IMPROVING SCHOOL CULTURE: TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CULTURE IN A TITLE I SCHOOL AND THEIR BELIEFS ABOUT IMPROVEMENT

Gina Kim

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IMPROVING SCHOOL CULTURE: TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CULTURE IN A TITLE I SCHOOL AND THEIR BELIEFS ABOUT IMPROVEMENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Gina M. Kim

August 2023
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2023
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By

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ABSTRACT

IMPROVING SCHOOL CULTURE: TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CULTURE IN A TITLE I SCHOOL AND THEIR BELIEFS ABOUT IMPROVEMENT

By
Gina M. Kim
August 2023

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Amy Olson

The purpose of this qualitative study was to promote a positive school culture in a Title I school by listening to veteran teachers’ voices about the policies and practices being implemented daily. The primary research question guiding this case study was: What are the perceptions of teachers, who have been in their position for 15+ years, about school culture in a Title I school? The secondary research question guiding this study was: What changes in policies and practices in a Title I school do veteran teachers suggest might improve school culture? Participants were purposefully sampled and included four classroom teachers in grades 4-8 who are currently on the formal teacher evaluation process, teach a state-tested content area, and have worked in the building for a minimum of 15 years. The data were collected through a writing prompt in which each teacher was asked to outline their typical day. Once teachers submitted their responses, semi-structured
interviews were conducted. The qualitative analytic process was cyclical, and the data were initially coded utilizing open coding. Three themes emerged from the collected data: the mismatch between time and responsibilities, the mismatch between district policy and school procedures, and teacher burnout. The findings of this study indicate potential areas of improvement for the school.

Keywords: school culture, teacher burnout, time, administration
Packing up my life while unpacking my data: I dedicate this Dissertation of Practice, to my family. To my husband, Bill, his tireless support, unconditional love, and unending belief in me, even when I didn’t believe in myself. I could not have completed this process without his help in taking over additional household responsibilities, being the chauffer for our children, and packing to move our home in the fourth quarter of this process. My beautiful children, Landon, Tanner, Eleanora, and Parker, for sacrificing time with me while I reached the finish line. May this be a reminder to you all, no dream is too big, and you are more than capable of doing anything you want to in this world. Thank you for believing in me, and for those snuggles at the end of a long day. To my mom, Rachel Pallotta, and sister, Becky Oravetz, for supporting me every time I go back to school. For my family and friends who accepted that I would be a ghost for the final stretch of this journey and understanding that my absence was not against them, but for me. I am eternally grateful for the love and support during this process. And finally, to my father, Rich Pallotta, who although he is not here to see this dream fulfilled, always knew I had the power within me to become published.
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Thank you to Dr. Amy Olson for chairing my dissertation committee. Your guidance and support were instrumental in completing this process. Thank you for reminding me to celebrate the small wins and reminding me that I can do hard things. I will miss our frequent meetings. Thank you to Dra. Liliana Castrellón, for your expertise in methodology and your unwavering support in providing clarity to my thinking, and to Dr. Rick McCown, for teaching me the value of Gracious Space and for providing me countless opportunities to grow academically and professionally. Learning and working alongside of you has been an honor.
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Theme: Mismatch Between Time and Responsibilities

  Code: Negotiating lesson planning time

  Code: Delivering instruction

  Code: Committee work

Theme: Mismatch Between Policies and Procedures

  Code: Communicating with staff

  Code: Addressing student behaviors

  Code: Experiencing standardized test pressures

  Code: Navigating tensions

Theme: Burnout
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Assistant Principal (AP)
Differentiated Instruction (DI)
Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)
English Language Arts (ELA)
Essential Staff Education Practices (ESEP)
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
Individualized Education Plans (IEP)
Instructional Teacher Leader (ITL)
No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)
Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA)
Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
Professional Development (PD)
Professional Learning Communities (PLC)
Race to the Top Act (RTT)
Research-based Inclusive System of Evaluation (RISE)
School Improvement Plan (SIP)
Social Emotional Learning (SEL)
CHAPTER I
RATIONALE & INTRODUCTION


“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” – Benjamin Franklin.

“Teaching is the one profession that creates all other professions.” – Unknown.

Introduction

There are countless quotes dedicated to teacher appreciation and the importance of a high-quality education. Yet, according to a poll conducted by Gallup in February of 2022, over 40% of K-12 workers in the U.S. reported experiencing burnout at work, with 52% of teachers reporting feeling burnt out. Additionally, 55% of female teachers and 44% of male teachers reported feeling burned out often or always. It is no surprise that teachers are feeling overwhelmed. With each new President Elect comes a new Secretary of Education and resulting policy shifts that affects how teachers do their jobs. Moreover, there are additional and sometimes conflicting policy shifts at the state and localized school levels that can bring an additional burden to an already exhausted workforce.

In addition to policy changes, K-12 teachers work in a context of historical and current power dynamics, expectations from various stakeholders, and responsibilities that are outside of their realm of control and outside of instructional duties. In addition to these factors, teachers are up against historically systemic issues that create barriers to their work. One of the most prevalent barriers is Whiteness, which acts systemically in education and results in inequitable educational outcomes for marginalized groups. Yet, education is seen as a pathway for economic
movement and empowerment as well as providing a political voice and social revolution, (Howard & Navarro, 2016).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic and aftermath have nearly liquidated the profession with “more than three-fourths (76.4%) of teachers surveyed considered leaving their positions during the 2021-2022 school year” (Marshall et al., 2022, p. 7). As society attempts to return to “normal” following the pandemic, teachers are being evaluated on the same rating systems used pre-pandemic with no revisions to how the teaching and learning has shifted. Standardized test scores, already too often used as the sole indicator of teacher and student success pre-pandemic, are now being used to measure student “learning loss” from COVID related disruptions in the instruction while still evaluating a teacher’s effectiveness in their classroom and content (Donnelly & Patrinos, 2022, Pier et al., 2021). Being situated in a school where veteran teachers are experiencing symptoms of burnout from aforementioned factors has influenced the researcher to conduct this study in hopes of gaining knowledge that will foster improvement in school culture.

**Policy Shifts and Accountability Impacts on Teachers**

Over the past 15 years the United States has had three Presidents and eight Secretaries or Acting Secretaries of Education. This has placed education in the precarious realm of agenda changes and policy shifts. Among the new and existing policies being implemented over the last 15 years were the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the Race to the Top Act (RttT), the Common Core State Standards Initiative, and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Aforementioned policies took place at the national level along with a variety of other state and district initiatives. The work of Marshall et al. (2020) explores the differences in some of these policies. NCLB was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)
in 2002 that maintained ESEA focus on improving the achievement levels of low-income students under the guise of being equity driven; however, in doing so, NCLB increased accountability measures by mandating state test scores operate as the primary indicator of student achievement. In addition, NCLB tied federal funding to improving student achievement as indicated by state test scores. NCLB was the federal law guiding schools until ESSA was introduced in 2015. In response to the years of NCLB implementation, ESSA called for a reduction in federal funding influence and decision making while giving greater control back to the state in the designing of accountability systems that used more than student test data to evaluate teachers (Marshall et al., 2020). Furthermore, Marshall et al. (2020) states:

[These] shifts occurred in the direction, goals, and respective roles of different governance levels. Shifts also occurred in the kinds of policy logics, mechanisms, and programs created to address the shifted focus. In each instance, the politics of the time, the competition for benefits, the power struggles among key actors and partisan groups, the interest groups lobbying, and the crisis definition du jour all played a part in shaping policy. (p. 166)

In the state where this study took place, this meant that additional teacher and building data were used in teacher evaluations. Teachers in this district are evaluated according to the Danielson framework which assesses teachers according to four domains: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional development. With RttT, teacher observations using the Danielson framework were formalized, placing new burdens on teachers and school leaders.

Across these policy shifts, it becomes clear that the focus of educational policies varies with each new administration to take office. Marshall et al. (2020) further argue that some
administrations focus more on identifying high performers to ensure they receive the best quality education while others focus more on equity-oriented social programs to ensure education for all. These conflicting foci are important in that they directly impact expectations for teachers’ instructional practice and lead to questions regarding if teachers should focus on raising the scores of their highest performers or focus on ensuring all students reach competency, even if that means some students are bored. In the case of either extreme, the policy leaves some students’ needs unmet.

What legislators often fail to account for is the impact on teachers via increased workloads that follow shifting priorities, new initiatives, and roll outs, which frequently lead teachers to experience greater levels of exhaustion and an inferior level of self-efficacy in their practice and self-esteem in the profession (Marshall et al., 2022). Additionally, as teachers struggle to keep up with the latest academic trends, initiatives, and programs, they must also keep up student standardized test scores since the impacts of these scores are continued to be weighted heavily on their year-end teacher evaluations.

In addition, intensive test focus places a serious demand on historically vulnerable student populations. There is a direct relationship between socioeconomic status and achievement known as the opportunity gap (Hanushek, 2019). The opportunity gap continues to demonstrate the educational differences between the haves and the have-nots (Hanushek, 2019). The standardized test achievement emphasis also removes the focus from social-emotional services designed to keep students “emotionally and physically healthy, in school” (Marshall et al., 2020, p. 166) and places it on raising test scores.

Although testing remains at the forefront of educational accountability policies, there continues to be unprecedented drops in student scores. According to Sparks (2022), national test
scores for the spring of 2022 “show the biggest drop in math performance in 4th and 8th grades since the testing program began in 1990” (para. 2). Sparks further states, “In reading 4th and 8th graders likewise are performing on par with students in the 1990s, about a third of students in both grades can’t read at even the ‘basic’ achievement level – the lowest level on the test (para. 2).

As a result of declining test scores, a higher demand is placed on both students and teachers alike. The demand on teachers results in pressures from administrators, as well as from students, parents, and the community they serve (Tye & O’Brien, 2002). At the same time, the declining test scores have an impact on teacher evaluation that can leave teachers feeling overwhelmed and underappreciated. This lack of appreciation cuts deeply with the media and policy reforms; thus, placing multiple layers of blame on teachers (Pawlewicz, 2020).

In addition to test scores being counted into overall teacher evaluation systems, teachers are now also evaluated formally in ways designated by the state, such as principal observation and teacher-created portfolios. In Pennsylvania, teachers on a formal evaluation system are expected to upload artifacts into a comprehensive template to demonstrate their abilities and effectiveness as teachers. This is an added layer of expectations and responsibilities that are being placed on teachers who already feel the burden and pressures of the expectations to raise test scores, which additionally continues to affect their evaluation.

Adhering to educational policies and accountability pressures may cause teachers to feel overwhelmed; teachers may also feel like they are losing control over decision making within their classrooms. The culture of the classroom and schools is in turn impacted by teachers’ stress and frustration. This was the status quo in education before COVID-19. In the next section, the ways in which the pandemic impacted teachers will be further explored.
COVID-19 Impacts and Accountability Impacts on Teachers

The COVID-19 pandemic brought insurmountable changes in education to this county and altered the way education and educators were perceived forever. The shifts in education resulted in several challenges specifically for teachers. For example, while many Americans experienced difficulty in working from home while their children were also learning from home, the effects for teachers meant managing their own children as well as their students at distance (Marshall et al., 2022).

While some of these challenges brought positive changes, such as more and increased access to technology in classrooms and for students to use at home, the impacts of the pandemic operated inequitably across students and schools historically impacted by an already disproportionate system of standardized testing (Castrellón et al., 2021). The existing accountability system that focused on standardized testing and achievement rates that historically left a systemic gap for students of color, was now being scrutinized because it was disrupting the norm by indicating low achievement termed “learning loss” for historically privileged and high achieving White students.

The COVID-19 learning loss is tied up in the ideas of Whiteness and White achievement as well as deficit mindset. Historically, the narrative behind learning loss has been color-evasive; the framing of Whiteness was critical because it exposed the learning loss narrative for what it truly is, a color-evasive way of thinking about student achievement. Because everyone lost during COVID education systems are no longer focused on equitable achievement and evaluation processes for historically marginalized families. Therefore, I began this study in Whiteness, which led me to think about teachers’ deficit mindsets when it comes to student achievement for Black and Brown students. The recovery from COVID has been tied up in the
narrative around learning loss which is color-evasive by nature; therefore, removing the pressures to think about the achievement of Black and Brown students. Instead, there is an overall concern focused on the achievement for all students since everybody lost during the pandemic. This is an equality perspective; society is losing the equity argument when making the argument for learning loss. The focus needs to be on the achievement of historically marginalized population of Black and Brown students.

Learning loss is determined when the rate of educational progress does not meet or exceed that of the previous year (Donnelly & Patrinos, 2022; Pier et al., 2021). Castrellón et al. (2021) argues this “conceptualization of the learning loss is fixated on the idea of education and production, schooling, and assessment, or standardized testing” (p.7). Three years into a global crisis that shifted the way education would be seen moving forward and learning loss narratives remain prevalent as we wonder how teachers are going to “make up” losses from the COVID years (Ferlazzo, 2021).

Furthermore, the idea of what has been lost in the pandemic is shortsighted and achievement-test focused, with the focal point being a loss of test scores rather than the true loss and trauma we all endured. These experiences not only impacted students and their families, but teachers and administrators as well (Castrellón et al., 2021). The grief and trauma students bring into classroom today results in extra responsibilities for social and emotional healing and learning being placed on the classroom teacher. No one doubts that there is a greater need for social-emotional learning in schools, but with rapidly declining enrollment and budget cuts, these needs are being filled by the teachers who are already overworked and undercompensated; therefore, creating an unequal distribution of responsibilities with no additional compensation or
time in the day to plan for successful implementation (Marshall et al., 2022). This in turn places a great deal of strain on the culture of a school.

Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic is not the cause of learning gaps between White students and students from historically marginalized communities. Milner (2010) had previously identified this construct of the learning gap, categorizing it as an achievement gap. The learning loss narrative has simply called to light an issue that has been both historically prevalent and historically overlooked (Sahlberg, 2020). The work of McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) argues that “on average, classrooms, schools, and districts in the United States are inequitable for children of color…some substantial portion of that inequity is caused by the attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and behaviors of teachers and administrators” (p.628). Working through the COVID-19 era has brought these inequities more firmly into the light. Deficit mindset has become more extreme with the learning loss narrative post COVID. While this study does not focus specifically on learning loss due to COVID-19, the context of COVID-19 and additional resulting pressures placed on teachers impacts the attitudes and beliefs being examined.

As disparities grew in schools with returns to the classroom amidst the COVID-19 pandemic so did the ways that teaching and learning were understood. School cultures began to change, the workload for teachers grew exponentially, teachers were forced to learn new teaching platforms and applications. Furthermore, some teachers had to acclimate to teaching in a hybrid setting with some students in the classroom and others online at the same time (Marshall et al., 2022). In other words, expectations grew, but grace did not (Castrellón et al., 2021). In response, frustration and resentment from teachers increased, potentially impacting students both social-emotionally and academically (Kim et al., 2021). The construct of learning loss and the perception that teachers failed students during the COVID-19 pandemic has begun to shape the
narrative of schooling in the United States. Overcoming this idea is one of the major challenges that school districts are facing in education as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 era.

At the same time, teachers have become part of the learning loss narrative and are quick to blame the idea of learning loss for difficulties they currently encounter in the classroom. Teachers have been blamed for keeping students out of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic due to claims of unreasonable demands to return to in person learning (Bonilla-Silva, 2020). Teachers have always faced the challenge of having students of varying academic levels all within one classroom, but currently the concept of learning loss offers a potential justification for the discrepancies in educational outcomes like never before. The learning loss lens focuses on the negative and what students are unable to do; thus, exacerbating any beliefs associated with a deficit mindset that teachers may already hold. It provides a way for teachers to blame the shortcomings in student achievement on something outside of student and teacher control; a global pandemic that kept students out of school for, in some cases, the better part of a year.

**Teacher Burnout, Complacency, and School Culture**

These strains on school culture are contributing to teachers feeling burnt out and underappreciated. Matiang‘i et al. (2016) found several school culture factors contributing to teacher burnout: discipline, under staffing, management and administrative practices, professional development, teacher role expectations, disengaged parents, time-consuming meetings, and balancing administrative duties among teachers were some of the key factors in escalating teacher burnout. Moreover, their study found that because teachers are becoming increasingly overwhelmed in many aspects of education, they “go through the motions of teaching with no emotional commitment to the task and no sense of efficacy” (Matiang‘i et al.,
This manifestation of burnout manifests in a complacent manner among teachers where they appear disinterested in growing their practice.

**Problem Statement**

One problem the United States is facing is an unprecedented turnover in the teacher workforce. The rapid loss of teachers underscores the difficulty of the profession and the lack of prestige associated with teaching. According to The University of Massachusetts Global, when teachers leave, they are often replaced by inexperienced and less-effective teachers, teachers who are teaching on alternate certificates, and even teachers who have been trained outside of traditional educator programs. Furthermore, instead of providing our most vulnerable populations of students with highly qualified, experienced educators, students are being taught by teachers who have less preparation and on the job support.

Attention has been given to teachers leaving, but not enough attention is being paid to the difficulties of teachers who stay. Historically, shifting accountability policies have put pressures on teachers to chase improvements in student standardized test scores at the cost of the wellbeing of their students and themselves. The most current policies additionally require teachers to spend increasing amounts of time on metrics beyond test scores (e.g., observations, portfolios), but still do not center on the needs of students and their teachers. The result is a feeling of burnout that impacts both teachers who eventually leave the profession and those who choose to stay in the classroom.

Moreover, a learning loss narrative has dominated the return of teachers and students to classrooms after a period of instructional disruptions due to COVID-19. The loss teachers and students experience can be framed as learning opportunities to be successful at achievement measures. The loss can also be the grief and loss of loved ones and time during the pandemic.
Nonetheless, teachers are being asked to bear responsibility for supporting students to be successful in navigating and ameliorating these losses. At the same time, the narrative allows teachers to become complacent about real and pre-existing opportunities and learning gaps as a cause of students’ lack of achievement; teachers can point to the pandemic instead of taking accountability for what happens in their classrooms.

**Problem of Practice Statement**

Teacher burnout and complacency have real and practical impacts on school culture. Burnt out and complacent teachers may not see the need or have the energy to tackle some of the structural challenges in the system of education to meet the needs of historically and currently marginalized students in their classrooms. Teachers are primarily from White and middle-class backgrounds, and although they have likely been taught in their education programs about Whiteness and implicit bias, they may still engage with color evasive and deficit-oriented practices that negatively impact school culture, even when they attempt to engage in critically-responsive pedagogical practice to meet the needs of diverse students. This study is intended to explore the larger problem of teacher burnout and complacency in the context of how veteran teachers perceive and experience school culture in a school with low teacher turnover.

**Leadership Perspective**

As a white woman teacher practitioner with 15 years of experience I have observed firsthand the difficulties teachers are experiencing in navigating evaluation pressures as educators attempt to transition back to “normal” in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. My district is a Title I urban setting that involves a white teacher majority working with diverse students and families from historically marginalized communities. Furthermore, my school setting is unique in that my school experiences very little teacher or leader turnover. I have
worked with many of the same colleagues and the same principal for most of my years as this school. As the demographics of our school have shifted, we have routinely engaged with professional opportunities to better the school culture so that we might meet the needs of our students. Last year I spent the second semester as Acting Principal while our long-term principal was on medical leave. This year I have returned to a more teaching-focused role as the middle school English Language Arts (ELA) teacher and Instructional Teacher Leader (ITL) while the school has welcomed a new full-time principal. It is through these lenses as both colleague and leader that I have observed the impacts teacher burnout and complacency have had on our school culture.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to promote a positive school culture in a Title I school by listening to veteran teacher voices around the policies and practices being implemented daily. The culture of a school is developed through the interactions among staff, students, and the school community (Hinde, 2005). There is a link between strong, positive school culture and continuous improvement in school achievement (Lee & Louis, 2019). When a positive school culture is in place, student achievement increases (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016). The current study aimed to uncover the experiences that veteran teachers were having in a typical day, as it relates to their beliefs about school culture, and research aimed to provide critical reflection on school policies so that teachers were given opportunities to voice ideas to promote a more positive school culture. Furthermore, study focused specifically on veteran teachers with a 15 year or more background within their school. All participants are under accountability pressures from standardized testing because they teach ELA or mathematics to a Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA) assessed grade level and are on the formal observation evaluation process,
Research-based Inclusive System of Evaluation (RISE), this year. As veteran teachers of at least 15 years, these teachers have navigated stresses brought on by the policy shifts of three United States Presidents, eight Secretaries of Education, four district superintendents, and countless localized policy reforms, all in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic. They have a context to understand the profession and to speak specifically to the pressures they are under today with respect to pre-COVID norms. With teacher burnout rates increasing, and teachers going through the motions to survive each school day, there is a need to listen to teacher voices and to provide educators with the supports they need to survive the profession.

**Research Questions**

This qualitative study will examine school culture through the voices of veteran teachers who have experienced pressures in the same school setting as they navigated policy shifts, accountability pressures, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The primary research question for this study is *What are the perceptions of teachers, who have been in their position for 15+ years, about school culture in a Title I school?* Additionally, the study serves to answer the secondary question, *What changes in policies and practices in a Title I school do veteran teachers suggest might improve school culture?*

**Summary**

Since NCLB, educational policy changes and reforms have increased the accountability, achievement, and evaluation pressures being placed on classroom teachers. With the impacts of COVID-19 on students’ achievement and social and emotional wellbeing at the forefront of current policy discussions, there is an additional strain on teachers. In the school that participated in this study, veteran and already exhausted teachers are navigating these tensions within the context of the first new school administration since 2002. Thus, this study explores their
perspectives of school culture at an unprecedented time in the profession and in their careers. Chapter Two unpacks significant literature related to teacher beliefs that are theorized to impact school culture and perceptions of school culture, including beliefs about Whiteness in education and implicit biases.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The foundation set in Chapter One emphasized the growing issue surrounding teacher burnout. This burnout has led the teachers who remain in the profession to become complacent in their positions which is negatively impacting the culture inside schools. There are many pending operational challenges with the educational system that these teachers do not have the capacity to confront. The systemic achievement issues in public education are not new to the field; these issues have a long history. The results of these problems leave historically marginalized students at a critical disadvantage compared to their White counterparts (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Moreover, the voices of marginalized students are consistently left out of policy discussions and considerations which make it nearly impossible for their narratives to be acknowledged and perpetuates the narrative of Whiteness and White privilege in schools. This power struggle that dominates education leads to the disenfranchisement of many students, specifically any students that are not in the majority grouping (McGee & Stovall, 2015). The COVID-19 learning loss is tied up in the ideas of Whiteness and White achievement and Deficit Mindset. Historically, the narrative behind learning loss has been color-evasive. The framing of Whiteness was critical because it exposed the learning loss narrative for what it truly is, a color-evasive way of thinking about student achievement. Because everyone lost during COVID, society is no longer focused on historically marginalized families and how the achievement and evaluation processes are not equitable for Black and Brown children. Therefore, I began this study in Whiteness which led me to think about teachers’ deficit mindsets when it comes to student achievement for Black and Brown students. The recovery from COVID has been tied up in the narrative around learning loss which, by its nature, is color-evasive. Pressures to think about the achievement of Black and
Brown students have been removed because of overall concern focused on achievement—everybody lost during the pandemic. This is an equality perspective; we are losing the equity argument when we make and argument for learning loss. Learning loss needs to focus on our Black and Brown students which are the historically marginalized population.

With the urgency of a national teacher shortage and a need to support a vulnerable population of students this literature review examines Whiteness in education, implicit bias, and school culture.

**Whiteness in Education**

This section serves to explore teacher complacency through a lens of Whiteness in education. For the purpose of this study complacency is defined as being unwilling to change practices from the way things have always been done. In a 2017 study, Taie and Goldring uncovered that the teaching profession remains largely White. In the 2015-2016 National Teacher and Principal Survey nearly 80% of all public-school teachers were non-Hispanic White. As Emdin (2017) found, the reality is a glaring racial disparity between teachers and students in the urban classroom which can have implications for the ways in which White teachers understand the needs of students of color. Whiteness is a fluid term that has been difficult to define as the meaning shifts with changes in race, political realignments, societal shifts and economic cycling (Kinchole, 1999). However, Whiteness in education is a norm that promotes privilege and sustains power to those considered, who identify as, or are perceived as White (Yoon, 2012). The complacency among a mostly White teacher population allows schools to function in ways that overlook this privilege and how this privilege impacts students, particularly students of color (Diem & Welton, 2020; Yoon, 2012).
Structural Whiteness and racism in education is a systemic problem. It is rooted in a disproportionate understanding of the structural nature of White supremacy in schools. The education system provides White students with the opportunities to continue to succeed while placing students of color at an academic disadvantage (Diem & Welton, 2020; Pawlewicz, 2020).

**Impacts of Color-Evasive, Culturally Sensitive, and Neutral Teacher Beliefs**

In addition to understanding the role of Whiteness in education it is important to understand the role of color-evasiveness and neutrality in teacher beliefs. Teachers may not understand how racial disadvantages are built into the systems of schooling; as a result, teachers may take an individualized approach to student achievement and but could unintentionally perpetuate inequities by behaving in color-evasive ways or by assuming that all students have equal opportunities to succeed. Bonilla-Silva (2018) and Durand and Tarvaras (2021) discuss the implication of color-evasiveness; it is important to note that throughout the last decade the terminology has shifted from a negative implication of the word blind in color-blind to the term color-evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2017, Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

Color-evasiveness can prohibit White teachers from developing a comprehension of race and diversity that extends beyond a surface level. Additionally, the White power and privilege from color-evasiveness is demonstrated through an ideology associated with the belief that only bad individuals can be racist (Durand and Tarvaras, 2021, Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Moreover, the overall notion is that racism and its manifestation are dismissed or misunderstood through the lens of Whiteness and color-evasiveness. According to Durand and Tarvaras (2021), White people utilize their color-blindness to avoid the acknowledgement of their White privilege or confronting their “limiting beliefs about the individual, rather than the institutional, nature of racism” (p. 154). The notion of Whiteness and White privilege must be acknowledged for
systemic changes to occur through active change rather than ambiguous or surface-level appreciation of diversity.

This systemic problem begins within preservice teacher education programs as these programs continue to train an overwhelming number of White students without attracting more racially diverse students (Durand & Tavaras, 2021; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Sleeter & Milner, 2011). Gorski (2016) addresses the point that “teachers were trained to be culturally sensitive, rather than racially or linguistically just” (p.222). Gorski believes that it is not enough to simply be aware of cultural differences; educators must act to create authentic and courageous conversations focusing on race and equity in order to change the narrative of education. Furthermore, Gorski illustrates his argument with an example of preservice teachers being taught the concept of cultural racial sensitivity: “for example, they were cautioned to avoid using red pens because red ink symbolizes death in some Asian cultures” (p. 222). In this example, Gorski demonstrates how teacher education programs can focus on cultural and racial sensitivity as empathy to individual students who may be unintentionally harmed by the use of red pen rather than on the systems that privilege some students over others. Even when teachers learn to behave in culturally sensitive ways, Gorski argues the result is that schools are “attending to ‘diversity’ in was that implicitly or explicitly emphasize culture at the expense of equity” (p. 225-226).

Gorski (2016) further suggests that the idea of cultural sensitivity does not automatically lead to an equitable education because it seeks to maintain neutral cultural stances that further promote color-evasiveness. As Gorski (2016) states, “because inequity and injustice are not cultural problems, they cannot be resolved through cultural analyses and cultural solutions” (p. 224). The distinction between culture and race is important. Ladson-Billings (2006) argues that the term cultural is too often used interchangeably with race, socioeconomic status, and other
equity concerns. This serves to make the privileged population feel more comfortable so as not to disrupt the status quo by challenging this notion of White privilege (Gorski, 2016; Park, 2005). Acknowledging the difference between culture and race serves to change the narrative in schools to become more culturally inclusive.

According to Durand & Tavaras (2021), maintaining neutrality in racialized issues serves to reinforce a system of power and privilege. For teachers, being able to remain silent about systemic racism while engaging in cultural sensitivity and individual empathy showcases White privilege at work in the education system. Remaining silent in the face of oppression only serves to benefit the oppressor. Whiteness in education is a “matter of power” where “inequity and injustice are not cultural problems” (Gorski, 2016, p. 224).

Moreover, by utilizing individualized sensitivity and empathy, teachers may fall into the trap of thinking in terms of equality instead of equity. But equity (providing everyone with what they need to be successful) is not equality (providing everyone with the same tools). Far too often “the idea of equality is related to the misbelief that fairness means even distribution and is closely associated with the belief that all students can be successful if they “pull up their bootstraps” and “work hard” (Payno-Simmons, 2021, p. 344). It is more than a meritocratic mindset; work hard and you will be successful. Equality must give way to equity if educators are to ensure that every student can participate in their learning as well as have positive, high-quality learning experiences regardless of their race or cultural background (Kyser & Skelton, 2019; Payno-Simmons, 2021).

The research lends itself to the idea that complacency among White teachers has been framed as being neutral where teachers are neither a help or a hinderance to their educational practice; they continue to teach in ways they have always taught and utilize the same practices
they have always used. This neutrality is supported by the ideal of color-evasiveness where
White teachers claim to not see students’ skin color and to only see children. Color evasiveness
is seen as an attempt to save children of color through uncritical racial consciousness. Instead,
exploring complacency through a critical multiculturalism lens lends itself to moving beyond “a
spurious acknowledgement of cultural traditions toward a commitment to more equitable school
practices- and contend that it is the theoretical grounding for the promotion of radical reflection
among teachers in diverse urban settings” (Durand and Tarvaras, 2021, p. 150).

Color evasiveness further impacts the development of relationships between students and
teachers which are paramount to the success of the students. As such, Steele (2010) notes that the
interactions between White teachers and students of color have a fragile dynamic in which the
teacher is likely to attribute non-achievement to the lack of effort of individual students of color
rather than to racist systems. Therefore, the exchanges between students of color and White
teachers can highlight ways teachers take a complacent approach to teaching (Steele, 2010;
Durand and Tarvaras, 2021). Teacher complacency threatens these student-teacher relationships,
which are critical in attaining high levels of student success. According to Wilkins (2014)
“teachers saw relationships with students as central to their jobs. Teachers did not separate their
relationships with students from other aspects of teaching” (p. 66). For students to succeed,
positive student-teacher relationships must be fostered; however, positive relationships between
White teachers and students of color are hindered by teacher neutrality in the face of oppressive
educational systems.

From the work of May and Sleeter (2010), Banks (2016) and Durand and Tavaras (2021),
critical multiculturalism serves to break the barriers of neutrality by challenging dominant norms
or standards of practice. Furthermore, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) argue that inequitable
opportunities are still “most often conceptualized by schools, teachers, and textbooks as a superficial celebration of difference…but is devoid of an examination of unequal power and status between such [marginalized] groups” (Durand and Tarvaras, 2021, p. 151). The status between these groups lays a foundation for their rank and prestige allowing Whites to continue moving forward at the expense of marginalized racial populations.

The research of Mazzei (2004, 2008) demonstrates the impact of White teacher complacency through the well-intentioned practices of classroom teachers. She studied the observed silence White teachers express. Teachers displayed thoughtlessness toward the cultural and racial background of their students in planning. Additionally, educators circumvented discussions with a race-based focus. Importantly the teachers believed this practice was synonymous with incorporating inclusive practices into their teaching.

**Deficit Mindset**

The notion of complacency can be framed through a deficit mindset discussed further in the theoretical framework. When teachers operate from a deficit mindset, they focus on the discrepancies or inabilities of students. It is an approach that remains fixated on what someone cannot do rather than what they can. Findings of a study conducted by Baldwin et al. (2007) showed that the majority of White prospective teachers participating in an urban service-learning project believed “children of color are difficult to teach or unmotivated toward school” (p. 325). Bryan (2017) found White teachers disproportionately target Black males for minor and subjective school disciplinary infractions. Additionally, these White teachers influence the way White students see Black students. Through this target biases and actions become part of White students’ “intergenerational legacies of negative views about Black males, which contribute to the maintenance of disproportionate school discipline” (p. 327) and the larger society. These
biases are unconscious prejudices or beliefs about the student. Historically, the narrative has written Black male students as troublemakers, many times resulting in the misdiagnosing them and assigning Special Education services to help fix the problem (Durand and Tarvaras, 2021). This approach to education is known as subtractive schooling and takes away from the educational experiences of students (Valenzuela, 1999). The problem is not the behavior of these Black males but of the education system continuing to incorrectly label them, thereby perpetuating systemic racism in schools. Several studies conducted suggest that Black boys do not misbehave more than their White peers. The studies indicated that the Black boys frequently face unfavorable discipline outcomes due to the systemic bias in place regarding behaviors (Gage et al., 2019; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Payno-Simmons, 2021; Skiba et al., 2011). The complacency centered around the teacher reactions to the misbehaviors of Black males continues to demonstrate the ways in which disadvantages are created through structural racism.

Further studies from McGrady and Reynolds (2013) and Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) revealed that there are fewer positive comments directed to African American and Latino students by their White teachers. Furthermore, African American and Latino students are rated as less attentive, mature, and competent compared to White or Asian students. Additional negative perceptions have influenced the tracking and grouping practices of Black and Latino students. These inequitable practices frequently result in a lack of access to college preparatory courses and other less academically rigorous opportunities for these students (Durand and Tarvaras, 2021; Nieto & Bode, 2011).

**Whiteness & Social Capital**

Another way to foster relationships and to create a successful school environment is through social capital. Utilizing the work of Tredway and Generett (2015) and Goddard (2003),
this study incorporates teacher voice as a means of capitalizing on social capital to help explore school culture and expectations for the academic success of students. Lassiter et al. (2022) identified the following four characteristics of social capital:

[The] normative behaviors of the school (how problems are resolved, and decisions are made), rational networks (the triangle of interpersonal relationships between teachers, students, and their families), trust in parents (the belief of school staff that parents and teachers work together effectively to achieve goals), and trust in students (the belief of school staff that students work together with teachers effectively to achieve goals). (p. 87)

It is crucial to understand the role social capital plays in moving away from individual color-evasive norms within the educational system. Social capital is collaborative and focuses over individual attributes (Valenzuela, 1999). Schools work to create social capital by establishing norms and expectations and developing social skills for students (Valenzuela, 1999).

Social capital can feel the influence of White spaces and privilege and power can create conditions of institutionalized oppression (Ogbu, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999). Since the accepted norms in education are White centered this perpetuates the systemic racial discrepancies in the educational system. Tredway and Generett (2015) suggest that the analysis of both assets and challenge can employ effect change efforts.

**Implicit Bias**

The unconscious manner in which the attitudes or stereotypes impact one’s understanding, actions, and decisions is implicit bias (Kirwan Institute, 2012). Implicit bias is sometimes referred to as unconscious bias and unknown to the holder of the biases and beliefs (Ratliff & Smith, 2021). It remains true “that people have attitudes and stereotypes that influence
how they see and interpret the world around them” (Ratliff & Smith, 2021, p. 1), and this unintentional bias “occurs unconsciously and without intent” (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006; Gullo et al., 2019, p. 14).

In addition, implicit bias in education is endemic to school culture and to the students the school serves. Despite being rooted in the social psychology field (Ratliff & Smith, 2021) the study of implicit bias has become important in education. The lack of high expectations for students and misdiagnosed behavioral issues are collateral damage to a more widespread problem; teachers are allowing their own implicit biases and preconceived cultural stereotypes to impede their ability to focus on a student-centered learning environment with high expectations for all. The work of McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) uncovers the idea that, “on average, classrooms, schools, and districts in the United States are inequitable for children of color…some substantial portion of that inequity is caused by the attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and behaviors of teachers and administrators” (p. 628).

Implicit bias in education operates in different ways with prominent ones being in the form of equity traps that “are ways of thinking or assumptions that prevent educators from believing their students of color can be successful learners” (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 601). The implicit bias that teachers bring into the classroom immediately identifies students of color or students living in poverty with the expectation that they cannot perform the same as their White counterparts. The result is that “most schools have been doing an adequate job of providing a quality education for White middle-class students, but this has not been the case for students of color, especially those living in poverty” (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 602).

Additionally, implicit bias provides disadvantages for many students of color while creating opportunities for White students (Kozol, 2012; Kranich, 2001; Payno-Simmons, 2021;
Rothstein, 2017; Scheurich & Young, 1997). Implicit biases also manifest in a failure to set high expectations for all students. According to McKenzie and Scheurich, “[students of color are] frequently educated by teachers who do not believe they can learn or who are negative in their attitude towards these students” (2004, p. 602). Teachers allow these negative attitudes and beliefs to impede the learning culture in their classrooms as “racial, ethnic, and cultural attitudes and beliefs are always present, often problematic, and profoundly significant in shaping teaching conceptions and actions” (Gay, 2018, p. 143). When implicit bias operates within the framework of color-evasive practice teachers shape the expectations they set for their students because “teacher expectations are formed based on knowledge teachers have about their students” (Flanagan et al., 2020, p.1430; Friedrich et al., 2015). Furthermore, “this knowledge can be objective, such as previous grades; or subjective, such as perceptions of in-class performance as well as prejudices or stereotypes” (Flanagan et al., 2020, p.1430; Friedrich et al., 2015). An educator’s implicit bias directly impacts students’ achievement levels through the ways bias influences instructional and classroom management practice. Therefore, “students’ academic achievement will increase when a teacher has high expectations for them… low expectations for students will impede those students’ academic achievement” (Flanagan et al., 2020, p. 1430).

Opportunity Gap

Implicit bias can often manifest itself through a deficit mindset, specifically through deficit beliefs about student achievement. With implicit bias, language matters. As such, Gorski (2016) calls attention the fact that, in education especially, “how we frame the problem drives what we are capable of imagining solutions” (p. 225). The achievement gap is a way used to frame the achievement problem by describing the gap between “White and racial minority students – particularly Black and Latino students as compared with White students [and while]
the achievement gap as a whole has narrowed in the past 50 years, notable progress has stalled” (Gullo et al., 2019, p. 6).

Furthermore, the lack of progress is one indicator can be shifted by focusing on the achievement gap. One way to do this would be to reframe the achievement gap to the opportunity gap (Gorski & Dalton, 2019; Gullo et al., 2019; Milner, 2010). The research of Milner (2010) is the foundation for understanding the systemic opportunity gap in education; for students to succeed opportunity structures need to be put in place to support development and learning. Milner argues that by using opportunity structures the focus is detached from the individual students and instead placed on systems. Achievement is student focused, attending to students test scores and grades; therefore, placing the onus on the achievement of students. However, the opportunity gap focuses on what is missing in students’ education, which are systemic factors. Focusing on the systematic factors removes the onus from the students. Additionally, when these gaps are addressed, student outcomes improve (Milner, 2010).

Moreover, the work lends itself to addressing more than just academic outcomes. It addresses an equity mindset shift in educators where students are given what they need to thrive, providing students the opportunity to “build a stronger sense of identity and purpose based on their current experiences rather than waiting on a particular outcome that can be determined by an outside entity” (Milner, 2020, p. 23). Without working to close the opportunity gap in our education system the achievement gap will remain at a standstill (Gullo et al., 2019).

**Discipline Gap**

In addition to the achievement and opportunity gaps, a school culture focus suggests there are gaps focused on learning and on discipline. With the learning gap the reference is between what the expectation is for student learning compared to what they are actually learning (Gullo et
al., 2019). The discipline gap focuses on different groups of students and the frequency in which they are suspended or expelled from school (Gullo et al., 2019). No matter which gap is being referenced the fact remains that “low socioeconomic status students and students of color typically experience more detrimental outcomes (lower test scores, more suspensions) than White students (Gullo et al., 2019, p. 6), which is a further demonstration of the enduring impacts on implicit bias in the educational system. A mindset shift to overcome implicit bias is a necessity to propel the educational system forward rather than maintain its place in a circular pattern.

When focusing on the discipline gap it is clear that implicit bias is not limited to academic achievements as many teachers hold the “belief that Black boys act out more than their White peers” (Allen, 2015; Payno-Simmons, 2021, p. 344; Riddle, 2014; Skiba et al., 2011). Implicit bias impacts behavioral health through the discipline gap because “students of color often receive harsher and more punitive consequences than White students, resulting in higher rates of discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions” (Blitz et al., 2016, p. 520; Skiba et al., 2002). Educational opportunities become limited through these punitive discipline practices and “even push students toward the criminal justice system” (Gullo et al., 2019, p. 7). These elevated discipline rates have occurred disproportionately higher for students of color for nearly 30 years; disparate discipline and exclusionary practices have increased nationally and currently occur in urban and suburban schools (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Losen & Skiba, 2010; U.S. DOE., 2016). As a sign of the growing problem, in 1973, African American students were twice as likely to be suspended than their White peers (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975). By 2006, this inequity had risen to three (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Currently, African American students are 3.8 times more
likely to be suspended than their White peers (U.S. DOE. Office of Civil Rights, 2016 as cited by Payno-Simmons, 2021, p. 343).

Moreover, disproportionate discipline rates can deny students their fundamental right to an education, which will further exacerbate the opportunity gaps (Gullo et al., 2019). Through the equitable implementation of high expectations for all students teachers can create relationships and students will be able perform better when they are in an environment where they feel cared for, attesting to the idea that “The first job of the schools is to care for our children” (Noddings 1992; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016, p. 16). While the implementation of these programs has “proven challenging in practice” (Augustine et al., 2018; Bastable et al., 2021, p. 220; Gregory & Evans, 2020), there is “evidence of interventions that can significantly decrease disparities” (Bastable et al., 2021, p. 220; Bradshaw et al., 2018; Cook et al., 2018; Gion et al., 2020; Gregory et al., 2016; Knochel et al., 2022) when removing implicit bias and implementing an equitable approach to discipline in order to lessen the discipline gap. Many researchers have linked the connection between the discipline and achievement gaps.

As expected, disparities in school discipline are just as pronounced and pervasive as academic disparities (American Civil Liberties Union, 2008; Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, & Belway, 2015; U.S. DOE., 2016). For example, the Office of Civil Rights’ analysis of 2013–2014 discipline data found Black students were 3.8 times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than White students (Office for Civil Rights, 2016). The data also revealed that American Natives, Latinx, Pacific Islanders, and multiracial boys were disproportionately suspended, but to a lesser extent than Black boys (Gullo et al., 2019, p. 8).
School Culture

To begin, school culture can be difficult to define as the term is often used interchangeably with school climate and school environment. For example, “Climate emphasizes the feeling and contemporary tone of the school, the feeling of the relationships, and the morale of the place… culture best denotes the complex elements of values, traditions, language, and purpose” (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 18). According to Fullan (2007), school culture can be explained as the directing beliefs and values apparent in the way a school operates. Furthermore, it is inclusive of the attitudes, expected behaviors and values that influence how the school functions (Fullan, 2007). The culture of a school pertains to both how the employees feel about working in the school as well as how the students feel about learning in the school. The school culture is greatly impacted by the school leadership in place and contributes to the school climate or environment recognized by other people upon entering into the school (Barkley et al., 2014; Lee & Louis, 2019). There are many ways that the culture of a school can be portrayed, and these portrayals can be both positive and negative.

Types of School Culture

School culture can be identified as positive or negative, and each type has distinct identifying characteristics. School culture is developed through the interactions among staff, students, and the school community (Hinde, 2005). Positive school culture is shown when the stakeholders of the school have a united sense of what is important, a mutual philosophy of care and concern, and a collective commitment to the learning of all students (Peterson & Deal, 1998). The result of a positive school culture is a team of stakeholders who willingly take risks and carry out initiatives (Hinde, 2005). The other side of the coin is a negative or toxic school culture. The tone in a negative environment is oppositional and bitter and largely the staff is
unwilling to change or try new practices and “places where negativity dominates conversations, interactions, and planning; where the only stories recounted are of failure” (Peterson & Deal, 1998, p. 29). The shared philosophy in a school with a negative school culture centers around riding out the storm and waiting for the newest ideas to pass while focusing on the shortcomings in the abilities of their students (Hinde, 2005).

School culture, when implemented positively, fosters an environment of high expectations for all students and promotes morale and increased performance among staff and students (Cogaltay & Krradag, 2016; McKinney et al., 2015). Furthermore, it can promote teacher efficacy and job satisfaction all the while increasing student achievement (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016). However, a negative school culture can have quite the opposing effect on both staff and students (Lee & Louis, 2019). The relationship between a strong school culture and the success of the school is no surprise. Lee and Louis (2019) found that “there was a strong linkage between schools with a strong school culture and their continuous improvement in school level achievement” (p. 92). Moreover, pride in the school culture fosters a community of learning and academic growth.

One facet of school culture is a focus on high expectations which proves to be beneficial for student achievement (Moller, 2018). One of the key components to creating a strong and positive school culture is to focus on the relationships within the school. It is crucial to approach these relationships through an equity lens and to support the whole learner with a positive emphasis on the development of racial, cultural, and ethnic identity (The Education Trust & MDRC, 2021). These relationships must be cultivated from a place of trust and free of both bias and discrimination through a strength-based lens (The Education Trust & MDRC, 2021). It is critical that in forming these relationships teachers set “expectations that all students can
progress, that achievement for all is changeable (and not fixed), and that progress for all is understood and articulated” (Hattie, 2009, p. 35). A critical part to developing these relationships is “fostering young people’s personal and social development [as] a fundamental focus of our educational institutions” (Carroll et al., 2020, p. 852; Durlak and Weissberg, 2011). By creating a focus that promotes positive student-teacher relationships and places emphasis on the social-emotional development of students the positive school culture will be strengthened. Research has shown that teachers have significant influence on student self-perceptions (Espinoza et al., 2014) which can contribute to whether the school culture is viewed as positive or negative through the eyes of the students.

A positive school culture is fostered when teachers are accepting of students’ diverse needs and backgrounds and embrace students for who they are, not what they cannot do. The work of Scott (2001), as referenced by Skrla et al. (2004), indicates that this idea of systemic equity must be implemented to ensure success of every student in any learning environment be given the opportunity to be successful. The perception of school climate is experienced by those living in that space each day, and it is through the cultivation of authentic relationships between staff and students that the culture of the school can grow strong. A positive school culture can be established “by the presence of a set of norms and values that focus everyone’s attention on what is most important and motivates them to work hard toward a common purpose” (Jerald, 2006, p. 2). Additionally, a school’s mission, vision, and beliefs serve to build their school culture. The work of Deal and Peterson (1999) demonstrates the inner working of the school culture network and identifies how each of the roles play an integral part in establishing and maintaining the culture of a school. The culture of a school serves many purposes including fostering effort and productivity, improving collegial and collaborative activities that in turn promote better
communication and problem solving, supporting successful change and improvement efforts, building commitment and helping students and teachers identify with the school, amplifying energy and motivation of staff members and students, and focusing attention and daily behavior on what is important and valued (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Jerald, 2006, p. 2). The overall goal of establishing a positive culture is to create an environment where the students and staff thrive and create a community of shared norms and values. Jerald (2006) identifies that creating a warm and nurturing culture is not enough, and that high expectations must be set for a positive school culture to be truly effective.

The culture of the school is experienced by the stakeholders and fosters the belief of what is important to the parents, students, and staff of the school community (Prokopchuk, 2016). According to Schein (2010) and Prokopchuk (2016), there are three levels to a school culture: artifacts, espoused values, and assumptions. These three levels allow the school community to see proof of what is happening, take ownership for things, and establish a clear vision and purpose (Prokopchuk, 2016). The foundation for school culture at the core is establishing the mission and vision for the school. From there, teaching practices, behavioral expectations, and an overall sense of purpose can be defined. A mutual trust and relationships must be formed between leadership and teachers and between teachers and students (Prokopchuk, 2016). School culture is critical as it “provides a school’s identity and image-its brand” (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Prokopchuk, 2016, p. 79). Above all else, school culture and a community of high expectations are vital to the success of the school and its students.

**Critically Responsive Pedagogy**

Gap framing is an important step in being explicit rather than color evasive about systems of schooling. The work of Blitz et al. (2016) found “disproportionately higher discipline referrals
and lower standardized test scores for students of color and those who are economically disadvantaged are troubling patterns seen in schools nationwide” (Blitz et al., 2016, p.520). Additionally, studies conducted for students with special needs demonstrated a glaring discipline gap. Furthermore, “Other studies show drastic differences in days suspended by race for students with special needs, with Black students with disabilities receiving three times as many days of lost instruction as White students with disabilities (Losen, 2018, as cited by Gullo et al., 2019).

The examples provided are just a snapshot of a sizable body of proof displaying the glaring disparities in school discipline. These disparities encompass racial, gender, and ability identities. As a result, “disparities in academic and discipline outcomes contribute to persistent racial differences in high school completion rates Barton & Coley, 2010; Gullo et al., 2019, p. 9; Reeves et al., 2016).

Culturally responsive (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b) equity-based approaches to student discipline and academics are the next step in addressing the impact of disparities (i.e., gaps). These approaches can teach resiliency skills and promote the well-being and achievement of all students, and focus on expressing basic acts of kindness in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Additionally, implementing a culture of high expectations in schools for all students can greatly influence the overall social-emotional and academic health of students; therefore, creating overall healthier schools. The equitable implementation of high expectations for all students creates an overall positive school culture by “embedding culturally responsive practices into how behavioral expectations are taught” (Bastable et al., 2021, p.221; Fallon & Mueller, 2017).

Additionally, research conducted by Koch and Gross (1997) showed that basic classroom discourse must be culturally relevant in communication styles (Durand and Tarvaras, 2021; Gay,
Students should not be penalized when their cultural methods of learning do not match up with the widely accepted White norms the system has perpetuated (Durand and Tarvaras, 2021). Drawing on the lived experiences of all students adds a deeper, more meaningful level of engagement which affords students the chance to learn more meaningfully. Additionally, such practices provide all students with the opportunity for culturally rich dialogue (Durand & Tavaras, 2021; Perry et al., 2004; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2004).

**Brining the Theoretical Frame Together**

As explored in the literature review, the theoretical framework chosen to guide this study combines elements of deficit thinking and Whiteness studies. The deficit thinking framework is guided by teachers’ implicit bias and can provide insight to the way teachers’ perceptions of school culture and student backgrounds can impact their preparation and instruction in the classroom. Paralleled to implicit bias, teachers who take up a deficit thinking model focuses on what students cannot do, rather than highlighting and celebrating what they can do; it is a blame the victim approach to education (Valencia, 1997).

Many teachers, especially those experiencing burnout, may be operating within the mindset that they cannot reach students from homes where they believe education is not valued (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). This type of thinking supports complacency rather than the need to create a classroom and school culture where all students feel respected, included, and understood by their teachers. Whereas a critically responsive school culture supports where students to embrace a higher level of self-esteem and worth (Hooks, 1994; Sharma, 2018), a complacent school culture in which teachers are operating from a deficit thinking framework supports teachers’ inability to see past their preconceived beliefs of student abilities based on their race or socioeconomic background. It is therefore imperative that teachers reframe their
thinking about students, families, and communities. School leaders need to encourage a growth mindset where teachers move from a deficit orientation to an assets-based one (Moll et al. 1992; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Replacing the deficit orientation allows for recognition of the knowledge and experiences students bring with them to school (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Moll et al., 1992).

Additionally, Whiteness studies in education align with the deficit thinking framework by focusing on underachievement of students of color rather than the underachievement of students more generally, which leads to inaccurate perceptions of racially marginalized students. Moreover, Whiteness may act to encourage color evasiveness and prevent teachers from constructing lessons to meet the needs of their diverse students more effectively (Milner & Smithey, 2003; Sharma, 2018). This perpetuates a school culture where staff believe that those students who are failing are doing so because of their internal intellectual or motivational shortcomings regardless of whether it is intellectual or motivational. Additionally, teachers focus on some what they perceive to be deficits connected to students, such as their culture, race, or family background. These traits are perceived to contribute to the students’ struggle because they are not conforming to the White standards and norms set forth in education (Smit, 2012; Valencia, 1999). The fluidity of deficit thinking model allows the definition to fit many categories but there are a few solid truths that remain intact with the definition. Referencing the work of Portelli (2010, 2013), Sharma (2018) describes deficit thinking as:

- a very common way of thinking which affects our general way of being in and constructing the world. Differences from the “norm” are immediately seen as being deprived, negative, and disadvantaged. It never questions the legitimacy of what is deemed to be normal nor does it consider that differences may actually go beyond
expected norms. It discourages teachers and administrators from recognizing the positive values of certain abilities, dispositions, and actions. Deficit thinking leads to stereotyping and prejudging. It marginalizes certain people on the basis of misinformation and misconstructions. (p.137)

With respect to this definition, schools act to normalize behaviors that are congruent with a White society; thus, sustaining White power and privilege. Students who do not fit this societal norm are labeled in a negative way. With respect Valenzuela’s (1999) work regarding the sociological-cultural framework, Sharma (2018) states “one of the major effects of deficit thinking is a sense of alienation” (p. 149). This model allows for the further division of classes and a sustainability of White privilege by alienating students who have historically been racially marginalized from engaging with systems of schooling (Valenzuela, 1999). In turn, teachers label these students as rebels who are seemingly disengaged. Additionally, they can be called unappreciative or disrespectful because they do not follow the White norms of school culture (Durand and Tarvaras, 2021; Sharma, 2018). When teachers engage with the deficit thinking model, it has “ethical implications on historically marginalized students…. As educators, we need to begin thinking about how we can be ethically responsible and contribute to accessible, engaging, and positive public schooling experiences for all students” (Sharma, 2018, p. 150). This means setting a higher standard and fostering a positive school culture with high expectations for all students regardless of their race or class to break the mold and provide authentic learning experiences for all students.

Summary

The purpose of this literature review was to provide a concrete background and understanding on the role of Whiteness in education, how Whiteness influences teachers’
likelihood to engage with deficit thinking, and the impact of deficit thinking engagement on school culture. Chapter Two also identified the framework through which this study will be conducted. In the following Chapter Three, the purpose, context, and background of this study will be explained. Additionally, the methods used for gathering the data, the participants, and the role of the qualitative researcher will be outlined and elaborated.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins by reiterating the purpose, context, and background of this study as well as the theoretical frameworks in which this study was positioned. Then, the methodology, the participants, and the role of the qualitative researcher will be described. Next, the process for data collection and analysis will be clarified. To conclude, the protection of the participants in this study will be detailed.

Research Questions

Primary Question: What are the perceptions of teachers, who have been in their position for 15+ years, about school culture in a Title I school?

Secondary Question: What changes in policies and practices in a Title I school do veteran teachers suggest might improve school culture?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to promote a positive school culture in a Title I school by listening to veteran teacher voices around the policies and practices being implemented daily. The culture of a school is developed through the interactions among staff, students, and the school community (Hinde, 2005). There is a link between strong, positive school culture and continuous improvement in school achievement (Lee & Louis, 2019). When a positive school culture is in place student achievement increases (Alridge & Fraser, 2016). A qualitative case study using narrative inquiry approach was conducted to uncover the experiences that veteran teachers are having in a typical day as it relates to their beliefs about school culture. Furthermore, a qualitative case study was used to provide critical reflection for the teachers to voice praise and concerns around policy as a means to promote a more positive school culture.
Positionality

Education is historically and presently overpoweringly White. Therefore, my study began by examining the overwhelmingly White and female population of teachers and what this means for our students of color, particularly in the way that discipline practices and educational norms rooted in Whiteness were impacting students of color. In addition, I had concerns about the way myself and my fellow White teachers were impacting our students of color. As I was developing my inquiry in this study I became critically aware of Whiteness in teacher practices; I was aware of the need to improve outcomes but did not know enough about how Whiteness works to move to deficit models. Initially, I began by considering teacher complacency and burnout through a color evasive framing. As a White woman teacher, I was seeing complacency and burnout, which was what I intended to study. However, over the course of the dissertation process and my learning journey I began to see the impact of Whiteness and differing expectations for students due to deficit mindset in the space. This led me to understand deficit models. In understanding deficit models and their impact on school culture an understanding of relationships materialized. For example, the relationships between student and teacher are not just simple interactions, they form the basis of school culture.

In regards to my familiarity with the setting of the study I have had 15 years of experience in urban, public K-12 education, and I have worked for the same principal and with largely the same staff. This experience allows me to have a unique perspective of the setting of the study. The principal of Starfield Elementary School (pseudonym), moving forward, called Starfield, provided me with the opportunity to walk into a school community and to remain in a single place for 15 years. I am a White woman and am in my fifteenth year at the school, having taught as a long-term special education substitute, special education teacher, middle level ELA
teacher, math teacher, and social studies teacher. Additionally, I am the middle school Instructional Teacher Leader (ITL) and I have served as the Acting Principal for the school.

In my tenure at the school I have seen the demographics shift from a 50%-50% racial split to a predominantly Black student population. However, over the last few years, the demographics have returned close to the 50%-50% split. Today Starfield is a PreK-8 neighborhood elementary school that is 100% Title I and comprised of 232 students. Over 60% of the enrolled population are considered to live in economically challenged communities. The current composition of the school enrollment is 116 boys and 116 girls; 112 students are African American, 88 are White, 16 are Multi Racial, 12 are Hispanic and less than five are Asian American Pacific Islander. As a community Title I school we have a responsibility to provide our students with the highest quality education we can. We are a Title I school with an entirely free lunch population.

Being a teacher to an underserved population often means making sure that my students’ most basic needs are being met before I can work to meet their academic needs. Often, students return to school on Mondays and are hungry and exhausted from helping with siblings at home. In comparison, I grew up in a middle-class home with parents that made sure I ate breakfast every morning before I left for school. My mother was always there in the morning when I got on the bus and there in the afternoons when I returned home. She made certain my homework was finished in the evenings, and I was not allowed to play until it was completed. Therefore, as a teacher in an urban setting I acknowledge that my experiences may differ from the students I currently teach, and that I hold privilege in how I experienced schooling.

Furthermore, early in my career I was a color evasive teacher. I thought that not seeing color, only seeing kids, was a way to show that I was not racist as I joined the throngs of White
teachers of primarily Black and Brown students. While I am not proud of my color evasiveness, it is a testament to my ignorance and my White privilege. I quickly learned that being color evasive is not the same as being antiracist. I learned that in order to understand, support, and make academic gains with my students I needed to understand their backgrounds, their cultures, and their stories. It is important to make sure students know that their backgrounds and knowledges are valued, that their stories matter, and that they are important. Taking time to get to know my students and giving them the opportunity to get to know me and ask me questions about who I am as person and not just as a teacher has provided me the opportunity to create relationships with my students. Forming these relationships are a critical component to creating a positive classroom culture.

Currently, I serve as the middle school Instructional Teacher Leader (ITL) as well as the Responsible Teacher in Charge when the principal is out of the building for meetings, sick days, trainings, or personal reasons. It is through this lens that unintentional teacher complacency and an unwillingness to change is an issue that bubbled to the surface and then overflowed last year as I spent the second semester as the Acting Principal while the principal was on medical leave. Seeing the way some of our students are treated by teachers for what they have, or in several cases do not have, uncovered within me a call to action. As an administrator it seemed to me that the implicit biases teachers held towards students of color and students living in poverty were creating a culture that was not positive within the school. I felt driven to explore the connections between school leadership, school culture, and the expectations for students as a means of improving outcomes for our students.

This year the leadership at Starfield has changed after 19 years. The new administrator, Mrs. Adams (pseudonym), is eager to work with the school community and stakeholders to
provide an equitable school culture with high expectations for all students. Therefore, when moving away from my role as an interim administrator, I knew that I wanted to collect veteran teacher perspectives to examine potential links between shifts in school leadership, unintentional teacher complacency, implicit biases that may have become ingrained and reinforced in the accountability pressures brought on by policy shifts and responsiveness to COVID-19 learning losses, and the impact it has on Starfield’s school and classroom culture. It is my hope that the knowledge gained in this study will help foster improvement in this school culture.

Methods

The study was a qualitative study utilizing one group of teachers at a single location and focused on narrative inquiry. Qualitative studies take a holistic approach to a specific occurrence to affect change and grow practice in education (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative methods also work to develop a specific understanding of the instance. Narrative inquiry is a practice that is not new to education. In addition, narrative inquiry involves telling stories about lived experiences (Clandinin, 2006). When coupled with a qualitative study approach lived experiences and shared stories of narrative inquiry provide an opportunity to influence a contribution toward improvement (Clandinin, 2006). Lastly, this study is framed as a matter of social justice and focused on Deficit Mindset and Whiteness Studies frameworks that were combined to focus on the school culture.

Context

The study was conducted in the winter of 2023 following two school years of remote and hybrid teaching models due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to reforms to educational policies since starting at this school 15 years ago the effects of 2020 and the following two years with the COVID-19 pandemic have left our staff and students dealing with learning loss. Due to
the amount of time spent out of school and with remote learning the responsibility of teachers to respond to the opportunity gap is at an all-time critical high. The expectations and demands being placed on teachers to return to the achievement expectations of pre-pandemic learning while still navigated the effects and trauma of the pandemic are largely impacting their work.

Starfield Elementary School is a Title I school in the Pennsylvania Metropolitan School District (PAM; pseudonym). The school district services 20,166 students in grades PreK-12. The district employs roughly 4,100 staff members across 57 schools. Nearly 72% of students (roughly 14,500) qualify for free lunches and an estimated 354 students are experiencing homelessness. The median income of families in the district is $53,040 and the millage rate is 8.06. Starfield is a PreK-8th grade neighborhood school. Students are primarily from all neighborhoods within the east end of an urban city located in Pennsylvania with some students enrolling through an open enrollment program. There are 232 students enrolled and over 60% of the students are from families whose income is below the federal poverty threshold. Current data indicated that there are 116 boys and 116 girls enrolled in the school; 112 students are African American, 88 are Caucasian, 16 are Multi Racial, 12 are Hispanic, and less than five are Asian. Overall PSSA Math, ELA, and Science Proficiency or above levels increased from 2018-2019. Math scores increased from 26% to 33%; ELA increased from 57.5% to 64.7%; and Science increased from 41% to 51% proficiency.

The staff is comprised of 28 teachers, five paraprofessionals and one of each: principal, social worker, school nurse, secretary and student systems data specialist (SDSS) split between two schools with an alternating schedule of three days one week and two the next. Staff demographics are 87% White and 13% Black. Teacher demographics are 79% female and 21%
male. Of the female teachers, 95% identify as White and 5% identify as Black. The male teachers all identify as White.

Participants

Recruitment of participants was based on a purposeful sample identified as members of the PSSA ELA and Math teaching team who are on the formal evaluation system, Research-based Inclusive System of Evaluation (RISE), this year. All members of the learning community were provided information about the study and verbally invited to participate by the researcher during a regularly scheduled meeting of the professional learning community at the school.

Participants included six classroom teachers in grades four through eight who are currently on the formal evaluation process RISE, a system modeling the work of Charlotte Danielson, and teach a PSSA tested content area. The test score data accounts for 20% of a teacher’s end of the year rating. All participants identified as White. Three men and three women agreed to participate. The span of urban school experience among the participants was 15 to 27 years. Additionally, participants have all taught in the same school for a minimum of 15 years. Each participant selected a pseudonym to protect their identities. Before the written responses were administered one participant removed herself from the study, stating that she did not feel she had time to participate due to taking over the additional role of Wellness Coordinator. At the conclusion of the written prompts and before the interviews were conducted a second participant removed himself from the study. A direct reason was not provided. Therefore, four participants remained in the study including myself as a researcher and participant. The work of Milner (2007, 2010, 2015) argued that researchers should not be detached from the research process. Therefore, including myself as a researcher and a participant allowed me to further extend my own positionality (Theoharis, 2007), guide this study, and include my own personal narrative.
The participants were selected based on their time employed at the school, their response to the changes in school policies and reforms, their placement in the formal observation process, and their role as teaching a tested content area. All identifying information regarding the participants has been removed; participants chose pseudonyms for the purpose of maintaining anonymity in the interviews and transcripts.

**Data Collection**

The data were collected through a small writing prompt in which each teacher was asked to outline their typical day. It was important to start with the “A Day in the Life” narrative because I was looking at the experiences teachers were having in the building during the day and their perceptions of the school culture. This was designed to get a sense of the question: what does a day feel like for a teacher? I chose to look at one day in order to respect the time of the participants and provide a snapshot for what was happening in a day rather than trying to ask participants to remember everything that happens over the course of a longer time frame such as a week or a month. Using one day also provided me insight into the number of responsibilities teachers had each day and the potential impact on burnout and complacency.

Once the participants submitted their responses semi-structured interviews were conducted with them in order to learn more about their perspectives on the impact of their reflection on their typical day. While the researcher asked questions of the participants, a semi-structured protocol allowed the interview to unfold conversationally and provided opportunities for the participants to “explore issues they feel are important” (Longhurst, 2016, p. 144). Furthermore, a semi-structured approach allowed the interviewer to ask follow-up questions as they fit into the conversation. Upon the request of participants three of the four interviews were conducted face-to-face. Only my own interview as the participant was conducted via Zoom.
Each interview was transcribed using Otter and voice recorded to ensure validity with responses. The participants were asked a series of open- and close-ended questions allowing for immediate clarification and elaboration. The interviews spanned from 18 to 32 minutes due to the time participants could make work in their schedules, and the transcripts were between five and nine pages. At the end of each interview session the researcher noted initial after thoughts about each interview. The recorded responses were then uploaded to the researcher’s computer for analysis. The notes and interviews were transcribed and coded for common themes.

Next, all participants were provided a copy of the transcript from their interview and a reflection sheet with two reflective questions to respond to after reviewing the transcript from their interview. This provided participants with an opportunity to engage in member checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to ensure accuracy in the interpretations as they were coded. In comparison to the written prompts and transcripts the reflections were briefer; the shortest response was one paragraph. The longest reflection was about a page and a half. Participants noted time being a barrier completing reflections.

The data for this study were coded using Saldana (2021) as a guide. The qualitative analytic process was cyclical, and the data were initially coded utilizing an open or free code (Charmaz, 2014). Each part was broken down into discrete parts and compared for similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Upon completion of each interview I replayed the recording while following along with the transcript to address inconsistencies or incorrect transcriptions. Furthermore, I reread the transcripts and reviewed the notes I made during the interviews. Transcripts were returned to the participants for review and gave participants the opportunity to clarify or add to their responses. This method of member checking was utilized to ensure accuracy in each participant’s response.
The goal of this study was to identify how the culture of a school in an era post-Covid-19, with the idea of learning loss and the opportunity gap for Black students at the forefront, impacts the perception about school culture of veteran teachers. The study was conducted through a writing prompt, interviews, and reflection questions; therefore, the data were coded to look for similar, reoccurring themes that occur through the participants responses.

An additional strategy utilized in the data collection through the interviews is discussed in Tredway and Generett (2015)—this strategy is called the concept of Gracious Space, which they define as “a spirit and setting where we invite the stranger to embrace learning in public” (p. 21). Gracious Space provided an opportunity for the participants in the space to develop trust in the researcher and in the experience and process while building a collective power. Establishing norms and guidelines for the interviews allowed the participants to feel safe and valued as they learned together (Tredway & Generett, 2015). Creating a Gracious Space allows and encourages participants to be their authentic selves with the understanding of no judgement or punitive repercussions.

Member checking, also known as respondent validation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), was also used throughout the study to encourage feedback on the findings from those interviewed. The purpose of member checking is to avoid the misinterpretation of responses and to rule out any of the researchers own bias (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants were provided with their transcripts after the interviews were conducted to review and reflect on their responses as well as given the opportunity to clarify their responses.

Data Analysis

I, as the researcher, served as the primary interviewer except when conducting my own interview. My interview was conducted by my mentor for The Educational Leadership Program.
Interviews were semi-structured, and after all interviews were conducted participants implemented a member check system. Interviews were conducted in March and April of 2023.

Additionally, the semi-structured interview asked a series of open-ended questions and each of the six participants were asked the same questions. Even though I, as the researcher, asked some specific questions, the semi-structured protocol allowed the interviews to unfold conversationally and provided opportunities for the participants to “explore issues they feel are important” (Longhurst, 2016, p. 144). This allowed the me to ask follow-up questions as they fit into the conversation. Interviews were transcribed verbatim using transcription software and checked against the recorded interview sessions to ensure accuracy. The interviews were coded by looking for common themes as suggested by Saldana (2021).

**Summary**

This qualitative case study is set to examine the link between school leadership and unintentional teacher complacency in education. Furthermore, this study investigates how innate implicit bias creates complacent teachers, and examines how bias impacts school and classroom culture while being driven by policy reforms and political agendas in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative study was conducted using narrative inquiry and semi-structured interviews to receive data from the participants. Data were collected through written prompts, semi-structured interviews, and reflection questions with four veteran teachers in an urban school district located in Southwestern Pennsylvania. After collecting data, I explored themes related to school culture, deficit mindset, and Whiteness which served as the theoretical framework for this study. The findings and analysis from the study will be discussed in Chapter Four following this section.
CHAPTER IV
DATA ANALYSIS

Overview

This section will outline the data and findings of this study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to promote a positive school culture in a Title I school by listening to veteran teachers’ voices about the policies and practices being implemented daily. Data were collected through written prompts, semi-structured interviews, and reflection questions with four veteran teachers in an urban school district located in Southwestern Pennsylvania. After collecting data, I explored themes related to school culture, deficit mindset, and Whiteness, which served as the theoretical framework for this study. The primary research question guiding this case study was: *What are the perceptions of teachers, who have been in their position for 15+ years, about school culture in a Title I school?* The secondary research question guiding this study was: *What changes in policies and practices in a Title I school do veteran teachers suggest might improve school culture?* Participants included four classroom teachers in grades four through eight who are currently on the formal evaluation process RISE, teach a PSSA tested content area, and have worked in the building for a minimum of 15 years.

Data Sources

Demographic Information

At the start of the interview, before engaging in the questions about their written responses to the prompt, participants were asked a series of demographic questions regarding how long they have been teaching and why they chose to enter the field of education. Their responses are presented in Table 4.1 below.
### Table 4.1

**Participant Demographic Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pronouns</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Reason for Becoming a Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexa</td>
<td>she/her/hers</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Wanted to help children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn</td>
<td>she/her/hers</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Wanted to help children and give back to district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>he/him/his</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Wanted to give back to the same district that he was educated in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>he/him/his</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Wanted to help children; respectable career</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Alexa**

Alexa is a middle school ELA teacher and has taught in her current building for more than 20 years. She has both elementary and middle school experience. Alexa sits on many of the committees in the school and brings a sense of organization to the teams she serves. She prides herself on the relationships she builds with her students even after they have left her classroom.

**Evelyn**

Possessing 15 years at the school, Evelyn has the least amount of time in the building and district. She has both classroom teacher and administrative experience and currently serves as the middle school team leader in the building. She is actively involved on all the committees in the building and serves as the teacher in charge when the principal is out. Her interview was the only interview conducted via Zoom rather than in person.

**Joe**

Joe has over 20 years in the building serving in both elementary and middle school capacities. He also has experience with non-classroom positions as an academic coach. Joe was inspired by his own childhood teachers to become an educator. He wants to be a role model for future generations.
Max

Max has the most experience of the four participants serving his school for over 20 years. He has both elementary and middle school experience. He has primarily taught at the intermediate grade level for the past eight years. He serves on the discipline committee and has a strong sense of classroom management.

Results

I will present the results of this study by summarizing each participants’ writing prompts and answers to each interview question in a narrative form. Results were coded for similar themes as they related to the written responses, interview questions, and reflection questions. Interviews were transcribed and voice recorded to ensure accuracy. Participants were then provided with their transcripts from the interviews to member check for credibility and validity. This step provided participants with an opportunity to engage in member checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to ensure accuracy in the interpretations as they were coded.

Responses to Writing Prompt

Prior to conducting the interviews, each participant was sent an electronic copy of the prompt: “A Day in the Life”: please walk me through your day, illustrate what you are seeing and experiencing, and how you are feeling during a typical school day. Participants were asked to respond to the prompt and submit it within one week. Upon receipt of their written responses the interviews were scheduled. A summary of each participant’s response will follow.

Alexa

Alexa wrote one and a half pages to outline her typical day in the life. She discussed the stress and a feeling of never being able to catch up. She noted that the “constant piling on of things seems to be never ending which results in that feeling of never being able to catch up.”
addition to her daily teaching load she has breakfast and lunch duties in the cafeteria, and she is responsible for an intensive Tier 3 Reading Intervention group for students who are struggling readers. She equates this to an additional teaching period which she must prepare. She also discussed her frustrations with the lack of discipline and challenging behaviors of her afternoon class. Her overall belief is that change can be a good thing. However, there must be a concerted group effort in place coupled with a strong sense of leadership the school had previously known so that situations can be corrected for the better.

**Evelyn**

Evelyn’s response to her typical day was two and a half pages. She focused a lot on the role confusion that exists in the building, especially since the school has a new principal this year. She has served in a teacher leader role in the building for more than six years and feels that the staff relies on her to lead instead of the new administrator. Another focus of her day was the lack of time to accomplish all the expected roles and responsibilities she is required to fulfill. She described this as “one of the things about entering the field of education is that you enter knowing this isn’t a regular 9-5 job. You know the work will follow you home and you will never really shut it off…so much is being added to our already overflowing plates.”

**Joe**

Joe wrote the longest response to the prompt at nearly three full pages to outline his typical day, noting that his day truly begins when he is commuting. On his way to the school he already feels the stress and frustration of the day and is concerned about getting his students to understand the material without adequate planning time to accommodate reteaching or differentiated instruction (DI). He stated, “Well, it all starts on the ride into work. Either languishing over coming back to this place or thinking about ways to get my students to
understand the materials we are going over.” While his narrative was written with a lot of wit and humor, as is the way he conducts himself during a conversation, the tone of the piece was far from comical. Joe focused a lot on time in a day, or more accurately a lack of time in his day. He stated, “I eat lunch with our Instructional Teacher Leader (ITL) where we discuss our ‘lovely’ 8th graders and how they acted today. This usually gives me some idea of how I approach 7th and 8th periods.” He noted that preparing materials for three 90-minute block periods is nearly an impossible task given all the meetings the school has in a week during their morning Essential Staff Education Practices (ESEP) time. He comes in early and often stays late to accomplish everything he needs to be prepared for a day, voicing, “I don’t want to do it at home, so I stay until 4:30 or so. So, in case you are keeping track, that’s a 7:00 A.M. arrival and a 4:15 or so departure.” He notes this has caused him to contemplate retiring now rather than three years from now as he had originally planned.

Max

The outline of Max’s typical day was two pages in length. He focused on the lack of support for the middle school teachers. Responses reflected frustration in dealing with the behaviors of the middle school students as well as the inconsistencies and lack of follow through with discipline from the administrator, voicing, “I feel it’s because there is a lot of favoritism by administration with several of these students so their behaviors are overlooked or ignored – even when teachers report incidents to the principal.” He spoke to the struggles with one class in particular this year with behaviors and the fact that there are little to no consequences for student misbehavior which has “put a bad taste in my mouth, for lack of better terms, and has caused me to ignore any outside behaviors beyond my classroom and my own students.” He also discussed the lack of time in the day, and that he has no additional time to prepare for the teaching
intervention period that is on his schedule. Max also noted that the daily meetings often set the tone for his day and also take up needed time.

**Interview Question Responses**

Prior to conducting the interviews each participant was sent an electronic copy of the prompt: “A Day in the Life”: please walk me through your day, illustrate what you are seeing and experiencing, and how you are feeling during a typical school day. Participants were asked to respond to the prompt and submit it within one week. Once I was in receipt of their responses interviews were scheduled where we could discuss the day they wrote about at length. A summary of each participant’s response to the individual questions will follow.

**Interview Question One**

After responding to the participant demographic questions, the first interview question I asked participants was “What caught your attention the most about your day as you were writing it?”

**Alexa.** In her response to interview question one, Alexa emphasized the struggle of time and tasks. She spoke to the exhaustion she feels regularly:

I think what I focused on the most was the constant feeling like I can't catch up. It's just regardless of how many notes I write myself of things to do. I'm still taking things home. And then of course I get home and I'm so exhausted from the day that they sit in my bag and never come out.

Additionally, she outlines the frustration she feels with starting and ending her day in chaos because of the hectic mornings overloaded with meetings she talked about in her response. She also noted the group she has in the afternoon is particularly draining which leaves her day a
chaotic and disorganized mess. She noted “The constant starting our mornings out with the tones of the meetings, it also stood out to me. I feel like I start in chaos, and I end in chaos.”

**Evelyn.** When Evelyn began her response to question one she immediately launched into time and tone as the two things that struck her the most as she was writing about her day. She focused on the different roles she fills and how that makes it challenging to negotiate the actual amount of time in her given day with the ever-growing list of tasks she has to accomplish. She feels like she never stops and is constantly in motion, stating, “How much I don't stop moving. A lot of it came back to time, time and tone. And a lot of it came back to time and not having enough time during the day to prepare for everything.” When asked for clarification around the tone of the building she noted, “Administration tends to lead from the office with the door closed. And I think the problem with that is nobody sort of knows where to look when something is going wrong.” She explained that staff will look to her to fill the void and the exhaustion of trying to find the balance of accomplishing everything is nearly impossible.

**Joe.** Joe’s response to question one was different from the other participants in that he did not note anything really sticking out as attention grabbing. He said the day he described “It was just another normal day until the last couple periods… And it was just terrible last two periods.” When asked for clarification around how typical this was for his day he said, “Typical is a good way to put it.” His response to this question noted that the students in the class cause behavior issues and they are unmotivated to work in his class, which is after lunch, having spent the morning doing work in their other classes. He said, “And kids in my last two periods typically think that ‘I've done work all day. I don't really want to do more work now.’” Additionally, he noted favoritism towards several of the eighth graders in his class and how this causes behavior problems:
I have the eighth graders after lunch and unfortunately some of them have been, for lack of a better term, coddled, by the principal. And they feel as if they can do whatever they want. They can speak however they want.

This was a visible source of frustration for Joe as he rubbed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. He sighed heavily as we moved on to question two.

**Max.** Max also spoke to the tone of the school in his response to the first interview question noting that the tone for his day is frequently set by the meetings he must attend in the mornings:

> What caught my attention the most is basically just a feeling I get when I walk in the building, and I go into the office, and I see the meetings for the day and that kind of sets my mood because I feel like we are constantly in meetings.

This has left him with a sense of being overwhelmed and feeling like he cannot get his work done unless he takes things home. In addition to the tone set through meetings, Max noted how some teachers react or avoid behavior situations at breakfast duty, which factors into the tone and mood. He stated, “I'm always standing in between the gymnasium and the cafeteria… And sometimes the kids are wound up and you got to settle them down and there's certain people there I feel that just turn a blind eye to it.”

**Interview Question Two**

The next question participants were asked was a multipart question: “How does the time period impact what your day would look like? To clarify, how would this day differ from when you first started teaching? How about from pre-pandemic, to COVID to now?”

**Alexa.** Interview question two continued to perpetuate the feeling of negotiating planning time and having too many tasks and not enough time in the day. Alexa responded, “I felt like I
have less time to fit more things into I feel like we just keep getting things piled on top of us especially from more than one individual.” Additionally, it highlighted the confusion in roles in the building, specifically between the academic reading coach and the principal:

So, I'll get things piled on me to do from administration and then get things passed on from coaching. And all of these things do not many times incorporate things in the curriculum. So, they're in addition to so when you look at your scope and sequence it's all now not fitting in.

Alexa spoke to the way that time has evolved as school has returned to full in person instruction since the COVID-19 pandemic began, responding, “ESEP time has been moved to the morning when I first started teaching and throughout most of my career, I've had ESEP in the afternoon.” With this minor change came a major adjustment. Alexa said, “I don't like it in the morning because I feel like I don't get a chance to prepare myself for the day.” To further speak to the way the pandemic has impacted her day, Alexa addressed, “I'm finding that the kids are behind so I'm having to take five and 10 steps backwards to then go on with what they should have already known when they entered.”

**Evelyn.** When responding to question two, focusing on the timeline from the beginning of her career through the pandemic to now, Evelyn still noted time as major influence in her day, but she related it to staffing and the fact the with budget cuts they have lost teachers at an alarming rate. She explained, “I think when I first started teaching time wasn't as big of an issue. You know, we all had prep periods, and they were for that, prepping. We also had a lot more staffing.” When asked to elaborate on that point she noted, “We've lost five staff members in the last two years. We're really a bare bones skeleton crew. The lack of time really impacts that between funding and positions being cut, everybody's expected to do more with less.”
Joe. Joe has been in the district for 30 years, and his response to how things have changed focused on instruction. He talked about a time where teaching was the focus of a teacher’s job and there was not an emphasis on all the background noise, stating, “There wasn’t as much emphasis things other than teaching. When I started teaching it was, you need to teach this, they need to learn this. They didn't put a whole bunch of stuff on your plate that was external.” He expressed frustration with the constant meetings the staff is expected to attend now and the need for things such as Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) to be embedded into instruction. The result he feels, is burdensome, mentioning, “There's SEL that needs to be incorporated. The social emotional learning needs to be incorporated into your curriculum as well.” Here, he noted that an emphasis the district places on pacing guidelines does not coincide with their directives to capitalize on teachable moments. Joe explained, “These teachable moments break off from any pacing issues that you may have already. You can't keep up with where they want you to be at a certain time and it's just gotten to be very, very cumbersome.”

Max. When comparing his day across the timeline Max focused on how things have changed with behavior, discipline, and routines. He noted that returning to pre-pandemic protocols are helping to reduce distractions and return things to what he referred to as normal, stating, “I just feel like we need to tighten up to the reins.” When asked to elaborate further he discussed the lack of discipline in the building, responding, “I feel there are kids in this building that get away with everything. And I feel they are still rewarded for negative behaviors, so to speak.” From his perspective, even when staff take issues to administration nothing is being done, and this is causing a lack of focus in his classes. Max said, “And I feel that the good kids aren’t focused on enough because we're always dealing with the behavior problems.” This has
led Max to alter his practice from assisting in the hallways to avoiding conflicts by keeping to himself. He said:

I really don't worry about what's going on in the hallways, even if I hear a lot of commotion I more or less shut my door now. Just because I know if I step in, things aren't done. So, I just, so to speak put my blinders on. I think that's what that's how I would express it, just putting my blinders on and just teach my class.

**Interview Question Three**

The third question posed was “What surprised or shocked you the most about your day when you wrote it down?”

**Alexa.** When discussing interview question three Alexa emphasized a change in her practice this year regarding behavior. In the past she noted that she has not been one to struggle with behavior management and prides herself on building relationships with her students. She found the biggest surprise in writing down her day and really looking at it was “The amount of energy [she needs] to put into [her] afternoon class.” When prompted to tell why she thought this was the case she candidly discussed the lack of support for teachers and the lack of consistency when it comes to discipline in the building:

And this year, I struggled. And I struggled mainly because I don't have support. So, I've used everything in my resources that I feel like I could. But nothing's consistent. Their behavior is so inconsistent from day to day, from period to period. And that's because the constant allowing of disarray. Like it's nothing to have your door open and hear kids runs down the hall. Or yelling out things that are inappropriate or shouldn't be said, which then in turn, totally sets them off. So, I spend a lot of time with my door shut and the amount
of time that I spend on behavior is something I think that I really, when I wrote that, I really didn't realize how much I do spend on it now. During this part of the interview, Alexa’s face showed the exasperation she is feeling. She noted that the lack of support is not only occurring at the school level, but also from district policy, stating, “The district doesn't allow suspensions. There are no consequences for behaviors, which trickles down to administrators, principals who don't have a leg to stand on when they want to discipline kids.” This has led her to adopt a similar style this year which is unlike any of her past practice. Alexa responded, “I’ve found myself doing the same thing, which is not any practice that I have ever done.” Similar to Max, prior to this year when Alexa heard commotion in the hall or another class she would jump in and assist, stating, “If somebody's running in the hall I would get up out of my chair to go to see who it was with the chaos I now find myself closing my door and worrying about the four walls that are here.”

**Evelyn.** The most surprising thing to Evelyn when she responded to her day was seeing a visible shift in the tone of the building. She noted that this year has been trying for them in part because they are all adjusting to the expectations of a new administrator; Evelyn is also learning the staff, building, and job. She said:

I think part of the tone shift are growing pains that come with having a new administrator because everybody has to feel each other out. We knew what the expectations were with our previous administrator, there is a learning curve to that. Things in the district are shifting as well. There's a lot more being put on the principal's plates to and they're not getting any assistance from central [office]. Our school doesn't have an assistant principal and so there is no one to share the workload with as she learns this new role.
Joe. Consistent with his view on time in question two, Joe found time to be the most surprising to him when he wrote about his day and reviewed his thoughts. He noted that the most surprising aspect was “How much time I spend at school. And how, how much stuff I still don't get done, because there's just not enough time.” Joe’s course load changed this year to include three sections of math in different grade levels, and he feels that “Having three different grade levels is tough even though I have done it in the past but now it seems just totally swamped. An exorbitant amount of paperwork, emails, other stuff that just runs through.” He also noted that he was surprised at how much sticks with him after the day is over and how the last two periods of the previous school day set the tone for his next day:

It's weird how the minute I get into the car to come here I’m either languishing about coming in or I'm okay with coming in and all depends on how my last two periods the day before. It surprises me how much sticks with you. When I started, I let a lot of stuff roll off my back but now, all of a sudden it sticks with me.

He reflected that this was not previously the case, stating, “I used to be happy coming to school.”

Max. Max found himself surprised at the amount teachers do in any given day. He was uncertain how long to make his initial response to the writing prompt because he figured everything he is doing is routine, but when he examined his writing there was more that met the eye. Max reflected, “I thought I was going to write a paragraph but then when I was going through every single step of my day, it became two pages. I thought it would just be routine and it’s - it's a lot.”

**Interview Question Four**

Interview question four asked: “From your perspective, what are the barriers or obstacles impeding student achievement you are encountering in that day?”
Alexa. Interview question four produced a similar response to the one Alexa gave to question three. The biggest barrier she is facing in impeding student achievement are behaviors and a lack of support from the new administration. Alexa answered, “Behavior is causing a lot of the problems at this point, where I'm constantly correcting you, or I'm correcting you, I correct you. I have to turn around and correct you. Okay, we’ve just lost 10 minutes of instruction.” The behaviors are not being addressed by administration, only by the classroom teachers. She addressed the point, stating, “However, I feel like we [administration] are not focused on worrying about what's happening in the building.” When asked to elaborate on what she meant, she continued, “Closed in the office, not walking the halls during transition time. That is a huge in any school elementary, middle school, high school, that's a huge time where there needs to be presence.”

Evelyn. Evelyn found the main barriers that she is facing to be outside of the classroom, particularly from people who are not in the classroom and have not been for several years. Additionally, she spoke to time and the idea of teaching to maintain pace versus teaching to attain mastery: “For me, it comes back to time. We don't have time to teach to mastery. If we want to stay on pace – as teachers we’d rather teach to mastery – but the pressure on pacing comes down from up above.” She clarified that it is not her building administrator questioning the time, noting, “And it's not even from the administrator. It's coming from the curriculum coaches and district curriculum people checking in and questioning where you are in the scope and sequence and why.”

Joe. Without hesitation Joe named behavior as the number one barrier impeding the learning of his students. He said, “Number one would have to be behaviors. If they can't act right, they can't learn if I have to redirect, correct. It just takes that much more away from
everybody else.” He also felt strongly that the lack of accountability for students was a close second, noting, “The other things that I would say is lack of accountability of students. As we've been told you can't force them to do anything.” His frustration, again visible on his face. Coupled with the lack of accountability for students, Joe feels administration puts too much pressure on teachers:

There's no accountability for the students and it [accountability] all falls on us if they are failing. And then they [administration] want to know what we're trying to do to help them when the students that are not passing. But we have given every opportunity and they just don't want to do it and it's not that they can't do it.

Despite his frustrations Joe continues to support his students by letting them to make up missing assignments, giving them notes, and allowing them to use the notes with examples on his tests.

Max. The first barrier Max spoke to was, similar to Alexa and Joe, behavior. He responded, “Well, first and foremost, I think there's a lot of behavioral problems.” Second, along with Joe, Max noted a lack of accountability from his students: “I think there is a lack of accountability from these kids.” The third barrier is the pressures put on to teachers regarding standardized testing, in this case the PSSA. In addition to testing Max made note that there are several different strategies being thrown at teachers, from professional development sessions, to the need that Evelyn spoke about, time and maintain pacing:

I feel that they pressure us with the PSSAs, PSSAs, PSSAs. But everybody's throwing things at us of how to teach these kids: different strategies, groups, this, that, and the other thing and we have a pacing guide that we need to sort of adhere to, and there's just not enough time in the day to get it all done.
**Interview Question Five**

The fifth and final question provided participants the opportunity to speak to the changes or improvements they would like to see in their day: “How could that day [from the writing prompt] be improved?”

**Alexa.** When asked how her day could be improved Alexa wrapped it back up to an appreciation of teachers’ time, presence from administration, and discipline. She feels that the times of “meetings could be given before 15 minutes before I walk into the building when I check the bulletin”; therefore, allowing for more planning time in the morning or the day before if she knows she will lose her Essential Staff Education Practices (ESEP) time. Furthermore, Alexa feels that an increased presence from the administrator would make a large impact on student behavior, stating, “I think if that changed, and the presence was there, and the rules were followed, then I think the chaos and the inconsistency of the behavior would be different.”

**Evelyn.** Evelyn would like to see more supports in place for staff and students. She noted that self-care is preached a lot at professional development (PD) sessions and at the end of staff meetings, but there is no direct action to correlate supporting self-care. She also spoke to the meetings principals must attend twice a month that have them removed from their buildings for the entire day. The meeting times are consistent, and she believes this should make it easier to lend support to schools, especially those like hers that do not have an Assistant Principal (AP): I mentioned when the administrator is out nobody from Central Office comes to check on us. They know when the meetings are; the meetings are at the same every month. They're the second Tuesday and third Thursday of every single month. How hard is it to dispatch people into our buildings. To say, ‘okay, you're going to go to this school and support on these days.’
**Joe.** Consistent with his other responses, Joe believes that if the behaviors and discipline issues are addressed his day would improve. He feels that discipline is not being handled effectively:

There are students that think that they are above the rules or just it [the rule] doesn't pertain to them. If those students had been dealt with properly, when the first signs of misbehavior, disrespect, whatever, towards schoolwork, towards teachers, towards other students, had that been handled properly, my afternoons would probably be a lot better and I could probably teach a lot better to instead of having to stop, wait, redirect.

Joe also remarked, “They [his afternoon class] are very intelligent at times, but since there's no discipline, no repercussions. They don't learn.” When asked what the phrase “dealt with properly” meant, he talked about the previous administrator and how she would hold grade level team meetings at the beginning of each school year to set expectations. He believes that if administration was discipling the students things would run more smoothly and result in less stress on teachers, noting, “And if all of this was handled appropriately, through administration, things would run a lot smoother. There would not be as many incidents, behaviors. There will be less stress period.”

**Max.** First and foremost, Max feels that a decrease in meetings would improve his day, responding, “I would say not so many meetings all the time.” Additionally, he thinks restoring the faith in teachers as the experts would improve his day: “They want us to teach certain ways, instead of the way I feel like I'm used to teaching I feel like I know my kids better than any of our administrators or outside agencies do.” Finally, he emphasized that removing pacing the curriculum could improve his day, noting, “I feel like if there wasn't a stress on pacing and we
could slow it down and teach to mastery instead of just touching on everything. I think that would really help my day.”

**Theoretical Framework and Identified Themes**

During the interviews participants shared their lived experiences from their perspective as classroom teachers in the same school for 15 or more years. These experiences provided participants with the opportunity to pause and reflect about why they became a teacher and how they would like to see changes implemented to retain teachers in the profession.

To begin coding I reread the participants “A Day in the Life” responses noting similarities between responses. Next, I listened to each interview again and noted commonalities in the participant’s responses. As I noticed themes emerging I reviewed the transcripts and the written responses with different colored highlighters to categorize the data into each of the themes I had noted. Once the initial themes were established I continued to listen to the interviews and reread the transcripts to find quotes from the participants to support the code system. I reread their written responses and used the color-coding system to find quotes in the responses as well. The reflections were not utilized in the coding process as they were brief and did not provide usable data. The following three themes were established from the data set: Mismatch Between Time and Responsibilities, Mismatch Between District Policies and Administrative Procedures to Support Staff, and Burnout.

**Theme: Mismatch Between Time and Responsibilities**

Table 4.2 establishes the codes in the first theme of the disconnect between time and responsibilities for teachers. These teachers expressed a frustration between all that is expected of them each day and the amount of time there is in a given day to accomplish everything that is
asked of them. More expressly stated, they have an infinite number of tasks and a finite amount of time in a day to make everything happen.
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<th>Code</th>
<th>Explanation of Code</th>
<th>Associated Behavior(s)</th>
<th>Sample Data</th>
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</table>
| Negotiating lesson planning time | Preparing for lessons | Copying, grading, creating materials | Making copies  
Developing resources  
Checking assignments  
Lesson Plans  
ESEP Time  
PLCs  
Coverages  
Loss of preps  
Working beyond contracted time |
| | | | “I feel like we are constantly in meetings. There’s not a lot of downtime to get any extra work done, unless I’m taking it home.” (Max)  
“I came in early as normal because I don’t have enough time to prepare everything and don’t want to do work at home. (Joe)  
“It’s the constant feeling of I can’t catch up, it’s just regardless of how many notes I write myself of things to do.” (Alexa)  
“I don’t like ESEP time in the morning, I feel like I don’t get a chance to prepare myself for the day. It’s like I start my day behind.” (Alexa) |

| Delivering instruction | Teaching | Mastery of skills | Pacing vs. Mastery  
Pressure to keep up  
Timelines  
Incorporating SEL |
|------------------------|----------|------------------|-------------------|
| | | | “We’re still expected to teach and get our kids to learn and try and keep them on pace.” (Evelyn)  
“I feel like if there wasn’t such a stress on pacing, we could slow it down and teach to mastery.” (Max)  
“We don’t have time to teach to mastery, if we are expected to stay on pace.” (Alexa)  
“There’s SEL that needs to be incorporated. The social-emotional learning needs to be incorporated into your curriculum as well.” (Joe) |
Committee work
Extra responsibilities
Check-ins, coverages, committees

Instructional Cabinet
Discipline Committee
PBIS Team
Leadership Team
ITL/coverage
Lunch Duty

“I get one prep period a day for all three of my classes and a lot of time it’s taken up with extra responsibilities.” (Joe)

“I have also had the responsibility of taking on two girls that come to me on a regular basis. One that is struggling with a depression issue, and another who just needs the constant check in of validation that she’s doing the right thing.” (Alexa)

“I have a lunch duty, where I stand in the gymnasium and make sure the kids are doing what they need to do. I teach reading and math interventions. I cover the fourth-grade teacher’s class every day for his ITL period.” (Max)

“I’m the middle school ITL. I sit on all our committees: instructional cabinet, discipline, PBIS. I coordinate transportation and I am the responsible teacher in charge when the principal is out of the building.” (Evelyn)

The theme of the disconnect between time and responsibilities materialized from the written responses to the prompt where the participants had the opportunity to look at everything they are expected to do in a day and how much they actually accomplish in that day.

**Code: Negotiating lesson planning time.** All four participants expressed a feeling of being ill prepared for each day. Time that was once utilized for planning for a day has been replaced with an excessive number of meetings almost daily. This leads to teachers being unable to prepare for their day unless they come in early, stay late, take work home with them, or a combination of the three. Alexa expressed that the movement of ESEP time to the morning last year causes less time to prepare for the day, and she feels she “starts the day behind.” She also noted that she feels as though there is “less time to fit more things into.” Max noted that “unless I’m taking it home,” there is not enough “downtime to get extra work done.” Joe expressed his frustration by stating that he comes in early every day because “I don’t have enough time to
prepare everything, and I don’t want to do work at home.” Evelyn experiences a constant feeling of “being unable to catch up.”

**Code: Delivering instruction.** There is a disconnect between teaching skills to mastery and maintaining pace as outlined in the scope and sequence for teachers. The participants all noted that as teachers they are drawn to teach to mastery and to reteach when students need additional help or miss the benchmark. Due to the pressures from the district to maintain pace this has become unattainable. Max noted that with an emphasis on pacing, “We don’t have time to teach to mastery.” Evelyn notes that as teachers pacing is not as important as a mastery of skills: “As teachers, we want to teach to mastery, to ensure our kids are getting it, but then we have to answer as to why we are only on lesson two when we should be on lesson four.” There are additional objectives that need addressed within the everyday curriculum as well. Joe noted, “There’s SEL that needs to be incorporated. The social-emotional learning needs to be incorporated into your curriculum as well.” These additional responsibilities are not factored into the pacing guide, yet teachers are expected to incorporate them into the same amount of time they had before.

**Code: Committee work.** The participants in this study all made mention of the additional responsibilities teachers have in addition to their planning and delivering instruction. These include, but are not limited to, the instructional cabinet, discipline committee, PBIS team, lunch duties, and morning duties. Often these responsibilities occur during teachers’ allocated preparation period. Max has several additional duties this school year:

I have a lunch duty, where I stand in the gymnasium and make sure the kids are doing what they need to do. I teach reading and math interventions. I cover the fourth-grade teacher’s class every day for his ITL period.
In Alexa’s case, the additional duties come from the relationships she has built with her former students:

I have also had the responsibility of taking on two girls that come to me on a regular basis. One that is struggling with a depression issue, and another who just needs the constant check in of validation that she’s doing the right thing.

Supporting these girls is important to Alexa because she knows that building relationships with her students creates an environment where they feel confident learning from her. Joe stated that, “I get one prep period a day for all three of my classes and a lot of time it’s taken up with extra responsibilities.” Evelyn is juggling several balls at once:

I’m middle school ITL. I sit on all our committees: instructional cabinet, discipline, PBIS. I coordinate transportation and I am the responsible teacher in charge when the principal is out of the building. Add in teaching three double blocks of ELA, and there is a lot that needs done in a 45-minute prep period.

While the participants noted that the school is a place where the teachers work as a team, the additional responsibilities still weigh heavy on them time after time; therefore, teachers are left with a feeling of disconnection and are overwhelmed with what needs done in an allotted amount of time.

**Theme: Mismatch Between Policies and Procedures**

Table 4.3 illustrates the codes in the second theme of the disconnect between district policies and school level procedures. Participants were unanimous in their exasperation with the level of support they receive. It begins at the district level with specific policies being implemented and the way administration carries out procedures at the building level. The
participants expressed a grave concern with the fact that these policies and procedures often undermine the support that teachers are looking for.
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<th>Explanation of Code</th>
<th>Associated Behavior(s)</th>
<th>Sample Data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with staff</td>
<td>Providing updates and information</td>
<td>Emails, daily bulletin, lack of support for teachers</td>
<td>Staff meetings not listed on calendar</td>
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<td>Limited notices of meetings</td>
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<td>Teachers on multiple teams</td>
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<td>“Notice of meetings could be given before 15 minutes before I walk into the building when I check the bulletin.” (Alexa)</td>
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<td>“Sometimes I’m in the K-5 group, sometimes I’m considered in the 6-8 group, but there’s confusion because I can’t go to both for in-services.” (Alexa)</td>
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<td>“But everybody’s throwing things at us about how to teach these kids different strategies, groups, this, that, the other thing, with administration, or in our PLCs or in services, whatever it may be and it’s all these different strategies.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Addressing student behaviors</td>
<td>Misbehaviors</td>
<td>Off task, interruptions, outbursts</td>
<td>No consequences for students</td>
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<td>student misbehaviors</td>
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<td>Disciplining students</td>
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<td>Lack of visibility to students</td>
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<td>“Admin is closed in the office, not walking the halls during transition time. That is huge in any school, elementary, middle school, high school, that’s a huge time where there needs to be presence.” (Alexa)</td>
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<td>“The district doesn’t allow suspensions. There’s no consequences for behaviors, which trickles down to administrators.” (Alexa)</td>
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<td>“They [administration] turned a blind eye to things. I just feel there’s a lot of inconsistency in this building. And the district.” (Max)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experiencing standardized test influence pressures</td>
<td>Administrative influence for proficiency</td>
<td>Expected goals for proficiency PSSAs</td>
<td>Pressure from administration/academic coaches</td>
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<td>“I feel like we’re under a lot of pressure when it comes to PSSA scores.” (Max)</td>
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<td>“I am a teacher and I have my education. It’s not my accountability or not my responsibility to learn it. It is my responsibility to teach this, it is their responsibility to learn it.” (Joe)</td>
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The theme of the disconnect between district policies and school level procedures emerged from the interviews when the participants were asked to reflect upon what they felt surprised them the most when they wrote about what their typical day looked like and what they thought the cause of that was.

**Code: Communicating with staff.** Participants were unanimous in their view that information, especially regarding meetings, is not disseminated clearly or often at all. Three out of the four participants noted that they check the board in the office or wait for the daily bulletin before they have any idea what meetings they are expected to attend for any given day. Alexa thrives with organization and clear direction and expressed her frustration with the lack of communication, noting, “Notice of meetings could be given before 15 minutes before I walk into the building when I check the bulletin.” Additionally, she noted that many teachers in the building sit on more than one committee and may have anywhere from one to four meetings in a week. Sometimes these meetings overlap. Since she cannot be in two places at once she ultimately misses out on key information: “Sometimes I’m in the K-5 group, sometimes I’m considered in the 6-8 group, but there’s confusion because I can’t go to both for in-services.” As noted above, Evelyn is

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<th>Navigating tensions</th>
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<th>Personnel/roles and responsibilities</th>
<th>Role Confusion</th>
<th>Overwhelmed District policies</th>
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<td>“Everybody’s kind of expecting us to do more with less, less funding, less staff, more district initiatives, raise test scores.” (Evelyn)</td>
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<td>“Plus you’re dealing with behavior problems and absenteeism and lateness and personal problems and family problems.” (Max)</td>
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<td>“It seems sort of like, almost like, nobody knows who is in charge.” (Evelyn)</td>
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<td>“I’ll get things piled on me to do from administration and then get things passed on from coaching…being in both the K-5 and 6-8 group, I’m almost in trouble [for missing one of the in-services] because I can’t go to both, by the reading coach.” (Alexa)</td>
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on every committee in the building because of her role as the Middle School Instructional Teacher Leader (ITL). Her mornings are constantly monopolized with meetings. She is left without clear direction on when to attend which committee when they overlap.

Additionally, Max expressed great frustration over how multiple policies within the district are pushed out in tandem with procedures being implemented at the school level. This makes it challenging to navigate which ones are priority. Max responded, “But everybody’s throwing things at us about how to teach these kids different strategies, groups, this, that, the other thing, with administration, or in our PLCs or in services, whatever it may be and it’s all these different strategies.” Participants would like to see a more streamlined approach to disseminating information, particularly in meetings.

**Code: Addressing student behaviors.** Discipline, or rather the lack thereof, as expressed by the participants is largely disconnected between the district policies and how the school administration implements procedures. This area was a main concern for all participants and is where they are feeling the most unsupported in their work. On top of discipline concerns, additional challenges have been presented when trying to motivate students and maintain control of the classroom environment. One of the main concerns was addressed in Alexa’s interview where she explained, “The district doesn’t allow suspensions. There’s no consequences for behaviors, which trickles down to administrators.” She elaborated on the point noting that, “principals…don’t have a leg to stand on when they want to discipline kids.” However, while this is a district level policy that the school cannot change, staff would like to see a deeper presence from the principal when it comes to addressing student misbehaviors. Alexa stated, “We [administration] want to be friendlier and let the little things go, but the little things just keep snowballing into bigger things.” In her interview Alexa called attention to this point, stating the principal needs to be visible to
students during unstructured times: “Admin is closed in the office, not walking the halls during transition time. That is huge in any school, elementary, middle school, high school, that’s a huge time where there needs to be presence.” Multiple participants noted that the principal is not visible to students, especially in the hallways and at lunch. Max noted connected the conclusion that because of the way the district policies tie the hands of administrators in their schools, responding, “they [administration] turned a blind eye to things. I just feel there’s a lot of inconsistency in this building. And the district.” Joe expressed what other students are missing out on with the lack of discipline in the building: “If I have to redirect, correct, it just takes that much more away from everybody else.” He feels that the students who want to learn are losing critical instructional time because he is constantly redirecting behaviors. Overall, all participants noted that they feel unsupported when it comes to addressing the misbehaviors of students, in part from the district implemented policies that place restraints on what administrators are permitted to do, but also from the lack of visibility of administration to the students.

**Code: Experiencing standardized test pressures.** There are many aspects to education that are made into policy at the district level or above. There are policies that schools have no say in creating, as they are district mandated. However, the schools are the vehicles for the execution of these policies and mandates. Standardized testing is one of these policies. As noted in the previous theme, the participants felt a strong pull in teaching to mastery rather than maintaining pace—the issue of standardized test pressures is married in this policy. The district sets expectations for test scores, and the teachers are expected to attain these goals, whether or not they are feasible. Expected goals for proficiency are established at the school level and outlined in the School Improvement Plan (SIP). The SIP is created by the principal with general direction from the state and district as outlined in a template. While the principal may request input from the
leadership team, it is ultimately his or her decision as to the benchmarks the teachers and students are expected to achieve. Max simply expressed his frustration with it, stating, “I feel like we’re under a lot of pressure when it comes to PSSA scores.” The pressure manifests slightly differently in Joe, as he feels there is too much accountability on the teachers and not enough on the students: “I am a teacher, and I have my education. It’s not my accountability or not my responsibility to learn it. It is my responsibility to teach this, it is their responsibility to learn it.” Additionally, the district is continuously introducing new programs and initiatives while simultaneously cutting funds and staffing from schools. Evelyn discussed this inverse relationship, stating, “Everybody’s kind of expecting us to do more with less, less funding, less staff, more district initiatives, raise test scores.” The pressure the participants noted in their interviews was often accompanied with looks of frustration and exasperation as they gave voice to this disconnect.

**Code: Navigating tensions.** To further the point of the disproportionate level of support from district policies and school procedures teachers are seeking assistance, but there is a great deal of role confusion in the building and additional policies the district is adamant must be implemented. Max focused on all the additional policies outside of teaching that he must first address: “Plus, you’re dealing with behavior problems and absenteeism and lateness and personal problems and family problems.” In his interview he noted that there are specific policies and procedures that the district and school say must be implemented. Furthermore, he noted how the social and emotional well-being of his students must be met before they can focus on academics, and yet none of this is considered with the district policies being put in place. To expand the disconnect even further, Evelyn noted that with so many different messages coming from different departments, expressing, “It seems sort of like, almost like, nobody knows who is in charge.” When asked how her typical day would differ in a different time frame, specifically when she first
started teaching, she noted the role confusion and how academic coaches are trying to act like administrators: “I’ll get things piled on me to do from administration and then get things passed on from coaching…being in both the K-5 and 6-8 group, I’m almost in trouble [for missing one of the in-services] because I can’t go to both, by the reading coach.” The overall message conveyed by all participants is that they do not feel supported and need more help at both the district and the school levels.

**Theme: Burnout**

The third theme the data was revealed in tandem with the first two. Table 4.4 portrays the codes related to the theme of teacher burnout. The participants expressed in their writing prompts, interviews, and reflections that their plates are overflowing, and because of the disconnects between time, responsibilities, district policies, and school procedures they are shutting down. Their responses reflect a growing disengagement among staff to avoid problems.
### Table 4.4

**Theme: Burnout**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Explanation of Code</th>
<th>Associated Behavior(s)</th>
<th>Sample Data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling overwhelmed</td>
<td>Exhaustion</td>
<td>Stress and frustration</td>
<td>Call offs</td>
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<td>Professional development</td>
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<td>“Everybody’s throwing things at us of how to teach these kids different</td>
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<td>strategies, groups, this, that, the other things, and we have a pacing</td>
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<td>guide that we have to adhere to, and there’s just not enough time in the</td>
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<td>day to get it all done.” (Max)</td>
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<td>“But we’ve lost five staff members in the last two years. So, we’re really</td>
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<td>kind of a skeleton crew.” (Evelyn)</td>
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<td>“The constant feeling like I can’t catch up regardless of how many notes I</td>
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<td>write myself of things to do.” (Alexa)</td>
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<td>“There are no subs. It is coverages. It is splitting kids. It’s getting</td>
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<td>really creative with the schedule.” (Evelyn)</td>
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<td>Avoiding conflict</td>
<td>Ignoring problems</td>
<td>Keeping to myself and in my own classroom</td>
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<td>Seclusion</td>
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<td>Staff shutting down</td>
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<td>“I think that’s how I would express it, just putting my blinders on and</td>
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<td>just teach my class.” (Max)</td>
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<td>“So, I found myself doing the same thing, which is not any practice that I</td>
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<td>have ever done. I now find myself closing my door and worrying about the</td>
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<td>door and only worrying about my four walls.” (Alexa)</td>
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<td>Becoming disengaged</td>
<td>complacency</td>
<td>Continuing old practices</td>
<td>Lack of Differentiated Instruction</td>
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<td>Disengaged parents</td>
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<td>“And I think kids learn in all different ways. But when you’re a single</td>
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<td>“A kid is a kid. You know, it doesn’t matter what color, race you are.”</td>
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“I feel like kids just don’t care. I feel like their parents have kind of given up on the education system.” (Max)

“It was always just do what works. Now that’s not always the case.” (Alexa)

**Code: Feeling overwhelmed.** In her interview Evelyn noted that the school is short staffed due to lack of funding and budget cuts: “We’ve lost five staff members in the last two years. So, we’re really kind of a skeleton crew.” The participants all noted how overwhelmed and exhausted they are feeling. There is a staffing crisis and a substitute teacher shortage despite copious amounts of daily call offs and the teachers in schools are the ones living the reality. After a long sigh, Evelyn said, “There are no subs. It is coverages. It is splitting kids. It’s getting creative with the schedule.” Alexa noted, “I’m finding a lot of times, lunches and preps become optional because we’re covering, because there are no subs in the building. Ever.” She also noted that this has perpetuated a cycle of never catching up or getting ahead, responding, “The constant feeling like I can’t catch up regardless of how many notes I write myself of things to do.” This is not just limited to a lack of subs and covering classes. They are feeling overwhelmed with professional development expectations and new program implementation as well. Max expressed his frustrations:

   Everybody’s throwing things at us of how to teach these kids different strategies, groups, this, that, the other things, and we have a pacing guide that we have to adhere to, and there’s just not enough time in the day to get it all done.

Three out of the four participants spoke to the overwhelming and exhausting feelings they are regularly experiencing.

**Code: Avoiding conflict.** In his interview Joe noted that some of the additional responsibilities he has taken on are because “we are only as good as each part of our team.” He feels that in stepping in to format a computer file helps contribute to the school environment and
affords him the opportunity to “lead by example.” Unfortunately, due to the realization of being burnt out in addition with a lack of support from administration when it comes to dealing with discipline, “They [students] get angry when I tell them to stop, I keep on teaching.” Both Alexa and Max reported similar strategies, noting that rather than stepping in to help with a situation they find themselves closing their doors and ignoring any commotion. Max referred to this as putting his blinders on: “I think that’s how I would express it, just putting my blinders on and just teach my class.” Alexa felt similarly, noting that this year is the first year she has taken this approach: “If somebody’s running down the hall, I used to get up out of my chair to go see who it was with the chaos, and step in. Now I find myself closing my door and only worrying about my four walls.” When asked why she has taken this approach she expressed that she is following the lead of administration who she noted has let things go, responding, “So, I found myself doing the same thing, which is not any practice that I have ever done. I now find myself closing my door and worrying about the four walls here.” The participants all agreed that staff is shutting down because they do not know what else to do as they are too tired to continue addressing issues without administrative support.

**Code: Becoming disengaged.** This code was developed as the compilation of all the data came together. Teachers are engaging in outdated, complacent practices because they are beyond overwhelmed with everything on their plates. In the struggle between pacing and mastery differentiated instruction (DI) is falling by the wayside. Additionally, teachers are experiencing feelings of not being able to reach all students and are placing blame on family support. While understanding the importance of all students learning in different ways, Max stated his frustration;
And I think kids learn in all different ways. But when you’re a single teacher with 22 plus kids in the classroom, you cannot reach all the kids all the time. I feel like kids just don’t care. I feel like their parents have kind of given up on the education system.

Participants noted that with the new administrator has come new beliefs for educating their students. As Alexa put it:

Instead of just do what works, which used to be our practice, there’s now 5,000 questions about why I am doing it. Why I chose to do things in the order I chose to do them in when the program tells you to do this, that, or the other. That was never it. It was always just do what works. Now that’s not always the case.

This has ultimately led to a color-evasive approach to teaching in where the teachers are no longer acknowledging student culture and backgrounds. Max believes, “A kid is a kid. You know, it doesn’t matter what color, race you are…let us teach how we feel we can reach these kids instead of people always telling us do this, that, and the other thing.” Overall, three of the four participants noted ways in which they are becoming disengaged, and it centered around the feeling of burnout.

**Responses to Reflections**

The reflections in this study were not used in thematic analysis as they were brief and provided little data. By the time the reflection piece of the research protocol was implemented the participants were preparing for the state mandated standardized tests and had little time to devote to critical reflection. The difficulty teachers had in completing the reflections—this speaks to the themes of a lack of time and of burnout. A summary of their responses follows.

**Alexa**

Alexa’s reflection was approximately a page and a half. She noted that she recognized the negative undertone of her words, “frustration, inconsistency, disarray, overwhelmed, exhaustion,
support, presence.” This was bothersome to her as these words have a negative connotation and she feels afraid for how her perspective has changed. She also addressed that when she chose education, she was full of positive things to say about the job. She acknowledged that this change is not a result of the students nor teaching itself, but rather, “more the way things have changed and how our district is now being run. The negative feelings come from not being able to catch up, feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, and just mentally exhausted.” She ended her reflection by noting that she needs to stop taking things personally and stop allowing her passion to feel like a burden with the additional responsibilities and lack of time leading to extreme exhaustion and burnout.

**Evelyn**

Evelyn’s reflection was just over a page. She addressed the point that the majority of her day is dependent on other people and what is handed to her first thing in the morning. She noticed that she needs to continue shifting her mindset and keep her focus on her students and making sure they know that she cares for them. Evelyn said, “In a world where upper administration and board members are focused on test scores and funding. I want them to know that I care about them as a whole person and want to see them succeed.” She noted that in attending to the social-emotional well-being of her students first she can then work to promote their academic success and growth.

**Joe**

Joe’s reflection was seven sentences and focused on the recent lawsuit this district is bringing to social media companies. Joe expressed that this was a major frustration area for him because the current administrator has made and posted TikTok videos with students during
instructional time. He noted that his current attitude is survival mode for the last quarter of the school year and that, “I’m done, stick a fork in me!”

Max

Max’s response was the briefest reflection at five sentences. He noticed that his focus was on “the negativity about the whole school environment and the lack of discipline that goes on within our building.” He would like to shift his mindset to focus on more positive behaviors of his students rather than the negative ones. He ended his reflection by noting that he hopes all students will be held accountable for their actions and he feels there needs to be more equity around student behaviors.

Outliers

While most of the data uncovered fit within the three themes identified in this chapter there was a portion of the data that were considered outliers in that they were important for better understanding the individual teachers; however, did not fall into one of the codes or themes as analyzed in this study. In order for the teachers’ stories to be comprehensively reported, the outlier data are reported in this section.

In his interview, Joe spoke about the passion that the new administration has for children. This point did not fall within the themes the rest of the data drove, but it is important to note this point as it aligns with the reason most participants listed in their reason for becoming a teacher.

Additionally, Joe noted in his interview that if it were not for the team he works with he would not make it. He also spoke to how much of the previous day he felt sticks with him and carries into the next day. This was paralleled with what Alexa mentioned in her reflection about taking things personally, even when she knows she should not. This speaks to the caring nature of the participants in this study.
An interesting point Evelyn made in her interview was when she discussed the limiting freedoms and choices students have within their own educations specifically when it comes to the district computer-based programs. She believes as a reading teacher students should have a choice in selecting to read articles that interest them. The district mandates assigning the same articles to the entire class removing the ability for students to choose their own topics and foster their own growth and love for reading.

When discussing discipline in his interview Max noted that he feels teachers are afraid to write discipline referrals because he thinks they feel like they will be tracked and targeted by administration. Additionally, he made note that administrators in general are afraid of parents and of making the district look bad to perspective families by calling attention to disciplinary infractions.

Even though these outliers did not fall within the determined themes and codes for this study they were each a unique part of adding veteran teacher voice to the systems in place in the school and district.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to promote a positive school culture in a Title I school by listening to veteran teacher voices around the policies and practices being implemented. The primary research question guiding this case study was: *What are the perceptions of teachers, who have been in their position for 15+ years, about school culture in a Title I school?* The secondary research question guiding this study was: *What changes in policies and practices in a Title I school do veteran teachers suggest might improve school culture?* Participants identities were protected using pseudonyms. Data were coded noting similarities between the participants “A Day in the Life” responses and commonalities in the participant’s
interview responses. Once the themes emerged the transcripts and written responses were reviewed with different colored highlighters to categorize the data into each of the themes. Additionally, once the initial themes were established the color-coding system was utilized to find quotes to support the codes in the interviews transcripts and written responses. Participant reflections were not utilized in the coding process as they were brief and did not provide usable data. The following three themes were established from the data set: Mismatch Between Time and Responsibilities, Mismatch Between District Policies and Administrative Procedures to Support Staff, and Burnout. These experiences provided an authentic look at how the workload on teachers is resulting in burnout and creating complacent teachers whose implicit biases are manifesting through color-evasiveness. Several outliers to the data set arose and added a unique perspective from the veteran teacher participants.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, & IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to promote a positive school culture in a Title I school by listening to veteran teachers’ voices about the policies and practices being implemented. The primary research question guiding this case study was: What are the perceptions of teachers, who have been in their position for 15+ years, about school culture in a Title I school? The secondary research question guiding this study was: What changes in policies and practices in a Title I school do veteran teachers suggest might improve school culture?

Participants were recruited based on a purposeful sample, identified as members of the PSSA ELA and Math teaching team who are on the formal evaluation system this year to gain an understanding of all the expectations and responsibilities that may be placed on a teacher in a given day. Data were collected through written prompts, semi-structured interviews, and reflection questions with four veteran teachers in an urban school district located in Southwestern Pennsylvania. The data were free coded (Charmaz, 2014) to find commonalities in the data.

After analyzing the data collected in this study, three themes were discovered: Mismatch Between Time and Responsibilities, Mismatch Between District Policies and Administrative Procedures to Support Staff, and Burnout. This chapter examines the findings from this study as it is situated within theory and review of the existing literature. Additionally, contributions to the field of educational leadership and recommendations for the future work of social justice educational leaders are discussed. Finally, I discuss the limitations of this study and provide my personal growth and leadership agenda moving forward.
Discussion of Findings

The following three themes were established from the data set in this study: Mismatch Between Time and Responsibilities, Mismatch Between District Policies and Administrative Procedures to Support Staff, and Burnout. These themes work together to potentially contribute to explanations for a growing problem in education: the national teacher shortage. In this study deficit mindset and Whiteness studies were examined in context of the school culture of a school where teachers are staying despite this growing problem in education. The culture of a school is developed through the interactions among staff, students, and the school community (Hinde, 2005). Additionally, the culture of a school is greatly impacted by the school leadership in place and contributes to the school climate or environment recognized by other people upon entering the school (Barkley et al., 2014; Lee & Louis, 2019). Therefore, it is important to examine school cultures that lead to both teachers leaving and staying in the field.

The findings in this study suggest that even when teachers stay in the field they may be experiencing elements of burnout and complacency that impact school culture, including frustrations with the demands of the profession, district policies, and some practices of the school administration. These findings further indicated some complacent teacher behaviors that could work to hurt school culture. When a school has a positive school culture the team of stakeholders willingly take risks and carry out initiatives (Hinde, 2005). However, when the culture of a school is negative or toxic, the environment can become unsupportive to school goals. In this context the outcome seemed to be consistent with Peterson and Deal (1998) who argued that complacency can occur in “places where negativity dominates conversations, interactions, and planning; where the only stories recounted are of failure.” Consistent with this, the Starfield teachers recounted stories about choosing not to engage in new practices or engage in what was
happening at the school. For example, as noted in his interview, Max is frustrated with people outside of the classroom telling him what to do inside his classroom, stating, “They want us to teach certain ways, instead of the way I feel like I'm used to teaching I feel like I know my kids better than any of our administrators or outside agencies do.” Influenced by the negative culture in the building, he is hesitant to try new practices presented to him. Additionally, as he and Alexa both noted that they no longer jump in to help at the school and focus purely on the four walls of their classrooms. The data revealed a level of disengagement from the teacher role manifesting in ways related to the culture and tone of the building, such as when participants spoke about isolation and seclusion in their rooms to avoid involving themselves in conflicts that were not directly related to their class.

Some aspects of the teachers’ experience (e.g., frustration with conflicting demands and time pressures) are negatively impacting school culture. There were also some elements of deficit mindset that were indicated in the teachers’ responses. For example, Joe noted his frustrations with student behavior, stating, “if they can’t behave, they can’t learn.” Joe’s focus on what students cannot do instead of what they can is very consistent with implicit bias and deficit framings (Valencia, 1997). Although Joe did not mention student identity markers such as race and class, the discipline gap (Gullo et al., 2019) suggests that it would not be uncommon for teachers to attribute student behavior to those markers and link behavior to learning outcomes as Joe does.

Whiteness studies further coincides with deficit thinking when the focus on underachievement leads to inaccurate perceptions of racially marginalized students. Additionally, Whiteness studies illuminate the racialized and classed undertones in referring to the students in this study as they. Moreover, it prevents teachers from constructing lessons to
meet the needs of their diverse students more effectively (Milner & Smithey, 2003; Sharma, 2018). The literature cited in Chapter Two suggests that many teachers are embedded in the mindset that they cannot reach students from homes where they believe education is not valued. Although not prevalent in teacher responses in this study, some deficit views of families were clear in the teachers’ responsiveness to COVID-19. For example, in his interview Max spoke to the idea that students no longer care about their education and lack respect for teachers after the way their district handled the COVID-19 pandemic and remote learning. He feels as though “their parents have given up on the education system.” This deficit thinking makes setting high expectations for his students a notable challenge. Furthermore, as teachers serve families in addition to serving students, high expectations are not being set for families either in response to deficit thinking.

The teachers here reported they would like to see a more visible presence from administration in order to support a culture of high expectations for student behavior. The majority of the participants reported feelings of exhaustion from a constant redirection of student behaviors and perceived a lack of support from school leadership and district policy in addressing their behavioral concerns. From the teachers’ perspective, greater visibility from the school leader is a simple request and would work to improve school culture. However, students may not feel the same way and may attribute greater administrator visibility and disciplinary enforcement to negatively impact the warmth of the school culture. Jerald (2006) identifies that creating a warm and nurturing culture is not enough, and that high expectations for student behavior must be set and enforced for a positive school culture to be truly effective. The research supports that a mutual trust and relationships must be formed between leadership and teachers and between teachers and students to promote a positive school culture (Prokopchuk, 2016).
An aspect of lack of trust between leadership and teachers was made clear when teachers reported that they were frustrated with district policies in place that greatly limit suspensions and discipline for students. Historically, suspensions and discipline have been used as tools to push students out of school. Repercussions for fighting will not solve the fighting, and suspension and discipline will further disenfranchise students, particularly students of color. This practice of discipline as a solution in a school that has such a large population of students of color and students from lower socioeconomic neighborhoods can be interpreted as a practice of Whiteness. Therefore, the focus should not be on enforcing these policies but addressing campus climate and building relationships with students. Teachers found this to be a barrier to instructional time, as there have been minimal repercussions for fighting in school. The procedures implemented at the school level gave the participants pause as they all spoke to a degree of favoritism from administration toward a select group of eighth grade students. These students were identified as disruptive by the teachers and as behavior problems. Alexa noted in her interview that she feels this because administration would rather be friendly with the students than discipline them. Participants felt the inconsistencies in implementation of policies left them feeling unsupported.

It is difficult to determine how to move forward with collected data from this study. What teachers are requesting may not improve school culture if students are alienated by disciplinary structures. What is clear is that schools need more resources to support the staff in carrying out district policies. Along with resources there need to be support staff in place for alternative discipline options such as restorative circles that would develop relationships between students and staff rather than disrupt them. This would remove the disruptions from the general education learning space while also allowing the offending students to continue with their education without being removed from school.
The timing of this study was unique in that veteran teachers were reacting to the first new school leader they had had in 15+ years, aside from the temporary change in leadership just a year earlier. Therefore, it is no surprise that the participants discussed the tone of the building and the influence it has on how they feel about the rest of their day. Most participants referenced the previous administrator and the expectations of the past and how that gives them pause as they navigate a new principal with a new set of building procedures. The impact of change in culture from leadership can be seen in these findings, indicating potential for future analysis of these data specific to leadership shifts.

What is especially clear in these findings are that teachers are overworked and overwhelmed with the disconnect between the finite amount of time teachers have coupled with the seemingly infinite number of tasks they are being asked to undertake. The methodology of asking teachers to recount a day at work demonstrated the sheer number of tasks teachers were asked to accomplish. In addition, the relative brevity of the interviews further suggests teachers have little time to give to additional tasks. After teaching all day, attending meetings, and trying to cross tasks off their to do lists most teachers were only able to provide an average of twenty minutes to discuss their responses with me. Teacher voice is important, but researchers need to be cognizant of timing and amount of time needed when working to collect teacher reflections.

Another clear finding across teachers was that there are many policies the district has in place that participants said contributed to feelings of a lack in support. The focus on standardized testing and pacing is a generalized district policy and is not implemented on a school-to-school level. Even though the pacing policy is designed to create equity among schools, this policy causes frustrations for the teachers in this study who desire to teach their students to mastery of skills rather than to prepare for a standardized test.
While the district level policy changes cannot be amended by the school, these findings suggest the importance of building leadership making improvements in the procedures in the school, especially those procedures that result in additional meetings and repetitive paperwork. Joe noted in his interview that the teachers in his school function as a team and that many of the things he does are because of that team and the support they provide him. Joe’s interest in being part of a team suggests that opportunities for team building need to exist for schools to utilize their staffing in the most efficient way. A related system that the school could potentially utilize moving forward is peer coaching and mentoring to help reduce the perceived lack of support. As Max and Alexa noted in their interviews, they both used to step in and assist in chaotic situations; therefore, demonstration a connection that teachers have when assisting in a situation can restore the community feeling of the school.

In conjunction with data from Gallup (2022) surrounding teacher burnout and a national teacher shortage it is no surprise that teachers in this study reported feeling burnout and overwhelmed in the workplace. There were also direct links between the deficit mindset framework and the language used by some of the participants. Phrases such as “these kids” and responses regarding the lack of value families place on education directly correspond with this framework and with elements of Whiteness that make schools inequitable for students of color. Providing professional development opportunities to help reframe the thinking and language being presently used will help to create a growth mindset where teachers move from a deficit orientation to an assets-based one. Replacing the deficit orientation allows for recognition of the knowledge and experiences students bring with them to school (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, Moll et al., 1992). Additionally, professional development regarding discipline and the ways in
which discipline has historically marginalized some groups more than others are needed to move the focus from discipline to a focus on improving the culture in the school.

**Leading Through Social Justice**

As an educational leader for social justice it is critical to take the knowledge gained in this study and utilize it to mitigate the structural racism that is prevalent in education. The ways teachers spoke about discipline and misbehavior in this study suggests ways in which disadvantages are created through deficit thinking and structural racism. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) and Durand and Tarvaras (2021) theorized that the lens of Whiteness and color-evasiveness are used to avoid the acknowledgement of White privilege, particularly in education. As Gorski (2016) notes, the ideas of White privilege are supported by the idea that maintaining cultural neutrality is the same as being anti-racist, whereas the opposite is true. To maintain neutrality is to engage in color-evasiveness, which is not the same as actively addressing racism in education. In listening to participants’ responses there were very limited references to culture and race. This speaks to the color evasiveness in teachers’ discourse in a diverse school. Additionally, the participants in this study did not explicitly state how they felt discipline should be handled, rather they expressed that they did not feel it was handled appropriately. After reviewing the data and themes I would have liked to have probed the participants more in order to understand what they are looking for in the discipline policies. Furthermore, I would have like to analyze their perceptions of what appropriately handling a discipline situation would look like and to unpack which students’ behaviors are the focus of their concerns. The literature supports that Black and Brown students are overdisciplined, and demonstrates color-evasiveness in referring to students in a diverse setting as “these kids”. Bryan (2017) found White teachers disproportionately target Black males for minor and subjective school disciplinary infractions.
However, several studies conducted suggest that Black boys do not misbehave more than their White peers. The studies indicated that the Black boys frequently face unfavorable discipline outcomes due to the systemic bias in place regarding behaviors (Gage et al., 2019; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Payno-Simmons, 2021; Skiba et al., 2011). As an educational researcher (while the data does not explicitly suggest this is what the participants are doing) the discourse used by the teachers and by me, as the interviewer, suggests the possibility of implicit bias and color-evasiveness.

This study set out to examine the link between school leadership and unintentional teacher complacency in education. Throughout the data and analysis, the complacency surfaced particularly in relation to following the lead of administration. For example, Alexa made note in her interview of administration not addressing smaller discipline infractions, such as inappropriate language or running in the halls. She acknowledged that she has changed her practices and behavior management to do the same because she is frustrated when school leadership will not support disciplinary actions. Yet, the process created through the research protocol suggests that complacency can be shaken up by reflection. Alexa also reflected that following the administrator’s lead on ignoring behavior is something she would like to change in the future, addressing the issues she previously would not permit in her class. Providing teachers with the opportunity to reflect on a day in their life can shed light on areas they did not realize were problematic. Implementing similar processes with administration and sharing stories across staff may support a chance to become change agents and work with school-based leadership to implement procedures that support staff and keep learning at the forefront.

**Recommendations for Future Research**
It is my recommendation that if this study were to be replicated or expanded upon the timeline could be increased. There was a quick turnaround between receiving the transcript from the interview and responding to the reflection question. This may be one explanation for why responses to the reflections were brief and nondetailed. Future studies should include a further spaced-out distribution of data collection tools and an altered timeline. Consideration should be given to conducting the study in the winter of a school year after returning from the holiday break. In regards to spacing out the data collection tools, more usable data could be procured from the reflection piece of the study. Arranging a space for the reflections to be done with conversations rather than written responses could also provide an opportunity for the participants to engage in purposeful dialogue.

Additionally, although the sample population was intentional, future research should include a larger sample size and other content area teachers to understand the scope of teacher burnout beyond those teachers who are under evaluation and accountability pressures from state standardized testing. An additional limitation to this study is that while it sought out teacher voice, leadership voice was not included. Had the leader had the chance to provide her voice to the space there may have been room for purposeful dialogue in practice surrounding why leadership is making her decisions.

The participants appreciated the opportunity to write freely about their day. I would encourage future researchers to create a community of social capital with their participants and to engage in Gracious Space with them. Social capital fosters relationships to create a successful school environment; incorporating social capital into the interview process in this study allowed myself as the researcher to build a connection with the participants (Goddard, 2003; Tredway & Generett, 2015). The concept of Gracious Space is “a spirit and setting where we invite the
stranger to embrace learning in public” (Tredway & Generett, 2015, p. 21), and this provided an opportunity for the participants develop trust in the researcher. Additionally, using the Gracious Space concept created a nonthreatening space for the participants where they felt empowered to be their authentic selves and to be truthful with their responses.

**Leadership Agenda and Growth**

When conducting this study, I found myself in a unique space. I have experience as both a teacher and an administrator, and as a developing leader for social justice I know that it is critical to understand both the teachers and the students. During this study I served in the role of a teacher. I understood and empathized with the vocalized frustrations around time, responsibilities, policies, and procedures. Furthermore, I found myself in a unique space because of my understanding of deficit model and Whiteness studies that my colleagues have not researched. This gave me an opportunity to see this issue as a matter of social justice and to understand the inequities from a different perspective. Because of this unique understanding, elements of the school culture stick out differently to me now compared to the way they did before I started, specifically around discipline and the way our young Black male students are labeled for special education or labeled with behavioral problems. I know the burnout the participants spoke to is very real. On the other hand, I understand the expectations and limitations placed on administrators in a way that the participants did not. I believe that this gives me an opportunity to be a truly unique administrator when the time comes.

The theme surrounding burnout was one I not only heard when conducting interviews, but saw it on the participants’ faces during the interviews and read about it in their writing prompt responses and reflections. I have sat through the meetings and professional development sessions where it seems like teachers are told they are doing nothing right and everything wrong,
and they need to change to a new system. I have also heard at the end of those meetings how appreciated teachers are and that self-care is an essential part of the job. I can also say, with confidence, that the contradictory comments are laughable. Districts are saying that they want to take things off teacher’s plates, but no one is asking how to make this possible. Additionally, no one is taking the time to see how workloads can be reduced because the reality is that is nothing can be taken off a teacher’s plate. The tasks and stressors that need removed simply cannot be eliminated because they are still things that need to occur regularly in education. There has always been required paperwork that accompanies teaching: lesson planning, grades, contributing to the Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for students. Additionally, since schools have returned to in fully in person models following the COVID-19 pandemic, paperwork has increased to include planning to make up for the learning loss. There are new protocols being implemented to take minutes during meetings and to make plans during Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

I think that in moving my own leadership forward it is important to be respectful of staff’s time. For example, if a meeting could be an email, it should just be an email. Meetings should be purposeful, and an agenda should accompany them so that everyone is clear on the expectations and outcomes for the meetings. Moreover, it is important to schedule meetings well in advance and not take prep time from teachers at the last minute.

Furthermore, I have seen and heard the frustrations of teachers who feel unsupported by their administrator. It is critical for administration to be a visible presence to the staff and students. Being a school leader is more than sitting in an office and holding a title. It is being in the halls for transitions and in the cafeteria during lunches to help teachers feel supported. However, it is also about working to collaborate with, support, and build trust with and between
the teachers and the students. It is taking the student who needs a break for a walk or fresh air to clear their head so they can focus on classwork. It may be having lunch with a student or teacher who needs compassion and to know they are not alone. Moreover, is not asking your teachers to do something that you yourself would not be willing to jump in and do. Being an educational leader is about supporting and building your team during the hard times as well as celebrating the wins with them. Above all, being an educational leader is letting your team know you are there to help them serve the students—everyone should work together for common goal of doing what is best for students.

As a leader I have learned that it is important to check in with teachers to provide a space for them where they can express their needs and where they can have honest dialogue around how those needs are or are not being met. The burnout of teachers is a growing problem in the field of education, and it is clear from this study that burnout affects teachers who are staying as well as teachers who are leaving. By providing teachers with additional supports and strengthening the link between school leadership and staff I can work to minimize the complacency that comes from being overwhelmed and burnt out.

Furthermore, it is the responsibility of educational leaders and administrators to help support staff and to develop positive school culture. While there are larger systems in place that teachers cannot change, I believe the starting point for leaders is teacher and student voice. In hearing what teachers and students need in terms of support (e.g., professional development, curriculum support), leaders can begin to improve the school culture.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the purpose of this qualitative study was to promote a positive school culture in a Title I school by listening to veteran teachers’ voices about the policies and practices
being implemented daily. The following three themes emerged from the data set: Mismatch Between Time and Responsibilities, Mismatch Between District Policies and Administrative Procedures to Support Staff, and Burnout. These themes demonstrate the connection between the theory and literature of deficit thinking and Whiteness in education and the ways they are impacting teacher burnout and complacency. The written response to the prompt: “A Day in the Life”: please walk me through your day, illustrate what you are seeing and experiencing and how you are feeling around a typical school day, allowed participants to critically reflect on their daily lived experiences and provided evidence that teacher burnout and complacency are impacting school culture even when teachers choose to stay in the field. During the interview phase participants were given the opportunity to explain how their day could be made better. The experiences of these participants provided an authentic look at teacher workload and suggested changes teachers felt would improve their experience. As Aldridge & Fraser (2016) argue, stronger, more positive school culture will lead to a better educational experience for students and better student outcomes. While these findings speak only to the teacher perspective, they are a starting point for considering impacts on school culture. In creating a stronger, more positive environment where everyone thrives can be attained.
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DOI: [10.1080/13613324.2011.624506]
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research Protocol

Writing Prompt:

“A Day in the Life”: please walk me through your day, illustrating what you are seeing and experiencing and how you are feeling around a typical school day.

Interview Questions:

Demographic information:

How long have you been teaching? Why did you choose to enter the field of education? Tell me about your position/role for this school year. What additional responsibilities have been placed on you this year? Why?

1. What caught your attention the most about your day as you were writing it?

2. How does the time period impact what your day would look like? To clarify, how would this day differ from when you first started teaching? How about from pre-pandemic, to COVID to now?

3. What surprised you (good or bad) the most about your day when you wrote it down?

4. From your perspective, what are the barriers or obstacles impeding students from being successful you are encountering in that day?

5. From your perspective, what policies and practices could be improved in our school that would improve days like you described?

Reflection Question:

Please take an opportunity to review the transcript from our interview to clarify anything that may have been lost in the auto generated transcription. Please make any corrections, additions,
restatements to your responses. After you have reviewed the transcript, please respond to the following questions.

What was brought into focus for you in reading the transcript?

What reflections, thoughts, and ideas will you carry forward into your practice?
Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter

[External] Exemption Notification - IRB ID: 2022/12/4

Duquesne IRB <noreply@axiommentor.com>
Mon 12/12/2022 5:59 PM
To: Regina Kim <pallottar@duq.edu>

Downloadable Attachments:
2022-12-04 Consent Stamped.pdf
Exemption Notification - IRB ID: 2022/12/4.pdf

Institutional Review Board
DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

Duquesne University IRB Protocol Exemption Notification

To: Regina Kim
From: David Delmonico, IRB Chair
Subject: Protocol #2022/12/4
Date: 12/12/2022

The protocol 2022/12/4. Improving School Culture: Teachers’ Perceptions of School Culture in a Title I School and Their Beliefs About Improvement has been verified by the Institutional Review Board as Exempt according to 45CFR46.101(b)(3, 10): (3) Benign Behavioral Interventions - Adults, Does not involve human subjects on 12/12/2022.

If applicable, the consent form and/or recruitment flier have been stamped and are attached to this email or are accessible via Mentor. Please use these stamped versions to distribute or display.

Exempt status means there is no specific expiration date, and you are not required to file annual reviews or termination reports. However, any unanticipated problems, adverse effects on subjects, or protocol deviations must be immediately reported to the IRB Chair before proceeding with the study.

Further, any changes to your study requires the filing of an amendment and is subject to the approval of the IRB Chair. You must wait for approval before implementing any changes to the original protocol. Changes to your protocol may affect the exempt status of your research.

Please contact me if you have any questions regarding this study.

Best wishes in your research,

David Delmonico, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board, Chair
irb@duq.edu
Appendix C: Recruitment Letter

Dear Colleagues,

As you may know I am currently working towards a doctoral degree in the School of Education at Duquesne University. As partial fulfillment of the requirements for this degree, I am conducting a study to better understand what changes in policies and practices in a Title I school veteran teachers suggest might improve school culture. As a veteran teacher for the district and in our building, you have first-hand experience in how school culture impacts the success of our students, and you are in an ideal position to provide valuable first-hand information from your own perspective.

The study will involve responding to a short writing prompt, as well as participating in an interview, and finally two brief reflection questions. The interview takes around 45 minutes, but should not exceed one hour, and is a structured but informal discussion. My goal is to capture your thoughts and perspectives on our school culture and how you believe we can improve it. Your responses to questions will be kept confidential, and personal identifiers will not be revealed during the analysis and write up of findings.

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to the research, and findings could lead to a more positive school culture and more academic success for our students. If you are willing to participate, please respond to this email and I will send you the details along with the prompt.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Thanks!

Gina
Appendix D: Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE:
Improving School Culture: Teachers’ Perceptions of School Culture in a Title I School and Their Beliefs About Improvement

INVESTIGATOR:
Regina M. Kim, M.Ed.
Doctoral Student
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Educational Foundations & Leadership
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ADVISOR:
Amy M. Olson, Ph.D.
Director of Administration and Graduate Studies, School of Education
Associate Professor, Department of Educational Foundations & Leadership
Duquesne University
101C Canevin Hall
412.396.5712
olsona@duq.edu

SOURCE OF SUPPORT:
This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in the School of Education at Duquesne University.

STUDY OVERVIEW:
This is a qualitative case study using a narrative inquiry approach through a writing prompt, semi-structured interviews, and reflections to better understand the need for teacher voice in the policies and procedures. The goal is to establish a positive culture by creating an environment where the students and staff thrive and create a community of shared norms and values. You may want to participate in this study as you have been identified as a veteran teacher with 15 or more years of experience in your position. Your experiences could be valuable in assisting others in creating a more positive school culture, being more effective, and leading to a more equitable
education system. This study will include 4-6 participants who have been in their position for a minimum of 15 years, teach a PSSA tested content area, and are on the formal evaluation system for the 2022-2023 school year.

PURPOSE:
You are being asked to participate in a research project that is investigating the promotion of a positive school culture in a Title I school by listening to veteran teacher voices around the policies and practices being implemented to provide critical reflection concerning policy that will promote a more positive school culture.

In order to qualify for participation, you must:

- Have 15+ years of experience in your position
- Teach in a PSSA tested content area
- Be on the formal observation (RISE) process for the 2022-2023 school year

PARTICIPANT PROCEDURES:
If you provide your consent to participate, you will be asked to do the following:

- Complete the “A Day in the Life” prompt (illustrating what you are seeing and experiencing and how you feel regarding a typical school day)
- Review your transcription from your interview and
- Complete the Reflection prompt (2 questions reflecting on your experience, your writing prompt, and transcription from the interview)

These responses should take no more than 30 minutes each to complete.

In addition, you will be asked to allow me to interview you

- The interview is a five-question interview focused on your response to your day you explain in the prompt. They will last approximately 45 minutes and no longer than one hour. Audio of the interviews will be recorded and transcribed.

All data collection procedures will occur via email (written prompts and reflections) and Zoom for the interviews approximately two and no more than three total hours of participants’ time.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:
The risks in this study are minimal and no more than you should encounter in your everyday life. This research is designed to benefit our school and district by gaining new knowledge about veteran teachers’ beliefs around school culture and improving it. There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study; however, I hope to improve the school culture of our building. You may be uncomfortable answering some questions and some discussion points may evoke a variety of emotions. A minimal amount of personal time will need to be dedicated to the process.

COMPENSATION:
There will be no compensation for participating in this study. Participation in this project will require no monetary cost to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
Your participation in this study, and any identifiable personal information you provide, will be kept confidential to every extent possible, and will be destroyed three years after the data collection is completed. Your name will never appear on any survey or research instruments. All written and electronic forms and study materials will be kept secure. Any study materials with personal identifying information will be maintained for three years after the completion of the research and then destroyed.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:
You are under no obligation to start or continue in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time by alerting the researcher via email. You can withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence. Previously collected data will be included the study, unless exclusion is specifically requested.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:
A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request. You may request this summary by contacting the researcher via email. The information provided to you will not be your individual responses, but rather a summary of what was discovered during the research project as a whole.

FUTURE USE OF DATA:
Any information collected that can identify you will have the identifiers removed, will not be used for future research studies, nor will it be provided to other researchers.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:
I understand that if I have any questions about my participation in this study, I may contact Regina M. Kim at 412.779.2629 or by email at pallottar@duq.edu, as well Dr. Amy M. Olson at 412.396.5712 or by email atolsona@duq.edu. If I have any questions regarding my rights and protections as a subject in this study, I can contact Dr. David Delmonico, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at 412.396.1886 or at irb@duq.edu.

___________________________________  __________________
Participant’s Signature                      Date

___________________________________  __________________
Researcher’s Signature                      Date
Appendix E: Design Alignment Tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Problem and Purpose</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Collection Tools</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide one sentence for each. They must align with all RQ rows.</td>
<td>RQ 1: What are the perceptions of teachers, who have been in their position for 15+ years, about school culture in a Title I school?</td>
<td>“A Day in the Life” Writing Prompt</td>
<td>Written Responses to “A Day in the Life” Prompt</td>
<td>Qualitative Analysis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>RQ 2: What changes in policies and practices in a Title I school do veteran teachers suggest might improve school culture?</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews conducted face to face or via Zoom</td>
<td>Audio recording/ transcripts</td>
<td>Qualitative Analysis</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection Questions</td>
<td>Written Responses to reflection questions</td>
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