# EQUITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN A PRIMARILY WHITE PUBLIC SCHOOL: STAFF EXPERIENCES WITH MINORITIZED STUDENTS' SENSES OF BELONGING AND ENGAGEMENT

BY

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## SIGNATURE PAGE

This dissertation has been examined and approved.

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## DEDICATION

My dear mom, you have always taught me to treat everyone right, even in times when other people did not. I will always carry that with me as character value.

My personal journey with understanding about race issues and equity in the United States started with a group of talented and passionate teachers who made an impact on my choices and career path. I was largely unaware of day-to-day injustices in the United States until I became an educator.

Thank you, India, Taryn, and Sooz, for illuminating my path. I've learned so much from you.

Thank you, Liz, for always supporting me.

Thank you, students, for trusting me and sharing your stories with me, I want the best for you.

My dear daughter, I hope to pass my learning and these values to you, you are my motivation and resilience and the reason for everything I want to do better.

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## ABSTRACT

Disengagement and isolation for minoritized students is an educational problem. The general problem is that while schools implement professional development (PD) interventions to address engagement and belonging, these interventions are not always successful. Specifically, students' of color sense of belonging and engagement is a problem in predominantly White institutions (PWIs). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore high school staff perceptions of current equity PD efforts and culturally responsive practices and to analyze what equity PD efforts and practices create an inclusive school culture, increased minoritized students' senses of belonging, and reduced disengagement. Critical race theory (CRT) was used to frame staff lived experiences of equity efforts.

The research questions (RQs) included staff perspectives on current equity PD efforts, which specific equity PDs were instrumental, which equity efforts had increased, and whether through equity efforts, staff acquired knowledge about inclusiveness and diversity to help minoritized students feel more included and engaged. Data was collected through semistructured individual interviews, with a purposive, maximum variation sample of eight staff members participating in the equity PD efforts for the previous 2 years. Interview data was sorted into codes, and grouped by common themes, mirroring Colaizzi's (1978) seven steps for phenomenological data analysis and leading to answers to the RQs. After the analysis was complete, participants' experiences from the findings were combined into six major themes: (a) Personal Journey, (b) Belonging, (c) Staff-Student Relationships, (d) Family and Community, (e) Staff Progress on Equity PD, and (f) Barriers to Staff Progress.

Recommendations include increasing equity PD, listening to student voice to implement change, combating systemic barriers by mitigating academic tracking inherited from middle school, offering support for minoritized students to be in advanced placement (AP) and honors classes, and building trust to strengthen relationships with minoritized students. The study has value in addressing the problem of minoritized students' disengagement and isolation in PWIs, and high school staff might learn about equity and use their growth to serve students from all demographics. This study benefitted the minoritized students, staff, and leaders involved with the intervention.

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Sense of belonging and engagement in high school is an indicator of academic success and being rejected by peers and teachers can lead to feeling excluded and low academic attainment (Arslan & Duru, 2017). Experiences of minoritized students can be different from the experiences of their peers because minoritized students can feel isolated, unsafe, unsupported, or discriminated against, which contrasts with White students' feelings (Voight et al., 2015). Minoritized students frequently feel disengaged and experience discrimination, especially in predominantly White institutions (PWIs; Thandeka & Kalwant, 2019). In PWIs, racial justice and educational inequity for minoritized students has continued to be a problem, as racism and its impact alienates minoritized students, and staff can be resistant to equity efforts (Lac & Baxley, 2019).

The current study was an exploration of staff perspectives on minoritized high school students' senses of belonging and engagement. The current study explored staff equity efforts to address unwelcoming climates and low engagement for adolescent students at a PWI. Critical race theory (CRT) was used to frame staff perceptions of equity efforts to address isolation and disengagement for minoritized students (Lac & Baxley, 2019). This qualitative study had a focus on in-depth staff perspectives and lessons learned from equity efforts in a high school in the Pacific Northwest. Staff views are relevant because staff can influence, change, and design interventions that affect school climate.

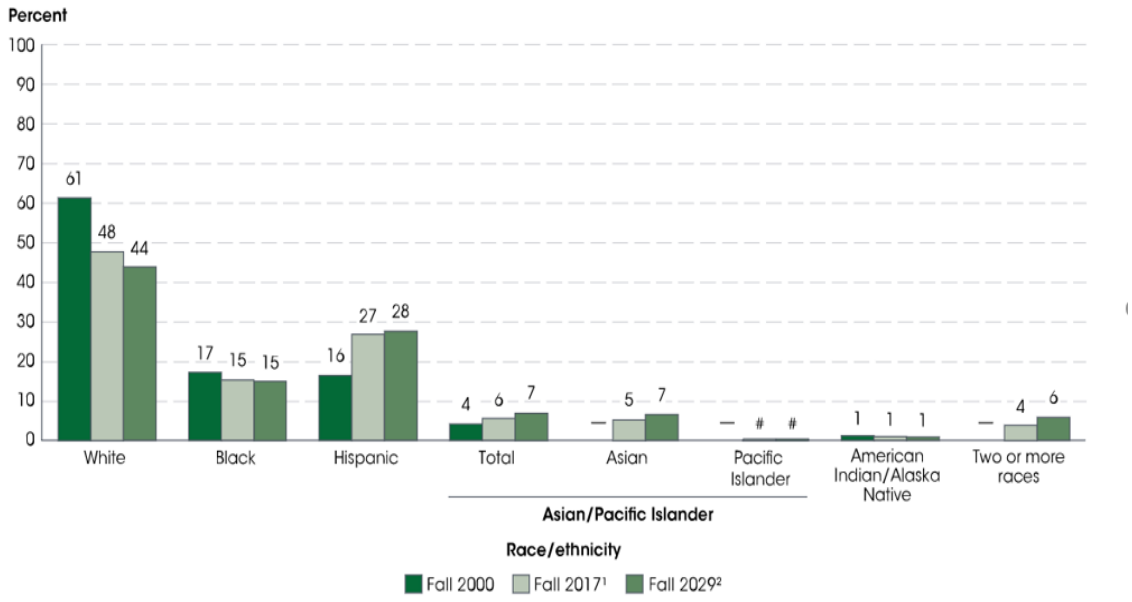
## Study Background/Foundation

Student populations in public schools are changing. In 2000, White students represented 61% of the total student population, and in 2017, White students represented

48% (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). Projections showed by 2029, the non-White student population will increase to 56%; Asian, Latino, and multiracial student populations in public schools will increase and the White student population will decline (see Figure 1; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). In 2017, most public-school teachers were White (79%; NCES, 2020; see Figure 2), yet only 48% of students were White students (see Figure 1; NCES, 2020).

**Figure 1**

*Percentage Distribution of Student Enrolled in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Race/Ethnicity: Fall 2000, Fall 2017, and Fall 2029 (Projected)*

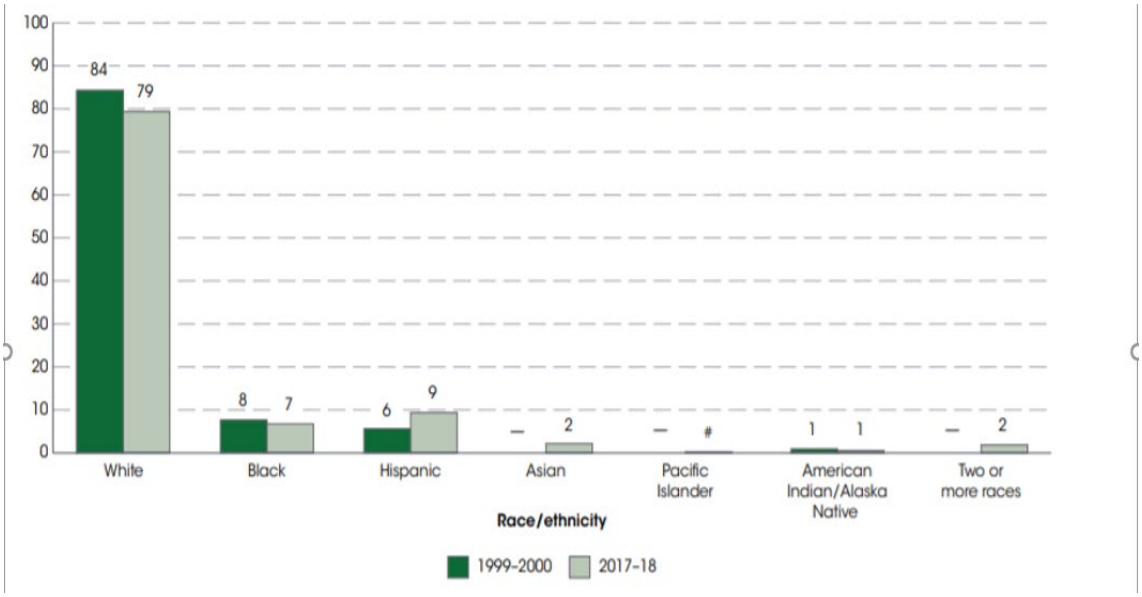



*Note.* The bar graph shows decline of White student population and increase in Hispanic, Asian and multiracial population. The bar graph represents projection data for Fall 2029. From *The Condition of Education* by the National Center for Education Statistics, 2020 (https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020144.pdf).

In 2017, the general student population was 27% Hispanic, yet the teaching population was only 9% Hispanic. Black students made up 15% of students, yet only 7%

**Figure 2**

*Percentage Distribution of Teachers in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Race/Ethnicity: School Years 1999-2000 and 2017-2018*




*Note.* Bar graph shows most teachers were White in 1999-2000 and 2017-2018. From *The Condition of Education* by the National Center for Education Statistics, 2020 (https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020144.pdf).

of teachers were Black educators (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). National projections for student demographics show White student populations will decrease to 44% of all students by 2029, and the Hispanic student population will increase to 28% by 2029. The NCES (2020; see Figures 1 and 2) showed disparity between teaching and student populations, with the 78% of educators being White and the 48% of students being White.

Research has shown African American students are better served by educators who understand their identity and struggles; thus, there is a growing need to have diverse educators (Milner, 2020). Dixon (2018) connected superficial multicultural education in

schools with majority White teacher attitudes and teachers that did not attend to equity. White teachers must know and appreciate students from cultures different from their own, so they can serve them well in an increasingly global and diverse society with changing demographics. When considering school climates for non-White students, Camacho et al. (2018) emphasized adolescents perceive the value of their racial identity and the associated supports for their ethnicities, and Camacho et al. recommended teachers develop positive relationships with non-White students and show appreciation for their pupils' backgrounds. These relationships are beneficial because positive school climates increase non-White students' engagement and senses of belonging (Camacho et al., 2018). School climate shapes minoritized students' schooling experience and teachers' actions could influence the engagement of culturally diverse populations (Camacho et al., 2018). In conclusion, minoritized students perceive they are valued by their educators when their teachers develop relationships with them, value their identities, and create a welcoming climate and conducive to engagement and learning.

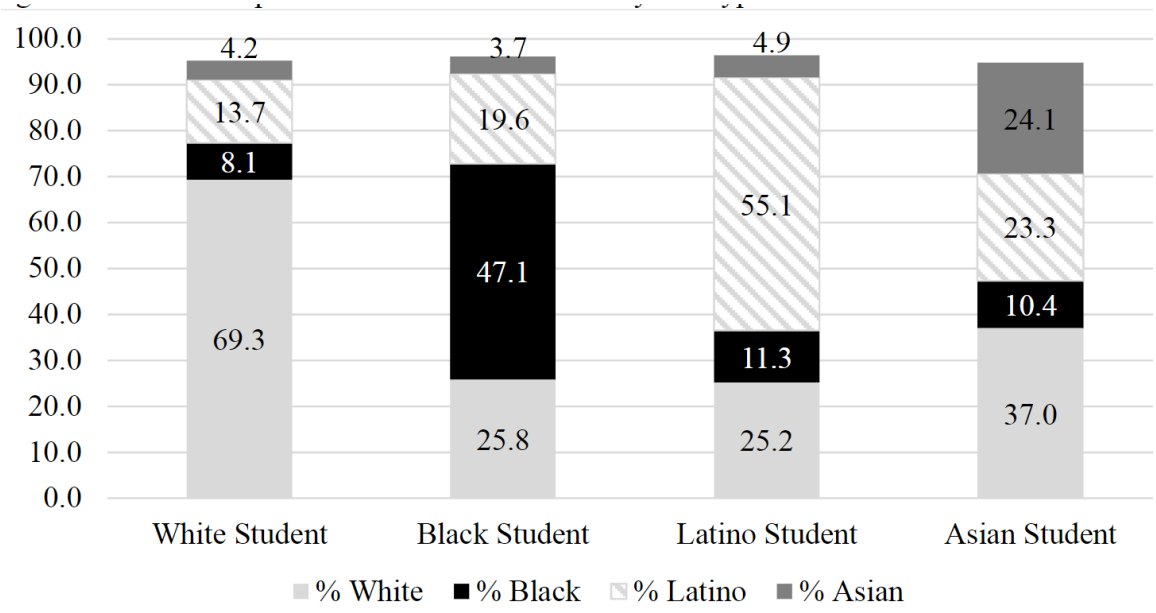
Figure 3 contains data from The Civil Rights Project at UCLA, reported in an article by Frankenberg et al. (2019). Figure 3 includes information about typical White, Black, Latino and Asian students and demographics of the schools they attended.

In 2016-2017, the typical Black student attended mixed-demographic schools, where the Black student population was not 50% or higher, while typical White students attended schools where much more than 50% of the student population was of their own race (Frankenberg et al., 2019). Frankenberg et al. (2019) used published national census data (see Figure 3) to argue the typical White student attended schools where 69.3% of

their peers were also White, which was in contrast with the corresponding percentages on typical Black, Latino or Asian students. The typical White student was more segregated

**Figure 3**

*Racial Composition of Schools Attended by the Typical Student of Each Race 2016-2017*




*Note.* Percentages do not add up to 100% due to the exclusion of American Indian students int this aggregated data set. From "Harming Our Common Future: America's Segregated Schools 65 Years After Brown" by E. Frankenberg, J. Ee, J. B. Ayscue, & G. Orfield, 2019, *Civil Rights Project UCLA, 5*(1), 1-45. (https://scholarship.org/uc/item/23j1b9nv).

and has less exposure to and contact with other races than any other students of different races were and did. Primarily White institutions served primarily White students (Frankenberg et al., 2019).

The current study explored how high school staff understood minoritized students' belonging and the purpose and impact of equity professional development (PD) and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) practices. This study was framed through self-

determination theory (SDT) and CRT. The construct of belonging comes from psychology and SDT was developed by and Ryan and Deci (2008), in 1985. Ryan and Deci showed by attuning to student needs and making students feel included, teachers support students' emotional safety, so students can investigate ideas and challenge themselves. Critical race theory emerged from scholarly legal studies and the fight for equality in education for African Americans (Dixon, 2018). Dixon (2018) recalled CRT scholars believe the legal system does not make provisions for social and educational equity for people of color and attempted to rectify the past injustices. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued past education policies and practices in the United States have contributed to low academic achievement and inequities for students of color, especially those who have been economically disadvantaged. Scholars using critical race theory have a 30-year history of legal and educational advocacy for African Americans, and this theory relates to other social issues, such as affordable housing and police violence, which are current problems for African Americans in the U.S. society (Dixon, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical race theory is a theoretical lens that can aid in the exploration of staff perceptions through an equity lens. Ladson-Billings and Tate detailed how multicultural education is insufficient to erase school racism. Critical race theory practices can be applied to the chosen institution, as the stakeholders aim to move past shallow cultural exchanges and pursue race and equity efforts. Thandeka and Kalwant (2019) used CRT to understand non-White students' experiences at a PWI and showed staff contributed to racism toward minoritized students and impacted minoritized students' senses of belonging.

**Current State of the Field in Which the Problem Exists**

The problem of minoritized students' disengagement in schools exists nationwide (Voight et al., 2015). When studying the racial school climate gap, Voight et al. (2015) found minorities felt disconnected and unsupported and displayed low senses of belonging. When analyzing integration for African American high school students in a PWI, Thandeka and Kalwant (2019) articulated that teachers displayed deficit thinking in African American students' abilities and did not develop positive relationships with them.

More research is needed on how to impact minoritized students' belonging and engagement. When analyzing school support, Bottiani et al. (2016) called for additional research to understand how students' racial backgrounds interact with school contexts to shape their perceptions of school support. In a study about student engagement, Lam et al. (2014) recommended further research to find what affect student engagement. Student engagement depends on teachers providing support and opportunities for students to use critical-thinking skills, but the researchers did not follow up with these recommendations or provide the suggested opportunities (Lam et al., 2014).

School climate can impact engagement, especially for at-risk students. At the institution for the current study, most at-risk students were minoritized students, which has been the historical trend. When analyzing school characteristics related to dropout rates, Christle et al. (2016) showed student disengagement impacted dropout rates, and the authors recommended in-depth studies on student engagement. Considering equity in education, Pinheiro et al. (2016) called for systems that allow access to equal education for underrepresented populations, and they described problems of isolation and disengagement and their systemic roots.

## Historical Background

Sense of belonging can be a fundamental need, and there is historical research to show it. Maslow (1943) articulated the fundamental need to belong, as an essential requirement for the development of high levels of knowledge, an idea that has been repeated in an article about learning and achievement (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). Goodenow and Grady (1993) defined *school belonging* as levels of perceived appreciation, acceptance, inclusion, and agency students feel at school.

A sense of belonging can be defined and understood through scholarly work on SDT. Researchers have argued for support for belongingness in the classroom, central to SDT, as it has been shown to support students' well-being and self-sufficiency (Martin & Dowson, 2009). d'Ailly and Blokhuis (2018) explained SDT can be used to advocate for social policies across cultures and is connected to students' wellbeing, the universal need for integration, relatedness, and the topic of the current research.

Non-White students in PWIs have historically experienced discrimination at school: Their identities have been questioned and stereotyped (Leath et al., 2019). Some non-White students have been placed in PWIs and mostly taught by White women, who make up 85% of teachers in public schools (Leath et al., 2019). Effects of minoritized students' integration in PWIs with dominant Eurocentric cultures have been disproportional disciplinary issues, social exclusion, achievement gaps, low engagement, diminished sense of belonging, and teachers questioning their abilities (Leath et al., 2019). In a study about the academic, psychological, and physical well-being of adolescents, Huynh and Fuligni (2010) showed Latino and Asian youth immigrants experienced peer and adult discrimination, just as African American students

experienced. The authors explained the impact of discrimination led to lower achievement, lower confidence, and higher levels depression, in comparison with White students' achievement, confidence, and depression (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010).

Researchers have suggested using CRT to address systemic injustices for non-White students (Lac & Baxley, 2019). Critical race theory emerged from the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, through legal studies to support education work, acknowledge marginalized voices of African Americans, and counter racist attitudes. Critical race theory scholars have advocated for legal reparations for people of color; the reparations are needed to address existing injustices in law and education for people of color (Dixon, 2018). The earliest work on CRT happened in the 1970s and was piloted by Bell (1976), considered one of the founders of the theory. Bell examined race in the context of law schools and then applied it to other educational institutions, exploring issues of appropriate education for desegregated schools. When articulating the need for CRT, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) said additional efforts were needed to eradicate schools' systemic injustices. The authors explained multicultural education is not enough to erase racism because multicultural education is rooted in an assimilationist, meritocracy-based perspective. When considering major legal decisions in education through a CRT framework, Burr (2018) showed how the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Brown Versus the Board of Education* turned into resegregation in the following decades, due to zoning laws, and Burr advocated for increased use of CRT in legal and educational decisions.

Culturally responsive pedagogy can affect students' senses of belonging and engagement. Ladson-Billings (1995) argued teachers employing CRP practices offer a

way for Black students who have historically experienced discrimination to preserve their cultural values, be academically successful without fear of being labeled as "acting White," feel included, and show higher interest in learning. Ladson-Billings recommended training teachers in CRP practices before those teachers work with diverse populations. Culturally responsive pedagogy has been applied in curriculum to support marginalized students' voices and includes different perspectives, which impact students' senses of belonging and achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive pedagogy helps educators reflect on their life experiences and understand how those experiences affect their attitudes and teaching practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

**Deficiencies in the Evidence**

There have been limited data from quantitative research on this topic, leading to insufficient literature on minoritized students' isolation and disengagement and how staff can alleviate these issues. Researchers have shown low student engagement is correlated to poor behavior and low grades (Lam et al., 2014). Positive engagement can impact grades. Griffin et al. (2017) showed the mediating effect of positive engagement for high school African American students in their academic achievement. Lam et al. (2014) and Griffin et al. could not study the lived experiences of discrimination on minoritized students because the quantitative data did not provide enough depth.

Non-White students can feel estranged, devalued, and discriminated in PWIs. Hope et al. (2015) conducted an action research study about high school Black students' perceptions of equity in a PWI to show that, given the same infractions, Black students were more likely than White students to receive tougher discipline, and staff questioned

their academic abilities. The authors had limited data and suggested further studies have a more diverse sample than their sample.

Staff-student relationships (SSRs) can impact students' engagement and make them feel included, while they are in the critical transition to adolescence. In a study including teen student motivation, Scales et al. (2019) showed improvement in relationships correlated with improvement in engagement, perceptions of quality instruction, and belongingness. To clarify their findings, the authors recommended looking at which specific changes to implement.

Teacher behaviors can be trained through schoolwide PD on equity, cultivating positive SSRs, applying CRP in education, and instructional practices focused on equity. These behaviors can influence and possibly reverse the adverse effects of isolation, as teachers meet minoritized students' needs and assist in advocating for social justice. Teachers and administrators who plan equity PD need to add CRP into curriculum practices, be mindful of pervasive colonial views, be informed, and work toward changing resistant attitudes. Teachers could change behaviors and build positive SSRs because positive relationships contribute to minoritized students' engagement and belonging.

The literature includes research with quantitative and mixed-method approaches, and while authors have shown the problems of minoritized students' isolation and disengagement, findings have lacked depth (Griffin et al., 2017; Scales et al., 2019). The current study included looking into what specific changes, from staff perspectives, were instrumental and exploring staff learning about equity with a multitude of equity PD. Various equity PD opportunities needed to happen to solve the problem of disengagement

and belonging for minoritized students. This study was needed because it was qualitative, and the staff applied the recommendations of building positive SSRs, including CRP, and getting training on equity. Furthermore, staff perspectives on equity efforts were not considered in any of the reviewed literature. These views are relevant because staff have the power to affect school climate and design interventions. The lessons learned from this study could be useful in schools with similar demographics and problems of engagement and belonging for minoritized populations.

## Problem Statement

School engagement and belonging can be difficult for minoritized students. Disengagement and isolation for minoritized students is an educational problem: Minoritized students in PWIs have been disengaged and isolated. The problem can start with teacher attitudes. Multiple studies have been done to investigate minoritized students' difficulties in being engaged and having senses of belonging. In a qualitative study about addressing White teachers' resistance to anti-Blackness, Lac and Baxley (2019) argued staff seldom addressed root causes of racism and institutionalized discriminatory practices. In a study on teacher preparation, Brown and Rodriguez (2017) argued teachers need to learn how to connect with students of races other than their own because the disconnect diminishes their effectiveness and students' achievement levels. If teachers do not connect with and engage students, it can impact students negatively. Henry et al. (2012) showed disengagement for adolescents led to dropout and problematic behaviors. When analyzing school support for high school students, researchers have realized students who feel disengaged and isolated see school as unwelcoming and could drop out as Henry et al. (2012) argued, or students did not build

relationships with adults, changed classes and schools, did not persevere, and had low academic achievement, discipline issues, and low attendance as Thandeka and Kalwant, (2019) argued. Bottiani et al. (2016) recommended further studies with a focus on perceived school environments for non-White students and analyzing their perceptions of how staff addressed their needs.

The general problem is that while schools implement PD interventions to address engagement and belonging, these interventions are not always successful. The specific problem is students of color's senses of belonging and engagement in PWIs. When analyzing teachers' preconceptions around racism in education, Wilson and Kumar (2017) argued for filling the literature gap on educating teachers about social justice and equity by incorporating diversity, examining injustice, and examining anti-racism. The chosen institution was a large high school in the Pacific Northwest, where building leaders created a team to phase in these staff equity PD and trainings. These trainings have not been entirely successful.

**Audience**

High school staff and students benefit from equity efforts, as seen in the preliminary data collected by the proposed school. The study was an attempt to find ways to reach more of the faculty at the school than prior to the equity efforts. This study has value in addressing the general problem at PWIs. High school staff can learn and benefit from the findings, as they could use their potential growth to serve students from diverse demographics. This study benefits staff, minoritized students, and White students, who are less exposed than minoritized populations to social justice and CRP, and may not be aware of consequences of historical discrimination. Equity PD and staff efforts led to

staff growth on equity and they in turn educated their White students, so they could understand racial issues and be critical allies. Schools and communities benefit from improved climates for minoritized students as racial issues are acknowledged and confronted. This study may also be beneficial to schools that have similar demographics.

Traditional, Eurocentric education and teaching practices can contribute to the specific problem of staff resistance to equity efforts, but teachers can change existing systemic and institutional barriers (Felton-Koewstler, 2019). The goal of the study was to explore how staff understand, learn, know, and educate on equity. This study advanced the field through exploration of CRT, as advised by Griffin et al. (2017) and Scales et al. (2019), and by following recommendations and overcoming prior limitations cited in Bottiani et al. (2016) and Felton-Koewstler's (2019).

**Specific Leadership Problem**

This study connects to educational leadership because of the need for increased minoritized students' engagement and belonging (Voight et al., 2015). The lessons learned from this study can aid school leaders in implementing equity PD. The general and specific problem are also leadership problems because leaders need to know staff perspectives on equity efforts. In a seminal school improvement book encompassing moral leadership, Sergiovanni (1992) advocated for supporting students to serve students' needs to belong, which schools could provide. Lac and Baxley (2019) recommended school leaders promote equity, provide resources, and facilitate and train staff to handle difficult conversations on race and implicit bias because these issues have rarely been addressed in equity interventions. In the climate of Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, the lessons learned from the staff PD equity efforts will be useful to PWIs and could lead

to transferable solutions for school leaders choosing equity PD in PWIs to ensure equal educational opportunities. School leaders can use the results of this study to compare biannual climate data and minoritized students' perspectives with staff experiences from the results. This study supports the chosen school district superintendent's equity goal and advances equity education for all school stakeholders because some of the equity PD efforts were district directed.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore high school staff perceptions of existing PD on equity and CRP practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest and, from a staff perspective, how the PD efforts may increase minoritized students' sense of belonging and reduce disengagement. This study was an exploration of staff perspectives about race and equity efforts at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest. The purpose of equity efforts was to alleviate the disengagement and isolation of minoritized students.

Training staff with equity PD and CRP can address the problem of minoritized students' engagement and belonging, but staff attitudes on equity efforts can influence the outcomes of engagement and belonging interventions. In a case study about a teacher implementing social justice, Felton-Koewstler (2019) described a teacher changing from being resistant on social justice towards embracing student-centered learning and equity practices with equity PD and CRP. The results of Felton-Koewstler's study were limited to one teacher's perspective; thus, the study is connected to the purpose statement of the current study, which was an exploration of staff perceptions of the equity efforts and how their new learning about diversity and inclusion impacted them.

## Methodology and Research Design Overview

The researcher used a qualitative methodology with a phenomenological design. Qualitative research is a methodology for exploring and understanding the substance of an issue; the process involves collecting interview data to show lived experiences (Creswell, 2018). Phenomenology requires an interpretive, constructivist perspective, where the researcher describes individuals' lived experiences. The core of the lived reality is brought forward by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In an article on Husserl's worldview as the origin of phenomenology, Corijn (2019) said phenomenology shows participants' subjective, lived views and consciences, which would otherwise be obscured, in favor of objective, established views, as the same phenomenon could appear differently for different individuals.

The current study included exploring staff perspectives of the impact of the equity PD efforts at a primarily White high school in the Pacific Northwest. The chosen institution had racist incidents; minoritized students reported feeling disconnected; and staff showed resistance to equity PD efforts. This study included school data to establish the need for the study and built findings from analysis of interviews with staff members involved with the equity PD efforts. Some staff have been reluctant and have not enacted the PD practices in their classrooms.

This study included open-ended interview questions about the equity efforts and their impact on staff. The study included multiple staff perspectives and addressed the RQs. The researcher coded the data and looked for themes from in the interview data. The researcher considered different staff perspectives on equity efforts to highlight the phenomenon and to improve minoritized students' sense of belonging and

engagement. Phenomenology showed participants' meanings and allowed the researcher to gather data in a natural setting and solve the problem of understanding the process studied.

The author investigated lessons learned, from staff perspectives during interviews, and how these lessons converged into the essence of the experience with equity efforts and addressed the general and specific problem and RQs. Staff gave feedback on how equity efforts and their impact, assessed which ones worked best, and, if perceptions had shifted, suggested additional efforts and equity interventions that should be implemented. Staff addressed the specific problem of equity PDs that were not successful. Staff gave their perspectives on what inclusion and engagement could look like for minoritized students and how the equity PDs were working to remedy the climate of isolation and disengagement, thus addressing the general problem. The equity efforts happened at a single institution, but the nature of the situation is transferable.

The target population was the staff at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest, and these staff underwent equity PD efforts for 2 years. This study included a purposive, maximum variation sample of eight staff members. Chosen staff at the institution had varying roles and degrees of participation in the equity efforts, and some had shown resistance and discomfort with equity PD. Participants were teachers, administrators, coaches, instructional assistants, and counselors. Some participants developed the equity PD efforts. Participants included individuals with varying ages, tenure statuses, positions, and experience with the institution. The target population was accessible to the researcher because the PD happened at an institution familiar to the researcher. The researcher conducted semistructured, individual interviews, which allowed the

participants and the researcher to gain a deep understanding on the phenomenon. The researcher emphasized staff experiences with equity efforts to connect findings with the RQs and focus on the lived experience of the participants (Creswell, 2018).

## Research Questions

The RQs for the study were:

1. To what extent do staff members feel minoritized students are included, in a PWI in the Pacific Northwest?

2a. How do existing PD on equity and CRP practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest increase minoritized students' sense of belonging from a staff perspective?

2b. How do existing PD on equity and CRP practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest reduce disengagement from a staff perspective?

3. How has the staff perception of inclusion changed in the last 2 years of equity efforts at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest?

## Study Limitations

The researcher's personal interests are a limitation. The researcher is aware of bias through transcribing and translating information from the interviews and mitigated this issue with recording accurate transcripts, member checking, triangulation, and sharing information with the chair and committee.

Limitations included not having enough participants, not enough interview time, and staff not responding truthfully. The researcher thought of alternative methods of recruitment, such as recruiting additional participants at an institution with similar demographics and similar staff profiles, a snowball sample, building trust and

anonymity for the participants before interviews, and securing data. The interview responses were limited by the questions asked. The researcher paid attention to what was not being mentioned to balance this limitation.

The results may be transferable, as the institution, chosen staff, and sample are not unique, and the equity efforts can be replicated; however, not all components of the study may be transferrable to other institutions. This study was done in 2021-2022, and the staff had experienced a wealth of equity PD.

## Study Delimitations

This study took place at a Pacific Northwest high school, a PWI, in 2021-2022. The researcher knew many of the participants and had personal experiences with some interviewees. The researcher chose the site due to the equity PDs happening there and because she had easy access to the institution. The equity PDs and chosen population are not particular to this institution, thus they are easily transferable to similar high schools that are PWIs. Most schools in the United States are PWIs, and the problem addressed happens predominantly at these institutions, so the delimitation is not too confining. The responses of the chosen sample limit the results, yet the strategy of maximum variation yielded a variety of responses. The equity efforts and their impact were explored from the staff's perspectives. While minoritized students' perspectives on the impact of these efforts are valuable, the researcher chose this delimitation because the staff had the power to implement and change the current climate of isolation and disengagement for them. Because this is a qualitative study, the results were not generalizable. Therefore, the findings and results of the study may or may not generalize to other subjects, demographics, locations, or future time periods.

## Definitions of Key Terms

*Critical race theory (CRT):* Critical race theory arose from civil rights advocates and scholars who critically examined the law, as applied to issues of race and social justice (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

*Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP):* Culturally responsive pedagogy includes educational practices to include and engage non-White students to preserve their cultural values; promote equity, inclusivity, and critical thinking; and develop interest in learning (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

*Student disengagement:* Student disengagement means students do not manifest interest in learning and do not connect or pursue understanding of the topic they are supposed to be learning in class (Lam et al., 2014).

*Inclusive culture for minoritized students:* School climate that promotes ethnic-racial identity in school and a sense that school is a safe space (Camacho et al., 2018).

*Staff members*: For the purposes of this study, staff members include teachers, counselors, vice principals, administrators, academic intervention specialists, deans, coaches, full- and part-time staff, and other support staff employed in the building.

*Student engagement*: Student engagement is vested interest, diligence, and resilience in learning, and teachers can influence it (Lam et al., 2014).

*Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)*: BIPOC refers to those who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. The term first appeared online in 2013 and expanded on social media (Deo, 2021).

## Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to address the problem of minoritized students' disengagement and isolation in a PWI through an exploration of staff perceptions of existing PD on equity and CRP practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest and explore staff perspectives of how PD efforts may have increased minoritized students' senses of belonging and reduced disengagement. The staff had the authority and influence to change school climate, but adopting new practices and changing the climate is not without obstacles, especially when White teachers must navigate their own implicit biases (Lac & Baxley, 2019). White staff in PWIs could take for granted their own narratives, as their dominant culture has been a model for majority populations; therefore, they may not see the need for social justice or have negative attitudes toward non-White students (Lac & Baxley, 2019; Ladson-Billings &Tate, 1995; Leath et al., 2019).

Supporting students from a culture different than one's own and changing curriculum practices are valuable journeys that take time to develop (Felton-Koewstler, 2019). Equity PD and efforts to connect with students support this process and benefit all stakeholders' growths in an increasingly global and diverse society. Applying CRP, building positive SSRs, and holding equity PD help minoritized students feel included and reduce disengagement created by historical inequitable practices toward disadvantaged student populations (Camacho et al., 2018; d'Ailly & Blokhuis, 2018; Felton-Koewstler, 2019; Ladson-Billings &Tate, 1995; Scales et al., 2019).

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter includes review of literature on minoritized students' engagement and belonging in schools and staff equity PD efforts to address these issues. When considering organizing a literature review, Hart (1999) advised extracting key content, theories, and research approaches from each article and presenting them in a synthesized format. The researcher will highlight critical ideas from articles and noting the designs used to show the study's need. The review consists of an introduction to the topic, its relevance, RQs, and journal articles organized by common themes. The researcher summarizes the main ideas in the literature review and connects the current study with the literature strengths and gaps.

The topic was analyzed and investigated in the literature to review existing theories, critique current research, and find literature gaps. When considering the purposes of literature review in research, Hart (1999) outlined several criteria as (a) providing background for the topic; (b) synthesizing and gaining a new perspective; (c) finding connections between concepts and applications, and (d) separating previous research from gaps. The topic should be reviewed to set the groundwork and context for the proposed stud. Sources were analyzed and combined into a novel overview. Connections were made between ideas and practice, and recommendations were made to advance the field based on critiques of scholarly research.

## Purpose of Literature Review

The topic for this literature review is minoritized students' senses of belonging and engagement. The narrowed topic is staff efforts to address unwelcoming climates and low engagement for students in a PWI. The problem can start with teacher attitudes. In

a qualitative study about addressing resistant White teachers who were anti-Blackness, in a PWI, Lac and Baxley (2019) argued staff seldom address root causes of racism and institutionalized discriminatory practices. In a study on teacher preparation, Brown and Rodriguez (2017) argued teachers need to learn how to connect with students of races other than their own because not addressing the root causes of racism diminishes teachers' effectiveness and students' achievement levels. If teachers do not connect with and engage students, the lack of connection can impact students negatively.

When analyzing integration for African American high school students in PWI, Thandeka and Kalwant (2019) articulated the negative effect of racism on students' senses of belonging and engagement. Racism has an impact because, in a PWI, these students have often experienced discrimination, and been disproportionally overdisciplined, been subject to microaggressions, and teachers have displayed deficit thinking about their abilities (Thandeka & Kalwant, 2019). The authors used the frame of CRT to show the damaging impact of racism on student-to-student and student-adult relationships, creating barriers to student engagement. Students' academic performances, motivation, and attendance were impacted by racism.

When analyzing teachers' preconceptions of racism in education, Wilson and Kumar (2017) found preservice teachers' equity education did not include race issues and did not address stereotypes and systemic racism. Wilson and Kumar argued for filling the literature gap on educating teachers about social justice and equity by incorporating diversity, examining injustice in schools, and including anti-racism into teacher education programs.

In the following sections literature on the following themes and subthemes will be introduced: sense of belonging, self determination theory, engagement for minoritized students, building positive SSRs, research about minoritized students in PWIs , servant leadership, historical and political contexts, historical law cases, CRT CRP, colorblindness , staff resistance, hiring for diversity, building African American leaders, PD for teachers, and remote learning. The last theme on staff perspectives on PD efforts will be presented and connected to engagement, belonging, and the study's purpose.

## Sense of Belonging

High school students who report a sense of belonging can feel valued and accepted in school, and staff could influence growth in students' sense of belonging. Arslan and Duru (2017) recalled that sense of belonging encompassed a student's perception of feeling respected, important, and included. The authors argued a sense of belonging is associated with wellbeing and accomplishment, whereas being rejected was associated with feeling excluded, anxious, demoralized, and lower educational attainment than students who felt that they belong. The adverse effects could be counteracted by staff efforts to meet students' needs to improve their senses of belonging (Arslan & Duru, 2017). Arslan and Duru's (2017) article was set in Turkey. Self-determination theory (SDT) supported the researchers' conclusions, as they quoted the work of Ryan and Deci and the researchers showed that the instrument they created to measure sense of belonging was established based on this theory (Arslan & Duru, 2017).

Using a quantitative approach, Wegmann (2017) measured social support and school belonging in elementary Black/African American and White children. The data showed in elementary school, Black/African American students' senses of belonging was

higher than their White counterparts' senses of belonging. These findings prompted the researcher to advocate for maintaining Black/African American students' senses of belonging from elementary school because they are more vulnerable to stereotypes than White students.

Using a quantitative approach, Voight et al. (2015) analyzed the racial school climate gap for minoritized students in 400 California middle schools. The authors established the problem of school belonging for minoritized students existed nationwide by using data from the U.S. Department of Education. The researchers found minoritized students, such as Black and Hispanic students, felt disconnected, unsafe, and unsupported and displayed low senses of belonging, contrasting with their White counterparts' contrasting with their White counterparts' feelings of inclusion and belonging.

The previously described articles included arguments that sense of belonging affects all students' academic achievement and well-being. Special attention should be given to sense of belonging for minoritized populations, further away from educational justice. Teachers can change negative perceptions by meeting students' needs, using an SDT approach, and advocating for social justice. These research conclusions from the last two sentences and affirmations connect with the purpose and questions of the study. The author of the chosen study follows through to understand this gap in school belonging, which can be influenced by teachers. The authors of the articles gave recommendations that could lead to understanding the problem and possible solutions but did not follow through with implementing these ideas.

All articles were quantitative in nature, qualitative studies are needed for in depth data on sense of belonging and engagement for minoritized students and what teachers

can do to help alleviate isolation and reduce disengagement for these students. Arslan and Duru's (2017) article was set in Turkey, but the chosen study was done in the United States.

## Self-Determination Theory

A sense of belonging can be understood using scholarly work on SDT. Ryan and Deci (2008) are established researchers on SDT and they defined SDT as a theory of human motivation and personality in social contexts. Seminal authors on sense of belonging, Goodenow and Grady (1993), defined school belonging, as the level of perceived appreciation, acceptance, inclusion, and agency students feel at school. When studying frameworks targeted at improving at-risk students' motivation and achievement, Martin and Dowson (2009) looked at comprehensive studies that connected belongingness with SDT. The researchers argued belongingness in the classroom should be modeled by the educators to support students' well-being and self-sufficiency. Maslow's (1943) fundamental need to belong was articulated as an essential requirement for developing higher levels of knowledge and was repeated in an article about learning and achievement (Burleson & Thoron, 2014).

Teachers can impact sense of belonging. Ryan and Edward Deci (2008), known scholars on SDT, argued that by attuning to students' needs and making them feel included, teachers could establish students' emotional safety, so students could investigate ideas, self-motivate, and challenge themselves. In a book review of Ryan and Edward Deci's seminal work, d'Ailly and Blokhuis (2018) recalled that SDT can be used to advocate for social policies across cultures and is connected to students' well-being. The authors of SDT reached into the universal need for integration and relatedness. Much

of the scholarly work on defining sense of belonging came from psychological studies and theories, such as SDT. Arslan and Duru (2017) used this theory in their study about school belonging.

## Student Engagement

Student engagement in school can be observed as a vested interest, diligence, and resilience in learning. When conducting a review of psychological definitions of school engagement, Jimerson et al. (2003) revealed this concept to be multifaceted, with cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions. Cognitive engagement relates to persistence with a task. The emotional dimension refers to relating and identifying with the task, and behavioral engagement was viewed as students actively participating in the task (Jimerson et al., 2003). Lam et al. (2014) defined student engagement in school as students caring about the topic about which they are learning, staying focused, working on the topic, and maintaining interest in learning. This definition is supported by previous research on student engagement and its dimensions (Jimerson et al., 2003) and was used in the current study.

Teachers can impact and change low student engagement. Lam et al. (2014) explained that low student engagement is associated with poor behavior and low grades. Further research is needed to find what affects student engagement, academic performance, and school conduct (Lam et al., 2014). The authors argued student engagement depends on teachers providing students with opportunities to use their critical thinking skills and to choose exciting and applicable topics, providing proper support, and recognizing students' work.

Minoritized students are more impacted by disengagement than White students are. When analyzing school characteristics of high schools with the lowest dropout rates, Christle et al. (2016) conducted a mixed-methods study to show student disengagement and suspension rates impacted dropout. Christle et al.(2016) showed minoritized students had disproportionately higher dropout rates and more disengagement compared to White students' dropout rates and disengagement. A sample of 20 schools with the highest dropout rates was compared to a sample of 20 schools with the lowest dropout rates. The quantitative sample was too small, and the authors only used quantitative data provided by the state. The schools with the lowest dropout rates had higher engagement level than the schools with high dropout rates, promoted positive SSRs, and had teachers who attended to students' needs.

In a quantitative study, Griffin et al. (2017) showed the mediating effects of positive engagement for high school African American students' academic achievement. The study could not establish the negative effects of discrimination on minoritized students' disengagement or low academic achievement. The study used quantitative data to gauge school climate, which did not give enough information about engagement.

The studies in this section show minoritized student engagement can be influenced by teachers' behaviors, instructional practices, positive SSRs, and dropout. These conclusions connect to the purpose of the review and the first RQ for this study. The gaps included recommendations for in-depth studies, follow-ups for teacher practices, and larger samples. Quantitative methods limited the authors' abilities to explain the impact of staff efforts.

## Staff-Student Relationships

Positive SSRs can impact student engagement and make students feel included during critical transitions, such as the one from childhood to adolescence or middle to high school. While searching databases to find indicators for student engagement in schools, Quin (2017) meta-analyzed peer-reviewed quantitative studies with a focus on adolescent populations. The researcher showed with quantitative data the important—but not exclusive—factor of SSRs in elevating student engagement and described limitations of quantitative studies, such as not having qualitative data on how positive SSRs elevate engagement and belonging.

Staff student relationships are connected to engagement levels for students. In a mixed-methods study about middle and high school student motivation, Scales et al. (2019) argued for improved student-teacher rapport to change students' academic, motivational, and engagement declines during the transition from middle to high school. The authors showed improvement in relationships correlated with improved engagement, perceptions of quality instruction, and belongingness. The data did not reveal why some relationships did not improve, and the authors recommended looking at which specific changes were implemented to clarify findings. In another study, Christle et al. (2016) articulated connections between positive SSRs, students' needs, and high engagement levels for minoritized students.

Martin and Dowson (2009) showed positive SSRs lead to high engagement; made connections between collaborative learning, teacher training, teacher practices, and leaders; and constructed an integrative framework from these elements (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Martin and Dowson's (2009) review of scholarly articles was

comprehensive because the authors addressed many theories, such as self-worth theory, self-efficacy theory, and SDT and provided a conceptual framework that showed the relevance of SSR in motivation, achievement, and instructional practices (Martin & Dowson, 2009).

A common theme across all articles was the importance of positive SSRs, which connect to minoritized students' engagement, belonging, the purpose of the study, and first RQ. Identification of specific ways to improve SSRs is the purpose of the second RQ. Scales et al.'s (2019) study connects to the topic of the current study, as the researcher examined specific changes teachers identifies as improving belonging and engagement. The participants from the chosen study gave their input about all minoritized SSRs. Quin's (2017) article is connected to the chosen topic because the equity intervention had a focus on fostering positive SSRs. Quin's work is relevant since he included a large number of databases and sources in the review, but his research was quantitative. Quin's article connects to the chosen topic through exploring effective teaching, PD, and engagement. The equity PD efforts at the chosen institution include embedded classroom practices that foster interactions and collaborative learning and address the articles' quantitative limitations and recommendations. The staff at the chosen institution had already received training on relationships, resiliency, and building positive SSRs. The researcher for the current study sought to learn from staff members how building positive SSRs connects with minoritized students feeling welcome and acting engaged.

## Minoritized Students in a Predominately White Institution

Non-White students can feel estranged, devalued, and discriminated against in a PWI. Hope et al. (2015) conducted an action research study about Black and White high school students' perceptions of racial discrimination and inequality in a PWI. The data indicated given the same infractions, Black students were more likely to receive harsher discipline than their White classmates were, and their academic abilities were questioned by staff. The authors claimed further studies should employ a more diverse population than just Black students only, and Black students should be included in conversations with teachers about racism.

In a qualitative study about pressures on Black students in a predominantly White school, Griffith et al. (2019) argued for a more inclusive school environment for Black students by comparison to White students' senses of belonging, because White students generally did not struggle with belonging, as much as Black students did. The findings highlighted that Black students felt isolated, were subject to open discrimination, had their intellectual abilities questions, and were judged on appearance. The researchers argued for a need to change the oppressive environment for Black students and acknowledged the study's limitation to students who already found coping strategies. The findings show students in a PWI are marginalized and placed outside the dominant culture, and teachers can contribute to this problem.

Griffith et al. (2019) did not analyze positive teacher interventions or what would happen if teachers took note of Black and minoritized students' input. Instead, they gave recommendations that were related to the purpose of the chosen study. The articles are relevant to the chosen study, highlighting the effects of race on school belonging for

minoritized students in PWIs and providing background for the study's first RQ. The chosen study incorporates strategies to reduce the race-related stressors for Hispanic, Black, and mixed-race students.

## Servant Leadership

School leaders' and teachers' leadership approaches, in particular servant leadership, could support minoritized students in PWIs. Frey (2017) recalled that Robert Greenleaf coined the term *servant leadership* in the 1970 to show an altruistic leadership approach that serves the needs of followers because he wanted to combat the popular autocratic leadership style, which he viewed as harmful to people and not sustainable long term. Greenleaf viewed servant leaders as leaders who always empathize and accept their followers (Frey, 2017).

Researchers have shown servant leaders choose followers' interests first, grow followers' capacities, and help them develop to their full potential (Northouse, 2015). Crippen and Willows (2019) said servant leadership is about serving followers and helping them reach their potential, as a priority over organizational or personal aspirations of the servant leaders. Teacher leaders demonstrated service by attending and developing PD, supporting growth through professional learning communities (PLCs), mentoring, and promoting equity initiatives (Crippen & Willows, 2019). A servant leader is motivated by moral principles and learning, which could include equity work. In an article about the role of servant leadership in diverse organizations, Gotsis and Grimani (2016) argued these leaders foster belonging and inclusiveness among diverse followers..

The chosen study connects to leadership because of the need to solve minoritized students' disengagement and isolation and the adverse effects on students' achievement.

A servant leader is a moral leader and is motivated by high moral principles and learning, which could include equity work. In a seminal school improvement book encompassing moral leadership, Sergiovanni (1992) argued that advocating for inclusion and supporting students serves the need to belong, and schools could provide this advocacy for inclusion. When addressing White teachers who were resistant to equity efforts in a PWI, Lac and Baxley (2019) recommended school leaders promote equity, provide resources, and facilitate and train staff to handle difficult race conversations around implicit bias because equity interventions rarely addressed these issues. Administrators at the chosen institution support and lead some of the equity PD for the staff or brought in outside experts on handling race and equity conversations to help staff grow as they requested it, which connects to the third RQ.

## Political Climate

Sociopolitical and historical contexts can exacerbate existing racial conflicts in an institution and put additional burdens on minoritized students. When considering teaching in the political landscape in 2016 and 2017, Andrews et al. (2017) argued the political national climate and the U.S. presidential campaign in 2016 brought forth open displays of race, hate crimes, and isolation for minorities and immigrants, and these actions manifested in schools. Less than two months after the 2016 election, a Southern State agency documented more than 1,000 such reports of racist incidents (Andrews et al., 2017). The authors recommended addressing the postelection climate in public schools with teacher PD and educational equity in schools. The researchers called for teacher preparation so that teachers can take an activist role, work to dismantle systemic

policies that add to educational inequities and help students deal with conflict in society and learn how to make knowledgeable decisions.

In an ethnographic study on White teachers interacting with Latino students at a public high school, Morales et al. (2019) said stereotypes against Mexican Americans came from a long history of discrimination of other administrations, in addition to the Trump administration and Mexicans Americans not having the same rights as White Americans, after the Hidalgo Treaty in 1848. The Hidalgo Treaty was the treaty signed at the end of the Mexico-American war and led to Mexico ceding 55% of its territories to the United States. The political climate resurfaced anti-Latino sentiments, and the authors urged teachers to call out White supremacist narratives as damaging because these narratives aliment a climate of racial hatred. The authors called on White teachers to analyze their positionalities and how they interact with non-White students, their racialized identities, and seemingly benign attitudes that could hide elements of implicit superiority.

COVID-19 increased racial tensions for and hate crimes targeted at Asian Americans. Researchers showed COVID-19 coverage was linked directly to China by some news outlets and popular social media, despite the virus spreading globally (Tessler et al., 2020). The Trump administration reports on the pandemic called the disease “the Chinese virus” (Tessler et al., 2020). The researchers explained that racist jokes and microaggressions targeted at Asian Americans othered their identities, placed them outside the safe boundary of Whiteness in the United States, and escalated into massive business boycotts and hate crimes, creating fear and anxiety for Asian Americans.

## Black Lives Matter

Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests against social injustice and systemic disregard for Black lives has added to political tensions created by the 2016 election. When considering a CRT perspective on BLM, Dixson (2018) argued for activism in schools in response to the outrage of how established, state-supported institutions, such as the police and public education, avoided or criticized BLM protests. Dixon (2018) claimed youth-led activism, sparked by social media platforms, showed teens the social justice reality that had been incompletely and inaccurately portrayed in U.S. history and in many schools.

When analyzing BLM and the contradictions of U.S. politics toward Blacks, Hooker (2016) showed protests against social injustice were condemned as violent by the state, while protestors and the BLM movement viewed them as justified actions for social change. Hooker questioned the moral authority of a U.S. democratic system in which African Americans are expected to peacefully accept the loss of their lives for the sake of the established order, in a system that has not redressed past injustices. Hooker questioned the fairness of the U.S. system and expectations imposed on African American people, on behalf on a White-based democracy.

The BLM has movement has inspired youth to activism, but teens might not see social injustice acknowledged and discussed in their schools. Dixon (2018) argued many traditional curriculum choices have presented perspectives skewed toward dominant narratives and have used materials with incorrect information. These texts have not dealt with taking responsibility for racial inequality, thus contributing to the distortion of how

racial justice is viewed predominantly by White people versus Black people (Dixon, 2018).

Kinloch et al. (2020) analyzed perspectives of Black youth in dominant discourses, during BLM protests. The researchers constructed a background story for counternarratives to show Black students responded with counternarratives and storytelling, illustrating their experiences facing oppression.

## Legal Decisions Impacting Integration in Schools

U.S. court decisions on educational rights and freedoms have shaped the current educational system. Since the 1954 Brown decision, African American students have received far from equal education by comparison to their White peers (Milner, 2020). Milner (2020) analyzed the impact of the 1954 *Brown versus Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court decision that made school segregation unconstitutional and aimed to provide access to equal education for all students, regardless of race. Milner conducted a qualitative study with a tenured African American educator in one district affected by the decision, and the educator recalled how desegregation in Southern states led to massive layoffs and demotions for Black teachers and principals. Teacher demographics became predominantly White (81%) after the layoffs, while the student population in the United States grew more diverse, as shown by national, public data (Milner, 2020). With a majority White teaching staff and increasingly diverse students, the educator explained how race issues were left unspoken, and Mexican-American students suffered the systemic inequities.

When addressing racial and current events included in curriculum, Milner (2020) showed African American teachers' hardships with teaching about lynching in the 1960s,

police brutality, and killings targeted at Black people in the current sociopolitical climate because Black teachers felt insecure under White leadership. Milner argued forced desegregation, without teacher preparation on addressing topics related to racial and understanding diverse identities, did not serve students, and Milner recommended further PD for teachers teaching across racial lines.

School choice could influence integration efforts, as many families strive to gain access to top-rated institutions. Desegregation efforts can be stalled and reversed when some White families do not get their first choice for schools. Donnor (2012) analyzed the desegregation policies after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in an urban area in the Pacific Northwest. Donnor (2012) detailed how a U.S. Supreme Court lawsuit originated with school choice in 2006, when the school district in the case used an open choice plan to accept more students of color into a desirable PWI. The lawsuit originated with White parents, whose children did not get accepted into that area's most desirable school, while some students of color students did, based on a district policy with quotas of White students in the highest achieving school (Donnor, 2012). The school district in the lawsuit was in a different geographical area than Milner's (2020) study was and was a place that claimed a liberal stance on race issues, which Milner's setting did not, yet a significant lawsuit ensued that stalled and reversed the ongoing integration efforts at that time. Donor explained how the fight to maintain White privilege and access to the area's most desirable school was relentless. *White privilege* is a societal advantage that gives preference to Whites over non-Whites, and in the case of Donor's study, it was a preference of White parents for their children to attend any school of their choosing, regardless of district guidelines. The U.S. Supreme Court overturned the district's

decision to use race as a tiebreaker to diversify schools because it put White students at a disadvantage, and the court ruled that the White population needed protection (Donnor, 2012). Thus, efforts and policies to reduce the systemic injustices were overturned by the highest legal authority, and White privilege was maintained. Donnor claimed discrimination against the White population is scarce, as White privilege protects them, while historical truths about discrimination against the African American population are well-known facts.

Some of the most diverse U.S. schools are situated in impoverished communities and continue to have low academic achievement, offer few advanced classes, and have less prepared teachers than majority White schools in affluent areas have, offer, and have, as these schools have parent-teacher associations that can donate generously and regularly. In an article explaining the gentrification and influence of affluent parents, Freidus (2019) detailed how even though federal support is allocated for schools in the United States, high income from property taxes and parent donations in affluent areas can create inequities in school funding. Schools with high funding and parent donations and parent support can fund extracurricular programs and enrich academics (Freidus, 2019). Freidus argued middle-class families evaluated public school services and exercised influence through their opinions, demands, and funding, as social capital.

Another landmark lawsuit case in education was the 1972 *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez,* where a disadvantaged school district pushed for even distribution of public school resources to eliminate discrepancies between schools that benefited from property taxes in affluent areas and underfunded districts, with claims for equal rights to education (Black, 2018). The U.S. Supreme Court rejected

the claim of the school district that asked for more funding and decided further resources for the disadvantaged school had to be voluntarily given and not legally mandated (Black, 2018). Thus, economically disadvantaged schools continued to need funds that could not be secured and mandated through a legal process (Black, 2018).

## Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory originated in the 1970s, when some legal scholars saw that civil rights progress from the 1960s was impeded and even obstructed (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Past injustices against minoritized populations should have been redressed and instead were resurgent (Delgado & Sefanic, 2017). Racist acts was less overt but still present (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Delgado and Stefanic (2017) said the CRT movement is comprised of scholars and social justice advocates who aim to study and change laws that create injustices and inequalities for African American people because the authors believe racist acts are not isolated incidents of hate and instead are deeply ingrained in U.S. life. Critical race theory emerged from the Civil Rights Movement, and its advocates aimed to support education that includes marginalized voices of African American people, to counter racist or colorblind attitudes. In the 1970s, when in law school, Derrick Bell, considered one of the founders of CRT, examined race issues and CRT and then transferred the concept of CRT to educational institutions, where he explored appropriate education for desegregated schools (Bell, 1976).

Critical race theory scholars have aimed to change the established racial inequalities through constitutional law. Critical race theory encompasses legal actions and educational decisions, such as curriculum choices, student placement in high-level classes, school discipline, and achievement testing, especially for non-White minoritized

populations (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Colorblindness or persistence in treating everyone the same are subtler forms of racism that helped to erase blatant forms of discrimination, yet colorblindness remained a subtler form of racim because it was not understood as a racist act (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Delgado and Stefanic (2017) highlighted that even with progressive legal action, such as *Brown v. the Board of Education*, and civil rights activism, legal decisions needed to be accepted by the White majority in order to be enacted, recommended, and continued as social justice actions by the White majority (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017).

When analyzing CRT 20 years after its inceptions, Howard and Navarro (2016) looked at concerns students of color had in their educational experiences. The authors said the use of CRT in education combats ingrained notions of colorblindness, meritocracy, and other forms of veiled racism (Howard & Navarro, 2016).

In their book about CRT, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) detailed how multicultural education is not sufficient to erase the effects of racism in schools because it is rooted in an assimilationist, meritocracy-based perspective. Schools that adopt a CRT lens pay attention to dialogues, voices of people of color, and even had Black studies classes (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). These practices are relevant to the chosen institution, whose stakeholders aim to move past surface cultural exchanges and to dismantle the pervasive colonial view of education, colorblindness, and racist attitudes through equity interventions. The institution has an ethnic studies class, strives to lead deep conversations with students about social justice, and invited African American and minoritized students to create a mural about a diverse, inclusive community. The mural reflects the school's vision statement, which mentions an inclusive, collaborative

community. The CRT theory fits with a qualitative study, just like the intended study, from which the author aimed to learn from the staff's experiences using CRT practices.

Critical race theory can be used to empower marginalized voices to counter dominant narratives because racism is an obstacle to minoritized students' senses of belonging. In a study about African American high school students and integration in a PWI, Thandeka and Kalwant (2019) used CRT to understand participants' experiences. The authors showed staff contributed to racism toward minoritized students and impacted their senses of belonging. They showed that in PWIs, adverse effects of racism on senses of belonging for minoritized students could result from dysfunctional teacher-student relationships, student-student interactions, and school discipline. The authors stated school stakeholders, such as school leaders and staff, need to examine and dismantle existing systemic and institutional racism.

In a qualitative study about master narratives and White supremacy, Woodson (2017) used a CRT lens to show counterstories from two Black high school youths who experienced diluted social studies and history curriculum. Woodson defined *master narratives* as social mythologies where supporters of master narratives ignore and discard characteristics of racial struggle in ways that strengthen mentalities of White supremacy. The curriculum conveyed misrepresentations of racial identities and racial struggles, sanitized versions of leaders, such as portraying Martin Luther King only in peaceful speeches, taken out of context, and convictions that the Civil Rights movement eliminated racism, all showing the teachers sustained master White narratives. Woodson recommended teachers think profoundly about their practices and damaging implications, such as racism was an accident, adopt social justice practices, and stop considering social

justice a finished subject because disregarding these damaging implications alienates minoritized students.

Teachers who plan and analyze equity PD need to demonstrate allyship, include oppressed voices, carefully inspect and incorporate CRT into curriculum practices, analyze relationships with students and discipline disproportionality, and act in awareness of pervasive supremacist views. This statement addresses the literature's purpose and the RQs. Equity PD efforts could alleviate minoritized students' senses of disconnect, a focus of the current study, covered by the second RQ.

## Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Cultural responsiveness of school administration and staff can affect students' senses of belonging and engagement. Culturally responsive pedagogy is based on CRT. When considering diversity in the global age, Banks (2008), a seminal author and advocate of CRP, recalled many U.S. policies had an assimilationist approach prior to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Minoritized children were often discriminated or othered on the basis of their ethnicity or religious orientation (Banks, 2008). Nondominant cultures and ethnic groups in the United States have claimed they should have the rights to maintain and be respected for their cultural values, and that educational institutions should include culturally responsive practices (Banks, 2008). Due to this need to reform education to address educational equality for a diverse student population, multicultural education was considered as a solution by schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Ladson-Billings (1995) argued that there is a contrast between CRT and multiculturalism. Ladson-Billings highlighted that multicultural education initially

adhered to an integration of diverse people into the dominant national narrative, and later the effect of multiculturalism was that it reduced diverse culture to superficial displays of customs and foods. Culturally responsive pedagogy adheres to deep social justice work, critiquing current injustices, and promoting human rights and not property rights (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Hammond (2015), another seminal author, in their book on CRP and the brain, reinforced the use of engagement practices based on neuroscience to help Black students build relationships in the classroom.

Thandeka and Kalwant (2019) analyzed barriers to engagement and belonging through a CRT lens. The negative effects of not belonging, which amounted to isolation and disengagement, were connected to the lack of cultural responsiveness, and the authors advocated for continued support for racial integration. When minoritized students do not develop rapport with staff and peers, due to lack of cultural responsiveness, they feel more isolated and are less likely to actively participate than the rest of the students whose cultures are represented feel and are.

When analyzing inequality in Black and White students' perceptions of high school support, Bottiani et al. (2016) showed deficit thinking about students of color. This thinking was a barrier to positive student-teacher interactions, mutual consideration, CRP, engagement, and belonging. The authors recommended school leaders engage students and empower them as key stakeholders in the systemic change process.

When discussing CRP, Ladson-Billings (1995) argued teachers employing CRP practices offer a way for African American and Latino students, who have experienced discrimination historically, to preserve their values and be academically successful,

without fear of being labeled as acting White or become social isolates. Ladson-Billings explained African American students often feel they had to leave behind their racial identities to perform according to White standards of education, which makes them feel isolated, or they can be labelled as acting White (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings recommended that teachers should be trained in CRP practices before working with diverse populations, as teachers using CRP can overcome deficit thinking and value and promote students from diverse backgrounds.

When considering CRP in an urban high school, Myers (2019) used a qualitative case study to show an alternative to the mandated curriculum. The theoretical framework of the study was based on CRT; the teacher in the study shared her experience and connected community events for students with classic literature, which sparked their engagement. Further implications included CRT's relevancy for secondary teachers to engage minoritized students.

Culturally responsive pedagogy and curriculums that include students' cultural values could be used to address minoritized students' low senses of engagement and belonging. Teacher practices and attitudes that lack a CRP lens can hurt students. A lack of sensitivity and knowledge about students' culture can produce harmful effects on engagement and school climate and foster racial stereotypes. Professional development on CRP and CRT, racial integration, using students' strengths and cultural values as assets, and empowering students, as change agents in social justice, could create an inclusive school climate, counter low engagement, and elevate low senses of belonging for minoritized students. These ideas relate to the purpose of the study and the RQs.

## Minoritized Students as Leaders

Incorporating the marginalized voices, building resilience, and promoting minoritized students can help dismantle disengagement and isolation. In a qualitative study of supporting continued academic success for African American and Mexican American students, Fenzel and Richardson (2019) analyzed interventions to promote resilience and develop coping skills for graduates of the programs used as interventions in the study. The authors argued with skill development, cultivating persistence, mentoring, caring, and servant leadership to support Mexican-American and African American students, students' engagement, self-esteem increased, and isolation decreased, and they started feeling part of the school community. The authors suggested expanding these initiatives to other schools.

In a qualitative case narrative, Lac and Baxley (2019) studied a high school administrator who aspired to implement social justice and incorporated minoritized students' views to remediate the school's hostile climate for these students. The principal had many White staff and White students resistance to change; however, she chose to listen to students in the Black Student Union (BSU) to find ways to remediate the unwelcome climate (Lac & Baxley, 2019). The authors reported many students felt teachers did not build positive SSRs and did not care about their pupils (Lac & Baxley, 2019).

In conclusion, summarizing the literature in this section, minoritized students can become disengaged and feel othered when their opinions are not part of the school improvement plans for diversity and inclusion. Building minoritized student leaders and considering their opinions matters, when selecting PD efforts to improve school climate.

Thus, these approaches are a way to show which specific SSR efforts aid with the belonging and engagement of minoritized students.

The study by Fenzel and Richardson (2019) was restricted to a middle school with a Catholic student body; the design of the study resembled a phenomenology design. The study by Fenzel and Richardson is connected to the current study because the equity PD offered was for staff to mentor minoritized student leaders and build a strong sense of belonging and engagement for these students. The study by Lac and Baxley (2019) is relevant, as the site of the chosen study has mostly White staff, who have shown resistance to social justice and change and at the chosen institution there are administrators that included voices of minoritized leaders from the BSU in the equity PD efforts.

The current study will advance the field because, after the suggestions and the PD are implemented, teachers will talk about their experience and lessons learned. The next theme includes research on colorblindness as the general attitude about race relations and resistance to change and acting on race issues.

## Colorblindness

Yogeeswaran et al. (2018) defined *colorblindness* as a philosophy about diversity that aimed to blur racial differences and to focus on qualities that all human beings have, as professed by Dr. King in his seminal *I Have a Dream* speech. Yogeeswaran et al. argued Dr. King's meaning was to advocate for racial equality at that time, not for colorblindness, because he was also fighting for race policies meant to redress historical injustices for racially discriminated populations.

When considering the prevalence of colorblindness, Hartman et al. (2017) found 70% of Americans of different races have adopted a colorblind stance, as a model to aspire to for race relations. The authors argued White Americans showing colorblind attitudes did not act to reduce discrimination. The findings showed in the 1990s, colorblindness was preferred to existing racial divides, as it was seen as a step toward improved race relations and acceptance. Colorblindness was accepted by the White majority because it was incorporated in the individualistic and meritocracy traits of the U.S. society , thus becoming a step backward on equal opportunities for African American populations (Hartman et al., 2017). Colorblind attitudes reflect a postracial society that has moved past unfair practices and toward merit-based achievements, masking existing injustices and providing evidence of superior abilities of the White Americans (Hartman et al., 2017). The authors emphasized that colorblind attitudes and merit-based mentalities are dominant narratives in the United States (Hartman et al., 2017)..

When applying a CRT perspective on BLM and activism in education, Dixon (2018) connected colorblindness with surface-level multicultural education in schools. People adopting a colorblind attitude aimed to show differences in foods and customs, showcasing minoritized populations as tolerant, assimilated, assuming generic U.S. identities and this attitude does not attend to equity (Dixon, 2018). When considering forms of racial humor that includes microaggressions and stereotypes, Pérez (2017) recalled critical race theorists see colorblindness as a way to maintain conventional racial views under a benign discourse where a person who displays a colorblind attitude

discards direct racial offenses and the person adopting colorblindness can shy away from being called out for racism.

The staff from the chosen institution showed a colorblind attitude for the past decade, before district and school PD equity efforts. STAR students advocated to change institutionalized practices of class placement, grading, class sizes, tracking, and discipline disproportionalities. The purpose of PD equity efforts was to target staff growth, which can influence the school climate for minoritized students, thus addressing the third RQ. The multicultural assemblies, which were regularly held, showed African, Polynesian, and Hispanic dances as entertainment, while the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King assemblies focused on sanitized speeches, chattel slavery, and other historical injustices of slavery that were surmounted by the modern U.S. society. STAR activism changed the spirit of these large school gatherings to show present-day injustices happening at the institution. They called on local poet activists and Black Panther representatives as speakers, collaborated with Race and Equity Team (RET) staff members, and directed conversations with a panel of scholarly Black and Hispanic and LGBT students on present-day injustices. The purpose of race and equity panel was that the majority White students acknowledge the pain of the Black, Hispanic, or LGBT students and make future choices to call out stereotypes and aggressions.

### Staff Resistance on Professional Development Equity Efforts

White teachers, the 79% majority in public schools, can adopt colorblind attitudes and avoid or resist teaching equity in their classrooms. Celeste et al. (2019) analyzed school diversity policies to reduce isolation and achievement gaps for minoritized adolescents and showed colorblindness and ignoring racial diversity connects to isolation

and lower achievement for minoritized students. White teachers can have difficulty shifting to perspectives different than their own race. White student teachers in preparation programs had difficulty with adapting to perspectives different from their own race and displayed blame toward students from different backgrounds than their own (Brown & Rodriguez, 2017). The student teachers ignored effective instructional practices, instead blaming faculty for not all students shown in the instructors' learning videos were quiet or still during the featured class (Brown & Rodriguez, 2017).

When considering teacher preparation programs for White college students, Masko and Bloem (2017) reflected on college students' White fragility and White fatigue related to teaching equity in schools in their future profession. The researchers explained *White fragility*, a term used by DiAngelo in 2018, as an attitude the White population in North America can show to protect itself from feeling guilty or assuming ownership for how race functions in U.S. society (Masko & Bloem, 2017). Behaviors associated with White fragility include defensiveness, aggression, the silent treatment, and counterarguments (Masko & Bloem, 2017). The behaviors put pressure on the people facing these attitudes to accommodate the White person's discomfort and to revert to a prior, stable state that benefits White people. *White fatigue* is a term based on Flynn's (2015) work and means a resistant attitude toward spending extensive time learning and acknowledging the full impact of systemic racism on minorities and historically disadvantaged populations (Masko & Bloem, 2017). Masko and Bloem (2017) advocated for changing these behaviors and moving to conversations, where, through allyship, the White population supports people who have been discriminated against.

At the site of the current study, which is a PWI with a primarily White teaching staff, there were instances of White fragility and White fatigue. White teachers had shown resistant attitudes, wanted to be comforted, and showed defensiveness when asked to include race and equity conversations in their curriculum. In one instance, a White male teacher countered a minoritized speaker at the staff meeting. The equity PD work includes allyship conversations, led by teachers, in their classrooms, thus matching with the recommendations in the research and addressing the third RQ.

## Hiring for Diversity

Some PWIs have been recruiting diverse staff, but retention without support can be problematic. Kelly et al. (2017), quantitatively and with a CRT lens, analyzed causes for lack of retention of Black staff at a PWI. The authors showed tenure for Black educators connected to support and role models for Black students. While institutions strived to have diverse staff as a result of affirmative action, new hires were targeted by other staff and students for critique; other staff members questioned them on their expertise; their authority was challenged in the classroom; and the appearance of diversity hiring was explained by the authors as tokenism. The researchers analyzed challenges to the retention of Black educators and found tokenism to be a cause, especially in PWIs, because the Black educators were questioned on their expertise by other staff, and their authority was challenged in the classroom. Dissatisfied Black staff had to confront a hostile climate and uneasiness from White people.

Milner (2020) showed African American students were better served by same-race educators, rather than White educators, because African American educators

understood their identities and struggles and saw discipline not synonymous to punishment, which was not the case in PWIs (Milner, 2020).

The site of the current study had few non-White staff. Some non-White staff were recruited due to STAR, and equity efforts minoritized leaders either left or felt unsupported, when most White students questioned instructional choices. The institution continues to recruit African American leaders and minoritized teachers, so students can have role models from similar racial backgrounds. A new African American administrator at the chosen institution reported in 2017 that a White parent questioned her expertise and delivered what the parent thought was a compliment for someone who is Black by "complimenting her her on literacy and her eloquence, despite her Black identity. By 2018, the administrator left the institution. In 2019, a highly praised and valued by staff Indian woman teacher reported having difficulty managing defiant, White, boy students, who discredited her in front of their peers. She reported feeling unsupported and needed a White man teacher ally to assert herself. She posed the issue to staff, asking for change, but the staff responded inconclusively and had a divided, questioning attitude, when she asked for support. The new academic intervention specialist is an African American, former student of the institution, widely appreciated by all staff. There was also a new African American assistant principal hired during the pandemic. These efforts are part of the chosen study as equity efforts.

## Professional Development for Staff

Professional development for staff can be targeted at equity efforts to increase student belonging and engagement, and equity PD for staff in a PWI can address cultural crashes and non-White students' estrangement. In an action research study of preservice

teacher education, Brown and Rodriguez (2017) adopted a Freirean outlook to provide students with an education that frees them from social injustice. Freirean pedagogy comes from Freire, who wrote about power status and domination (Freire, 1970). According to Freire (1970), the oppressed are aware of existing injustices and speak their truth, aiming to free themselves. This outlook has connections with CRT and CRP because minoritized and African American students have been marginalized. Brown and Rodriguez showed preservice White teachers had difficulty understanding Black and Latino students' points of view, and the preservice teachers fixated on outward manifestations of students' frustrations. The researchers' recommendations were based on teachers' skilled techniques to engage and create an inclusive space for minoritized students, such as exercising critical consciousness to recognize inequalities and their students' experiences.

Individuals who teach African American students and are not African American might struggle with instructional practices that incorporate social justice and CRP, but they can adapt and try to understand realities of their African American students. In a qualitative case study about dominant perspectives, Rubel (2017) analyzed high school teachers' equity practices, such as teachers using standards-based instruction, complex instruction, CRP, and teaching mathematics for social justice. Rubel discussed how Whiteness may play a role in White teachers adopting colorblindness, ignoring systemic barriers, and refusing to acknowledge systemic inequities. Rubel recommended non-African American teachers of African American students develop competency with equity-directed practices because a surface-level approach alienates the historically marginalized. Andrews et al. (2017) called for future teacher preparation so that teachers

could advocate for social justice curriculum and change institutional policies to help students understand racial realities and be informed about race issues.

Specific equity PD, such as complex instruction, CRP, standards-based grading, adding social justice curriculum, and exercising a critical consciousness can address cultural crashes and non-White students' estrangement. The studies included in this section are relevant because the site of the current study had many White staff members and many staff who had used complex instruction. The department heads engaged in PD on standards-based grading, and CRP is encouraged schoolwide. Several departments are using the practices in Rubel's (2017) study. Staff PD time is limited, and analyzing change needs to be discussed. The study by Brown and Rodriguez (2017) was limited to resistant preservice teachers, while the current study tries to reach experienced resistant staff. Rubel looked at teachers who were successful with all practices but struggled to connect their subject to minoritized students' real experiences. Two practices in Rubel's study were (a) CRP and (b) teaching for social justice; the teachers were not as successful as the authors thought the teachers would be.

## Remote Learning and Equity

Due to technology access and additional pressures for teens in households affected by job losses, remote learning can be uneven and challenging for some students,. Some adolescents have had to contribute financially or as caretakers for younger siblings. In a study of Covid-19 and inequalities, Blundell et al. (2020) found the pandemic and resulting policies could deepen existing socioeconomic inequalities and lead to long-lasting effects. Affluent families with members with college educations had more savings and could work remotely more easily than low-income essential workers had and could

work, as low-income family members had to make choices between stable income and taking health risks (Blundell et al., 2020). Kaden (2020) argued equity and personalized choices adapted to student needs should be at the center of lesson planning, even in remote settings. Obstacles to learning were insufficient devices for everyone, including teachers and counselors not reaching vulnerable students, despite multiple attempts to contact families through phone calls, emails, and reminders and providing additional supports, due to unstable family situations and lack of high-speed internet (Blundell et al., 2020; Kaden, 2020).

Burch and Heinrich (2016) argued that for students who already struggled academically and had economic disadvantages, digital learning brought forth equity issues because poor students had more barriers than wealthier ones to accessing fast internet and better technology in terms of internet speed, technical support and ease of access to personal computers. Kaden (2020) called for the need for practices such as addressing equity issues, flexible school schedules, and additional infrastructure to support students' needs. These practices relate to the current study's fourth RQ.

The institution in the current study provided devices and technical support for all students, but there is a digital divide when it comes to reliable internet access, which the district did not provide. Students from poor households had to take on childcare roles and often struggled with having quiet spaces to attend virtual class, complete assignments, and participate without interruptions. Some other student demands, such as college classes or part-time jobs, conflicted with the teachers' one-to-one individual meeting availabilities.

When considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on instruction, Barton (2020) concluded teachers delivered less instruction than they did pre-COVID-19. With most classes meeting virtually, the content was more teacher led and less focused on active student engagement than if the students had been in person, when they could have the options of dynamic activities in a classroom setting without social distancing restrictions (Barton, 2020). In another study of teaching remotely in the pandemic, Code et al. (2020) affirmed curriculum competencies were thwarted by district guidelines due to decreases in instructional hours. Equity of resources and access to technology presented additional obstacles, while isolated learning inhibited motivation for students who had difficulty learning in online settings for extended periods of time.

At the current study's site, curriculum outcomes were greatly reduced in the pandemic. The curriculum was reduced to a quarter by comparison to a normal schedule. Due to microphone echoes and breakout rooms continuing to be problematic throughout 2020 and 2021, most students were encouraged to be on mute, which inhibited their habitual modes of communication in classrooms.

Remote learning can exacerbate existing inequities and add challenges for teachers to engage students. Blended learning (BL) could mitigate some virtual learning inhibitors. Code et al. (2020) thought about technology education and teacher experiences during COVID-19 and identified BL as an instructional model. The novelty of BL in remote settings had constraints, such as device limitations, needed access to internet, classroom discussions with multiple students talking at the same time on Teams, and difficulty in providing feedback. Code et al. suggested a hybrid learning rotation, so small groups of students could attend in person.

When considering changes in teacher workload and expectations during the pandemic, Kaden (2020) showed increased demands for staff and pressures to adapt curriculum. Remote learning can benefit students, when teachers pay attention to existing divides and inequities, and proven effective techniques could be foundational to hybrid learning and future educational models (Kaden, 2020). Kaden claimed no specific instructional model could be the sole solution for equitable instruction to address the current crisis with teaching during the pandemic education and provide adequate funding for all students to be able to have enough wireless and computers for them The pandemic and its challenges created a need for major changes in education (Kaden, 2020). There is a gap in research involving teachers and leaders finding equitable teaching practices in remote learning that addressed the needs of vulnerable populations to prepare students to face the global challenges of the future (Kaden, 2020). Kaden argued teacher preparation programs could address this gap in remote learning with BL and prepare future educators to grow online. Blended learning could be a feasible strategy for in person and remote learning, possibly a needed one for the future of education.

Blended learning can help students stay engaged when in remote or hybrid leaning, when access is not a problem and BL is supported by appropriate pedagogical decisions. When considering improving access, quality, and effective digital K12 teaching, Burch and Heinrich (2016) recalled that BL, reliable access to technology, and live interaction positively impact achievement. When access was not a problem, student motivation increased. The authors recommended that with expanding technology uses, more research is needed to compile lessons learned from BL and digital technology experiences.

Blended learning can be a pedagogical tool in remote learning as practices that are used in BL such as technical pedagogical background and digital content with content can be applied to remote learning too. When considering pedagogical moves that support the forced transition to remote learning, Flynn (2020) listed four relevant aspects related to technology use for teaching: (a) technological pedagogical background, (b) use of digital tools with content, (c) instructional practices, and (d) knowing how to use content digitally while embedding pedagogy.

The leadership in the chosen institution encouraged all staff to apply BL practices and create learning environments driven by student choice. At the onset of the pandemic, all teachers were forced to create new practices and curriculum that were adaptations to the challenges. The chosen institution had 22 of its 90 teachers using BL, and the remaining teachers were shown examples of BL in staff meetings. In consideration of Flynn's (2020) criteria, most teachers at the study site were adept with content knowledge and had a wide array of effective instructional practices, but there were various comfort levels with digital technology and content taught pedagogically with digital tools; staff might need more PD for this in the future.

### Staff Perspectives on Professional Development Equity Efforts

Staff perspectives on equity efforts can influence the success of equity PD efforts that address engagement and belonging. In a case study about a mathematics teacher implementing social justice in her classroom, Felton-Koewstler (2019) described one teacher's journey, starting with resistance to social justice and evolving toward embracing student-centered learning and equity practices. The results were limited to one teacher's perspectives (Felton-Koewstler, 2019). Myers (2019) used a qualitative case

study to focus on only one teacher to show his perspective on implementing CRT practices and changing the curriculum. The effects of the initiative were empowering, creating a spark in engagement for students who could connect to the curriculum through their experiences (Myers, 2019). Recommendations form Myers'(2019) study included implementing CRT to engage and include all students and understanding that CRT is a complex process.

Teacher perspectives on equity efforts can change, increase engagement, and create an inclusive culture. The research presented in this section relate to the purpose of the study and the RQs. Felton-Koewstler's (2019) research connects with the current study because the site of the current study resistant teachers who were willing to complete equity PD efforts. The institution's professionals need scaffolding and time for their journeys toward understanding and embracing the equity work done, just as the teacher from Felton-Koewstler's (2019) study. Myers's (2019) study showed all students felt included and engaged, but the race and equity work empowered the teacher. The current study showed various perspectives on equity PD and staff journeys toward an inclusive school culture.

## Gaps in the Literature

Senses of belonging and engagement for minoritized students decline in adolescence. Wegmann (2017) showed senses of belonging for minoritized students decreased between elementary and end of high school and recommended social justice work in schools. Lam et al. (2014) found minoritized students had low engagement and underachieved academically and concluded discrimination might have an impact. Thus,

Lam et al. recommended further studies about what could elevate minoritized students' senses of engagement and academic performances.

For minoritized students in PWIs, racism could have an impact on their sense of belonging and engagement. Hope et al. (2015) analyzed racial discrimination for Black high school students and recommended further studies should include diverse populations and take into account Black students' perspectives. The current study was an exploration of staff perspectives on minoritized students, such as Latino, Asian American, and Black students in a PWI and equity efforts created from suggestions from the minoritized students.

Teacher attitudes could influence senses of belonging and engagement for minoritized students in a PWI. Morales et al. (2019) attributed White supremacist behaviors to alimenting racism and recommended White teachers analyze, question, and check their positionalities when working with students of color and inspect even their normalized, well-intended attitudes, which could hide elements of implicit superiority and alienate their pupils. These recommendations were reinforced by Dixson (2018), who argued for activism in schools, and Thandeka and Kalwant (2019), who claimed stakeholders need to examine and dismantle existing systemic and institutional racism. Masko and Bloem (2017) recommended White populations adopt allyship to support minoritized populations, and Myers (2019) highlighted the relevance of CRT to engage and include minoritized students. The current study included CRT practices and other equity PD for staff and was an exploration of high school staff perceptions of equity PD efforts at a PWI and whether the efforts created an inclusive school culture, increased minoritized students' belonging, and reduced disengagement.

## Conclusion

Sense of belonging impacts grades, educational attainment, and wellbeing for all students (Arslan & Duru, 2017). Particular attention should be given to a sense of belonging for historically disadvantaged students because their senses of belonging are lower than their White counterparts' senses of belonging, and past legal decisions have contributed to current inequities (Voight et al., 2015). The adverse effects of disengagement leads to low performance, attendance issues, and dropout (Christle et al., 2016). Teachers could alleviate the effects of discrimination and racism (Thandeka & Kalwant, 2019). Teachers could add to the problem by adopting colorblind attitudes and being resistant to equity PD efforts (Masko & Bloem, 2017). The historical and political climate, the pandemic, and remote learning during the pandemic brought on additional challenges to engagement and belonging, especially for minoritized students (Kaden, 2020; Tessler et al., 2020). The current political climate after the 2016 elections, the BLM movement, and the pandemic hate crimes exacerbated existing issues for minoritized students, but teachers could address these issues (Andrews et al., 2017). The chosen equity PD efforts were strategies targeted to the minoritized population and were focused on equity practices for teachers because they can change disengagement and isolation. Teachers who plan equity PD need to include oppressed voices, add CRT into curriculum practices, use BL with an equity lens, address root causes of discipline disproportionality, and be mindful of pervasive dominant colonial views and their own colorblind attitudes. Teacher behaviors can be trained through schoolwide PD on equity, applying CRT in education, CRP, and instructional practices, such as complex instruction and BL, with equity at the center of these practices. These behaviors can influence and

possibly reverse the adverse effects of isolation by meeting minoritized students' needs and by advocating for social justice (Arslan & Duru, 2017; Dixon, 2018). Building minoritized student leaders, cultivating their resilience and persistence, and valuing and using their opinions should be relevant topics when choosing equity efforts to improve school climate (Lac & Baxley, 2019).

While each of the pieces of literature in this chapter showed a technique or made a recommendation, the current study included all these suggestions. Very few staff positive experiences were included in the literature. Only two studies had a focus on staff perspectives on the equity intervention (Felton-Koewstler, 2019; Myers, 2019). No study considered staff perspectives of training. No study included all the PD and training that was present at the institution in the current study. Staff views are relevant because they can design and implement equity PD to change the climate, so the current study had a focus on staff perspectives.

The lessons learned from these equity PD efforts could be useful to similar programs. Teachers and school leaders at the institution could compare staff perspectives from the current study to students' perspectives from climate data and decide on further equity PD efforts. Race and Equity Team teachers and leaders can demonstrate servant leadership by promoting and designing equity PD that staff needs (Cripppen & Willows, 2019).

Established instruments can provide precise definitions of engagement and belonging but do not shed light on how specific teacher efforts and perspectives could change a school climate. The RQs of the current study were tailored to a qualitative

approach that expands the literature. The next chapter will discuss the study methodology for these RQs.

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The topic of the study is minoritized students' isolation and disengagement and staff efforts to address these issues. The general problem is that while schools implement PD interventions to address engagement and belonging, these interventions are not always successful. The specific problem is minoritized students' senses of belonging and engagement in PWIs. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore high school staff perceptions of equity PD and CRP practices at a PWI and how these efforts created increased inclusivity in the school's culture, increased minoritized students' senses of belonging, and reduced disengagement. Minoritized students' senses of belonging and engagement is a problem in PWIs. Researchers have found Black and Hispanic students' senses of belonging diminish through adolescence, and these students feel more disconnected and isolated when compared to how their White peers feel (Voight et al., 2015). Teachers contribute to the problem of minoritized students' disengagement and isolation through implicit bias and stereotyping, maintaining the dominant narrative of schooling, adopting colorblind attitudes, and not caring appropriately for minoritized pupils (Thandeka & Kalwant, 2019). White staff may resist equity efforts due to colorblind attitudes, White fatigue and White fragility can be changed (Masko & Bloem, 2017).

The author explored staff perspectives of race and equity efforts at a large high school in the Pacific Northwest. The efforts were meant to alleviate the problems of disengagement and isolation for minoritized students. Race and equity efforts were created to address the problems of low levels of engagement and sense of belonging, and the specific problem of unsuccessful staff equity efforts at the chosen institution. The

school is majority White, and minoritized students have reported feeling more isolated and disengaged than their White counterparts have reported. The author sought deeper understanding of the phenomenological process of PD equity efforts and how these efforts helped create a more inclusive school culture, elevated student engagement and belonging, led to staff growth on equity work, and shift perceptions.

The RQs for the study emanating from the study purpose were:

1. To what extent do staff members feel minoritized students are included, in a PWI in the Pacific Northwest?

2a. How do existing PD on equity and CRP practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest increase minoritized students' sense of belonging from a staff perspective?

2b. How do existing PD on equity and CRP practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest reduce disengagement from a staff perspective?

3. How has the staff perception of inclusion changed in the last 2 years of equity efforts at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest?

This chapter includes an argument for the chosen research methods, research design, data collection, instruments, RQs, data analysis, limitations, and delimitations. The researcher describes the target population, sampling methods, and demographic information about the chosen institution. The researcher summarizes how the chosen methodology addresses the purpose of the study and the problem statement.

## Research Method

The study included staff perspectives of equity PD efforts meant to reduce disengagement and isolation for minoritized students at a primarily White high school in

the Pacific Northwest. Yilmaz (2013) explained that with the qualitative methodology, the researcher can describe the essence of a lived phenomenon, as people experiencing the phenomenon understood it. A qualitative approach suited the study, as the researcher can show the complexity of staff perceptions and essence of the experience on equity efforts (Creswell, 2018; Yilmaz 2013). Qualitative research includes a constructivist worldview that shows how people constructed meaning in their interpretations of phenomena (Creswell, 2018).

The researcher collected data through interviews with staff about their reflections. Qualitative research is suited to exploring and understanding the substance of an issue; the process involves interviews to collect data on lived experiences (Creswell, 2018). When critiquing definitions of qualitative research, Yilmaz (2013) drew on Creswell's definition to argue that qualitative research is an inductive, interpretative method applied to phenomena and processes in their natural settings. The chosen study was conducted with staff from the chosen institution; the researcher used inductive analysis to interpret findings and create themes from interviews to show the essence of staff perspectives.

Quantitative and mixed-methods research include statistical analysis; quantitative researchers assumed increased objectivity, because quantitative researchers used the positivism paradigm, which contrasts with the constructivist paradigm (Yilmaz, 2013). The researcher did not consider a quantitative or mixed-methods approach because the staff's perspectives needed to be constructed into the essence of the experience, which is not numerical. The essence of the experience does not have the same static reality that a quantitative approach can objectively measure, and the researcher aimed to show the complexity of views. Researchers using quantitative methodology start with a theory,

then test it with statistical analysis. The current study does not test a theory, and instead, the researcher aimed to show staff perspectives in the findings and themes (Creswell, 2018).

## Research Design

The researcher aimed to understand staff perspectives through qualitative methodology with a phenomenology design. Phenomenology was suited for interpreting multiple perspectives toward constructing the essence of a phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Phenomenology originated with Husserl's worldview, which was developed in the early years of the 20th century, when he conceptualized a qualitative design to include the personal lived experiences that otherwise might not be heard in dominant discourses (Corijn, 2019). Sense of belonging and engagement for minoritized students, staff perspectives, equity efforts based on CRT, as the chosen study includes, were not part of dominant discourses (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). A phenomenological design can be used with inductive reasoning to explain experiences embedded into mundane life (Doyon, 2016). When considering the assumptions of phenomenology, Goulding (2005) argued individual social experiences are connected and contributed to sense-making. In this study, through phenomenology, interviews of staff on their perspectives on race and equity efforts to reduce isolation and disengagement for minoritized students show the rationale, connections, and essence of staff experiences. The interviews were used to capture staff's everyday experiences with race and equity efforts.

The researcher considered other qualitative designs before choosing phenomenology. Case studies include details and a deep focus on a particular case, as

Cresswell (2018) explained, but most of equity PDs from the chosen institution were present at other schools in the district and were not entirely novel practices. Researchers using case studies emphasize intensity with the case and the connection between the chosen institution and the study, as Marshall and Rossman (2016) explained, but the proposed study does not need to be tied only to the chosen institution.

When comparing ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology and how these designs were established, Goulding (2005) concluded grounded theory is the study of behavior through interactions; ethnography is concerned with structural, cultural, and social patterns; and phenomenology is concerned with individual life experiences to build a deep understanding of the essence of experiences. A researcher who chose grounded theory aims to build a new framework through an exhaustive process with grounded theory until nothing new is added to the theory (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Grounded theory was not chosen for this study because the researcher was not proposing a new theory of equity PD in PWIs, and staff behavior through interactions was not the focus (Creswell, 2018). Ethnography was not well suited, as the researcher was not studying common characteristics of a population; the staff does not have a shared culture. Instead, the researcher focused on analyzing various perspectives to build the essence of an experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Thus, after considering several established qualitative designs for this study, the researcher chose phenomenology as the best-fit design.

With a phenomenological design, the researcher used open-ended interview questions and then coded data and look for themes related to the RQs (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Using phenomenology, the researcher could show staff perspectives in

their natural setting, as they occur every school day, to explore solving minoritized students' low senses of belonging and engagement, staff resistance, and staff growth through the process. In the interviews, staff explained if equity PD efforts increased minoritized students' senses of belonging and engagement, and staff explored their personal growth and lessons learned, thus addressing the general and specific problem statement. The following section will detail the instruments used for data collection process to address the general, specific problem statement, RQs, trustworthiness, credibility, and validity.

## Instruments

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument, constructing meaning from an insider's, emic perspective (Yilmaz, 2013). The researcher acknowledges her positionality, as a staff member at the institution, and bracketed her experiences through reflexivity. The researcher abstained from making judgment calls on participants' experiences and perspectives and acknowledged her own bias and positionality in interviews, before proceeding with data analysis (Yilmaz, 2013). The researcher is a White woman who immigrated to the United States as an adult. The researcher is interested in this topic and has bias, as a teacher, but in the professional environment, she is not in a position of authority in relation to the participants. The researcher checked her bias with the noninvolved parties, the chair, and committee members.

Before the study took place, the researcher contacted the school district's Office of Research and Evaluation for permission and obtained informed consent from participants. The researcher followed the study plan and selected staff, according to preset criteria.

The researcher developed open-ended interview questions to answer the RQs and created a protocol for asking questions, including icebreakers. Then, she set interview dates and times on Zoom, prepared recorders in advance, conducted interviews following a protocol, and adjusted field notes.

The researcher's personal notes and reflections from the interviews were secondary sources of data. The researcher created interview questions centered on exploring staff understanding of minoritized students' senses of belonging and disengagement, their rapport with minoritized students, staff experiences with the types of equity PD that they had, and their perceptions of how these efforts affected the minoritized students. Interview questions included topics such as staff experiences with leading race and equity discussions with students, developing equity PD for staff, incorporating CRP practices (e.g., collaborative norms from Strong Start materials to create an inclusive climate, Book Club experiences, equity in remote learning for minoritized students, adapting grading policies and standards to meet students' needs), which CRP practices were used in classroom routines and practices, perceptions of discipline disproportionality and equity, and their confidence levels in adding ethnic studies or BLM awareness topics to their curriculum.

The main data collection method in phenomenology is conducting interviews to gather information on perspectives, code responses, and organize codes into themes. For phenomenology, interviews are the main data collection that shows the participants' views, which are considered factual by the researcher using phenomenology (Goulding, 2005). When considering qualitative designs, Creswell (2018) affirmed the researcher should design interview questions to find the key descriptors of the experience. The

author used the data to show how staff understood the problem, how the staff equity PDs worked, address all RQs, and analyze if the findings can inform the solution to the problem. This phenomenological study was an exploration of equity PD efforts from the viewpoints of staff members who designed them and those who experienced them. This phenomenon was explored through observations of staff understanding and responses, gathered through in-depth interviews.

The researcher established credibility in interviews to understand the equity intervention, develop the essence of the experience, and build trust (Creswell, 2018). Participants were informed about the study's purpose and estimated interview length, gave consent, and chose their pseudonyms for anonymity. Data was securely stored. The data collection process—interviews and transcriptions—lasted about 3 months.

The researcher used persistent observation and thick description to build depth and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher used persistent observation to focus on participant responses connected to the central aspects of using equity PD to create an inclusive culture, the problem, and the RQs being studied. Persistent observation is different from a general, qualitative observation because the researcher was focused on the issues relevant to what staff can do to address minoritized students' belonging and disengagement, thus building deep understanding of the problem studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick description was included when listening to interview responses The author used thick description to observe and interpret the demeanor and attitudes of participants in their social context during the interviews. The researcher describes the sampling criteria in the next section and data from the chosen institution and the equity PD efforts.

## Participants

The chosen institution is a PWI, a comprehensive high school in the Pacific Northwest. A school climate study from 2020 showed the general problem at the chosen institution, as shown in Table 1. The data from the chosen institution includes 1,300 responses from a total school population of about 1,600 students. Only 57% of the students felt school climate was favorable. The overall perception of remote learning was only 38% favorable.

**Table 1**

*Panorama Climate Data for the Chosen Institution for 9-12th Grades*

| Topic Description | Results |
|---|---|
| How to improve remote learning<br>Perceptions of which specific areas of remote learning are most in need of improvement<br>*Note:* For this topic, "responded favorably" refers to the precent of respondents reporting this area does not need important. | 37% |
| Overall perceptions of remote learning<br>Overall perceptions of how remote learning is going at the school<br>*Note:* For this topic, "responded favorably" refers to the percent of respondents feeling positive or better about remote learning. | 38% |
| School climate and culture<br>Perceptions of school climate and culture for select questions from the annual climate survey<br>*Note:* For this topic, "responded favorably" refers to the precent of respondents reporting positive agreement. | 57% |
| Teaching challenges with remote learning<br>Degree of challenges experienced with technology tools or connectivity during remote learning<br>*Note:* For this topic, "responded favorably" refers to the percent of respondents reporting no technology-related challenges. | 68% |
| My teachers help me connect what we learn to my interests, experiences, or cultural background. | 25% |
| My teachers help and encourage me to think deeply, critically and creatively. | 56% |
| I feel like people accept me for who I am as a person at school. | 88% |

*Note.* n = 1,321. The data shows deficiencies in remote learning, school climate, and culture in 2020. The source is omitted to preserve confidentiality.

The researcher included a description of the equity PDs that supported the problem statement. The institution has held staff equity PD efforts for more than 2 years. Staff equity PDs efforts have consisted of (a) three in-classroom, student- and teacher-led discussions; (b) equity PD connected to digital learning, BL, and creating a culture of belonging; (c) an assembly on why talking about race is relevant; (d) classroom practices focused on equity, CRP, and CRT; (e) hiring and retaining diverse teachers; (f) staff training on building positive student-teacher relations; (g) Strong Start materials that were designed to welcome students back to school when transitioning to remote learning for each quarter, during Covid-19; (h) BLM promotion days on Wednesdays; and (i) teaching ethnic studies curriculum in social studies.

The in-classroom discussion topics were racial identity, privilege, and White allies for people of color. The first two discussions were student led; the third discussion was staff led. The discussions took place in the second period of community time and lasted 30 minutes. Community time is an advisory period once a week, mostly used for announcements and some school initiatives, set aside to build community schoolwide. The Student and Teachers Against Racism (STAR) members created presentations for the discussions, and the RET at the school gave additional input before the rollout. STAR is a club comprised of minoritized student leaders, White students allies, and teachers who advise bring articles and create agendas related to equity issues. STAR has been meeting weekly for more than 5 years to analyze issues of race and equity at the institution and in the media. STAR has been leading some of the equity PDs at the chosen institution. Staff members and students were trained for 1 hour to lead discussions and encouraged student feedback and responses in the community time sessions.

Purposeful sampling has been recommended for qualitative studies because a small number of participants can generate a wealth of information (Goulding, 2005; Yilmaz, 2013). The chosen sample for this study was purposive. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advised nonprobability sample criteria to build rich information in qualitative studies. Nonprobability sampling means choosing a nonrandom sample to gather deep information from the participants (Merriam & Tisdell (2016).

In an article on sampling strategies, Moser and Korstjens (2018) recommended criterion sampling for phenomenology. *Criterion sampling* means selecting a sample according to criteria of importance and relevant to the chosen study (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The target population was the staff at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest undergoing equity PD efforts for two years, as the initial criteria.

Maximum variation sampling included participants of various backgrounds (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Emerging patterns from maximum variation that capture the essence of the experience are central to describing a phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants had various roles and degrees of participating in equity efforts, and some showed resistance and discomfort with equity PD. Participants were teachers, administrators, coaches, instructional assistants, or counselors, all experiencing the equity PD efforts; some were staff members who developed the PD efforts. The chosen staff included various ages, tenure, positions held, and experience with the institution. The sample was purposive, with a maximum variation strategy, to encompass various perspectives, gain an in-depth understanding. Having a purposive sample was another criterion and it was used as a representative population (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Purposeful sampling was appropriate for information-rich cases, and the maximum

variation criterion was appropriate for dense information and capturing the essence of an experience; thus, it was appropriate for the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Phenomenological studies require no more than 10 participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The goal was seven to 10 staff members. Each staff member chosen had a profile description to meet the criteria. The target population was accessible to the researcher because the PDs were happening at an institution familiar to the researcher.

The researcher conducted semistructured individual interviews, about 60 minutes in length, to allow participants and the researcher to elaborate and gain depth in data. When follow-up questions or clarifications arose, the researcher sent emails afterwards with further questions or continued with the interview virtually through Zoom. The researcher emphasized staff experiences with equity efforts to connect findings with the RQs and focused on the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2018).

## Data Analysis Methods

Phenomenological studies include interview data sorted by common themes. The researcher can note themes during the interview (Creswell, 2018). Interview data is dense; some parts might be disregarded and others emphasized, while the researcher looks for five to seven themes, according to Creswell (2018). The researcher took notes, highlighted themes, and used persistent observation during the interviews and afterward. The researcher recorded the sessions on Zoom, made observations about body language, and looked for pauses and omissions in responses to extract additional meaning. The recording led to transcriptions that were shared with participants.

The researcher analyzed significant statements in the transcripts and coded with NVivo (Version 12). After the interviews, the researcher immersed herself in the data, checked the transcripts against the recordings, and analyzed interview data to address all RQs. The researcher used inductive reasoning to discover patterns, codes, and themes and deductive reasoning for building subcodes, based on the researcher's familiarity with the literature.

Interview data included audio recordings, field notes, memos, and transcripts. In reading Zoom's (Version 5.3.9) automatic transcripts, the researcher checked the accuracy and adjusted transcripts to match the recordings. The researcher stored all written artifacts and the recordings on her password-protected computer.

The researcher applied a triangulation method for data sufficiency. Interview transcripts were shared through email with the participants to verify transcript accuracy. The findings chapter includes participant quotes to establish themes and code accuracy.

Member checking was another method used to show *credibility*, defined as the researcher allowing participants to view parts of the findings to check that the essence of their experiences were captured in the findings (Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transcripts and themes underwent member checking and source triangulation between different participants for consistency, and the researcher shared the transcripts and themes with the chair for increased accuracy and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The process of identifying the study's findings started with reading transcripts for familiarization; finding relevant phrases for the RQs; interpreting meaning; selecting, refining, and grouping codes into categories; elevating codes into themes; thick description; finding the essence; and member checking on findings. This process

mirrored Colaizzi's seven steps for phenomenological data analysis, as shown in Table 2 and cited in Morrow et al. (2015).

**Table 2**

*Steps in Colaizzi's Descriptive Phenomenological Method*

| Step | Description |
|---|---|
| 1. Familiarisation | "The researcher familiarizes [themselves] with the data, by reading through all the participant accounts several times." |
| 2. Identifying significant statements | "The researcher identifies all statements in the accounts that are of direct relevance to the phenomenon under investigation." |
| 3. Formulating meanings | "The researcher identifies meanings relevant to the phenomenon that arise from a careful consideration of the significant statements. The researcher must reflexively "bracket" [their] pre-suppositions to stick closely to the phenomenon as experienced." |
| 4. Clustering themes | "The researcher clusters the identified meanings into themes that are common across all accounts." |
| 5. Developing an exhaustive description | "The researcher writes a full and inclusive description of the phenomenon, incorporating all themes." |
| 6. Producing the fundamental structure | "The researcher condenses the exhaustive description down to a short, dense statement that captures just those aspects deemed to be essential to the structure of the phenomenon." |
| 7. Seeking verification of the fundamental structure | "The researcher returns the fundamental structure statement to all participants . . . to ask whether it captures their experience. [They] may go back and modify earlier steps in the analysis in the light of this feedback. |

*Note.* The figure describes Colaizzi's staggered process for phenomenological data analysis.

*Source.* "Colaizzi's Descriptive Phenomenological Method" by R. Morrow, A. Rodriguez, and N. King, 2015, *The Psychologist*, *28*(8), 3. [http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/26984/1/Morrow_et_al.pdf]

The researcher connected themes with storylines and direct quotes to show the phenomenological process (Creswell, 2018). The themes identified were interwoven with short explicit statements and compiled to produce an additional layer of analysis. When presenting findings, the researcher used verbatim examples as evidence because direct

quotes proved common themes. Connections between quotes and findings provided robust analysis and authenticity (Creswell, 2013). The researcher emphasized staff experiences with equity PDs to connect findings with the RQs and focused on the lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 2018).

For the first RQ, the researcher asked what staff knew about minoritized students' inclusion and their visions to remedy this problem. For the second RQ, the researcher asked participants for their experience and impact of equity PD and CRP practices, and the answers were different for everyone, as PD worked well for some but not others. The assessment, impact, and depth of equity PD were analyzed when the author was responding to this RQ. In the second RQ, the researcher asked the participants what they considered to be the most impactful interventions and to explain why. The third RQ required exploration of staff growth and their perceptions of inclusion after the equity PDs. By answering interview questions, staff evaluated the equity PDs for positive impact and narrowed PD they thought was relevant for them , thus addressing the problem statement. Cross-referencing with triangulation, comparing and contrasting answers, and using thick descriptions could yield credible, transferable solutions and possibly solve the problem. The researcher analyzed the responses to interview questions on staff perspectives about senses of belonging and disengagement, staff experiences with equity PD, CRP, race and equity discussions with students, equity in remote learning for minoritized students, and other subtopics that relate to the RQs and the purpose of the study.

## Limitations

The researcher had a personal investment in the study, as a former RET and STAR member, but she ceased direct involvement with RET and designing equity PD with RET in January 2020. Like all other staff members, the researcher remained a participant in the equity PD efforts. When considering dominant roles in interviews, Kvale (2006) showed positionality, one-way questions, and beneficiaries from research can be barriers to open, unencumbered dialogue for qualitative interviews. Staff members might have been hesitant to give truthful responses because they might have felt evaluated on their equity stances, teaching practices, or rapport with minoritized students. The researcher created open-ended questions, where participants could elaborate on their experiences. She did not hold an evaluator's position over participants, had no conflicts with staff, and strived to maintain friendly, professional relationships. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time, without consequences, and the researcher would have preserved their confidentiality and secured their data. The findings from the study can benefit staff, leaders, and minoritized students at the institution, and the researcher will share the findings with the institution and informed the participants about this intent before consent forms were signed.

There were several limitations related to participants and the institution in the study. Limitations included not enough interview time, and staff not responding truthfully. The researcher paid attention to what was avoided in interviews and pauses in conversation. Interviews lasted about 1 hour, and if participants would have not answered the questions in the allotted time or there were technical problems, a follow-up interview would have been scheduled, if participants wanted to finish the interview.

The researcher compensated participants for their time with a gift card to Amazon. If the chosen district or school were not to approve the research or if there were an insufficient number of staff members in the sample, the researcher would have recruited participants from a different district or a different institution that consented, or the researcher would have posted an invite on a Facebook middle or high school staff group. If additional recruitment would have been needed, the researcher would have used a snowball sample, due to unfamiliarity with other institutions. The researcher would have adjusted the sample to be a snowball sample due to unfamiliarity with a new institution.

Other limitations could have come from transcribing and interpreting the interview data, but member checking, triangulation, and sharing information with the dissertation chair and committee mitigated the limitations. The data were limited by the questions and responses, but the staff experienced many equity PDs for several years and could detail their points of view. Interview questions were open ended, and the researcher was flexible with participants' responses, so they could share their experiences. The researcher tested the questions with a nonstudy participant. For data analysis, the researcher assumed she would use NVivo, but if the NVivo software were not adequate, a similar software would have replaced NVivo. The next section will detail delimitations.

## Delimitations

There were several delimitations for this study. The chosen institution was a predominantly White high school located in the Pacific Northwest. The chosen study's timeline was 2021 to 2022. The equity PDs at the chosen institution were not unique, and the data from the setting could be transferable because the institution was a majority

White high school, commonly found in the United States. The equity PDs can be replicated; however, not all components of the study may be transferrable to other institutions. These equity PD efforts and CRP practices could be transferable to similar PWIs with comparable issues of belonging and engagement for minoritized students. PWIs and majority White teaching staff are predominant throughout the United States, using data from Figures 2 and 3.

The researcher chose to delimitate to staff perspectives because they can change the climates of isolation and disengagement for minoritized students. Students' perspectives were included in climate data that prompted the implementation of equity PD efforts at the chosen institution and is part of the Table 1 in this chapter. The study's findings were confined to data collected from the interviews, but because the researcher proposed a sample with maximum variation, the responses covered various viewpoints and experiences. The researcher restricted herself to interpretations aligned with the tenants of CRT. Because this was a qualitative study, the results are not generalizable, but they could be transferable. The findings of the study may transfer to other subjects, demographics, locations, or future time periods.

## Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study was an exploration of staff perspectives of equity PD efforts of high school staff at a PWI. The efforts were intended to create an inclusive school culture, increase minoritized students belonging, and increase engagement. In this chapter, the researcher explained why a qualitative methodology with a phenomenology design was used to address the problem statement and the RQs. The equity PD efforts were not unique to the chosen institution, and the purpose of the study

was to explore high school staff lived experience with existing PD on equity and CRP practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest and how efforts may increase minoritized students' senses of belonging and reduce disengagement. Using phenomenology, the researcher can show staff perspectives in their natural setting to address minoritized student belonging and engagement and staff attitudes toward equity PDs. In the interviews, staff discussed how efforts helped minoritized students' sense of belonging and engagement and detailed their personal and professional growth.

The researcher was the instrument; she acknowledged her positionality at the institution and bracketed her experiences. The researcher was aware of credibility transferability and trustworthiness, which she mitigated with appropriate consent, confidentiality measures, the interview protocol, triangulation, member checking, securing data, prolonged exposure to the chosen school environment, persistent observation, and a maximum variation sample. The researcher analyzed data using Colaizzi's seven-step process (as described in Morrow et al. (2015); see t Table 2) to code the data into themes that address the RQs and the problem statement.

Limitations included transcribing and interpreting the data because of researcher bias and generated automatic transcripts which had to be checked, which the author addressed with triangulation, member checking, and checking findings with the chair and committee members. The study was confined to one institution geographically, one time period, the selected questions, and staff answers from interviews, but the equity PDs and the institution were not unique.

# CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS/RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore high school staff perceptions of existing PD on equity and CRP at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest and how, from staff perspectives, PD may have increased minoritized students' sense of belonging and reduced disengagement. The purpose of the equity efforts was to contribute to an improved school climate and alleviate disengagement and isolation for minoritized students. This chapter contains the RQs of the study, methodology, participant profiles, data collection, data analysis, presentation of findings, and a summary of the findings.

## Research Questions

The following RQs were addressed:

1. To what extent do staff members feel minoritized students are included in a PWI in the Pacific Northwest?

2a. How do existing PD on equity and CRP practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest increase minoritized students' sense of belonging from a staff perspective?

2b. How do existing PD on equity and CRP practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest reduce disengagement from a staff perspective?

3. How has the staff perception of inclusion changed in the last 2 years of equity efforts at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest?

## Methodology

The researcher used a qualitative phenomenological design because she explored staff perspectives of equity efforts at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest to construct the

meaning and the essence of their experiences. Researchers choose qualitative methods to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the participants' point of view to show their lived experiences (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research includes a constructivist worldview that shows how people construct meaning in their interpretations of phenomena (Creswell, 2018). The author interviewed and observed participants in their natural settings, as Creswell (2018) recommended for researchers employing a qualitative approach. The author used phenomenology to understand staff perspectives on equity PD from the previous 2 years. Researchers use phenomenology to show the lived, subjective reality of the same phenomenon can be perceived differently by different people who have experienced it (Corijn, 2019). Listening and learning what it was like for staff to participate in the equity PD, to connect with minoritized students, to make minoritized students feel more included, and to spark engagement was at the center of the research. Researchers using phenomenology explore participants' lived experiences in vivid details (van Manen, 2017).

## Participant Profiles

The author used a purposeful sample with a maximum variation. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advised using a purposeful sample in qualitative studies to build rich information, and for phenomenology, Moser and Korstjens (2018) recommend using selection criteria based on relevant connections to the intended study. Researchers use purposeful sampling in a qualitative study to collect a wealth of perspectives from a small number of participants (Goulding, 2005; Yilmaz, 2013).

Staff qualified for the study if they were employed at a specific PWI and involved with equity PD efforts for the past 2 years. Some equity PD efforts were staff

led, and participants who led those PD efforts focused only on those efforts; others were participants in a multitude of equity PD efforts.

The researcher of this study reached out to nine staff members with details about the the study, and eight gave timely informed consent to participate. The author selected eight participants with various roles and degrees of involvement with the equity PD efforts (see Table 3). All staff members were contractually required to participate in equity PD efforts at the chosen institution, and some decided to lead these efforts or adopt optional equity efforts and CRP practices not contractually mandated.

**Table 3**

*Participant Profiles*

| Participant Pseudonym | Race | Pronouns | Years of experience at the institution | Role |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cleopatra | Hispanic | She/her | 5 | Mathematics teacher |
| Cerulean | White | She/her | 12 | Administrator |
| Daniel | White | He/him | | GAINS coordinator, coach, and former instructional assistant |
| Grecia | White | She/her | 15 | Science teacher, Race and Equity Team (RET) leader |
| Thomas | White | He/him | 6 | History and language arts teacher |
| Diana | White | She/her | 7 | Counselor and coach |
| Michelle | White | She/her | 18 | Language arts teacher |
| Freddie | White | they | 3 | Special education teacher and equity professional development leader |

The sample included seven White staff and one minoritized staff, and this sample is representative of the general demographics of staff members at the school. Five participants self-identified as female, one as a queer person, and two as male. The sample included a variety of tenures at the chosen institution. Some staff members had

been employed at this institution for as many as 18 years, while the shortest length of employment at the institution was 3 years. The selected participants were not close friends of the researcher, and some had never interacted with the, though they knew about her position as a tenured staff member. The researcher learned about the participants and their personal experiences by following the interview protocol, rather than having amiable conversations, to reassure and confirm what the participants said or to agree or disagree with them

## Data Collection

The main tool for data collection in phenomenology is semistructured interviews (Goulding, 2005). Moser and Korstjens (2018) recommended a sample of no more than 10 participants for a phenomenological study. The interview questions and protocol were aligned to the RQs, discussed with the researcher's advisor and tested with a tenured staff member at the chosen institution. This staff member was not a participant in the study. The author then scheduled and conducted eight semistructured interviews, ranging from 55 to 100 minutes. During the interview, the author restricted herself to the interview protocol to bracket her own interpretations and views of the phenomenon, leave room for open-ended responses, and prevent her biases from influencing the participants.

Because the study was done during the pandemic, when social distance requirements and gathering limitations were in place, virtual interviews were the only means through which the author could conduct interviews. The interviews were recorded on Zoom and transcribed with an automatic feature that directly imports Zoom content to create transcriptions. Zoom technology allowed for virtual, face-to-face

interaction, as participants kept their cameras on for the interviews. The author proofread the automated transcripts, while listening to the recordings. This step was necessary, as the researcher and one participant spoke with an accent, so some phrases were lost, and Zoom incorrectly identified some acronyms. During the interviews, the author took notes and made observations on participants' behaviors, pauses, attitudes, avoidances, and hesitations. There were no unexpected interruptions during any interviews, though sometimes the internet connection was weak. One interview had to be rescheduled due to a conflict, and one interview was 1 hour later than planned, due to confusion about the start time. The proofread transcripts were sent to all participants for verification. The author had follow-up questions after the interviews, and these questions were sent through email. After the transcripts were verified and seen by the participants, the author started the data analysis process. In addition to using Colaizzi's (1978) method, the author took field notes that she consulted later and noticed pauses, omissions, and and participant attitudes, such as body language, humor, congeniality and ease or discomfort with certain topics.

## Data Analysis

The interview transcripts wwere 16 to 24 pages long. The researcher analyzed interview data from each transcript to look for common themes and subthemes, using the Colaizzi's (1978) method for data analysis. Colaizzi's seven steps of analysis for the phenomenological method include: (a) familiarization, (b) identifying significant statements, (c) formulating meanings, (d) clustering themes, (e) developing exhaustive descriptions, (f) producing the fundamental structure, and (g) verifying the fundamental structure (Morrow et al., 2015). Because the interviews were spaced one or more days

apart, the researcher had sufficient time to read each transcript several times and to highlight words and phrases that resonated with equity PD efforts, staff shifts, and experiences with minoritized students. The researcher used persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to identify significant statements were identified based on their connections to the RQs and the phenomenon of equity PD efforts. The researcher used codes derived from the literature review and created in-vivo codes to connect the data with the RQs.

These codes were organized with NVivo, which is data analysis software for qualitative studies. Some codes, such as introduction, pastimes, icebreaker, and check-ins, were later discarded because they were not closely connected to the equity efforts phenomenon. Overall, there were 76 codes placed in subthemes. Codes were also connected to the interview questions. The organization for codes and themes is shown in Table 4.

The significant statements contributed to establishing themes and code accuracy (Yilmaz, 2013) and were used with thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After the researcher identified all significant statements directly connected to the phenomenon and RQs, she looked for interpretations of the phenomenon that came from the significant statements and clustered them into subthemes and then into larger themes. These interpretations represented Steps 3 and 4 of Colaizzi's (1978) method. Larger themes included Personal Journey, Belonging, Staff Progress, Barriers to Staff Progress, Staff/Teacher Student Relationships, and Family and Community.

During the analysis, the researcher bracketed her own perceptions and interpretations of the phenomenon and followed through with the coding steps and line

**Table 4**

*Coding Process in Codes, Subthemes, Themes*

| Themes | Subthemes | Codes |
|---|---|---|
| Personal Journey | Personal Experience | ELL, SPED, experience with minoritized students, role |
| | Prior Professional Development | CRP classes, prior equity PD |
| | Personal Reading | CRP as a teacher reading |
| | Personal Identity | personal journey |
| Belonging | Systemic Pressures | minoritized students, sense of belonging, system, racism, stereotypes, categorizing indiscriminately, historical, and legal issues |
| | AP /Honors for Minoritized Students | honors AP classes, identity, student support, White kids, student choice voice |
| | Feeling Unwelcomed | safe, space, resources, political climate, BSU, STAR, remote learning, student engagement, PWI, |
| Staff Progress with Equity PD | Staff Shift | staff perspectives on equity PD, different perspectives |
| | Leadership Shift | leadership push |
| | Specific Practices and Equity PD Efforts | Strong Start, collaboration, decolonizing curriculum, CRP, grading, differentiation, RET, mural, blended learning, Book Club, Strong Start, decolonization, STAR, student voice, grading practices, collaboration |
| Barriers to Staff Progress | Leadership Issues | trust, fear |
| | Shift is Slow | tension, fear, consistent, staff resistance, time |
| | Systemic Barriers | out of school control, complex, colorblindness, different perception, hiring for diversity |
| | Not Enough Support | teacher support double, gender issues, harassment |
| | Harmful SSR | SSR, trust |
| Staff Student Relationships | SSR with Minoritized Staff | hiring diverse staff, minoritized teacher |
| | General SSR | SSR, White teachers, caution, ally |
| | Trusted Adults | trust, role |
| Family and Community | Navigating the System | community, system, new access |
| | Building Relationships | teacher family relationships, parent nights |

*Note*. ELL refers to English language learners. SSR refers to staff-student relationships.

-by-line coding to prevent her biases and experiences from influencing the coding process. Occasionally, the researcher's opinion differed from participants' opinions, or she saw participants had incomplete views of some racial issues at the school, based on her opinion. The researcher refrained from contributing her opinions, as this study was meant to capture the views of the participants and not to alter or challenge them. By following these rigorous steps, the researcher found counterthemes that otherwise could have been obscured. The researcher initially separated themes and subthemes for each interview and placed the significant statements as quotes next to each theme and subtheme. The earlier codes and categories found in in each interview were associated with subthemes and the larger themes. The researcher used inductive reasoning to discover codes and themes, as Marshall and Rossmann (2016) recommended, when analyzing qualitative interview data.

The researcher took the themes and subthemes from each interview and compiled them into the findings, as a fifth step. She produced short statements based on the general structure of themes, subthemes, and codes that represented the core learnings form the study. These short statements led to the structure for the findings and the discussion chapter. The researcher saved direct quotes from each interview to show evidence for the themes and subthemes and then used them in the findings and discussion. The fundamental structure and quotes were made available to the participants for verification, after the fundamental structure was produced. The researcher organized the fundamental structure to address the RQs of the study.

At the last step, the researcher sent each participant the fundamental structure and subthemes connected to their specific transcript for member checking. Six

participants confirmed the structure was accurate and captured the essence and meaning of what they described. One participant saw both the transcript and the fundamental structure but did not comment on it, and another participant was on leave for the rest of the school year and not accessing their email, but they agreed with what was captured. The author noticed some awkward pauses and correlated those pauses with moments of discomfort with the topic and noticed how some participants tried to find the best way to convey their thoughts on equity and their perspectives on other staff with carefully chosen words.

## Presentation of Findings

The staff members interviewed for this study provided enough data in their responses, and in some instances, they surpassed the scheduled 60 minutes because they wanted to provide detailed examples and in-depth explanations about their experiences. The personal and professional details they offered were the foundation for understating the phenomenon and the presentation of findings. The author summarized the findings into six themes: (a) Personal Journey, (b) Belonging, (c) Staff Progress, (d) Barriers to Staff Progress, (e) SSRs, and (f) Family and Community. Most themes had subthemes and are accompanied by significant statements.

### Theme: Personal Journey

All participants referred to learning about racial issues, CRPs, and their experiences with teaching minoritized students as Personal Journeys. The researcher found four subthemes of Personal Journey: (a) Personal Experience, (b) Prior PD, (c) Personal Reading and (d) Identity.

### *Personal Experience*

All participants emphasized the relevance of personal experiences with minoritized students, when learning about CRP and equity. For some, such as Thomas, Daniel, and Cerulean, this experience occurred much earlier and at diverse institutions. Cerulean said she: "learned the most at an African American school." For staff like Diana, Michelle, Freddie and Daniel, their roles at the school were the drivers to change their perspective on equity issues. Diana was counselor and coach and interacted often with minoritized students and had to learn about them to serve them better. Michelle was club advisor of STAR, and she learned most from listening to stories of minoritized students in this club. Freddie worked as a special education case manager, serving more diverse families than the rest of the school served. Daniel was an instructional assistant, coach, and GAINS coordinator, serving primarily African American students. For Grecia and Freddie, who had only experience at the chosen institution, diverse classrooms compelled them to learn about minoritized students.

Cerulean mentioned that before becoming an administrator, a lot of learning occurred, when teaching at an all African American school:

> I taught the first grade in an all African American elementary school. . . . I did that for a couple of years. Then later, middle school teaching science, and it was mixed race. It was diverse then in almost all of my work in Washington since 1992. . . . But I'll tell you, where I learned most was in 1975 in an all African American community, in an all African American school in the Deep South.

Daniel recalled:

> I've coached high school football for 19 years now at five different schools. And they've been a mix of public and private schools and in different areas of the city and even down in [in another city]. So by the airport. And at each school, the demographics have been very different. So in that role, I've worked with dozens, maybe hundreds of minoritized students.

Thomas mentioned teaching in diverse schools across the country was formative:

> I taught at a middle school . . . was probably about 85, 90% kids of color. The two different high schools that I taught out in [city name] way were probably right around at least 50% kids of color. When I worked at the [school name] academy in [city name] way for 2 years, that was a school explicitly set up for STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math] education for Black kids. It was, you know, explicitly pro Black. I mean, it pretty much set it right on the front door. . . . So those are a lot of the experiences I've had.

For Michelle, a language arts teacher, the personal experience came from leading the STAR club for many years and hearing the students' personal stories as an ally and not as a teacher for their classes. STAR students and their activism were Michelle's drivers to learn about equity. She called the learning "hugely instrumental," for her and all the staff members:

> I would say STAR, just because again, I think, it goes back to student voice. The students that I worked with on STAR, they really were able to feel like they took a leadership role at the school cause they did. . . . I think that just like the learning that I've done from STAR students, that's been hugely instrumental because I like—if I don't hear about something in my class, I've heard about it in STAR.

The student intervention team evaluates students who struggle academically and was created with the intention of offering special accommodations, after classroom interventions have proven not effective. Diana explained how her role as a counselor, coach, and part of the student intervention team put her in the position of an ally and support for minoritized students:

> I think I've had incidences in the last couple of years that I have worked directly with African American students, when there's been a racial incident. So then, I am the one that is supporting them and being their ally. And then, they, you know, tell their friends, "Hey, Ms. B. helps me with this." . . . I think, kind of, like, word of mouth of who I am and how I can support students of color. I have a little mini fridge that has, like, water bottles in it and—water bottles and snacks—and then having some students just grab and go. And so, that's, like, a good thing.

Having a role at the school as a GAINS coordinator was the key for Daniel to interacting with BIPOC students, and he found joy in being a support person for them:

> I really, really enjoy my job, both, the GAINS coordinator role and the head football coach role. . . . In both the special ed and then this current role, I'm working—Primarily with this role, I have 45 or 46 students on my caseload, and I believe that over 30 of them are students of color.

Freddie said their experience as a special education teacher was connected to their personal journey and that the most important part for a staff member working with diverse population is to listen to their students:

> I work with in special education, which has a very high percentage of, well, disproportionately high percentage of special education students due to structural racism. . . . Many of my classes are 30 to 40% people with people of color, some even higher, but the school it's just 77% White. That is a significant and frustrating for a lot of reasons. Students need to know that they're seen, and all parts of them are seen.

Freddie and Grecia felt working with diverse students made them more curious, aware, and adamant in making students feel safe and comfortable. Grecia said her diverse classrooms and her 15 years of teaching at the institution in classrooms that have been more than most teachers see connected to her learning and personal journey:

> I will work with students, as my students. . . . I work with the Pacific student Alliance, and I've also gone to Latino student clubs. . . . Well, certainly from my start at the school till now, and in general, I mean, my classes, for whatever reason, tend to be some of the most diverse in terms of population of students, for upper science division courses. And so that's—I, you know, when I walk into other science classrooms, sometimes it's not very diverse. And so my student population populations always been like that. And so that's made it part and parcel for me to basically learn how am I interacting with students so that all students feel safe and comfortable and welcome in my classroom. And so I probably would say, I have really worked on my own to educate myself more over the years about what are best practices and actually how to make, how to make my classroom a warm and welcoming place for all of my students and where they feel successful and where they are successful.

When asked about experience with minoritized students and in what role, all participants shared how personal experiences and their roles motivated them to listen and learn from the students to better serve them. Overall, prior personal experience with minoritized students and taking on roles that specifically were meant to serve them accelerated all participants' learning about equity issues.

***Prior Professional Development***

All participants were asked about prior PD and classes on equity. Several staff members spoke about prior PD or classes they took during their student teaching preparation programs. Daniel spoke about his cultural responsive classes from college, as "classes that we needed to take and the diversity inclusion classes" and how "those were definitely beneficial." He went to "several district PDs, and some PDs that are specific to our race and equity team." From his graduate school teacher education program, Thomas recalled a class "called Public Education in the Urban Setting" to support students from minoritized backgrounds. Freddie mentioned when in graduate school, they "took a class on culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional learners, tied to students with disabilities." Cerulean remembered the district "started emphasizing race in 2000, emphasizing it with courageous conversations" and that during her roles at the district, she "had several that several—probably more than several over the years, many, many, many courses. . . . We went through that for years, and they did a lot of PD on that."

Michelle was of a different opinion than Cerulean on her coursework preparation to work with students of color, claiming it was inadequate for working in a diverse setting:

> So in grad school, I took a multicultural education course, and there was one that focused on urban schooling that talked about some issues of race and racism. But most of my grad schoolwork, I would say did not really prepare me to work in a diverse setting or to work with students of color.

Cleopatra recalled recent classes she took because of her personal interest, which were not district mandated:

> I took several over the summer, just dealing with culturally responsive teaching and how to bring that into the classroom. And just trying to be more aware of minority students and just students of different cultures and how they don't see themselves in the curriculum. And how can we bring it a little bit more into it?

Overall, the participants had mixed responses when it came to prior equity PD and its usefulness. Five participants, Cleopatra, Thomas, Daniel, Freddie, and Cerulean recalled their classes as useful for the time period they took it, while Michelle felt that her program did not prepare her adequately to teach minoritized students.

***Personal Reading***

When asked if they were culturally aware, many staff members mentioned the impact of reading about equity and relevant books that motivated them to have a personal interest in social justice. Daniel, Freddie, and Thomas talked about many books that shaped their perspectives. Daniel recalled how he does a "a lot of personal reading on like leadership and positivity and stuff like that," and while the topic is not race and equity, it still helps: "It's not specifically for the scope of working with diverse students, but it's definitely a human thing." Freddie commented on the high amount of reading they do and the continued interest they have: "I do a lot of reading around racial equity. I have three or four books selected for this year." Freddie mentioned being

> excited to start with is this one . . . by Azura Savage. It is called *You Failed Us*. It's by students in public schools who talk about how we, as students of color, queer students, identified, basically how the talking about the experience of

> students of color and how students of color have been failed by our school district.

These readings were relevant because they included the minoritized student voice and perspective, sparked their interest in looking for similar resources, and created excitement in learning more about race:

> So starting with kind of the student voice from there, I have a couple of other texts that I haven't really dived into yet. *The Sum of Us* is one of them for this year. *The Sum of Us* is this really great. And it's all about how, just with math, we are all set back by racism, systemic racism, right? Like everything. Like, as White people, it is impacting us negatively too. And so I'm excited for that one because that one, I think, will help m,. first of all, just having an open, you know—I read this great book, *Not Light, But Fire* by Matthew Kay. . . . It's all about how to talk about race in the classroom. And one of the things he talks about is like, the way to talk about race is to start talking about race, right? So if we start talking about it, it provides an opportunity for other people to talk about it and to feel comfortable.

Thomas, a history and language arts teacher, explained how "definitely reading books has shaped my perspective." He sought different perspectives by reading texts that might tell another story from different perspectives and that enriched his understanding:

> I don't always read only the books they tell me to read. . . . I read all of *Stamped From the Beginning*, you know, the big 900-page book. And that one was really interesting in terms of how he reframed Lincoln, you know. Black historiography has really changed my reading on Lincoln, the evolving discipline of history. . . . History is always trying to answer questions about the present by looking at the past. And so, as our present evolves, our interpretations of the past are going to go with it. . . . I think reading people like Ta-Nehesi Coates and Ibram Kendi, and it has certainly given me new perspectives. . . but it's been interesting to see how the kind of historiographic emphasis has changed.

Daniel, Diana, and Grecia talked about reading as a way to understand students better. Daniel related how reading helped him strengthen interpersonal relationships and support minoritized students in his caseload. He exemplified reading about positivity, as an approach with students: "How I can be my best self and how can I help others be their

best self?" Diana shared how her individual reading helped her become more aware of racism and how to combat it saying:

> *So You Want to Talk About Race?* . . . led me to do more research, and reading books like *White Fragility*, *Just Mercy*, *How to Be an Anti-Racist*, and really taking that next level of, you know, doing work outside of the actual work that I'm doing at this school.

Grecia recalled how working with diverse students sparked her interest in educating herself so she can learn more about other cultures and learn from students:

> Working with students from diverse backgrounds, it's made me curious more curious about different cultures and to go and read and learn about those different cultures so that I have a better understanding of, you know, what's the history of a place? What's the background of a place? How does that operate? My, my pleasure reading is nonfiction. . . . I'm reading a book right now called *Data Feminism*, and it's helping me think a little bit more about like some of the things that I'm going to talk about this year. . . . If a student tells me something, I don't know anything about it, right? Then I'm going to go look it up. I'm going to try and find out more information.

She also pointed to the problematic approach with the history of science and revictimization of the Black community: "It's really hard to talk about that without having it be all about the victimization of Black people." Michelle shared how current events shaped her learning and reading about race issues:

> I would say my first few years, I didn't do too much of my own research, but then, last chunk of my career, I've done a lot of reading and research just on my own. A lot of that I think was driven by what was happening just at large in society. And I felt like, okay, I've got to pay more attention here and learn a lot.

All participants identified the relevance of personal reading and its contribution to their growth in understanding equity, social justice issues and how currents events were shaped by past history. All participants showed a clear interest in reading and learning about equity, they were engaged, motivated, and interested in many texts and these texts widened their understanding about race and racism.

***Personal Identity***

For several staff members, how they identify or have been classified in U.S. society gave them insight into how populations discriminated against by race or gender might feel, just as minoritized students are viewed at the chosen institution, thus bringing their personal stories closer to minoritized students' plights. Cleopatra is a Hispanic teacher. She associated her experiences with that of her students. Freddie identifies as queer. Cleopatra and Freddie had experience with discrimination. Freddie was a special education and equity leader and spoke about how identity could manifest differently in different circumstances; at school Freddie's identity might be less overt or less accepted than in the company of friends: "I understand that as a queer person, how I interact with others is very different at school than it is with my community. . . . I'm trying to be more and more conscious of it." Cleopatra explained how being a minoritized teacher related to her students: "I've got to teach them how the system works because they might not know it and their parents might not know it. Because that's the same thing that I go through. So I try to figure out how the system works. I'm trying to navigate it as well."

Some staff, such as Cerulean, Thomas, and Diana, spoke about Whiteness and how it could be perceived. Thomas talked about some of his experiences in a diverse school: "This guy is White. And so he's not to be trusted as much. Diana spoke about how she was implicitly perceived with mistrust in interactions with minoritized students when offering support because she is a White woman who never has to worry if she belongs: "I don't have to worry about those things that they come into the building worrying . . . versus me as a White female." Cerulean shared that being a White woman

who relocated from the southern United States into the Pacific Northwest gave her a stigma, and her White peers implicitly believed her to be racist, while viewing themselves as better than her and having surpassed racism:

> How race was in the South and, and how it is when I moved to X. Whoa, I would go work in a school, and they'd asked me where I was from. And I would tell them. In their gut, like, you're part of the KKK [Ku Klux Klan], and you must be racist. And I wouldn't say, I didn't know these people in the staff lounge. . . . I was like, no, we don't associate with the KKK. Then they would respond with, well, we're not racist here. And I would just nod. And then in about two sentences later, the teacher would tell me something racist they did in their classroom.

Overall, participants were aware of their identity as being part of a marginalized or privileged group. Freddie and Cleopatra saw them themselves as having affinities with the minoritized students through their identity, while Cerulean, Diana and Thomas saw how their Whiteness could place them in a position of implicit mistrust with BIPOC students.

**Theme: Belonging**

Staff understandings of minoritized students' senses of belonging at the chosen institution were at the center of the study. The author found three major subthemes: (a) the minoritized students feel unsafe and unwelcomed, (b) they face systemic pressures, and (c) they are underrepresented in AP and honors classes.

***Feeling Unwelcomed***

The participants detailed on STAR survey results done during remote learning in 2021 and climate data. All participants talked about their experiences in relation to how minoritized students felt at this institution. The STAR survey results included statements that showed that minoritized students have a much lower senses of belonging in comparison to White students' senses of belong at this school and how there are very few

trusted adults that relate to them. The district quantitative climate data from the previous year included the same trends when it came to non-White students and their belonging. When asked about how they felt about the STAR results, Michelle, Freddie, Thomas, Diana, Grecia, Cleopatra, Cerulean, and Daniel talked about how minoritized students feel and are viewed. Michelle felt sad that existing data from the STAR survey confirmed what she knew from listening to students and the ongoing problems with student belonging: "It's disheartening, and also, I think not surprising. It kind of lines up with what I think we've been hearing from students for years now." Freddie, who had worked only at this institution, was not surprised when the STAR results showed that minoritized students did not feel included: "I've worked in a predominantly White school for the entirety of my career. It doesn't surprise me." Thomas empathized with the minoritized students feeling excluded: "I mean, it's frustrating. It's something I'd like to see improved. . . . I can see the survey data. It's frustrating" and then shifted to White students:" I don't recall the White kids feeling super included or accepted either." The STAR survey data was transformational for Diana. She led the creation of the STAR survey in 2021 and she shared:

> It's definitely opened my eyes to the injustices that are of public education in America. The things that I've had students of color tell me happened to them in day to day is unbelievable. That's something that's opened my eyes too, in that I feel like there are a lot of minority students that don't have that support and don't know where to go when something negative like that happens to them.

Grecia added the survey clearly showed the belonging issues: "They make that really clear with … the survey results, really clear." Grecia shared she understands the minoritized students feel frustrated and sad and their reaction is justified: "I mean, I would be walking around, pissed off. . . . I think that there's some frustration that's

justified. And I think that that adds stress to students." Grecia spoke about White students not questioning whether they belong and a Black student automatically questioning it:

> I think White students don't question that at all at our school. And I think that as soon as a student of color walks into our building, they look around and they go, where do I fit in here? I just think it makes it really difficult. Then, I think that's—I think it, you know, a lot of it's a daily strain on students. It's daily strain.

Grecia felt saddened and frustrated showed care and concern for minoritized students:

> It makes me feel, you know, angry and sad that students feel not safe at school, not accepted at school, not honored at school, not cherished at school, not loved at school. Like, that bothers me a lot because, you know, no, I don't think anyone gets into education to be unsupportive of students.

Daniel had a similar reaction to STAR data and minoritized students not feeling included:

> I think that it's sad. . . . Every student, student of color, either lives or part-time lives in our community and to not feel safe, welcomed, to not to not have a feeling, where there's a lot of pride or that they feel like people are proud of them within a school hurts because it's their community.

Cleopatra explained, in contrast to other places where she taught in diverse classrooms, for example in California, at the current school, minoritized students were viewed as "harder to deal with." She felt that in this area people said things like: "The Title I schools has a lot of minorities in it . . . and having like a harder time dealing with those type of students," whereas in California, she said, "You don't see a lot of those references there." Michelle acknowledged knowledge of the isolating school culture for minoritized students, from STAR survey and in her past role as STAR advisor. She saw some teachers wanted to remedy the negative impact of school climate, but overall that was not the general trend:

> Based on the majority of what I've heard from students of color? I don't think they feel very welcome at all. . . . There are certain teachers who really prioritize listening to students and trying to make them feel safe and welcomed, but it seems that the school culture as a whole has been really alienating for them. And that has seemed to be pretty consistent.

Michelle added while the outward impression is one of polite interactions, the school culture is alienating for minoritized students, and they do not feel safe or welcomed at this institution:

> Generally, I think it's probably polite, on the surface, but I think that there's a lot going on within the students' minds, where they're feeling like alienated or like they're not respected or listened to. . . . I think if you were going into a lot of classrooms, it would seem polite and respectful, but I think that later the students would be feeling like they don't really fit in and they don't really belong.

Cerulean confirmed the overall perception of most participants and added that from her administrator role, she sees people are saying leadership should be doing more, but the issues are more complex:

> The minority population doesn't necessarily feel welcome in the schools or feel that teachers are admin[instrators] aren't doing the most that they can. We need to try harder. I think it is a multifaceted problem. That's not easily addressed. They want a connection of some sort, just help them enjoy it and feel more comfortable.

Diana explained a divide between White and non-White students. She referred to racial incidents and the need to educate White students in the school and the vulnerability and pressure for minoritized students speaking out against racist comments:

> I think the big issue is right now, we have this divide between White students and us educating them on microaggressions, on specific racial things that happen in our community, but also happens directly at [the] high school. And then we also, on the flip side, have students of color that are trying to speak out against certain things, but because they don't have the support, they don't speak out about it, don't want to be seen as, as students of color that speak about it[microaggression] because it isn't their job. I think we sometimes put pressure and assumptions on our students of color in order to look for them as guidance when that's not what we should be doing.

All participants spoke about the challenges with inclusion for minoritized students, especially in remote learning and about positives. The opinions were divided between positive and negative aspects. Michelle said:

> I think most students in general felt more disconnected and alienated. . . . I know that, like, articles that I've read about in general society .., it seemed that students who are farthest from educational justice were most impacted by the online, the remote time.

Her colleague from the same department, Thomas, shared these views on remote learning: "That was just a dead zone. . . . They weren't even turning their cameras on, so I think everybody felt disincluded [sic], marginalized, especially us teachers." When asked about how she thought minoritized students felt in remote learning, Cerulean shared some students felt even less engaged than in person due to lack of access to technology and lack of structure in their family lives: "Looking at a cold screen and trying to do a lesson isn't very engaging all the time." Daniel thought remote learning made it harder for students to feel connected because the camera was optional, and there was no community building. Despite the considerations of privacy—for which he understood why using a camera was optional—Daniel saw remote learning as not engaging and detrimental to students who were not priorly engaged in person before the pandemic:

> It's not like you have to show up at a physical space. . . . I totally understand the camera's being optional, but I think that took away a lot of the human element and the community piece of school. I think that it was really hard to reach all the students, but especially students that felt disconnected prior to the remote learning.

Some participants saw some positives in the online learning format. In contrast to Michelle, Thomas, Daniel, and Cerulean, Diana felt that in remote learning, some minoritized students were more forthcoming, especially when they shared their feelings on the climate STAR survey: "When virtual, I think a lot more feelings came out and things. Students felt more comfortable saying certain things, which was awesome. 'Cause I think we got more feedback that way." Grecia also shared that although remote

learning has had challenges in terms of access, equity, student rapport, communication, and organization, especially for historically marginalized populations, she saw instant feedback from students that she did not always get in person:

> There was nowhere near enough early coordination to really make sure that all students were connected up at school. I mean, first semester, I certainly saw my students more connected. And then second semester, I had so many students who just disappeared. And I definitely felt like, what was being done to include students? And how did they feel. . . . I would have never said I missed anything about online school, but I do miss having a chat box open because that allowed students to respond in real time, in a way that other people could see that. . . . I feel like there's some students who I would have probably responding to questions this year, that since we're in person they're less willing to do.

Freddie saw that remote learning was easier on the minoritized students, with no extra burden of race identifiers and systemic pressures removed:

> One [student] specifically said that she, for the first time in her life, she didn't feel like she had to code switch all the time. And she felt like she could access the curriculum because she wasn't, you know, worried about race all the time and how she was presenting herself all the time, rather than all she had to do. She was at home. She didn't have to worry about . . . people making microaggressions. She didn't have to worry about any of that because she was separated from White society in some ways.

Cleopatra appreciated the flexibility remote learning afforded for some students who had many demands on their time. She thought remote learning could have been easier for minoritized students to feel included and perform well, due to flexibility of schedules and not being physically present at the school. She thought about it from her perspective and what she would have done if she had it in her time as a student:

> If I was going through that during my time, I would think I'd feel more included, but that's because I would have more of the freedom to do the responsibilities that I had. . . . It would be easier to do if I was at home and then take care of things. I would feel more included at that time than when we're not online.

The participants explained STAR survey results showing BIPOC students felt unincluded were not surprising because participants were aware of how minoritized students viewed

themselves at this institution. For them, seeing the quantitative data confirmed what they perceived and also saddened them, showing them that the school culture was alienating for these students. Some participants spoke about access and engagement issues that accentuated in remote learning for students from low-income families and all students.

### *Systemic Pressures*

Several participants talked about systemic issues, referring to disproportionate discipline, entering White spaces, code switching, and access. When asked about what they perceived about discipline disproportionality, Grecia, Daniel, Cerulean, and Diana, who in their roles, had looked at the discipline disproportionality data, shared insights and responded to questions on comparing minoritized students' experiences with White students' experiences. Cerulean was aware of the disproportionality and explained the district-imposed corrective policies. Diana explained how minoritized students are seen, perceived, and disciplined by White teachers and pointed to these issues as systemic, through with some progress in building staff awareness. When asked about discipline disproportionality Diana said:

> I think that is a major issue at [the] high school. We do have a lot of staff members that will automatically judge students of color if they are in the hallways during class versus not judging White students who were in the hallways during class. . . . However, if you looked at our demographics of students of color and compared the percentage of students of color who are disciplined versus the percentage of White students, it's higher.

Daniel echoed Diana's thoughts on the institution being a White space and explained that minoritized students stand out, which makes them vulnerable because the school is "a very White space. And if you're not White, like you're going to stand out, which means more eyes are on you." Grecia knew about discipline disproportionality as a

systemic issue due to her involvement and activism and leadership in the school. She said:

> Well, that number has been something that I've been looking at for over a decade. And it's continued to disproportionate, especially for African American students. And that's been consistent. . . . Typically, it's about twice what it is for all other student groups. Students get caught up in the system of discipline much more often. I had a Black student say, "If you're the only one, it's really easy for you to get singled out in a crowd or in the hallway. You'll get stopped more often than White students will because you stand out because you're the only one." The stress of what our school is like, right? We have this system that's built on not honoring and promoting and celebrating students and other cultures. . . . That that is a stress on students every single day.

Diana explained how her race has no impact on her day at a PWI, as she automatically belongs. She contrasted that with the experience of non-White students: "I don't have to worry about those things that they come into the building worrying about that extra package, that extra bag that they're carrying when they walk into the building."

Freddie, Cleopatra, and Daniel brought up about code switching to avoid standing out or being overdisciplined. Freddie added that because minoritized students stand out at this PWI, it creates added pressures, and minoritized students try to act like the White students because those are the norms of the school:

> I think that over the last few years, and really, I mean over the last 400 years, especially with code switching—I think I understand code switching a lot. When you enter fully White space, you are—you have to completely change everything about you. Every single day at school, rather than act like themselves. . . . I can't imagine trying to put on an act and try to act White or normative. I mean, it makes sense why it would also be difficult for them a to feel involved. And it adds a whole burden the White students don't have in accessing education.

Daniel was aware of code switching too; he said, "They're sitting in a classroom and they don't see other people that look like them, and they're trying to switch into White spaces and act in that perceived way." In diverse classrooms, the sense of feeling you are the only one of a certain race was not happening because "there's more comfort there"

(Daniel). Cleopatra looked for curriculum influences on issues of belonging and why students feel they have to code switch. She argued minoritized students do not see themselves represented in the curriculum; they are assimilated into mainstream White U.S. culture, and Diana advocated for "changing our views of how we present things. Everything is not, uh, like White centric." She gave an example with shared holidays:

> Holidays. Those are big. All our holidays are always centered about White people and their religion. . . . There are other holidays and . . . traditions that people do. . . .We've erased a lot of ideas Native Americans have created and Indigenous people have created. We try to erase that.

Diana, Cleopatra, Cerulean, and Freddie talked about access issues. Cerulean spoke about unequal access and opportunities for non-White students: "A big part of what's missing is a lot of opportunities, they haven't always experienced it… I don't think they have benefited from that." Cleopatra added her personal experience as a minoritized teacher when she spoke about navigating the system because "they might not know it, and their parents might not know it. Because that's the same thing that I go through. I try to figure out how the system works. I'm trying to navigate it as well." Diana elaborated on how inequities in access and educational attainments of students from minoritized families predetermined which minoritized students were most likely to succeed:

> I think financial demographics really determined what supports students had at home and then family demographics of did your parents go to finish high school? Did your parents go to a 4-year institution? Do they know how to support you academically? Versus others whose parents didn't have the opportunity to go to that higher education learning and don't have those skills to support their students.

Freddie pointed out access issues and that social inequity place an additional economic burden on minoritized students:

> I have a couple of students of color who I had to provide a lot more access to devices because of social inequity and the fact that people of color haven't been able to build capital over the last a hundred years, 400 years, in the way that White people have. So they don't have money, which is a societal issue, not an individual issue. And so for many of those students, some of the societal issues struggled to access the education.

Thomas saw a different side than Freddie and Diana when interacting with Black and Hispanic students and was concerned about them acting belligerent and oppositional saying, "I don't think that a lot of our students have enough of a critical mass to really band together and become oppositional in that way," and he classified them as "polite and compliant on the surface." Viewing African American students as belligerent is a systemic issue, as historically and systemically minoritized students were targets for oppression, ruled by White people, and objectified in the United States. Thomas said these students act distant to minimize contact with the teacher: "Often you turn around a day or two later and realize that they weren't necessarily complying. They were just kind of acting like it to get you off their back. It's not adversarial. It's just kind of elusive."

Overall, all participants spoke of systemic issues such as discipline disproportionality because they stand out in a White space, and how minoritized students were being targeted for punitive measures, viewed as confrontational, threats to a White system of oppression, and marginalized by society when it came to access to resources.

### *Advanced Placement and Honors Classes for Minoritized Students*

All participants confirmed and detailed on how minoritized students were underrepresented in AP and honors classes. Freddie, Daniel, Michelle, or Cleopatra explained underrepresentation as a systemic issue with education. Freddie argued

minoritized students are overidentified and tracked into special education or less advanced classes and taught by less experienced teachers, so when they reach high school, they are several years behind, at least in math, if not in other classes too. High-level math can then be a requirement for some high-level science classes. Freddie said:

> I think that I've walked into a lot of honors and AP classes and just visually, it looks pretty White, you know? And I mean, I, I can't say much more than that, but I think that there are trends over the course of schooling. Once we get to high school, we've had students in school for 9 years, right? It's very difficult. You know, I have students who come into my math class and want to go to a 4-year college. And so, my job then, I guess, is to get them in 4 years from wherever they are through Algebra 2. And a lot of times that's not possible by the time you get to high school.

Freddie saw issues stemming from lack of resources that could make the high-level classes more culturally responsible than what it is currently, as the AP curriculum is driven by White culture as a norm. Freddie said:

> I also think that across the board, there's not been enough resources devoted. . . . A lot of high-stakes assessments have questions and just aren't culturally related to people of color. So it makes sense that they would not be as connected to the curriculum and wouldn't necessarily want to be in those classes as well. It's hard to want to be in a class where everybody else is different than them.

Daniel explained and corroborated the tracking Freddie mentioned and how at this institution, minoritized students in core classes could still make the switch to honors, even if they are not ready:

> The multitiered systems of support team talked about how a lot of that stems from middle school and the prerequisites and their trajectory there. It's disproportionate that students of color are not in AP. I don't know when this change happened, but I noticed it a few years ago that students can opt into honors classes, even if maybe they're not currently ready for honors-level work, but the fact that they can say, yes, I'm in honors. I know that some of the students that I work with that took honors, maybe didn't do great, [but] there was definitely a sense of pride: I'm in an honors class.

All participants acknowledged White students are predominant in the AP classes and most affirmed minoritized students are underrepresented. Grecia explained:

> I know that in general, when you walk into AP classes, it's very, very, very White. Typically, students who are on Association of Student Body are also students who are really strong academic students as well, taking a pretty significant academic load, but I think historically, looking at our numbers for those classes, is low. Students of color, it's low in AP courses.

The counselor, Diana, had a different lens than a teacher because she is a counselor who interacts with many more students and helps them with their schedule. She scheduled over 400 students into their electives and required classes each year and confirmed underrepresentation when she analyzed school data and saw most minoritized students were in in low-level science and language arts classes. Diana said:

> We definitely have less students of color enrolled in AP courses, in relation to let's say a general education course. For example, students enrolled in AP Calculus versus students that get through Precalculus their senior year, differences between ethnicity, demographics of those. I do think there's also a divide on students of color, depending on again, your household demographics, if your parents have had that educational background of higher education and that support from them. We do have some students of color that are very academically driven in AP classes, in ASB, you know, captain of the sports team. If you compare again a core math class versus an AP math class, you are going to see the differences in there. I think specifically we have a very, very low number of African American males that are not accessing those advanced classes, those AP courses.

Cleopatra recalled how the math department sought to eliminate tracking issues and underrepresentation by allowing any student to be in core or honors and the flexibility to change levels as a strength of the department. She also acknowledged the systemic stereotypes as she herself is part of a minoritized group:

> I like the fact that we've mixed them up in the math classes because it's less of segregating students and more of being inclusive, but still has that title. . . . I just feel a certain way towards honors classes. It just felt more excluded when you are categorized as that. You're, like, less than.

From the school leader perspective, Cerulean had done some activism at a previous school to hire diverse staff that would support minoritized students being in AP classes, and from her perspective it was a successful effort. She said:

> I did a lot with the . . . communities and putting AP studies into [the school] and hiring teachers who would be good, young new teachers. . . . All students were included in. We put in AP classes in the schools and populated them with anybody that wanted to be in them. We've sought out teachers who would be really good for those spots and connect with the kids. And that went really well.

In particular, the language arts department seemed to be in the middle of a debate about honors classes. Michelle explained how removing the honors-only classes helped with systemic inequities, but once students got to AP in their junior years, despite not having an impediment to sign up in terms of prerequisites, minoritized students preferred not to sign up for the AP language arts classes. Michelle said:

> I know that in our department we've been fighting for a long time now to get rid of honors, which we've mostly done by going to honors for all. And we do feel like that is more equitable because when we have the standalone honors classes, it was almost all White kids. And so it was perpetuating these inequities for sure…I think our classes now are more diverse since we went to the honors for all model, but we still have the same problem as soon as we get to junior year, when we go into like the AP, and then eventually the college and the high school classes. There ends up being this divide as well.

Thomas had a different perspective for honors underrepresentation. His perception was a countertheme because he felt there was somewhat fair representation, but due to the low numbers of students that he saw in his class, the data was not meaningful for him, and he did not see the obstacles for students to be in AP classes:

> I taught AP class 'cause we do honors for all in English, which means everybody's an honors student, at least in ninth and 10th grade. And my only basis is the AP junior courses that I've taught, and they're wider than the school data. But not by a whole lot. I mean, part of the—It's the struggle of small population sizes to begin with. If you have, you know, 25, 30 kids in a certain racial group or, you know, 15 in a grade level ,and you see two or three of them in your classes, you figure like, oh, okay, well that's not that disproportionate, but

> it's a challenge to say that our classes are not inclusive when any kid who wants to can sign up now.

Michelle, who is in the same department as Thomas, had an opinion that diverged from her colleague Thomas's opinion. She argued the possible gaps could be addressed with differentiation, and the content does not build on itself, like in some other subjects:

> I don't agree with that too much just because I think that, like, English language arts is much less sequential than something like math, for example. Yes, it might be more challenging to teach a diverse group of learners and AP curriculum, but you can absolutely do it. You just have to provide more scaffolding and support to those students. So I understand like why a teacher might be concerned that that's going to be more work for them. It probably is, but it's also totally doable because they benefit so much from just being in that kind of intellectually vibrant environment. . . . I think it's what we do as teachers all the time is we try to differentiate for the students who are in our room. And just like assuming that a student is not going to have the skills needed. I don't know. It seems like it's not giving the student that much credit.

Overall, all participants saw that BIPOC students were underrepresented in AP or honors classes. Some of them saw it as a systemic issue with tracking that started early in elementary school or stereotyping the BIPOC students. All participants except one saw barriers in being in AP or honors having to do with tracking, not having the same race peers in AP, lack of culturally responsive curriculum or not having diverse teachers teaching those classes.

**Theme: Staff-Student Student Relationships**

All participants talked about establishing rapport with minoritized students and the importance of SSRs. The author organized their responses into subthemes: SSR, diversity hiring, and trusted adults.

***General Staff-Student Relationships***

All participants were asked about their rapport with minoritized students and the general rapport between staff and minoritized students. All participants responded with

themselves, and some staff having a good rapport with minoritized students and gave details on the importance of SSR in getting to know their students, establishing trust, showing care, listening, engaging, and developing socioemotional learning (SEL), as factors to improve sense of belonging and engagement. The practices from the previous sentence they used to establish good rapport, engaged minoritized students, and helped them feel included. They gave details about why and for whom relationships might be strained. Diana said, "A lot of minoritized students have really great teachers who are supportive, who, you know, are on STAR, are on Race and Equity Team [RET], like, are doing the work to become a better school and a safer building for students of color." Thomas classified the general rapport with BIPOC students as "pretty good," while Michelle said, "It's polite on the surface." Grecia and Cerulean knew some specific people to whom BIPOC students could talk, and Cleopatra said the relationship of staff with BIPOC students is one of "caution." Freddie said, "It varies" Daniel said good SSRs happen with many staff members, though some relationships take more time to build:

> I think there's so many teachers that have so many really cool relationships with kids, and in our role, we get to hear about it. But there are so many teachers and adults in the building that maybe half the students don't like, but there's kids that like—There are many, many teachers that maybe you wouldn't think are really great relationship building teachers, but there's students that love them and identify with them. . . . I do think that at our school, there are really, really good educators. There's teachers that students identify with all over the place. I do think, like, the more out there the teacher is, like, the more, bigger personality, the sooner kids identify like them, where the more reserved personalities, I think it takes maybe a quarter to really get it.

Diana, Freddie, Daniel, and Michelle spoke about building SSR early in the year and establishing trust. Diana explained SSR is a major step in minoritized students to feeling safe. Build trust and sometimes something as simple as providing a simple food offering when needed can initiate that trusted rapport: "It's really easy to, like, grab

something that you might like and start building that relationship that way." Freddie explained how they work to build SSR at the beginning of the school year "making they sure to do names" because they believed "building relationships in my classroom is by far the most important" and assigning an identity project to get to know students. Freddie emphasized:

> Students need to know that they're seen and all parts of them are seen. Behind me, you can see the Black Lives Matter flag, next to me, women of color, over here. Like this, a trans woman of color here. My room should reflect the students that I want to feel comfortable in my room.

Freddie wanted their students "to walk in the door and see themselves." Michelle explained how she set up her room at the beginning of the year, so a variety of students would be represented: "I think about what does it look like when a student walks into my room? Like, are they going to see themselves represented on the walls and in the books?" Michelle reflected on how she saw herself as "relatively aware and definitely open to learning from students." Daniel affirmed, "[SSR] starts early at the beginning of the year" when teachers show they "value [students] as a person by getting to know them." He explained how he started with being polite. Then, he said, "Once I find something I know that they're passionate about or something, I try to use that to build our relationship." His approach is everyone needs to be valued and treated with respect, and it's important understand cultural differences in approaching minoritized students versus White students.

Freddie used SEL daily because "it's an opportunity for them to just to share their background, to learn from each other." Daniel also used SEL to provide an "open space, a safe space and consistent. The students know what they're going to get from me every day." He emphasized routine and expectations with SEL, and showing a nonjudgmental

attitude toward students' issues: "I think that's the biggest thing is that they know that regardless of what's going on, I'm available. I'm not going to judge. I'll either sit there and I ask a lot of our students, "Do you want to just vent right now?"

Michelle explained how showing care and being aware of injustices, acknowledging students speaking on an injustice, and being open to listening were pathways to changing problematic relationships and activism for her minoritized students. She detailed:

> We are not very diverse. It makes the problem more glaring. And so I think it's something that's ended up infiltrating like all different reaches of my life. . . . If I feel like a student has been unfairly treated, which happens to students of color here, I get most like worked up about things that impact students, and it makes me want to, like, change things on all levels. I think anyone here who spends any amount of time listening or talking to students of color are going to know right away. There are big problems. . . . I think that most people, once they've listened, they're going to want to change what's going on because it's kind of hard to look at a student who's saying, like, "I'm experiencing all of this" and to not do anything.

Cerulean, Thomas, Grecia, and Freddie thought SSR is connected to showing care and establishing trust, but trust is not implicitly given to White staff. Cerulean spoke about SSR from her position an administrator and how she tried to make them feel safe, give them attention, have them be comfortable at school, and give them support. A 504 coordinator is responsible for monitoring accommodations and contact with families of students who receive special accommodations, in addition to supervising the special education teachers who provide the services to those students. As a 504 coordinator, she was aware of the learning and behavior accommodations students needed and was willing to find resources for basic needs, such as food. Her rapport with students and trust sometimes was conditioned by consequences she had to follow in response to incidents

and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations. She reinforced minoritized students relate to very engaging teachers and counselors and she is

> trying to find classes that fit for them. And sometimes teachers that fit for them, if that's what they need. Like, take a look at their individual needs and trying to have them met, just so they feel seen and heard and part of the school.

Thomas explained SSR means showing care and clearly communicating how feelings about students' performances. He explained these strategies help all students:

> What causes a kid to turn it around is me showing that I care, me getting on their case, me letting them know: I want you to turn this essay in. I'm frustrated. . . . I want to see you do better.

He added that trust is foundational to good SSRs and how White staff may be perceived by minoritized students, who do not implicitly feel that they could trust teachers of other races. Behind some of Thomas's narratives, there are also problematic assumptions about how he does not perceive hostility from non-White students—as if this was an expectation in general—or that there are not enough minoritized students who could organize hostile acts toward teachers:

> I don't perceive kids of color here to be standoffish or hostile. Some of it is a group size of fact. When I taught at [another school], out of the probably 30, 33 kids, there were probably seven or eight Black kids. At times could feel like they had a little bit of a clique and felt like, okay, you know, this guy is White. And so he's not to be trusted as much, but you know, that only lasted maybe for a month or 2.

Grecia thought similarly to Thomas: trust is not implicitly given. She said, "I think some students are like, I don't really know this environment. I don't really know this teacher. I'm not sure." Cleopatra said the general rapport between BIPOC students and White staff is that of "caution," but since she is a minoritized person herself she felt connections.

Freddie explained that sometimes all it takes is one incident to damage the relationship and trust: “One incident, right? One mistake not dealt with in the right way can be enough to make you an unsafe teacher and make your success and make your positioning unsafe.”

Daniel elaborated on why some relationships between BIPOC students and staff are problematic. Daniel commented that teachers with engaging curriculum who promote student interaction are more likely to make all students feel engaged than teachers who do not have engaging lessons, and help them put systemic pressures outside of their focus. He was a trusted person for them, along with another minoritized staff and GAINS leader who was a former student at this institution. Daniel said:

> I think it’s just as much that they are uncomfortable sitting in classrooms. And why I’m saying that more so is because a lot of the time it’s the same teachers that students are like, “Hey, can I just come work in here?” Or it’s the same subjects. . . . We never see it with world language because their curriculum is very much community building. . . . It’s always like history or [language arts], where it’s more of a regimented schedule, where there’s not as much interaction in the classroom and a lot more work time.

Diana talked about the importance of check-in meetings as developing strong SSRs, showing staff care, and creating open spaces for students to relate to trusted adults how they are feeling:

> GAINS staff and myself and a couple other people we would have meetings with African American males and other students of color to kind of see what’s going on in the building, check in with them, hear what their concerns were. . . . It was just for them to have an open space to talk about what they experienced day to day, the microaggressions that might happen or when they feel uncomfortable in a class. Like this is why, whether that was the uncomfortableness of, like, learning something in U.S. history about slavery, or, you know, they, they saw an actual microaggression happened to them. Or in the hallways. So we created a kind of a safe space for them just to like tell us what’s going on. And then we could further help them take the steps to kind of report that bullying and harassment and those microaggressions.

All participants spoke of their relationships with students and how they build rapport, trust, and try and get to them comfortable in their classroom, listen to them or get to know them. Several participants conveyed the importance of organizing their physical space to make sure all students walking in would be represented, displaying posters on social justice, diversity, and LGBT acceptance. Overall, the general rapport between minoritized students and staff was viewed as one of caution, and while some staff had good rapport with students, others did not and minoritized students sought refuge with the GAINS coordinators when uncomfortable in some classes.

***Staff-Students Relationships with Minoritized Staff***

Several participants referred to equity efforts, such as diversity hiring, to create SSRs for minoritized students and bring in trusted adults that understand students. All participants were asked about the impact of diversity hiring, and Daniel, Michelle, Diana, Freddie, Cerulean, and Cleopatra had firsthand knowledge, due to their roles. Diana explained how BIPOC students related to the two African American males in the GAINS program: “They would go to other people like [these individuals] and talk to them about it.” Daniel spoke on how having two African American colleagues made the BIPOC students more forthcoming:

> They like the fact that we have a Black male that is advocating for education, and then there’s a bunch of other students of color that will come in and work. So it’s more of a preferred space for them. I think they want to be with in that space with other students of color and comfortable with myself and [colleagues].

Several participants explained why there should be diversity hiring. Cerulean was part of an initiative in the district to hire diverse staff to teach AP classes to help BIPOC students enroll in classes they usually were not in, where they would relate to same race teachers. Cleopatra, a Hispanic teacher reported feeling self-aware and drew

parallels between her race and her rapport with the minoritized students, being aware of how she phrases her opinions to make sure she is not misunderstood: “I know there’s not very many Hispanic teachers. You feel it. You always feel bad, like, noninclusiveness, so I can understand with them.”

Michelle saw the impact a diversity hire had in her department. Michelle commented on a minoritized teacher and friend she had in the department, before she left for another program. This teacher was part of the diversity hiring efforts, and STAR students were part of the hiring committees. She spoke about her colleague and her impact with students: “I know there were a lot of students who just saw her as not only an advocate and an ally, but just someone that they could like really trust and feel comfortable with.” She spoke about the STAR efforts to have more diverse staff:

> I think that went a long way. I know like [one teacher], for example, was hired from a committee that had a STAR student on it, and I think having her at the school went a long way to getting people to, like, rethink our view or our White-like view of the school.

During her time, there were racial incidents at the school. Michelle narrated how she felt and an email she sent to staff after witnessing an incident that made her feel unwelcomed:

> Like, I feel as an adult, totally unwelcomed. So can you imagine how students feel? And I think a lot of staff members really took that to heart, and we had like that whole meeting with [the principal] in the library.

Diana spoke about students of color having role models on staff, and how scarce role models of color at this institution are. She explained she did her best to meet those needs and support the students. She said there are not a lot of African American leaders to whom they can talk and who can see those students’ perspectives and understand them,

but there is one Latino counselor in her department who could and wanted to support Latino students:

> I think they don't have any adult in the building that they can go to when they're feeling down, when they're feeling like they need somebody to talk to about certain things. So just trying to connect with other populations at [the school] that are marginalized, that do need support. Our other counselor . . . does our Latinx club, and I have also, like, partnered with her on some stuff. And I think it's great that we do have a staff of color on the counseling team.

Six of the eight participants emphasized the positive impact of hiring diverse staff that could connect and establish positive rapport with the BIPOC students at the school, and how the school does not have many diverse staff. All of the six participants spoke on their experience and seeing how minoritized teachers were advocates and allies for students at the school.

***Trusted Adults***

When asked about who has trusted relationships with BIPOC students, many participants pointed to the GAINS coordinators and several teachers having strong SSRs with minoritized students. Thomas said GAINS staff have trusting relationships with BIPOC students: "All three guys in the GAINS program have more trust than average. I see [them] as being very approachable and connected to our students." Grecia mentioned GAINS, herself, the researcher, and other tenured staff as having trusting relationships with BIPOC students. She said:

> Our football coaches, I know our security staff, for sure. . . . There's a lot of different teachers the kids say they feel comfortable to go and talk to. That's for sure. I know, you know, I know you're somebody. I know me.

Cerulean pointed out that besides GAINS counselors and engaging teachers, she saw adults who went out of their way to help minoritized students and seek to help out

BIPOC students intentionally are also in their circle of trust. She said, “Some go out of their way to be more engaging for them, but some really seek it out.”

Michelle pointed to a new STAR advisor as someone minoritized students trust because of his commitment, leadership, and advocacy. She also talked about the social studies teacher as an example of a trusted adult, because when confronted with student feedback the social studies teacher was not defensive:

> Diana pointed to coaches and GAINS counselors because they have I think a lot of STAR students lean on [the STAR advisor] and really like and trust him. And he’s someone who I think is super committed. [The social studies as well, I think, has been a leader, not only with our staff, but she’s come to STAR all the time. And what I love about her is when students give her honest feedback, she does not get defensive. She, like, she takes it in, and she learns from it and grows and, like, really values their opinions, which I think a lot of teachers don’t do. I think a lot of us get really defensive automatically.

Diana pointed to coaches and GAINS counselors because they have roles that allow strong relationships with minoritized students, saying the “football program and our GAINS program is a really big population of students and staff that students feel comfortable going to” and to herself. She mentioned despite being White and not looking as someone who might understand minoritized students’ struggles in a PWI, her involvement and rapport with other non-White staff place her as a trusted adult with the students. She said:

> I guess in my caseload, they know that I am somebody that knows a lot of things because I’ve been here for a while, so they can come to me and talk to me. Being out in the hallways, being on RET, partnering with STAR, being a coach, like, all of those things puts my face out there more as being somebody for students to feel comfortable around. Being a coach, it puts me on a on a different level. That’s a different level of, like, relationships that they can come to talk to me about. . . . I’m White, but I coach with two African American males, so having those connections shows that our alliances and that students of color can come to us if they need support or on anything because they know that they can trust us because they see our relationships with other staff members and how we support them. And we support each other.

Freddie confirmed that among the trusted adults are the staff from the GAINS program, some teachers of color, and the Latinx counselor who "does incredible work with the Latino students or Latino student association. And she has a crew of students who just go to her and provide support." They also mentioned the shift in ASB "I think that there's also some other teachers who've kind of stepped up in different ways either with ASB or with like working with publicly in working with people." Overall, they believed it takes a lot of time to build trust and respect with minoritized students who have been marginalized by White people with authority: "And I think it takes a lot of time have built, have built respect from people from the students of color and like any population." Daniel explained that there are around 70 minoritized students on his and his colleague's caseload, and that number is increasing, while receiving "conservatively, 20 to 25 BIPOC students per day who

> want to and try to come into our office to work, instead of being in the classroom, and some of it is just normal teenage avoidance, but a lot of it is that they are just uncomfortable in their classroom.

He said:

> I do believe that we are our trusted adults in the building for students of color. Like, every day there's random students that I don't know their names yet. They come up and say, "Hi coach" and talk to me. And then I get to know them. And so our role is expanding. [My colleagues] and I are football coaches. And so we've always had male students of color identify with us. And—but this year, and I don't know what the change has been, but if you come to our office during lunch, you're going to see football players, but any other time, it's women of color.

All participants confirmed that the GAINS coordinators are trusted adults for minoritized students at this school. In addition, some other ones were identified such as the social studies teacher, minoritized staff, some counselors, coaches, and the STAR current

advisor who were making efforts with social justice issues and offering specific supports to BIPOC students.

**Theme: Family and Community**

When asked about including families as partners in educational outcomes, all participants mentioned the importance of connecting with families, building relationships, and helping minoritized families navigate the system.

***Building Relationships***

Several participants, such as Thomas, Michelle, Daniel, and Cerulean, spoke about building relationships with families of color and their views on how to approach that. Thomas talked about reaching out to families and kids: "Let them know you care. Let them know you want to do well." He had tips he learned from an African American principal on how to contact the minoritized families because traditional methods that work for White families are impersonal for some other families:

> These people don't live in a world of email. If you want to talk to them, you get them on the phone. . . . So that, more than anything, has changed my interactions with families of color. Because email, just, it's cold. you know. Human voice has a certain power to it.

He spoke about setting high expectations for minoritized students because their families would want that: "I've never had a Black mom say, 'Take it easy on my [child]. I've heard it from White moms, but I've never heard it from a Black mom." Thomas explained families hope their students do well school, and they put some pressure on students to succeed:

> My perception is a lot of families of color really want their kids here and really go all out to get them here. And I think sometimes that hope creates an extra layer of pressure that can be hard to push through. . . . I worry that doesn't honor the ambition and hope of kids of color whose parents are hustling to keep them here.

Michelle explained how some minoritized families have a "really crummy experience [with this school who did not serve their students well due to disproportionality data and academic gap]," they were "kind and open-hearted" and still "sending their kids to us with kind of open arms." She emphasized listening to minoritized families, just as she listens to student voices: "the families that I've worked with have been, I think, just so grateful that I'm doing this basic thing by just listening."

Daniel built relationships with home visits and follow-up communication, especially during remote learning, but his strategies do not reach everyone:

> Families have definitely been a big thing. [I] will do home visits. . . . We were trying to wrap it into also delivering some food or grocery gift cards for some of the students that we work with. . . . It was pretty cool. Some cases though, the families aren't very involved, but the ones that are we've seen a lot of growth in that in the last year.

Cerulean talked about her role and interactions with families:

> Building relationships with families is major for leaders. Consulting with families is big with us [and] can be challenging sometimes. . . . It's easier when you have built a rapport with a family, and they know that your heart is in the right place. That's the most important if you did anything.

She pointed to the complexities and tensions between staff and families because "it gets more complicated when you add the families and students and staff together. They don't know how to talk to each other. . . . It starts causing tensions." She explained that despite repeated efforts, some families were hard to reach: "We did a lot of phone calls home, but the sad part is they wouldn't answer the phone. That's kind of hard, but it happened across the board." She was wondering if the approach was culturally appropriate because some families might not feel safe with a White administrator going into their homes and seeing their circumstances. Overall, four participants offered suggestions they implement to build better rapport with minoritized families such as making personal contact,

showing care, listening, being aware of positionality for a White staff member and providing supports during remote learning.

### *Navigating the System*

Several staff members, such as Cleopatra, Diana, Freddie, and Grecia, spoke in depth about how they build relationships with families and brought up the importance of having specialized support for and partnering with minoritized families. Cleopatra saw the need to teach minoritized students and families how the system works and how to navigate it. She spoke from her experience as a minoritized person trying to "navigate the system." She advocated for and then organized an informational night with a school counselor for Latino to create community for minoritized families. She explained why this night helped and was a good idea:

> The dinner—We had one, and it's like, cool because that was the push we were really trying to get. . . . Luckily, the group really were on board, and they all saw. It was a good idea. They don't know what's out there like the FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid] information nights and—Do we give them that information to be translated into the different languages? Maybe they don't always feel comfortable going because they don't think the assistance will be there or it's at an inconvenient time. So that was a good night. And then we had food, which is always a good thing.

Diana spoke from her counselor role, building relationships with families through Schoology and Teams Night, which is reserved for minoritized families. Schoology is the official learning management system where all counselors and teachers post assignments and curriculum and other resources for students and families. Teams Night was a special event organized by the counselor to help minoritized families with the college applications process. Diana echoed Cleopatra's view: The specialized night was needed due to issues of access. She did a financial aid night to help minoritized families

and students with college applications and support the students. She looked into individualized support and accommodations for specific families:

> Be more accessible to families. . . . Then I can actually meet with families. . . . And being flexible and maybe meeting with them outside of the school hours. . . . Being available for families and students. . . . Our college application process, we're going to have our own virtual meeting just for families of color so that they can go through and get extra support on applying to colleges. . . . We had a financial aid night last week for all families, but I think that families of color want like more supports around that, more individualized supports around that. . . . The counseling team is going to do is provide those specific accommodations for those families.

As special education teacher and case manager, Freddie talked about the importance of building relationships with families and ongoing communication. Grecia and several other participants commended an initiative called the Diversity Empowerment Council (DEC), which was created to involve minoritized students and families in school decisions. The DEC's purpose was to welcome and link incoming minoritized freshmen with peers at the school. Grecia interacted with DEC in her role as the RET leader:

> I joined the Diversity Empowerment Council, which was students and parents. That was really a space for parents to come and talk about what they needed, what they wanted to see. When we came back to the building, how are we going to connect students, new students of color at [the school] with students who are upperclassmen at [the school]? Because our kids who were freshmen weren't really going to know anybody in the building. I'm certainly hoping that with the Diversity Empowerment Counsel, with RET, that we're building more community connections and that then helps bring things to the forefront what our students, our families are saying that they need.

Freddie commended the DEC efforts: "I think [the DEC coordinator] doing a great job and the Diversity Empowerment Council and getting impact. I think the more voices of students and families of color we have, the better." Diana mentioned the relevance of DEC and the new special night that the new assistant principal would have for the families of color in the community:

> Working with families to kind of figure out what they would like to see. I know [three colleagues] are doing some specific work with families of color in our community around how to support them with getting certain information out to them.

Overall, four participants spoke about more in depth efforts they made to reach out and support minoritized families to help them navigate the system because those families needed it. Those specific efforts included specialized nights dedicated only to African American families or Latino families or committee meetings such as DEC with minoritized families to help incoming freshmen feel included.

**Theme: Staff Progress with Equity PD**

All participants were asked if there was any progress from the equity PD efforts. Overall, the responses converged in three subthemes: (a) Staff Shift, (b) Administrative Shift, and (c) Specific Equity PD efforts and CRP Practices. Participants considered these elements as most influential for connecting, including, and engaging minoritized students.

***Staff Shift***

All participants were asked about changed perceptions due to equity PD happening in the last 2 years. All participants responded overwhelmingly that in general, staff had changed their views and involvement with equity efforts and that the PD was beneficial for participants, too. Cerulean affirmed she saw the change: “I do. And I see teachers changing and trying harder.” Cleopatra explained the change happened because there was more encouragement and support from leadership to change. Cleopatra added that staff was more aware of not simplistically categorizing all Hispanic students than before starting the equity PD and added, “I think a lot of the staff is trying to learn a little bit more that there are nuances. She said referred to staff attitudes as “definitely changed”

and to herself as being "lees fearful and cautious of talking about current events like voter registration or BLM [the Black Lives Matter movement] because staff are required to address those issues openly, as part of education on racial issues in the classroom. Cleopatra said:

> I do feel a change. I—because I feel like a lot more of the staff is willing to do what is being asked, which is not the perception that I sensed before. . . . I do feel that there's a little bit more change that there's more staff willing to do that as opposed to before.

Michelle confirmed most staff have "definitely" shifted their perceptions, and teachers were more willing to listen to student voices than before the equity PD efforts, were less defensive, and engaged in PD in "in ways they hadn't before." She spoke about how the PD impacted her: After racist events and resulting protests were discussed at PD, she felt supported by staff and administration to put up a BLM sign in her room without concerns of contentious discussions. Michelle said:

> I think most teachers at this school do want to listen to students and do want to learn from students. There's sometimes that initial defensiveness, but I think hearts are in the right place . . . I—There's been a shift after the murder of George Floyd, where it became, like, very okay—in a way that it wasn't before—and very encouraged to put up a Black Lives Matter sign.

While analyzing the staff progress during the interview, in an earlier conversation with the researcher, Michelle acknowledged in previous years, the equity efforts were contested, and some staff openly questioned some presenters and their credibility, claimed rights to comfort when difficult social justice topics were discussed. She described the overall atmosphere as tense, and staff were not in a safe space. In contrast,

equity PD efforts form the last 2 years were not contested anymore and instead hailed as eye openers. Michelle said:

> I think the example you brought up was a really good one as to illustrate that a couple of years ago that we had the big meeting. Things were, like, very tense, and a lot of us were not on the same page, but I think that it's less acceptable to be, like—to overtly like get in the way of equity work then than it used to be. And so it's no longer okay to just, you know, start arguing with presenters who come in to bring valid information. People, I think, want to be better and want to be doing better by their students of color. And I think that they're more aware of the fact that the experience for students of color at [the] high school, you know, is not what it should be.

Freddie saw staff had shifted their perceptions, and while levels of involvement varied, they said, "I have personally seen more engagement." Freddie believed most staff have changed some aspect of their practice or tried something new: "I think . . . most people are moving forward in some way." The frequency of the PD (bimonthly) had maintained momentum, as Freddie said, "This has just become a thing that we do 2 weeks a year, 2 weeks a month. I think the more that people will just be okay, this is just what we do." They emphasized differentiation and picking topics that engage staff:

> The more we've differentiated and more engagement. . . . So some have dived completely into this and completely changed their curriculum. Some of them have added a small unit, right? In terms of, we're just talking about—Like, say I'm decolonizing curriculum, right? And so there's varying—There's varying levels.

Diana talked about staff shifting perceptions and said: "totally" and

> I think that our staff members are starting to do the work . . . are being open to when other staff members call each other out when an incident happens in their classroom or when they feel, or when a student of color feels, uncomfortable.

Overall, she saw change: "I think staff members are taking those steps to change. I think that's a positive goal. That's good. So we've made a long way. We've been maybe growing." Diana saw a big shift for herself, too, from looking at the STAR survey data

and in her role as a counselor, which gave her a comprehensive view of the building climate:

> I think being involved totally changes your perspective on everything. . . . Looking at the percentages of students who don't feel comfortable in the building and figure out, okay, how can we change this? How can we create a more welcoming thing? So, I think, for me, seeing the whole of the building and that perspective has helped me. . . . This is the whole building that needs to change and make adjustments so that we're supporting all of our students.

With regards to staff progress, Daniel acknowledged, "I feel like our staff is growing" and that "for sure, most individuals are making progress or working towards the same point." Overall, Daniel thought each individual was putting in the effort to grow and learn. Daniel said his understanding grew from looking at gender issues in the building and talking with staff members, such as Freddie. Because gender issues were prevalent for students in his caseload, he felt he grew a lot in supporting them. He reflected:

> Queer students and then students that maybe don't identify as male or female—I have grown a lot in my understanding of that. . . . I just did not know much. And with how big of a queer population we have at [the school], I've been able to learn a lot.

Grecia agreed there was a staff shift, and she saw how teachers want to reach all their students:

> What I see [is] a shift. More staff in our building [are saying], 'Yes, I want to do more of these things. I want to be better at reaching all of my students. . . . I want to have greater engagement from all of my students.

She saw there was staff progress with understanding and acting on racial issues: "I definitely feel our teachers are more willing to do that.[meaning equity PD]" She added that due to staff turnout of some staff that was less willing to engage in equity PD and increased efforts in diversity hiring, "I definitely felt like teachers were more willing to

engage in a much more motivated way because our staff has changed some over the last few years."

Thomas saw personal change came from some books discussed at PDs or at the Book Club and felt staff had grown. He mentioned reading *Stamped From the Beginning*: "That one was really interesting. Black historiography has really changed my reading on Lincoln. He saw progress in understanding the U.S. Reconstruction period because "the Reconstruction is this big deal and this important topic" and the new emphasis it received with BLM protests. He described a conversation about Reconstruction he had with the principal:

> That long video that he had us watch—I actually saw [a colleague] in the hallway. He mostly taught American history and I said, you know, [teacher's name], do you remember this being this much emphasis on the Reconstruction when you were in high school or college or as a history teacher? And he goes, "No, we never really talked about the Reconstruction." And I get why. I mean, it provides a model for a time when Black people were very successful.

Overall, Thomas understood and reframed the staff shift as a matter of progress in understanding of how issues evolve, as do people:

> That's just part of the evolving discipline of history. And, you know, history is always trying to answer questions about the present by looking at the past. And so, as our present evolves, our interpretations of the past are going to go with it.

All participants clearly articulated and acknowledged that they had a perspective shift and also staff in general on their understanding of equity issues and this change was due to equity efforts in the building. Participants saw staff acting less fearful of race issues, trying harder, and more willing to engage with equity PD compared to earlier years when these efforts were not yet implemented.

### *Leadership Shift*

Several participants, such as Cleopatra, Cerulean, Freddie, Diana, and Grecia, spoke about a leadership shift with the importance of equity PD and emphasized how administrators and district leadership pushed the staff to be more involved in equity PD efforts. The push was evident in the specific, consistent, mandated time dedicated for equity development. Cleopatra acknowledged the leadership change toward prompting staff to participate in equity PD:

> That's definitely changed. I've . . . definitely [seen] that push to create lessons. We're really doing it this year. . . . The staff is being pushed to, like, actually create a lesson that is more inclusive. It's a lot more than what we've done before.

Cleopatra specifically referred to administrators in the building:

> [I] definitely see some changes with administration really trying a lot more—to be a little bit more understanding. . . . They are pushing the staff towards making those changes to create things that will be more inclusive and aware of students of color.

The administrators encouraged her to create more inclusive curriculum: "That's a good thing that's happening because I was more willing to do, bring in issues that are relating to us and less fearful of saying things."

Freddie commented on how administrators in the building had shifted and increased resources for special education from discretionary funds: "We're lucky, in some ways, that our [administration] allows us to use it [discretionary funds for the building] kind of freely." Diana saw the shift in leadership by how they changed discipline policies due to district driven initiatives: "Public schools, in the last couple of years, have changed their discipline." As a counselor, Diana interacted often with

administration through GAINS and the student intervention team and master schedules. She commented on the change:

> I think our administration has also been taking those steps and realizing how important it is to require those PDs, to require that every staff member be at this training, to require that we're not going to just do one training a month. We're going to do a training, two trainings, 2 times a month. [We need to] understand that [we] aren't doing a good job of supporting our students of color. And so we need to make a change.

Grecia appreciated the top-down district directive to have equity PD days for staff:

> Absolutely, this is, like, what the district is behind. The district is saying that this is important, I think, has helped some teachers who were on the verge of being really willing to tackle those things, then feel a little bit more comfortable to talk about this in [their] classroom.

She compared the experience to an earlier time, when administration did not support teachers in talking about race issues in the classroom:

> Because 5, 6 years ago, there were teachers in our district who got disciplined for . . . having, like, tough racial conversations in their classrooms. So I have seen how that has shifted in the last 2 years from being like, "I'm scared to talk about this" to "I need more tools to want to talk about this." And that's a shift.

Cerulean saw a shift in discipline policies, which had been enacted disproportionality and were unfavorable to minoritized students. She said data have changed: "I know that people feel it's far worse than it actually is. It is improved substantially in the last 3 years." From her perspective as an administrator, Cerulean talked about the push for equity PD. She said despite sentiment amongst teachers that administration needed to do more [to push the staff toward more progress with equity PD], learning about equity cannot be forced for people who do not want to engage. She said, "I think that part is hard," and while there are many good conversations and points being made in staff meetings about the value of equity, when it translates to classroom

efforts and change for students, “it doesn’t always reach all the students.” Cerulean felt leadership was always held accountable for systemic change: “Accountability is big for us.”

### *Specific Practices and Equity Professional Development Efforts*

All participants were asked what specific equity PD efforts were instrumental in creating strong senses of belonging and engagement for minoritized students. All participants found many equity PDs helpful for learning, growing, and developing culturally responsive classroom practices helped minoritized students feel included and engaged, and participants discussed how equity PD and CRP helped them, too. All participants mentioned PD helped, and many identified the ones they considered had the most impact on their practice and on students.

When asked what specific equity PD efforts or RET PD efforts in which she participated and were instrumental in creating an inclusive culture for minoritized students, Cleopatra responded with the leadership push to create inclusive lessons and decolonizing curriculum during the equity PD days: “That push to create lessons now that we’re really doing it this year, pushing the staff toward making those changes to create things that will be more inclusive and aware of students of color.” She picked Strong Start as an indicator of those changes. Strong Start was a set of PowerPoint presentations and classroom activities about identity, equity, race issues, community building, and taught support, building trust to aid students navigate the system and set the tone of an inclusive culture. These presentations were initially meant for start of the year in remote learning for 1 week, but they were extended every quarter after that and included in the beginning of the new school year as students came back to in person. In terms of

culturally responsive practices, she said, “Bringing more of the student choice and having them present things” had an impact on minoritized students feeling included. Student choice and voice and discussing current events, such as voter registration helped the minoritized students’ engagement, as Cleopatra said: “I think more giving them the choice and also, like, making sure that a lot of it does apply to what is happening. You know, bringing in current events into the world . . . into the classroom.”

When asked to pick the most helpful equity PD for creating a sense of belonging for minoritized students, Cerulean picked Strong Start:

> I really liked the Strong Start piece because it reaches the students, and the teachers at the same time, and it makes activities for the students, and the teachers enjoy, and they’re giving the grace of having this time to interact with their students.

In her administrator role, Cerulean interacted with minoritized students and families more often than other staff did. She explained that to improve sense of belonging

> It’s easier when you have built a rapport with a family, and they know that your heart is in the right place. . . . You’re looking for their child to—and all they listened to you a little more. That’s the most impactful, having the rapport, having the heart, looking out for their child’s interests. That’s the most important, if you did anything.

Cerulean used building rapport as her CRP practice and said:

> If there was anything you could do to make it all better quickly, it would be to be genuine because people can tell if you’re genuine or not. And to genuinely care for their students. And for them being successful and to listen to them and to apologize if you’re wrong, you know. And even if you don’t feel you’re wrong, an apology goes a long way.

When asked which culturally responsive practices and equity PD efforts are most impactful for engaging minoritized students, Cerulean picked Strong Start, Book Club, the school mural, and RET:

> I think Strong Start reaches the most [students], and programs like that, where we teach everyone. I think the book clubs were good for teachers to open their eyes a little, mostly in the discussions, but you had had to have built a real rapport with your group for people to open up and have a really enriched conversation. And I think RET is fabulous for some students, but not everybody. I liked the mural they did. I thought that was wonderful, you know, when they team that. I really think that has made a lot of them proud of their school.

Grecia's answers for most impactful PD equity efforts for creating an inclusive culture for minoritized students mirrored some of Cerulean's and Cleopatra's answers. She said, "Continuing to bring resources and tenets of White supremacy, RET work, CRP, teachers reflecting on their practices," and Strong Start were the most impactful PD in her opinion. Grecia said:

> I know that the feedback that we got last year from teachers was they appreciated having time and groups to work with on the things that they were really interested in and working on around racial equity. And I think people felt like they made personal progress. I feel like just continuing to bring resources around talking about the tenants of White supremacy, the culturally responsive teaching, and continuing to, like, bring that to the forefront and provide information to teachers, having teachers work on their own and reflect on their own and then think about their own practices. . . . Strong Start, people loved it. They did. They loved it.

When asked about reducing disengagement for minoritized students and equity PD and CRP that she found most impactful, Grecia picked bringing in kids' backgrounds, connecting curriculum to real life, having many entry points for an assignment, and student choice. She said:

> Culturally responsive things really thinking about how am I letting students express what they want to talk about? How am I bringing in their experiences? How am I bringing in their, like, family background? [That] helps change things in the classroom the most because once you get kids kind of feeling like they can talk about their background and once they feel comfortable, then they engage a little bit more often. I do always try and connect what's happening [to], you know, real life, right? Like if we're talking about something, I'm always trying to come back to like, why does this matter right now? Why should you even care about this? And so, when I can give students—like, ask them why it's important to them.

Michelle was grateful and thought all PD on equity helped with creating a sense of belonging and engagement for minoritized students: “All PD helps. I think probably all of them “and specifically “the last one: A Long Talk was memorable.” A Long Talk was an equity PD with outside presenters who were social activists and African Americans. The principal invited them in for a 3-day equity PD. The presenters had initial videos explaining historic facts about laws that put African American at a disadvantage, BLM, showed politicians who were openly racist yet accepted publicly and endorsed. They presenters assigned homework and discussions posts for staff, and their presentations were interactive, staff practiced with several scenarios on how to interrupt racism and address issues. For equity PD, she thought the outside presenters from A Long Talk were most impactful for staff:

> A Long Talk. I really liked that because I thought that the presenters were super knowledgeable and very passionate, and I liked that they had us all do homework to sort of get us to a standard level of understanding about race in America. Before we, like, delved into the conversation. The role play practice I thought was especially helpful. And I wish we would do more of that.

She explained that due to recent BLM protests and societal changes, it is no longer accepted to ignore equity work in schools.

> I think there were a lot of teachers at this most recent PD that felt like they were really moved by it and engaged by it. So I think it’s partially that. I think it’s also like what is happening at the societal level. And so, I think there was just a shift culturally, in general, in our country, after the murder of George Floyd. And so, I think that some teachers who are not as engaged by these [conversations and have not been] as committed to . . . equity work decided to get on board. I think overall that teachers for, like, the past, like, year or so have been more willing to, like—I think they’re more aware of kind of some of their blind spots and they’re more open to change.

Michelle thought STAR and their involvement with equity PD was instrumental for building inclusiveness for minoritized students. STAR helped with hiring diverse staff,

brought student voice, especially minoritized student voice, to the fore front. She explained:

> I would say all of those [efforts] probably contributed towards it [staff perspective shift on equity]. I mean, I think definitely, like, STAR, I'm really proud of, and I think that they have helped. They have helped improve the climate at school, especially because they're a student-led group. And it's—There's just been more of an emphasis on staff listening to students, which I think is better for everybody, but especially better for students of color. . . . Like, they really were able to feel like they took a leadership role at the school—'cause they did. And they got administration's attention. . . . Certainly when the effort was made to include like students on the hiring committees and listening to student voice. I think that went a long way. [One teacher], for example, was hired from a committee that had a STAR student on it. And I think having her at the school went a long way to getting people to, like, rethink our view—or our White, like, view of the school.

Michelle commented on the impact with equity PD and the power of student voice to create a staff shift. STAR represents the minoritized students 'voice and they had been presenting and leading PD over the past 2 years. Michelle said:

> Just because it [historical facts and videos on race issues] made it so real to me. Like, you just—Like, when you—Like, any of the PD that we've had, where student voices are featured, it just makes it very concrete. And so, you see in here exactly how what you're doing in class impacts that student. So it—I think creates a lot of motivation for change.

In terms of reducing minoritized students' disengagement, Michelle picked decolonizing curriculum and changing grading policies as most impactful:

> I would probably pick diversifying my curriculum, just because I think that it did used to rely too heavily on like White, Western classics. And I feel like now it does a much better job of pulling from many different voices and backgrounds. I just think [I] teach a better class now than I used to. I would also say, with grading, like, how we only now do the 50% missing for a missing assignment that they still get 50% in a grade book. I've just been looking—because it's the end of the quarter—at my grades. And I was like shocked that there was not a single person who was failing yet. I had some low D's, but there was nobody failing. So that's something that I think will make a really big difference for students, too.

Daniel affirmed that all PD helped and how he had been in "mainly, it's just been whatever PD has been asked of us through the school." From his perspective, it is enough to learn and

> If the staff implement the culturally responsive practices and the PD, I think that it's really important that teachers who may be—or just people—that we understand that the culturally responsive practices and the equity training, all of that stuff is amazing.

Daniel picked staff collaboration for inclusiveness as most impactful because it led to addressing race issues at the institution and to changing grading policies in the classroom:

> So one that stood out to me the most . . . it's our building collaborating on making [the school] better . . . are the ones that are most beneficial because we can address issues that are specific or unique to our building and how we can make it more comfortable for our students. I think when we have the ability to collaborate as a staff and as a student body, those have been the most beneficial ones. [Collaborations] on how we can make it more inclusive are the most beneficial equity PDs we can do. [I] think that changing, with the pandemic, changing the, like, the late work policy and stuff like that, I think was very beneficial.

Daniel thought student ownership and staff collaboration were the most impactful in reducing disengagement for minoritized students:

> I think the ones where it's staff collaborating together, and whether that's off of a larger equity [PD that transitioned into a small group work for collaborating] but just whenever. . . staff has a chance to work together. That's where, I think, it becomes the most beneficial. I think the biggest one is just giving [students] ownership. So like, like bringing them into the conversation. Like, so when we start to actually get a little bit closer, I asked them, what are their goals? Like, what are you trying to do? Are you trying to—Do you have a certain GPA you want to strive for? Do you want to go to college? What kind of in college? You know, and then whatever they said in that moment, I have it. So whenever they're not wanting to be in class or getting behind on stuff, I remind them like, hey, this was your goal. When you were not emotional, this was your goal. Now you're straying away from it. You're drifting away from your goal. Like, what do we need to do to get you back?

Diana advocated for continuing equity PD to create an inclusive culture as the most important PD:

> I think it's to continue to advocate for students of color and doing it in a way that everybody sees that you're involved. Um, we need to continue to provide racial equity training to our staff. It can't just be one thing 1 year, 1 time, 1 day. It needs to be continuous for us to all grow. Doing things, not just 1 month. We need to continue to do things every day, every, every month.

Diana felt continuing with equity PD has created the staff shift and also the administration shift. In terms of CRP, as part of her role, Diana and GAINS coordinators had check-in meetings with minoritized students to create a safe space and combat racism. She thought it was impactful for the BIPOC students.

> GAINS staff and myself and a couple other people, we would have meetings with African American males and other students of color to kind of see what's going on in the building, check in with them. We created a kind of a safe space for them, just to, like, tell us what's going on. We could further help them take the steps to kind of report that bullying and harassment and those microaggressions.

She felt the ethnic studies class that was approved by the district and the current civics engagement course were instrumental for inclusiveness. She detailed:

> It was awesome because last year [the district] public schools came out with a Black studies U.S. history course. It was in place of U.S. history. . . . So you would do one semester of Black studies. And hopefully, we can have that. 'Cause I think that is something so critical and would be a perfect class for juniors to take as their U.S. history. This year, we do have an anti-racism and civic engagement course. She [the teacher who is teaching the civic engagement class] is amazing. She has really taken a leadership role on our race and equity team. And she's also, like, our ASB teacher. So that has been awesome to have somebody in ASB who is also thriving to create a safe environment for our students of color and making sure that students of color voices are heard through ASB. So that's been awesome.

Dina felt calling out microaggressions when they happen was most impactful to reducing disengagement for minoritized students and making progress on issues minoritized students face in classrooms:

> I think I do see staff members calling out and calling in, calling out those not okay—those microaggressions, those harassment, those bullying things. And then calling in the students, whether that's calling them into work with staff members that are trained more in race inequity or if that staff member is trained

> in that field, they're calling them in and having that conversation and having that student learn from that mistake and move forward.

Freddie commented that all PD helped, yet staff needed differentiation because not everyone was ready for the same, fast-paced, results-oriented implementation. Freddie emphasized applicability of equity PD and with regards to differentiation they explained that what might be common knowledge for someone could be a revelation and a groundbreaking moment of truth for others. Thus, for Freddie differentiation was how to go in the equity and social justice awareness journey and its impact on classroom practices. Freddie thought differentiation as equity PD for staff and in the classroom makes the biggest impact on creating an inclusive culture for minoritized students:

> I think all PD efforts are helpful. I think everything moves us forward. The big thing with the differentiation, we started with a lot of people wanting people to move faster, and I totally agree. I want everybody to move faster. I also know that we have to approach people where they are and work with them there. So I think that there are some that I would—for me, would not be as impactful, but for other people, maybe that light bulb moment of "I need to kickstart what I'm doing," the more impactful it is because the more people see use. I think the more practical a PD is the better, and so we offered—not only do we offer differentiation in target [choosing different equity PD tracks], but also in groups. So we had small groups. We had individuals. We had partners working together. And then we did a lot of whole group sessions. Some of them were better received than others and the whole group sessions. And some of them were intentionally created to challenge the staff.

Freddie also picked differentiation as the most impactful in reducing disengagement for minoritized students:

> I think the best, the biggest practice, is differentiation—and action, right? If people think they're going to get something out of it, they're going to want to do it. If people think that it's directed towards them, they're going to want to do it.

They added that building strong relationships and decolonizing curriculum are impactful in reducing disengagement:

> I think that, you know, every teacher has strengths. Every teacher has weaknesses. Some teachers are, like, very personal, will know every single student in their class. They have really strong relationships, right? And so, for those teachers, I want them to work on, like, how do you change your curriculum? For other teachers, who are very focused on curriculum but don't have relationships with their students, what they need to focus on is building those relationships, right? And that relationship building is a culturally responsive practice.

Freddie, just as Daniel shared, felt for them personally, collaboration had the most impact in shaping them to learn about equity and lead equity PD for staff:

> I would say the most useful for me, personally, was—We had a small group, racial equity book club, for, like, 3 years, my first 3 years here. And that was really impactful for me, both because I love reading—I learned a lot from reading, and I like to like learn independently. That leans into my learning style—and to be able to talk with a group of staff who are committed to the work and volunteering and to the work in the mornings, right? It gave me a crew of people who I knew would be willing to let me bounce ideas off of and challenge me. And that really has helped me because I know that I can go over there and be like, "I don't know what to do with this." And I can get honest feedback. And that honest feedback is also, like, knowing you can get honest feedback on your mistakes, especially around racial equity, I think, is essential because so often we, [ White] people are upset to [face equity issues], and again, I know it's a societal thing. I think part of it is, you know, White supremacy, the idea of, like, the right to comfort, right? And people don't want to be called out, and that's fine.

In terms of CRP they used, Freddie thought listening to students, representing their identities in the room, and learning about their students were the most impactful practice for inclusiveness:

> Starting your classroom with acknowledging . . . making our students visible in your classroom. . . . I think that's a huge piece, right? Students need to know that they're seen and all parts of them are seen. You can see the Black Lives Matter flag next to me. I try to—My room should reflect the students that I want to feel comfortable in my room. So, I try to be very conscious of, like—Just the first thing is, I want my students to walk in the door and see themselves. And then I want them to hear me say: this is their classroom. I think that's the most important is to really just listen to your students.

Thomas felt that the Book Club was the most influential equity PD for him because it created an inclusive culture and reduced disengagement for minoritized

students: “I think the Book Club with has been the best one.” He used the Book Club ideas he learned there in the classroom to stimulate leadership qualities for a minoritized student. The other practice he felt was instrumental as CRP and helped with reducing disengagement was showing care and having rapport with students:

> [I] mean, usually what causes a kid to turn it around is just, you know, me showing that I care, me getting on their case, me letting them know like, “Hey, I want you to turn this essay in. I’m frustrated. Your are grades as low. I want to see you do better.” This is just the direct one-to-one, you know, just kind of showing that I care for kids who are struggling.

Thomas agreed PD can influence growth, and despite being reluctant to acknowledge any PD as transformational for him, he used some ideas in his practice: “I couldn’t point to any one thing. I tend to read these things. You know, take influence from them. That becomes a part of my regular practice. And then, whatever residue there is in my practice.” He was interested in grading for equity as equity PD and BL as CRP: “You know, I was excited to finally have the laptops to enable me to go back to doing this. Yeah, the grading for equity.”

Thomas’s responses fit mostly with counterthemes, a common thread of doubt about whether the efforts were genuine or just performative and whether the information presented was mostly someone’s perspective and not necessarily a comprehensive one. Thomas said he “always looks for the alternative perspective.” He doubted the STAR survey results, minoritized students’ representation in AP classes, and barriers, saying he did “not recall the White students feeling super included.” He questioned the need to eliminate tracking system for mathematics and language arts and also some CRP, such as student choice in reading, to stimulate engagement in the classroom because “students chose texts that were not difficult enough for them.” Thus, he believed they were setting

themselves up not to be ready for AP classes. The doubt and mistrust in the equity PD efforts happened despite having a variety of presenters, such as Native Americans, who came to the building, hearing from minoritized staff in the building, seeing staff engaged with outside presenters who were African Americans, having choices for equity books to read in Book Club and choosing his own PD path. His perspective about equity PD efforts and their impact was different than all other participants. Despite his reserve, he commented on the equity PD efforts:

> I wouldn't say that I implemented any of them in any kind of programmatic way. I feel like PD just kind of influences me in terms of what I'm thinking about, what I'm talking about with kids, the direction I go in.

All participants chose the most impactful equity PD and CRP practices for them and staff to reduce disengagement and create an inclusive culture for minoritized students. Many of these responses had commonalities such as Book Club, decolonizing curriculum, student voice, Strong Start, grading policies, and other specific CRP practices which will be combined by participants choosing them next.

**Book Club.** Many staff members referred to Book Club or personal reading in their personal journeys, getting the race conversation started, creating staff awareness, and creating momentum for the later changes and equity PD efforts. Freddie pointed to the racial equity Book Club and how that was suited to their own personal journey and their choice of equity PD for this year (i.e., grading for equity). Thomas mentioned how the Book Club influenced growth at the school and his classroom practices. While he expressed doubt about many practices and mistrust about intentionality, the STAR survey, and even student voice, he said:

> Yeah, I think the most influential PD that I've had over the last couple of years was the Book Club. When we read Christopher Emdin's *For White Folks Who*

> *Teach in the Hood* and just some of the stuff around giving students responsibility in the classroom.

Diana explained how the Book Club started conversations at the school: "So I think [there was] a big uptick when we started doing a race and equity book club. And I think that kind of started the bigger conversation around race and equity things here at [the school]. That push." Cerulean saw that while staff had been less open to talking about race issues, especially in her supervisors' opinion, Book Club helped staff open up, show vulnerabilities, and trust each other. She emphasized that the more staff had cross-cultural interaction and talked, the more they understood the differences:

> Our Book Club, we did a lot about equity, and I felt good about it because people began feeling very safe and they even—The people of different cultures opened up. I was proud that they were—felt safe enough to tell their stories at our Book Club. I think the book clubs were good for teachers to open their eyes a little, mostly in the discussions. . . . I think that the discussions is, you know—Talking between minorities is what's going to change people and realizing everybody's the same, but culturally we've had really learned and done different things. And just because you understand at one way, and they understand it this way, you know, there's no better way. They're just different, but you have to be able to talk about it.

Four participants chose the Book Club as the starting point or the most important for them to grow their understanding of equity. They talked about the relevance of the Book Club PD, because it brought to light understanding cultural differences, expanded their perspective on equity, sparked their interest to do more personal reading, join another book club, or be more aware of social justice topics and could handle conversations on equity with people of different viewpoints.

**Decolonizing Curriculum.** Several participants talked about decolonizing curriculum, as creating a positive shift and as something they chose to work on personally and as an equity PD this school year. Michelle referred to her older curriculum

only focusing on “dead, White males” and shared her thoughts on positive shifts. Some of her changes were prompted by the school librarian, who said of the old curriculum, “Whose classics are we reading?” and pushed the department to have choice reading. Decolonization was one of the equity efforts and CRP practices Michelle identified as impactful. She explained that using resources and texts that make all students feel represented engaged minoritized students, and she felt the practice could shift power to students.

> Over the past, like 5, 6 years, [I] really tried to go back through my curriculum and make sure to get new books in there and new stories in there. We do a choice reading unit as well. And so that I hope ensures that students can choose any texts that they feel engaged by and where they feel represented. And then towards the end of the year, we do race in America. And it’s where we talk about race and racism really openly and read a whole bunch about it. And like the books for that, I had students come with me to the PTSA [Parent-Teacher-Student Association] to get a grant for a book or books that are written by authors of color and they feature protagonists who are teenagers of color. Really trying to make sure that there’s a lot of diversity in there and that everyone in the class is going to, at some point in the year, see themselves represented somehow. The curriculum is one thing, but if you flip your classroom so that the teacher is not the ultimate authority figure, teacher is someone who learns in conjunction with the students, and we learn from each other, and getting rid of a little bit of that problematic power dynamic, where the teacher’s in control of everything, that, I think, it gets closer to actual decolonization. Now, it does a much better job of pulling from many different voices and backgrounds. I think I teach a better class now than I used to.

Diana detailed that decolonizing “is relevant in a lot of humanity classes. So English and history, our curriculum isn’t very flexible to showing people of color and their experiences throughout our history,” and “doing history more on people of color, instead of just what happened in the civil war. Focus on what amazing things people of color have done in our history.” She said history teachers started talking more about current events than in previous years they taught and compared past content in history to present and how the department tried to create a positive climate for students: “I know

our history teachers have really bonded and come together to create a safe and positive environment."

Freddie was aware of the decolonizing efforts in the history department, despite being in special education, and confirmed how "the history team has been doing a great job of trying to do that last few years because of all the classes." Freddie spoke about their classroom efforts at decolonizing with Alex, a math program that uses diverse names and faces as student generated profiles when anonymizing or in application problems, and how "I love the fact that it's not just like leaning into White norm."

Grecia mentioned that in her role as science teacher, she became aware of injustices of scientific advancement, and these injustices were in contrast to the dominant narrative of science as an impartial objective field:

> A lot of, like, really important science has been built on Black bodies and the abuse of Black bodies, and then, you know, how—What are the things we have in place now to make sure that it doesn't happen? And then also what's the responsibility of science community to make, to repair that damage? Because I feel like science—Science likes to pretend that it's objective, and we're not.

Grecia's major equity focus for the year was decolonizing curriculum, examining her curriculum to "decenter the White science voice." She felt that was the most impactful practice for herself and her students to create belonging and engagement. She felt the practice "has changed my view hugely on what I'm doing in my classroom."

Thomas, the participant who was the most skeptical about equity efforts, spoke about decolonizing as a "really interesting challenge to the enlightenment and the scientific method." He was intrigued about "having to go deep on an epistemology and really question the scientific method." He said:

> As far as like—Oh, Christopher Columbus, isn't this big giant hero and neither is Abraham Lincoln. I'm certainly intrigued by what [the music teacher] was saying

> last week around, like, how hard it is to get sheet music that's classical and appropriate for orchestras but isn't a bunch of Europeans.

Cleopatra spoke about decolonization, as admin pushed staff to create inclusive lessons, and she chose it as her PD this year, "acknowledging that [multiple cultures] do exist." She had spoken to her class about and brought in "current events, like the voting registration."

**Student Voice.** Michelle emphasized learning from students and staying aware of personal biases and blind spots. She shared one key classroom norm: "Think for yourself. The teacher might be wrong." She explained, "I'm hugely problematic in a lot of ways. And just being like open and vulnerable with them about that, I think goes a long way." Michelle said:

> At the front of my classroom, this classroom expectations list—The third one is the one that's most important is think for yourself; the teacher might be wrong. And I really emphasize that with students at the beginning of the year, so that they know that I'm someone who's comfortable being called out, that I want them to let me know if I've done something wrong. I think, like, the biggest thing, if I could only do one of those things, it would just be to think for yourself. The teacher might be wrong. And letting students know that I'll listen, that I'm open to feedback, and that I know I don't have all the answers, and I'm not perfect.

When asked what was the most impactful PD or equity effort for staff, Michelle pointed to her involvement in STAR and how she learned a lot from STAR students because, for her, student voice had the most profound impact on her learning and practice. She called STAR leadership the "most instrumental" for staff and "hugely instrumental" for her. Michelle said:

> I would say STAR, just because—Goes back to student voice, the students that I worked with on STAR. . . . They took a leadership role at the school. They got administration's attention. . . . I think that they, like, move things further and that staff were paying more attention because they were given the platform to at least have their voices heard. . . . I think that would probably be the one that I would classify as most instrumental. I think that just, like, the learning that I've done

> from STAR students, that's been hugely instrumental because if I don't hear about something in my class. I've heard about it in STAR, there have been times where STAR students, like, mention a policy that they think is problematic. And I think like, oh my God, I have that policy, my classroom. And so it gives me a heads up to, like, go change it. I think definitely STAR, I'm really proud of, and I think that they have helped improve the climate at school, especially because they're a student-led group. And it's—There's just been more of an emphasis on staff listening to students, which I think is better for everybody, but especially better for students of color.

Grecia also spoke about the power of student voice and how she is "always trying to make space for students to share their background, their experience, their life, not only to share, but to, like—Being really intentional about how are you talking about experiences."

**Grading Policies.** Several participants pointed to the effectiveness of changing grading practices. The grading policies changed during the pandemic due to extraordinary circumstances. The teaching staff, who usually have autonomy over their own grading practices voted yes on a no zero grade for missed work for the entire building. They also voted yes on accepting late work at no penalty until the end of the semester. Thus, with the staff vote these grading proposals became policies for last year. These grading practices were spearheaded by the district and adopted in other buildings too. Daniel explained the new grading practices adopted during the pandemic helped struggling students, and for those students, these equity efforts were "the most beneficial" and "made it more manageable for students." Daniel said, "It's really, really helpful for our most struggling students." The pandemic quarter and semester grades were disproportionately lower for minoritized students, especially the ones who had issues with connectivity, support, and access. He saw the issues late-work policies created for students who were on target before the pandemic calling it "a double-edged sword."

Grecia spoke about how she had already embedded flexibility and similar grading policies before they were mandated and voted by staff: "I feel like my grading policy has

been so wide open for so long that I—It's not like I changed a whole lot during COVID because I was already really doing a lot of those."

Cerulean spoke about the importance of teachers being flexible and how adjusting grading policies helped:

> Even though a lot of the grading systems [were] forced . . . by the pandemic efforts, you know, a lot of people have accepted it and, you know, can see the benefits. Although everybody's not doing the same thing still, but it's getting more like that. And people are open to accommodating students more, a lot more reteaching, a lot more retesting a lot. A lot more of all that.

Diana spoke about the importance of being flexible and how the staff is being "more creative in how they can support students being more creative and . . . how they can meet have students meet standards being more accommodating to students and kind of seeing where students are at." Michelle detailed change in her own practice and the beneficial impact on students; she credited the PD:

> My grading policies have really gotten different than they used to be. I was very rigid and inflexible, but—And I credit the PD that we've had about like the problems with policies that are too rigid with really pushing me in the other direction. And so at this point, like, I accept late work until the end of the semester. Students know that they can always improve their grade, that it's never too late. It's the end of the quarter. I was, like, shocked that there was not a single person who was failing yet. . . . That's something that I think will make a really big difference for students too.

Overall, five participants emphasized the relevance of changing the grading practices during an unusual situation. These changes became schoolwide policies, were enforced, and helped students that struggled with other commitments, mental issues, and had less access to technology or reliable internet, feel that they were not too far away from earning credit. At the beginning of the pandemic, it was mostly minoritized students who were falling behind, because some of them were also the ones coming from a low socioeconomic background.

**Strong Start.** Several staff members identified Strong Start as impactful for students and staff. Daniel argued Strong Start built community and gave students voice:

> We did a Strong Start and I worked with [one teacher] on community. And we worked on a PD of writing what your ideal classroom would look and feel like. Then, we generated a word cloud[1] based off of student feedback and what the teachers submitted. That was open to all students, but it was also giving opportunities for minoritized students to have a voice. And we made sure that every single word that came back to us was on that word cloud. And then, I did one about my identity, and we put that together and then gave some examples for that and then had students write about their identity. A lot of students, specifically students of color—and came up to me and thanked me and said that it was really good for them.

Grecia felt positively about Strong Start: "Strong Start, people loved it. . . . All of those things, like, being really intentional in Strong Start that seemed like people were really responsive to it. They seem to feel like they weren't scared to do it." Cerulean, who was one of leaders for Strong Start. She said what she really appreciated about it was the equity embedded in it. She "really liked the Strong Start piece" because

> it reaches the students and the teachers at the same time, and it makes activities for the students, and the teachers enjoy it because they're given the grace of having this time to interact with their students and do these activities.

Cerulean explained how Strong Start was supposed to be an activity to be done during the pandemic, as way to interact with students virtually and give them guidance for to come back-to-school through remote learning, but it had so much success, adherence, and commitment from staff that it happened 3 times already. She felt Strong Start was most impactful because "Strong Start reaches the most of them [all students and minoritized students] and programs like that, where we teach everyone." Cerulean said:

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[1] Word cloud was a digital image representing a collection of students' feelings .

> I really liked Strong Start. Teachers are already—Teachers asked us last week, "Are y'all gonna do one for second quarter?" When we started doing Strong Start, it was one time. You volunteered for [it]. . . . It was so successful. We did it 3 times last year 'cause people wanted it. They really enjoyed being a part of that. . . . We just were getting new members, but no one's backed out. So that's really good to see.

Cleopatra also appreciated Strong Start being inclusive and because it helped with students' senses of belonging:

> I'm seeing the Strong Starts . . . which is a good thing to see, and that is pushing a lot more inclusivity. And, you know, this year, Strong Starts were really good with like pronouns and having that being brought up, [which] we didn't before.

Overall, Strong Start was chosen as most impactful when it came to engaging and including all voices, especially BIPOC students, by four participants. They expressed how welcomed these relationships building activities were for all students who were remote and how since all staff implemented them students got a cohesive introduction to the beginning of the year that made them feel included.

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.** Many participants talked about the importance of using CRP. For Daniel, the most instrumental practices were ones "where people are trying—The teachers that [are] already doing a lot of inclusive practices" and making sure that "they were building a culture in their classroom." In terms of impact, his opinion was that "the main changes are usually the teachers who are already doing similar steps." Cerulean thought that it was "wonderful if teachers use it," but there are still challenges with CRP due to lack of resources and making sure all students are respectful. Freddie talked about classroom practices in general and explained teachers who have strong, culturally diverse curriculum could go further in building their rapport with students, and the ones who have their students' trust could spend more time strengthening their curriculum. Freddie said:

> Some teachers are, like, very personal [and] will know every single student in their class. They have really strong relationships, right? And so for those teachers, I want them to work on like, how do you change your curriculum for other teachers who are very focused on curriculum but don't have relationships with their students? What they need to focus on is building those relationships. Relationship building is a culturally responsive practice.

Grecia detailed her classroom practices and goals:

> I feel like just continuing to bring resources around the tenants of White supremacy, the culturally responsive teaching, and continuing—Bring that to the forefront and provide information to teachers. Teachers are hungry to implement it in their classrooms, but there's still—It takes time.

When asked about the CRP she used, Cleopatra mentioned how bringing in different mathematicians from diverse backgrounds captured students' interests: "Oh yeah, they do. They do like that. And a lot of them, I did have a few students say that they appreciated it because they never knew that they existed."

Thomas's view was in sharp contrast with the rest of the participants. He felt the equity PD was not needed for him since he had been using the CRP practices already for many years and he felt he was well read on diverse perspective already. He questioned the values of the PD, asking why these practices are linked to equity since they are just good classroom practices and these CRP practices do no need the label of being equitable. He felt these PDs do not help minoritized students and said:

> I don't think any of them, right? Like I said, it's this paradox of the harder we try, the worse it gets. So, you know, I don't see a direct correlation between increased equity PD and increase students' sense of belonging.

Six of the participants talked about the relevance of using CRP practices in their interactions with minoritized students and five of them thought these practices are relevant.

**Theme: Barriers to Staff Progress**

All participants were asked to give feedback about staff progress and equity PD. While they all said there had been positive change for themselves, for the staff in general, and for minoritized students, they also identified issues, such as (a) the shift is too slow; (b) there are teachers who do not have positive SSRs with students; (c) there is not enough support to push forward the change; and (d) there are systemic issues; and (e) there are leadership issues.

***Shift is Slow***

Several participants, such as Diana, Grecia, Michelle, Freddie, Cerulean, Cleopatra, and Daniel mentioned the shift is slow and why; they wanted to have measurable progress. Diana categorized the slow shift as typical of PWIs: "[This] high school is an example of what a lot of schools in America are." She explained lots of schools struggle with "inclusion," and she added, "I think that a lot of schools struggle with the same things that we struggle in, whether you're in a predominantly people of color neighborhood or not." Diana thought that the shift is not easy and won't happen overnight, due to systemic issues: "It's okay that we are taking those steps to learn, and it's not going to happen overnight. It's going to take a lot of hard work to make that happen."

Grecia argued it is hard to implement changes because levels of commitment and interest could vary: "I feel like I don't know enough yet about what people are doing. I know some teachers absolutely, like, got a fire lit underneath them, and they're like, 'This is what I want to work on this year.'" She explained going back to school was overwhelming for teachers, so they reverted to past, habitual practices due to less time to

prepare team building activities and realizing students had many content gaps to be filled this year, which took priority over taking time to establish relationships with students. She commented, “I also kind of feel like everybody’s drowning right now.”

Cleopatra said the shift was not happening as fast as she would like it: “I think it’s something we’re trying to work towards for. . . . I guess it’s not going as fast as I would like it.” Cerulean’s view was in line with Cleopatra’s, saying that the shift would not be easy and would not happen fast enough, which caused tension amongst staff members due to readiness levels. She felt the slow progress with equity affected minoritized families, who continued to suffer the consequences of unresolved racial issues from the past that persisted: “It’s an ongoing, developing process that’s not moving fast enough for a lot of people. . . . People are trying, but it’s not fast enough for the minoritized folks the kids and for their families. That’s hard.”

Michelle spoke about teacher resistance, as an issue that persists for a few staff members, who questioned why the equity PD efforts had to happen and the time invested in them. Michelle explained some teachers preferred to focus solely on teaching their content, saw changes as unnecessary, and were unwilling to invest time in equity PD efforts: “I think there’s a smaller minority of teachers, but definitely a presence: ‘Why do we have to do this? I don’t have time for this.’ [Saw it] as extra work.” Her view was that bigger shifts were needed, as small progress can be reversed with pushback:

> All of the efforts that I mentioned, they’ve like pushed us along. They’ve inch[ed] along, but we still have so far to go. So it’s like, you take a little baby step almost, and then often there’ll be something that pushes it back.

Daniel also accounted for teacher resistance as to why the shift was slow. He explained PD does not produce change for everyone in the same way:

> I feel like, there's always going to be a group of teachers, unfortunately, that maybe are kind of set in their ways and are receptive to hearing stuff, but actually putting that to action doesn't happen as, as quickly.

Thomas' opinion was quite different from the rest of the participants' opinions. He said, with equity PD, "the harder we try, the worse it gets. Seems puzzling. I don't know, you know. This school tries way harder than anywhere else I've ever been. It often seems like the harder we try, the worse it gets." Thomas concluded that for him a faster push does not seem to be the solution to the low sense of belonging and disengagement for minoritized students.

***Not Enough Support***

Besides teacher resistance, several participants such as Diana, Freddie, Cerulean, and Daniel explained the shift was slow because there was not enough support to implement change. Diana commented teachers should notice racial issues, but they need more training: "It's hard and, I think some teachers don't have all the training that they could have to spot those things."

Freddie, from their perspective working in special education, explained there were not enough devoted resources, especially for translating individualized education plans (IEPs) into multiple languages to communicate with families. They mentioned staff fear, which stemmed from lack of support and consequences for staff when addressing sensitive topics: "I think sometimes people are afraid to do certain things, or things have backfired in a different way."

Freddie pointed to AP curriculum as being regimented and less culturally responsive and to the lack of resources for teachers to change it: "AP is so regimented

from college board. A lot of our teachers don't have the ability to modify curriculum to make it more culturally responsive or culturally diverse."

Cerulean was of a similar opinion about staff fear:

> It's very uncomfortable for some people because they're always afraid they're going to say the wrong thing at the wrong time. And I know if they get in that situation, they have a hard time getting out of the situation.

Daniel mentioned teachers asked for his support to lead race and equity conversation because they were afraid conversations would backfire; there were trust issues, and they did not feel competent addressing the race issues. "I know that some teachers aren't comfortable leading conversations that are maybe more sensitive or aren't involving their curriculum." Grecia dedicated her time to decolonizing her curriculum and to being a RET leader, and she was aware decolonization needs resources, time, and effort: "I know it takes a lot of time and effort, probably and resources, and I'm probably still not doing it all that well." She added families need to be supported, too, especially families of African American males:

> We still don't have enough connection, especially to families of color of male students. But that's a place where I still feel like there's like part of our population of students of color that we don't get a chance to really talk to and ask them, "What do you want? What do you need?" And I always am thinking about like, whose voice are we not soliciting information from?

Several participants offered rationale as to why the shift is slow. They explained that there is not enough support for the change in perspectives, staff are not quite yet competent at directly addressing race issues or microaggressions with students, curriculum is not diverse, it takes time to change it, and there is not enough support for minoritized students' families to express their voice and be part of the change.

### *Harmful Staff Student Relationships*

Diana, Daniel, Cerulean, and Grecia thought harmful SSRs between staff and minoritized students are impediments to progress. As an administrator, Cerulean saw some teachers had a harder time than other teachers with diverse cultures or understanding nuances of racism:

> All through my teaching—years, some people understand, race and interacting with BIPOC students more than others. I think everyone feels that they [White people] are relating to them [BIPOC] are trying really hard to, but it's not as natural for them. And they don't always say the right things or put on the most welcoming environment.

Cerulean had witnessed situations in which teachers damaged SSRs, despite efforts put into making students of color feel included and supported: "We can do a lot of work and get students engaged, and then they have one bad experience with a teacher, and it triggers and sets it back even more. It's hard." She saw discipline for certain teachers with minoritized students because some teachers did not understand diverse cultures. She said:

> Even though they're trying, I think they're fearful that they don't understand what they're doing. I think that not everyone understands what people call racism in school. People with less experience with cultures [have a] harder time understanding that there are differences. They don't understand that that's part of a person's culture rather than misbehavior or loudness.

Grecia explained while acts of racism happen throughout the school, many teachers were unaware, as they are too preoccupied with their curriculum to notice that they do not have the rapport with minoritized students to have those conversations. Grecia spoke about herself in comparison to other staff:

> I'm always shocked when I hear these stories of racism and identity harassment at school because I never heard these stories from students. It's been going on for years. For years. This has been going on for years, and it's still not solved, and my

> question is always—I hear these all the time. So now the question needs to be "Why are you not hearing this?"

Diana explained that even though many staff members had good rapport with students, some harm the relationships. Negative SSR is detrimental to minoritized students, and it can damage their academic performance:

> Unfortunately, we do have staff members that [have] marginalized students, and students of color don't feel comfortable around [them]. And that experience can really, you know, harm their academics. . . . If a teacher does not have a trusting relationship with a student of color, it's not going to be good. And that student of color will not feel safe in that classroom.

Daniel explained SSRs between minoritized students and some teachers are problematic due to unengaging practices, such as independent work time. Students came to him from teachers who had a regimented curriculum, while classes where community building and interaction are emphasized engaged them. Sitting in an unengaging environment, where they might be one of very few students of color makes these students feel out of place and wanting to leave:

> I think it's just as much that they are uncomfortable sitting in that class. Why I'm saying that more so is because a lot of the time it's the same teachers. . . . It's always like history or [language arts], where it's more of a regimented schedule, where there's not as much interaction in the classroom and a lot more work time. And so I think that when they're not being engaged in having to go through stuff and demonstrate stuff and switch up, that they start to realize, "Oh, wait. I'm one of the few students of color here. And this is kind of weird. I want to go."

Overall, four participants had personal knowledge of how some teachers did not have a very good rapport with minoritized students, explaining that some of the issues came from open conflict, mismanaged cultural differences on behalf of the teachers, or just lack of trust. These negative rapports had a negative impact on discipline, class environments, school culture, inclusion, and academics for minoritized students.

### *Leadership Issues*

Several staff members, such as Cerulean, Daniel, Freddie, and Michelle, spoke about leadership issues. Michelle had doubts about administrator efforts to help minoritized students. She analyzed the leadership response to the STAR student survey, where minoritized students explained how they felt, and she concluded: “It’s disheartening and not surprising. I don’t think there was a lot of, like, concern or follow-up, afterwards.” She detailed a past experience with students’ complaints, and she was frustrated because that administration seemed not to help:

> When complaints are brought or, like, when White students do things that are demoralizing, that it’s sort of just “poo pooed” by the administration. So there’s a sense that it’s like, why even bother reporting something because nothing’s actually going to change?

Freddie was aligned with Michelle, commenting on issues they’ve seen when leaders responded to minoritized students' concerns. Freddie thought that the minoritized students were upset due to recent racial incidents, but because FERPA regulations prohibit disclosures about specific consequences in disciplinary action, the racial incidents seemed to go unpunished, even when some actions were repeated. The Black face incident occurred about 2 years ago, when a White student posted a racist meme on their social media. Despite some consequences being applied at the time, those affected by the incidents were not informed of what was done to discipline the student doing it, and moreover the racist joke reappeared a few more times. Freddie explained what they learned when talking to minoritized students:

> A lot of those students. And I talked to a lot of students who were very, very angry—both because they didn’t think that they won [and because] they didn’t know what punishment had been leveled, which is part of an issue with visibility. [They] felt like they were being punished for objecting to the Black face, rather than the White student being punished for putting on Black face. And you know,

> whether or not that's reality, it doesn't matter. If that's the perception of our students, that is so ostracizing. That is a problem in and of itself.

Daniel had a different perception of disciplinary policies and leadership actions at the school. He felt leadership should hold students accountable, and if the policies got too lenient, leaders may not hold students accountable; in the past, the opposite was true. More recent discipline policies included advice to leaders against punishing students of color. Daniel showed he was aware White students did not stand out at a PWI as much as minoritized students did, thus minoritized students might have ended up being targeted:

> I do think that, like, the school district has almost gone the opposite way with discipline. . . . That's a student of color. Like, we want to make sure that we're not disciplining them. I don't think that's going to set students color or White students up to be successful adults. I don't know what that answer is, but it's—I know that there's definitely more eyes are on those students and something that I don't know how to fix, but what we all need to be mindful of is just because a student of color is making a mistake, there's probably 10 White kids doing the exact same thing. It's just, they blend in more.

Cerulean, an administrator, had views on how leadership was perceived and obstacles and issues she saw. Just like Daniel, she spoke about FERPA barriers, explaining that administrators cannot share some details, so what is seen could paint an inaccurate picture. She explained, "They [BIPOC students] didn't feel like—which is the case, often—They don't feel like we're doing enough or they don't have enough information, but because of privacy, we can't always tell them that. We can hardly ever tell them that." She sensed minoritized students do not always trust administrators, despite visible efforts to support minoritized students. She acknowledged handling discipline and support at the same time could make students mistrust her and her true intentions and put her in the position of "navigating treacherous waters." She said:

> Admin[istrators], we try to help them a lot, but they don't always—I don't know if it's—They don't always trust what we're doing. They don't always know what we're doing. They don't always—Yeah, they're probably fearful a little, and it's when it comes to administration, it's a little more complex for them, for any student.

Overall, four participants thought that administrators were viewed with mistrust by the minoritized students either due to real or perceived issues connected to discipline. The discipline issues came from repercussions for them which was a barrier to future trust given to administrators or other people unjustly acting racist toward them and leadership appearing to ignore the minoritized students' voices.

***Systemic Barriers***

Several staff members, such as Freddie, Daniel, Diana, Grecia, and Cerulean chose systemic barriers, such as not enough African American leaders, not enough support for minoritized students to be in AP classes, and retaining diverse staff in a PWI as issues with staff shifts at this institution. Diana spoke about a limited number of student leaders who were not White who could support peers and understand them:

> I don't think there are a lot of students of color in leadership roles that other students of color go to for help. . . . I know there are students of color on ASB. Students of color who are not on ASB wouldn't necessarily go to them for support.

Diana saw there was not a lot of peer support, not a lot of African American students who were leaders. She said, "Peer wise, I don't think there are a lot of peer supports for students of color in the building. There's not a lot of students of color in leadership roles or around those topics."

Freddie did not see a lot of support for minoritized students to be in AP classes or to be supported when they were there. Freddie mentioned tracking systems and how

minoritized students might not be in classes taught by highly qualified teachers, adding to systemic barriers. They spoke about minoritized students in special education:

> I teach general math. I don't have a math cert[ification], right? Like, I can't do calculus. I'm not highly qualified. A lot of our students haven't had access to a highly qualified educator, [whether] it's in math or other subjects, because they've been pulled out of this general education classroom.

Freddie and Daniel referred to systemic issues with hiring and retaining minoritized leaders. Freddie explained from their view, as a union representative, they did not know how to confront

> that the youngest teachers get displaced first because they are new to profession. New to profession teachers are typically a much higher percentage of people of color, but it's not a good look for a majority White school to be displacing teachers of color every year.

Daniel explained there were not enough minoritized leaders and not enough applicants: "Unfortunately, like, what I've seen is there hasn't been a lot of people of color applying for the roles that I've been [on] interview committees for."

Cerulean spoke about complex systemic barriers that were not in the control of the school, such as an unstable home life for some students: "Some of those problems go beyond control in the school. we can't make up for what's going on when they're not in school. That plays a huge role sometimes." She discussed how the pandemic and students having jobs could affect schoolwork and motivation:

> Some of the kids started working during the pandemic when they had online school, so a lot of them don't want to do homework anymore. They want to work. They keep their jobs. They like making the money.

Overall, five participants named systemic barriers at this institution for minoritized students. Those were not enough diverse staff, not enough African American student leaders to act as role models, the middle school tracking system in math put

minoritized students at a disadvantage and they had difficulty enrolling or being successful in higher level classes, and there were other access issues having to do with socioeconomics that went beyond the control of this school.

## Summary

This chapter contains the lived experiences of eight participants and their perspectives on equity PD efforts and CRP at the chosen institution. The author collected data using Zoom in eight individual semistructured interviews. Participants had at least 2 years of experience with equity PD and CRP at the institution, and they had a variety of roles and tenures. The author centered the phenomenological study around three RQs and used Colaizzi's method for analysis leading to the findings. After the analysis was complete, participants' experiences were combined into six major themes: personal journey, belonging, staff student relationships, family and community, staff progress on equity PD, and barriers to staff progress. The theme of belonging, family and community, staff student relationships relates to RQ 1 (To what extent do staff members feel minoritized students are included, in a PWI in the Pacific Northwest?). The theme of personal journey, barriers to staff progress and progress on equity PD and relates to RQ 2a: How do existing PD on equity and CRP practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest increase minoritized students' sense of belonging from a staff perspective? and How do existing PD on equity and CRP practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest reduce disengagement from a staff perspective?). The theme of staff progress on equity PD relates to RQ 3 (How has the staff perception of inclusion changed in the last 2 years of equity efforts at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest?). These findings are further discussed in

Chapter 5 along with recommendation, conclusions and the dissemination plan to leadership and the district.

# CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Evidence shows minoritized students feel unsupported and have a low sense of belonging (Voight et al., 2015). Culturally responsive pedagogy can affect students' senses of belonging and engagement, and teachers who employ CRP practices offer a way for minoritized students, who have been historically discriminated against, to feel included and show higher interest in learning than without CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Wilson and Kumar (2017) argued for educating teachers about social justice and equity by incorporating diversity, examining injustice, and anti-racism into teacher education. The current study explored staff perspective with equity PD efforts and CRP practices to alleviate disengagement and increase minoritized students' senses of belonging. The RQs were:

1. To what extent do staff members feel minoritized students are included, in a PWI in the Pacific Northwest?

2a. How do existing PD on equity and CRP practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest increase minoritized students' sense of belonging from a staff perspective?

2b. How do existing PD on equity and CRP practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest reduce disengagement from a staff perspective?

3. How has the staff perception of inclusion changed in the last 2 years of equity efforts at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest?

Phenomenology is a qualitative design well suited for exploring and understanding the substance of an issue (Corijn, 2019). The researcher used phenomenology to explore staff perspectives on equity PD efforts at the chosen

institution. The chosen participants had at least 2 years of equity PD efforts at the institution. The researcher collected data from eight staff members through semistructured, individual interviews.

The researcher used a CRT lens to analyze the findings. Critical race theory can aid in exploring staff perceptions about equity PD efforts. Culturally responsive pedagogy is CRT used in education because CRT has been applied in curriculum to support marginalized students' voices and includes different perspectives according to Ladson-Billings (1995), since these CRP practices were impacting students' belonging and achievement. The interview questions covered staff awareness of how minoritized students feel at the institution, their rapport with minoritized students, their perceptions on equity PD and CRP practices they used, and the impact of these practices on minoritized students' senses of belonging and engagement. The researcher analyzed interview data with Colaizzi's (1978) method through familiarization with the transcripts, finding relevant phrases connected to answering the RQs, interpreting meaning, selecting, refining, grouping codes into categories, elevating categories into themes, thick description, finding the essence of the phenomenon, and member checking (Morrow et al., 2015). This chapter includes a discussion of findings and conclusions using the themes presented in Chapter four, application of findings to the problem statement, application to leadership, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, and a concluding statement.

## Discussion of Findings and Conclusions

The researcher analyzed data from eight participants and a total of 150 pages of transcripts to learn about the lived experiences of staff who participated in the equity PD

efforts at the chosen institution. The researcher used Colaizzi's (1978) method for phenomenological analysis and found six common themes: (a) Personal Journey, (b) Belonging, (c) SSRs, (d) Family and Community, (e) Staff Progress with Equity PD, and (f) Barriers to Staff Progress. Each theme had subthemes. Personal Journey encompassed (a) personal experience, (b) prior PD, (c) personal identity, and (d) reading. Belonging included (a) systemic pressures, (b) AP and honors classes, and (c) feeling unwelcomed. Progress on Equity PD included (a) staff shift, (b) leadership shift, and (c) specific shifts. Family and Community included (a) navigating the system and (b) building relationships. Staff-student relationships included (a) trusted adult, (b) general SSRs, and (c) SSRs with minoritized staff. Barriers to Staff Progress included (a) harmful SSRs, (b) slow shift, (c) leadership issues, (d) not enough support, and (e) systemic barriers.

**Research Question 1: To What Extent Do Staff Members Feel Minoritized Students Are Included in a Predominately White Institution in the Pacific Northwest?**

For answering RQ 1, the researcher used the themes of belonging and subthemes of general SSRs and family and community. These themes and subthemes came from the findings in chapter four and the findings in these themes connected to belonging for minoritized students. Under the theme of belonging the researcher collected participants' answers referring to how and if minoritized students feel included. Participants detailed what they thought the general rapport of staff is with minoritized students, and the responses were gathered under the general SSR subtheme. When participants responded to questions about their rapport with minoritized families they made connections with how they felt about these families being included.

### *Belonging*

Researchers found minoritized students, such as Black and Hispanic students, felt disconnected, unsafe, unsupported, and displayed a low sense of belonging, contrasting with their White counterparts' feelings of inclusion and acceptance (Voight et al., 2015). The findings in this study supported Voight et al.'s (2015) findings, as all staff were aware of the minoritized students' low sense of belonging by comparison to White students due to the publicly available climate data and the STAR survey from the previous year. All participants detailed their perceptions on how minoritized students were viewed. These perceptions included mentions of minoritized students not feeling they belonged at the school, being discriminated against, feeling devalued, not feeling welcomed, facing systemic pressures (e.g., discipline disproportionality), being viewed negatively, having access issues, being underrepresented in AP classes, not feeling safe, not trusting all adults, and believing there were only some staff who connected with them. All participants added that families of minoritized students also faced similar systemic pressures as their pupils, and that these families' relationships with the school could be improved.

All interviewees talked about how minoritized students had a low sense of belonging, how they felt, and were viewed. These findings connected with Arslan and Duru's (2017) explanations about how sense of belonging is comprised of a student's view of feeling respected, important, and included. The authors argued a low sense of belonging is associated with feeling unincluded, distressed, and sad (Arslan & Duru, 2017). The participants were not surprised to learn about the low sense of belonging for minoritized students from the STAR data. Michelle, Grecia, and Thomas felt

disappointed when commenting on the results of the STAR survey. Michelle said, “It’s disheartening, and also, I think, not surprising. It kind of lines up with what I think we’ve been hearing from students for years now,” while Thomas wanted change: “I mean, it’s frustrating. It's something I’d like to see improved,” while Grecia said, “It makes me feel angry and sad that students feel not safe at school, not accepted at school, not honored at school, not cherished at school, not loved at school.” Diana explained how her race is a privilege by comparison to non-White students at PWI because she automatically belongs. Diana added there is a divide between how White and non-White students feel in terms of belonging. Grecia felt the survey data confirmed there was a problem with belonging.

Non-White students can feel unwelcomed, estranged, devalued, and discriminated against at a PWI (Hope et al., 2015). Michelle shared the school culture is alienating for minoritized students, and students do not feel safe or welcomed at this institution echoing what Hope et al. (2015) said previously. Griffith et al. (2019) explained Black students felt isolated, discriminated, and were judged by their race and appearance. Grecia spoke about the institution as a PWI and how race added to the problem of belonging for non-White students because as Griffith et al. (2019) explained, Black students felt isolated and discriminated against due to their race: “I think that as soon as a student of color walks into our building, they look around and they go, ‘Where do I fit in here?” Cleopatra compared her experience in California with this institution and said at the researched institution, minoritized students were viewed as “harder to deal with.” Cerulean confirmed the overall perceptions about belonging and said leadership should be doing more, but there were systemic issues at play.

Hope et al. (2015) examined Black students' perceptions of racial discrimination and inequality in a PWI, in comparison to perceptions of their White counterparts, and showed that as a consequence of discrimination, Black students were more likely to receive harsher discipline than their White classmates were. The participants talked about systemic issues such as discipline disproportionality that persisted at the chosen institution. Diana detailed how minoritized students are seen, perceived, and disciplined by White teachers and pointed to implicit bias as systemic:

> I think that is a major issue at [the] high school. We do have a lot of staff members that will automatically judge students of color if they are in the hallways during class, versus not judging White students who were in the hallways during class.

Participants also mentioned entering a White space, code switching and access, which connected with literature findings from Ladson-Billings (1995) who explained using CRT, that African American students felt they had to leave behind their cultural identities to perform according to White standards of education, which made them feel isolated.

Using CRT, Thandeka and Kalwant (2019) showed, that in a PWI, staff contributed to racism toward minoritized students and impacted their sense of belonging and school discipline. Grecia's perspective connected with Thandeka and Kalwant (2019) because she said sometimes non-White students might act out of stress and in frustration imposed by staff pressures on them, and that it is understandable. Hooker (2016) questioned the moral authority of an U.S. democratic system in which minoritized students are expected to peacefully accept defeat for the sake of the established order in a

system that did not redress past injustices toward them and Grecia shared how despite built up minoritized students, they were still expected to calmy accept a system and norms that put them at a disadvantage, thus connecting with Hooker's (2016) views.

As an administrator, Cerulean was aware of the disproportionality and explained the district imposed corrective policies to reverse past systemic injustices. Cerulean's perspective connected with Griffith et al. (2019) who recalled Black students felt isolated, were subject to open discrimination, and were judged on appearance in a primarily White space. Griffith et al. argued for a more inclusive school environment than the present one for Black students because White students generally did not struggle with belonging as much as Black students did. Daniel spoke about the school a as mostly a White space where non-White students feel vulnerable, thus connecting with what Griffith et al. said. Freddie, Cleopatra, and Daniel brought up about code switching to avoid standing out or being overdisciplined. Diana, Cleopatra, Cerulean, and Freddie talked about issues with equal access to opportunities. Cerulean spoke about unequal access and opportunities for non-White students: I don't think they have "benefited from that [the opportunities White students had]." Cleopatra and Diana spoke about how students' background, families background, access, and opportunities, determined how likely they were to succeed. Freddie saw economic burdens as access issues for minoritized students. Freddie's concerns are reflected in Blundell et al. (2020) where they found the pandemic accentuated existing socioeconomic inequalities and lead to longer lasting effects on unequal access than without the pandemic. Researchers argued for students who already struggled academically and had economic disadvantages, remote learning brought forth equity issues because poor students had less access to fast internet and current technology

(Burch & Heinrich, 2016). All participants spoke about challenges with inclusion for minoritized students, especially in remote learning, due to the disconnect of lacking interpersonal interaction, lack of community building for all students, access issues, and inequities for families farthest from educational justice (e.g., minoritized families). They also talked about positives of remote learning. Freddie saw remote learning was easier on minoritized students, because by having their cameras were off, it did not create the extra burden of race identifiers.

All participants confirmed and detailed on how minoritized students were underrepresented in AP and honors classes and literature included these views. Minoritized students can sense their academic abilities are questioned by staff (Hope et al., 2015). Low senses of belonging can impair educational attainment for minoritized students (Arslan & Duru, 2017). Study findings from Diana echoed Hope' et al. (2015) views on educational attainment for non-White students since Diana confirmed underrepresentation in higher level classes when looking at 400 students and saw most minoritized students were in low-level sciences and language arts classes. Griffith et al. (2019) argued minoritized students' intellectual abilities are often questioned and were held back in their educational progression. Study findings from Freddie, Daniel, Michelle, or Cleopatra reflected Griffith' et al. (2019) when they justified underrepresentation as a systemic issue with education and placing minoritized students in low-level classes. Freddie argued minoritized students are overidentified into special education and less advanced classes, taught by less qualified teachers; thus, when they reach high school, they were behind in math and sometimes in other classes too. Freddie and Grecia thought college board classes had a regimented curriculum, not a diverse one,

so those classes were unsupportive of diverse students. Despite minoritized students coming in from middle school in regular and not advanced classes, Michelle, Diana, Daniel, Grecia and Cleopatra felt minoritized students could switch to AP or honors classes, even if they were not ready, if they could have support. Cleopatra talked about how the math department successfully eliminated tracking and underrepresentation by allowing any student to be in core or honors classes and the flexibility to change levels. Cerulean supported minoritized students being in AP classes successfully, so she knew that with the right staff attitudes, systemic issues could improve. Michelle argued possible gaps can be addressed with differentiation and with support, systemic inequities can be changed.

### *General Staff-Student Relationships*

Scales et al. (2019) advised improved student-teacher rapport to change students' academic, motivational, and engagement declines in high school. All participants commented on their rapport with minoritized students and the general rapport they perceived. Their responses varied from saying the rapport was generally good to saying the rapport was polite on the surface yet tense, cautious, and reserved. The participants saw themselves as having good rapport with minoritized students and the staff in general too. Diana commented, "A lot of minoritized students . . . have really great teachers who are supportive." Thomas said his rapport with students was "pretty good." Daniel said "good teacher-student relationships happen with many staff members, though some relationships take more time to build," while Freddie said, "It varies." All participants pointed to specific staff who had positive, trust-based SSRs with minoritized students and that did not happen for all staff.

Some teachers by Daniel's, Freddie's, Diana's and Cerulean's account were considered unsafe or had harmful SSRs with minoritized students echoing literature on SSRs with minoritized students from Lac and Baxley (2019). Lac and Baxley (2019) reported many minoritized students in a PWI felt teachers did not build positive SSRs and did not care about their pupils. Thandeka and Kalwant (2019) articulated those teachers in a PWI displayed deficit thinking in African American students' abilities and did not develop positive relationships with them. Study findings from Michelle, Cerulean, and Grecia reflected the literature from Thandeka and Kalwant (2019) on minoritized students not having positive rapport with many staff members. Michelle described minoritized students' relationships with staff as: "it's polite on the surface," and Grecia and Cerulean knew specific people BIPOC students would talk to. Cleopatra said the rapport of minoritized students with staff is one of "caution." Cerulean commented that sometimes general positive SSRs can quickly change due to incidents, where progress made is lost.

***Family and Community***

All participants mentioned the importance of connecting with minoritized students' families, building relationships to overcome systemic barriers students face. While most White families understand and are familiar with the U.S. educational system, families of students farthest from educational justice need extra steps to establish connection. Using a CRT lens, Delgado and Stefanic (2017) argued persistence in treating everyone as the same is not eliminating all racist acts, it only eliminates the outspoken discrimination but does nothing to erase the subtler non-spoken forms of racism. Study findings reflected Delgado and Stefanic 's (2017) views on offering

adequate support which was not the same as equal support for people that need it, when Thomas felt setting high standards and reaching out to minoritized students' families personally through phone calls was culturally adequate. He felt the approach of less rigorous, more lenient policies toward African American than toward White students harmed academic competencies for minoritized students and what their families wanted. Michelle felt some minoritized families had a "really crummy experience" but were still hopeful. She thought listening to minoritized families is needed because their voices could be just as obscured as in a PWI as their students' voices. Daniel felt he needed to take an extra step, with home visits, to improve relationships because in remote learning, the minoritized students' families were farthest from educational justice. Cerulean felt home visits could make the minoritized families feel judged and uncomfortable with their home situations, especially when a White woman in a powerful position, such as Cerulean, entered. She said, "It's easier when you have built a rapport with a family, and they know that your heart is in the right place. That's the most important, if you did anything." She thought trust would be there when a situation arose and "starts causing tensions."

Several staff members, such as Cleopatra, Diana, Freddie, and Grecia, spoke about bringing in extra support for minoritized families, especially in remote learning, because these families were at a systemic disadvantage with technology and access. Affluent families with family members with college educations had savings and could work remotely more easily than low-income, essential workers could, as low-income and essential workers had to make choices between stable incomes and endangering their health (Blundell et al., 2020).

Cleopatra saw the need to teach minoritized students and families how the system works and how to navigate it. She spoke from her experience as a minoritized person, trying to "navigate the system," and how she organized an informational night for Latino families. As a counselor, Diana sought to build relationships with minoritized families through the school's website and especially dedicated virtual nights to help minoritized families navigate financial aid and college applications to mitigate access barriers. Diana echoed Cleopatra's view that the specialized night was needed due to issues of access, and these efforts were not sufficient.

As a special education teacher and case manager, Freddie was in constant communication with families, but sometimes there were language barriers and insufficient resources. Grecia and several other participants were hopeful for the DEC, which aimed to involve minoritized students and families in school decisions and reduce systemic barriers for incoming freshmen from diverse families. Freddie commended the DEC efforts: "I think [the facilitator is] doing a great job and the diversity empowerment council and getting impact." Diana mentioned the relevance of the DEC and added the new assistant principal would lead another event for the families of color in the community.

**Research Question 2a: How Do Existing PD on Equity and CRP Practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest Increase Minoritized Students' Senses of Belonging from a Staff Perspective?**

Nondominant cultures and ethnic groups in the United States have claimed they should have a right to maintain and be respected for their cultural and ethnic values and that educational institutions should include culturally responsive practices for their pupils

(Banks, 2008). When discussing CRP, Ladson-Billings (1995) argued teachers employing CRP practices offered a way for students of color, who were historically discriminated, to preserve their cultural values, feel included and be academically successful. All participants commented all equity PD and CRP practices increase minoritized students' senses of belonging. Each participant picked the equity PD efforts or CRP practices they felt were most instrumental and explained why they felt that way. These responses were embedded in the subtheme specific shifts from the findings presented in Chapter 4.

***Specific Shifts***

Freddie thought all PD helps, especially the ones that can be put in practice quickly and generate rapid change. They picked differentiation as most impactful for creating an inclusive culture because staff needs PD since learning about equity and implementing equity practices takes time, and not everyone is ready to implement major changes immediately. Freddie said:

> I think all PD efforts are helpful. . . . I think everything moves us forward. The big thing with the differentiation—I want everybody to move faster. I also know that we have to approach people where they are and work with them there. . . . The more impactful it is because the more people see use. I think the more practical a PD is the better.

Schools that adopted a CRT lens paid attention to dialogues, and voices of people of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Freddie thought listening to student voices, and learning about them, and honoring their identities in the classroom were the most impactful CRP practices for inclusiveness. Michelle felt STAR and their involvement with equity PD was instrumental for building inclusiveness for minoritized students because those students were active in hiring diverse staff and creating and leading equity PD and race conversations in classroom. STAR brought student voices at the forefront,

especially minoritized students' voices. Michelle felt student voice had the most impact toward inclusiveness. Milner (2020) argued forced desegregation without teacher preparation for addressing racial topics and developing an understanding of diverse identities did not serve students. Milner recommended further equity PD for teachers to teach across racial lines. Michelle thought all PD on equity helped with creating a sense of belonging for minoritized students and emphasized the practical ones, which she thought were "memorable" because they offered role play scenarios and practice with equity conversations.

Daniel reaffirmed all PD helps and "that the culturally responsive practices and the equity training, all of that stuff is amazing." Daniel felt staff collaboration and working together to achieve a common goal was the most "beneficial" in creating a culture of belonging because together, they tackled race issues and agreed to make changes, such as adjusting grading practices as a CRP practice, so minoritized students had chances to make up missed learning. Daniel thought the grading policy change was "very beneficial."

Teachers who work with African American students and are not of the same race and ethnicity might struggle with instructional practices that incorporate social justice and CRP, but they can adapt and try to understand realities of their African American students, as literature from Rubel (2017) and Felton-Koewstler (2019) showed. Cleopatra thought the leadership push to create inclusive lessons and decolonize curriculum during the equity PD days was the most impactful equity PD for improving sense of belonging for non-White students. Cleopatra felt the Strong Start lessons in the classroom were as an indicator of those beneficial changes. For impactful CRP practices, Cleopatra picked

students' choice and voice and presentations on topics relevant to minoritized students as the most impactful CRP practices she used in her classroom.

Cerulean picked Strong Start as the most helpful equity PD because "it reaches the students and the teachers at the same time" and builds rapport and positive SSRs. She emphasized having rapport with minoritized students' families as her main CRP, as it was especially helpful when conflict arose saying: "Having the rapport, having the heart, looking out . . . for their child's interests. . . . That's the most important, if you did anything."

Teachers can become skilled with engaging in and creating inclusive spaces for minoritized students; they can exercise critical consciousness to recognize inequalities and students' experiences (Brown & Rodriguez, 2017). Grecia's views echoed literature from Brown and Rodriguez (2017) on creating inclusive spaces for minoritized students, since Grecia picked Strong Start, RET, awareness of White supremacy, and teachers reflecting on their CRP practices, as the most impactful PDs for creating an inclusive culture for minoritized students. Diana advocated for continuing equity PD to create an inclusive culture as the most important PD because it created momentum for positive change. She picked check-in meetings as the most impactful CRP because having these meetings with minoritized students created safe spaces and combatted racism. Schools could use an ethnic studies class when applying CRT in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Study findings reflected Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) when Diana mentioned the ethnic studies class and the civic engagement class at the school as instrumental for sense of belonging.

Thomas picked the Book Club as the most influential equity PD and as what most created an inclusive culture for minoritized students because he used ideas from the Book Club in his class to spark leadership qualities for minoritized students. Overall, Thomas felt all PD was embedded in CRP practices he already used.

**Research Question 2b: How Does Existing Professional Development on Equity and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Practices at a Predominately White Institution in the Pacific Northwest Reduce Disengagement from a Staff Perspective?**

All participants commented that all equity PD and CRP practices increased minoritized students' engagement. Each participant picked the most relevant equity PD efforts or CRP practices that they felt were instrumental and explained why they felt this way. Many participants thought practices that were instrumental for creating an inclusive practice also contributed to reducing disengagement. These responses were embedded in the subtheme's specific shifts, SSR with minoritized staff, and trusted adults, presented in Chapter four.

***Specific Shifts***

Critical race theory is relevant for secondary teachers who engage minoritized students (Myers, 2019). Using CRT, teachers who connect events in students' lives with their curriculum spark their engagement (Myers, 2019). Myers' (2019) views on teachers using CRT were echoed by Cleopatra who thought student choice and voice and discussing current events, such as voter registration, helped minoritized students' engagement because students contributed to the curriculum and current racial issues were acknowledged in class.

In terms of which equity PD created the most impact toward student engagement, Cerulean picked Strong Start, Book Club, the school mural, and RET as helpful in reducing disengagement. She explained Strong Start helped with building rapport because students were asked for their input; the Book Club built the initial awareness of race issues for White staff to engage minoritized students in class; RET was "fabulous" for some knowledgeable students who knew about race and had activist roles; and the mural depicted the minoritized students as part of the community and made them proud.

When asked about reducing disengagement for minoritized students, equity PD, and CRPs she found most impactful, Grecia picked decolonization, incorporating students' backgrounds into lessons, connecting curriculum to students' lives, open-ended assignments, and student choice as instrumental to engagement for all students not just the minoritized ones. Grecia's views were reflected in the literature by Ladson-Billings (1995) who argued teachers employing CRP practices offered a way for students of color, who were historically discriminated against, to preserve their cultural values.

In terms of reducing minoritized students' disengagement, Michelle echoed Ladson-Billings' s (1995) views on CRP practices when she thought all PD helped with reducing disengagement and picked decolonizing curriculum and changing grading policies as most impactful. She wanted to see students represented in her room, and with the policy change, all students in her classes were passing: "I think it will make a really big difference for students."

Daniel thought staff collaboration had an impact on reducing disengagement because it was directed at specific issues in the classroom: "That's where, I think, it becomes the most beneficial." He also emphasized student ownership as impactful to

reduce disengagement because in conversations with minoritized students on his caseload, he supported them with the goals they chose and held them accountable: "'What are you trying to do?' So whenever they're not wanting to be in class or getting behind on stuff, I remind them, like, 'Hey, this was your goal.' Like, 'What do we need to do to get you back?"

Thandeka and Kalwant (2019) analyzed barriers to engagement through a CRT lens. The negative effects of barriers to engagement, which amounted to isolation and disengagement, were connected to the lack of cultural responsiveness, and the authors advocated for continued support for racial integration. Diana's perspective echoed Thandeka and Kalwant's perspectives on barriers to engagement because she felt addressing issues of racism by calling in to teach and calling out to spot microaggressions when they happen were most impactful to reducing disengagement for minoritized students. She felt the equity PD training on race issues addressed microaggressions and how to deal with them. She felt the institution had instances of racism that were not addressed prior to training and continued to happen, which is why action when racism happens was the most impactful and reduced disengagement for minoritized students.

Freddie picked differentiation as most impactful in reducing disengagement for minoritized students because it played to the strengths, willingness, and accountability for each staff member: "If people think that it's directed toward them, they're going to want to do it." They added SSRs and decolonizing curriculum combined as impactful for reducing disengagement.

Thomas felt the Book Club was the most influential equity PD for reducing disengagement, just as it was for creating an inclusive culture. He felt an instrumental CRP for reducing disengagement was SSRs through showing struggling students he cares and wants them to do better.

### *Staff-Student Relationships with Trusted Adults and Minoritized Staff*

Scales et al. (2019) argued for improved student-teacher rapport to change students' academic, motivational, and engagement declines because improvement in relationships correlated with improved engagement, perceptions of quality instruction, and belongingness. When minoritized students do not develop rapport with staff and peers, due to lack of cultural responsiveness, minoritized students feel isolated and are less likely to actively participate than the rest of the students, such as the White students, are. Teaching-student relationships elevate engagement and belonging (Quin, 2017). Many participants spoke about the impact of positive SSRs on minoritized students' engagement and belonging. Christle et al. (2016) articulated the connection between positive SSRs, students' needs, and high engagement levels for minoritized students. Positive SSRs happened at this institution between minoritized students and trusted adults, such as GAINS coordinators, equity leaders, minoritized staff. Their responses connect with RQs 2a and 2b.

Daniel, Michelle, Diana, Freddie, Cerulean, and Cleopatra talked about the impact of hiring on minoritized students' senses of belonging and engagement because these staff of color had stronger SSRs with those students. Milner (2020) argued African American students are better served by same-race educators rather than they are by White educators because same-race educators understand African American identities and

struggles, which was not the case with White educators in PWIs. The findings in this study reflected Milner's (2020) views on same race educators since Diana explained BIPOC students related to the two African American men in the GAINS program when issues of belonging or racism arose in their classes because they felt they would understand: "They like the fact that . . . we have a black male that is advocating for education, and then there's a bunch of other students of color that will come in and work." Diana commented, "I'm White, but I coach with two African-American males, so having those connections shows that our alliances and that students of color can come to us if they need support or on anything." Cleopatra, a Hispanic teacher, commented she understood being marginalized from a personal-identity standpoint. Michelle commented on a minoritized teacher and her impact as a trusted adult, an ally, and advocate with students. Diana spoke about students of color having role models from diverse staff members to look up to, and of one Latino counselor who took action to support Latino students.

Cerulean pointed out that besides GAINS educators, engaging teachers were engaging for minoritized students too. Daniel added rigorous expectations and building community engaged minoritized students and helped with building a positive rapport. Cerulean commented on the instructional and CRP expertise of some staff: "Some go out of their way to be more engaging for them, but some[teachers] really seek it out." Michelle commended the social studies teacher who took a learning, non-defensive stance when talking about equity, and could engage and create an inclusive atmosphere for students which is echoed in the literature by Martin and Dowson' s (2009), because these researchers argued for teacher training and learning about race issues . Martin and

Dowson (2009) showed positive SSRs led to high engagement; the researchers made connections between collaborative learning, positive SSRs, teacher training, teachers' and leaders' instructional practices and constructed an integrative framework from these elements that showed how all of these efforts contributed to high engagement for all students. The findings in this study reflect Martin and Dowson's (2009) views because at this institution, all equity PD and CRP practices combined with positive SSRs contributed to creating an inclusive culture and reduced disengagement for minoritized students.

**Research Question 3: How Has the Staff Perception of Inclusion Changed in the Last 2 Years of Equity Efforts at a Predominately White Institution in the Pacific Northwest?**

There is a staff shift and a leadership shift at the chosen institution, due to equity efforts that have been ongoing for the past 2 years at the chosen institution. Personal journeys, such as experience with minoritized students, prior PD, and reading about equity and identity contributes to change in perception and development on understanding equity issues.

***Staff Shift***

School staff can shift and evolve in their practices and understanding of equity issues to create an inclusive culture and reduce disengagement for their minoritized students. Felton-Koewstler (2019) described one teacher's journey starting with resistance to social justice and evolving toward embracing student-centered learning and equity practices. The findings in this study reflect Felton-Koestler's (2019) because the participants agreed that they have changed perceptions due to the equity PD over the

previous 2 years and the participants thought about the impact of equity PD on personal change toward understanding race issue. All participants thought the staff in general had changed perceptions too.

Cerulean explained the shift was visible because the staff was working harder than before the equity PD. Cerulean thought her personal journey helped her grow the most in understanding race issues out of all the equity PD efforts. Cleopatra thought the shift happened because there was leadership support, and staff were more willing to work on equity issues with less resistance than before the equity PD efforts. She referred to staff attitudes as "definitely changed," and she felt less afraid than before the equity PD to bring up topics that could be controversial, such as voter registration or police shootings and BLM protests.

Rubel (2017) recommended African American students' teachers who are not of the same race and ethnicity develop competency with equity-directed practices because a surface-level approach alienates the historically marginalized. Cleopatra felt staff was required to address controversial racial topics in the classroom with the mandated race and equity conversations, which created progress with those issues. Researchers have called for teacher preparation so that teachers are prepared to advocate for the social justice curriculum and changes in institutional policies to help students understand racial realities and be informed about them (Andrews et al., 2017).

Michelle confirmed most staff have "definitely" shifted their perceptions; teachers cared about injustices, were open to students' perspectives and learning from them, were less defensive, and engaged in PD in "in ways they hadn't before." She felt teachers were more aware of the disparities in belonging at the school for minoritized students: "I think

that they're more aware of the fact that the experience for students of color at [the] high school, you know, is not what it should be" and that "People want to be better and want to be doing better by their students of color." Michelle felt that, for herself, PD had an impact too because she could express and display her advocacy for social justice freely. Michelle saw the change in staff attitudes too. In previous years, outside presenters who came in to deliver PD on social justice and equity were contested, and staff wanted their rights to comfort. The atmosphere was tense, as opposed to recent years, where those incidents did not occur, and there was a lot more acceptance and encouragement from staff during PD.

Freddie saw staff shifted because they were more engaged with PD, implemented changes to their lessons, which Freddie witnessed in their role as an equity PD leader. They said, "Most staff have changed some aspect of their practice or tried something" and that "most people are moving forward in some way." Freddie thought the mandated PD, the allocated time for it, and its frequency had set the tone and helped staff see the importance of persistence and the work that needs to be done to create an inclusive climate. Freddie thought differentiation with equity work was appropriate because not all staff were at the same level, and differentiation allowed for their input and choice and made them more engaged. Freddie thought that personally, they made progress with their personal journey through reading and collaborating with trusted staff before designing equity PD.

Diana confirmed staff made progress because overall, she saw changes in their actions: "So we've made a long way. We've been maybe growing." Diana saw progress on equity work when staff "are being open to when other staff members call each other

out. When an incident happens in their classroom or when they feel or when a student of color feels uncomfortable." For Diana, the shift came from came from looking at the STAR survey data, which gave her a whole building view of the issues at the school because more than 800 students participated in it. Diana's reaction to STAR survey motivated her because the sheer number of responses confirmed student belonging for minoritized students is clearly a problem:

> It's definitely opened my eyes to the injustices that are of public education in America. . . . I've had students of color tell me what happened to them in a day to day… is unbelievable. . . . I feel like there are a lot of minority students that don't have that support and don't know where to go when something negative . . . that happens to them.

The STAR data made Diana see opinions about climate did not just come from a few affected students, and that is what pushed her to help change the climate for minoritized students. She contemplated her actions and asked: "How can we create a more welcoming thing?"

Daniel acknowledged, "I feel like our staff is growing" and that "overall, everyone was certainly putting in the effort to grow and learn." Daniel saw he grew in his understanding of gender issues in the building by talking with staff members like Freddie. He felt better than before the equity PD were implemented because by understanding gender issues, he could support students on his caseload, as he had a higher percentage of non-binary students than most staff. He reflected, "[I] have grown a lot in my understanding of that. I just did not know much. And with how big of a queer population we have at [the school], I've been able to learn a lot."

Grecia agreed there was a staff shift: "I see a shift. . . . More staff in our building [say], "Yes, I want to do more of these things." Ms. Grecia felt staff wanted to better

connect with all students, and teachers wanted to have higher engagement during class. She thought staff was better than before the equity PD efforts at understanding and acting on racial issues. She felt staff were more motivated to act on racial issues and create an inclusive culture due to the training they received equity efforts and the CRP practices they implemented. Grecia acknowledged the change with diversity hiring, as there was more effort than before the equity PD efforts in it, and leadership changed with the new African American assistant principal. Ms. Grecia saw a personal shift in wanting to serve her students better and in her efforts at connecting with families and decolonizing curriculum, which was the equity track she was leading.

Thomas saw personal change came from some books discussed at PDs and at Book Club, which also sparked his own personal reading and journey. He confirmed there was a staff shift. He said his perception shifted about some important historical figures: “Black historiography has really changed my reading on Lincoln.” He acknowledged progress in his classroom, as there were more conversations and analysis about the Reconstruction era, which was not present before the equity PD efforts. Overall, he understood staff shift as coming naturally as understanding of race issues evolves and creates the necessary change. Yet, Thomas was also shown to be more resistant to the equity PD efforts that were not Book Club and some of his comments were contrary to what the other participants acknowledged as valuable equity PD. He only commented positively on the Book Club, and his responses stand out differently from the rest of the participants. He showed doubt on the authenticity of equity PD, he mistrusted the minoritized student voice when they spoke about belonging, and he questioned the value of the STAR survey despite the large number of respondents which

were more than 800. Thomas is an outlier with respect to the rest of the participants which could reflect an issue in society about resistance to change and White fatigue as mentioned by Flynn (2015). White fatigue was a term based on Flynn's (2015) work and meant a resistant attitude toward spending extensive time learning and acknowledging the full impact of systemic racism on minorities and historically disadvantaged populations.

***Leadership Shift***

Thandeka and Kalwant (2019) called on school stakeholders such as school leaders and staff to examine and dismantle existing systemic and institutional racism because there was a need to serve their students better than in previous years. Literature findings connected with study findings because several participants acknowledged the leadership shift because administrators and district leadership pushed the staff to be involved in equity PD efforts. The push was evident in the specific, consistent, mandated time dedicated for equity development.

Cerulean is an administrator and she saw the district change in discipline policies because old due processes with discipline created disproportionality and were unfavorable minoritized students, and minoritized students' behavior was negatively perceived due to cultural differences: "It[ discipline disproportionality] is improved substantially in the last 3 years." Cerulean said staff had mixed responses to progress on equity, and while many asked for accelerated growth, Cerulean argued learning about equity cannot be forced: "I think that part [fast progress on equity] is hard." She thought not all equity efforts reach all students, yet leadership was always held accountable for systemic change.

Diana talked about the change in discipline policies and equity PD efforts due to district initiatives. She knew about the change in discipline policies because as a counselor, Diana witnessed it personally in her frequent interactions with administrators: "I think our administration has also been . . . realizing how important it is to require those PDs." She said, "In the last couple of years . . . [the district and administration] changed their discipline."

Grecia appreciated the top-down district directive to have equity PD days for staff: "The district is saying that this is important," and the top-down directive transferred to less teacher and staff resistance to change and more motivation for the staff who wanted to learn about equity. Grecia compared the current equity PD efforts to previous years and said in previous years teachers felt they took risks when openly discussing social justice issues, and they suffered repercussions and endangered their job security. Grecia praised the current equity efforts as making teachers feel safer in taking risks and talking about equity.

Cleopatra appreciated the leadership prompting staff to participate in equity PD: "We're really doing it this year. . . . The staff is being pushed to, like, actually create a lesson that is more inclusive." She referred to administrators in the building: "[I] definitely see some changes with administration . . . really trying a lot more." Freddie commented on administrators allocating funds for special education from the discretionary budgets: "We're lucky in some ways that our [administrator] allows us to use it kind of freely."

***Personal Journey***

All participants attributed part of their learning about racial issues and CRP to their personal journeys. They spoke about how roles, experiences, prior PD, and personal reading impacted them, in addition to the equity PD and CRP training at this institution. All participants emphasized the relevance of prior personal experience with minoritized students when learning about CRP and equity. Their roles in the classroom as counselor, administrator, or coach put them in a position to listen and learn from the students and to want to better serve them.

For some, such as Thomas, Daniel, or Cerulean, this experience occurred earlier at more diverse institutions. Cerulean said she "learned the most at an African American school." Thomas learned the most at a STEM school for Black students and in his student teaching, and Daniel had prior experiences at a much more diverse school than the chosen institution.

For staff like Diana, Michelle, Freddie and Daniel, their leadership roles at the school were the drivers to change. Diana is counselor and coach working with minoritized students; Michelle was club advisor of STAR; Freddie is an equity PD leader and special education case manager with a lot of minoritized students on their classroom; and Daniel was an instructional assistant, coach, and GAINS coordinator for mostly minoritized students. For Grecia and Freddie, who had only experience at the chosen institution, it was their more diverse classrooms, in comparison to the other ones at the same school, that compelled them to learn more about their students.

Many participants mentioned how reading about equity motivated them to have a personal interest in social justice. Daniel, Freddie, and Thomas talked about many books

they were in which they interested, and which shaped their perspectives. Daniel felt, in his role, reading helped him approach students, motivate them, and inspire positive change and leadership traits. Freddie commented on the high levels of reading they did on racial equity and how that influenced the PD they led. For Thomas, as a history and language arts teacher, reading shaped his perspective, and he talked about how the equity PD motivated him to read from diverse authors. Daniel, Diana, and Grecia talked about reading to understand students better. Diana shared how her individual reading helped her become more aware of racism and how to combat it. She mentioned the books *White Fragility* and *Just Mercy*.

In addition to reading, working with minoritized students or current events shaped some participants' interest in learning more about race issues. For Grecia, working with diverse students sparked her interest in educating herself, so she could learn about other cultures and learn from her students. Michelle shared how current events and reading about race issues shaped her learning.

For several participants, how they identified or were classified in U.S. society gave them an insight into how populations discriminated against due to race or gender might feel, and the participants drew parallels between how they were viewed and how the minoritized students were viewed at the chosen institution. These participants brought their personal stories closer to the minoritized students' plight. Cleopatra identified as Hispanic, and she associated her experience with that of her students. Freddie identified as queer and had experiences with discrimination. Freddie spoke about how their identity could manifest differently in different circumstances; at school

they might be less overt about their identity to blend in with the majority or feel less accepted as opposed to their behavior in the company of friends.

Cerulean, Thomas, and Diana spoke about Whiteness and how it could be perceived. Thomas talked about some of his experiences in a diverse school, saying how he was perceived: “This guy is White. . . . He’s not to be trusted as much.” Diana spoke about how she is implicitly perceived with mistrust in interactions with minoritized students when offering support because she is a White woman who might not understand minoritized students and what they face daily. Cerulean shared that being a White woman who relocated from the South gave her a stigma, and her White peers implicitly placed her as racist, a prejudice she had to combat through action on equity.

## Application of Findings and Conclusions to the Problem Statement

The general problem is that while schools implement PD interventions to address engagement and belonging, these interventions are not always successful. Lac and Baxley (2019) argued White staff seldom address root causes of racism and institutionalized discriminatory practices. At the current institution, which is PWI, there had been equity PD efforts ongoing for the previous 2 years. to help teachers understand race issues and connect more with their minoritized students, as Brown and Rodriguez (2017) advocated for. Brown and Rodriguez called for White teachers to learn how to connect with students of other races because the disconnect diminished their effectiveness and their students’ achievement levels. At the chosen institution, building leaders created a team to phase in these staff equity PD and trainings. These trainings were initially met with some resistance and their value and time investment was initially questioned but were needed for staff growth. The benefits of using CRT in educations and equity training for staff

were echoed in the literature by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) who explained how these efforts are needed to eradicate schools' systemic injustices. The themes connecting directly to the general problem are progress on equity PD, personal journeys, and barriers to staff progress.

**Staff Progress on Equity PD**

All participants agreed all equity efforts expanded their knowledge on equity issues and helped minoritized students feel included, and due to those efforts, there was a shift in perspective, for them and for the overall staff. All but one [Thomas] participant felt that the overall staff was growing in their understanding of equity, because of how they tackled race issues and shifted classroom practices, included student voice and choice, and adjusted practices to show they created an inclusive culture. Participants confirmed everyone was involved in equity PD and were trying harder than prior years with equity PD. Participants indicated the most influential PD and CRP practices for them, and while these choices were different for each of them, their responses pointed to the value of having all equity PD efforts and CRP practices to create an inclusive culture and reduce disengagement for minoritized students. Cleopatra, Cerulean, Freddie, Diana, and Grecia spoke about leadership shift on the importance of equity PD and emphasized how administrators and district leadership pushed the staff to be persistent and create visible change The push was evident in the specific, consistent, mandated time for equity development.

**Personal Journey**

All participants felt personal journeys had an impact in their perspective shifts and experiences with equity PD, and they felt compelled and motivated to take additional

steps such as reading, activism, and leading equity PD. For participants such as Michelle, Diana, Freddie, Daniel, their role as a STAR advisor, counselor, equity PD leader, or GAINS coordinator made them more involved and personally invested. For others, such as Grecia and Freddie, it was their diverse classrooms and desire to serve students best that compelled them to learn more than what was presented in equity PDs. For Cleopatra and Freddie, it was their identities and getting personally stereotyped that made them understand their minoritized students' plights.

**Barriers to Staff Progress**

All participants commented on some remaining barriers to staff progress on equity PD. They mentioned the shift had been slow; there was not enough support; there were still systemic issues; some staff created harmful SSR with minoritized students; and there were leadership issues. Several participants, such as Diana, Grecia, Michelle, Freddie, Cerulean, Cleopatra, and Daniel saw the shift as slow. Diana felt this institution was a typical of PWIs and therefore progress was slow because lots of schools struggle with inclusion. Grecia argued levels of commitment varied. Cerulean's view was that the shift is not easy and would not happen fast enough, which caused tension among staff members, a few who were resistant and the rest who were progressive. Masko and Bloem (2017) reflected on the teachers' White fragility and White fatigue when it came to teaching equity in schools. Behaviors associated with White fragility included defensiveness, aggression, withdrawal, and finding flaws with social justice PD (Masko & Bloem, 2017). There were incidents of defensiveness, heated discussions, and counterarguments during equity PD at the chosen institution, but not in the preceding year. *White fatigue* is a term based on Flynn's (2015) work and means a resistant attitude

toward spending extensive time learning and acknowledging the full impact of systemic racism on minorities and historically disadvantaged populations (Masko & Bloem, 2017). Michelle spoke about teacher resistance as an issue that persists for a few staff members who questioned why the equity PD efforts had to happen and the time invested in them. She explained these complaints had not happened in the past year and a half. Daniel said teacher resistance was why the shift was slow.

Several participants, such as Diana, Freddie, Cerulean, and Daniel, explained the shift was slow because there was not enough support to implement change. Diana commented more training would be needed to spot and deal with microaggressions. Freddie and Grecia felt there were not enough resources devoted to change curriculum and decolonization. Freddie and Cerulean mentioned staff fear, which stemmed from job security concerns, when addressing sensitive topics. Morales et al. (2019) called on White teachers to analyze their positionalities and how they interact with non-White students and their racialized identities. Freddie, Daniel, Diana, Grecia, and Cerulean identified systemic barriers, such as not enough African American leaders, not enough support for minoritized students to be in AP classes, and retaining diverse staff in a PWI as issues with staff shift at this institution. Kelly et al. (2017) analyzed causes for lack of retention of Black staff in PWI through CRT and showed tenure for Black educators connected to offering support and role models for Black students. Freddie and Daniel referred to systemic issues with hiring and retaining minoritized leaders because the least experienced staff members were non-White staff, thus the first to be displaced based on the current system.

## Specific Problem

The specific problem is students of color and their senses of belonging and engagement in PWIs. Henry et al. (2012) showed disengagement for young adolescents leads to dropout and problematic behaviors. When analyzing school support for high school students, researchers have shown students who felt disengaged and isolated saw school as unwelcoming, did not build relationships with adults, changed classes or schools, did not persevere, and had low academic achievement, discipline issues, and low attendance (Henry et al., 2012; Thandeka & Kalwant, 2019). The themes connecting directly to the specific problem are specific shifts, staff student relationships, and family and community.

### *Specific Shifts*

Ryan and Deci (2008) explained belonging through SDT and argued by attuning to student needs and making students feel included, teachers support students' emotional safety and model belonging in the classroom. When analyzing integration for African American high school students in PWI, Thandeka and Kalwant (2019) used CRT to articulate the negative effects of racism on their belonging and engagement. The equity PD and CRP practices at the chosen institution were meant to reduce disengagement and isolation or minoritized students. All participants identified what specific equity PD efforts were instrumental in creating a strong sense of belonging and engagement for minoritized students.

For specific equity PD efforts or RET PD and CRP practices that were most impactful to create and inclusive culture, Cleopatra picked leadership push to decolonize curriculum and Strong Start. Cerulean also picked Strong Start. Grecia picked and Strong

Start and added bringing resources to analyze tenants of White supremacy, RET work, CRP, and teachers reflecting on their practices. Michelle picked STAR and PD on equity with practical advice. Daniel chose staff collaboration for inclusiveness as most impactful. Diana, in a counselor role, chose check-in meeting with students and ethnic studies as being most impactful for inclusiveness. Freddie picked differentiation in equity PD for staff and listening to student voice in the classroom. Thomas chose Book Club.

For specific equity PD efforts or RET PD and CRP practices that were most impactful to reduce disengagement, Cleopatra picked student choice and voice, bringing in current events, Cerulean chose again Strong Start, Book Club, RET PD, and the school mural. Grecia picked bringing in students' backgrounds, connecting curriculum to real life, having many entry points for assignments, and student choice. Michelle picked decolonizing curriculum and changing grading policies. Daniel chose student ownership and staff collaboration as most impactful for engaging minoritized students. Diana felt calling out microaggressions when they happen was most impactful in reducing disengagement. Freddie again picked differentiation and added building strong relationships and decolonizing curriculum. Thomas felt showing care and encouragement when a student falls behind helped with reducing disengagement.

### *Staff Student Relationships*

Thandeka and Kalwant (2019) used the frame of CRT to show the damaging impact of racism in student-to-student and student-adult relationships. These impacts create barriers to student engagement All participants discussed the importance of positive SSRs when creating an inclusive culture and engaging minoritized students. The participants' responses about the general SSRs showed while the rapport is amiable and

polite on the surface, for minoritized students, there are only a few trusted adults in the building. Those trusted adults are the minoritized staff, the GAINS coordinators, coaches, some equity PD leaders, and engaging teachers who take the time to build community in their classrooms. Grecia justified trust is not implicitly given: “I think some students are like, ‘I don’t really know this environment. I don’t really know this teacher. I’m not sure.’” Several participants confirmed the general rapport is more of caution on behalf of the minoritized students.

### *Family and Community*

Several participants argued for additional supports for minoritized students’ families because these families suffered from the same systemic pressures and access issues their pupils did. Cerulean, in her administrator role, picked being genuine and building rapport with families, as the most important CRP to improve belonging: “That's the most important, if you did anything.” Diana, Cerulean, Grecia, Freddie, Thomas, Daniel, and Michelle spoke about the importance of offering additional supports, such as specialized nights, personalized calls, check-in meetings, home visits, and listening to help families navigate the systems and cope with systemic issues.

## Application to Leadership

The current study connects to educational leaders because of the need for increased minoritized students’ nationwide engagement and belonging (Voight et al., 2015). The lessons learned from this study can aid school leaders in implementing equity PD. The general and specific problem are also leadership problems because leaders need to know staff perspectives on equity efforts and how these efforts create an inclusive culture and reduce disengagement for minoritized students. When analyzing how to

improve schools, Sergiovanni (1992) advocated for supporting students to serve students' needs to belong, which schools could provide. Lac and Baxley (2019) recommended school leaders promote equity, provide resources, and train staff to handle difficult conversations on race and implicit bias because these issues have rarely been addressed in equity interventions. The lessons learned from the staff PD equity efforts can be useful to other PWIs and could lead to transferable solutions for school leaders choosing equity PD in PWIs to ensure equal educational opportunities and create an inclusive climate. School leaders in the district can use the findings of this study to compare biannual climate data and minoritized students' perspectives with staff experiences. The current study supports the superintendent's equity goal and advances equity education for all school stakeholders. All participants explained how their experiences of equity PD efforts shifted them and other staff and the impact of these efforts on serving the minoritized students. The leadership style applicable for this study is servant leadership, as described in the following section.

**Servant Leadership**

School leaders and teachers could support minoritized students in PWIs when showing a servant leadership style. School leaders and teacher leaders can support staff by serving their needs and providing adequate support for them to grow in understanding race issues. Greenleaf, the seminal author on servant leadership explained that with this style, leaders altruistically serve the needs of their followers, show empathy, and accept them (Frey, 2017). Servant leaders choose followers' interests first, grew followers' capacities, and help them develop to their full potential (Northouse, 2015). Teacher leaders demonstrate their persuasion and service by attending and developing PD,

supporting growth through PLCs, mentoring, and promoting equity initiatives (Crippen & Willows, 2019).

At the chosen institution, Michelle, Freddie, Daniel, Diana, Grecia, and Cerulean showed servant leadership through their roles, their activism, supporting families, and designing equity PD for all staff. In her counselor role, Diana brought students' voices to the forefront and coordinated and presented data from the STAR survey at staff meetings. Diana supported many diverse clubs and organized specialized financial aid nights for families of minoritized students. Grecia was the RET Team leader who promoted equity PD and collaboration, bringing in district presenters for equity PD days over several years. She served students farthest form educational justice in the classroom by having race and equity conversations, bringing students interests into the curriculum, decolonizing curriculum, and using CRP practices. She commented:

> I have really worked on my own to educate myself more over the years about what are best practices and actually how to make my classroom a warm and welcoming place for all of my students and where they feel successful and where they are successful.

Grecia served families of minoritized students through her work with DEC, which was a committee of staff and minoritized parents that focused on creating a welcoming climate for incoming freshmen that come from minoritized backgrounds and also helped minoritized parents have a voice in school leadership decisions.

Daniel was the GAINS coordinator and one of trusted adults for BIPOC students. In addition to his check-in meetings with students and their families, he read about leadership to inspire his students to reach their potential and advocated for removing systemic barriers, such as tracking.

Michelle was the STAR leader for several years, and STAR efforts led to race and equity PD, promoting minoritized student leaders, race and equity conversations in the classroom, and the school mural on diversity and hiring for diversity.

Freddie designed equity PD and differentiated tracks to serve staff, in addition to their role as a special education teacher in the classroom, where they supported students. Freddie commented that leadership should continue to push equity PD: “I think the more administration can push and the more administration can encourage teachers to engage the better it would be.”

Cerulean was a school administrator who participated in designing Strong Start and led Book Club. Strong Start and Book Blub were recognized by other participants as impactful for inclusive culture and engaging minoritized students.

Overall, all participants showed leadership traits of servant leaders and how they used their roles to engage and include diverse students by attuning to their needs, paying attention to their voices, and offering all the support they can. Gotsis and Grimani (2016) argued servant leaders foster belonging and inclusiveness among diverse followers. Participants served students and staff, and the equity PD persuaded many teachers to make progress on equity work and to alleviate isolation and disengagement for minoritized students, by employing a servant leadership style. The staff who experienced the equity PD efforts and shifted perceptions became servant leaders. Greenleaf described servant leadership as putting followers and their support first (Yasir & Mohamad, 2016). The teacher leaders in this study described how they put students first and what CRP practices they used and recommended. Fenzel and Richardson (2019) argued with skill development, cultivating persistence, mentoring, caring, and servant leadership to support

Latino and African American students, students' engagement, self-esteem increased, and isolation decreased, and they felt part of the school community. These authors suggested expanding these initiatives to other schools. The current equity PD efforts reduced isolation and disengagement for minoritized students with consistent PD and putting the lessons learned from PD into staff practice.

## Recommendations for Action

Participants mentioned several barriers to staff progress on equity PD and how progress was slow for equity efforts, systemic barriers with tracking, access, hiring diverse staff, support for implementing change, leadership issues, and harmful SSR. The following are the recommendations for action at the chosen institution and PWIs.

### Equity Training

Integrating diverse students into a PWI without adequate teacher PD on racial topics and developing an understanding of diverse culture and identities does not serve students better than segregation, and researchers have recommended further PD for teachers to teach across racial lines (Milner, 2020). Ladson-Billings (1995) called for teachers to be trained in CRP practices before working with diverse populations. When teachers embedded CRP into their classroom, the dominant narrative changed to overcoming deficit thinking and valuing and promoting students from diverse backgrounds. All participants acknowledged all PD helped and pointed to Strong Start, Book Club, differentiation, collaboration, and CRP practices as the reasons for positive change. Thus, one recommendation is implementing equity PD such as equity Book Club, building awareness for staff by having them spot and combat microaggressions, race and equity conversations, CRP practices in classrooms (e.g., decolonization), student

choice voice, community building activities, and teacher collaboration and sharing ideas for implementation.

Researchers have called for future teacher preparation and advocated for teachers using a social justice curriculum to help students understand racial realities and be informed about it (Andrews et al., 2017). Several participants emphasized equity PD should be ongoing and consistent because the shift is slow and further progress is necessary. Grecia felt there should more equity PD on the tenants of the White supremacy and decolonization. Freddie and Diana felt teachers need more equity training. Freddie felt consistent training and adequate differentiation could push everyone forward.

Masko and Bloem (2017) advocated for changing resistant teachers, and incorporating White fragility, and White fatigue into a conversation, where the White population supported minoritized people through allyship. Michelle spoke about teacher resistance as an issue that persists for a few staff members who questioned why equity PD efforts happened and the time invested. Daniel also accounted for teacher resistance as reasons why the shift was slow. As an administrator, Cerulean saw some teachers had a hard time with diverse cultures or understanding subtler nuances of racism. Diana and Freddie felt more PD was needed because teachers need to know more on how to spot and combat microaggressions. Diana and Daniel felt the institution needed to routine race and equity conversations and to talk about identity to maintain focus on equity issues. Diana added classes, such as Black studies, should be part of credit requirements. Daniel echoed Diana's thoughts on continuing PD on equity, collaboration, and

following through, moving from conceptualization to actual changes to build awareness and demonstrate change for students that have been long marginalized.

Cerulean, Cleopatra, Diana, Freddie, and Michelle recommended another CRP practice: staying current on political event to acknowledge students' experiences. Diana and Freddie saw staying current as offering support. Grecia, Cleopatra, Freddie, and Thomas recommended embedding more CRP practices, more of students' experiences, and more decolonization into the curriculum. Grecia commented that more time is needed for CRP.

School administrators should pay attention to the results of this study before moving forward with more equity PD, because listening to their recommendations will be attuned to staff perspectives, and were based on what equity PD they called out as effective for minoritized students' sense of belonging and reducing their disengagement. School leaders are responsible for selecting adequate equity PD and the results of this study could aid them. All but one staff member recommended continuing with the current equity PD and moving from conceptual understanding of race issues to practical results and applications. School leaders could use differentiation and have staff pick their equity path as they are now, but also have staff show data that supports their CRP practices in action. All participants recommended CRP practices, and school leaders could bring in more resources or create equity PD days dedicated to CRP practices and decolonizing curriculum. By using the study's findings school leaders starting equity PD in other PWIs can make an informed decision on how to choose staff to lead equity PD, which equity PD efforts make an impact for alleviating minoritized students' isolation and reducing their disengagement. School leaders at this institution or at a similar one could choose to

plan out equity PD for more than 2 years, will be prepared to meet staff resistance with mandated trainings and inspired speakers, community building activities for both staff and students. Another recommendation for school leaders is listening to students' voices to implement change.

**Listening to Student Voice to Implement Change**

Schools that have adopted a CRT lens pay attention to dialogues and to voices of people of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Bottiani et al. (2016) recommended school leaders engage students and empower them as key stakeholders in the systemic change process. Several participants, such as Daniel, Michelle, Freddie, and Cerulean, identified issues with how leadership action is viewed when it comes to equity issues. Cerulean, Daniel, Freddie, and Michelle spoke about leadership issues. Michele and Freddie had doubts about administrator efforts to help minoritized students because they felt there was not enough follow up after their concerns were voiced. Cerulean and Freddie explained that due to FERPA regulations, there are no disclosures about specific consequences in disciplinary action, even for racial incidents, which might send the incorrect message that they seemed to go unpunished. Cerulean felt minoritized students do not always trust administrators because handling discipline and support at the same time can send a conflicting message.

Daniel, Michelle, Thomas, and Freddie felt student voice, especially the ones less heard, such as minoritized student voice in a PWI, is a powerful tool for systemic change. The researcher's recommendation to combat leadership issues is to listen to minoritized students' voices. Lac and Baxley (2019) commended a high school administrator who aspired to implement social justice that incorporated minoritized students' views to

remediate the school's hostile climate for these students. The principal had many White staff and White student body resistance to change; however, she listened to the Black voices to find ways to remediate the unwelcome climate.

Daniel felt listening to student voice engages students and helps them succeed academically: "The more we involve students in processes—I think it's also a great way to then navigate and steer them towards meeting expectations in classrooms." Michelle felt the more teachers listened, the more students felt they mattered: "Having teachers continue to do a better job at listening. Students want to feel listened to and heard like their voice matters [sets] up an environment where [you are] making yourself approachable." Freddie felt minoritized student voice should be more often heard in conversations with administrators:

> I mean, there's huge amounts of growth that we need to do. I think that students of color need to be way more visible in ASB [Association of the Student Body]. . . . We need to have students of color in leadership, more opportunities for our students to talk to our administration, and more opportunities for our administration to talk to our students in a responsive way that makes them see action.

Thomas also felt students' voices need to be heard, referring to the sexual assault protests that happened: "Yeah. I got to say, I'm proud of whoever's putting those [stop sexual assault] posters out."

**Combatting Systemic Barriers**

Andrews et al. (2017) called for teachers to take activist roles, work to dismantle systemic policies that add to educational inequities, help students deal with conflict in society, and learn how to make knowledgeable decisions. Participants called out systemic barriers, such as academic tracking, discipline disproportionality, access issues (especially in remote learning), not enough African American leaders and staff, teacher

resistance, and systemic barriers that minoritized families face. Critical race theory encompasses legal actions and educational decisions, such as curriculum choices, placement in high-level classes, school discipline, and achievement testing, especially for minoritized populations (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). To combat these systemic barriers in PWIs, the researcher's recommendations are to mitigate academic tracking, inherited from middle school, with adequate support for minoritized students to be in AP and honors classes; offer more opportunities for non-White students; continue with policies that prevent inequities, such as disproportionate discipline and grading policies; continue with diverse hiring; promote more African American leaders; and offer more support to families through special nights for minoritized students' families to help them navigate the system. Teacher resistance is addressed by the previous recommendation of more equity PD.

To combat systemic barriers, Michelle, Cleopatra, Grecia, and Daniel were advocates for removing tracking and considered it a feasible change. Michelle felt the adjustment could be done with differentiation: "It's also totally doable. Yes, it might be more challenging to teach a diverse group of learners and AP curriculum, but you can absolutely do it. You just have to provide more scaffolding and support to those students." She felt the precedent was created with the removal of honors-only classes and that in assuming minoritized students cannot do well in these classes was also assuming a deficit mentality that some teachers have. Grecia felt minoritized students would like to be in AP honors classes for science if there were support system and a school policy that mandates at least one AP class for graduation:

> Maybe we set up a system for students. If I'm going to take this class as AP class, who are going to be my study buddies? Maybe we need to have ways for teachers to think about how to set up that kind of system.

Daniel felt honors classes should be more accessible to minoritized students, even if they did not master all the skills previously, because that would be confronting current systemic barriers:

> If we can figure out a way to make it more accessible to students that maybe aren't quite ready for the workload yet. I think that could be a huge spark and a huge confidence builder. I think it's a whole systemic thing.

Daniel, Diana, and Grecia advocated for more opportunities for minoritized students to engage them, and Daniel said trying to "help these students find some welcoming climate and community within the school" would make them feel included. Diana added:

> I think we need to offer opportunities for students of color to be engaged, whether that's creating more clubs for students to have an outlet, to feel safe, whether that's teachers giving students of color more accommodations than other students, or just connecting with them one-on-one more regularly so that they feel safe and connected to somebody in the building.

Researchers have called for changing institutional policies when advocating for social justice (Andrews et al., 2017). Michelle and Cerulean advocated for policies to promote systemic change and flexibility, such as the current grading policy. Michelle talked about BLM being supported by policy changes, such as the grading policies currently in place:

> Until there are these, like, requirements—basically kind of like what we're starting to have now with [Instructional Council]—saying, this is what we want all teachers to do unless or until we have that in place, I think it will be hard to make really big shifts.

Some PWIs are trying to recruit more diverse staff, but retention without support can be problematic. Researchers analyzed qualitative causes for lack of retention of Black staff in PWI through a CRT lens and showed tenure for Black educators connected to offering support and role models for Black students (Kelly et al., 2017). Freddie, Daniel,

Diana, Grecia, and Cerulean identified systemic barriers such as not enough African American leaders, not enough support for minoritized students, and difficulty retaining diverse staff in a PWI. Diana spoke about a limited number of student leaders who are not White and can support peers and understand them. Freddie and Daniel referred to systemic issues with hiring and retaining minoritized leaders. To combat these issues, the researcher's recommendations are to continue with diversity hiring, promote non-White student leaders that their same race peers can relate, and connect to in PWIs.

Participants recommended supporting families and connecting with the community because they also suffered from systemic disadvantages. Cerulean recommended continuing to connect with families, as the school did during remote learning. Grecia advocated for a safe space for students and more engaging with the community through DEC. Cleopatra hoped the special Latino night will continue to be held. Diana recommended more individualized support for minoritized families. Freddie recommended more resources: "We need to do a lot with linguistically diverse families. I think that we are failing a lot of them. We don't have many opportunities for them to engage. We don't have interpreters."

**Building Positive Staff-Student Relationships**

Morales et al. (2019). called on White teachers to analyze their positionalities and how they interact with non-White students. Thandeka and Kalwant, (2019) showed in PWIs, the adverse effects of racism on senses of belonging for minoritized students could result from dysfunctional SSRs, student-student interactions, and school discipline initiated by teachers. Diana, Daniel, Cerulean, and Grecia thought harmful SSRs between staff and minoritized students are an impediment to progress. Grecia felt teachers do not

know about race issues happening and do not address them because they do not have a trusting rapport with the students. Diana knew of specific staff whom minoritized students avoided because they did not feel safe around them, which was harmful to those students' academics.

Fenzel and Richardson (2019) argued with skill development, cultivating persistence, mentoring, and caring to support Latino and African American students, students' engagement, self-esteem increased, and isolation decreased, and the students felt part of the school community. The authors suggested expanding these initiatives to other schools. All participants spoke about minoritized students having only a few trusted adults. The researcher's recommendation is to build trust to strengthen SSRs with minoritized students in PWIS. Daniel recommended the more consistent and genuine teachers are, the better the SSRs: "I think the more consistent teachers are and the more true to who they are, the kids will adapt. I think that just helps, especially students of color, but all students really." Diana, Cerulean, and Freddie asked for building trusting relationships to combat harmful SSR. Diana commented, "I think it's just creating that initial trust, creating that welcoming space, asking them how they are, getting to know them as a person, and getting to know them first and then, you know, building that trust." Daniel added student ownership was helping him build positive SSR: "Like, I know what they want to do. And then, so whenever they're not wanting to be in class or getting behind on stuff, I remind them like, 'Hey, this was your goal.'"

## Recommendations for Further Research

The current study explored staff perspectives on equity PD efforts to alleviate isolation and reduce disengagement for minoritized students. The themes of belonging,

personal experience, SSRs, family and community, progress on equity PD, and barriers to staff progress were used to answer the three RQs, address the general and specific problem statements, make recommendations for action, and apply the findings to leadership. Next, recommendations for further research are included.

All participants acknowledged one barriers was staff progress on understanding and acting on equity issues and that progress is slow. Studying the long-term impact of equity PD efforts on staff and their perceptions of minoritized students' senses of belonging and engagement after sustained equity efforts might provide useful information on how and if the staff made big shifts and in what manner. Data could be gathered from the same participants or participants with a similar tenure and experience with equity PD at this institution, after another 2 years, expanding the length of the equity efforts to 4 years.

The current study could be part of a study, where staff experiences and progress on equity efforts could be compared with minoritized students' experiences. A study that compares how minoritized students feel about their belonging and their engagement in the classrooms at the PWI with how teachers responded, would show if the experiences and perceptions of teachers and students align or not. The district has a quantitative climate data tool for students. Quantitative data from students at the beginning of the equity efforts could be compared to the same data for the same group of students several years later. The survey is administered schoolwide 2 to 3 times per year and this data is broken down by groups, grade level, and ethnicities.

The current study was focused on staff experiences with equity PD efforts and their perspectives on how these efforts create an inclusive culture and reduce

disengagement for minoritized students. Many participants talked about the power of students' voices to implement change. Thus, conductions a study on minoritized students and their experiences in a PWI that has ongoing equity PD efforts would show a different perspective. The district already has a quantitative tool, and there could be a qualitative part added, consisting of semistructured interviews with minoritized students who could provide details their experiences and if there is progress on belonging and engagement for them due to staff equity PD efforts.

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that can address school performance, systemic change, and teacher buy in. Transformational leadership originated with Burns in 1978 and has four components: the leader (a) is a paragon for staff, (b) establishes and inspires the vision, (c) stimulates teachers' creativity, and (d) attends to their needs (Luo et al., 2020). The equity PD efforts in this study are systemic and have ethical and moral components, and these efforts could spark and inspire followers and creativity. The type of leadership that could make feasible change with equity PD efforts could be the transformational leadership. Transformational leadership was effective in schools and the author added that transformational leadership combined well with instructional accountability (Kwan, 2020). Thus, a qualitative study with participants experiencing equity PD with a transformational leader could be a possible research study.

The chosen institution is a PWI, a high school in the Pacific Northwest, which had several racial incidents, and in its farther history, this school was the center of attention due to a contested legal decision based on equity issues. Moving the study to a different geographical area and not necessarily conducting it in a PWI could strengthen the

transferability of the findings to include different perspectives of other staff undergoing similar equity PD efforts at a wider variety of secondary schools.

All participants in the current study spoke about the relevance of their personal journeys and how the journey complemented and augmented their learning on racial issues. The literature review on the chosen topic included ideas about SSR, equity PD, CRP, and listening to student voice but there were only a few studies that mentioned personal journey. The importance of personal journey in terms of experience, identity, and self-chosen reading was highlighted by all participants. A qualitative study with staff working with minoritized students and how these three factors they mentioned made an impact on their growth could clarify the effect of personal journey when learning about equity.

## Concluding Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore high school staff perceptions of existing PD on equity and CRP practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest and how these efforts may increase minoritized students' sense of belonging and reduce disengagement from a staff perspective. Literature recommendations were reinforced with Dixson (2018), who argued for activism in K12 schools, and Thandeka and Kalwant (2019), who claimed stakeholders need to examine and dismantle existing systemic and institutional racism. The current study fills the literature gap of further studies on what would elevate minoritized students' sense of engagement and academic performance and incorporates social justice work in high school for minoritized students. Staff lived experiences of equity efforts were interpreted through CRT. Data was collected in semi structured individual interviews and analyzed

using Colaizzi's (1978) method. The findings of this study showed staff understood minoritized students feel isolated and that there are systemic pressures for them. Findings included that staff shifted perspectives and grew in understanding of race issues from equity PD efforts and embedded CRP practices and that these efforts help with creating an inclusive culture and reduce disengagement for minoritized students. Personal journey and experience with minoritized students, staff student relations, rapport with families also played a role in the findings. The findings support the need to continue these equity PD efforts and CRP practices and be consistent with them for the culture to truly shift.

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# APPENDIX A

## Interview Questions

**Preliminary questions to be asked before the interview:**

1. How long have you been working at the school and in what capacity/capacities?
2. Do you work with minoritized students?
3. Have you been involved with equity efforts at the school such as:
    a. participated in equity PD
    b. participated /used CRP in your classroom or role
    c. developed equity PD for staff
    d. implemented CRP practices from PD or strong start materials in your classroom or another role?
4. If yes, have you worked for two or more years with any of the previously stated equity efforts at the school?

**Zoom Interview Questions:**

Icebreakers

1. How are you feeling today? What is something you enjoyed doing this week?
2. What pseudonym would you want to choose for yourself for the purposes of this study?

*RQ1. To what extent do staff members feel minoritized students are included in a primarily White high school in the Pacific Northwest?*

A. <u>Questions related to RQ1:</u>

1. In what role do you interact with minoritized students?

2. What experience do you have with teaching students from diverse cultures and backgrounds? Classes? textbooks? research?
3. Would you say that you are culturally aware in your classroom, teaching, person?
4. Are you aware of STAR survey results from last year when the school went into remote learning?
5. How do you feel about minoritized students scoring lower on feeling included?
6. What is your perception of how welcome minoritized students feel at this institution?

   and accepted? in person? in remote learning?
7. a. What do you know/perceive about minoritized students at this school and their sense of belonging? by comparison to White students?

   b. engagement? by comparison to White students?
8. What do you know/perceive about minoritized students at this school and their academic accomplishment or them being enrolled in honors/ AP classes?
9. What do you know/perceive about minoritized students at this school and discipline disproportionality? in your classroom?
10. Who are the peers and adults at this school the minoritized students relate to and feel they trust?
11. What do you perceive is the general rapport between minoritized students and teachers?

12. How are your students of color different than you?
13. How are they the same to you?
14. What do perceive your rapport with minoritized students is?

*RQ2a: How do existing PD on equity and CRP practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest increase minoritized students' **sense of belonging** from a staff perspective?*

B. Questions related to RQ2a

1. Which equity PD have you have you been involved with at the school?
2. In what capacity: participant, or did you present/facilitate equity pd?
3. From your experience with the equity efforts (strong start, RET member, school mural, equity action plan, race and equity discussions, hiring diverse staff, leading multicultural, LGBTQ or STAR or BSU as advisor), which ones did you participate /develop to support minoritized students and to make them feel welcome, included
4. Which ones were/are you implementing to create an inclusive climate for minoritized students? in person? in remote learning?
5. What specific RET (Race and Equity Team) equity PD efforts are instrumental in creating an inclusive culture for minoritized students from your perspective?
6. How do you know this, what changes do you see as an indicator?
7. Which equity PDs has been the most useful to you?
8. Why?
9. What are your perceptions about teaching practices CRP to include minoritized voices?

10. Which CRP practices are you including in your classroom or context to create an inclusive climate especially for minoritized students? (ethnic studies, bring students background and interests into the curriculum, adapting new grading policies, aligning grading scales in core classes, students choice, use BL, adding BLM units to your curriculum, other, etc.)
11. Which one were most impactful from your experience?
12. Why?

*RQ2. b. How do existing PD on equity and CRP practices at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest* ***reduce disengagement*** *from a staff perspective?*

C. Questions related to RQ2b

1. What stands out to you the most about your teaching style as a teacher of culturally diverse students?
2. Which CRP (ethnic studies, bring students background and interests into the curriculum, adapting new grading policies, aligning grading scales in core classes, students' choice, use BL, strong start materials and using strong start ideas in your classroom practices, adding BLM units to your curriculum, other, etc.) have you implemented in your role to reduce minoritized students' disengagement?

   in person? in remote learning?
3. In what capacity: participant, or did you present/facilitate equity pd?
4. From your experience with the equity efforts (strong start, RET member, school mural, equity action plan, race and equity discussions, hiring diverse

staff, leading multicultural, LGBTQ or STAR or BSU as advisor), which ones did you participate /develop and implement to support minoritized students to make them feel engaged?

5. In what capacity: participant, or did you present/facilitate equity pd?
6. What specific equity PD efforts are instrumental in reducing disengagement, from your perspective?
7. How do you know this, what changes do you see as an indicator?
8. What are your perceptions about teaching practices CRP to engage minoritized voices?
9. Which CRP (ethnic studies, bring students background and interests into the curriculum, adapting new grading policies, aligning grading scales in core classes, students' choice, use BL), adding BLM units to your curriculum, other, etc.)
10. What practices are you including in your classroom or context to engage minoritized students?
11. Which one were most impactful from your experience?
12. Why?

*RQ3. How has staff perception of inclusion changed in the last two years of equity efforts at a primarily White high school in the Pacific Northwest?*

D. Questions related to RQ3

1. Did you sense a change in your perspective and approach as a result of being involved with equity PD?

2. In what way?

3. What about the staff in general?

4. What do you intent to learn about next in equity PD?

5. How has teaching culturally diverse students impacted your day to day practice? mindset?

5. Did you sense a change in your perspective and approach as a result of using CRP in your classroom or in your interaction with minoritized students and their families?

6. In what way?

7. What about the staff in general?

8. What more would you like to learn about CRP?

9. Do you use families as partners in educational outcomes and as CRP practices?

10.What do you know about decolonization?

11. Which resources that are available to you with CRP do you plan on referring to? (book offered this year) Will you read Dr Muhamed's book on CRP?

12. Do you have a role in CSIP, IC, RET, BLT?

13. How do you plan on using your role to advocate? for including and engaging practice for minoritized students?

14. Are you part of an equity action plan? as a small group, individual, what role? and what are the goals of that plan?

15. What do you believe still needs to happen to create a stronger sense of belonging for minoritized students?

16. What do you believe still needs to happen to create a stronger sense of engagement for minoritized students?

17. What do you believe still needs to happen for staff to grow and have an impact on creating a culture of belonging and engagement for minoritized students?

APPENDIX B

IRB Certificate of Approval

**IRB ID# Rus_Malaret091321**
Principal Investigator (if faculty research):
Student Researcher: Oana Rus
Faculty Advisor: Dr Stacey Malaret
Department: SAL

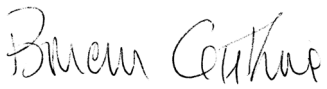
Title: Equity professional development in primarily white public school. Staff experiences with minoritized students' senses of belonging and engagement.

Approved on:

- ☐ Full Board Review
- X Expedited Review (US)
- ☐ Delegated Review (Can)
- ☐ Exempt (US)

**CERTIFICATION**

City University of Seattle has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The Faculty Advisor Dr Stacey Malaret and the student researcher Oana Rus have the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original Ethical Review Protocol submitted for ethics review.
This ***Certificate of Approval*** is valid provided there is no change in experimental protocol, consent process, or documents. Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures are required to be reported to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board in advance of its implementation.



Brian Guthrie Ph D
Chair, IRB City University of Seattle

APPENDIX C

CityU Research Participant Informed Consent Form

School/Division of Applied Leadership

**CITYU RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT**

**Title of Study:**
Equity Professional Development in a Primarily White Public School: Staff Experiences with Minoritized Students' Senses of Belonging and Engagement
**Name and Title of Researcher(s):**
Oana Rus City University Ed.D student

***For Faculty Researcher(s):***
**Department:**
**Telephone:**
**City U Email: _____**
**Immediate Supervisor: _____**

***For Student Researcher(s):***
**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Stacey Malaret
**Department:** Educational Leadership Doctoral Chair
**Telephone:** 4075952221
**City U E-mail:** malaretstacey@cityu.edu

**Program Coordinator (or Program Director):**
Dr. Joel Domingo

**Sponsor, if any:**
N/A

**You are being invited to participate in a research study.**

**Key Information about this Research Study**

The researcher will explain this research study to you before you will be asked to participate in the study and before you sign this consent form.

- Your participation is voluntary, and you can decide not to participate or withdraw your participation at any time without penalty or negative consequences.
- It is your choice whether or not you want to participate in this research.
- The purpose of the research is to explore high school staff perceptions of current equity PD efforts and culturally responsive practices, at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest, and what equity PD efforts and practices create a more inclusive school culture, increase minoritized students' senses of belonging, and reduce disengagement.

- If you choose to participate you will be asked to answer questions about your understanding of minoritized students' sense of belonging and engagement and your experience with equity efforts and culturally responsive practices.
- The risks or discomforts from this research include questions about your rapport with students

- The direct benefits of your participation are: staff members at the institution might be able to reflect on about equity in an academic environment

You should talk to the researcher(s) about the study and ask them as many questions you need to help you make your decision.

**What should I know about being a participant in this research study?**

This form contains important information that will help you decide whether to join the study. Take the time to carefully review this information.

- You are eligible to participate in this study because you are a staff member at BHS who has participated in equity PD for the past two years
- You will be in this research study for approximately 3-5 months
- About 7-10 individuals will participate in this study.

Why is this research being done?

Purpose of Study: explore high school staff perceptions of current equity PD efforts and culturally responsive practices, at a PWI in the Pacific Northwest, and what equity PD efforts and practices create a more inclusive school culture, increase minoritized students' senses of belonging, and reduce disengagement

**Research Participation.**
**You will be asked to participate in the following procedures:**

I understand I am being asked to participate in this study in one or more of the following ways (initial options below that apply):

☐ Respond to in-person; and/or, ☐ telephone Interview questions; Approximate time
☐ Answer written questionnaire(s); Approximate time
☒ Participate in a virtual video interview using this video program/app Zoom; Approximate time 60 minutes

☐ Other, specifically, _____. Approximate time _____

You may refuse to answer any question or any item in verbal interviews, written questionnaires, or surveys, and, you can stop or withdraw from any audio or visual recording at any time without any penalty or negative consequences.

**Are there any risks, stress or discomforts that I will experience as a result of being a participant in this study?**
Minimal risk is involved as participant may refuse to answer any proposed question.
**Will being a participant in this study benefit me in any way?**

- We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your participation in this research. However, possible benefits may include staff members at the institution might be able to reflect on about equity and inclusive climate for minoritized students.

☒ You will receive 25$ Amazon e-gift card for your participation in this research.

☐ You will not receive any payment for participation in this study.

**Confidentiality**

I understand that participation is confidential to the limits of applicable privacy laws. No one except the faculty researcher or student researcher, his/her supervisor and Program Coordinator (or Program Director) will be allowed to view any information or data collected whether by questionnaire, interview and/or other means.

If the student researcher's cooperating classroom teacher will also have access to raw data, the following box will be initialed by the researcher. ☐

Steps will be taken to protect your identity, however, information collected about you can never be 100% secure. Your name and any other identifying information that can directly identify you will be stored separately from data collected as part of the research study. The results of this study will be published as a thesis and potentially published in an academic book or journal, or presented at an academic conference. To protect your privacy no information that could directly identify you will be included.

All data (the questionnaires, audio/video tapes, typed records of the interview, interview notes, informed consent forms, computer discs, any backup of computer discs and any other storage devices) are kept locked and computer files will be encrypted and password protected by the researcher. The research data will be stored for 5 years (5 years). At the end of that time all data of whatever nature will be permanently destroyed. The published results of the study will contain data from which no individual participant can be identified.

Signatures

I have carefully reviewed and understand this consent form. I understand the description of the research protocol and consent process provided to me by the researcher. My signature on this form indicates that I understand to my satisfaction the information provided to me about my participation in this research project. My signature also indicates that I have been apprised of the potential risks involved in my participation. Lastly, my signature indicates that I agree to participate as a research subject.

My consent to participate does not waive my legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, and/or City University of Seattle from their legal and professional responsibilities with respect to this research. I understand I am free to withdraw from this research study at any time. I further understand that I may ask for clarification or new information throughout my participation at any time during this research.

I have been advised that I may request a copy of the final research study report. Should I request a copy, I understand that I will be asked to pay the costs of photocopy and mailing.

Participant's Name:
Please Print

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: Oana Rus
Please Print

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

If I have any questions about this research, I have been advised to contact the researcher and/or his/her supervisor, as listed on page one of this consent form.

Should I have any concerns about the way I have been treated or think that I have been harmed as a research participant, I may contact the following individual(s):

Dr. Joel Domingo, Program Coordinator (and/or Program Director), City University of Seattle, jdomingo@cityu.edu, 206.239.4770 521 Wall St #100, Seattle, WA 98121

This study has been reviewed and has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of City University of Seattle. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the IRB at IRB@Cityu.edu.

# APPENDIX D

## Email Invitation to Staff Participants Selected for Interviews

Email script for participant recruitment
Hello, my name is Oana Rus and I am a student at City University of Seattle preparing for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. I am conducting research on equity professional development in a primarily White public school, in the pacific Northwest and studying the lived staff experiences with minoritized students' senses of belonging and engagement.

You are receiving this email because you have participated in equity PD efforts such as: staff meetings, district directed days, used or created strong start materials, or were involved in equity PDs during collaboration time and other professional development days.

Based on the information I have gathered, staff perspectives and experiences with equity PD can impact minoritized students in a positive way and in the study I seek to understand what equity PDs can have an impact on staff growth and create a more inclusive climate for minoritized students.

Data from this study can provide information on how high school staff and students benefit from equity PD efforts. The study will be an attempt to find ways to reach more of the faculty at the school. The study will benefit not just staff and minoritized students, but also the White students who are less exposed to social justice, CRP, or not aware of consequences of historical discrimination. Equity PD and staff efforts will help educate White students and staff to appreciate other cultures and be critical allies. This study may also be beneficial to other schools that have a similar demographics.

I hope for your voluntary participation and would like to schedule a conference call at a time that is convenient for you. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted via a Zoom call. Our conversation will be recorded and transcribed for me to analyze and identify themes. This is so I can accurately and efficiently collect data. If you choose to participate, you can ask that you are not recorded at any time, and you can terminate the interview at any time without consequence. Once we finish our conversation, I will ask that we follow up again so if I have questions regarding your responses, you can help clarify them. After the conclusion of this process, you may be provided with a list of identified themes at your request to review and comment on to ensure they reflect your perspectives and experiences.

All data (the questionnaires, typed records of the interview, interview notes, informed consent forms, computer files, any backup of the computer's files and any other storage devices) will be kept locked and computer files will be encrypted and password protected by the researcher. The research data will be

stored for five (5) years. At the end of that time all data will be permanently destroyed. The published results of the study will contain data from which no individual participant can be identified.

To schedule a time for an interview, please respond to the email. I have attached an “Informed Consent" document and I am required to collect and maintain for all participants. We can discuss this when we meet.

If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with me as the researcher. I may be contacted by email at oanarus@cityunivesity.edu or via telephone at 4259851132. You may also contact my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Stacey Malaret via email at malaretstacey@cityu.edu or by calling 407-595-2221.

Thank you for considering participation in this important research. Your input and perspectives are valuable to me, and I appreciate your consideration.

Oana Rus
Doctoral Student
City University of Seattle

# APPENDIX E

## District Approval for Study

**From:** Anderson, Eric M <emanderson@seattleschools.org>
**Sent:** Monday, September 27, 2021 11:24 AM
**To:** Rus, Oana V <ovrus@seattleschools.org>
**Cc:** Cooley, Shelby P <spcooley@seattleschools.org>
**Subject:** RE: research application for doctoral student SPS employee

Dear Oana,

Thank you for your application to conduct research in the Seattle Public Schools. The Research Review Committee has approved your research project. Attached are two documents. The first is the approval letter from the Research & Evaluation (R&E) department. The second is the Principal Signatures Form, which is required from each principal at the prospective research sites before research can begin. Please send the signed Principal Signatures Form to our office – once we confirm receipt, you may commence research at the school site.

Best of luck as you pursue your research goals – we look forward to learning from your work.

Sincerely,

**[redacted]** (he/him/his)
Director of Research & Evaluation
emanderson@seattleschools.org
T: 206.252.0844
2445 3rd Ave S. Seattle, WA 98134
Research & Evaluation websit

September 27, 2021

Oana Rus

17285 NE 36th St.

Redmond WA 98052

Dear Oana,

Thank you for submitting a research application to Seattle Public Schools (SPS). Your proposal entitled "Equity Professional Development in a Primarily White Public School" was reviewed and district-level permission has been granted.

The next step is to contact the principal(s) at the school(s) included in your sample to request or confirm their support. It is important to note that principals are responsible for granting final permission. In other words, they are under no obligation to permit research to take place at their schools. If permission is granted from the principal, you are required to obtain the principal's signature on the Principal Cooperation Form accompanying this letter and to return a copy of the signed form to R&E.

You must also notify R&E of any proposed changes to the project's approved design. Finally, in return for granting you permission to conduct research inside Seattle Public Schools, we request that you submit a copy of your results and final analysis to R&E.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Director of Research & Evaluation

Seattle Public Schools

# APPENDIX F

## School Approval for Study

SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**Principal Letter of Cooperation**

I, [redacted], of [redacted] give permission for Oana Rus of City University to conduct the study entitled [Equity Professional Development in a Primarily White Public School: Staff Experiences with Minoritized Students' Senses of Belonging and Engagement] at my school.

The overall purpose and procedures of the study have been explained to me, as well as the potential impact on staff, students and families.

I understand that neither I nor this school has any obligation to participate in this or any other voluntary program, even though the project has been approved by the [redacted] Research & Evaluation department. Further, I realize that participation in the study is absolutely voluntary. Any teacher, student, parent, or staff member who participates may choose to withdraw at any time.

I understand that I will receive a copy of the final findings of this study, including a final report and any related publication(s).

Principal Signature

09/28/21
Date