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Transforming a Public Primary School into a "School for All": A Qualitative Case Study of Inclusive School Leadership in Greece

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Abstract

Inclusive education is increasingly recognized as a comprehensive school-wide process necessitating enduring organizational, pedagogical, and cultural transformation rather than discrete interventions. This study examines the implementation of a "School for All" strategy in a Greek public primary school, emphasizing inclusion as a dynamic and context-dependent process influenced by leadership and systemic factors. This research employs a qualitative single-case study approach, utilizing practice-based data such as documented school initiatives, organizational practices, and reflective professional experiences to investigate the implementation of inclusive principles across various aspects of school life. The findings underscore the establishment of a collective professional culture among educators, student-centric educational approaches that foster engagement and inclusivity, organized collaboration with

families, and alliances with the broader community as essential components of inclusive transformation. The study concurrently finds enduring issues associated with staff volatility, accountability demands, infrastructural deficiencies, and overarching socio-economic factors that influence the opportunities and limitations of inclusive growth. This discourse contextualizes the findings within the global literature on inclusive education, comprehensive school strategies, and equitable leadership, highlighting inclusion as a negotiated and non-linear process. The study offers a contextually grounded account from a Greek public school, contributing practice-based insights to international discussions and highlighting the significance of leadership, collaboration, and institutional support in promoting inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Whole-School Approach, School Leadership, Qualitative Case Study, Primary Education

Introduction

Inclusive education has emerged as a critical policy and practice focus globally, intricately linked to overarching objectives of equity, participation, and social justice in education. Modern scholarship asserts that inclusion is not primarily attained through the implementation of discrete methods or the integration of specific groups into mainstream environments; instead, it relies on schools' ongoing identification and elimination of obstacles to participation and success for all students within their local contexts ^[1]. In this context, inclusion is increasingly conceptualized as a dynamic process of organizational learning and cultural transformation that necessitates continuous focus on connections, values, and daily behaviors throughout the entire school community ^[2]. Policy-oriented analyses have emphasized that effective inclusion requires coordinated efforts across various levels of the education ecosystem, encompassing school cultures and structures, professional competencies, leadership practices, resource allocation, and community engagement ^[3].

In this changing environment, research has increasingly emphasized the significance of school leadership in cultivating inclusive environments and facilitating activities that address learner diversity. Research on inclusive school effectiveness indicates that principals and leadership teams impact inclusion by formulating shared visions and expectations, organizing professional development, establishing collaborative frameworks, and mobilizing resources and partnerships that facilitate equitable participation ^[4, 5]. Recent integrative perspectives contend that school-level initiatives alone are seldom adequate; inclusive development is enhanced when schools implement comprehensive, ecosystem-sensitive strategies that link classroom practices with family involvement, community cooperation, and systemic policy and support ^[6]. This profession corresponds with a wider transition towards "whole-school" and "whole-education" paradigms that regard inclusion as a

collaborative obligation shared among stakeholders, influenced by contextual limitations and possibilities [6]. Notwithstanding these advancements, there persists a necessity for empirically based, contextually relevant narratives that illustrate the implementation of inclusive transformation in daily school operations, especially in national contexts where educational institutions encounter enduring institutional limitations. The Greek education system presents a significant background for this investigation, due to persistent issues related to staffing stability, organizational continuity, and the intricate dynamics of school-family connections, in addition to changing aspirations for inclusive education. Recent studies have initiated an exploration of leadership and inclusion in Greece, emphasizing the critical influence of school principals' values, knowledge, and practices. However, the field still requires detailed case-based analyses that clarify how inclusive priorities are implemented through specific organizational routines and pedagogical actions [7]. International evaluations emphasize the ongoing significance of recording how leadership for inclusion is manifested in participatory, collaborative, and justice-oriented behaviors in real-world contexts [8].

This paper presents a qualitative case analysis of comprehensive school reform aimed at establishing a "School for All" in a Greek public primary institution. The research investigates the formation and implementation of an inclusive orientation through interrelated actions encompassing teachers' professional development and collaboration, student-focused pedagogical and relational practices, organized family engagement, partnerships with community stakeholders, and considerations of infrastructure and accessibility. The article emphasizes inclusion as a pedagogical initiative and an organizational transformation, influenced by leadership practices and negotiated within systemic and contextual limitations. The research is directed by the principal inquiry: how is a "School for All" methodology implemented in a Greek public primary school, and what facilitating factors and obstacles influence this process?

Theoretical Framework

Inclusive education is predominantly understood in modern academia as a value-oriented and rights-based framework aimed at guaranteeing the presence, participation, and success of all students in shared educational environments. Inclusive education is progressively conceptualized as a process of detecting, comprehending, and mitigating barriers inherent in school cultures, policies, and practices, rather than being limited to deficit-oriented perspectives centered on individual learner characteristics [1]. This transition signifies a comprehensive redefinition of diversity as an inherent and beneficial aspect of educational systems, rather than as an anomaly necessitating specific interventions. From this viewpoint, inclusion is inherently linked to matters of equity, social justice, and democratic engagement, hence designating schools as moral and social entities accountable for confronting structural inequities [9].

The core of this reconceptualization is the concept of a whole-school approach to inclusion. Whole-school approaches prioritize coherence across pedagogical practices, professional collaboration, organizational structures, leadership, and relationships with families and communities, rather than attributing inclusive responsibility

solely to individual teachers or support specialists [10]. Studies suggest that sustainable inclusive development is more probable when schools function as learning organizations, where staff collaboratively reflect on practices, share accountabilities for all students, and integrate values into daily routines and decision-making processes [2, 11]. From this perspective, inclusion is perceived not as a definitive result but as a continuous, context-dependent process that develops via discourse, experimentation, and collaborative understanding.

School leadership has been recognized as a crucial element in facilitating and maintaining comprehensive school inclusion. Modern frameworks of inclusive leadership highlight the ability of school leaders to express and implement ethical commitments to fairness, cultivate collaborative professional environments, and reconcile policy expectations with local circumstances [12]. Empirical research repeatedly demonstrates that leaders in inclusive schools emphasize relationship-building, distributed leadership models, and professional learning frameworks that facilitate differentiated and responsive instruction for diverse learners [5]. Significantly, inclusive leadership transcends official authority and management efficiency; it is manifested via daily activities that influence norms, expectations, and opportunities for engagement within the school community.

Recent research emphasizes that inclusive leadership functions within expansive educational environments marked by conflicts, limitations, and conflicting expectations. Systemic variables, including accountability frameworks, staffing volatility, resource constraints, and socio-economic disparities, profoundly affect schools' ability to maintain inclusive practices [6]. Consequently, inclusive development is frequently non-linear and precarious, requiring school leaders to manage uncertainty while sustaining a clear ethical commitment to equity and participation. Case-based and qualitative research have been helpful in elucidating the translation of inclusive values into practice under these circumstances, providing nuanced insights into the interaction between agency and structure in school development processes [13].

This study employs a comprehensive framework that unifies inclusive education as a social justice initiative, the whole-school approach to inclusion, and leadership for fostering an inclusive cultural transformation. This framework facilitates the analysis of inclusion as a pedagogical and organizational process, influenced by leadership practices and manifested via interactions among educators, students, families, and community stakeholders. This study aims to enhance international comprehension of the development of inclusive schooling within contextually limited public education systems by situating the case within this framework, highlighting practice-based knowledge that supplements extensive policy and effectiveness research.

Methodology

This research used a qualitative single-case study methodology to investigate the implementation of a "School for All" strategy within a Greek public elementary school. Qualitative case studies are especially suitable for investigating intricate educational phenomena in real-life contexts, facilitating a comprehensive knowledge of processes, meanings, and relationships instead of quantifying predetermined variables [14]. Case-based

research in inclusive education has been extensively employed to elucidate the translation of inclusive values into daily organizational and instructional practices within particular systemic and cultural contexts ^[13].

This study focuses on a public primary school in Greece that has systematically sought to modify its organizational culture and practices to promote inclusive education over a three-year period (2023-2025). This extended timeframe enabled the examination of inclusive development as a longitudinal and evolving process rather than a short-term intervention. The Greek public primary education system is defined by centralized administration, frequent personnel turnover, and stringent curriculum oversight, all of which influence schools' ability to implement enduring reform. The school caters to a socially and culturally diverse student body and functions under the traditional limitations of metropolitan public schools, such as constrained resources and infrastructure difficulties. These contextual elements render the case analytically pertinent rather than statistically representative, providing insights into inclusive transformation within a framework of systemic complexity. The researcher assumes the combined role of educational leader and reflective practitioner. This insider role offers continuous access to school procedures, decision-making methodologies, and extensive understanding of institutional transformation. This positioning prompts significant inquiries regarding subjectivity, yet it is increasingly acknowledged in qualitative and practice-oriented research that practitioner inquiry can produce valuable, contextually relevant knowledge when paired with systematic reflection and transparency ^[15]. This study employed reflexivity through continuous critical reflection on professional acts and decisions, focusing on the interaction between leadership objectives, implemented practices, and contextual limitations. Reflexive practices included the systematic use of analytic memos, deliberate interrogation of taken-for-granted assumptions arising from the researcher's leadership role, and ongoing comparison between intended inclusive strategies and their observed effects. These processes supported critical distance and enhanced the trustworthiness of interpretations.

The study's data were sourced from many practice-based repositories collected over time. These repositories included documented school initiatives related to teacher professional development, inclusive pedagogical practices, student engagement activities, collaboration with families, partnerships with community organizations, and infrastructural modifications aimed at enhancing accessibility and learning. Supplementary sources comprised institutional documentation, school records, and publicly accessible materials related to school activities. Collectively, these sources enabled triangulation across multiple dimensions of school life and strengthened the credibility of the analysis. The documented school initiatives encompassed teacher professional development, inclusive pedagogical practices, student engagement activities, collaboration with families, partnerships with community organizations, and infrastructural modifications to enhance accessibility and learning. Supplementary sources included institutional documentation, school records, and publicly accessible resources pertaining to school activities, which furnished tangible evidence of implemented practices. Collectively, these sources facilitated triangulation across several aspects of school life

and enhanced the validity of the research ^[16].

The data analysis employed a thematic analytic technique guided by the study's theoretical framework. The process involved iterative cycles of close reading, inductive coding, and categorization, with attention to recurring patterns related to inclusive culture, leadership practices, whole-school collaboration, and experienced challenges. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data and subsequently refined into broader themes aligned with inclusive education, whole-school approaches, and leadership for inclusion. The analysis entailed iterative cycles of reading, coding, and categorizing, concentrating on the identification of patterns associated with inclusive culture, leadership practices, and whole-school collaboration, and encountered challenges. Preliminary codes were derived inductively from the data and later categorized into overarching themes related to inclusive education, comprehensive school strategies, and leadership for inclusion. During the analytical process, focus was directed towards both facilitating conditions and conflicts to prevent idealized portrayals of inclusion and to encapsulate the intricacies of school change processes.

Ethical considerations were meticulously handled due to the researcher's leadership position. The research emphasizes organizational procedures above individual achievement, and no personal information regarding students, instructors, or families is revealed. Descriptions are provided at an aggregated level to safeguard anonymity and confidentiality. The study's reflective and practice-oriented approach was governed by principles of professional honesty, respect for participants, and accountability to the school community.

This research, like any qualitative case studies, has limitations. The results are context-dependent and do not seek statistical generalization. The study aims to offer analytical insights that may be relevant to and inform comparable educational settings. The researcher's insider status, although providing depth and continuity, requires meticulous reflexivity to reduce potential bias. These limitations are recognized as essential to the methodological framework and are evaluated in conjunction with the study's contribution to comprehending inclusive school transformation in practice.

Findings

The results are organized thematically to demonstrate the implementation of a "School for All" strategy across various interconnected aspects of school life. This qualitative case-study research in inclusive education analyzes patterns of practice rather than discrete initiatives, contextualizing these patterns within established theoretical frameworks of inclusion and whole-school development ^[10, 13].

A key conclusion pertains to the establishment of a collective professional culture among educators focused on inclusion. Inclusion was established as a group obligation rather than an individual assignment assigned to particular positions or specialists, mirroring research that underscores collaboration and shared ownership as essential for the advancement of inclusive schools ^[5]. Continuous professional development, involvement in curriculum revision, and organized forums for reflective discourse assisted educators in aligning their teaching methodologies with inclusive ideas. Analytically, these processes functioned as mechanisms for collective sense-making, enabling educators to reconceptualize learner diversity as a

shared pedagogical responsibility rather than an individual challenge, thereby strengthening the sustainability of inclusive practices. These approaches facilitated a progressive transition from disjointed classroom practices to enhanced professional coherence, underscoring the idea that inclusive teaching ability is cultivated collaboratively within school cultures ^[11].

A secondary theme pertains to student-centered methodologies and the establishment of inclusive educational settings. The results demonstrate that inclusion was implemented via pedagogical strategies that emphasized participation, differentiation, and emotional safety, aligning with modern interpretations of inclusion as transcending mere physical placement to encompass meaningful engagement and a sense of belonging ^[1]. Instructional methods prioritized adaptability and attentiveness to learner diversity, whereas institutional initiatives fostered empathy, acceptance of differences, and the mitigation of exclusionary behaviors. These practices correspond with research emphasizing the necessity of addressing both academic and socio-emotional aspects of inclusion to maintain student engagement ^[9, 2].

Collaboration with families has become an essential aspect of inclusive practice. Over time, this collaboration evolved from an initial focus on communication and trust-building to more structured forms of engagement, including clearly defined opportunities for participation and negotiated role boundaries. This progression illustrates the temporal and developmental character of inclusive school-family partnerships. The results indicate that persistent endeavors were undertaken to establish trust-based relationships with parents and guardians via transparent communication and organized chances for involvement. These practices demonstrate international evidence that inclusive education is enhanced when families are acknowledged as collaborators in learning and well-being, while distinct role boundaries are upheld to foster professional autonomy and mutual respect ^[4]. Recognizing the varied social and occupational factors influencing parental involvement alleviated discriminatory tendencies and fostered more fair participation.

Interaction with the broader community was another crucial element of inclusive development. Collaborations with local authorities, social services, cultural groups, and civic entities enhanced the school's ability to tackle social, cultural, and environmental aspects of education. This discovery aligns with ecosystem-oriented viewpoints that define inclusion as beyond the school and rooted in reciprocal connections with the local community ^[6]. The school operated as a community-focused institution, promoting inclusive principles via civic engagement and social responsibility through various alliances.

Ultimately, material conditions and infrastructure exerted a dual yet significant influence on the implementation of inclusion. Investments in digital technologies, customized learning settings, and support services improved access to education and facilitated more inclusive teaching techniques, aligning with research on the impact of learning environments on participation ^[13]. Simultaneously, enduring constraints in physical accessibility exposed structural obstacles that surpassed the school's immediate ability to address. These tensions underscore a persistent problem in inclusive education research: the disparity between inclusive objectives at the school level and systemic limitations

concerning policy, finance, and infrastructure ^[1, 6].

The findings depict inclusion as a dynamic and negotiated process influenced by leadership, professional culture, pedagogical practices, family involvement, community participation, and material conditions. In accordance with international literature, the case demonstrates that converting a school into a "School for All" is not a linear trajectory but a perpetual process marked by adaptation, reflection, and the continual negotiation of limitations and opportunities ^[5, 13].

Challenges and Tensions in Implementing a "School for All"

Despite sustained efforts toward inclusive transformation, the findings indicate that the implementation of a "School for All" approach was shaped by a range of persistent challenges and structural tensions. These issues served not only as external impediments but also actively shaped the interpretation, prioritization, and implementation of inclusive objectives in daily school practices. In accordance with international research, the case demonstrates that inclusion develops inside intricate educational systems where school-level agency is perpetually negotiated about policy, organizational, and socio-cultural limitations ^[1, 13].

A major difficulty was the instability of teaching personnel, a structural feature of the Greek public education system. Frequent personnel changes hindered the continuity of pedagogical activities and complicated the establishment of a cohesive inclusive culture. Although collaborative practices and professional learning frameworks were established to address this volatility, the absence of sustained staffing continuity limited the extent and speed of transformation. This finding corresponds with global research indicating that the advancement of inclusive education necessitates time, relational trust, and consistent professional communities to be integrated into daily practice ^[10, 11].

An additional strain arose around accountability and evaluation methods. The vagueness around teacher and school evaluation frameworks engendered uncertainty concerning expectations, priorities, and professional autonomy. Inclusive approaches need adaptability, reactivity, and consideration of contextual demands, whereas accountability frameworks typically prioritize standardization and quantifiable results. This tension signifies a wider global apprehension that performative accountability frameworks may unintentionally compromise inclusive principles by favoring limited measures of effectiveness at the expense of relational and participatory aspects of education ^[9, 12]. Framing this issue as a structural contradiction, rather than a deficit in school practice, underscores the systemic conditions within which inclusive leadership must operate.

Collaboration with families, acknowledged as vital for inclusion, nevertheless produced intricate relationships. Differences in parental availability, expectations, and perceptions of education influenced the nature and extent of involvement. In several cases, robust parental engagement bolstered inclusive measures: conversely, efforts to influence pedagogical decision-making generated problems over professional limits. These findings align with research indicating that inclusive school-family partnerships necessitate meticulous role negotiation, mutual respect, and awareness of social and occupational disparities influencing

parental involvement ^[4, 6].

Material and infrastructural limitations represented a continual struggle. Despite substantial advancements in digital resources, learning environments, and specialized support facilities, issues with physical accessibility persisted unaddressed. These limits highlighted the disparity between inclusive goals at the school level and the overarching policy and financing decisions that regulate school infrastructure. International research indicates that such structural impediments frequently compel schools to manage inclusion symbolically rather than achieving it in physical and material dimensions ^[13, 1].

The wider socio-economic and cultural backdrop consistently impacted inclusive initiatives. Economic pressures, evolving communication methods, and the rapid tempo of modern life have influenced students, families, and instructors, thereby altering the expectations and emotional burdens imposed on educational institutions. The contextual aspects emphasized that inclusion is inextricably linked to broader socioeconomic situations, and that schools frequently serve as arenas where social inequities are both perpetuated and challenged ^[9, 6].

Collectively, these issues underscore that the transition to a "School for All" is neither straightforward nor uncontentious. It is defined by continuous negotiation between inclusive values and structural realities. This instance illustrates that inclusive leadership encompasses not just fostering participation and equity but also managing uncertainty, conflict, and limitation. These tensions, instead of indicating failure, reflect the complexity inherent in inclusive school growth and highlight the necessity for ongoing support at both the school and systemic levels.

Discussion

This study investigated the implementation of a "School for All" strategy in a Greek public primary school, emphasizing inclusion as a pedagogical and organizational process influenced by leadership, professional culture, and systemic factors. The findings enhance global discourse on inclusive education by demonstrating that whole-school inclusion is realized not through isolated initiatives, but through the cumulative impact relational, pedagogical, and organizational practices cultivated over time. The study underscores that inclusion is more accurately perceived as a continuous process of school development rather than a static condition or technical remedy ^[1, 13].

The instance significantly demonstrates inclusive school leadership as a sort of cultural and relational endeavor. The leadership practices in the examined school highlighted collective accountability, professional discourse, and the integration of values into daily operations, corroborating international findings that inclusive leaders primarily affect practice by cultivating school culture rather than exerting hierarchical authority ^[5, 4]. The results indicate that leadership for inclusion functions by fostering conditions conducive to collaboration, reflective practice, and collective problem-solving, reinforcing the notion that inclusive leadership is inherently linked to distributed and participatory governance models ^[12]. This underscores the perception of leadership as a mediating influence between inclusive values and the pragmatic aspects of education.

The research highlights the importance of the whole-school approach as a cohesive framework for inclusive growth. Inclusion was implemented through interrelated domains,

educational methodologies, student involvement, familial engagement, community collaborations, and learning settings, rather than being limited to specialized provisions or focused assistance. This discovery corresponds with studies highlighting that sustainable inclusion relies on the consistency of school structures and practices, together with the collaborative involvement of all stakeholders ^[10, 6]. The story demonstrates that whole-school inclusion may be promoted even in highly centralized education systems, as long as schools maintain a certain level of organizational autonomy and leadership stability.

The discussion emphasizes the significance of addressing limits and tensions as essential to inclusive school growth. Challenges associated with staff volatility, accountability demands, infrastructural constraints, and intricate school-family dynamics were integral to the inclusive process. These findings align with significant work that cautions against idealized narratives of inclusion, which neglect the institutional and policy factors influencing educational practices ^[9]. The study posits that conflicts should not be perceived as failures, but rather as evidence that inclusive growth is a negotiated and frequently precarious process necessitating continuous adaptation and reflexivity ^[13].

The Greek setting offers analytical insight into the pursuit of inclusion amid uncertainty and systemic constraints. The findings enhance worldwide literature by providing a context-specific analysis of a Southern European public education system, while also offering analytical insights that may be transferable to other centralized and resource-constrained contexts. In particular, the study highlights leadership practices that support inclusive development amid staffing instability, infrastructural limitations, and policy ambiguity, conditions that characterize many public education systems internationally. This underscores the demand for additional geographically and systemically diverse case studies that can enhance comprehension of how inclusive education is influenced by national and local contexts ^[1, 6]. This study illustrates the significance of practice-based, qualitative research in enhancing large-scale policy and effectiveness studies.

The discourse characterizes the "School for All" not as a repeatable framework, but as a contextual process of inclusive transformation rooted in leadership, collaboration, and ethical dedication. The results indicate that inclusive education is maintained not through the elimination of restraints, but by the ability of school communities to operate effectively within those limitations. This viewpoint underscores the necessity for educational policies that promote enduring professional stability, infrastructure enhancement, and leadership development to ensure that inclusive education transcends mere desire and becomes an integral component of public schooling.

Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the implementation of a "School for All" strategy in a Greek public primary school, focusing on leadership, comprehensive school processes, and contextual limitations. Utilizing a qualitative case study, the essay enhances international scholarship by providing a contextualized narrative of inclusive school transformation based on routine educational and organizational practices. The results underscore the comprehension of inclusion as a dynamic, protracted process that develops via enduring collaboration, thoughtful leadership, and ongoing

negotiation between principles and systemic realities^[1, 13]. A primary result is that inclusive education is most effectively promoted when regarded as a collaborative effort rather than a series of isolated activities. The instance exemplifies how inclusion is ingrained through collective professional cultures, student-focused pedagogies, organized family involvement, and collaborations with the broader community. These interrelated characteristics embody the concepts of comprehensive school inclusion underscored in international literature and underscore the significance of coherence in practices and relationships^[10, 6]. Leadership serves as a vital enabling element, achieved not via authoritarian control, but through the fostering of trust, professional discourse, and a principled dedication to equity. The study emphasizes that inclusive transformation is influenced by enduring obstacles that surpass the school's direct impact. Staff instability, infrastructural deficiencies, accountability demands, and socio-economic factors impeded the speed and extent of inclusive growth. Instead of diminishing the legitimacy of the inclusive initiative, these tensions reveal the intricacies of executing inclusion in public education systems and warn against simplistic or romanticized accounts of transformation^[9]. The results indicate that resilience, reflexivity, and adaptive leadership are essential competencies for maintaining inclusion in these circumstances.

The research presents multiple consequences for educational practice. It underscores the necessity for school leaders to prioritize inclusive ideals in daily decision-making, invest in professional learning communities, and cultivate collaborative partnerships both within and outside the school. The findings underscore the importance of collective accountability for learner diversity and continuous reflective practice as essential components of inclusive pedagogy for educators. This scenario highlights the necessity for systemic support at the policy level, including personnel stability, logical evaluation systems, and accessible school infrastructure, to effectively implement inclusive education. This study illustrates the significance of practice-based qualitative case studies in enhancing global perspectives on inclusive education. By emphasizing the viewpoints and actions of practitioners, such research helps elucidate the contextual intricacies of inclusion that are frequently overlooked in extensive or policy-oriented assessments. Subsequent research may expand upon this study by integrating several case analyses across other locations, directly investigating student and family viewpoints, or evaluating the longitudinal progression of inclusive school development.

In conclusion, converting a public school into a "School for All" is neither a technical endeavor nor a brief initiative, but an ethical and organizational commitment sustained through leadership, collective responsibility, and ongoing reflexive practice. This case demonstrates that inclusive transformation is achieved not by eliminating constraints, but by developing the collective capacity of school communities to work productively within them. It is an ethical and organizational obligation that necessitates time, consistency, and ongoing support across all levels of the educational framework. The journey toward inclusion may be slow and inconsistent, although the example provided demonstrates that significant advancement is achievable when inclusive principles are continuously implemented through leadership, cooperation, and reflective practice.

These efforts, despite limitations, further the overarching goals of fairness and social justice in education.

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