the school population (“Enrollment Export”). The data are comparable to New Haven Public Schools overall, which did not have a majority racial/ethnic during the 2021-22 school year, the latest year for which data are available (“Enrollment Export”).² Weinreb said that student recruitment has involved video promotions, door knocking, and open houses. ECMS is committed to teacher diversity, in addition to student diversity; according to 2022-23 data from EdSight, Connecticut’s education data portal, eight out

² To see the data, select the 2021-22 school year, district level, and the race/ethnicity student group. Under the select district(s) tab, scroll down to New Haven School District. The data show that Hispanic/Latino students made up roughly 48 percent of the school district population during the 2021-22 school year, Black students made up roughly 35.16 percent, white students made up roughly 11 percent, and Asian students made up roughly 2.8 percent.

of 22 educators (about 36 percent) are educators of color (“Educator Diversity Export”). In the same school year, roughly 29.9 percent of educators in New Haven Public Schools are educators of color (“Educator Diversity Export”). Above all, the school is intentional about creating a school climate where all students feel welcomed, respected, and heard.

In March 2021, Weinreb emailed me about the school’s upcoming virtual “one book, one school” community discussion. He wanted me to cover the event for the Yale Daily News, which I did. During the community conversation, I saw the paintings inspired by African American artists that students made for Black History Month, heard teachers express excitement about a book that tells the story of a Black Muslim girl finding pride in her identity, and listened to school administrators commit to hiring a diverse team of educators (Robles, 2021). It was all part of ECMS’ anti-bias, anti-racist (ABAR) curriculum (Robles, 2021). And It was also the kind of curriculum I wish Walls had championed. As I considered making ECMS the case study for my capstone in the Fall of 2022, my skepticism returned; I could not help but wonder if the ABAR curriculum alone is enough for ECMS to create a school that embraces its diversity.

Thus, my capstone asks if ECMS is living up to its initial vision of creating a “racially, ethnically, and economically diverse with a nurturing, child-centered approach to early education and strong parent engagement” (“Our History & School Design,” n.d.). Through school climate survey data, classroom observations, and teacher interviews, my capstone explores this question. I developed a school climate survey specifically for ECMS by modifying Olivia Hussey’s (2020) “Real Integration Rubric” or RIR for short (see Appendices A and B). All data sources are created in consultation with the literature review, Weinreb, and my capstone advisors. My findings show that while ECMS effectively honors and celebrates its diversity, the school can get

closer to its original mission by reallocating curricular resources, building stronger ties to the New Haven community, and proactively supporting students.

Elm City Montessori 2022-23 Demographics

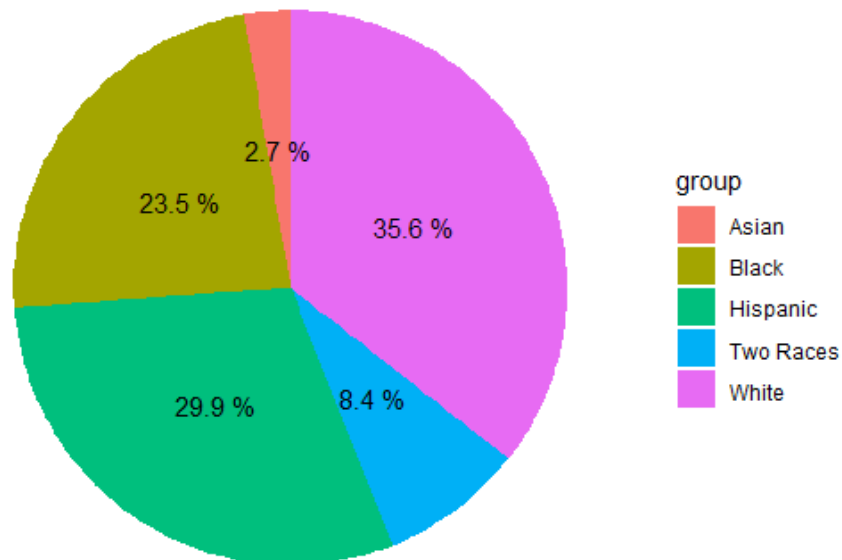


Figure 2. Elm City Montessori School Demographics³

In Part I of this capstone, I provide background on the history of the school integration movement and IntegrateNYC's 5R framework, which I use to assess the school climate at ECMS. In Part II, I present my research questions, the findings of my literature review, and my methodology. In Part III, I analyze my data using the 5Rs framework, articulate my methodology's limitations, provide policy recommendations, and describe potential improvements to my capstone's survey tool.

³ Student enrollment data comes from EdSight, Connecticut's publicly available database of education-related statistics. You can explore the database here: https://public-edsight.ct.gov/Students/Enrollment-Dashboard/Public-School-Enrollment-Export?language=en_US

Background: History of the School Integration Movement

School segregation was first upheld as the law of the land in 1896 when the Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that “separate but equal” schools for Black and white students were constitutional. For decades, communities from the deep South to the far North segregated their school systems, depriving Black children of access to quality education. The Supreme Court’s 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision upturned its abhorrent “separate but equal” doctrine. The following year, the Supreme Court issued another ruling known as *Brown II*, which had that school desegregation must occur “with all deliberate speed.” However, the following decade saw nationwide mass resistance to school desegregation, which at the time meant ending the legal practice of banning students of color from white-only schools.

Most famously, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus called on the national guard to block nine Black students’ entry into Central High School in Little Rock in September 1957, including Elizabeth Eckford (Lebeau, 2004). Just a year prior, a group of 101 southern members of Congress 1956 signed the Southern Manifesto, which declared “we pledge ourselves to use all lawful means to bring about a reversal of this decision which is contrary to the Constitution and to prevent the use of force in its implementation.” Resistance to *Brown* was not isolated to just the deep south. In 1964, more than ten thousand people, most of whom were white mothers, marched to New York City’s city hall from the Board of Education building in Brooklyn in protest of school desegregation (Delmont, 2016). These protestors were opposed to several school integration policies such as voluntary transfer programs, but chief among them was busing (Delmont, 2016). Nationally, politicians amended the 1964 Civil Rights Act so that the federal government would only have the authority to curtail de jure (“in law”) segregation in the

South, protecting northern states (Delmont, 2016). By 1964, just one-fiftieth of all southern Black children attended integrated schools while northern school segregation remained unaffected until the mid-1970s (Ogletree).

The late 1960s and early 1970s marked a turning point in the school desegregation movement. During this period, Black-white, Hispanic-white, and Asian-white school segregation metrics reached historic lows (Reardon & Owens, 2014). The 1980s, however, saw a reversal of school desegregation policies and court cases. Consequentially, schools have since increasingly resegregated. (Reardon & Owens, 2014). In the 1990s, multiple Supreme Court rulings began to accelerate the dismantling of school desegregation efforts. One such case was *Board of Education of Oklahoma City Public Schools v. Dowell (1991)*, which held that it is not unconstitutional to end a federal school desegregation order once a school district has eliminated past discrimination in “good faith.” Another case was the lesser-known *Freeman v. Pitts (1992)*, which also made it easier for school districts to be released from their desegregation orders. In the years since those two cases, the second Bush and Obama administrations have gradually freed school districts from federal desegregation orders as the Department of Education has struggled to enforce court orders already on the books due to staffing shortages (Felton, 2019). In 2007, the Supreme Court placed a significant policy constraint on the school desegregation movement by barring the use of race in school assignment policies in its *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* decision. These court cases and policy decisions have had dire consequences for students as today’s American public school system has become just as segregated across racial and socioeconomic lines as they were in the late 1960s, according to a Politifact review (Fiske, 2022).

The Modern School Integration Movement

Recent data show that US schools across the country continue to be segregated across racial and socioeconomic lines. A July 2022 report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that more than a third of K-12 students (18.5 million) attended a school where 75 percent or more of students were of a single race or ethnicity (“K-12 Education: Student Population Has Significantly Diversified, but...,” 2022). The same report found that 14 percent of students attended a school where one race or ethnicity made up 90 percent of the student population (“K-12 Education: Student Population Has Significantly Diversified, but...,” 2022). A May 2022 report from the progressive The Century Foundation similarly found that during the 2018-19 school year, one in six students attend a school where one race or ethnicity made up 90 percent of the student population (Potter, 2022). The Century Foundation has also created a map that charts the severity of school segregation by race and income based on the variance of school demographics with 0 representing no school segregation and 1 representing total school segregation across major US metro areas (Potter, 2022). Despite the resegregation of US schools over the last few decades, school integration is still a worthwhile goal.

Academically, studies have shown that students in integrated schools have average test scores (even after controlling for socioeconomic status), are more likely to go to college, and are less likely to drop out of school; integrated schools have also been found to close the racial achievement gap (“The Benefits of Socioeconomically and Racially Integrated Schools and Classrooms,” 2019). Socially, integrated schools reduce racial bias, encourage students to seek out diverse settings later in life, improve students' intellectual self-confidence, and improve leadership skills (“The Benefits of Socioeconomically and Racially Integrated Schools and

Classrooms,” 2019). However, bringing Black and white students into the same school building is not going to magically unlock the promise of school integration in America. History, my experience at Walls, and stories from New York City students show how intentional and structural efforts toward inclusion are necessary prerequisites.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the youth-led, New York City-based integration advocacy group IntegrateNYC filed spent a year talking to students across New York City about their experiences with their peers and teachers at school. The findings demonstrated that students of color experienced harrowing impacts of segregation and racial inequity. BIPOC students shared stories about how their freshman global class spent a disproportionate amount of time on European history compared to African history, discussed the “pros and cons of imperialism” in AP US History, and felt alienated by hyper-competitive academic environments at elite selective high schools (“Stories,” n.d.). IntegrateNYC presented the results of the listening tour using its 5R framework — race and enrollment, restorative justice, resources, representation, and relationships (“Stories,”). That framework is widely used by modern school integration activists and informs this capstone’s methodology.

Frameworks: Why IntegrateNYC's 5Rs

The 5Rs is a framework that was developed by IntegrateNYC to assess the degree to which a school has achieved real integration. Real integration is a concept that acknowledges that integrated schools must not only bring students of different backgrounds into the same school building but also develop policies that ensure equity and inclusion. IntegrateNYC defines and provides examples of violations of each of the 5Rs in its lawsuit against the New York officials and its website:

1. **Race and enrollment** asks “Who is in your school? How are students admitted?” (“Making the Grade...,” 2019). This R challenges policymakers to undo school admissions policies that cause racial and socioeconomic isolation as well as deprive students of color of access to quality education (“The Policy Platform for School Integration,” n.d.). An example of this is IntegrateNYC’s opposition to Gifted & Talent Programs for four-year-olds, which they claim creates a racial and socioeconomic “caste system”(IntegrateNYC et al. v State of New York et al., 2021) and by extension, high school screening for selective schools. These two policies have systematically deprived students of color and poorer students of access to high-quality education (IntegrateNYC et al. v State of New York et al., 2021).
2. **Restorative justice** asks “Who is punished in your school and how? What can schools do to create a more positive school climate and culture?” (“Making the Grade...” 2019). This R challenges schools to become police-free and metal detector-free (“The Policy Platform for School Integration,” n.d.). IntegrateNYC calls attention to disproportionate suspension rates for Black and Latino students compared to white students even though

these student groups do not disproportionately misbehave (IntegrateNYC et al. v State of New York et al., 2021).

3. **Resources** asks “What is in your school?” (“Making the Grade...,” 2019). This R pushes schools and school districts to provide an equitable distribution of resources such as qualified staff, up-to-date books, appropriate class sizes, and more to all of its students (“The Policy Platform for School Integration,” n.d.). IntegrateNYC argues that fifth-grade students of color struggle with identifying “good” schools with resources such as “rigorous academics, robust athletics, and extracurricular programs” compared to their privileged counterparts (IntegrateNYC et al. v State of New York et al., 2021).
4. **Representation** asks “Who teaches and leads your school?” (“Making the Grade...,” 2019). This R demands schools have a diverse array of staffers, reflecting a wide set of races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, immigration statuses, etc., (“The Policy Platform for School Integration,” n.d.). IntegrateNYC seeks to change the fact that there is a lack of teacher diversity; between 2011 and 2017 there was just one teacher of color for every 30 students of color in New York City compared to one white teacher for every white student (IntegrateNYC et al. v State of New York et al., 2021).
5. **Relationships** asks “How do people in your school relate to one another and their differences? How do students, families, and teachers learn to build across difference?” (“Making the Grade...,” 2019). This R compels schools to be considerate and empathetic of students of all backgrounds, asking for schools to adopt a curriculum that speaks to different identities and provides safe spaces (“The Policy Platform for School Integration,” n.d.). IntegrateNYC argues that this R is violated because New York City

Public Schools fail to provide teachers with the training, curriculum, and resources needed to deliver culturally responsive pedagogy, despite clear calls from the New York Department of Education to teach in this fashion (IntegrateNYC et al. v State of New York et al., 2021). The coalition cites student examples of teachers making culturally insensitive comments about slavery and failing to acknowledge the racial trauma associated with its depictions as manifestations of this failure (IntegrateNYC et al. v State of New York et al., 2021).

When IntegrateNYC first conceived of the 5Rs, they were merely guiding principles. Teacher activist Olivia Hussey (2020) worked with IntegrateNYC and adult allies to create a survey called the Real Integration Rubric (RIR) to help schools quantify the degree to which they have achieved real integration across each of the 5Rs. The tool asks for school staff to reflect on different policies and practices at their schools such as the use of culturally responsive textbooks and disciplinary referrals. While the RIR is not a school climate survey, Hussey included questions related to equity and diversity, which were largely absent in the popular Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) (Hussey, 2020). The CSCI and other school climate surveys are too often not adequately tailored to an integrated school's needs or realities (see literature review). I modified the RIR (see Appendices A & B) to address the shortcomings of prior school climate surveys to create a new one that takes an intersectional approach and is suitable for a Montessori school.

Besides allowing me to create a school climate survey, I also chose to use the 5Rs in this capstone because integration activists widely utilize them. In 2017, the New York City Department of Education established the School Diversity Advisory Group as a part of its Equity

and Excellence for All: Diversity in New York City Public Schools Plan (“Making the Grade...,” 2019). In its final report, the advisory group, composed of students, teachers, parents, policymakers, and other leaders used the 5Rs as its guiding framework (“Making the Grade...,” 2019) and made many concrete systemic recommendations for each of the 5Rs. For instance, the group suggested that to improve upon the relationships R, New York City public schools should assess the role that School Safety Agents play in schools, add school climate accountability metrics on school-wide Comprehensive Education Plans, expand initiatives that connect the school with the community, and adopt a working definition of culturally relevant education, among other things (“Making the Grade...,” 2019). While many of the policy proposals have not been adopted, it is undeniable that the 5Rs provided a fitting framework for policymakers to envision what types of policies New York City public schools should implement. It is important to mention that while other frameworks such as Harvard Graduate School of Education’s ABCDs of school integration exist and are solid options, this capstone chooses the 5Rs because of its popularity and focus on systemic policy action.

Research Questions and Scope

My capstone research questions can be summarized as follows:

1. How can Elm City Montessori School, a school with a racially and socioeconomically diverse student population (see Figure 2) and commitment to integration (“About Us,” n.d.), effectively create a school climate where students, teachers, and parents feel welcomed, respected, and heard? How can IntegrateNYC’s 5R framework inform the role that culturally responsive pedagogy, restorative practices, and social-emotional learning play in this work?
2. How can the “Real Integration Rubric” be repurposed to serve as a school climate measurement tool for Elm City Montessori School?

By answering these questions, this capstone derives recommendations for ECMS to improve its school climate. This capstone presents recommendations using three out of the 5Rs, resources, restorative practices, and relationships. These 3Rs all relate to culturally responsive, pedagogy, restorative practices, and social-emotional learning, which Weinreb said are areas of interest to ECMS and subjects where schools traditionally invite bias and racism. Specifically, an inquiry into culturally responsive pedagogy invites questions about school resources, representation, and relationships. An exploration into social-emotional learning, similarly, pertains to school resources and relationships. And restorative practices itself is one of the 5Rs.

Weinreb recommended that this capstone be situated in ECMS’s “primaries” classroom (ages 3-6) because at ages 3-6 teachers tend to think less about anti-bias, anti-racist (ABAR) work. I agreed to conduct classroom observations in only “primaries” classrooms because of this suggestion and desire to narrow the scope of my capstone (see methodology section).

To bring to answer my research questions, I start with a review of the literature on school climate, culturally responsive pedagogy, restorative practices, and social-emotional learning. My literature review achieves three goals. Firstly, the literature review findings help me understand how different school actors (e.g. students, teachers, parents) can influence the broader school climate. Secondly, the literature review informs the creation of my capstone's school climate survey tool, the RIR (see Appendices A and B). Thirdly, the literature review allows me to make evidence-based policy recommendations.

Literature Review

This capstone is situated at the intersection of literature on school climate, culturally responsive pedagogy, restorative school disciplinary practices, and social-emotional learning. By bringing these fields together, my capstone seeks to provide Elm City Montessori with a three-pager of policy recommendations to improve its school climate. The recommendations come from data generated using a teacher survey, interviews, and classroom observations.

School Climate

While there is no one definition of school climate, scholars have long researched the topic and typically define the term using five dimensions. School climate research traces back to Perry (1908), who wrote a book about the internal school problems that principals in urban schools faced. Today, scholars often define school climate as the culmination of a school's norms, values, goals, and/or qualities ("What is School Climate and why is it important," n.d.; Zullig et al., 2010; Thapa et al., 2013). Scholarship tends to break down this broad definition into five domains, which can include school safety, interpersonal relationships (between students and school staff), sense of school connectedness, and teaching practices, among other areas ("What is School Climate and why is it important," n.d.; Zullig et al., 2010; Thapa et al., 2013). Other niche school climate domains include social media ("What is School Climate and why is it important"), school facility quality (Zullig et al., 2010), and "the school improvement process" (Thapa et al., 2013). For this capstone, *school climate* refers to the "quality and character of school life" ("What is School Climate and why is it important," n.d.; Cohen et al., 2009), which includes people's perceptions of safety, interpersonal relationships, curriculum/teaching, and

sense of school connectedness. A school with a “positive school climate” enjoys high student, teacher, and parent ratings across all of these domains on school climate surveys. Since at least the 1990s (Zullig et al., 2010), scholars have created invaluable various school climate surveys.

Scholarship indicates that surveys are an effective way to measure school climate and can help schools improve academic outcomes, teacher retention rates, student mental health, and more. Academically, studies find that more positive school climates are associated with better in-school grades and performances on standardized tests (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020; Thapa et al., 2013; Cohen et al., 2009; Berkowitz, 2020; Berkowitz et al., 2016). Additionally, scholars have found that schools with a positive school climate experience narrower racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps (Berkowitz, 2020; Berkowitz et al., 2016; Thapa et al., 2013), though the degree to which school climate alone can close academic gaps is a matter of scholarly debate (Berkowitz, 2020). Academics aside, teachers at schools with more positive school climates are more likely to stay (Cohen et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020; Thapa et al., 2013) and experience less exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of low personal accomplishment (Thapa et al., 2013). Positive school climates can help students express empathy, recognize emotions, and self-regulate, in addition to improving their self-esteem (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020; Thapa et al., 2013). A literature review of school climate research finds that schools with positive school climates enjoy other benefits such as decreased student absenteeism, lower suspension rates, and increased student motivation to learn (Thapa et al., 2013). Despite the importance of school climate surveys, many of them neglect to account for the needs of schools serving a diverse student body.

The National School Climate Center's Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI), one of the most popular surveys only mentions "race" once ("CSCI School Personnel Sample," 2021; Hussey, 2020). Keywords such as "class," "socioeconomic" and variations of "geography" are not included in sample versions of the CSCI ("CSCI Elementary School Sample," 2021; "CSCI Middle and High School Sample," 2021; "CSCI Parent Sample," 2021; "CSCI School Personnel Sample," 2021; Hussey, 2020). Many other school climate surveys do not place questions about race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender at the forefront either. A look at the US Department of Education-contracted National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments' School Climate Survey Compendium (2021) shows that the overwhelming majority of surveys do not make race, gender, or class relations a centerpiece of their metrics. Only one survey in the compendium mentions "good race relations" as a variable of interest. None of them make any references to differences in school experiences across socioeconomic or gender lines. The lack of intersectionality in school climate surveys is problematic because scholars know that identities profoundly shape how someone experiences their school. Variations in school experiences across different identity groups are known as school climate gaps.

The racial school climate gap is a well-documented phenomenon. The racial school climate gap was first coined by Voight's (2015) paper on school climate in California, which found that Black and Hispanic students in middle schools reported feeling less safe, connected to the school community, and positive about adult-student relationships than their white counterparts. Variations in student responses were most pronounced within schools, suggesting that even in integrated spaces, views on school climate are not homogenous. Shirley & Cornell (2012) similarly found evidence of racial school climate gaps; their paper found that Black

students at one suburban Virginia middle school were more likely to report that their peers “supported aggressive behavior” and less likely to express a willingness to ask teachers to help them address bullying and threats of violence. A broader study of 53 schools with a sample of 18,397 Black students found that Black students were statistically significantly more likely to feel less cared for, to say that there is racial inequity in their schools, and to report they are disengaged in school than their white counterparts (Bottiani et al., 2014). Schools with a more positive racial school climate (e.g. more students believe that there is racial fairness amongst students, fewer students self-report having experienced racism, and fewer students say changes are needed to achieve in-school racial fairness, etc.) are associated with higher self-reported grades, in addition to fewer self-reported cases of detention and suspension (Mattison & Aber, 2007).

The findings of this portion of the literature review suggest that the ideal school climate survey for Elm City Montessori would acknowledge the existence of school climate gaps and question the efficacy of practices designed to narrow them.

Montessori Schools and School Climate

Montessori schools themselves can have either a positive or negative impact on school climate factors, depending on how school policies are designed. In traditional public schools, students have structured schedules and are expected to absorb whatever information the teacher decides to disseminate. Montessori schools radically shift this paradigm through its six distinctive components (Flower, 2006):

1. Freedom

2. Structure and Order
3. Reality and Nature
4. Beauty and Atmosphere
5. Montessori Materials (this refers to materials that encourage self-directed learning such as a movable alphabet, pink tower, sound cylinders, dressing frames, etc., (“10 Common Montessori Learning Materials...,” 2017))
6. The Development of Community Life

These six components have a profound impact on school climate. For example, Harris (1995) proposed that students at Montessori schools are more peaceful than traditional public schools because of Montessori’s emphasis on positive adult role modeling. Harris (1995) additionally found that some teachers believe Montessori schools are more democratic than their traditional public school counterparts. Others such as Lillard (1972) theorized that Montessori education inherently produces a strong sense of community, in part because children take ownership and responsibility over their education. Additionally, Lillard (1972) observed that older children in mixed-aged classrooms often spontaneously offered help to their younger peers engaged in exploration. This body of literature suggests that a school like Elm City Montessori should foster a positive school climate.

However, Mira Debs, executive director of the Yale Education Studies program, noted in her book *Diverse Families, Desirable Schools: Public Montessori in the Era of School Choice* (2019) that deliberate policy decisions are needed to make Montessori schools. She wrote that Montessori schools are “particularly vulnerable, both historically and today, to being diverted to serve predominantly middle-class and White students” because of their popularity and location in

school districts that offer school choice (Debs, 2019). Debs (2019) also adds that some parents' views on the purpose of education may clash with Montessori practices, representing a "conflicted fit" for which educators must account.

This portion of the literature review suggests that Montessori schools must be intentional about the policies so they do not widen school climate gaps. The next three sections of the literature review explore how culturally responsive pedagogy, restorative practices, and social-emotional learning can be embedded into a school climate survey that meets the aforementioned needs and follows the 5R framework.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and School Climate

Culturally responsive pedagogy is teaching that "draws on the cultural background and knowledge of students as assets in the classroom" (Byrd, 2016; Vavrus, 2008). Vavrus (2008) adds that culturally responsive pedagogy "calls attention to schooling norms where White middle-class values and expectations are privileged while other cultural, racial, and economic histories and community backgrounds are overlooked or degenerated." Culturally responsive pedagogy can manifest itself at the institutional, personal, and instructional levels (Richards et al., 2007).

At the institutional level, schools engaged in this way of teaching question where the best teachers are assigned, which students get to take advanced courses, and where resources are allocated (Richards et al., 2007). Institutional resources are often concentrated in white middle-class communities at the expense of BIPOC students (Vavrus, 2000). At the personal level, Richards et al., (2007) and Darling-Hammond & DePaoli (2020) argue that teachers must engage

in reflection, learn about student communities and families, and understand their positionality. At the instructional level, teachers committed to culturally responsive pedagogy acknowledge student differences and commonalities, represent student diversity in classroom materials, and foster positive relationships between themselves and students and their families (Richards et al. 2007). A culturally responsive classroom, for example, might celebrate its Muslim students by having teachers read *The Proudest Blue*, a book about a Black Muslim girl who becomes proud of her identity despite being bullied for her religion (Robles, 2021). A culturally responsive classroom might also acknowledge the irreparable harm that the United States inflicted on Native American communities through violent displacement and subsequent efforts to preserve Native identities (Klotz, 2021). Importantly, Darling-Hammond & Depaoli (2020) note that a diverse staff can help schools systematically implement culturally responsive pedagogy at the institutional, personal, and individual levels. Scholars widely hold that investment in culturally responsive pedagogy has a positive impact on positive ethnic-racial identity and school relationships.

When schools lack culturally responsive pedagogy, marginalized students feel alienated and struggle with self-identity (“Stories,” n.d.). Through careful curriculum design, schools can help students constructively explore their identities. For example, the 10-week afterschool Young Empowered Sisters program introduced young Black girls to a culturally responsive curriculum that was designed to foster a sense of Black identity, promote collectivism, increase awareness of racism, and “encourage participation in liberatory activism” (Thomas et al., 2008). Students in the program discussed what Black unity meant to them, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, how they have seen racism manifest, and how to cope with racism (Thomas et al., 2008). The program had

a statistically significant positive effect on Black ethnic identity (Thomas et al., 2008). Another study of 315 sixth-12th graders found that culturally responsive pedagogy is “particularly important for the development of students’ ethnic-racial identity” (Byrd, 2016). The study defined culturally responsive pedagogy as a way of teaching that incorporated students’ identities into the curriculum and rooted learning materials in real-life examples of interest to students (Byrd, 2016).

Culturally responsive pedagogy also supports healthy school relationships between students and their teachers (Hollins & Spencer, 1990; Howard 2001; Tatum 2003; Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). A widely cited 2001 study of African American elementary school students’ interpretation of culturally responsive pedagogy found that the teaching practice made students feel more comfortable at school (Howard, 2001). Students in the study frequently described their schools as a home and reported feeling “more comfortable with their teachers through their modes of communication, modes of interaction, and overall cultural knowledge” (Howard, 2001). Tatum (2003) argued that “straight talk” about racial identities in schools, an example of culturally responsive pedagogy, is essential to facilitate school communication across racial and ethnic lines. Byrd’s (2016) study similarly found that culturally responsive pedagogy instills in students more positive attitudes about their peers of other backgrounds. Finally, research has also shown that a lack of culturally responsive pedagogy can strain relationships between students and their teachers, particularly for students of color (Blitz, 2016).

In short, research shows that culturally responsive pedagogy — when incorporated into all facets of education — is associated with more positive school climates, especially for students of color. More precisely, students at schools with culturally responsive pedagogy tend to resonate

more with their identity and have healthier school relationships than their peers at schools that lack the teaching practice.

Restorative Practices and School Climate

Shifting away from punitive forms of discipline toward restorative practices has long been touted as an effective way to improve school climate. Scholars know that traditional forms of school punishment such as detentions and suspensions are ineffective at preventing students from engaging in “problem behavior” (Massar et al., 2015). Moreover, school staff disproportionately takes disciplinary action on Black and Latino students (Fadus, 2021; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2018), which traumatizes students, creates student distrust in school authority, and places students into the school-to-prison pipeline. In light of this literature, researchers have written hundreds of articles on a promising approach to addressing student misconduct — restorative practices (Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021).

Evans and Lester (2013) outline the seven key principles that restorative practices must follow; they must recognize that unmet needs can result in “misbehavior,” provide accountability and support for all afflicted parties, repair harm, view conflict as a learning opportunity, build healthy communities, restore relationships in light of conflict, and address power imbalances. Nevertheless, what constitutes a restorative practice is a matter of much scholarly debate (Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). In a sample of 71 scholarly articles about restorative practices, Zakszeski & Rutherford (2021) found that the majority of them did not clearly define the term or what it meant in the context of their paper. Twenty-two articles discussed reactive practices such as responsive circles and restorative conferences, 20 talked about proactive community-building

circles, 11 mentioned peer mediation, and just one described a re-entry circle (Zakszeski & Rutherford, 2021). Despite ambiguity over the meaning of a restorative practice, scholars still widely believed that restorative practices improve school climate.

Quantitative evidence suggests that restorative practices cause a decrease in student misbehavior, an increase in students' belief that their school is safe, a decline in the need for discipline, and an improvement in school relationships (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Augustine et al. (2018) randomly assigned 22 Pittsburgh schools to receive restorative practices training from the International Institute of Restorative Practices. Twenty-two others did not receive the treatment. The authors found that the program caused a 16 percent decrease in the number of days lost in school days lost to suspension and was associated with a positive increase in school climate opinion among teachers (Augustine et al., 2018). The efficacy of the training program was measured after one and two years, which means the results are likely attenuated because Evans and Lester (2013) noted that it takes three to five years for restorative practices to become fully embedded into a school's climate. Pittsburgh's story is not unique. Other school districts have seen suspension rates drop after implementing restorative practices. For example, researchers studied the Restorative Discipline program, which had San Antonio-area teachers participate in a two-day training on restorative circles, write "respect agreements" with their students, and lead three circles a week to check up on their students (Amour 2014). They found that one middle school saw a 65 percent drop in in-school suspensions for sixth graders and a 47 percent drop for seventh graders in just one school year after the school implemented the Restorative Discipline program (Amour, 2014). The researchers also found that the districtwide mean School Climate Survey score for both students and staff generally increased after just one

school year. The school climate survey used in the study included questions about if students and teachers communicate with each other respectfully if students are included in conflict resolution, and if students are given chances to correct mistakes, among other items.

The scholarship is clear that restorative practices can improve student school experiences by lowering suspension rates, instilling students with a sense of safety, and nurturing healthy relationships.

Social-Emotional Learning and School Climate

Social-emotional learning refers to the skills necessary to maintain and develop mutually supportive relationships and the ability to make equitable decisions (Robles, 2021). The five key competencies associated with social-emotional learning are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Robles, 2021). In practice, social-emotional learning can take on multiple forms such as writing hand-written letters to a fictional character, discussing prompts about managing stress and articulating emotions through a mood meter (Robles, 2021). Scholars have long found that social-emotional learning practices improve interpersonal relationships, help manage school conflict, and improve student well-being, all of which are essential aspects of a supportive learning environment (Baumsteiger et al., 2021; Robles, 2021, Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020).

Data from 37 Mexican high schools show that one longitudinal social-emotional learning program, RULER, led to significant improvements across multiple school climate indicators such as teaching quality, student relationships, adult relationships, student-adult relationships, and discipline, among others (Baumsteiger et al., 2021). RULER is an evidence-based, whole-

school approach for improving a school's climate that teaches teachers how to use social-emotional learning tools such as the mood meter, the charter, meta-moments, and the blueprint (Baumsteiger et al., 2021).⁴ RULER experts initially train a small group of educators who go on to teach their peers RULER social-emotional learning practices (Baumsteiger et., 2021; Robles, 2021).

In addition to RULER, scholars have found that other social-emotional learning programs have a positive impact on school climate. Other programs reduce cases of “acting out,” student aggression, and delinquency (Baker, 2020; Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). They also decrease feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, and depression (Baker, 2020, Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). A meta-analysis of 213 school-based, universal social-emotional learning programs, serving 270,034 kindergarten children, echoed these findings. The meta-analysis concluded that social-emotional learning programs increase prosocial behavior, lower student misconduct issues, and improve student mental health (Durlak et al., 2011). It is important to note that while social-emotional learning programs can be valuable resources to schools, their effectiveness depends on school district support, community buy-in, and teacher training (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020; Robles, 2021). Nevertheless, the literature is clear that spending time to teach students how to process and respond to their emotions improves the well-being of school communities.

Summary of the Literature Review

⁴ The charter is an agreement that articulates how adults and students want to feel in school and the behaviors to which everyone commits. The mood meter is a four quadrant graph that helps students describe their emotions. A meta-moment is a four-step process that people use to handle unwanted emotions. The blueprint is a conflict resolution approach that is centered around empathy and understanding other perspectives.

In diverse schools, marginalized students often experience hostile school climates where they feel unrepresented, disrespected, and unheard. Students in these school environments are also often disproportionately disciplined by school staff, taught a curriculum that does not reflect them, bullied by their peers, and targeted by their teachers. The literature widely holds that culturally responsive pedagogy, restorative practices, and social-emotional learning are all effective ways for schools to make all students feel like they belong, are respected, and heard, but especially marginalized students. Culturally responsive pedagogy pushes teachers to adopt a curriculum that decenters whiteness and leverages the experiences, cultures, and identities of every student. Restorative practices, when they are centered around acknowledging and repairing harm, enhance student opinions of the school community and safety. Social-emotional learning helps students foster healthy relationships with their peers and improves their self-esteem.

Despite the clear literature that students perceive their experiences and school policies are based on their racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender, and other identities, school climate surveys tend to lack an intersectional lens. Acknowledging this flaw in school climate surveys, I transform Hussey's (2020) RIR into a school climate survey that explicitly asks how student identities impact school experiences. For example, I place questions about who is included and excluded from school curriculum, who is friends with whom, and how discipline is carried out at the forefront of RIR. All transformations made to the RIR (see Appendix B) are informed by both the findings of my literature review and conversations with Weinreb and my capstone advisors.

Existing School Climate Resources

I would be remiss to not mention the numerous pre-existing tools designed to improve culturally responsive pedagogy, restorative practices, and social-emotional learning. The following list is by no means exhaustive. Many other curricula, factsheets, and surveys can help schools like Elm City Montessori implement their school climate. The following resources were merely chosen because of their popularity and generalizability to all schools;

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

1. [NYU Steinhardt's Culturally Responsive Scorecard](#) ("Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard," 2022)
 - a. A tool that allows parents, students, and teachers to assess the extent to which English Language Arts and/or Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics curriculum is or is not culturally responsive. Scorecard users select a sample of larger curricula (e.g. seventh grade science unit about cells) and then extract key words, ideas, and statements from it. Users then quantify their level of satisfaction with the curricula, which is used to spur constructive conversation with peers about how to improve course content. *Relevant Pages:* 8-16.
2. [Black Lives Matter at Schools](#) ("Curriculum," n.d.)
 - a. After more than four years of hard work by 40 volunteers, Black Lives Matter at Schools has created an impressive Google folder of lesson plans for teachers to utilize. The folder additionally includes several webinars, suggested books, and PowerPoint presentations that can be used for students of all ages.

Restorative Practices

1. [Dignity in Schools' Manual on Classroom Circles](#) (“Center for Restorative Practices — teaching restorative practices with classroom circles,” n.d.)
 - a. This manual provides schools with a step-by-step guide on how to hold restorative circles in their classrooms. The goal of this framework is to build community and respond to misbehavior through healthy dialogue, shared understandings, and making “things right.” *Relevant Pages*: 30-63.
2. [Girls for Gender Equity' The Schools Girls Deserve Report](#) (“The Schools Girls Deserve,” 2017)
 - a. This report includes a section about how schools can decriminalize their learning environments. It specifically calls for schools to eliminate all police from their schools, remove metal detectors, and lowering the number of school-based discipline referrals. These policies are just some of many ways in which a story can move away from a zero-tolerance framework to a restorative one. *Relevant Pages*: 35-42.

Social-Emotional Learning

1. [RULER](#) (Baumsteiger et al., 2020; Robles, 2021)
 - a. A whole school approach to instilling in students the five competencies of social-emotional learning — self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships skills, and responsible decision-making. Participating schools have some teachers become trained in the RULER methodology and participate such as

the mood meter. Over a year, these teachers help their peers implement the methodology in their classrooms.

2. [Miss Kendra](#) (Robles, 2021)
 - a. A trauma-informed social-emotional learning program that can be used for children in kindergarten through high school. The program is centered around a fictional character named Miss Kendra who has experienced trauma and hardship in her life. By discussing her story in schools, honest conversations about emotions emerge in school classrooms, which transforms the relationships between students and teachers.

Methodology

This capstone’s methodology is three-pronged; I had Elm City Montessori teachers anonymously complete a school climate survey called the modified RIR (see Appendices A and B), sit down for 30-minute interviews, and allow me to observe “primaries” grade-level classrooms. Details about each of the three prongs are as follows:

1. **Issued a modified Real Integration Rubric (RIR) to all “primaries” teachers.** The RIR is a four-part survey created by Olivia Hussey (2020) that measures the degree to which an integrated school has achieved *real integration*, (see frameworks section for more information). My version has just three parts (see Appendices A and B). The first part spells out in simple terms the directions for the survey. The second part provides definitions, data sources to consider, and a list of descriptors for each of the 3Rs I selected — resources, relationships, and restorative practices. I choose these 3Rs because they pertain to key school climate indicators and make for a shorter survey. The final part asks the teacher to reflect upon the survey’s questions and design in writing. The RIR was sent to Elm City Montessori staffers via an anonymous Qualtrics survey link in February. 2023. To incentivize staffers to respond to the modified RIR, I visited Elm City Montessori in December, had Weinreb send staff email correspondences, and revisited the school in February with Dunkin’ Donuts. Due to my relatively small sample size of 13 teachers, I did not perform any linear regressions. Instead, I calculated the average five-point Likert scale score for each survey question. I looked at the average scores for each survey item and responses to the question “Which of the three areas should be Elm City

Montessori's top priority" to create theories about the school's climate. These theories were put into conversation with teacher interviews and classroom observations.

2. **Conducted 20-minute interviews of "primaries" teachers.** Two Elm City Montessori teachers agreed to be interviewed for my capstone. An interview script can be found in a Google Folder of scraped IRB materials.⁵ The script pushes teachers to reflect upon their school's use of culturally responsive pedagogy, social-emotional learning, and restorative practices. Select quotes were chosen to either corroborate, challenge or add nuance to quantitative survey findings. I stored all interview transcripts in a private, password-protected Otter.ai account. Both interviewed teachers are unnamed and referred to using gender-neutral pronouns. I chose this design to prevent Elm City Montessori from reprimanding a teacher for speaking candidly about the school's climate.
3. **Conducted four classroom observations focused on the 3Rs and the special areas of interest noted by Elm City Montessori staffers.** I conducted classroom observations over two days. In each classroom, I discretely took notes in a notebook. I took detailed notes about the physical layout of each classroom and the resources available to students. I also took note of specific student-student and student-teacher interactions that reflect the relationships and restorative practices Rs. I used my detailed observations to either corroborate, challenge or add nuance to quantitative survey findings.
 - a. Sassafras Classroom: February 17, 2023 (8:45 am - 9:45 am)
 - b. Cherry Classroom: March 8, 2023 (8:45 am - 10:15 am)

⁵ I initially applied for IRB approval to carry out my capstone's methodology. The IRB told me that I did not need to apply for its approval because my capstone's findings are not generalizable. The remnants of my IRB application can be found here: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1kZu2E06jDBGiqWPUznyDc6pj4WEaodI9?usp=sharing>

- c. Mulberry Classroom/Hallway Transition to Recess: March 8, 2023 (10:15 am - 11:30 am)
- d. Hickory Classroom: March 8, 2023 (1:35 pm - 2:35 pm)

Data Analysis/Findings

I collected 13 survey responses from ECMS teachers, two 30-minute long interviews, and roughly four and a half hours of classroom observations for this capstone project. In this section, I begin with a quantitative breakdown of my survey data, using the 5Rs to anchor my analysis. Afterward, I use qualitative interviews and classroom observation data to help explain and add nuance to the numbers. Interview subjects are referred to as “Teacher A” and “Teacher B” to protect their identities. This section ends with a discussion of the limitations of my methodology and conclusion. The result of my labor can be found in Appendix C, which is the final three-page report that I sent to ECMS.

In total, 13 ECMS teachers completed the modified RIR, which put my response rate at about 26 percent. One teacher only answered eight out of 21 modified RIR questions so their response has been omitted from this analysis. Of the 13 teachers, four taught the erdkinder level (students ages 12-15), four taught the primaries level (students ages 3-6), two taught the lower elementary level (students ages 6-9), one taught the upper elementary level (students ages 9-12), and two were part of the school’s social-emotional learning team. Other demographic data such as race, age, and gender were not recorded.

Each question (see Appendix A) was asked on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, and strongly agree. I converted each possible answer to a number from one to five with one representing strongly disagree and five representing strongly agree. I calculated the average for each survey question (see Figures 5 and 6). Lower averages suggest that a particular survey item is seen as an area for improvement while higher averages suggest that the survey item is a strong point.

Quantitative data and supplemental qualitative data suggest that while ECMS celebrates and honors its diversity, should reassess how it allocates its resources, foster stronger ties to the New Haven community, and take a more proactive approach to student discipline.

Grade Level	Frequency	Proportion
Erdkinder	4	0.31
Lower Elementary	2	0.15
Primaries	4	0.31
SEL Team	2	0.15
Upper Elementary	1	0.08

Figure 3. Survey Responses by Grade Level

Resources

Survey data suggests that out of the 3Rs, teachers are overwhelmingly concerned about resources. More than half of all survey respondents — seven — said that addressing questions about resources should be ECMS’ top priority going forward. The two survey items with the lowest averages were both related to school resources. The question with the lowest average of 3.69 was “Our school offers and promotes a diverse range of extracurricular clubs, activities, and sports to meet the needs of our students.” The question with the second lowest average of 3.77 was “Our academic programs (intervention and academic supports) are effective in closing opportunity gaps between students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.” Four out of the bottom six lowest-ranked modified RIR items pertained to resources (see Figure 5). Initial

research, classroom observations, and interview data, however, seem to suggest that the emphasis on resources is overblown.

5R	Frequency	Proportion
Relationships	4	0.31
Resources	7	0.54
Restorative Practices	2	0.15

Figure 4. Survey Responses to Top 5R of Concern

ECMS is incredibly well-staffed: there is an ABAR director in charge of helping teachers implement anti-bias, anti-racist pedagogy, a team of four social-emotional learning educators who help students build positive relationships with each other, and multiple teachers in every classroom. Most public school teachers dream of having access to this amount of support. Inside the classroom itself, there are plenty of Montessori-related resources available for students: flashcards, building blocks, world maps, towels, magnifying glasses, water buckets, fish tanks and so much more. Drawings of people of different races standing together, copies of *Black is a Rainbow* (this was Elm City Montessori's book of the month for its one school, one book initiative (Robles, 2021) for February 2023), and social-emotional learning posters encouraging students to be empathetic toward one another peppered the walls of the Sassafras and Cherry classrooms. A closer inspection of the data reveals the specific aspects of the resources R that ECMS should seek to improve.

Question	Average	5R
Our school offers and promotes a diverse range of extracurricular clubs, activities, and sports to meet the needs and interests of students.	3.69	Resources
Our academic programs (intervention and academic supports) are effective in closing opportunity gaps between students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.	3.77	Resources

Our school actively support students who struggle with behavior to avoid the removal of students from school through out-of-school suspensions or out-placements.	3.92	Restorative Practices
Students and teachers feel that they have access to adequate supplies, equipment, text books, and technology that support their ability to be culturally responsive.	4	Resources
Our school offers and promotes financially accessible field trips that focus on issues of equity, diversity, and social justice.	4.08	Resources
In our school, students and adults of all ethnic and racial backgrounds feel positive about their relationships and the community within the school.	4.08	Relationships
Our school provides a curriculum that incorporates current events of importance to our diverse student body.	4.15	Relationships
Teachers intentionally involve parents of all racial and socioeconomic statuses to guide classroom decision-making and other programming.	4.15	Relationships
Our school has behavior protocols that promote reflection and supports healing for students who struggle with behavior.	4.15	Restorative Practices
Students of all racial/ethnic backgrounds are disciplined in a way that is fair and just.	4.15	Restorative Practices
Our school incorporates student voice when addressing behavioral concerns and determining consequences.	4.15	Restorative Practices

Figure 5. Bottom 11 Lowest Ranking Modified RIR Survey Items

Firstly, ECMS should leverage the expertise of its students and families to determine what extracurriculars, sports, and other activities would interest community members. This capstone's literature review found that culturally responsive pedagogy, which has been found to improve school experiences for all students, requires that teachers create a curriculum that resonates with its student body. Acknowledging the literature, ECMS should identify community interests and needs from multiple data points; quarterly surveys of ECMS students and their families, concerns teachers express at school staff meetings and informal conversations between teachers and parents, among other things. When reviewing the data, school administrators should determine if interests and needs differ based on racial, ethnic, gender, or other identities. Fortunately this line of thinking has already started; at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic,

ECMS, along with two other New Haven schools, started virtual gay-straight alliances in an attempt to foster community (Robles, 2021). The student groups enjoyed success because they offered queer students a sense of anonymity and safety that could not be achieved in person (Robles, 2021).

Secondly, classroom materials and staff meetings should better reflect the intersectional identities of students. In classrooms, I saw many books about Black people such as *Change Sings: A Children's Anthem*, *The Undefeated*, and *Let's Talk about Race* but less about Latinx and Asian cultures, for example. Initially, I believed that my observations were an anomaly because I visited ECMS shortly after the end of Black History Month but survey and interview data supports my theory that intersectionality is missing from classroom materials. Teacher B said “if we plan for Black History Month, months before it happen[s], and keep going, why we don't do the same with every culture?” They explained that earlier in this school year, they felt as if teachers gave less energy to Chinese New Year and Hispanic Heritage Month. Additionally, the average teacher ranking for a question about access to culturally responsive materials was a four — the fourth lowest out of the modified RIR's 21 questions. Beyond just BIPOC cultures, I also noticed that classrooms paid some lip service to queer identities through signage: “Love is Love” read one sign in the Cherry classroom. However, I wish that I saw more books and materials that honor the LGBTQ+ community.

Thirdly, ECMS should invest in the needs of its future students, whose needs might not be served under current school infrastructure. Teacher B expressed frustration that ECMS does not have a wheelchair ramp or an ASL teacher. Weinreb clarified that currently no student in a wheelchair or deaf student is currently enrolled at ECMS. Weinreb added that ECMS

is wheelchair through the front entrance but not a back entrance. Nevertheless, ECMS should invest in both a wheelchair ramp and an ASL teacher. The lack of these resources may be dissuading parents of children in wheelchairs and deaf children from even applying to ECMS, undermining the school's diversity mission ("About Us," n.d.). Furthermore, the addition of an ASL teacher means that ECMS will be better equipped to teach able-bodied students about the deaf community. Beyond these two specific resources, ECMS administration should continue to identify and fill other staffing needs such as bilingual educators and occupational therapists. All of these changes can help foster a more diverse school community by showing New Haven that ECMS is serious about welcoming students of all backgrounds.

Question	Average	5R
Our school curriculum is anti-bias, anti-racist.	4.54	Resources
The restorative methods that our school uses are designed to work with students to ultimately reduce the involvement of police and court.	4.46	Restorative Practices
Teachers have professional learning opportunities that help them develop and maintain positive relationships in the school with both staff and students.	4.46	Relationships
Our teachers are reflective of their implicit biases and judgements when disciplining students.	4.38	Restorative Practices
Teachers are intentional about fostering cross-racial and cross-socioeconomic student relationships during classroom instruction.	4.38	Relationships
Our school provides opportunities for student voice to be included and elevated around the school.	4.38	Resources
Our school provides sufficient emotional support for students' social-emotional well-being.	4.38	Resources
Our school provides a high quality Montessori instruction.	4.31	Resources
Our school provides teachers with frequent professional development opportunities that support restorative practices.	4.23	Restorative Practices
Our school provides a curriculum that reflects the history, culture, struggles, achievements and contributions of our student body.	4.23	Relationships

Figure 6. Top 10 Highest Ranking Modified RIR Survey Items

Relationships

ECMS teachers play the role of facilitator and grant their students immense freedom. My observations show that Elm City Montessori's student-led learning environment has had a largely positive impact on student-student and teacher-student relationships:

In the Cherry classroom, Marifrances Cooney notices that one of her students, Xavier, is not feeling well. Rather than standing up from the carpet, Cooney recruits another student named Aurora to check up on Xavier and ask him if he wants to play a game together. Aurora complies and walks over to the other side of the room to briefly talk to Xavier. Aurora returns to the carpet and tells Cooney that Xavier is not feeling well, adding "He misses his dad." Cooney processes the information and tells Aurora to ask Xavier if he'd like to sit by her. Aurora asks Xavier the question and informs Cooney that he wants to sit next to Cooney. Cooney gestures for Xavier to sit next to her, which he does. Cooney has her arm over Xavier as she leads off a game with other students. Five minutes later, two students tried to slide a yoga mat out of a black tin but struggle to do so. One student holds the tin in place while the other repeatedly yanks away. Marifrances Cooney notices the situation but does not tell the students to stop trying to get the yoga mat out, which I expected. Instead, Cooney watches the student succeed and comments "Whew, what good teamwork." She turns around, her eyes widen, and she rotates her head as if to express relief. No student is hurt.

In other classrooms, I notice similar collaborative dynamics play out. *In the Sassafrass Classroom, students invite each other to draw world maps and in the Hickory Classroom, Nicola*

Watterson leads small group activities where students have to match flashcards based on which words rhyme with each other.

Outside of the classroom, Weinreb noted multiple ways in which teachers themselves embrace a collaborative spirit. He said that each multi-age classroom meets at least once a week and the whole school meets at least once a month; at multi-age classroom meetings, teachers are allowed to add items to the agenda and openly express their opinions. Administrators issue daily correspondence to teachers through the school's "daily digest" emails. Additionally, Weinreb mentioned that during a recent school break, staffers were invited to go on an optional retreat. All of these data points beg the question: why is it that four out of 13 survey teachers said that the relationships R should be Elm City Montessori's top priority? Survey results and interview data begin to answer that question.

Tied for the fifth-lowest rated survey response, teachers gave an average score of 4.08 to the question: "In our school, students and adults of all ethnic and racial backgrounds feel positive about their relationships and the community within the school" (see Figure 5). Teacher B provides some insight into why the question may have received such a low average score. They expressed concern with ECMS' diversity statement, arguing that its emphasis on celebrating differences insinuates that immigrants are placed in another "category." However, ECMS does not have such a diversity statement on its website. The closest statement with the verbiage Teacher B comes from a 2022-23 family recruitment slideshow⁶ in a slide titled "Our values for ABAR." It reads "celebrating differences (we uplift). We celebrate one another, take time to respectfully learn about different cultures."

⁶ The slideshow can be found here: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/10lN2S-4T8WtN5mLBBT-lbZREGzsCPDLK90tVsRs--Ng/edit#slide=id.gba9a386958_0_70

Teachers also gave relatively low scores of 4.15 to questions about incorporating current events into the classroom and involving parents in the classroom. Teacher B expressed some frustration about Elm City Montessori's annual Children's March, arguing that there are more productive ways for students to become civically engaged. They suggested that students should also engage in other forms of activism, ideally ones that require direct involvement with community members. They offered writing letters to and testifying before the United States Congress as examples. Teacher A did not bring up current events during our interview. I did not observe any indication that current events were being incorporated into the classroom through Montessori activities or room decoration.

Both Teachers A and B noted that Elm City Montessori staffers try to — but struggle with — building partnerships with parents. Teacher B noted that when they invited the families of their students to go to a museum this past summer, only about a handful of families appeared. In all four classrooms I visited, photos of students' families, accompanied by a tree made out of construction paper, covered the walls, an indication that Elm City Montessori is committed to familial involvement. This commitment also frequently appears at staff meetings, according to Teacher A. In response to perceived weaknesses in relationships at ECMS, I have arrived at several policy recommendations.

Firstly, ECMS should continue to invest in its staff bonding activities. School administration should continue to regularly hold staff meetings and incorporate a small amount of time for teachers to check in on each other. This work should be complemented by more frequent out-of-school excursions for school staffers. Additionally, the school staff lounge should have more events, activities, and giveaways to encourage teachers to see each other during break

times. Research suggests that investing in staff is beneficial, to an extent. Bottiani et al., (2014) surprisingly found that decreases in staff burnout and increases in a school's capacity to adapt to new challenges are associated with wider student racial school climate gaps. However, the school climate gap only widens because the decreases in staff burnout and increases in a school's capacity to adapt to new challenges have a positive impact on White students' opinions of their school's climate but no impact on Black students' opinions. This finding suggests that staff bonding interventions are good at improving the overall school climate but not closing gaps.

Secondly, ECMS should forge more collaborations with the New Haven community.

This capstone's literature review found that effective culturally responsive pedagogy requires teachers to leverage the expertise and experiences of their students, prioritizing a curriculum that interests students. In this spirit, ECMS teachers should work with their older students to determine what social movements (e.g. Black Lives Matter, climate justice, immigrant's rights, etc.,) resonate with the student body. Once a few movements are identified, ECMS administrators should offer ECMS' time and energy to the relevant local organizers. Local organizers and ECMS teachers should discuss what forms of activism (e.g. writing letters, drawing art, testifying at government bodies) are developmentally appropriate for each multi-age classroom and consider how they can bring an intersectional lens into advocacy. For example, local organizers and ECMS teachers might decide that students should submit written testimonies advocating for climate change solutions and/or create a mural educating the New Haven about. These projects could incorporate a discussion about the disproportionate impact climate change has on Black and brown communities around the world.

Thirdly, ECMS should be clearer about how families can form partnerships with ECMS. Updating the ECMS website is a great place to start. On ECMS' website, there is a tab titled "Family Resources," which contains a link to information about the school's "Family Teacher Organization" ("Volunteer with ECMS," n.d.) The "Family Teacher Organization" page is incredibly sparse: it just lists several activities in which parents can get involved such as helping at the front desk, repairing classroom materials, and building classroom materials, in addition to an email to contact ("Volunteer with ECMS," n.d.). A modern ECMS website should at least include a Google Form for parents to fill out should they be interested in volunteering, along with a spreadsheet of ever-evolving school needs. Both the Google Form and spreadsheet should be manually translated into commonly spoken world languages rather than automatically translated via Google Translate. This step should make the new website more accessible and reduce the risk, as Debs (2019) warned, that white and wealthy parents hoard school opportunities.

Restorative Practices

The prevalence of restorative disciplinary practices is a strong point for ECMS. At ECMS, I found that there are no police officers, security officers, or metal detectors on school grounds. Instead, I was greeted by a friendly front desk staffer who asked me to sign in when I visited ECMS in March 2023. These findings likely explain why the third highest-rated survey item with an average score of 4.46 was "the restorative methods that our school uses are designed to work with students to ultimately reduce the involvement of police and court." They

also likely explain why just two survey respondents said that restorative practices should be Elm City Montessori's top priority.

Rather than relying on police officers to address student misbehavior, ECMS teachers use a three-tiered system to inform their decision-making. The school's 2022-23 family handbook⁷ breaks these tiers down into "classroom managed" (level one), "classroom & administrative managed" (level two), and "administrative managed" (level three). According to the handbook, "classroom managed" behavior includes cursing/inappropriate language, running in class, refusing to follow instructions, misuse of materials, not engaging in work, and leaving the classroom without permission. Possible consequences include classroom observation notes about the misbehaving student, a phone call home, and a family meeting. "Classroom & administrative managed" behavior includes aggression toward peers or staff, inappropriate touching, unsafe actions, running through the building, running away from staff, destroying property, and repeated instances of classroom-managed infractions. Possible consequences include behavior referral, student support, a conference and reflection, in-school suspension, and a classroom transition meeting. "Administrative managed" behavior includes fighting, repeatedly running through the building, repeatedly running away from staff, and seriously endangering others. Possible consequences include a behavior referral, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, a phone call to Connecticut's 211 hotline, and a family meeting. Teacher A explained that in practical terms, level one offenses are generally cases of non-compliance, level two offenses are persistent non-compliance, and level three offenses are cases where hitting or physical violence

⁷ The 2023-23 family handbook can be found here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FZS4g58MJLvWrmv2uZEsOpNgwNoJ4x7LkZ1Bs_cjnTk/edit

are involved. They added that level three offenses are the most disruptive and require help from the school administration.

My classroom observations shine some light on how teachers practically implement this three-tiered framework and what administrative help looks like:

In the Sassafras classroom, Erin Burgett has three students count the number of wooden cylinders as she stacks them onto the table. There are 10 of them in total. John, one of the students in the classroom, tries to push one of the girls in the classroom to get closer. The girl who is sandwiched between the table where the demonstration is happening and another table, tells John not to push her. John succeeds and the girl cries out “I was here first” in an upset tone of voice. Burgett acknowledges the situation but continues the demonstration. She looks briefly at the two students to ask what’s wrong. The girl explains that she was pushed. She folds her arms and makes an upset pouty face. Burgett explains to John that what he did was wrong and tells him not to do that again. Burgett lets the girl process her emotions. Eventually, John and the girl peacefully watch the demonstration. This is a level-one behavior and response.

In the Hickory classroom, Ashton grabs some cotton balls out of a glass vase near the window and throws them onto the ground. At least three of Ashton’s peers notice what Ashton is doing. A girl in the classroom bursts out a “Hey!” to tell Ashton to stop throwing the cotton balls. Nicola Watterson notices the situation and tells her students that she will deal with Ashton. She encourages them to continue engaging in their work. Watterson walks over to the scene to ask Ashton why he is throwing the cotton balls and to encourage him to do something more constructive. Ashton ignores Watterson’s question and encouragement as he chooses to instead keep hurling handfuls of colorful balls onto the ground. More students begin to notice, including

Lorenzo, who stops reading cursive to pick up balls off of the ground. Watterson hands off the situation to Myesha Knight, a member of the school's social-emotional learning team. Knight escorts Ashton toward the door to usher him out. Ashton refuses to calmly leave and he tips over a chair near the front of the classroom. Eventually, another adult arrives and assesses the situation. After a brief interaction, the adult carries Ashton out. Knight pulls out a walkie-talkie to communicate with another adult in the school, though it is unclear who is on the other line and what the call is about. This is a level-two behavior and response.

My observation of the Hickory classroom brings up two important points that further explain why teachers feel good about restorative practices at ECMS. The obvious point is that ECMS has a four-person social-emotional learning team that is ready and able to help teachers address student needs. The less obvious point is that ECMS has a robust communication system. In addition to using walkie-talkies to facilitate communication throughout the school day, ECMS teachers also submit Google Form responses to the social-emotional learning team about less time-sensitive matters.

What my observations do not show should be that ECMS teachers also believe that they engage in critical reflection to challenge implicit biases and judgments. Tied for the third highest average score, teachers gave a mean rating of 4.38 to: “our teachers are reflective of their implicit biases and judgments when disciplining students.” Teacher A added that reflection and self-reflection about social-emotional learning and restorative practices are commonplace at school staff meetings.

Overall, the data show that ECMS teachers largely support and have faith in their school's restorative practices. Except for one area. Teachers gave the third lowest average (3.92)

to: “Our school actively supports students who struggle with behavior to avoid the removal of students from school through out-of-school suspensions or out-placements.” Watterson said that ECMS staff have struggled to attend to Ashton’s needs throughout the 2022-23 school year even though they have tried out multiple interventions, which have included one-on-one meetings and a “reward system.” Frustratingly, none of them seemed to sufficiently support Ashton. **Based on survey data and my observation of the Hickory classroom, it is clear that to improve upon its robust restorative practices, ECMS should take more proactive steps that allow students to recognize and restore harm. These measures should also allow students to take up space when needed.**

To this end, ECMS should consider adopting a peer mediator model that sees its Erkindler/Upper Elementary school students facilitate conflict resolution across all multi-age classrooms. A two-year study, which included 830 Turkish students and 28 classrooms, found that peer mediation resulted in 94.9 percent of all conflicts being resolved (Turnuklu, 2009). Researchers trained students in the Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation program, who went on to resolve conflicts ranging from physical fights, verbal harassment, communication issues, and conflicts of interest (Turnuklu, 2009). Under a hypothetical model, ECMS could have its social-emotional learning team train Erkindler/Upper Elementary school students on how to lead mediation sessions and/or facilitate other restorative practices-related work. In Ashton’s case, peer mediators can help lead conversations between Ashton and peers who may have been distracted when he threw cotton balls in the air. Additionally, while I saw social-emotional learning signage scattered throughout ECMS classrooms in my observations and teachers believe that social-emotional learning is a strong point at ECMS, incorporating other aspects of

established social-emotional learning can help the school proactively support students. For example, teachers might find RULER's meta-moment (Baumsteiger et al., 2021) and/or Miss Kendra's letterbox (Robles, 2021) to be useful tools. ECMS should ultimately provide students with the space to recognize and restore harm allowing them to fully enjoy the benefits of learning in a diverse classroom.

Limitations

While my methodology is multifaceted, there are multiple limitations worth acknowledging. Firstly, the modified RIR had a small sample size of just thirteen teachers. Due to the size of the dataset, I was unable to utilize statistical analysis techniques such as linear regression to analyze my data. Moreover, my data may suffer from selection bias. Secondly, my interview data is limited to two teachers, in addition to the context provided by Weinreb. The lack of interview data makes it difficult to identify trends in opinions and language, making content analysis nearly impossible. More interview data would provide a better picture of teacher priorities and add more nuance to the modified RIR data. Thirdly, my classroom observations may not be representative of the day-to-day happenings at Elm City Montessori and/or every school classroom. I observed four out of five "primaries" classrooms during two school days. My dataset would have benefitted from more school visits and observations of the fifth "primaries" classroom. My first two visits could have informed me what I would have paid close attention to during subsequent visits. For example, I would have noted that key school days hours such as lunch, recess, and dismissal were not included in my initial observations but should have been. Fourthly, my dataset does not include student or parent perspectives, both of which are relevant

to questions about school climate. Without student voices, I cannot precisely determine what changes to the school curriculum and practices would most resonate with students. Without parent voices, I cannot guarantee that my policy proposals aimed at enhancing parental involvement will achieve their purported goals. Nevertheless, my methodology has provided Elm City Montessori and me with several valuable insights. The data has shown that the school must leverage the expertise of its community, further diversify culturally responsive books, take proactive measures to support students, and more. Future research of Elm City Montessori should seek to address the shortcomings of this capstone.

Improving the Survey Tool

Teachers offered little advice as to how the modified RIR could be improved. One teacher wrote that they wished that the survey included more questions about the school curriculum. Another teacher wrote that the modified RIR should include a space for teachers to indicate that another area of concern outside of the Rs should be Elm City Montessori's top concern. These two suggestions are incredibly helpful and should be made to future iterations of the modified RIR. Both of these points speak to the importance of preliminary conversations when adapting the RIR for different schools.

Before sending the RIR to Elm City Montessori, I consulted three sources to make appropriate modifications — my literature review, Weinreb, and my capstone advisors. My literature review prescribed that I incorporate explicit questions about race and ethnicity, which I did in addition to adding a free-response section inviting educators to reflect on how their survey responses might differ across student subgroups. Weinreb helped me change the survey language

so that teachers at Elm City Montessori can understand the questions I am asking (e.g. use the phrase “anti-bias, anti-racist” rather than “culturally responsive”). Weinreb and Debs suggested that I cut some questions, out of concern that the original RIR is too long for teachers to realistically complete. Debs also encouraged me to think critically about how my case study school’s Montessori focus might change how I ask certain questions. Despite these thoughtful steps, I did not consult individual teachers before sending them my survey. In hindsight, I should have asked the “primaries” teachers what they wanted a school climate survey to look like during my first visit to the school in December. I would have complimented this change by distributing an anonymous feedback form for teachers to express their hopes and wishes for a school climate survey. Furthermore, I would have conducted at least one preliminary round of observations to better understand the needs of Elm City Montessori when designing the modified RIR.

Overall, the modified RIR I created and distributed satisfied my desire to investigate Elm City Montessori’s school climate with an intersectional lens. I hope that Elm City Montessori and other schools continue to use Olivia Hussey’s survey tool in the years to come. And if not the RIR, then these schools should choose another tool that satisfies its needs and incorporates questions explicitly about race. In every school where the RIR is utilized, teachers should be allowed to make suggestions about how to improve the survey. Other relevant school stakeholders and policymakers should also be consulted when adapting the RIR.

Conclusion

From my experiences at School Without Walls and knowledge of history, I know that racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and other identities profoundly shape how members of a school community perceive their school climate. And far too often, students of color and other marginalized groups feel less positive about their sense of belonging, self-esteem, and relationships with others — even at schools with a commitment to building a diverse student body. This phenomenon, known as a school climate gap, is well-documented. Unfortunately, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to closing school climate gaps. This capstone sought to help one school with a commitment to racial and socioeconomic diversity (“About Us,” n.d.), Elm City Montessori School, close its school climate gap.

To achieve this goal, this capstone adopted IntegrateNYC’s 5R framework, with special attention to culturally responsive pedagogy, restorative practices, and social-emotional learning, to assess Elm City Montessori School’s climate. More specifically, this capstone analyzed whether resources, relationships, and/or restorative practices at the school could be improved to help close school climate gaps. Analysis revolved around an adapted version of Olivia Hussey (2020)’s “real integration rubric” survey, teacher interviews, and classroom observations. The findings are clear: while Elm City Montessori School has made much progress at closing school climate gaps and improving school climate overall, it can further close its gaps by diversifying its curriculum, leveraging the expertise of its student body, forging closer relationships with the New Haven community, adopting more proactive social-emotional learning supports, and cautiously strengthening familial involvement, in addition to adopting other policies.

I wish that my high school administration sought to promote healing after clear instances of racism and antisemitism in the years after they happened, not just in the days after. I wish that my high school had a culturally responsive curriculum where I didn't have to listen to my AP world history teacher argue that imperialism was a "net gain" for developing countries. I wish that my high school invested in social-emotional learning programs and activities that brought students together. Ultimately, I wish that my school was more like Elm City Montessori School. But even if my high school were more like Elm City Montessori School with an anti-bias, anti-racist curricula, robust social-emotional learning staff, and well-articulated restorative disciplinary practices, it wouldn't have been enough to close all of the school climate gaps. To close school climate gaps, all schools, but especially ones that strive to foster a diverse student body, must continuously and critically assess their policies and practices from an intersectional lens. Only then can the promise of school integration be realized.

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Appendix A: Modified Real Integration Rubric

Dear Elm City Montessori Educator,

Thank you for participating in this survey. I'm a Yale student interested in learning about ECMS' school's climate as a racially integrated school. The survey adapts the Real Integration Rubric (RIR) which was developed by Olivia Hussey for New York City-based IntegrateNYC. The group emphasizes that integration is more than enrollment and also includes, Resources, Representation, Restorative Practices, and Relationships. Together these form the 5Rs of real integration. The survey should take about 15-20 minutes to complete.

Part 1: Survey Sections

The survey is in 3 sections that focus on Resources, Representation and Restorative Practices, pieces that are integral to a school's climate. Please read the definition for each section and indicate how much you think each practice is present at ECMS.

Part 2: Wrap-Up

Indicate which of the three aspects of integration you believe should be ECMS' priority. Write any additional comments you may have about ECMS' school climate and/or the survey itself.

The first section asks you to consider your school's resources, which are defined here as the distribution of academic supports and facilities, as well as access to extracurricular activities and emotional supports.

Data to consider:

- ☐ School budget
- ☐ Staffing
- ☐ Curriculum
- ☐ Supplies, textbooks, and equipment
- ☐ Intervention and academic support opportunities
- ☐ Extracurricular offerings

- ☐ Field trip opportunities
- ☐ Special education and intervention programs

Prompts

1. Our school curriculum is anti-bias, anti-racist.
2. Our school provides a high quality Montessori instruction.
3. Our academic programs (intervention and academic supports) are effective in closing opportunity gaps between students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.
4. Our school provides sufficient emotional support for students' social-emotional well-being.
5. Students and teachers feel that they have access to adequate supplies, equipment, text books, and technology that support their ability to be culturally responsive.
6. Our school offers and promotes a diverse range of extracurricular clubs, activities, and sports to meet the needs and interests of students.
7. Our school offers and promotes financially accessible field trips that focus on issues of equity, diversity, and social justice.
8. Our school provides opportunities for student voice to be included and elevated around the school.

The next section asks you to reflect on ECMS' relationships, which measures having an anti-racist and challenging curriculum and building spaces where diverse groups of students feel that they have meaningful connections with their teachers and to each other.

Data to consider:

- ☐ School culture and climate survey
- ☐ Documentation of student representation within the decision-making process (including being a part of committees, school policies, etc.)
- ☐ Culturally responsive texts, images, and sources within curriculum that are inclusive of all cultures as well as racial/ethnic groups
- ☐ Professional development opportunities for staff related to relationship building with a specific focus on race and identity

Prompts

1. In our school, students and adults of all ethnic and racial backgrounds feel positive about their relationships and the community within the school.
2. Our school provides a curriculum that reflects the history, culture, struggles, achievements and contributions of our student body.
3. Our school provides a curriculum that incorporates current events of importance to our diverse student body.

4. Teachers have professional learning opportunities that help them develop and maintain positive relationships in the school with both staff and students.
5. Teachers intentionally involve parents of all racial and socioeconomic statuses to guide classroom decision-making and other programming.
6. Teachers are intentional about fostering cross-racial and cross-socioeconomic student relationships during classroom instruction.

This last section asks you to reflect on ECMS' restorative practices, which are disciplinary measures that are just, effective. Additionally, members of the schools are reflective in their disciplinary practices.

Data to consider:

- ☐ Behavioral referral data
- ☐ Perspective of Dean of Students and Student Management Assistant
- ☐ School culture and climate survey
- ☐ Observation of teaching practices, Professional development opportunities
- ☐ Student feedback

Prompts

1. Our teachers are reflective of their implicit biases and judgements when disciplining students.
2. Our school provides teachers with frequent professional development opportunities that support restorative practices.
3. Our school has behavior protocols that promote reflection and supports healing for students who struggle with behavior.
4. Students of all racial/ethnic backgrounds are disciplined in a way that is fair and just.
5. Our school incorporates student voice when addressing behavioral concerns and determining consequences.
6. The restorative methods that our school uses are designed to work with students to ultimately reduce the involvement of police and court.
7. Our school actively supports students who struggle with behavior to avoid the removal of students from school through out-of-school suspensions or out-placements.

Conclusion

As you reflect upon your answers to this survey, do you notice any difference in school experiences along racial/ethnic/socioeconomic/gender lines?

Which of the three areas should be Elm City Montessori's top concern?

- Resources
- Relationships
- Restorative Practices

What grade level do you teach?

- Primaries
- Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Erdkinder
- SEL Team

Do you have any feedback for how this survey tool can be improved?

Appendix B: RIR Modifications

I added an introductory paragraph that describes the purpose of my capstone and why I selected Elm City Montessori as my case study. The directions section was greatly shortened in the modified RIR. The modified RIR contained only 3 out of the 5Rs — resources, relationships, and restorative practices. I choose these Rs because based on my literature review, they are closely related to school climate concerns such as senses of belonging, self-esteem, and safety, among others. Additionally, using just 3 out of the 5Rs made the survey much shorter, which was essential for increasing my response rate. For each of the 3R sections, questions were removed, added, and/or modified. I removed some questions because they are not relevant to a Montessori school. I added some questions because they are special areas of interest to a Montessori school. I changed the language to better reflect practices at Elm City Montessori and/or to be more concise. I modified RIR questions in consultation with Weinreb, my capstone advisors, and literature review findings. A list of modifications can be found below:

- *Removals*
 - “Our school provides access to high level courses such as AP and ECE. The school also prioritizes educating all students, despite their academic level, on the prerequisites and benefits of taking an AP or ECE courses.”
 - “Students have access to diverse elective courses such as music and art.”
 - “Our school has a strategic plan in place that incorporates student voice in the decision making process, allowing for meaningful input in making changes within the school community.”

- “Our school ensures that teachers are working to develop positive and culturally responsive relationships with students by implementing a plan that incorporates student voice and feedback.”
- “Our administrators hold teachers accountable to being reflective when writing referrals as well as being reflective of their own biases when assigning consequences.”
- “Our school has a strategic plan for discipline that requires the use of restorative methods.”
- *Additions*
 - “Our school provides a high quality Montessori education”
 - “Our school provides a curriculum that incorporates current events of importance to our diverse student body.”
 - “Teachers intentionally involve parents of all racial and socioeconomic statuses to guide classroom decision-making and other programming.”
 - “Teachers are intentional about fostering cross-racial and cross-socioeconomic student relationships during classroom instruction.” NOTE: In the modified RIR, classroom instruction was mistakenly referred to as “Montessori play.” This language was confusingly for surveyed educators.
- *Modifications*
 - “Our school provides all students with a high quality and culturally-responsive curriculum” -> “Our school’s curriculum is anti-bias, anti-racist”
 - References to “achievement gap” were changed to “opportunity gap.”

- References to “behavior referrals” were removed because Elm City Montessori does not engage in such a practice.

There are a number of smaller edits worth mentioning. Firstly, the modified RIR does not contain definitions for words such as culturally responsive, equity, implicit bias, and professional bias. These definitions were removed to shorten the survey. Secondly, the modified RIR does not ask teachers to tally up their likert scale ratings. Instead, I do the tabulation manually in R, the coding software I used for this capstone. Finally, the modified RIR asks teachers to reflect upon all 3Rs in one textbook rather than a separate one for each as was done in the original RIR. In short, all changes made to Hussey’s RIR were done to better reflect this capstone’s interest in school climate, fit the needs of Elm City Montessori, and increase the likelihood that teachers will diligently fill it out.

Appendix C: Report Sent to Elm City Montessori

Closing School Climate Gaps at Elm City Montessori School

Executive Summary

Racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and other identities profoundly shape how members of a school community perceive their school climate. Elm City Montessori School (ECMS) is no exception. Differences in how people of different identities feel at and about their school (e.g. sense of belonging, feelings about safety, opinions about relationships with others) are known as school climate gaps. *ECMS can close school climate gaps by further diversifying its curriculum, leveraging the expertise of its student body, forging closer relationships with the New Haven community, adopting more proactive social-emotional learning supports, and cautiously strengthening familial involvement, in addition to adopting other policies.*

Background

ECMS is a PreK3-8 school located in New Haven, Connecticut. ECMS' founders sought a school that was “racially, ethnically, and economically diverse with a nurturing, child-centered approach to early education and strong parent engagement,” according to ECMS' website. Today, ECMS serves a diverse student body where no racial/ethnic group forms a majority (see Figure 1). ECMS prides itself on its anti-bias, anti-racist education, emphasis on social-emotional learning, and robust restorative practices. However, it is unclear if these practices are enough to close school climate gaps that exist in ECMS' diverse school community. Christian Robles' 2022-23 Yale Education Studies senior capstone sought to provide ECMS with recommendations to close any persisting school climate gaps.

Elm City Montessori 2022-23 Demographics

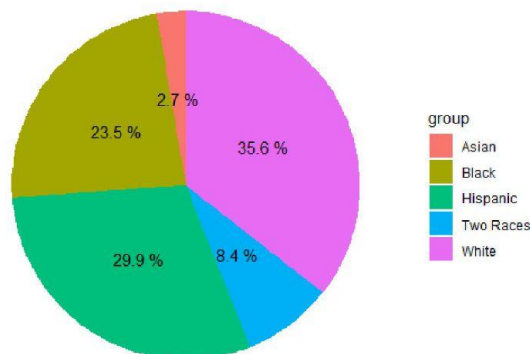


Figure 1. Elm City Montessori 2022-23 Demographics

Data Sources

- School Climate Survey (Modified Real Integration Rubric)
- Teacher Interviews
- Classroom Observations
- Miscellaneous (Phone calls with Dave Weinreb, the ECMS website)

Survey Results

Thirteen ECMS educators completed the 21 questions-long school climate survey. Four taught erkindergarten, two taught lower elementary, four taught primaries, one taught upper elementary, and two were on the social-emotional learning team. Figures 2 and 3 show the top and bottom three rated survey questions. The top three survey items reflect perceived strong points. The bottom three reflect perceived weaknesses.

Question	Average Score
Our school curriculum is anti-bias, anti-racist.	4.54
The restorative methods that our school uses are designed to work with students to ultimately reduce the involvement of police and court.	4.46
Teachers have professional learning opportunities that help them develop and maintain positive relationships in the school with both staff and students.	4.46

Figure 2. Top three rated survey items (Strong Points)

Question	Average Score
Our school offers and promotes a diverse range of extracurricular clubs, activities, and sports to meet the needs and interests of students.	3.69
Our academic programs (intervention and academic supports) are effective in closing opportunity gaps between students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.	3.77
Our school actively supports students who struggle with behavior to avoid the removal of students from school through out-of-school suspensions or out-placements.	3.92

Figure 3. Bottom three rated survey items (Weak Points)

The survey data show that ECMS educators are most concerned that the curriculum does not reflect student interests, school resources are not closing opportunity gaps, and students who struggle with self-regulation are not receiving enough support. Additional data add that ECMS educators are concerned about ECMS' implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy, relationship with New Haven, and partnerships with families. The following recommendations use IntegrateNYC's 5R framework to present ways in which ECMS can improve its allocation of resources, quality of school relationships, and restorative disciplinary practices. By adopting recommendations, ECMS will close its school climate gaps and improve its school climate more broadly.

Resources Recommendations

- Routinely survey students and families about their interests and needs. Disaggregate the data.
- Better reflect student identities by, for example, purchasing more LGBTQIA+ books, planning more for month-long observations, and asking "What's missing from my classroom?"
- Proactively seek to fulfill the needs of future students by, for example, hiring an ASL teacher, building a wheelchair ramp, and filling current staffing needs.

Relationships Recommendations

- Continue to invest in staff bonding activities such as excursions and staff meeting check-ins.
- Collaborate with and advocate alongside the greater New Haven community based on student interests. Teach about New Haven activism from an intersectional lens.
- Update the ECMS website to facilitate familial partnerships and reflect current school values.

Restorative Practices Recommendations

- Create a peer mediation program led by Erkindler/Upper Elementary students alongside SEL team.
- Review and adopt aspects of existing SEL programs such as RULER and Miss Kendra.
- Have one-on-one meetings and small group sessions for students who routinely struggle with self-regulation.