Building Authentic Relationships: Creating a Supportive Environment for Black, Indigenous, and / or People of Color

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BUILDING AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS: CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND/OR PEOPLE OF COLOR

Kimberly M. Norton

171 pages

Research suggests that the Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the need for mental health support, with an alarming increase in the number of adolescents reporting that their mental health has worsened during this period (Rodriguez, 2022). Well before the pandemic, substantial evidence indicated that young people were facing a rising tide of mental ill-health, including anxiety, depressive symptoms, psychological distress, and suicide. The transitional period to adulthood is a developmentally sensitive time, and mental illness is diagnosed heavily during this phase. Accessibility to doctors, therapists, and clinicians is often impeded due to wait time and lack of insurance. Coupled with this, students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students are further impacted due to experiencing microaggressions, lack of cultural sensitivity by peers and adults, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), subtractive schooling, and overall barriers to mental health support.

This mixed-research study used a 90-Day Cycle of Inquiry to understand the problem of lack of support for the mental health needs of United High School (pseudonym) students. Three primary drivers were identified: 1) transformative social-emotional learning, 2) authentic relationships, and 3) audacious hope.
The intervention in this study was a Mental Health Awareness Campaign. Data were collected from key stakeholders (staff, students, and administrators) through pre- and post-surveys, focus groups, and observations.

Four primary themes emerged: 1) lack of awareness for mental health warning signs; 2) uncertainty of who and where students can receive support for mental health; 3) all races’ mental health needs are not supported; 4) students are not seen and heard. Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL) provided evidence in reaching more BIPOC students throughout this cycle of inquiry by fostering authentic relationships and inspiring audacious hope for students by breaking the long-lasting stigma associated with being open about mental health.

KEYWORDS: Audacious Hope, Authentic Relationships, Black Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), Cultural Responsiveness, Microaggressions, Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL)
BUILDING AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS: CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND/OR PEOPLE OF COLOR

KIMBERLY M. NORTON

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Educational Administration and Foundations

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2023
BUILDING AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS: CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND/OR PEOPLE OF COLOR

KIMBERLY M. NORTON

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thank you to my pride and joy-my three amazing sons-Chase, Ethan, and Samuel. They have always listened to all my educational talk at home and have made me so proud of their accomplishments to date. Chase is a compassionate and reflective teacher at Danville High School. Ethan graduated Suma Cum Laude from Valparaiso University with a Major in Economics and a Minor in Mathematics and is pursuing a master’s degree in Business Analytics. Samuel attended Illinois State University and is taking a break to discover himself. I also can’t forget my soon-to-be daughter-in-law, Amanda. I have enjoyed watching Amanda and Chase grow in their relationship over the past ten years, and I am so proud of her for earning her doctoral degree this past May. I am counting the days to their upcoming wedding on April 22, 2023.
Finally, I wish to thank my loving husband, Andy. He is my main supporter in all I do, and together, we have made many sacrifices in this endeavor. Andy, you have brought out the best in me, and I love you more than you will ever know.

K.M.N.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Story of Mariela: A Local Example

Mariela is an eighteen-year-old Latina who used to experience success in school. She was an honors student who had achieved recognition playing soccer for the high school team. Over her senior year, some noticeable changes began to occur with Mariela. She was often seen wandering the halls, missing class, and her grades plummeted to Ds and Fs. This pattern continued until spring break and finally hit critical mass. Her twin sister shared concerns with a staff member that Mariela is no longer hanging out with her friends or doing many of the activities she was previously passionate about.

The high school is fortunate to have many human resources to support students in need, like Student Engagement Advocates (SEAs), clinical professionals, social workers, and school counselors. Unfortunately, these resources did not recognize the many warning signs indicating Mariela was in distress. Before spring break, the twin reported to an administrator that Mariela was thinking of self-harm. The adult, who made a phone call to their home did not speak Spanish and thought the parents knew of Mariela’s intention. So, Mariela’s cry for help was not heard and she attempted her life to end her life over spring break.

When Mariela returned to school, she was unsure where to go for support. Her parents arranged a meeting to express their frustration with the entire situation. To make the situation worse, an interpreter was not invited to the meeting. During this meeting, Mariela expressed that she felt “invisible.” As it turns out, Mariela was experiencing microaggressions. Two male students had repeatedly been calling her racist names and intimidating her near her classes and in
the hallways. Mariela had reported this situation to the administration, but it was ignored. Mariela felt the school had failed her and her family. While student supports were available at the high school Mariela was unsure of where or who to turn for help. She did not know of the many safe and trusted adults who could assist her. She never spoke to a social worker, clinical professional, or the SEA over the 100 days of reported absences during the school year.

The family shared their disappointment and frustration with United High School. They felt the school was not responsive to their daughter’s mental health needs. There was a lack of understanding of Mariela’s emotional state and her report of committing self-harm. As a result, the family distrusts the school system.

Mariela’s story directly relates to the problem of practice to support students with their mental health needs. What must the school do to ensure student voices are being heard and followed by a swift response by safe and trusted adults? How can we provide students and their families with resources to meet their linguistic needs? How can all staff members be trained to be aware of the warning signs and indicators of student mental health concerns and how to appropriately respond, especially when it comes to students of color? Digging deeper to comprehend student needs and how they can be better supported is critical.

In a Panorama survey that captures voices regarding climate, teaching, learning, and belonging that was deployed in February 2022, students were asked, “Do you have a teacher or other adult at school that you can count on no matter what?” The following responses reflect favorability ratings: Latinx, 69%; Black, 70%; Multi-racial, 70%, and White, 78%. In addition, discussions with BIPOC students reiterate the lack of connection with a trusted adult.
Mariela’s story has sparked the urgency in responsiveness with problem-solving meetings. These are now occurring to examine internal and external resources to support students’ mental health needs. Moving forward, efforts will be made to ensure not only students, but staff are aware of the appropriate steps to respond to mental health concerns. Suggestions were also sought from participants to determine how this problem could be solved. The Parent Teacher Advisory Committee which consists of teachers, parents, and administrators has shared urgency for the development of resources and help numbers that are available for when students are in a mental health crisis during or outside of school.

Students at the high school are provided with an abundance of human resources to meet their social-emotional needs outside of the classroom, including clinical professionals, social workers, student engagement advocates (SEAs), student interventionists, and increased counselor support. A significant increase in support staff compared to elementary was provided four years ago following an increase in fighting and violence at the secondary level. After further collaboration with social workers, clinical professionals, SEAs, and student interventionists there appears to be a disconnect between the classroom teacher and support staff that are available to provide interventions for mental health needs. Mariela’s story has taught others the need to listen and validate how students are feeling. The administration is now aware that due process is important, and we must call out individuals that are being neglectful towards our Black, indigenous, and/or people of color (BIPOC) students. A need for shared accountability for student relationships has been emphasized in collaborative discussions.
**Students as Facilitators of Change**

Capturing a student's voice is important for multiple reasons. Students need to know that they are not invisible, and their input can lead to radical changes within systems and structures within the school environment. It was hypothesized that staff were not seeing the purpose to connect with students and follow through when warning signs were present. Current professional development or resources that have been provided with the traditional model for SEL were not proving to be effective. Collaboration with BIPOC students has the potential to support an inclusive environment where students can advocate for representation throughout the school with images, languages, and cultural connections that are reflective of our BIPOC students. In addition, students need clear directions to bilingual staff and support services that are clearly defined with signage in multiple languages. Students were valuable in defining their needs as collaboration and planning were conducted with the School Improvement Teams.

**Problem of Practice**

A problem of practice is a current issue that rises to the surface for a practitioner within their school or district setting. Identifying the root causes and including stakeholders in a cycle of inquiry can result in continuous improvement for students and educators (Mintrop, 2018). The Carnegie Program for Education Doctorate (CPED) defines a Problem of Practice as a persistent, contextualized, and specific issue embedded in the work of a professional practitioner, the addressing of which has the potential to result in improved understanding, experience, and outcomes (CPED, 2022).

The Problem of Practice within my study is that the high school does not properly support the mental health needs of BIPOC. Adult presence was lacking throughout the hallways
and there appeared to be a hesitation to greet BIPOC students. The lack of cultural sensitivity was apparent through the behaviors displayed from student to student and adult to student. Even with SEL interventions in the classroom, designated support staff for students, especially BIPOC, were still having issues dealing with the system.

This lack of attention has led to attendance issues among other things. Students were taking off from their classes and in some cases not showing up for school.

**Table 1: Chronic Absenteeism: By Race**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>58.4%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>57.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2022 Illinois Report Card

This graph shows the percentage of students who miss 10% percent or more of school days per year either with or without a valid excuse. Missed class periods also equate to days missed. There is a significant disparity between White and BIPOC students. There are seven SEAs employed at United High School to work directly with students that are chronically absent and intervene to support students with any barriers that are preventing students from attending
their classes. Despite these attempts, it appeared students did not feel connected to the adults and there was a disconnect to other individuals such as social workers or clinical professionals to further support students’ mental health needs. A Panorama survey administered by United High School to all teachers in the fall of 2022 revealed that only 13% of staff feel that students are enthusiastic about being at school on most days.

Concerns have been shared regarding undocumented students that are unaccompanied minors. The registrar and high school administration stated they would drop students for non-attendance. However, after discussing with immigration attorneys, dropping them from school would leave students without much support that the school is providing, such as food, medical, and connection to services, and would hinder their legal case. This is another sad example of interventions not occurring and a lack of communication with BIPOC students.

BIPOC students and their families have requested student contracts to be signed by all parties when there have been reports of bullying, microaggressions, and altercations in the hallways. The behavior contract would serve as an attempt to get students to commit to the agreement, or consequences would ensue. After further review, there were instances when follow-through was not given until the central office or attorneys became involved.

The pandemic brought the need to a heightened level to make sure students are being fully supported across all student groups.

When observing hallways, a limited number of teachers were greeting students as they entered class and a message to “hurry up” was said by a select few. Staff appeared to not be engaged with an overall presence outside of the classroom and adults are designated that
supervise the halls. A Panorama survey that was administered to teachers and staff further indicated a lack of hope from adults when evaluated at the beginning of fall 2022.

**Figure 1: Staff and Teacher Optimism That Climate Will Improve**

![Bar Chart: Staff and Teacher Optimism That Climate Will Improve]

Source: Fall 2022 Panorama Staff and Teacher Survey

Table 1 demonstrates the level of optimism from both teachers and support staff that the climate will improve. The data emphasized the need for school-wide efforts to create partnerships and build leadership collaboratively among students and adults. This study sought to examine the impact of students serving as facilitators of change to connect students with safe and trusted adults that can serve as support when students are struggling with their mental health. Students’ voice is imperative in this study to raise mental health awareness for students and staff.

The principal conducted classes for students that are not engaged and attempted to get to the root of possible problems that contribute to a lack of belonging. However, students still lost valuable instructional time with this recent intervention. Through this study, a call for action was initiated for staff to meet the mental health needs of all, particularly BIPOC students through intentional efforts to facilitate a welcoming and culturally inclusive environment. In addition, an
investigation occurred on the problem of not addressing the mental health needs of BIPOC students and the use of interventions such as Transformative SEL to be responsive and collaborative as adults.

Assumptions

After identifying a problem of practice, it is recommended for practitioners to conduct exploratory needs assessments which may consist of data about results from assessments, surveys, behavioral observations, or gathering input from others (Mintrop, 2018). Several indicators were examined at United High School such as attendance data, student intervention documents, and hallway observations. An assumption that was initially made was staff were not recognizing the mental health warning signs of students that were not attending class. Students were present all day but were isolating themselves during several class periods hiding in restrooms or wandering from space to space.

Support staff appeared to expect BIPOC students to self-advocate for support from adults, rather than adults responding to student needs. After further discussions with SEAs and examining supporting documents, many students that were not attending class or school had not received home visits or check-ins with the staff that were assigned to support them. Through these discussions, it was clear that some staff were not utilizing social-emotional learning competencies such as self-awareness, relationship skills, self-management, social awareness, and responsible decision-making. (CASEL, 2021). When meeting with SEAs and Student Interventions there was often finger-pointing that it was the other person’s assigned student or responsibility.
Purpose of Study

When developing the problem of practice as a collaborative team at the high school, an urgent need came to the surface to address the mental health needs of BIPOC. The research on access to mental health resources and equipping staff with warning signs and resources are necessary to support students that are not attending class, lack motivation, and do not feel connected to a safe and trusted adult (Mental Health.Gov., 2022) Ultimately, the goal is to have students that feel connected, supported, and find meaning in their learning that they can co-facilitate in the classroom environment (American Psychological Association, 2014).

Urgency is needed to connect students with the support staff. Adults shared that some students may not know the locations of office spaces and individuals to whom they can report problems or are available to support social-emotional needs.

This research, through collaborative efforts with students, can immediately impact the school environment by bringing awareness to mental health needs and creating a culturally responsive climate which can more greatly impact students that are not attending class. It is critical that students feel connected to their teachers and peers. In addition, student voice did have a positive impact on this initial cycle of inquiry through a student-led mental health awareness campaign that can be revisited and refined for continuous improvement at the high school. This study sought to examine the impact of students serving as facilitators of change to connect students with safe and trusted adults that can serve as support when students are struggling with their mental health. Students' voice was imperative in this study to raise mental health awareness for students and staff.
Conceptual Framework

The theory of action applied to this study investigated student perception of the initiative at UHS to promote a culturally relevant environment that supports students’ mental health needs and class attendance. To achieve this, problem-solving should be intermixed with cognitive breaks (Willingham, 2009). Teachers are encouraged to “change the state” by varying and chunking the instructional format every twenty minutes. In part, following the pandemic, a need was present to increase stamina within the classroom. Teachers were guided to embed the five SEL competencies in all content areas. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) recommends interweaving Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL) into all courses as a foundation for supporting students with their academic goals that serve as ripe instructional opportunities for teaching and practicing SEL (CASEL, 2021). However, despite these suggestions, some educators found the need to push through the curriculum and may not have felt that they have “permission to pause” when students were not in the mindset to learn due to community violence, lack of belonging, or their own mental health needs.

The theoretical framework applied in this study includes building authentic relationships, transformative social-emotional learning, and audacious hope. United High School utilized these frameworks through a cycle of inquiry that consisted of the following four phases: analyzing evidence, determining a focus, implementing, and supporting, and analyzing impact (Austin, 2015). Evidence from the theoretical framework, review of literature, and academic and social-emotional data was analyzed to identify questions to guide the most pressing needs. Communication to all stakeholders was transparent as the next steps were shared towards
communicating results and navigating to the next cycle of continuous improvement. Audacious
Hope and Building Authentic Relationships all nest well to shift mindsets with the goal of
Transformative Social-Emotional Learning.

**Transformative Social-Emotional Learning**

An urgent need was present to provide students with opportunities to co-exist and serve
as partners in the culture of the classroom. Transformative SEL is a collaborative approach.
CASEL (2021) defines Transformative SEL as a “process whereby young people and adults
build strong, respectful, and lasting, relationships that facilitate co-learning to critically examine
root causes of inequity and to develop collaborative solutions that lead to personal, community,
and societal well-being.” (CASEL, 2021, p.1) Many educators are familiar with CASEL’s long-
standing five competencies which consist of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness,
relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

To be equity-centered, other focal constructs must be intertwined to promote well-being,
a sense of belonging, and success for diverse students and identity, agency, belonging,
collaborative problem-solving, and curiosity (Jagers et.al, 2021). The work of Camangian and
Cariaga (2021), emphasizes that SEL alone is hegemonic miseducation, meaning teachers are
permitted to look past societal trauma through colonized systems and are not prepared to
confront the historical grief that has been experienced by youth that has been historically
marginalized. Camangian and Cariaga suggest that humanization is a framework to counter
oppression when focused on three key areas: knowledge of self, solidarity, and self-
determination (Camangian and Cariaga, 2021). The CASEL competencies can be nested within
Leaders practice transformative leadership when they guide others toward new approaches and possibilities. They are willing to move beyond baby steps to confront equity by leaps and bounds. To be a great leader, one must inspect what you expect. Gorski et. al suggests “leaps are transformative, requiring deliberate, bold thinking and action. We shift our intention from less racism to antiracism. We reshape the entire school, not just a couple of spaces, to ensure justice” (para. 12). A common theme in the research is the need for TSEL to be embedded into all aspects of student learning, school practices, and policies. Intentional interactions are needed to establish relationships among school leaders, teachers, families, and communities.

As such, at United High School, a class was created for students that wander the halls. This intervention mattered to get to the root of why students were not attending or connecting with their teachers and leaving class. Intentional conversations with the students to determine the reasons why primarily BIPOC students were not remaining in the classroom spaces led to greater conversations and steps to address the mental health needs within the school environment.

**Authentic Relationships**

Authentic relationships are key to students developing a sense of belonging within the school environment. For adults and students, letting others in and revealing more of oneself, takes time to earn and build trust. Opening the door to authentic relationships begins when we reveal our true selves to another person. That means being genuine and vulnerable in our communication and interactions (Nosal, 2022).
When delving through the research to define authenticity in teacher-to-student relationships there is a strong overlap with the CASEL competencies in the areas of self-awareness and building relationships as represented by (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). Many educators struggle with being their true, authentic selves in front of students (Frommert, 2021). Teachers may be afraid to know how much to reveal about themselves or expose their vulnerability (Slusarski, 2018). There is a fine line between being professional, too personal, or acting as a parent or social worker. Research suggests that people are being authentic when they choose to act to "foster the growth and development of each other's being" (Jarvis, 2012, p. 119).

In this study, the student-led mental health campaign created opportunities to build authentic relationships between the BIPOC students participating and the adults leading these efforts.

**Audacious Hope**

According to research literature, audacious hope is a critical component of physical and emotional well-being (Weir, 2013). Hope correlates with success at many things and can also help people cope better with pain, illness, and stress (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Hope is associated with many positive outcomes, including greater happiness, better academic achievement, and even lowered risk of death (Weir, 2013). For students, it serves as a necessary ingredient for getting through tough times, but also for meeting everyday goals. Everyone benefits from having hope and psychologists' research suggests almost anyone can be taught to be more hopeful (Weir, 2013).

Audacious Hope is a concept that is embedded in the three types of critical hope as originally defined by Duncan-Andrade (2009): Material Hope which provides youth with tangible and intangible resources to help build life skills; Socratic Hope is fostered when youth
and educators confront social injustice together, and Audacious hope is when educators have a sense of solidarity with the youth and with the wider community in which they serve (Flennaugh, et. al., 2017)

Audacious Hope inspires teachers to see the challenges and struggles of all students as their struggles as well and that “their pain is our pain” (p. 6). This theory encourages teachers and students to examine inequalities based on societal and cultural differences and unite in solidarity with historically marginalized students. This mindset fiercely rejects the ideology of entitlement, white privilege, and the oppression of those that are marginalized (Duncan-Andrade, 2009).

When developing the problem of practice as a collaborative team at the high school, an urgent need came to the surface to address the mental health needs of BIPOC students which affected attendance when students did not feel connected to the adult within the classroom. Utilizing the conceptual framework of Audacious Hope and Authentic Relationships served as powerful drivers of change to shift mindsets when nested with TSEL. The research on access to mental health resources and equipping staff with warning signs and resources are necessary to support students that are not attending class, lack motivation, and do not feel connected to a safe and trusted adult. Ultimately, the goal was to have students that feel connected, supported, and find meaning in their learning that they can co-facilitate in the classroom environment. Hence, when students are given opportunities to co-facilitate in the classroom, this can immediately establish purpose, and a sense of belonging, and impact the greater school environment by bringing awareness to mental health needs.
Research Questions

Three research questions guide this study:

1. Do students, staff, and administrators feel that student mental health is being supported by adults at United High School? How does this compare when examining the results of White and BIPOC students?

2. Will students feel more connected to adults when intentional efforts are made to identify locations and areas of support within the school?

3. In what ways does a mental health campaign provide BIPOC students opportunities to co-facilitate with adults with learning opportunities that foster Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL)?

Definition of Terms

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)- Pronounced “bye-pock,” this is a term specific to the United States, intended to center the experiences of Black and Indigenous groups and demonstrate solidarity between communities of color (Davidson, 2022).

Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL)- A process whereby young people and adults build strong and respectful relationships that facilitate co-learning to critically examine root causes of inequity and to develop collaborative solutions that lead to personal, communal, and societal well-being (CASEL, 2021).

Authentic Relationships-Authentic relationships begin when we reveal our true selves to another person. That means being genuine and vulnerable in our communication and interactions (Nosal, 2022).
Audacious Hope- Related to the African American struggle against oppression, research indicates for a curriculum to be transformative, it must encourage a symbiotic relationship between hope and action (Generett and Hicks, 2004).

Microaggressions- The standard definition for microaggression is a verbal or nonverbal slight that impacts an individual who might identify as being from a marginalized or non-mainstream community (Fenneld, 2022).

Cultural Responsiveness- The ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people of your own culture as well as those from other cultures (Crisis Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Resource Center, 2013).

**Study Design**

In this study, I applied a mixed-methods research approach to collect and analyze data to answer the research questions stated above. Qualitative approaches occurred through focus groups with teachers, students, and administrators. The focus groups provided an opportunity for students, staff, and administrators to voice what they needed to build trusting relationships. Qualitative methods were conducted with a pre-survey before the student-led mental health awareness campaign and the quantitative methods were conducted in the form of a post-survey following the 90-day cycle of inquiry with students, staff, and administrators to assess each group that is surveyed on their perspective regarding if students’ mental health needs are being addressed by supportive adults. In addition, each group responded if they feel adults are collaborative in these efforts.
Summary

As United High School strove to Building Authentic Relationships: Creating a Supportive Environment for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, collaboration was needed among all stakeholders to ensure particularly BIPOC students felt safe and connected within their learning spaces not only through a culturally relevant and responsive environment but as shown through the words and actions of others. In daily interaction, it is essential to provide space and time for students to process their emotions. This could improve the environment, especially for the BIPOC students, and lead to better mental health and more support particularly for students who are not attending class, lack motivation, and do not feel connected to a safe and trusted adult.

Support for staff, monitoring delivery, and assessing progress is necessary through a continuous cycle of inquiry to ensure what is truly happening. Gaining intentional feedback from students and determining their level of belongingness can lead to improved structures that may have once been gatekeepers to opportunities.
A trendy phrase that often is associated with social-emotional learning is “you can’t pour from an empty cup.” This has evolved considerably from the days when many were told to “rub some dirt on our wounds and we would feel better.” Taking the time to pour into ourselves is important to have the sustenance to function fully and manage all aspects of life. School staff and caregivers can model this for our youth by practicing self-care and removing negative elements that cause unnecessary stress. In a fast-paced society filled with many demands, often more energy is expended than is being taken in. There are many toxins that individuals can unconsciously absorb in their cups through lived experiences and exposure to daily interactions. We must fill our cups with the ingredients that nurture our souls. In doing this practice and finding balance in our own lives, we will have more energy to support the needs of our children. It is important to practice social awareness and realize that not all wounds are visible, and we must be perceptive to the needs of others. Staff within school systems must be well informed on the indicators of mental health needs and avoid making stereotypes of students that have encountered difficult experiences based on their race or social class. When these biases occur, they can create self-fulfilling prophecies (Schaedig, 2020), when judgments are made based on student behaviors observed or as stereotypes are made by certain demographics.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events that occur in childhood, from birth to 18, and can significantly impact academic and social-emotional well-being. According to the Center for Disease Control in an updated 2016 ACEs study, there is much variation between children of different races and ethnicities and the impact of ACEs. Nationally,
61 percent of Black non-Hispanic children and 51 percent of Hispanic children have experienced at least one ACE, compared with 40 percent of white non-Hispanic children and only 23 percent of Asian non-Hispanic children. In every region, the prevalence of ACEs is lowest among Asian non-Hispanic children and, in most regions, is highest among Black non-Hispanic children (Wade, 2016). These traumatic experiences can be a result of domestic violence, abuse, neglect, parental separation, mental illness, divorce, or substance abuse which can impact children from varying backgrounds (Godoy et al., 2021). We should not make assumptions just because children live in poverty or are a minority that they have experienced adversity or on the flip side that if they are in the upper/middle class and white, they have not. The purpose of this study is to delve deeply into specifying supports that are available and reducing the stigma associated with mental health. Student voice was key in this study through student leadership with BIPOC students in a mental health awareness campaign. The next section in the literature review investigated the process used in exploring the research on this topic.

This literature review investigated best practices and barriers to supporting students’ mental health. This is key in providing implicit time for students to process and regulate their own emotions. Renowned organizations such as the National Association of Mental Illness (NAMI) and researchers like Tatum (2021), Yoder et. Al. (2020), and Durlak (2017) were predominant in findings to support students’ mental health needs. The themes that emerged from the literature reviewed include Mental Health Crisis, Mental Health in Schools, Community Mental Health Resources, Barriers to Supporting Students’ Mental Health, and Continuous Education for Students and Staff on Mental Health Awareness. The following contains findings that are taking shape in the literature review thus far.
Mental Health Warning Signs

There is substantial research from sources such as the National Association of Mental Illness (NAMI) that reveal statistics pre-pandemic that bring to light the age ranges when mental health conditions begin to surface. The theme of mental health warning signs was strongly addressed in this study along with the sub-themes of the mental health crisis, mental health in schools, community mental health resources, barriers to supporting students’ mental health, and the importance of continuous education on mental health awareness. Existing research and current studies emphasize the importance of not continuing to stigmatize individuals that are suffering from their mental health will be further outlined in this section.

A Mental Health Crisis

According to NAMI, 20% of students ages 13-18 live with a mental health condition, 10% have a conduct disorder, 50% of all lifetime mental illness cases begin by age 14, and 75% by age 24 (NAMI, 2016). Warning signs may be represented by social withdrawal, mood swings that impact relationships, difficulty concentrating, and worries that impact going to class. Furthermore, mental illness can be triggered by stress, social isolation, or the use of drugs or alcohol. In a mental health update provided by NAMI, one in six adolescents ages 12-17 has experienced a major depressive episode (NAMI, 2022). In a 2019 study, half of the female students and one in three high school students report persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, an overall increase of 40 percent from 2009. Emergency department visits for attempted suicide increased by 51 percent among adolescent girls. These alarming increases are accentuated by time spent on social media, when behaviors such as bullying or exclusion are
portrayed (Chaterjee and Wroth, 2022). Even more staggering is the average time treatment is provided following the onset of symptoms is 11 years (NAMI, 2022).

President Biden’s call to action that was started in his March 1, 2022, State of the Union address outlines the urgency to strengthen the capacity of specialists in the mental health field, connect more Americans to care and create an equitable continuum of support. Through the plan summarized on Biden’s fact sheet, a focus will address children’s mental health and proposals to push insurance companies to improve their coverage of behavioral health care (White House, 2022).

**Mental Health in Schools**

According to Kaiser Permanente’s Resilience in School Environments (RISE), schools are ideal sites for interventions with children: most children attend school for many years and spend a substantial amount of time there each day. RISE schools are provided with professional development that cultivates practices that strengthen the social and emotional health of all school employees and students. Schools function best when students, staff, and teachers optimize their health. Hence, schools that support social and emotional well-being, typically have students with fewer disciplinary issues, can focus more on schoolwork and can develop skills to communicate better. This can translate to improved academic outcomes and better health later in life (Kaiser Permanente, 2021).

Strategies that focus on helping students identify their emotions and modeling ways to respond appropriately to peers and adults are assisting students to connect in meaningful ways. Presently, all 50 states now have SEL standards/competencies in PK-12 (CASEL, 2019). Students may not display traditional indicators of distress and staff need to be equipped with
warning signs that students needing mental health support do not always display “visible indicators” of need.

In a survey conducted by CASEL, 45 states responded that the number one focus of schools was to address mental health needs, including trauma and anxiety (Yoder, et. al., 2021). Professional learning equated to 78% for educators desiring professional development in this area and giving advice in measuring SEL was the lowest priority at 11%. Evaluation of current policies was not included as an option for SEL efforts.

Connecticut is one of few states that explicitly outlines the need to address policies that will lead to greater success to address students’ social and emotional needs. Dr. Miguel A. Cardona, Commissioner of Education, states the following:

While many things are unclear during this time in our nation’s history, there is one thing that is not; this epidemic has further exacerbated inequities that have been there all along (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2020).

Linda Darling-Hammond (2020) highlights “A New Deal” for educators to focus on policies during the Covid era that has the potential to impact learning now and into the future. She suggests removing “regulatory impediments enforcing antiquated notions of how time and staff should be organized in schools” (p. 6). The time is now, and we need to strike while the iron is hot (Darling-Hammond, 2020). Like other researchers, Darling-Hammond recognizes the importance of closing the digital divide, utilizing formative assessments effectively, intervening early with mental health support, and offering extended opportunities.

As districts consider the financial resources allocated through the Elementary Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER), financial resources can be allocated to mental health
support, addressing the digital divide, and increasing access to meaningful relationships for students. Furthermore, states and local education agencies should consider systemic inequities so students may thrive in school, work, and life (Yoder et. al., 2020)

Critical policies to support students socially and emotionally, and to foster future academic success should make students feel connected and valued. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2014) defines a safe and supportive school environment as characterized by the absence of discrimination, intimidation, taunting, harassment, and bullying. Research indicates when a sense of belonging is established for students, they are more likely to perform well academically, have consistent attendance, and make healthy decisions. Furthermore, emphasis is needed on the great importance of implementing strong school policies to keep all students, regardless of their gender identity, healthy and safe. This sense of belonging is often described as school connectedness (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019).

Providing well-balanced resources for classroom connections includes not only evidence-based culturally relevant curricula and instruction (along with support for teachers), but also clear goals and benchmarks (i.e., standards), and tools for universal and targeted screening and progress monitoring (Denham, 2016). The results from these assessments not only inform learning but may lead to antiquated policies that are leaving students feeling unwelcome.

In addition to equipping staff with a toolbox of interventions, a focus should be provided to gain an understanding of identity development in adolescence. Tatum (2021) discusses the transition that occurs when children socialize with children from diverse backgrounds in elementary school, to a shift in middle school when students begin to cluster together by culture. At the onset of puberty, children begin to question, *Who am I?* It is crucial at this point to
develop racial-ethnic cultural (REC) identity models. This occurs through culturally responsive classrooms and when staff mirrors the student population (Tatum, 2021).

**Community Mental Health Resources**

The Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the need for mental health support, with 74% of adolescents reporting that their mental health has worsened during this period. Well before the pandemic, substantial evidence indicated that young people were facing a rising tide of mental ill-health, including anxiety, depressive symptoms, psychological distress, and suicide (McGorry, et.al., 2022). The transitionary period to adulthood is a developmentally sensitive time and mental illness is diagnosed heavily during this phase of life. Accessibility to doctors, therapists, and clinicians is often impeded due to waiting time and lack of insurance. Historically, young adults had to prove “chronicity” to receive care that symptoms have been ongoing and early intervention has not taken precedence (McGorry, et.al., 2022).

In the United States, the primary focus has been on physical health. Individuals are required to first go through the general practice provider to receive referrals for psychiatric care. These continued hoops only prolong proper diagnosis and treatment. In rare instances when the integration of behavioral health care is combined with primary care this has the potential to improve patient outcomes and increase patient productivity (Buche et al., 2017).

**Mental Health Supports in Illinois**

Illinois has a population of 12.9 million people of which 3.21% of adults are living with a mental health condition. Only 44.6% of those inflicted are receiving public or private treatment. The remaining 55.4% are living without treatment and are at risk of incarceration, homelessness, or life-threatening outcomes (Laurel House Inc., 2022).
Within the PreK-12 public school system there are supports available for student mental health. Human resources such as social workers, clinical professionals, and school counselors provide additional support beyond the classroom to address students social and emotional needs. Effective January 1, 2022, Public Act 102-0321 (Senate Bill 1577) provides five mental or behavioral health days per year that are excused and do not require a medical note. As with other excused absences, students must be given the opportunity to make up any schoolwork missed during the time not present. As stated in Illinois School Code, a student may be referred to the appropriate school personnel following the second mental health day absence (ISBE, 2022).

When children PreK-12 are showing indicators of mental health distress within school, Screening, Assessment and Support Services (SASS), may be called when a child is experiencing a psychiatric crisis. SASS agencies collaborate with school administrators, social workers, and clinicians to provide safety plans or determine when hospitalization may be needed (Department of Human Services, 2017). One obstacle is that families with their own medical insurance are not always eligible for a SASS evaluation as students that receive public funding through the Illinois All Kids Program or Medicaid are given priority. In these instances, families must go through their primary care physician first. There are numerous helplines that are listed through the Illinois State Board of Education such as Safe2HelpIllinois that offers students a safe and confidential way to confide in others in hope to help prevent suicides, bullying, school violence, or other threats to school safety.

Resources such as the NAMI hotline and the 2-1-1 number that is sponsored by the United Way can serve as a response to a cry for help, but often benefits only those that are a danger to themselves or others. NAMI does offer support groups for those with a mental health
condition or for family members, significant others, and friends that need guidance and coping skills (NAMI, 2022).

**Barriers to Supporting Students’ Mental Health**

The concept of race has a sociopolitical history of referring to skin color without regard to cultural identity (Radd, et. al., 2021). Racial categories remain inconsistent and often require individuals to check a single box that may not fully identify individuals. This categorization has historically impacted students, is still prominent today, and is falsely linked to heightened levels of intelligence among some students. Improving biases requires disrupting assumptions, biases, negativity, and the status quo (Radd, et. al., 2021).

No child should ever feel that they are invisible and that no one cares. Subtractive Schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) systematically strips BIPOC of their language, culture, and academic well-being with the intention of assimilation into the most prevalent group. Angela Valenzuela (1999) conducted a three-year ethnographic study of regular-track youth attending a comprehensive, virtually all-Mexican, inner-city high school in Houston. Valenzuela (1999) states that schools subtract resources from youth in two major ways: first, by dismissing their definition of education and secondly, through assimilationist policies and practices that minimize their culture and language (Valenzuela, 1999). Students are often thrown into the mix to assimilate and adapt without being given tools to support their transition and maintain their cultural heritage. Immigrant students may feel alienated culturally and socially, even if they experience academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Microaggressions can have a devastating impact on one’s mental health. Administrators need to guide the method of reporting to staff and support students when this occurs within
hallways and the overall school environment. Although the offender may be unaware and not seem ill-intentioned; it can result in much pain. Microaggressions are everyday insults or derogatory messages directed toward minorities and people of color, but may also be based on gender, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, and physical or mental disability (Reed, 2022). They have been described as “death by a thousand cuts.” Evidence from research on microaggressions reveals that they lead to elevated levels of depression and trauma among minorities (Torino, 2017).

Even with equipping school staff with tangible resources and ongoing professional development that is unveiled in stages, barriers still impact the successful implementation of establishing connections with students. Teacher responses to perceived negative behaviors displayed by students and their perceptions are critical when implementing school-wide support for mental health (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012). Leaders must provide time for challenging yet impactful conversations when opportunities for self-reflection with examining one’s self-identity are made available (Benson & Fiarman, 2019). Staff and students must be equipped with the knowledge to realize the stressors that are detrimental to one’s mental health which will be outlined further in the next section.

**The Importance of Continuous Education on Mental Health Awareness**

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) recommends that in addition to building the capacity among leaders, districts must create a structured professional development plan that is embedded, ongoing, and contains continuous assessment (CASEL, 2021). This plan should address academic, social, and emotional skills for all staff that is scaffolded over time. It is important to remember that professional development needs to focus
on the needs of the staff and students being represented. SEL for staff and students alone is not an example of self-care. It is at risk of becoming “white supremacy with a hug” (Simmons, 2021). In many districts, SEL is often about compliance when being structured to teach students how to behave. Furthermore, this model imposes a racial hierarchy in the classroom that promotes elitism for white students. SEL should be done with students and not to them.

Classroom spaces should be a collaborative environment that promotes healing, and a wide range of emotions. Students should be recognized for all the ways they are present (Kaler-Jones, 2020). Not all staff are equipped with the knowledge to provide social-emotional learning that affirms students’ cultures while also addressing mental health needs.

**Theoretical Framework**

Grant and Osanloo (2014) describe that lacking a theoretical framework in a study is much like a house that cannot be constructed without a blueprint. The structure and vision for the dissertation would be unclear. The floor plan of the dissertation contains concepts, theoretical principles, ideas, and constructs. The conceptual elements that are the interior of the home, must align with the exterior, which is represented by the theoretical framework. This study will draw on a cycle of inquiry with theoretical frameworks that will support the findings contained within the internal structure. The conceptual framework will consist of three theories: Authentic Relationships, Audacious Hope, and Transformative SEL, which serve as a nested model to address the Problem of Practice to support the mental health needs of BIPOC students.

**Authentic Relationships**

The first theory contributing to this framework is Authentic Relationships. Research has built upon the work of Cranton and Carusetta (2004) focused on the five-faceted model of
authentic relationships for school staff to consider: self-awareness, awareness of others, building genuine relationships, context, and leading critical reflection in life. When teachers do not see students as individuals, authentic relationships do not happen. Some school staff often struggle with how to be their authentic selves in their interactions with students. The challenge is where to draw the line in caring, how much of their personal lives to share, and determining at what point to get support from trained counselors (Cranton, 2006). Novice teachers can get support in finding this balance through mentors, instructional coaches, and their building administrators.

This framework is significant in this study to detail the importance of meaningful and authentic relationships between white teachers and their BIPOC students and why those relationships are critical for students' academic success and emotional well-being. These relationships are vital in giving students motivation and a sense that they are cared for.

Improving the quality of social relationships, especially between students and teachers, may yield improved adult health in the long run (Kim, 2020). Permission to pause needs to be granted for teachers to foster relationships and routines not only at the beginning of the year but also for responding now when students need emotional support. Teachers are under pressure to delve through the curriculum and meet district and state demands for accountability through assessment, but they should not lose sight of remembering that teaching is a relational profession with elements such as dignity and humanity (Lopez, 2017). When students are in distress, “pausing” can reap dividends when students are shown that they are valued and that their educators genuinely care.

According to the Center for Public Education (2018), U.S. classrooms consist of more and more BIPOC students, while teacher demographics remain overwhelmingly white, non-

The statistics reveal that classrooms and school environments do not mirror the population of students served. School staff must intentionally connect with students and continually share versions of their authentic selves through personal and cultural contexts to address learning gaps and inequities among the diverse groups of students that they serve (Gay, 2018).

One method that teachers can utilize to allow greater in school connections to connect students’ knowledge and personal experiences into the classroom is through “funds of knowledge.” This term was originally coined by Luis Moll in reference to those “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133.) This has been adopted by educators as an additive approach to further refine curriculum and pedagogical development for schools and districts that serve a significant population of emergent bilingual students. The focus is on knowledge assets rather than looking at deficits of students for the advancement of students’ and families’ goals and priorities (Moll et al., 1992). When teachers engage with families outside of the school setting, rich examples can be provided on how to recognize particular funds of knowledge and apply them in a school setting (Gonzalez et al., 2005). This approach should not be confused with parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings or providing families with tools on “how to school.” Instead, multilingual and multicultural families should be viewed as valuable resources and contributors to the learning environment by sharing their rich experiences (Gonzalez, et al., 2005). This approach can strengthen trust and serve as a bridge
between home and school when intentional connections and funds of knowledge are applied to the school environment.

Rosa L. Rivera-McCutchen, the author of the book *Radical Care* and an associate professor in the Leadership Studies Programs at Lehman in New York, notes the opposite approach when well-intentioned staff in schools that largely serve BIPOC children say they "care about students," too often, their words paired with their actions do not convey that message (McCutchen, 2021). This school of thought is applicable in this study as evidenced by the feedback from students in the focus group and indicated in the student survey, there is a significant disparity in BIPOC students compared to their White peers on feeling that adults collaborate to support their mental health needs.

**Building Trust**

Authenticity in relationships not only builds trust and success but also improves individual well-being. Barbara Frederickson’s (2014) research on “micro-moments” reveals that even brief periods of focused time on positive feelings can provide a buffer against stress and depression. Intentional moments can improve both physical and mental health. Even five intentional minutes can make a significant impact on a student’s emotional well-being.

Strengthening relationships by getting to know each other is critical to earning trust. Gay (2018) recommends that telling personal stories are key in classroom conversations as educators struggle to capture the importance of a culturally responsive environment. Students may be hesitant to share their experiences and time is necessary to build a safe and trusting environment. As students become more confident, the teacher can share less of themselves. Students need to see themselves as “partners in the quest for learning” (Gay, 2018, p. 234). Sharing versions of
oneself and being vulnerable to students can open additional opportunities for students to be susceptible to support through community connections, tutoring, and extra-curricular involvement once trust is earned.

Establishing trust takes time and does not happen overnight. Modeling values through demeanor and actions is a way to foster trusting relationships to project hope in uncertain times (Kutsyuruba and Walker, 2014). School-based trust is shown when there is a willingness to show one’s vulnerability and the hope that others will express facets of benevolence, openness, reliability, competence, and honesty. (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2000). Within each facet, across all settings of our lives such as education, medical, and law enforcement, we are dependent on other people to behave by our expectations. We must have confidence that our expectations of other people will be met. Having students as co-facilitators of learning create higher levels of trust (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2000). If school leaders are to embrace transformative change, attention must be paid to issues of trust.

Audacious Hope

Audacious Hope is the second theory that blends and braids with Transformative SEL and Authentic Relationships. The Audacity of Hope is well-known from Barack Obama’s 2004 speech. Obama was inspired when his former pastor described a G.F. Watts painting entitled Hope, where the subject is scarred, bruised, bleeding, carrying a harp with all strings broken except one, and still had the audacity to play music and praise God. This painting and sermon served as a reference to Obama in his 2004 keynote “The Audacity of Hope,” when he was a senate candidate. In 2006, Obama released the book, the Audacity of Hope as a continuation of his speech (Wikimedia Foundation, 2022). Even though Obama used a message of hope to
inspire urban youth and “reclaim the American dream,” he was not the first to use hope to spark social movements (Duncan-Andrade, 2009).

In 1964, Martin Luther King, Jr. stated these words as he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize, “I accept this award today with an abiding faith in America and an audacious faith in the future of mankind.” The message of hope was prominent throughout the Civil Rights Era as a call to action against social injustice.

Obama has reinvigorated hope in the educational realm. He called for a “radical transformation” of urban schools, emphasizing the “recruitment and training of transformative principals and more effective teachers” (Obama, 2006, p. 161). Within the educational setting, Audacious Hope serves as a commitment to transformative work and encourages students to partner with educators on a path to profound change. To provide the “authentic care” that students require from us as a precondition for learning, we must be relentless to connect our indignation over all forms of oppression with an audacious hope that we can act to change them (Valenzuela, 1999).

Supporting our students that have experienced trauma and are struggling with their mental health requires intentionality. Duncan-Andrade’s (2009) research on Audacious Hope supports Transformative SEL and Authentic Relationships to provide action within every classroom and within the school environment. When educators act with Audacious Hope, they have a strong conviction for the success of every student. They frame goals on assets rather than deficits (Rios-Aguilar, 2010). This unwavering belief in the success of each student is an arduous journey that serves the best interest of students rather than what is “fair” for adults. Duncan-Andrade (2009) describes audacious hope as flowers growing out of cracks in the concrete.
Educators must have a purpose when nurturing our students, colleagues, and ourselves through the cracks. The stressors or damaged petals along the way must not be hidden or reformed but instead celebrated as attributes of tenacity, resilience, and fearlessness. In practice, school staff demonstrate their devotion and love with students through their actions by providing transformative, collaborative work that aspires a vision for a better world. The cognitive dimension of hope being developed when there is a concerted goal-directed action (Webb, 2013). Furthermore, transformative hope mobilizes action toward a better future.

**Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL)**

Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL) serves as the final theory that dovetails with Authentic Relationships and Audacious Hope. TSEL has the power to impact change when genuine partnerships with students, families, and educators collaborate to support young people’s social, emotional, and academic development while continuing to deepen their own social and emotional competencies (Jagers, et. al., 2021). TSEL is aimed at dismantling inequitable educational environments by attending to issues of identity, agency, belonging, and related issues such as power, privilege, prejudice, discrimination, social justice, empowerment, and self-determination (Jagers, et. al., 2019).

Following the pandemic, CASEL revised its definition to focus on TSEL through the lens of equity and inclusion by affirming the strengths and identities of all students (CASEL, 2021). The refinement of the traditional CASEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, has increased the focus on transforming inequitable settings and systems through Project-Based Learning (PBL) and promoting justice-oriented civic engagement (CASEL, 2021).
Transformative SEL is a process whereby young people and adults build strong and respectful relationships that facilitate co-learning to critically examine the root causes of inequity and to develop collaborative solutions that lead to personal, communal, and societal well-being. This form of SEL is necessary to meet the growing political, economic, and health challenges we face in the United States and around the world (CASEL, 2021).

While the five CASEL competencies promote measures in addressing the non-cognitive skills that students in all schools should learn, Camangian and Cariaga (2021) argue that they are missing a critique of social oppression. Focusing on those competencies alone is conformist, rather than socially transformative (Camangian and Cariaga, 2021). To truly promote healing through the humanization framework, educators must seek to align their teaching with the humanization of BIPOC students by asking themselves about purpose and outcomes. Typically, under the traditional SEL model, educators have students identify their feelings, emotions, and the cause of their pain, which can continue to marginalize students. Camangian and Cariaga (2021) suggest educators collaborate with students to help them recognize and re-claim their emotions and relationships as fuel for political inquiry, radical healing, and social transformation (Camangian and Cariaga, 2021).

Belonging within a democratic society means that “members are more than just individuals; they also have collective power and share a linked fate” (Powell, 2012, p. 5). Providing a sense of belonging in TSEL not only fosters recognition for students but also promotes civic engagement when building partnerships within the school setting. It encourages co-constructing progress towards goals and interactions between individuals and improvement. In this sense, students can experience Audacious Hope and Authentic Relationships within the
TSEL process. This transformative type of belonging promotes equity and inclusion as individuals are personally responsible for TSEL contrasted with traditional models of SEL that may lead to exclusion and oppression (Jagers et. al., 2019).

The California Department of Education has taken an all-hands-on-deck approach, affirming that is a collaborative effort to create the right conditions in the environment to foster equity-focused learning spaces in which children, youth, and adults have opportunities to develop and practice TSEL skills California Department of Education, 2021). California is conducting a gradual approach to foster relationships, develop culturally responsive policies, and model and practice TSEL strategies across all school settings. To advance this critical work, adult reflection is necessary to advance equity and intentionally weave together anti-racism and social and emotional learning.

TSEL has the potential to shift the educational environment through Audacious Hope and Authentic Relationships. It is necessary to consider a form of SEL that transforms individuals by fostering leadership within students through intentional, authentic human interactions (Jagers, 2016). Through this approach, providing student voice to develop a culturally responsive environment that recognizes the needs of our BIPOC students can lead to significant outcomes regardless of student circumstances or background.

Summary

Mental health warning signs are often misinterpreted by school staff and instead, students are labeled as “bad” or receive punishment rather than therapeutic care. According to the U.S. Department of Education, our educational system punishes, suspends, and expels children with
mental disorders at double or more the rate of their peers (United States Department of Education, 2017).

Our schools can serve as valuable support when equipping educators with the knowledge to understand the urgency to respond swiftly when there are triggers to mental health such as micro-aggressions, and subtractive schooling by stripping students of a cultural environment in which they can relate, and mental health supports not identified for students.

Existing literature suggests that classroom spaces and the school environment should be collaborative spaces that promote healing and a wide range of emotions. Students should be recognized for all the ways they are present. Authentic Relationships show students that they are cared for, heard, and seen. Audacious Hope empowers educators and students to have grit and determination to trudge forward on a journey that can lead to radical change.

This evidence highlights the necessity for further examination of the student’s perspective to get student voice in collaborative efforts to focus on the problem of practice, that United High School does not properly support the mental health needs of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). The following chapter will provide the methodology, which discusses an overview of the research design and methods used for the study. Included in the methods section will be a mixed-methods approach consisting of qualitative and quantitative techniques, data collection and analysis, instrumentation, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the methodology of the study is described. This includes the purpose of the study, positionality, research design, instrumentation, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and limitations of the study. These sections are expanded upon to give a comprehensive overview of the research methodology applied in this study.

Description of the Action

This study examined the impact of BIPOC students partnering with parents, administrators, and the School Improvement Team, which consisted of teachers, clinical professional, social workers, and family liaisons to serve as facilitators of change to strengthen a culturally responsive environment that not only supports but raises awareness of the mental health needs of BIPOC students. A three-month partnership was established in collaboration with the team. Through this joint effort, student groups, parents, and the Regional Office of Education were all instrumental in planning for World Mental Health Day at United High School. The planning efforts allowed teachers to reignite student voices that had lost their spark with numerous leadership changes because of the pandemic. This study utilized Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL) to have BIPOC students serve as intentional facilitators of the World Mental Health Campaign.

The cycle of inquiry in this study focused on four phases: plan, do, study, and act (PDSA) (Perry et al., 2015). Planning included the activity (World Mental Health Day), setting the purpose, and the persons responsible. The second phase focused on doing the work, making further connections with the community, and securing resources. The event provided opportunities to record the lessons and include the student video production classes to further
educate others. The study phase occurred through the School Improvement Team to analyze the results and determine if growth was made through the pre-and post-intervention survey. In the final phase, the team determined the next steps as future cycles continue to narrow the gap between White and BIPOC students with their mental health needs being supported and continuing education for students and staff on the mental health warning signs. The Carnegie Program for Educational Doctorate (CPED) has built the Dissertation in Practice (DIP) on bringing improvement science tools, such as PDSA, to support leaders in answering everyday questions through a rigorous process that is systems-changing (Perry et al., 2015). This study took place with the stakeholders mentioned at United High School.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate through collaborative efforts, a mental health campaign that was student-led to bring awareness to mental health needs and create a culturally responsive climate that could more greatly impact students that are not attending class. It is critical that students feel connected to their teachers and peers. In addition, student voice can have a positive impact on this initial cycle of inquiry through a student-led mental health awareness campaign that can be revisited and refined for continuous improvement at United High School. This study takes a deeper look at the impact of BIPOC students serving as facilitators of change to connect students with safe and trusted adults that can serve as support when students are struggling with their mental health. Students' voice is imperative in this study to raise mental health awareness for students and staff.

The data for the study consisted of a mixed-methods research approach to collect and analyze data to answer the research questions stated below. Qualitative approaches occurred
through focus groups with teachers, students, and administrators. The focus groups provided an opportunity for students, staff, and administrators to voice what they need to build trusting relationships. Qualitative methods were conducted through focus groups before the student-led mental health awareness campaign and the quantitative methods were evaluated in the form of a post-survey following the 90-day cycle of inquiry with students, staff, and administrators to assess each group that is surveyed on their perspective regarding if students’ mental health needs are being addressed by supportive adults. In addition, each group responded if they felt adults are collaborative in these efforts.

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. Do students, staff, and administrators feel that student mental health is being supported by adults at United High School? How does this compare when examining the results of White and BIPOC students?

2. Will students feel more connected to adults when intentional efforts are made to identify locations and areas of support within the school?

3. In what ways does a mental health campaign provide BIPOC students opportunities to co-facilitate with adults with learning opportunities that foster Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL)?

**Positionality**

Throughout my career with being an administrator at all levels, I have always been intrigued with the interaction between students and finding any possible way to make connections to help students through extremely difficult situations; it could be a brief conversation or inviting their friends to lunch in my office. For the past three years, I have
observed the United High School climate and listened to students, parents, and staff, but felt something is missing. Many of our BIPOC students are not feeling connected, many are struggling with their mental health, and are unsure of where to go for help. Passion needs to be ignited in all our educators that extends beyond resources and professional development. I feel the answer lies within our students.

I am further devoted to this work as my son has struggled recently with his mental health. As a white-privileged family, we have experienced challenges with accessibility, wait time, out-of-pocket expenses, and no clear guidance on what to do next. With the stigma that comes with mental health, those suffering, and their families can feel isolated. Our BIPOC students and families face additional barriers to obtaining resources that are not representative of all languages or cultures. I am further inspired to collaborate with our families and community to increase knowledge, train others to further support, and raise awareness of mental health warning signs. No one should ever feel they are alone or feel stigmatized.

**Research Design**

In this study, I gained feedback from students, teachers, and administrators from a suburban high school on how the mental health needs of BIPOC students are being supported and the steps that are being taken to foster an environment that supports students’ mental health. The information gathered from this study was used to design an intervention to delve deeply into specifying supports that are available to reduce the stigma associated with mental health. Students’ voice was key in this study through a student-led mental health awareness campaign.

In this research, I employed a mixed methods form of data collection to obtain further information and capture students’ voices. Mixed methods are an approach that blends qualitative
and quantitative research methods and enables the focus on examining multiple perspectives (Johnson et al., 2007). Mixed methods originated in the 1980s and are popular in the social, behavioral, and health sciences. Through this method, researchers collect, analyze, and integrate both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or in a sustained long-term program of inquiry to address their research questions (Creswell, 2013).

Staff and BIPOC students served as partners to transform the learning environment and raise mental health awareness. This is a continuous cycle of inquiry designed collaboratively on the specific needs present at United High School and has the power to provide an inclusive environment that better supports students’ mental health needs. Students working alongside school staff can yield a united team that will ensure a culturally responsive environment is fostered and student voices are part of the decision-making within spaces throughout the school.

In the quantitative phase of the study, the survey data was used to determine if students have opportunities to provide input on promoting a culturally responsive environment and are aware of resources to support their mental health needs. When examining equity and social justice strictly through a quantitative format, numerical comparisons can reflect individuals’ attainments (Horn et al., 2016). By privileging existing social circumstances and predefined skill sets, such methodologies limit the scope of psychological inquiry and may further mask structural social inequity (Horn et al., 2016). The surveys separately administered to teachers and students consisted of 12 questions provided to approximately 700 students and 89 staff to seek feedback on culture and climate.

Qualitative methods were conducted by having students as an essential component of Transformative SEL that has the power to make an impact when they can be valuable team
members in contributing to a Student-Led Mental Health Awareness Campaign in conjunction. Qualitative data consisted of focus groups with students, teachers, and administrators. The focus groups involved discussions through open-ended questions asked to determine if opportunities are provided for student input on structures and if students are aware of resources/spaces for mental health support.

**Participant Selection**

The site of this study is home to an early childhood center, six neighborhood elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and one adult education center. According to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) school report card, the high school in this study contains approximately 52% of students from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds and mobility was last reported at 10%. Approximately 34% of the high school population is White, 38% Black, 14% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 8% of Two or More Races, and 2% American Indian and Pacific Islander (ISBE, 2021).

For the quantitative phase of the study, participants included students, staff, and administrators in grades nine through twelve. Staff, administrators, and students completed an anonymous survey that contained 12 questions that utilized a quantitative approach regarding the school culture, climate, opportunities for student input, and if students are aware of resources/spaces to support student mental health.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations extend beyond the guidelines and writers need to forecast dilemmas that may arise throughout the entire scope of the research process. These issues apply to all methods: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Creswell, 2015). In this study,
careful thought was given to protecting the privacy of participants, obtaining parent permission, neutral meeting sites, and consideration of future readers that may potentially be impacted by the study.

Before surveys were conducted, individuals were provided with informed consent that provided an overview and purpose of the study. Further details were included that their participation was voluntary, and they could decline at any time without repercussions. Permission for minors was obtained in a consent form signed by parents/guardians for the focus groups. Parents, guardians, and adults signed if they chose NOT to participate in the survey. No action was needed within the three-week time frame of receipt if they decided to participate in the survey.

Potential participants were notified of the study via daily announcements and email. Consent forms were available in the main office. In addition, forms were requested from parents, students, and staff via email in case students were absent or forms were lost. Forms were collected in an envelope to the administrative assistant in the office. Participants also had the option to email the completed forms to the Co-Pi.

Participants were not harmed at any time during the study. Participation was voluntary and individuals were recruited through a standard recruitment letter that was sent electronically to all guardians of high school students and staff.

**Data Collection**

The 90-day cycle of inquiry used in this study was completed over the fall 2022 semester. Data were collected using a mixed-methods approach, consisting of two forms of data collection: quantitative and qualitative.
First, students and staff participants within the high school were asked to complete an anonymous survey through the Qualtrics platform. The online survey contained 12 questions to gain perceptions surrounding the school culture, climate, opportunities for student input, and if students are aware of resources/spaces to support student mental health. Personally identifiable information of participants was not gathered with the survey. The staff completed the surveys during a staff meeting while students completed the surveys during a designated and agreed-upon time set in collaboration with the building administrator.

Further qualitative data was gathered with approximately four diverse students, 10 diverse staff, and five diverse school administrators to participate in focus groups. These numbers were chosen to equalize the ratio of each group and have a manageable size for feedback. Focus groups lasted approximately 30 minutes and were recorded to ensure accuracy with participant permission.

Mixed methods researchers use strategies such as observation, focus groups, and questionnaires and should understand qualitative and quantitative data collection (Graff, 2017). Organization is crucial when collecting data to keep information secure. Files will be kept and organized by theme. Information will also be stored from interview recordings and focus groups and stored within OneDrive for transcription. Participants will be reminded not to include names or any identifiable information when responding to questions.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis occurred in two phases through a mixed-methods approach. Data gathered from the open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively. The audio recordings were used for educational purposes to assist in achieving the goals of the school improvement plan to foster a
culturally responsive environment and address meeting the needs of students to support their mental health by ensuring there is student awareness in identifying locations for support. Creswell (2013) recommends the researcher keep their record of actions and reflections as well as this will be another source of useful data in later analysis.

The data gathered from the student and staff surveys were scored through a Likert Scale ranking the responses from the categories; Strongly Agree, Agree, Unsure, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Perceptions were measured in the areas of students having a safe and trusted adult, students being provided with opportunities to describe feelings, acceptance of other cultures, responsiveness, and resources for mental health needs. Students and staff were given similar surveys for comparative analysis to be made. Data was analyzed was reported in percentages within each of the response categories and examined for growth or deficits from the pre-to post-survey. Comparisons were made from staff, student, and administrator responses. Perspectives were also examined demographically to determine any gaps that may exist.

Focus group data were recorded, transcribed, and coded to generate themes. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clark (2006) through a six-step process that consists of familiarization with the dataset, coding, generating initial themes, developing, and reviewing themes, refining/defining/naming themes, and writing into literature.

**Validity and Reliability Strategies**

Member checks were used to validate internal validity in this study for the qualitative portion. Through member checks, the transcripts, results, and interpretations were taken back to the participants to be confirmed and validated. This provided the participant with an opportunity to locate any errors and clarify any inaccuracies.
(Zohrabi, 2013). The transcripts were reviewed by the interviewees to confirm the content of what they stated during the interview and/or focus groups. In this way, the plausibility and truthfulness of the information could be recognized and supported. To maintain reliability, interviews were recorded and reviewed multiple times for accuracy as the information is coded. In Chapter 4, I will review the findings of this study.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate through collaborative efforts, a mental health campaign that is student-led to bring awareness to mental health needs and create a culturally responsive climate that can more greatly impact students that are not attending class. It is critical that students feel connected to their teachers and peers. In addition, student voice can have a positive impact on this initial cycle of inquiry through a student-led mental health awareness campaign that can be revisited and refined for continuous improvement at the high school.

This study sought to examine the impact of BIPOC students serving as facilitators of change to connect students with safe and trusted adults that can serve as support when students are struggling with their mental health. Students' voices were imperative in this study to raise mental health awareness for students and staff. Through this investigation, findings confronted the problem of not addressing the mental health needs of BIPOC students and the use of intervention through a student-led mental health campaign to increase awareness for resources and responsiveness through collaboration with adults. This study was a mixed methods design using both quantitative and qualitative methods to measure and ascertain whether the student-led mental health campaign: 1) provided BIPOC students opportunities to co-facilitate with adults in learning opportunities that foster Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL); 2) positively impacted the mental health support for students, with an effort to reach more BIPOC students, as reported by students, staff, and administrators at United High School.
and; 3) an increase in students feeling more connected to adults when intentional efforts are made to improve areas of support coupled with predetermined locations for support within the school.

**Participants**

**Pre-Intervention Survey**

The participants in this study included students, staff, and administrators. About (78%) of students, (85%) of staff, and (100%) of UHS administrators responded to the pre-intervention survey. Of this number of students (30%) is Black, (17%) Latino(a)(x), (11%) Multiracial, (7%) Other, (33%) White, and (2%) preferred not to answer. (See Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Demographics of Student Identity for Pre-Intervention Survey**

![Pie chart showing demographics of student identity for pre-intervention survey]
A total of 89 staff completed the survey during the time provided on the opening day of school. Analysis of demographic information gathered from the staff survey shown in Figure 3 indicates staff (8%) are Black, (8%) Latino(a)(x), (2%) Multiracial, (4%) Other, (75%) White, and (3%) preferred not to answer. (See Figure 3). These findings are consistent with the 2021 data on the school report card that indicates 75% of staff are White. The pre-intervention survey demographics closely mirror data reported on the Illinois School Report Card, which reflects (35%) is Black, (16%) Latino(a)(x), (9%) Multiracial, (7%) Other, (33%) White (Illinois State Board of Education, 2022).

**Figure 3: Demographics of Staff Identity for Pre-Intervention Survey**

Analysis of demographic information gathered from the administrator survey shown in Figure 4 indicates administrators (40%) are Black and (60%) White. (See Figure 4). All five
administrators completed the survey at the end of July before the return for the 2022-2023 school year.

**Figure 4:** Administrator Survey: Demographics of Administrator Identity for Pre-Intervention Survey

The participants in this post-intervention survey included students, staff, and administrators. About (46%) of students, (85%) of staff, and (80%) of UHS administrators responded to the post-intervention survey. Student participants on the post-intervention survey were lower, possibly due to being completed first hour or due to a competing survey for the equity audit taking place during a similar timeframe. Of this number of students (24%) are Black, (18%) are Latino(a)(x), (7%) are Multiracial, (7%) are Asian, (39%) are White, Other (2.5%), and Preferred Not to Answer (2.5%). (See Figure 5). Compared to the data reported on the Illinois School Report Card, which reflects (35%) is Black, (16%) Latino(a)(x), (9%) are Multiracial, (4%) are Asian, (33%) are White, Other (3.0%) (Illinois State Board of Education, 2022).
A total of 88 staff completed the post-intervention survey during a staff development on November 4, 2022. One fewer participant completed the pre-intervention survey. At the staff meeting, individuals were informed that information would be shared once the overall results from the study were analyzed and approved to share for school improvement needs. Analysis of demographic information gathered from the staff survey shown in Figure 6 indicates staff (8%) are Black, (8%) Latino(a)(x), (2%) Multiracial, (4%) Other, (75%) White, and (3%) Preferred Not to Answer. (See Figure 6). These findings are consistent with the pre-intervention survey.
Figure 6: Demographics of Staff Identity for the Post-Intervention Survey

Analysis of demographic information gathered from the administrator survey shown in Figure 7 indicates administrators (20%) are Black and (80%) White. (See Figure 7). Four of the five administrators completed the post-survey after the conclusion of the intervention. One Black administrator, two White females, and one White male participated. Again, findings will be reported by overall administrators to protect confidentiality due to the small sampling.
Focus Groups

Three separate focus groups were conducted that were comprised of four BIPOC students, all five administrators, and seven staff that work directly with students. A diverse group consisting of three males and one female. The individuals consisted of, three Black, and one Multiracial student (See Table 2). Individuals identified themselves before they responded for the audio to later be transcribed.

Table 2: Demographics of Student Focus Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Racial Identity</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maurice</td>
<td>Black Male</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peyton</td>
<td>Black Male</td>
<td>Senior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Latino Male</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eli</td>
<td>Multiracial Female</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The staff focus group was held on September 7, 2022, at 2:30 p.m. Seven participants consisted of two Latinx females, two Black females, and three White females (see Table 3). Time was made available during staff development day and two individuals stated they were grateful as there was nothing planned for them. This group went the longest of the three focus groups lasting 37 minutes.

Table 3: Demographics and Roles of Staff Focus Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Racial Identity</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Phillips</td>
<td>White Female</td>
<td>PE Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Tucker</td>
<td>White Female</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Potts</td>
<td>Black Female</td>
<td>Clinical Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Martin</td>
<td>Black Female</td>
<td>School Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Vasquez</td>
<td>Latinx Female</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Alvarez</td>
<td>Latinx Female</td>
<td>Bilingual Family Liaison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Scott</td>
<td>White Female</td>
<td>Bilingual Instructional Coach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All five high school administrators participated in the focus group on August 2, 2022 (See Table 4). Feedback was collected for approximately 27 minutes and
individuals freely responded to questions. Individuals identified themselves before they responded for the audio to later be transcribed.

Table 4: Demographics of Administrator Focus Group Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Racial Identity</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Jones</td>
<td>Black Male</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Norris</td>
<td>Black Female</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Bolton</td>
<td>White Female</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Riggs</td>
<td>White Female</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Walter</td>
<td>White Male</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Findings of My Study

The results are presented by research questions. The quantitative data are described using statistical techniques, and tables, and are disaggregated by participants and by responses on the Likert Scale survey. The qualitative findings from the focus group interviews are presented by the themes generated from the data.

Research Question #1

Do students, staff, and administrators feel that student mental health is being supported by adults at United High School? How does this compare when examining the results of White and BIPOC students?

Before the student-led mental health campaign (49.59%) of students, staff, and administrators were in overall agreement that students are provided opportunities to describe
their feelings clearly. Access to resources for when students feel troubled was at the highest level of agreement compared to other questions (61.34%). Adult responsiveness to students’ mental health needs was represented by (53.34%) of overall agreement at the beginning of the school year (See Table 5).

Table 5: Results from Students, Staff, and Administrators from Pre-Intervention Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students are provided opportunities to describe their feelings clearly.</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.73%</td>
<td>40.86%</td>
<td>32.24%</td>
<td>15.01%</td>
<td>3.14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school has available resources for when students feel troubled.</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.17%</td>
<td>50.17%</td>
<td>28.75%</td>
<td>9.90%</td>
<td>1.97%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults are responsive to students’ mental health needs.</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.31%</td>
<td>44.23%</td>
<td>31.08%</td>
<td>12.57%</td>
<td>2.81%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, U=Unsure, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, T=Total

When students in the focus groups were asked if all races have equal access to mental health support, it was the only question that showed some hesitation. Students waited 22 seconds before there was a response. Peyton (pseudonym) finally responded with, “I would say I think all races have access, but I can’t speak for everyone. From my time working in the counselors’ office, I’ve seen a lot of different types of people come in. I think they could talk to a school counselor about whatever.

Alex (pseudonym) added, “I think, for the most part, we are doing that here. But there are different problems for each student.” He continued with the following:
They have their own problems and things they have going on in their life. I see a lot of students, some Black, some Hispanic, and a few white students that are struggling every day. Not a day goes by that I don’t see someone crying in the halls or other students visibly angry, others are ditching class and hiding in the strangest places. I have no idea if they are being provided with any kind of support. It is sad, and I think a lot about that.

When the staff focus group was asked if all races had their mental health needs supported, the responses nearly took my breath away. Each of the seven individuals went around the table, and uttered a loud, no! This was followed again by a long period of silence and one individual had to fight back tears. Ms. Vasquez (pseudonym) shared the following:

There are obstacles and barriers every step of the way and not only that there are students not knowing who to go to, but also the fact that many students in a specific group won't talk to anybody about the issues they're having at home or issues their families are facing legal issues. They won't talk to anybody, even if the path is very clear for them to know who they need to go to. They may think, I can go to this person, and she could help. They just won't do it; they know that piece is dangerous to share their information. They know it is dangerous to talk to others about what's going on, so they won't do it. So, the short answer is no. I'm gonna say no and like the mental health support is getting a little more
diverse. It's still real that we have heavy caseloads. It doesn't allow for time to meet with others who need it.

Ms. Tucker (pseudonym) adds, “I mean there's so much stigma still attached to it. We see it in several different facets. I mean it's just not safe for them sometimes to share what they need to share.”

Ms. Alvarez (pseudonym) says, “I will also say it has been a struggle to have someone that is Spanish speaking for a while. I appreciate that we do have that access now. In addition, I think sometimes Latino students will ask questions to adults and they don't have the training as a teacher to provide those mental health services. I've had students that I know see the social worker and try to persuade another student to see the social worker. They try to convince them by saying this is a person that can help you and they won't. Other students try to share they're not unsafe or they won't do something to provide a negative experience, so that has been difficult as well.” Ms. Alvarez explained that there are many students that are undocumented. The community is known as a sanctuary city, a community whose policies drastically reduce deportations of undocumented immigrants that do not have a criminal record (Wikimedia, 2023). Even though this exists, families fear having unfamiliar individuals come to their home or divulging personal information that can be linked to family members.

Administrators in the focus group shared that all races are not being supported with their mental health. Ms. Norris (pseudonym) explained the impact on multilingual students who need assistance and there wasn’t a bilingual social worker in the past. “I'm very excited that this year we do have a bilingual social worker so I think that some of
those needs will be able to be met this upcoming year. I feel that there are stigmas among different racial groups regarding accessing mental health and what it means to access mental health and it's not accepted in certain communities to go and look for mental health.”

Administrators shared in great length the feelings that students are feeling overwhelmed. Trust continues to be a factor when students are not connecting with adults when feeling anxious. Mr. Jones (pseudonym) stated,

“Students are feeling overwhelmed because they are having difficulties in the community, there's a lot of drama with their friends that's generally what is going on. They are fighting for survival in the streets, and they are bringing that into school. These kids though aren’t going to talk to an adult as there is no trust. at sometimes shuts down access.”

Following the student-led mental health campaign (62.27%) of students, staff, and administrators were in overall agreement that students are provided opportunities to describe their feelings clearly, noting a (12.68%) increase from the pre-intervention results. Access to resources for when students feel troubled indicated a decline (2.04%) with (59.3%) of the respondents in overall agreement (61.34%) of those surveyed in agreement. Adult responsiveness to students’ mental health needs declined by (3.15%) from the pre-intervention survey with (50.19%) of those surveyed in agreement that adults are responsive to students’ mental health needs (See Table 6).
Table 6: Results from Students, Staff, and Administrators from Post-Intervention Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students are provided opportunities to describe their feelings clearly.</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.67%</td>
<td>49.60%</td>
<td>23.12%</td>
<td>12.05%</td>
<td>2.56%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school has available resources for when students feel troubled.</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.83%</td>
<td>43.47%</td>
<td>27.47%</td>
<td>9.48%</td>
<td>3.75%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults are responsive to students' mental health needs.</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.47%</td>
<td>39.72%</td>
<td>28.85%</td>
<td>13.63%</td>
<td>7.31%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, U=Unsure, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, T=Total

When disaggregating the data further, the post-survey results revealed 96% of White students and 56% of BIPOC students agree that adults are responsive to their mental health needs. That remains a significant disparity even though gains have been made from the initial survey that conveyed 94% of White students and 48% of BIPOC felt that their mental health needs were being met by responsive adults.

Initial findings indicated 93% of White students and 38% of BIPOC students felt that adults collaborated on students’ mental health needs. Furthermore, according to the final survey results, 95% of White students felt that the adults in their school collaborate to support and coordinate students’ mental health needs compared to 50% of BIPOC students.

Research Question #2

Will students feel more connected to adults when intentional efforts are made to identify locations and areas of support within the school?
Students in the focus groups shared suggestions for intentional efforts to increase awareness and accessibility to supportive spaces throughout the school. Maurice (pseudonym) summed up:

If I'm not OK…, who can I go to, if I'm not OK? We can raise awareness if individuals don't know by having information on the school website. The school could either advertise it more if it exists, or if it doesn’t, they could add something about mental health in general like places where you can go. Students always check websites and Google Classroom … I am the kind of person who would check their Google Classroom every single day. There could be a resource or class for mental health and students could check out the bulletin for words every other day or something. We should put up posters and bulletins so every single day other kids will see the advertisement, Flyers, and websites in every classroom and know who to see for specific kinds of support. We don’t have that now.

Several individuals cited in the staff focus groups that it has been years since there have been real opportunities for students to have an active student voice. Individuals expressed their wishes that this could be brought back. Ms. Tucker adds the following:

I hope we can get back to that with a social justice focus. Instead of it being a committee or a lecture format, we get to make students feel good when they are inspired with audacious hope. That's what it was. Barack Obama had just been
elected president and there was a lot of focus on social justice initiatives. That
audacious hope... I've seen it here in this building and it's exciting when it's led
by a student's voice.

Ms. Martin (pseudonym) adds the following and covers her eyes as she
speaks, “When I first started here, our multicultural program felt like we
just kept students in the corner, like they were Cinderella, and they
couldn't come up to meet everyone else. I think we have done a much
better job, but isolation still exists. I mean so many now have come to me
and I'm happy about that. Some of them are my babies, but before that
wasn't the case. They had no idea who to talk to because it was like they
weren't allowed to come to the school counselor’s office.”

Ms. Phillips (pseudonym) stresses the importance of fostering authentic
relationships, “I feel like it's very hard for our emergent bilinguals to really create a
relationship to really trust somebody, to open the door a little bit, and let them in.” She
highlights the following as tears are in her eyes:

Last year, we lost several students. Some people who were working with
them daily didn't even notice that they were gone. This was difficult for
me to accept because I thought that several interventions must be taking
place before we just drop a student and let them go. Just like that, they
were gone.

Ms. Vasquez adds, “It is so important to just even be smiling in the hallway and
recognize that you want to be here for all the students. That doesn't happen very often
for bilingual students. I feel like students who are receiving services are seen as a separate entity from the school and it shouldn't be that way.”

Administrators in the focus group unanimously expressed that increases in mental health concerns have been on the rise, especially following the period when students were remote. Ms. Bolton (pseudonym) led the discussion stating, “We have about 16 to 20 individual staff members who are specifically designed to different aspects of student mental health and so I feel like all those members are being used daily by a wide variety of our students. I feel like most students that have trust for someone in the building know who they can go to.” Ms. Norris shared, “I feel that our students do know who their student interventionists are across the board and that they know their counselors and know how to access those people. If students are then able to then go ahead and see those people, if they don't, maybe they don't know how to go about accessing our mental health practitioners.” Ms. Bolton explained the process of a referral system that was initiated last school year. “I think the addition of a referral process that the social workers used last year and that teachers could refer, too. I think that was helpful because even if a student maybe didn't know the specific support services that were available, they at least had a trusted adult that that could work to initiate that.” Mr. Walter (pseudonym) highlighted the concerns that were shared by parents that didn’t know who to turn to when noticing changes in their child at home. Students echoed similar concerns in the focus groups that they were unsure of who could support them and there was a lack of feeling safe if they shared what they needed to. The administrator shared the following outreach from families, “Last year and the
year before especially with Covid we had more parents reaching out on behalf of the students to request services and interventions for example 504s and just counseling in general. I think that's an important step that we are making sure that our families know who to call because sometimes our students may know but they still may not feel comfortable going through the process. So having their families be advocates for them has been helpful.

In the staff focus group, Ms. Vasquez stated that roles are not clearly defined for students.

I think it’s educating our students about what the rules are. Our students come into the social worker’s office and say I need to change my class. They need to go to the counselor, but I think they associate a counselor more with mental health. The social worker is like, OK, your school counselor will change your classes, but they could just educate them more and then maybe advertise where we're at.

The students gave me much to reflect on and emphasized that most students were unsure of how to get help beyond their classroom teacher if they were not okay. Also mentioned, was that AP teachers push through the content. Social studies teachers were the main ones that were cited as interweaving SEL.

Some key takeaways from my short time with staff have confirmed earlier findings that there is a disconnect between supportive roles within the school. At the beginning of the discussion, the long pause was followed by concerns about when admin or hallway presence is lacking. In addition, opportunities are limited for students to be
drivers of change to raise awareness or disrupt social inequity. Students are feeling invisible when they are not greeted warmly by all staff or are isolated in the building based on their educational needs. The most disheartening, all races are not having their mental health needs met due to a lack of trust in adults or school-wide efforts not being initiated by all adults and collaboratively with students.

Feedback from the staff focus groups indicates that some students know where to go for support and others, their parents have initiated in the past. It appears that other students need to determine on their own how to receive the support.

Before the student-led mental health campaign intervention, less than fifty percent (49.59%) agree that adults within the school collaborate to support and coordinate students’ mental health needs (See Table 7). Through the collaborative efforts in the initiation, planning, and delivery of the intervention through a partnership among staff and BIPOC students an increase (3.39%) of those surveyed agree (52.98%) that adults within the school collaborate to support and coordinate students’ mental health needs (See Table 8). The pre-intervention survey indicated (77.99%) overall agreement that students get along well with others that are different than them and (83.79%) reported overall agreement in the post-survey with an increase of (5.8%). Before the intervention (60.29%) of those survey was in overall agreement that students have a teacher or adult at school that they can fully trust and following the mental health campaign (62.27%) with an increase of (1.98%)
### Table 7: Results from Students, Staff, and Administrators from Pre-Intervention Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The adults in my school collaborate to support and coordinate students’ mental health needs</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.73%</td>
<td>40.86%</td>
<td>35.73%</td>
<td>11.52%</td>
<td>3.16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students get along well with others that are different than them.</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21.07%</td>
<td>56.92%</td>
<td>17.22%</td>
<td>2.67%</td>
<td>2.12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students have a teacher or adult at school that they can fully trust</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.95%</td>
<td>39.34%</td>
<td>22.11%</td>
<td>12.68%</td>
<td>4.92%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, U=Unsure, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, T=Total

### Table 8: Results from Students, Staff, and Administrators from Post-Intervention Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The adults in my school collaborate to support and coordinate students’ mental health needs</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.44%</td>
<td>37.54%</td>
<td>27.66%</td>
<td>14.42%</td>
<td>4.94%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students get along well with others that are different than them.</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.75%</td>
<td>63.04%</td>
<td>9.88%</td>
<td>2.56%</td>
<td>1.97%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students have a teacher or adult at school that they can fully trust</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19.19%</td>
<td>43.08%</td>
<td>20.55%</td>
<td>11.85%</td>
<td>5.33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, U=Unsure, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree, T=Total
Research Question #3

In what ways does a mental health campaign provide BIPOC students opportunities to co-facilitate with adults with learning opportunities that foster Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL)?

In considering the findings from the surveys, focus groups, literature review, overall observations with United High School, the School Improvement Team, Parent Teacher School Association, and students decided on a student-led mental health campaign for the intervention that would provide intentional efforts for BIPOC students to partner with the school and community members. World Mental Health Awareness Day was on October 10, 2022. This served as an opportunity for students to advocate for much-needed change through BIPOC clubs such as the Royal Diamonds Dance Team, which is comprised of all Black females, Student Ambassadors, Minority Enrichment Club, Video Editing Class, and Latine Club. Although this was a one-day event, the planning, preparation, and change led to impactful changes to identify location, description, and training for support staff.

School Improvement Team

The SIP Team, which consisted of two BIPOC student ambassadors, staff, and all administrators was provided with initial findings from the survey. Areas that needed follow-up based on the information shared from focus groups. It was clear greater emphasis was needed to support our BIPOC students to raise overall mental health awareness and how educators in and out of the classroom can support students’ mental
health needs. It was encouraging to see the excitement from the SIP team as the ideas began to flow at our initial meeting.

The Team decided on planning for World Mental Health Day as this is an opportunity to raise awareness about mental health, educate individuals, and pair those in need with resources. The team felt it was important to address mental health warning signs and raise awareness to decrease the stigma that is often associated with individuals that seek out support. Campaigns such as this can encourage everyone, not only students, but staff as well to care for their mental health and support others.

Educating the school community about the warning signs of mental health issues can increase the safety of students. When students and educators are aware of indicators when others are struggling with mental health, they can have necessary conversations with supportive individuals in or outside of the school. Increasing awareness around mental health issues also helps those who suffer from these conditions to feel less alone. Most mental illnesses are isolating by nature. When the truth about their widespread nature is shared, it helps many people feel less alone or ashamed. The following action plan was developed at our first meeting on September 14, 2022, that consisted of five administrators, five support staff, three parents, and three students:
**Table 9: Mental Health Awareness Campaign-Action Plan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Person Responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create business cards with social workers, clinical professionals, school counselors, and bilingual staff locations. Backpack tags will be provided to secure cards on backpacks.</td>
<td>To raise awareness of safe, trusted adults that can provide support outside of the classroom</td>
<td>SIP Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a flyer to promote World Mental Health Day-October 10, 2022</td>
<td>Market the events with the school community</td>
<td>Student contest and committee will select a winner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational messages on lockers</td>
<td>Raise awareness throughout the school, particularly in hallways</td>
<td>Royal Diamonds Dance Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Latine Leadership Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Minority Enrichment Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a mental health awareness video</td>
<td>Ensure all students hear the same message about mental health signs and breaking the stigma. Trusted adults from the Student Support Team will also be featured.</td>
<td>Video Production Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a selfie station with multi-lingual and culturally responsive props</td>
<td>Gain student interest and awareness with multi-lingual and culturally responsive prompts to check in with others</td>
<td>Student Teams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table Continues)
(Table 9 Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Health Awareness Bulletin Board</th>
<th>Strengthening knowledge on mental health awareness and breaking the stigma</th>
<th>Social Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resource Tables During Lunch</td>
<td>Provide literature and local resources</td>
<td>Community Agencies (Rosecrance and Hope Springs) and Clinical Professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Awareness Bags: upon arrival (green lifesaver, mental health awareness bracelets, multilingual business card with support locations backpack/holder, ribbon sticker, motivational message)</td>
<td>Wrap-around support from the school community-students and staff together greeting students</td>
<td>Sponsored by the Regional Office of Education (ROE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-care stations for staff</td>
<td>Activities to restore health, harmony, and mindfulness for staff</td>
<td>Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) and Community Licensed Yoga Instructors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A second meeting was held on Friday, September 30th. With only ten days remaining, it was necessary to have all hands-on deck to make the final preparations. A final schedule was made to ensure the goals of providing students with explicit
instruction on mental health warning signs, resources for support, and educating adults on how they can better support students.

Students shared the idea of the video and collaborated to develop the following poem for the production that they shared with the team:

My Many Moods

Some days we feel silly.  
Some days we feel sad.  
Some days we feel scared.  
Some days we feel mad.

Everyone’s mood can change  
Based on their situation.  
A rough night of sleep,  
Or an angry tweet, 
Can trigger emotional manipulation.

Recognize your baseline moods  
Keep track of them on a chart  
If you are always down  
Or jumping around  
Then perhaps you need a heart-to-heart

Sometimes a simple conversation  
Can help you lift your mood  
If they are a true friend  
You know they will listen  
And not judge you when they do
As we celebrate Mental Health Day
Let’s all open and listen in
Because it's not OK
To live every day
Stuck in a mental prison

Mental health awareness starts with you.

If you are not feeling well
Talk to a friend
Talk to a family member
Talk to a teacher
Talk to a counselor
Talk to a social worker
Talk to a mental health expert
And if someone asks to talk to you
Listen

A flyer was chosen, and students wanted to focus on the following phrase rather than students being reflected as a statistic:

Your mental health is a priority. Your happiness is essential, your self-care is a necessity. You matter!

Fliers were created in English and Spanish and messages to support mental health awareness would be reinforced in and out of the classroom throughout the day.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:30-8:00</td>
<td>Distribute World Mental Health bags</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00-8:34</td>
<td>Mental health warning signs video, presentation by social workers and clinical professions, Video Production Class video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch Periods</td>
<td>Resource tables will be available with community representatives from Hope Springs and Rosecrance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:02-11:52</td>
<td>Selfie stations will be set up to promote mental health awareness with multi-lingual and culturally responsive props</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:50-1:40</td>
<td>Students responded to the following prompts:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• something that causes or caused you stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• something you do to take care of your mental health or to manage something stressful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• something adults need to know about student mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• changes we can make to improve the mental health of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• write a letter to a student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mental Health Awareness Day-October 10, 2022

All the planning and preparation for the day paid off and far exceeded my original expectations. There were many moments throughout the day that proved this was a valuable step for United High School to take to show each student that they are valued. The students’ reactions when they received their Mental Health Awareness Bags and when each was told, “You Matter” upon arrival was priceless. Some students were taken back for a second, and others responded, “This made my day!” Originally some members of the team were unsure how students would receive the resources upon arrival and felt that they may see the bags throughout the school. Students could be seen throughout the school wearing their mental health awareness bracelets, green ribbon stickers, and clear tags with support information attached to backpacks. Surprisingly for some, there was not a baggie to be seen.

I popped into a bilingual classroom as the video was being played with the mental health warning signs and I heard a young man whisper to his classmate, “I see a psychiatrist.” The Student Support Team came through by offering the live presentation in both English and Spanish combined. It was also inspiring as the social workers are Latina, Black, and White females and one White male. It is encouraging when students can see versions of themselves in those that can support them. This was further enforced in the video produced by students that contained a diverse group of students that delivered a powerful message.

The conversation about the event could still be heard during lunchtime. Students created posters, inspirational sticky notes attached to lockers, and the selfie station lined
the back of the cafeteria. From the impactful words that could be heard, a couple of examples will stick with me. At the selfie station, one black female held up the sign that reads, black mental health matters. She then continued by saying to another black female, “I don’t think it should say that mental health matters for all people.” The other student replied, “In my house though, we are not allowed to talk about it.” She then continues to proudly hold up the sign with her friend as the selfie was taken.

Another young lady approached me in the cafeteria and told me, “I had my first therapy session and my second one was canceled today. I am worried as I am really struggling. Fortunately, we were able to connect her with the social worker and the therapy agency which was one of the community resources present, and support was provided for the young lady. She was then all smiles, expressed her thanks, and was glad to have it worked out.

**School Board and Community Update**

Students and the team provided the Board with an update on World Mental Health Day to share the student video, purpose, and pictures of the event. Board members also asked how the transformational work led by students is related to the instructional mandates for health. New requirements for the 2022-2023 school year state mental health and illness, which must include how and where to find mental health resources and specialized treatment in the state (ISBE, 2022). Resources and information will also be shared with families in the Board Update and Family Focus that is disseminated to the community.
Conclusion

The Cycle of Inquiry was a thorough process that exceeded the expectations with stakeholder involvement from staff, students, parents, and support from the Regional Office of Education. The overwhelming response expressed the need for a community effort surrounding the mental health of BIPOC students. Students expressed the need for a concerted effort to promote resources and access to mental health resources in the focus group which further sparked the creation and planning for World Mental Health Day. Voices could be heard from Black, Latinx students, and emergent bilingual students on their beliefs regarding mental health and what they need. Although this was the initial cycle of inquiry, the significant disparity surrounding the mental health support lacking for BIPOC students compared to their White peers has brought a call to action that has inspired others to take the lead, despite who is leading United High School directly. Immediately following World Mental Health Day, the wheels remained in motion to provide staff and students with Mental Health First Aid Training and develop educator panels at multiple events that are addressing the inequities of questions that are being submitted by students and staff to better support the needs of BIPOC students. Conversations and planning are continuing not only at United High School but have also spread across the school community.

Staff expressed what they needed sometimes by silence. Their raw emotions ignited passion and involvement. The results indicated an increase in staff awareness and led to a vast improvement in cultural and linguistic resources that greatly impacted the environment. Most importantly, Spanish-speaking students are feeling the responsiveness from staff and are gaining
trust to access resources when feeling troubled. The findings suggest that collaborative efforts with students to increase awareness of mental health by intentionally connecting students to resources led by diverse staff, and culturally relevant and linguistic examples lead to greater awareness among students and adults.

It is recommended that these practices continue and that the Cycle of Inquiry is repeated to provide opportunities to support BIPOC students and meet the needs of their mental health being supported by adults at United High School. BIPOC students were actively involved in the intervention through the initiation of a newly formed Royal Diamonds Dance Team, which consists of all Black females. The Latine Leadership Team and Minority Enrichment Program were also key to this study. The Video Production Team consisting of all BIPOC students created an outstanding video and poem that was shared with the entire student body and community.

BIPOC students were provided opportunities to co-facilitate learning opportunities that foster Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL) through the planning of World Mental Health Day, leading the event, and reporting to the Board of Education. The takeaway will be the stories, the qualitative examples that are not revealed in numbers. Students having a voice is transformative and it is priceless to see the reaction on a student’s face when they are told, “You matter!”
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE IMPACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors necessary to support the mental health needs of BIPOC students at United High School. In addition, this study examined the impact of students partnering with adults to serve as facilitators of change to strengthen a culturally responsive environment that not only supports but raises awareness of the mental health needs of BIPOC students. A three-month partnership was implemented that included planning for World Mental Health Day at United High School. The planning efforts allowed teachers to reignite student voices that had lost their spark with numerous leadership changes because of the pandemic. This study utilized Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL) to have BIPOC students serve as intentional facilitators of the World Mental Health Campaign.

The cycle of inquiry focused on four phases: plan, do, study, and act (PDSA). Planning included the activity (World Mental Health Day), setting the purpose, and the persons responsible. The second phase focused on doing the work, making further connections with the community, and securing resources. The event provided opportunities to record the lessons and include student video production classes to further educate others. The study phase occurred through the School Improvement Team to analyze the results and determine if growth was made through the pre-and post-intervention survey. In the final phase, the act will determine the next steps as future cycles continue to narrow the gap between White and BIPOC students with their mental health needs being supported and continuing education for students and staff on the mental health warning signs. This model of Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) can be replicated to foster solutions to district problems within a short time frame (Park & Takahashi, 2013) with
each ongoing cycle. Chapter V further summarizes the findings and discusses the limitations of the study.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Transformative Social-Emotional Learning**

Staff provided BIPOC students opportunities to co-facilitate learning opportunities that fostered Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL) throughout the school environment at United High School. Students in the focus group shared mostly elective teachers have integrated TSEL at different points, but a student highlighted that to him, transformative SEL is when the race is interwoven with social identity and there is a partnership between the teacher and the students. Previous research conducted on Audacious Hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) and Authentic Relationships (Cranton, 2006) provide structures that nest within TSEL in this study. Students and staff were longing for students’ voices to be reignited, a lack of hope was initially evident when hearing and seeing the raw emotions in the focus groups and results from the fall 2022 Panorama staff survey where approximately 40% of staff are not optimistic that the climate will improve.

As Jagers et. al (2019) describe, TSEL is aimed at dismantling inequitable educational environments by attending to issues such as belonging, privilege, prejudice, social justice, empowerment, and self-determination. Through this study, students’ voices were heard, and attention is beginning to address these long-standing issues that were silenced. Staff that participated in this study aligned their thinking in the second phase of the PDSA cycle through the humanization of BIPOC students by asking themselves about purpose and outcomes with students (Park & Takahashi, 2013). Unlike traditional SEL, TSEL promotes civic engagement
when building partnerships within the school setting. It encourages co-constructing progress towards goals and interactions between individuals and improvement (Jagers et. al., 2019). The collaboration in this brief and initial cycle of inquiry did yield positive gains with the collaborative efforts in the initiation, planning, and delivery of the intervention through a partnership among staff and BIPOC with an increase (3.39%) of those surveyed agreeing that adults within the school collaborate to support and coordinate students’ mental health needs. Moving forward, it must be clearly articulated to students and staff that not only is support available for individuals that are struggling with their mental health, but culturally responsive mental health first aid training must be well marketed and available for staff and students willing to lead the charge to make a positive impact. This training is designed in English and Spanish. United District is also seeking out presenters that ensure the training is culturally responsive. The course introduces common mental health warning signs for youth, provides research on typical adolescent development, and teaches a 5-step action plan for how to help young people in both crisis and non-crisis situations (National Council for Mental Wellbeing, 2023). Following the initial cycle of inquiry, students and adults that participated in this study have exhibited a level of increased responsiveness as there has been tragedy throughout the community and they have provided support to others that are experiencing crisis. The high school students and practitioners were instrumental to fostering safe spaces in other schools for conversations and taking initiative by bringing therapy dogs to support students in need. This level of wrap around support had not occurred before this study.
**Authentic Relationships**

Students feel more connected to adults when intentional efforts are made to identify locations and areas of support within the school (Cranton, 2006). Students in the focus group shared the call to action to raise awareness so students know who can support them when they were not “okay.” It was noted that on rare occasions, some teachers take the time to make students part of social justice. Mostly elective teachers have integrated TSEL at different points, but according to a student, transformative SEL is when the race is interwoven with social identity and there is a partnership between the teacher and the students.

One staff member shared, “We are more focused on the educational piece, but we may miss that mental health piece. It’s the visibility; kids want to be seen, heard, and know somebody cares.”

But instead of asking, why are you angry? Well, there could be a different reason. I think that piece is important because there's such a disconnect. Students come here and feel, well, *I am a kid and then you come here and it's like boom, that is over.* I think that there must be some way to bridge that gap between middle school and high school.

Instead of being relentless in the push-through curriculum, we need to be relentlessly engaged with students. Content and curriculum are important, but that relationship is going to motivate students. In practice, this means that students are not held captive to sessions of “sit and get.” They are actively part of the learning process and social-emotional learning can be woven into the content and not in isolation.
Educators often feel pressure to cover curricula within a specified timeframe and feel conflicted with accountability through assessment, but they should not lose sight to pause when needed and remember that teaching is a relational profession with elements such as dignity and humanity (Lopez, 2017).

Today’s students are facing more mental health struggles, such as anxiety and depression, than in the past (McGorry, et.al., 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the need for mental health support, with 74% of adolescents reporting that their mental health has worsened during this period (McGorry, et.al., 2022).

Well before the pandemic, substantial evidence indicated that young people were facing a rising tide of mental ill-health, including anxiety, depressive symptoms, psychological distress, and suicide (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022).

Authentic relationships and intentionality made a difference when increasing the visibility of staff and messaging throughout the school environment were present during the planning and execution of World Mental Health Day. The collaborative efforts resulted in the delivery and participation among staff and BIPOC students in a united campaign. These efforts may have attributed to an increase (3.39%) of the students, staff, and administrators surveyed who agree (52.98%) that adults within the school collaborate to support and coordinate students’ mental health needs (See Table 8).

Before the intervention (60.29%) of those surveyed were in overall agreement that students have a teacher or adult at school that they can fully trust and following the mental health campaign there was increase of (1.98%) to an overall (62.27%) that felt students have a teacher or adult at school that they can fully trust. Having students as co-
facilitators of learning create higher levels of trust (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2000). If school leaders are to embrace transformative change, attention must be paid to issues of trust.

Further, the staff involved in the study see the need to educate others. Presentations have been shared with the District Parent Teacher Advisory Committee and panel discussions have followed up during staff development with a focus on fostering authentic relationships. It is emphasized that every child’s story is different. Listeners are provided with a feel for what many of the United District children are dealing with. There are opportunities for education and feedback surrounding triggers for BIPOC students when adults are not culturally responsive, barriers that are impacting students are discussed, and how staff across the district can lessen barriers and difficulties our students experience at school. Finally, the importance of building authentic relationships with students and methods for being sensitive to their experiences was shared among the panel.

**Building Trust**

Building trustworthy relationships with staff and peers are essential in chiseling away at the mental health crisis and the gaping disparity between White and BIPOC students. Teachers who nurture positive relationships with their students develop classroom environments more conducive to learning and meet students’ developmental, emotional, and academic needs. (American Psychological Association, 2014). Our youth want to show their vulnerability, but staff must take the first step and show they can be vulnerable as well. Establishing trust takes time and does not happen overnight.
Modeling values through demeanor and actions is a way to foster trusting relationships to project hope in uncertain times (Kutsyuruba and Walker, 2014). School-based trust is shown when there is a willingness to show one’s vulnerability and the hope that others will express facets of benevolence, openness, reliability, competence, and honesty (Hoy, & Tschannen-Moran, 1999).

In this study, trust was strengthened through TSEL by having students actively involved and engaged with caring adults. This was evidenced by qualitative findings such as participation throughout the World Mental Health Day with planning, execution, and responsiveness from study participants in community events within local schools.

Following the study, the United High School Improvement Team created a presentation on the incremental levels of trust that develop across a continuum. Staff shared their personal experiences that provided context to strengthen relationships with students. The conversations didn’t come easy among staff during this meeting and there were lessons to be learned. During this presentation surrounding the topic of trust, lessons were learned, such as removing individuals’ names when giving examples of student and staff interaction, and as leaders not to make any assumptions on how staff address student needs across varying race. Effective schools depend heavily on the continual collaborative efforts (Schneider, 2003). Relational trust is the connective tissue that bonds individuals together to promote a sound educational system and healthy environment for students. Improving schools requires educators to be more deliberate about how to best organize the work of adults and students so that this connective tissue remains healthy and strong. Research indicates that there was a 50%
greater likelihood of success in schools with a more trusting culture (Bryk, 2010). Findings indicate that schools with high trust have more than three-times higher chance of improving test scores than schools with low trust. (Bryk, 2010).

United High School is showing initiative with taking on challenging conversations head-on with topics focused on trust, race, and developing higher expectations for staff and students. Educational leaders must share the bad news as well as the good news. Researchers found that people trust those who take the time and courage to confront the issues rather than ignore them or act like they do not exist. It is critical to be honest rather than superficial or hiding the truth (Covey, 2006).

**Audacious Hope**

After the study, the post-survey results revealed 96% of White students and 56% of BIPOC students agree that adults are responsive to their mental health needs. These findings indicate a significant disparity even though gains have been made from the initial survey that conveyed 94% of White students and 48% of BIPOC felt that their mental health needs were being met by responsive adults. The disparity within these results aligns with the examples that were uncovered in the focus groups, specifically among students and staff. Staff shared that is difficult for emergent bilinguals to build relational trust. Students emphasized the urgency to know explicitly who can support them when they are not okay. Staff long for a time when social justice is embedded within the school culture.

Furthermore, according to the final survey results, 95% of White students felt that the adults in their school collaborate to support and coordinate students’ mental health needs compared to 50% of BIPOC students. Initial findings indicated 93% of White students and 38%
of BIPOC students felt that adults collaborated on students’ mental health needs. These findings suggest the need to further involve students in school-wide efforts not only on topics pertaining to mental health, but in school-wide efforts that promote social justice and collaboration to build trust with adults. As indicated previously from the focus groups and survey results, BIPOC students do not feel safe disclosing what they need to share and involvement in clubs and activities is overrepresented by White students.

Staff cited during the focus group that it has been years since there have been real opportunities for students to have an active student voice. Individuals expressed their wishes that this could be brought back. Audacious Hope takes commitment for transformative work and encourages students to partner with staff on transformative change. The relentless efforts to connect our indignation over all forms of oppression with an audacious hope that we can act to change them (Valenzuela, 1999).

This study provides new hope and is the beginning of intentionality to support our students and reduce the stigma that is often associated with mental health. Duncan-Andrade’s (2009) research on Audacious Hope supports Transformative SEL and Authentic Relationships to provide action within every classroom and within the school environment. Reflecting on this further, this equates to students providing input on what they perceive to be important in fostering a supportive climate within the school. Opportunities must be present for students to lead the charge by yielding peaceful, supportive, and collaborative outcomes. When considering continuous cycles of inquiry, solid systems must be in place to foster student leadership, build up sustainability among staff, so that support for students are in place no matter who the building leader is.
The staff focus group provided remembrance of past times when staff collaborated with students to inspire them with audacious hope. “That's what it was. That audacious hope… I've seen it here in this building and it's exciting when it's led by a student's voice.” Thus, our upcoming intervention led by BIPOC students was born.

**Discussion of Intervention**

**Transformative Social-Emotional Learning in Action**

The student-led mental health awareness campaign provided BIPOC students opportunities to co-facilitate with adults with learning opportunities that foster Transformative Social Emotional Learning. The Video Editing Class comprised all BIPOC students who wrote lyrics and created a video that depicted “many moods” and offered solutions. Their outstanding work was not only shared within United High School, but also at the middle school, in a presentation to the Board of Education, and via social media in the community. BIPOC Student Ambassadors, Royal Diamond Dance Team, Latine Heritage Club, and Minority Enrichment Program also thought about staff and partnered with the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) to have community stakeholders provide teachers with yoga and relaxation sessions during their lunch periods on World Mental Health Awareness Day on October 10, 2022.

The focus on students was unbelievable. Students prepared baggies to provide to every UHS student with a mental health awareness bracelet, green lifesaver, green mental health ribbon, and business cards with names and locations for students to receive mental health support. Clear luggage tags were provided for students to attach to their backpacks. The students created flyers and all information was available in English, French, and Spanish. The response from students was amazing and they appeared happy to receive their mental health bags when
beginning their day. Over and over students and staff stated, “You matter” as each student was greeted. It was evident from the reactions displayed by students that they are not told that often enough.

The support staff came through with a live presentation on mental health awareness signs to all students first hour. It was led by a diverse team of clinical professionals and social workers. This was also shared in English and Spanish. Students were still talking about the day as they walked to the Commons at lunch. The World Mental Health Student Team had inspirational messages written on lockers, posters, and a selfie station with multi-cultural props to be used. Many discussions could be heard at tables and the selfie station as students freely shared their beliefs and some worries. Community agencies were present at lunch and had informational handouts for students.

The Regional Office of Education heard about the event as part of an SEL Hub Grant and completely funded the planning and event materials. By the end of the study, 88 teachers responded to the post-survey which remained consistent with the initial survey. This is a success as many positions remain unfilled due to the teacher shortage and substitutes are in place. All the teachers surveyed were in 100% agreement that they accept students from varying cultures. By the end of the study, the percentage of teachers that agree that the school has available resources for when students feel troubled increased by 11% to 86.04%. Students results from the post-survey reflected 50.4% with only a slight increase of .03%.

**Overall Cycle of Inquiry**

Initially, the Problem of Practice was identified within this study through collaborative efforts as the team developed assumptions that the mental health needs of BIPOC students were
not being supported. Adult presence was lacking in the hallways and there appeared to be a hesitation for adults to interact with BIPOC students. There was a clear disparity in the attendance of BIPOC students compared to White peers. In addition, significant events throughout the school with lack of follow through further indicated gaps in the method situations were followed through with BIPOC students compared to White peers.

Areas of concern rose to the surface as the team further explored the problem of practice by reviewing evidence from observations in the hallways, lack of engagement during instructional time, and examining student and teacher interaction. The Theory of Action was further developed as the team discussed possible ways to further engage BIPOC students in the learning environment by fostering authentic relationships, inspiring audacious hope, and helping students see they can be part of something meaningful through collaborative work through TSEL. During this phase of the Cycle of Inquiry, the team researched possible solutions and patterns that were evident tied to the initial Problem of Practice.

In this study, it became abundantly clear that this work could not be done in isolation, and it was inspiring to see the partnership that grew between staff, students, parents, and the Regional Office of Education. The team came to a consensus that using interventions such as Transformative SEL to be responsive and collaborative efforts among staff and students would yield readiness as our youth move into adulthood. The World Mental Health Campaign provided the potential to raise mental health awareness for students and staff through a partnered effort consisting of recognizing mental health warning signs and identifying safe spaces for all students with cultural and linguistic resources. To achieve this mission, Authentic Relationships,
Audacious Hope, and Transformative SEL served as a nested model to address the Problem of Practice to support the mental health needs of BIPOC students.

Pre- and post-intervention survey data helped determine the needs and the effectiveness of the World Mental Health Campaign led by students. It was satisfying to see that 85% of teachers responded and that remained consistent on both surveys. It was also inspiring to see the involvement of many interested stakeholders in this project that included adults and students from start to finish.

There was growth made by BIPOC and White students according to their perception of mental health needs being supported and the collaboration among adults. Additionally, 57% of BIPOC students compared to 95% of the White students surveyed believe they have a teacher or adult at school that they can fully trust compared to 46% of BIPOC students and 91% of White students initially.

Mental health support staff responded positively by creating a live presentation for all students on mental health warning signs and how to seek help when in distress; this was conducted in English and Spanish by social workers and clinical professionals. All United High School teachers adjusted the schedule for the day to create time for the mental health presentation at the start of the day and hold follow-up discussions with students. Through follow-up emails shared by staff and informal discussions, students and staff have shared the need for continued projects that foster opportunities for students to take on school-wide needs and activate students’ voices. It was also shared that the mental health presentation was successful and scheduled time with the whole school should continue each month.
All the students and staff that participated in the focus groups were part of the mental health campaign and they brought along others with them to include BIPOC students’ groups and additional outreach to adults such as the Parent Teacher Student Association, and the Regional Office of Education for monetary support. Most importantly, all involved learned the impact of what can be accomplished collectively. Students expressed their willingness to help throughout the intervention whether it was stuffing the 1200 bags, placing motivational messages on lockers, or greeting their peers with positive words at the start of the day.

Additionally, both staff and the PTSA members learned the importance of involving students in meaningful work that can make such a positive impact when students can be provided with leadership opportunities. It is abundantly clear to all the stakeholders involved that meeting the mental health needs of BIPOC students and collaborative efforts among adults and students need an ongoing plan of action. The initial cycle of inquiry served as a starting point for chiseling away at the problem of practice, but repeated cycles will be necessary as this is ongoing work.

**Limitations of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors necessary to support the mental health needs of BIPOC students at United High School. The study was limited by the small number of students who participated in the focus group as there were four. There were competing factors with scheduling after school such as transportation or extra-curricular activities to establish a common time that would work for all students. In addition, the district is conducting an equity audit, and students were also being recruited for focus groups after school and asked to complete surveys. Although the participation was low with students in the focus
group for this study, the number of students completing surveys was substantially higher than the district-led equity audit survey participation.

A second limitation of the study was the time of day in which the student survey was administered. Students completed the survey first hour, and students may have arrived late to school creating lower participation, especially in the post-survey. Considering this limitation, there still was a large sampling with 765 students that completed the pre-survey and 414 on the post-survey. In addition, there was an increase in substitute teachers when the post-survey was administered resulting in students that may not have been given access to the link to participate.

**Conclusion**

The knowledge and experience gained from this study led to new questions to investigate, ways to improve the intervention in the future, and begin the next research cycle (Efron & Ravid, 2013). The findings from this study may be beneficial for other schools within United District. Also, due to the mobility of students across the street that attend another district, the community outreach will impact more students and adults by building cohesive partnerships. In the next section, I discuss how the PDSA can be further implemented as United High continues to address this problem of practice and the questions posed in this study to establish continual improvement. The initial cycle of inquiry serves as an anchor for future experiences to engage more individuals in the work through a relentless focus to make a positive impact on the lives of BIPOC students (Perry et al, 2020).
CHAPTER VI- IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

This study was designed to address the urgent need to respond to the mental health of our BIPOC students at United High School. It is clear through observations, focus groups, and feedback from student surveys, that a significant gap remains between White, and BIPOC students’ mental health needs being fully supported. This work must continue to address old systems that are not supporting students. Although this study was a short cycle, results from the surveys indicate an increase in the percentage of students that feel adults are being responsive and collaborative to address mental health needs. As the team further reflected on the disparity between BIPOC and White students, the need arose to model strategies for teachers within the classroom and change the current parameters for instructional coaches. Further details are disclosed within future research.

The work conducted in this cycle promoted TSEL and transformative leadership among adults. TSEL will need to continue to be embedded into all aspects of student learning, school practices, and policies. The leadership team agreed that all school improvement plans must include the problem of practice and continued evidence must be noted by including individuals responsible, measures that can provide multiple indicators of progress, and timelines for implementation and reporting. For continued improvement, conversations and education must continue to increase the knowledge surrounding mental health warning signs and appropriate methods for swift response. Intentional interactions are needed to establish relationships among school leaders, teachers, families, and communities. TSEL can shift the environment at United High School through Audacious Hope and Authentic Relationships. Leadership must continue to be fostered within students through intentional and authentic human interactions. Through this
approach, providing student voice to develop a culturally responsive environment that recognizes the needs of our BIPOC students can lead to significant outcomes regardless of student circumstances or background. Continuing to engage in these practices will further inspire staff and students to engage in a collaborative partnership.

Although there were some limitations in the study with student responses from pre to post survey participation, due to the simultaneous requests being made to students and staff with the district equity audit, the combined input can lead to greater outcomes for students. It will be critical to make sure the data and feedback received through the combined efforts are carefully considered to improve access to services, courses, extra-curricular activities, and systemic policies.

United High School has a diverse staff of social workers, clinical professionals, counselors, and family liaisons that are eager to continue this work. It is vital for our professionals to continue to mirror the population of our students. It will also be critical to continue to recruit BIPOC students that are involved and BIPOC students that are needing to feel a sense of belonging that may have not yet found their niche. The first cycle of inquiry was isolated to primarily students that were involved in a few school activities. Although the Royal Diamonds Dance Team, which is comprised of all Black females, Student Ambassadors, Minority Enrichment Club, Video Editing Class, and Latine Club, all led the charge on the initial cycle of inquiry, continued outreach and expansion must occur. It is essential for intentional efforts to be made in the next cycle of inquiry that gains participation from more BIPOC students that belong to an activity or those that need to find their niche. This will further be addressed in future recommendations as students contribute their knowledge into the school environment.
Finally, the student-created video and mental health presentation were all recorded for other staff to later benefit from this work at United High School for our other schools. The school district can benefit from the approach of using the Improvement Science approach to test solutions to local problems like the one persistent at United High School. This model of Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) can be replicated to foster solutions to district problems within a short time frame. The 90-Day Cycle Process Map and 90-Day Cycle for Roles and Responsibilities outlines the need for a collaborative process (Park & Takahashi, 2013).

Most importantly, United High School must continue to train staff and students to be aware of the mental health warning signs and raise awareness to determine when students are not in a safe place mentally. Students in the focus groups noted that it is not safe to share what they need to share and a need to identify next steps who can support them when they are not “okay.” Students must be visible and heard. Staff instructing all courses at all instructional levels needs to be reminded that they have permission to pause to connect with students and let them co-facilitate the learning process. It is critical to focus on audacious hope, fostering authentic relationships, and engaging in transformative work to reach more BIPOC students. The leadership team in this study was adamant that next steps should involve further outreach to feeder schools to address the disparities in mental health supports and raising awareness of inequities much earlier for our youth.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The fact that the post-survey results revealed an increase of (8%) for BIPOC students that are in overall agreement that adults are responsive to their mental health needs to 56% is
substantial growth during the short window of this study. However, a significant disparity is present with 96% being reported for White students.

Furthermore, according to the final survey results, 95% of White students felt that the adults in their school collaborate to support and coordinate students’ mental health needs compared to 50% of BIPOC students. Initial findings indicated 93% of White students and 38% of BIPOC students felt that adults collaborated on students’ mental health needs. These results provide evidence that a positive impact can be made in a short time frame and additional BIPOC students must be reached through inclusivity in transformative SEL through intentional school-wide efforts. The 40% gap in disparity that remains demands immediate change and radical changes to structures. The bilingual instructional coach could further support teacher growth by pushing into all dual language and ESL classrooms. However, the current coaching model in place is conducted by teacher request only. The job description will need revamping as it currently states “Encourage teachers to participate in peer observations that lead to professional conversations about instructional practices and student learning.” The team felt isolated professional development that occurs one time or in a large space would not be beneficial. In addition, it is clear from the disparity on mental health needs being addressed between White and BIPOC students, that a lack of trust is present among emergent bilingual students with staff as reported in focus groups and represented in the survey results.

The application of funds of knowledge can decrease the gap between school and home by embedding the acquired knowledge and skills that students experience with their families and communities to support academic learning (Gonzalez et al., 2005). This has been adopted by educators as an additive approach to further refine curriculum and pedagogical development for
schools and districts that serve a significant population of emergent bilingual students. The focus is on knowledge assets rather than looking at deficits of students. Instead, authentic experiences can be created that allow emergent bilingual students to bring their knowledge assets for learning within the classroom (Bennett, 2020). Teachers may further incorporate funds of knowledge by delving into general categories that tap into individual academic and personal background knowledge, such as: family values and traditions, family outings, favorite TV shows, etc. (Bennett, 2020). In summary, educators may apply strategies that can be done in class that involve having the students develop meaningful essays about their backgrounds, design presentations conveying their interests, or create projects that represent their family heritage. This design can integrate students' funds of knowledge across all content areas (Calaff, 2022). Research also suggests that conditions for learning and student engagement can be improved by acknowledging and building on students funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005).

Additional research suggests that funds of knowledge can be further supported using culturally responsive teaching pedagogies. First, teachers need to have a strong understanding how to incorporate funds of knowledge into the classroom. Again, this can be further addressed through coaching cycles. In addition, home visits and taking time to get to know students can further engage learners and families in school. Effective teachers who are culturally responsive, build bridges between the cultures of home and the cultures of school (Toker, 2019). In turn, classroom spaces and the instructional environment can shift into spaces that represent the cultures and knowledge that once were subtracted for far too many students. Teachers that are culturally responsive to their students, allow consistent opportunities for students to demonstrate their funds of knowledge and their voices become integral resources to the classroom curriculum.
Our school environment and our classrooms can be transformed from traditional, middle-class, colonialized representations to inclusive spaces that value the beauty of all cultures. Finally, another significant finding is that funds of knowledge can lead to improved self-confidence and promotes a safe, positive environment, when students feel they are able to be their true authentic selves and share personal stories (Volman & ’t Gilde, 2021). This method would be beneficial at UHS so students feel that they are seen by their teachers and peers.

To promote awareness for mental health warning signs through a culturally responsive model, the district has begun to train the SEAs, social workers, and clinical professionals on culturally responsive mental health first aid training. There is similar training available for student leaders and this would be powerful for BIPOC students to be recruited soon for future engagement in the next cycle. The PTSA has expressed interest in partnering on World Kindness Day and adding more Student Ambassadors that are BIPOC to other school-wide planning events.

Further expansion of this study could also focus on the middle school and upper elementary as it is estimated that mental health warning signs begin to surface at 3.6% of 10–14-year-olds and 4.6% of 15–19-year-olds experience an anxiety disorder. Depression is estimated to occur among 1.1% of adolescents aged 10-14 years, and 2.8% of 15-19-year-olds. Depression and anxiety share some of the same symptoms, including rapid and unexpected changes in mood. Globally, it is estimated that 1 in 7 (14%) 10–19-year-olds experience mental health conditions, yet these remain largely unrecognized and untreated (World Health Organization, 2021).

Families could benefit as well through additional offerings in training at the district-wide Parent Academy through virtual and in-person support that provides tips, warning signs, and
community resources to ensure families never feel alone when their child or someone in their family is struggling with their mental health.

Next Steps

Once the initial findings of the cycle of inquiry was completed, results were shared with the leadership team. During this meeting, we brainstormed a plan of action that included strategies to address the problem of practice and the individuals responsible for carrying out and monitoring the success or failure of the strategy (Mertler, 2017). The results in this study were directly relevant to my local setting and produced knowledge that was useful to my educational practice. Continuing to engage in these practices will further inspire and empower staff to take an active leadership role in fostering collaborative partnership in and outside of United High School.

Continuing the PDSA Cycle

Plan

After examining the initial findings, the leadership team knew that further training was needed among the United High staff. Mental Health First Aid training was scheduled during Spring of 2023 for support staff and students with the plan that additional training would follow for more staff in future months. The team predicted that this would create more follow through for students and mental health warning signs would become more evident as students displayed warning signs. Themes like “Are you okay?” were suggested to further reduce the stigma and enlist individuals to respond when signs are present that are not typical behavior for a student.

The original stakeholders wanted to remain involved in this PDSA. However, additional support staff were interested in participating following the traumatic event that occurred with a
middle school BIPOC student. The team decided to begin with a panel that would respond to questions that were generated by students and staff as a result from the findings of in the initial cycle. Many of the questions were focused on barriers between home and school and how to increase trust between students and families. Representatives from the team have met with central office staff with proposed changes to the instructional coaching model and this it was agreed among all parties that this is necessary to address gaps in students’ academic and mental health needs. Bilingual support staff further addressed the fear that exists with families that are undocumented immigrants. As home visits are planned, this needs to be thoughtful and occur with individuals that the families trust such as the bilingual family liaison that is visible and well known throughout the Latine community.

Do

The discussion panel occurred on Friday, January 14, 2023. The family liaison, social workers, and clinical professionals were the primary individuals to lead the organization of the panel. Following the discussion, it was clear that there were many unanswered questions and staff across the district expressed the importance of a needs assessment to determine areas of focus that may vary from school to school. Representatives from the Regional Office of Education (ROE) requested to meet and further offered to fund any continuous work for mental health through the SEL Hub grant. Monthly meetings continue as data and resources are updated on the action plan.

Study

Members of the leadership team have scheduled to meet with ROE to study and analyze the data to develop a plan of action. Each school did submit ideas that would better support
mental health within each school. Every school unanimously stated that there was a need to be more intentional in communication with students and families from early childhood to adult education. The United High School team shared the outcomes that occurred from World Mental Health Day and all schools have asked for a week devoted to raising mental health awareness in March. It was shared that the planning efforts would unite school stakeholders during the winter months and could be showcased the week of March 6-10, 2023, district-wide with all United schools (Early Childhood School-Adult Education). At the request of the leadership committee and responses from school teams, each school will showcase, promote, celebrate, and reinforce the value of Mental Health Awareness Week. Each school varies in some of the preparations, but common themes surfaced to address supports available during daily announcements, the addition of posters and bulletin board displays within each school, and the need for better communication among support staff. There has already been some shifting in staffing to provide BIPOC students with staff that mirror students because of the findings and follow-up discussions from this study. The ROE is also willing to provide a mental health coach that will be available following further identification of needs.

Act

The action plan that is being developed through the SEL Hub will focus on goals to further address inequities with BIPOC students and families. Key individuals and timelines will be included. Since this continued work is now part of a regional HUB grant, resources and partnerships will be fostered across a region to provide greater access to mental health supports for students. The next cycle of inquiry will involve more BIPOC students that may not be tied to a particular club. Students will also span across all grade levels.
Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the need for mental health support, with adolescents reporting that their mental health has worsened during this period. Well before the pandemic, substantial evidence indicated that young people were facing a rising tide of mental ill-health, including anxiety, depressive symptoms, psychological distress, and suicide (McGorry, et.al., 2022). The transitionary period to adulthood is a developmentally sensitive time and mental illness is diagnosed heavily during this phase of life. This study, however, began in high school, but mental health warning signs begin to surface much earlier. Audacious Hope was inspired in this study to break the stigma of mental health and develop plans of action as a community. The improvement plan began following the focus groups with staff and students, combined with results from survey data. This led to greater intentionality in recruiting students in the planning process.

Continuing the effort to raise awareness for staff by understanding and responding to the warning signs for mental health is necessary through culturally and linguistically responsive mental health training. Embedding TSEL across all courses is key in all subject areas, not just electives. Both the middle school and high school have time designated for daily Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Instructional Coaches, administration and teacher teams will discuss the methods in which they are supporting the whole child during this time. This involves discussion, walkthroughs, and professional development necessitating importance for all classes, AP, core content, electives, etc. to all recognize the needs to support the whole child and not push through the curriculum when clear warning signs are present, and students need emotional support. Continued guidance will need to be incorporated and supported by building leadership.
Additionally, surveys, flyers, panels of discussion, action plans, and new regional partnerships have emerged following this investigation. Staff at United High School is supportive and continues to provide an intentional focus each month on specific tips to share out to encourage self-care and support for students’ mental health needs to ensure a common message is shared in English and Spanish.

The 90-day Cycle of Inquiry focusing on Plan-Do-Study-Act can help staff keep a pulse on the needs of the school and collaborate to develop solutions within a short time (Perry, et. al., 2015). Using this process, capacity has already gained more individuals from one cycle to the next. The commitment by all the individuals led to efforts for supporting the mental health needs of not only BIPOC students at United High School but throughout the community. The steps taken proved that a positive impact can be made when adults and students co-facilitate and are responsive to the needs of our BIPOC students.

As a leader of a district, I have learned throughout this project, that decisions cannot be forced from the top down. The words from others continue to resonate with me about how important it was to make sure our BIPOC students are not only seen but heard. This study proves that there is more than an opportunity gap; there is an awareness gap. Staff must be cognizant and intentional with observing how students are feeling in all spaces throughout the school environment.

The quality time that I spent on this investigation made me realize how much I missed real conversations and problem-solving with students. I learned that prioritizing time to get students’ perspectives and listening to their needs must happen more frequently. Throughout this
cycle, I have learned the importance of providing staff with time in their schedules and space to further lead discussions with one another collaboratively.

Finally, I reflected on my leadership style which I feel is typically democratic where I listen to the needs of others before making decisions. I shifted to transformational, by being responsive and empowering other individuals throughout this study. I learned to listen to the needs of the group to inspire the focus of our work. I feel confident that this work will continue now that many seeds have been planted with how this could grow in the future and nurture many areas of needed support.
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APPENDIX A: STUDENT (18 OR OLDER) RECRUITMENT LETTER FOR SURVEY

August 2022

Re: Research Study—Building Authentic Relationships: Creating a Supportive Environment for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Dear United High School Student,

This email is to invite you to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to investigate the input that students, teachers, and administrators have at the high school in contributing to a culturally responsive environment and the influence this makes on students’ mental health.

I am contacting all United High School students, staff, and administrators to participate in this research study. Permission has been obtained from the Superintendent and United High School Administration. You are receiving this email if you are 18 or older so that you may determine if you would like to participate.

Individuals will be invited to participate in a brief 20-minute survey to gather feedback for promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school. Your participation in this study is voluntary and will take place at an agreed-upon time with your principal. You will not be penalized if you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

You have been asked to participate because the student's voice is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school.

Attached to this email is the permission document that contains further information regarding the study. If you are 18 or older and willing to participate in this study, no further action is needed. This survey will be conducted online. When beginning the survey, participants will have the option to select "next" and take the survey if they consent, or just close the survey if they would not like to participate.

If you have any questions about the research from the study, contact me at kmnorto1@ilstu.edu or Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu

Thank you again for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,
Kimberly Norton
APPENDIX B: NOTIFICATION TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS OF STUDENT
RECRUITMENT LETTER FOR SURVEY

August 2022

Re: Research Study—Building Authentic Relationships: Creating a Supportive Environment for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Dear United High School Parent/Guardian,

This email is to invite your child to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to investigate the input that students, teachers, and administrators have at the high school in contributing to a culturally responsive environment and the influence this makes on students’ mental health.

I am contacting all United High School students, staff, and administrators to participate in this research study. Permission has been obtained from the Superintendent and United High School Administration. You are receiving this email if your child is a minor to notify you of this study. If you wish for your child to participate, no further action is needed.

If you do not wish for your child to participate, please have your child return the attached form to Mrs. Kim in the main office or you may scan and return it to me via email.

Individuals will be invited to participate in a brief 20-minute survey to gather feedback for promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school. Your child’s participation in this study is voluntary and will take place at an agreed-upon time with their principal. They will not be penalized if they choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

Your child has been asked to participate because the student’s voice is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school.

If you have any questions about the research from the study, contact me at kmnortol@ilstu.edu or Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu

Thank you again for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Norton
APPENDIX C: SPANISH PARENTS/GUARDIANS OF STUDENT RECRUITMENT

LETTER FOR SURVEY

1 de agosto, 2022

Estudio de investigación, creación de relaciones auténticas: creando un entorno de apoyo para negros, indígenas y personas de color

Estimado Padre/Tutor de United High School:

Este correo electrónico es para invitar a su hijo(a) a participar en un estudio de investigación realizado por la Sra. Kimberly Norton y el Dr. Guy Banicki, Departamento de Administración y Fundaciones Educativas de la Universidad Estatal de Illinois. El propósito de este estudio es investigar el aporte que los estudiantes, maestros y administradores tienen en la escuela preparatoria para contribuir a un ambiente culturalmente receptivo y la influencia que esto tiene en la salud mental de los estudiantes.

Estoy contactando a todos los estudiantes, personal y administradores de United High School para participar en este estudio de investigación. Se ha obtenido el permiso del Superintendente y de la Administración de la Escuela Secundaria de United. Usted está recibiendo este correo electrónico si su hijo(a) es menor de edad y para notificarle sobre este estudio. Si desea que su hijo(a) participe, no se necesita ninguna otra acción.

Si no desea que su hijo(a) participe, pídale que devuelva el formulario adjunto a la Sra. Kim en la oficina principal de la escuela o puede escanearlo y devolverlo por correo electrónico.

Se invitará a las personas a participar en una breve encuesta para recopilar comentario para promover un clima seguro y de apoyo dentro de la escuela. La participación de su hijo(a) en este estudio es voluntaria y se llevará a cabo en un momento acordado con su director. No serán penalizados si eligen saltarse partes del estudio, no participar o retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento.

Se le ha pedido a su hijo(a) que participe porque la voz de los estudiantes es esencial para promover un clima seguro y de apoyo dentro de la escuela.

Adjunto a este correo electrónico se encuentra el documento de autorización que contiene más información sobre el estudio. **Si está dispuesto a que su hijo(a) participe en este estudio, no se necesita ninguna otra acción.** Esta encuesta se realizará en línea. Al comenzar la encuesta, los participantes tendrán la opción de seleccionar "siguiente“ y realizar la encuesta si dan su consentimiento, o simplemente cerrar la encuesta si no desean participar.

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre la investigación del estudio, comuníquese connmigo a través de este correo electrónico  kmnorto1@ilstu.edu o con Dr. Guy Banicki en gbanick@ilstu.edu

Gracias nuevamente por considerar esta oportunidad de investigación.

Atentamente,

Kimberly Norton
August 2022

Re: Research Study-Building Authentic Relationships: Creating a Supportive Environment for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Dear United High School Educator,

This email is to invite you to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to investigate the input that students, staff, and administrators have at the high school in contributing to a culturally responsive environment and the influence this makes on students’ mental health.

I am contacting all United High School students, educators, and administrators to participate in this research study. Permission has been obtained from the Superintendent and United High School Administration. You are receiving this email to inform you about the research and process.

Individuals will be invited to participate in a brief 20-minute survey to gather feedback for promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school. Your participation in this study is voluntary and will take place at an agreed-upon time with your principal. You will not be penalized if you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

You have been asked to participate because obtaining a voice from students, staff, and administrators is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school.

Attached to this email is the permission document that contains further information regarding the study. If you are willing to participate in this study, no further action is needed. This survey will be conducted online. When beginning the survey, participants will have the option to select "next" and take the survey if they consent, or just close the survey if they would not like to participate.

If you have any questions about the research from the study, contact me at kmnorto1@ilstu.edu or Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu

Thank you again for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Norton
APPENDIX E: ADMINISTRATOR RECRUITMENT LETTER FOR SURVEY

August 2022

Re: Research Study-Building Authentic Relationships: Creating a Supportive Environment for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Dear United Administrator,

This email is to invite you to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to investigate the input that students, teachers, and administrators have at the high school in contributing to a culturally responsive environment and the influence this makes on students’ mental health.

I am contacting all United High School students, staff, and administrators to participate in this research study. Permission has been obtained from the Superintendent and United High School Administration.

Individuals will be invited to participate in a brief 20-minute survey to gather feedback for promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may complete this survey within three weeks. You will not be penalized if you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

You have been asked to participate because student, staff, and administrator voice is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school.

Attached to this email is the permission document that contains further information regarding the study. If you are willing to participate in this study, no further action is needed. This survey will be conducted online. When beginning the survey, participants will have the option to select "next" and take the survey if they consent, or just close the survey if they would not like to participate.

If you have any questions about the research from the study, contact me at kmnortol@ilstu.edu or Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu

Thank you again for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Norton
APPENDIX F: PARENT/GUARDIAN RECRUITMENT FOR STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS

August 2022

Re: Research Study-Building Authentic Relationships: Creating a Supportive Environment for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Dear United High School Parent/Guardian,

This email is to invite your child to participate in a **Focus Group**. A research study is being conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to investigate the input that students, teachers, and administrators have at the high school in contributing to a culturally responsive environment and the influence this makes on students’ mental health.

I am contacting all United High School students, staff, and administrators to participate in this research study. Permission has been obtained from the Superintendent and United High School Administration. You are receiving this email if your child is a minor to notify you of this study. If you wish for your child to participate, no further action is needed.

If you agree that your child may participate in this study, they will participate in a small focus group, which will involve no more than 10 individuals that will take place at the high school and last approximately 30-45 minutes. Teacher and student focus groups are separate.
You have been asked to participate because the student's voice is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school.

Attached to this email is the permission document that contains further information regarding the study.

Please sign and have your child return the attached document to Mrs. Kim in the main office. Forms will be collected in an envelope, or you may also scan/take a picture and email it back to kmnorto1@ilstu.edu if you prefer. If your child is selected, I will contact all student participants via email to provide options on locations and meeting times.

If you have any questions about the research from the study, contact me at kmnorto1@ilstu.edu or Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu

Thank you again for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Norton
Re: Research Study-Building Authentic Relationships: Creating a Supportive Environment for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Dear United High School Student,

This email is to invite you to participate in a **Focus Group**. A research study is being conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to investigate the input that students, teachers, and administrators have at the high school in contributing to a culturally responsive environment and the influence this makes on students’ mental health.

I am contacting all United High School students, staff, and administrators to participate in this research study. Permission has been obtained from the Superintendent and United High School Administration. You are receiving this email if you are 18 or older so that may be provided with all information so you may determine if you would like to participate.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will participate in a small focus group, which will involve no more than 10 individuals that will take place at the high school and last approximately 30-45 minutes. Teacher and student focus groups are separate.

You have been asked to participate because the student's voice is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school.

Attached to this email is the permission document that contains further information regarding the study.

If you are 18 or older and willing to participate in this study, please sign and return the attached document to Mrs. Kim in the main office. Forms will be collected in an envelope, or you may also scan/take a picture and email it back to kmnorto1@ilstu.edu if you prefer. If you are selected, I will contact all student participants via email to provide options on locations and meeting times.

If you have any questions about the research from the study, contact me at kmnorto1@ilstu.edu or Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu

Thank you again for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Norton
APPENDIX H: EDUCATOR RECRUITMENT FOR FOCUS GROUPS

August 2022

Re: Research Study-Building Authentic Relationships: Creating a Supportive Environment for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Dear United High School Educator,

This email is to invite you to participate in a Focus Group. A research study is being conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to investigate the input that students, staff, and administrators have at the high school in contributing to a culturally responsive environment and the influence this makes on students’ mental health.

I am contacting all United High School students, educators, and administrators to participate in this research study. Permission has been obtained from the Superintendent and United High School Administration. You are receiving this email if you are a United High School educator so that you may be provided with all information so you may determine if you would like to participate.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will participate in a small focus group, which will involve no more than 10 individuals that will take place at the high school and last approximately 30-45 minutes. Teacher and student focus groups are separate.

You have been asked to participate because the student's voice is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school.

Attached to this email is the permission document that contains further information regarding the study.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign and return the attached document to Mrs. Kim in the main office. Forms will be collected in an envelope, or you may also scan/take a picture and email it back to kmnorto1@ilstu.edu if you prefer. If you are selected, I will contact all student participants via email to provide options on locations and meeting times.

If you have any questions about the research from the study, contact me at kmnorto1@ilstu.edu or Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu

Thank you again for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Norton
APPENDIX I: ADMINISTRATOR RECRUITMENT FOR FOCUS GROUPS

August 2022

Re: Research Study-Building Authentic Relationships: Creating a Supportive Environment for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Dear United Administrator,

This email is to invite you to participate in a **Focus Group**. A research study is being conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations at Illinois State University. The purpose of this study is to investigate the input that students, staff, and administrators have at the high school in contributing to a culturally responsive environment and the influence this makes on students’ mental health.

I am contacting all United High School students, educators, and administrators to participate in this research study. Permission has been obtained from the Superintendent and United High School Administration. You are receiving this email if you are a United School District 116 administrator so that you may be provided with all information so you may determine if you would like to participate.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will participate in a small focus group, which will involve no more than 10 individuals that will take place at the high school and last approximately 30-45 minutes. Teacher and student focus groups are separate. You have been asked to participate because the student’s voice is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school.

Attached to this email is the permission document that contains further information regarding the study.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign and return the attached document to Mrs. Kim in the main office. Forms will be collected in an envelope, or you may also scan/take a picture and email it back to kmnorto1@ilstu.edu if you prefer. If you are selected, I will contact all student participants via email to provide options on locations and meeting times.

If you have any questions about the research from the study, contact me at kmnorto1@ilstu.edu or Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu

Thank you again for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,
APPENDIX J: PARENT/GUARDIAN PERMISSION FOR STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS

You are being asked to allow your child to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations. The purpose of this study is to investigate the input that students, teachers, and administrators have at the high school in contributing to a culturally responsive environment and the influence this makes on students’ mental health.

Why is your child being asked to participate?
Your child has been asked to participate because the student's voice is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school. The research will not take place during class time. Gathering feedback is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school. Student, teacher, and administrator input is critical to provide each perspective to optimize the spaces within the school into a welcoming and nurturing environment.

What would your child do?
If you choose to allow your child to participate in this study, your child will participate in a small focus group, which will involve no more than 10 students that will take place at the high school and last approximately 30-45 minutes. The focus group will be audio-recorded, with your permission. There will be an audio recording of the interviews that will later be transcribed to note the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. Names and any identifying information of individuals and schools will be changed.

Are any risks expected?
We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. To reduce these risks, students may choose the location in the building that they feel most comfortable with, for example, the library or the conference room. Every attempt will be made to not pose any risks in this investigation. Social risks such as reputation, and emotional reactions are possible risks that could result if a breach of confidentiality may occur.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Individuals may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty of any kind. A breach of confidentiality from recording could lead to potential risks to employability or reputation.

Due to the nature of focus groups, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, but group members will be asked not to share individual responses outside of the focus groups. Information will be stored from interview recordings and focus groups and stored securely within OneDrive for transcription.

Will your child’s information be protected?
We will use all reasonable efforts to keep any provided personal information confidential. Your child’s responses remain confidential; nothing that will identify your child will be linked to their
responses. The findings from this study may be presented in newsletters or overall school improvement updates to the Board of Education. Names and any identifying information of individuals will be changed in the dissertation and will not be used in presentations. The research will be disseminated without any identifiable information for the individuals involved in the study.

However, when required by law or university policy, identifying information (including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by authorized individuals.

**Could your child’s responses be used for another research?**
De-identified data may be used for future studies not covered under this protocol.

**Who will benefit from this study?**
Benefits related to this research include the information shared that may be helpful to the United School District #116 to promote a culturally responsive environment and meet the mental health needs of Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). Another benefit of the study is that student voice can bring about systematic changes.

**Whom do you contact if you have any questions?**
If you have any questions about the research or wish to withdraw from the study, contact Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or IRB@ilstu.edu.

**Parent/Guardian Permissions**
Sign below if you are 18 or older and permit your child to participate in the focus group.

I have read the above information. I have been allowed to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree for my child to participate in this research.
Student Name ________________________________

Parent/Guardian Signature ____________________ Date ____________________

Please have your child turn in the form to Mrs. Kim in the main office. Completed forms may also be emailed to kmnorto1@ilstu.edu if participants prefer. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.
Student Interest in Student Focus Groups

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations. The purpose of this study is to gather feedback from students, teachers, and administrators on how staff and students can work together to positively impact students’ mental health.

**Why are you being asked to participate?**
You are being asked to participate because student voice can lead to positive changes in developing a safe and supportive climate within the school. The research will not take place during class time. Gathering feedback is important to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school. Student, teacher, and administrator feedback are critical to providing welcoming spaces within the school and fostering a nurturing environment.

**What would you do?**
If you choose to participate in this study, you will participate in a small focus group. A focus group involves no more than 10 students. Questions will be asked about the school culture and mental health supports that are available to students. The meeting will take place at the high school and last approximately 30-45 minutes. The focus group will be audio-recorded, with your permission. There will be an audio recording of the interviews that will later be used to note the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. Names and any identifying information of individuals and schools will be changed.

**Are any risks expected?**
We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. To reduce these risks, students may choose the location in the building that they feel most comfortable with, for example, the library or the conference room. Every attempt will be made to not pose any risks in this investigation. Social risks such as how you may feel if the information was shared outside of the groups or your emotional reaction to questions are possible.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Individuals may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty of any kind. Information shared from focus groups during the recording could lead to potential risks to your reputation, and how your friends treat you.

During focus groups, participants will be reminded not to share anything outside of the meeting space. Confidentiality, a promise to not share anything, cannot be guaranteed. Information will
be stored from interview recordings and focus group recordings will be stored securely within OneDrive for the information to be noted in written form

**Will your information be protected?**
We will make every effort to keep personal information confidential; nothing that will identify you will be linked to their responses. The findings from this study may be presented in newsletters or overall school improvement updates to School Board. Names and any identifying information of individuals will be changed in the dissertation and will not be used in presentations. Research that will be shared with others will have any identifiable information removed for individuals involved in the study.

However, when required by law or university policy, identifying information (including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by authorized individuals.

**Could your responses be used for another research?**
Data that has been removed from anything that would identify you may be used for future studies not covered under this protocol.

**Who will benefit from this study?**
Benefits related to this research include the information shared that may be helpful to the United School District #116 to promote a safe and welcoming environment that meets the mental health needs of Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). Another benefit of the study is that student voice can bring about dramatic changes.

**Whom do you contact if you have any questions?**
If you have any questions about the research at any time before, during, after, or wish to withdraw from the study, contact Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or IRB@ilstu.edu.

**Student Interest**
I am interested in participating in the focus group.
I have read the above information. I have been allowed to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research.

Student Signature ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Forms will be collected in an envelope to Mrs. Kim in the main office. Completed forms may also be emailed to kmnortol@ilstu.edu if participants prefer. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.
APPENDIX L: TEACHER CONFIDENTIAL CONSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUPS

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations. The purpose of this study is to investigate the input that students, teachers, and administrators have at the high school in contributing to a culturally responsive environment and the influence this makes on students’ mental health.

**Why are you being asked?**
Gathering feedback is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school. Student, teacher, and administrator input is critical to provide each perspective to optimize the spaces within the school into a welcoming and nurturing environment.

**What would you do?**
If you choose to participate in this study, you will participate in a small focus group, which will involve no more than 10 individuals that will take place at the high school and last approximately 30-45 minutes. Teacher and student focus groups are separate. The focus group will be audio-recorded, with your permission. Most likely there will be two sessions. There will be an audio recording of the interviews that will later be transcribed to note the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. Names and any identifying information of individuals and schools will be changed.

**Are any risks expected?**
We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. To reduce these risks, participants may choose the location in the building that they feel most comfortable with, for example, the library or the conference room. Every attempt will be made to not pose any risks in this investigation. Risks involved in participation, such as reputation, emotional reactions, and employability are possible risks that could result if a breach of confidentiality may occur.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Individuals may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty of any kind. A breach of confidentiality from recording could lead to potential risks to employability or reputation.

Information will be stored from interview recordings and focus groups and stored securely within OneDrive for transcription.

**Will your information be protected?**
We will use all reasonable efforts to keep any provided personal information confidential. Your responses remain confidential; nothing that will identify you will be linked to your responses. The findings from this study may be presented in newsletters or overall school improvement updates to the Board of Education. Names and any identifying information of individuals will be changed in the dissertation and will not be used in presentations.
The research will be disseminated without any identifiable information for the individuals involved in the study. The risks regarding breach of confidentiality related to focus groups will be mitigated by participants choosing private settings, by being reminded that the focus group discussions should not be shared outside of the focus groups, and the recordings from the focus groups will be securely stored in OneDrive. However, when required by law or university policy, identifying information (including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by authorized individuals.

**Could your responses be used for another research?**

De-identified data may be used for future studies not covered under this protocol.

**Who will benefit from this study?**

Benefits related to this research include the information shared that may be helpful to the United School District #116 to promote a culturally responsive environment and meet the mental health needs of Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). Another benefit of the study is that student voice can bring about systematic changes.

**Whom do you contact if you have any questions?**

If you have any questions about the research at any time before, during, after, or wish to withdraw from the study, contact Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or IRB@ilstu.edu.

**Documentation of Consent**

Sign below if you are 18 or older and willing to participate in this study.

I have read the above information. I have been allowed to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research.

Signature __________________________________        Date ______________________

If you are 18 or older and willing to participate in this study, please sign and return the attached document to Mrs. Kim in the main office. Forms will be collected in an envelope, or you may also scan/take a picture and email it to kmnorto1@ilstu.edu if you prefer. If you are selected, I will contact all student participants via email to provide options on locations and meeting times.
APPENDIX M: ADMINISTRATOR CONFIDENTIAL CONSENT FORM-FOCUS GROUPS

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations. The purpose of this study is to investigate the input that students, teachers, and administrators have at the high school in contributing to a culturally responsive environment and the influence this makes on students’ mental health.

Why are you being asked?
Gathering feedback is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school. Student, teacher, and administrator input is critical to provide each perspective to optimize the spaces within the school into a welcoming and nurturing environment.

What would you do?
If you choose to participate in this study, you will participate in a small focus group, which will involve no more than 10 individuals that will take place at the high school and last approximately 30-45 minutes. Teacher and student focus groups are separate. The focus group will be audio-recorded, with your permission. Most likely there will be two sessions. There will be an audio recording of the interviews that will later be transcribed to note the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. Names and any identifying information of individuals and schools will be changed.

Are any risks expected?
We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. To reduce these risks, participants may choose the location in the building that they feel most comfortable with, for example, the library or the conference room. Every attempt will be made to not pose any risks in this investigation. Risks involved in participation, such as reputation, emotional reactions, and employability are possible risks that could result if a breach of confidentiality may occur. Stakeholders may have questions that you may be asked following the dissemination of the results.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Individuals may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty of any kind. A breach of confidentiality from recording could lead to potential risks to employability or reputation.

Information will be stored from interview recordings and focus groups and stored securely within OneDrive for transcription.

Will your information be protected?
We will use all reasonable efforts to keep any provided personal information confidential. Your responses remain confidential; nothing that will identify you will be linked to your responses. The findings from this study may be presented in newsletters or overall school improvement updates to the Board of Education. Names and any identifying information of individuals will be changed in the dissertation and will not be used in presentations.
The research will be disseminated without any identifiable information for the individuals involved in the study.

However, when required by law or university policy, identifying information (including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by authorized individuals.

**Could your responses be used for another research?**
De-identified data may be used for future studies not covered under this protocol.

**Who will benefit from this study?**
Benefits related to this research include the information shared that may be helpful to the United School District #116 to promote a culturally responsive environment and meet the mental health needs of Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). Another benefit of the study is that student voice can bring about systematic changes.

**Whom do you contact if you have any questions?**
If you have any questions about the research at any time before, during, after, or wish to withdraw from the study, contact Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or IRB@ilstu.edu.

**Documentation of Consent**
Sign below if you are 18 or older and willing to participate in this study.

I have read the above information. I have been allowed to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research.

Signature ___________________________        Date ______________________

If you are 18 or older and willing to participate in this study, please sign and return the attached document to Mrs. Kim in the main office. Forms will be collected in an envelope, or you may also scan/take a picture and email it to kmnorto1@ilstu.edu if you prefer. If you are selected, I will contact all student participants via email to provide options on locations and meeting times.
CONSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUPS

Student (18 or Older) Confidential Consent Form-Focus Groups
You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations. The purpose of this study is to investigate the input that students, teachers, and administrators have at the high school in contributing to a culturally responsive environment and the influence this makes on students’ mental health.

Why are you being asked?
Gathering feedback is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school. Student, teacher, and administrator input is critical to provide each perspective to optimize the spaces within the school into a welcoming and nurturing environment.

What would you do?
If you choose to participate in this study, you will participate in a small focus group, which will involve no more than 10 individuals that will take place at the high school and last approximately 30-45 minutes. Teacher and student focus groups are separate. The focus group will be audio-recorded, with your permission. Most likely there will be two sessions. There will be an audio recording of the interviews that will later be transcribed to note the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. Names and any identifying information of individuals and schools will be changed.

Are any risks expected?
We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. To reduce these risks, participants may choose the location in the building that they feel most comfortable with, for example, the library or the conference room. Every attempt will be made to not pose any risks in this investigation. Social risks such as reputation, and emotional reactions are possible risks that could result if a breach of confidentiality may occur.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Individuals may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty of any kind.

Information will be stored from interview recordings and focus groups and stored securely within OneDrive for transcription.

Will your information be protected?
We will use all reasonable efforts to keep any provided personal information confidential. Your responses remain confidential; nothing that will identify you will be linked to your responses. The findings from this study may be presented in newsletters or overall school improvement...
updates to the Board of Education. Names and any identifying information of individuals will be changed in the dissertation and will not be used in presentations.

The research will be disseminated without any identifiable information for the individuals involved in the study. The risks regarding breach of confidentiality related to focus groups will be mitigated by participants choosing private settings, by being reminded that the focus group discussions should not be shared outside of the focus groups, and the recordings from the focus groups will be securely stored in OneDrive.

However, when required by law or university policy, identifying information (including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by authorized individuals.

**Could your responses be used for another research?**

De-identified data may be used for future studies not covered under this protocol

**Who will benefit from this study?**

Benefits related to this research include the information shared that may be helpful to the United School District #116 to promote a culturally responsive environment and meet the mental health needs of Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). Another benefit of the study is that student voice can bring about systematic changes.

**Whom do you contact if you have any questions?**

If you have any questions about the research at any time before, during, after, or wish to withdraw from the study, contact Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or IRB@ilstu.edu.

**Documentation of Consent**

Sign below if you are 18 or older and willing to participate in this study.

I have read the above information. I have been allowed to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research.

Signature ____________________________ Date ______________________

If you are 18 or older and willing to participate in this study, please sign and return the attached document to Mrs. Kim in the main office. Forms will be collected in an envelope, or you may also scan/take a picture and email it to kmnortol@ilstu.edu if you prefer. If you are selected, I will contact all student participants via email to provide options on locations and meeting times.
APPENDIX O: FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE/SCRIPT

Focus Group Schedule and Script

The same script will be used for students, staff, and administrators.

Note: Each focus group will not begin until all permissions have been received.

Introduction and Purpose of Group

Hello. My name is Kimberly Norton. I’d like to start by thanking each of you for taking the time to participate today. We’ll be here for about 30-45 minutes.

The reason we’re here today is to gather your opinions and attitudes about issues related to your experiences with the school environment and how students’ mental health needs are supported.

I’m going to lead our discussion today. I will be asking you questions and then encouraging and moderating our discussion.

I also would like you to know this focus group will be tape-recorded. The identities of all participants will remain confidential. Please remember to use the names of any individuals throughout the session. If you slip, I will provide you with a reminder. The recording allows us to revisit our discussion to develop research papers and presentations.

Ground rules

To allow our conversation to flow more freely, I’d like to go over some ground rules.

1. Only one person speaks at a time. This is doubly important as our goal is to make a written transcript of our conversation today. It is difficult to capture everyone’s experience and perspective on our audio recording if there are multiple voices at once
2. Please avoid side conversations.
3. Everyone doesn’t have to answer every single question, but I’d like to hear from each of you today as the discussion progresses.
4. This is a confidential discussion in that I will not report your names or who said what to students, staff, families, or community members. Names of participants will not even be included in the final report about this meeting. It also means, except for the report that will be written, what is said in this room stays in this room.
5. We stress confidentiality because we want an open discussion. We want all of you to feel free to comment on each other’s remarks without fear your comments will be repeated later and possibly taken out of context.

6. There are no “wrong answers,” just different opinions. Say what is true for you, even if you’re the only one who feels that way. Don’t let the group sway you. But if you do change your mind, let me know.

7. Let me know if you need a break. The bathrooms are [location].

8. I am providing you with a list of the questions and I can always repeat anything if needed.

9. Are there any questions?

Introduction of participants (5 minutes)

Before we start, I’d like to know a little about each of you. Please tell me:

1. Your name
2. What is your role? [Grade level for students, role, or assignment for employee]

Focus Group Questions (25 minutes)

At this point move to the next page to the questions.

Closing (5 minutes)

Thanks for coming today and talking about these issues. Your comments have provided me with much information on the topic. Thank you for your time.

(Source: adapted from InSites: Tips for Conducting Focus Groups via http://www.insites.org/CLIP_v1_site/downloads/PDFs/TipsFocusGrps.4D.8-07.pdf)
APPENDIX P: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Questions:

1. *How would you describe the climate at United High School?*

2. *Do you feel the climate is welcoming? Why or why not?*

3. *Do students know where or who to go to have their mental health needs supported within the school?*

4. *Why do you think someone may want to talk to an adult for support?*

5. *Do you think that students of all races have equal access to their mental health needs being supported?*

6. *Please describe what SEL or social-emotional learning means.*

7. *In what ways are students provided opportunities to assist the teacher in the classroom with activities or discussions focused on the following Transformative SEL features: Provide examples if you can.*

   a. *Authentic partnering among students and adults with a deep focus on sharing power and decision-making between young people, educators, families, and communities.*

   b. *Academic content that integrates issues of race, class, and culture.*

   c. *Instruction that honors and makes connections to students’ lived experiences and identities, and scaffolds learning to build an understanding of others’ lived experiences.*

   d. *Enhancing and foregrounding social and emotional competencies needed for civic engagement and social change, such as reflecting on personal and social identities, examining prejudices and biases, interrogating social norms, disrupting, and resisting inequities, and co-constructing equitable and just solutions.*
e. Prioritizing students’ individual and collective agency to take action for more just schools and communities.

f. Focus on creating belonging and engagement for all individuals.

8. Audacious Hope is a critical component of physical and emotional well-being. Hope correlates with success at many things and can also help people cope better with pain, illness, and stress.
   a. Can you think of examples where discussions, courageous conversations, or movements within the school have inspired audacious hope?

9. Authentic relationships are key to students developing a sense of belonging within the school environment. For adults and students, letting others in and revealing more of oneself, takes time to earn and build trust.
   a. What does this look like to you at United High School?

10. Is there anything else you want me to know?
APPENDIX Q: PARENT/GUARDIAN PERMISSION ANONYMOUS STUDENT SURVEYS

You are being asked to allow your child to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations. The purpose of this study is to investigate the input that students have at the high school in contributing to a culturally responsive environment and the influence this makes on students’ mental health.

Why are you being asked to participate?
Gathering feedback is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school. Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your child will not be penalized if you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

Your child has been asked to participate because the student's voice is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school. The research will not take place during class time. Student input is critical to provide each perspective to optimize the spaces within the school into a welcoming and nurturing environment.

What would you do?
If you choose for your child to participate in this study, they will complete an online survey. The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. The results of the study will be used in a written report and oral presentation and may later be used for a dissertation study, but your name will never be used.

Are any risks expected?
We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. To reduce these risks, participants may opt-out at any time in completing the survey. Every attempt will be made to not pose any risks in this investigation. Social risks such as reputation, and emotional reactions are possible risks that could result if a breach of confidentiality may occur.

Surveys will be conducted with anonymous links and an anonymous response feature. Information will be stored from interview recordings and focus groups and stored securely within OneDrive for transcription.

Will your information be protected?
Your child’s responses will be anonymous; nothing that will identify them will be linked to their responses. The findings from this study may be presented in school newsletters linked to overall school improvement goals, presented at the Board of Education in the school improvement report, and as part of a dissertation in practice.
Could your responses be used for another research?
De-identified data may be used for future studies not covered under this protocol

Who will benefit from this study?
Benefits related to this research include the information shared that may be helpful to the United School District #116 to promote a culturally responsive environment and meet the mental health needs of Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). Another benefit of the study is capturing student voices to bring about systematic changes.

Whom do you contact if you have any questions?
If you have any questions about the research at any time before, during, after, or wish to withdraw from the study, contact Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu

Documentation of Consent
If you are 18 or older and willing to have your child participate in this study, no further action is needed.

I have read the above information. I have been allowed to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree for my child to participate in this research.

Sign below, if you do not wish for your child to participate in the study, sign and return this form [within three weeks of receiving this form]. Only sign below if you do NOT wish to participate in the study.

_________________________________________  ________________________
Parent /Guardian Signature                        Date

_________________________________________  ________________________
Student Name                                    Date

Mrs. Norton will not continue further for any student whose parent did opt out.

You can print this form for your records.
APPENDIX R: SPANISH PARENT/GUARDIAN PERMISSION ANONYMOUS STUDENT SURVEYS

Formulario anónimo de permiso del padre/tutor: encuestas para estudiantes

Le pedimos que permita que su hijo(a) participe en un estudio de investigación realizado por la Sra. Kimberly Norton y el Dr. Guy Banicki, del Departamento de Administración y Fundaciones Educativas. El propósito de este estudio es investigar el aporte que los estudiantes tienen en la escuela preparatoria para contribuir a un entorno culturalmente receptivo y la influencia que esto tiene en la salud mental de los estudiantes.

¿Por qué se le pide que participe?
La recopilación de comentarios es esencial para promover un clima seguro y de apoyo dentro de la escuela. Su participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Su hijo(a) no será penalizado si decide omitir partes del estudio, no participar o retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento.

Se le ha pedido a su hijo(a) que participe porque la voz de los estudiantes es esencial para promover un clima seguro y de apoyo dentro de la escuela. La investigación no se llevará a cabo durante el tiempo de clase. La opinión de los estudiantes es fundamental para proporcionar cada perspectiva para optimizar los espacios dentro de la escuela en un entorno acogedor y enriquecedor.

¿Qué harías?
Si elige que su hijo(a) participe en este estudio, completará una encuesta en línea. La encuesta tardará unos minutos en completarse. Los resultados del estudio se utilizarán en un informe escrito y una presentación oral y se pueden utilizar posteriormente para un estudio de tesis, pero nunca se utilizará su nombre.

¿Se espera algún riesgo?
No anticipamos ningún riesgo más allá de los que ocurrirían en la vida cotidiana. Para reducir estos riesgos, los participantes pueden optar por no participar en cualquier momento al completar la encuesta. Se hará todo lo posible para no representar ningún riesgo en esta investigación. Los riesgos sociales como daño a la reputación y reacciones emocionales son posibles riesgos que podrían resultar en caso de que se produzca una violación de la confidencialidad.

Las encuestas se realizarán con enlaces anónimos y una función de respuesta anónima. La información se almacenará a partir de grabaciones de entrevistas y grupos focales y se almacenará de forma segura en OneDrive para su transcripción.

¿Se protegerá su información?
Las respuestas de su hijo(a) serán anónimas; nada que los identifique estará vinculado a sus respuestas. Los hallazgos de este estudio se pueden presentar en boletines escolares vinculados a
las metas generales de mejora de la escuela, presentados a la Junta de Educación en el informe de mejora de la escuela y como parte de una disertación en la práctica.

¿Podrían sus respuestas ser utilizadas para otras investigaciones?
Los datos no identificados pueden usarse para estudios futuros no cubiertos por este protocolo

¿Quién se beneficiará de este estudio?
Los beneficios relacionados con esta investigación incluyen que la información compartida puede ser útil para el Distrito Escolar de United #116 para promover un ambiente culturalmente receptivo y satisfacer las necesidades de salud mental de los Pueblos Indígenas de Color (BIPOC). Otro beneficio del estudio es capturar las voces de los estudiantes para generar cambios sistemáticos.

¿Con quién se pone uno en contacto si tiene alguna pregunta?
Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre la investigación en cualquier momento antes, durante, después o desea retirarse del estudio, comuníquese con el Dr. Guy Banicki en gbanick@ilstu.edu

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre sus derechos como participante, o si cree que ha estado en riesgo, comuníquese con la Oficina de Cumplimiento y Ética de Investigación de la Universidad Estatal de Illinois al (309) 438-5527 o IRB@ilstu.edu.

Documentación de consentimiento
Si tiene 18 años o más y desea que su hijo(a) participe en este estudio, no se necesita ninguna otra acción.

He leído la información anterior. Se me ha dado la oportunidad de hacer preguntas y mis preguntas han sido respondidas a mi entera satisfacción. Acepto que mi hijo(a) participe en esta investigación.

Firme abajo, si no desea que su hijo(a) participe en el estudio, firme y devuelva este formulario [dentro de las tres semanas posteriores a la recepción de este formulario]. Solo firme abajo si NO desea participar en el estudio.

Firma del padre/tutor ___________________________ Fecha ______________

Nombre del estudiante ___________________________ Fecha ______________

La Sra. Norton no continuará con ningún estudiante cuyos padres optaron por no participar. Puede imprimir este formulario para sus registros.
APPENDIX S: STUDENT INTEREST ANONYMOUS ASSENT FORM-SURVEYS

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations. The purpose of this study is to seek information from students, teachers, and administrators on how the high school in contributing to a safe and welcoming environment and the positive impact this makes on students’ mental health.

**Why are you being asked?**
Gathering feedback is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school.
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will not be penalized if you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

**What would you do?**
If you choose to participate in this study, you will complete an online survey. The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. The results of the study will be used in a written report and oral presentation and may later be used for a dissertation study, but your name will never be used.

**Are any risks expected?**
We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. To reduce these risks, participants may opt out at any time in completing the survey. Every attempt will be made
to not pose any risks in this investigation. Social risks such as reputation, and emotional reactions are possible risks that could result if any information would be revealed.

Surveys will be conducted with anonymous links and an anonymous response feature.

**Will your information be protected?**

Your responses will be anonymous; nothing that will identify you will be linked to your responses. The findings from this study may be presented in school newsletters linked to overall school improvement goals, presented at the Board of Education in the school improvement report, and as part of a dissertation in practice.

**Could your responses be used for another research?**

De-identified data may be used for future studies not covered under this protocol.

**Who will benefit from this study?**

Benefits related to this research include the information shared that may be helpful to the United School District #116 to promote a safe and welcoming environment to meet the mental health needs of Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). Another benefit of the study is capturing student voices to bring about dramatic changes.

**Whom do you contact if you have any questions?**

If you have any questions about the research at any time before, during, after, or wish to withdraw from the study, contact Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or IRB@ilstu.edu.

Documentation of Consent
If you are under 18, you are receiving this document only if your parents/guardians have already provided consent.

This survey will be conducted online. When beginning the student survey, participants will have the option to select "next" and take the survey if they consent, or just close the survey if they would not like to participate.

I have read the above information. I have been allowed to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

You can print this form for your records.
APPENDIX T: STUDENT (18 AND OLDER) ANONYMOUS CONSENT FORM-SURVEYS

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations. The purpose of this study is to seek information from students, teachers, and administrators on how the high school in contributing to a safe and welcoming environment and the positive impact this makes on students’ mental health.

**Why are you being asked?**
Gathering feedback is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will not be penalized if you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

**What would you do?**
If you choose to participate in this study, you will complete an online survey. The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. The results of the study will be used in a written report and oral presentation and may later be used for a dissertation study, but your name will never be used.

**Are any risks expected?**
We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. To reduce these risks, participants may opt out at any time in completing the survey. Every attempt will be made to not pose any risks in this investigation. Social risks such as reputation, and emotional reactions are possible risks that could result if any information would be revealed.

Surveys will be conducted with anonymous links and an anonymous response feature.

**Will your information be protected?**
Your responses will be anonymous; nothing that will identify you will be linked to your responses. The findings from this study may be presented in school newsletters linked to overall school improvement goals, presented at the Board of Education in the school improvement report, and as part of a dissertation in practice.

**Could your responses be used for another research?**
De-identified data may be used for future studies not covered under this protocol.

**Who will benefit from this study?**
Benefits related to this research include the information shared that may be helpful to the United School District #116 to promote a safe and welcoming environment to meet the mental health
needs of Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). Another benefit of the study is capturing student voices to bring about dramatic changes.

**Whom do you contact if you have any questions?**
If you have any questions about the research at any time before, during, after, or wish to withdraw from the study, contact Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or IRB@ilstu.edu.

**Documentation of Consent**
If you are 18 or older and willing to participate in this study, no further action is needed.

This survey will be conducted online. When beginning the student survey, participants will have the option to select "next" and take the survey if they consent, or just close the survey if they would not like to participate.

I have read the above information. I have been allowed to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

You can print this form for your records.
APPENDIX U: ADULT ANONYMOUS CONSENT FORM-SURVEYS

Adult Anonymous Consent Form-Surveys

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Mrs. Kimberly Norton and Dr. Guy Banicki, Department of Educational Administration and Foundations. The purpose of this study is to investigate the input that students, teachers, and administrators have at the high school in contributing to a culturally responsive environment and the influence this makes on students’ mental health.

**Why are you being asked?**
Gathering feedback is essential to promoting a safe and supportive climate within the school. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will not be penalized if you choose to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time.

**What would you do?**
If you choose to participate in this study, you will complete an online survey. The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. The results of the study will be used in a written report and oral presentation and may later be used for a dissertation study, but your name will never be used.

**Are any risks expected?**
We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life. To reduce these risks, participants may opt out at any time in completing the survey. Every attempt will be made to not pose any risks in this investigation. Social risks such as reputation, and emotional reactions are possible risks that could result if a breach of confidentiality may occur.

Surveys will be conducted with anonymous links and an anonymous response feature.

**Will your information be protected?**
Your responses will be anonymous; nothing that will identify you will be linked to your responses. The findings from this study may be presented in school newsletters linked to overall school improvement goals, presented at the Board of Education in the school improvement report, and as part of a dissertation in practice.

**Could your responses be used for another research?**
De-identified data may be used for future studies not covered under this protocol

**Who will benefit from this study?**
Benefits related to this research include the information shared that may be helpful to the United School District #116 to promote a culturally responsive environment and meet the mental health needs of Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). Another benefit of the study is capturing student voices to bring about systematic changes.

**Whom do you contact if you have any questions?**
If you have any questions about the research at any time before, during, after, or wish to withdraw from the study, contact Dr. Guy Banicki at gbanick@ilstu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, contact the Illinois State University Research Ethics & Compliance Office at (309) 438-5527 or IRB@ilstu.edu.

**Documentation of Consent**
If you are 18 or older and willing to participate in this study, no further action is needed.

This survey will be conducted online. When beginning the adult survey, participants will have the option to select "next" and take the survey if they consent, or just close the survey if they would not like to participate.

I have read the above information. I have been allowed to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

You can print this form for your records.
Conducted through Qualtrics

Q1. In what language would you prefer to complete this survey? ¿En cuál idioma prefieres completar esta encuesta?

○ English (1)

○ Español (2)

Q2 Which of the following best describes your identity?

○ Hispanic/Latino(a)(x) (1)

○ White (2)

○ Black (3)

○ Multiracial (4)

○ Prefer not to answer (5)

○ Other (6)

Q3 I get along well with students that are different than me.
Q4 I can describe my feelings clearly.

  □ Strongly Agree (1)
  □ Agree (2)
  □ Unsure (3)
  □ Disagree (4)
  □ Strongly Disagree (5)

Q5 I have a teacher or adult at school that I can fully trust.

  □ Strongly Agree (1)
Q6 My teacher accepts my culture.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Unsure (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

Q7 I am aware of safe and trusted adults to that I can report incidents.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
Q8 My school environment reflects the culture of the students that attend here.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Unsure (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

Q9 My school has available resources for when I feel troubled.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Unsure (3)
Q10 Adults are responsive to students’ mental health needs.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Unsure (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

Q11 The adults in my school collaborate to support and coordinate students’ mental health needs.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Unsure (3)
Q12 Announcements and signs are in multiple languages throughout the school.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Unsure (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)
Encuesta Estudiantil-Escuela Preparatoria de United

Inicio del bloque: Bloque de preguntas predeterminado

P1 1. ¿Cuál de las siguientes describe mejor su identidad?
- Hispano/Latino(a)(x) (1)
- Blanco (2)
- Negro (3)
- Multirracial (4)
- Prefiero no contestar (5)
- Otro (6)

P2 2. Me llevo bien con estudiantes que son diferentes a mí.
- Totalmente de acuerdo (1)
- De acuerdo (2)
- Inseguro (3)
- En desacuerdo (4)
- Totalmente en desacuerdo (5)

P3 3. Puedo describir mis sentimientos con claridad.
- Totalmente de acuerdo (1)
- De acuerdo (2)
- No estoy seguro (3)
- En desacuerdo (4)
- Totalmente en desacuerdo (5)

P4 4. Tengo un maestro o un adulto en la escuela en quien puedo confiar plenamente.
- Totalmente de acuerdo (1)
- De acuerdo (2)
• No estoy seguro (3)
• En desacuerdo (4)
• Totalmente en desacuerdo (5)

P5 5. Mi profesor acepta mi cultura.
• Totalmente de acuerdo (1)
• De acuerdo (2)
• No estoy seguro (3)
• En desacuerdo (4)
• Totalmente en desacuerdo (5)

P6 6. Conozco adultos seguros y de confianza a los que puedo informar incidentes.
• Totalmente de acuerdo (1)
• De acuerdo (2)
• Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo (3)
• En desacuerdo (4)
• Totalmente en desacuerdo (5)

Q7 7. El ambiente de mi escuela refleja la cultura de los estudiantes que asisten aquí.
• Totalmente de acuerdo (1)
• De acuerdo (2)
• No estoy seguro (3)
• En desacuerdo (4)
• Totalmente en desacuerdo (5)

Q8 8. Mi escuela tiene recursos disponibles para cuando me sienta preocupado.
• Totalmente de acuerdo (1)
• De acuerdo (2)
• No estoy seguro (3)
• En desacuerdo (4)
• Totalmente en desacuerdo (5)

P9 9. Los adultos responden a las necesidades de salud mental de los estudiantes.
• Muy de acuerdo (1)
• De acuerdo (2)
P10 10. Los adultos de mi escuela colaboran para apoyar y coordinar las necesidades de salud mental de los estudiantes.
- Totalmente de acuerdo (1)
- De acuerdo (2)
- No estoy seguro (3)
- En desacuerdo (4)
- Totalmente en desacuerdo (5)

- Totalmente de acuerdo (1)
- De acuerdo (2)
- No estoy seguro (3)
- En desacuerdo (4)
- Totalmente en desacuerdo (5)

Fin del bloque: Bloque de preguntas predeterminado
Conducted through Qualtrics

Q1 In what language would you prefer to complete this survey? ¿En cuál idioma prefieres completar esta encuesta?

- English (1)

- Español (2)

- Click to write Choice 3 (3)

Q2 Which of the following best describes your identity?

- Hispanic/Latino(a)(x) (1)

- White (2)

- Black (3)

- Multiracial (4)

- Prefer not to answer (5)

- Other (6)

Q3 Students get along well with others that are different than them.
Q4 Students are provided opportunities to describe their feelings clearly.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Unsure (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

Q5 Students have a teacher or adult at school that they can fully trust.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
Q6 I accept my students’ varying cultures.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Unsure (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

Q7 Students are aware of safe and trusted adults so that they can report incidents.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree (4)
Q8 My school environment reflects the culture of the students that attend here.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Unsure (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

Q9 My school has available resources for when students feel troubled.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Unsure (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

Q10 Adults are responsive to students’ mental health needs.
Q11 The adults in my school collaborate to support and coordinate students’ mental health needs.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Unsure (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

Q12 Announcements and signs are in multiple languages throughout the school.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
○ Unsure (3)

○ Disagree (4)

○ Strongly Disagree (5)
APPENDIX Y: WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY FLYER

Wear green to show your support

Monday, October 10th

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

You matter! UHS supports World Mental Health Awareness Day!

✓ 7:30-8:00 WELCOME & GIVEAWAYS
✓ SEL PERIOD: FEATURING UMS VIDEO & UHS SUPPORT TEAM
✓ LUNCH: RESOURCE FAIR AND SELFIE STATION

Your mental health is a priority. Your happiness is an essential. Your self-care is a necessity. You matter!

#WORLDMENTALHEALTHAWARENESSDAY
#YOU MATTER #BREAK THE STIGMA
#YOU ARE NOT ALONE
APPENDIX Z: SPANISH WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY FLYER

Vistete de color verde para demostrar tu apoyo.

Lunes 10 de octubre

Día de Concientización sobre la Salud Mental

¡Tú eres importante! UHS apoya el Día de Concientización sobre la Salud Mental

7:30-8:00 Bienvenida y regalos

Periodo de Aprendizaje Socioemocional: Video de UMS y Equipo de Apoyo de UHS

Lunch: Feria de Recursos y Estación para fotos

#WORLDMENTALHEALTHAWARENESSDAY
#YOMATTER #BREAKTHESTIGMA
#YOUARENOTALONE

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