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Administrators' Perceptions of Challenges When Supporting the Academic Achievement of Navajo High School Students

Derek Begay
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Derek Begay

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Kathryn Swetnam, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Andrew Alexson, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2024

Abstract

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by

Derek Begay

MA, Grand Canyon University, 2012

BS, Lee University, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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January 2024

Abstract

Administrators are challenged to support the academic achievement of Navajo high school students. Research concerning public school campus administrators' perceptions of these challenges is scarce. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine school administrators' perceptions concerning challenges they face when supporting the academic success of Navajo high school students, as well as the strategies they use to address these challenges. Brayboy's tribal critical race theory grounded this study. Research questions were focused on how administrators identified Navajo students' challenges and how they prioritized approaches and planning for Navajo students to achieve academically. Data were collected using semistructured interviews with eight purposively selected high school administrators in a southwestern state who held administrative licenses and had a least 30% American Indian/Alaska Native student populations in their schools. The data were analyzed using content analysis, which included a priori, open, and pattern coding. The findings indicated that Navajo students succeed academically when administrators prioritize their approach and planning to include Native classes, address Native issues, hire Native staff, accept Navajo cultural characteristics in the classroom environment, provide training for educators to increase cultural knowledge, and address the academic gap. It is recommended that high school administrators explore the approaches and planning strategies identified in this study to address the academic needs of Navajo students in their schools. Positive social change could occur if school, district, state, federal, and tribal leaders not only understand the challenges of Navajo students but also assume accountability to improve the strategies, approaches, and plans required to address these academic issues for Navajo students.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this doctoral study to my family. My parents, Harry and Anita, have guided, supported, and encouraged me to be humble, thankful, and resilient. My parents educated me through our faith while still honoring the importance of our Navajo culture. Your love, laughter, and support made my journey successful, and I am forever thankful to have you close by. My siblings Ron, Shar, and Renaldon taught me through their experiences, supported me to be the best I can be, and challenged me to work harder, be smarter, and to always remember the love of our family. My siblings' laughter and unwavering love encouraged me to work, be patient, think smart, and exhibit confidence. My siblings' families who are part of my life and with whom I have shared many great times – your support and times of laughter helped keep me grounded in my life.

To Dean, my son, thank you for showing me what is important in life and always reminding me to strive for the best, for you. Your understanding, patience, and love during this process has proven to me you will also achieve great things! Your development, growth, learning, and future are what I am excited to achieve next. Also, Charmayne, your love and support during the final stages of this process has not gone unnoticed. The late nights, long days, and my time away from our family has been a challenge, but you have provided me that time, support, focus, and love I needed to finish my doctorate. Thank you for everything; I am excited to start our next chapter together.

My hope for my family, extended Navajo family/shí Diné, and Indigenous friends is that you, too, are able to work hard, be persistent, be resilient, and meet the challenges of academic success for our people. Continue to be resilient.

Acknowledgments

This doctoral journey and the dissertation were a collection of the biggest challenges in my life. I learned many things about myself in this process and continue to grow as an advocate for improving and changing education to help Indigenous students. I hope my research, insights, and candid approach bring forth solutions through conversations, discussions, presentations, strategies, legislation, and accountability.

A special thanks to all those individuals who have helped make this journey possible for me. Dr. Kathryn Swetnam, my committee chair has patiently and at times painstakingly guided me through this process. Thank you to Dr. Christina Dawson and Dr. Andrew Alexson for your feedback, recommendations, and support. Thank you, Sara Keel, for your input and assistance. Thank you to the school districts and participants of my study who answered the call and provided vital information during the interviews. Thank you to all the individuals who provided me support behind the scenes, in the shadows, and through your own unique contributions; I made it because of all of you.

Additionally, I want to thank God/Creator for providing me with the skills and abilities to achieve such a prestigious milestone. My faith and culture guide me and remind me of my calling and duty to help others within my capacity.

Finally, I want to thank my friends and family for their support and encouragement. Thank you to my friends for listening to my rants about education and how we can do better. I am thankful to have such a strong support system. Again, thank you to my family; without you, I would not have achieved all that I have. This journey I have completed is for our family.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The topic of this study addresses administrators' perceptions of challenges to successful academic achievement of Navajo students in the New Mexico public school system, the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), and tribally controlled high schools. The research is necessary to identify challenges influencing Navajo students' academic achievement in a high school setting. Positive social change from the study may include an initial understanding of academic challenges to inform tribal policymakers and public-school leaders to make changes within their schools to increase Navajo high school students' academic achievement. The results of this study may not only benefit Navajo students attending schools in New Mexico, but also students from other Native American backgrounds, school districts with Native American populations, tribal educational agencies, and state educational agencies with substantial minority populations. In Chapter 1, I provide the contextual background, conceptual framework, problem statement, research questions, and purpose of the study. I also present the assumptions, limitations, and scope and delimitations, and conclude with a summary.

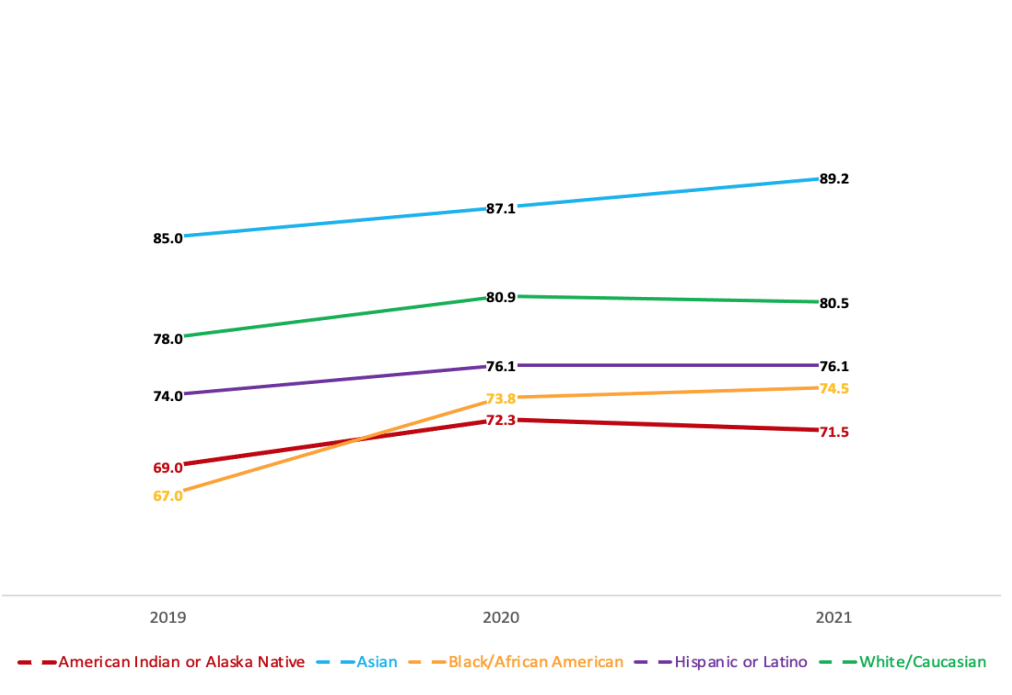
Background

Racial and ethnic minorities achieve at lower levels than other students as measured by high school graduation, college enrollment, and college graduation (McFarland et al., 2020). American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students have the highest dropout rate of all ethnic groups in the United States (McFarland et al., 2020). New Mexico's AI/AN students graduation rate is 71.5%, significantly below their Caucasian peers whose graduation rate is 80.5% (New Mexico Public Education

Department, 2022a). Thirty-one percent of AI/AN youth between the ages of 16 to 24 neither work or are enrolled in school, the highest of any race or ethnicity group in the nation (McFarland et al., 2018). Specifically, Navajo youth attending public schools have the lowest high school graduation rates, the lowest college enrollment, and highest attrition rates of any ethnic subgroup (Desai & Abeita, 2017). Figure 1 illustrates graduation rates in New Mexico for each ethnic group and depicts the gaps between each group. Over a 3-year trend, the data reflects AI/AN as the lowest performing ethnic group in the state.

Figure 1

New Mexico Graduation Rates 2019-2021



Note. Percentages of graduation rates by ethnic groups in New Mexico public schools over the past 3 years (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2022b). Cohort 2021 4-year graduation rate data. https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus /accountability /graduation/

Information is lacking for high school administrators about the challenges of Navajo high school students who are not graduating. High schools within the boundaries of, and those that border, the Navajo Nation in New Mexico are failing to make changes in their schools to help Navajo high school students graduate at the same rate as their peers. This study provides graduation data demonstrating achievement gaps; targets academic discussions to develop school, district, state, and tribal plans; and identifies accountability through fiscal initiatives, academic growth indicators, and government to government discussions to help Navajo students achieve academically.

This qualitative study reduces the gap in research about practice and increases knowledge about barriers pertaining to Navajo high school students' success. This study identifies barriers and limitations Navajo high school students encounter. Understanding the barriers will assist schools and their leaders to make meaningful decisions for Navajo high school students and replace misconceptions of one-size-fits-all approaches.

Problem Statement

Information is limited about factors concerning low AI/AN graduation rates and subsequential remedies for public schools to address this ongoing trend. New Mexico schools with high AI/AN student populations face unique challenges that need to be examined and identified. The most prevalent reasons given for these low achievement levels are Eurocentric curricula, low expectations, tracking AI/AN students in low-ability groups, poor academic achievement, lack of AI/AN educators, lack of parent and community involvement, and racism (Desai & Abeita, 2017; Mackety & Linder-VanBerschot, 2008). Previous researchers sought to explain AI/AN student dropouts

from a systems perspective. Similar studies examined the educational system's designs, instructor attitudes, and ineffective curriculum and instruction techniques (Patterson & Butler-Barnes, 2017). However, these reasons have most often been provided by researchers rather than those who work directly with AI/AN students, such as their teachers and administrators of the schools they attend. Despite evidence that Navajo students have challenges with successful academic achievement (Desai & Abeita, 2017), information concerning the perceptions of these challenges from public high school campus administrators is scarce (Ali et al., 2014; Desai & Abeita, 2017; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010; Gentry & Fugate, 2012). Nelson-Barber and Johnson (2019) presented examples of how Navajo public schools struggle and explained some research-based "best practices" (p. 47) are not the best for Navajo's cultural environment.

Administrators face challenges supporting the academic achievement of Navajo high school students. To modify and develop programs for AI/AN students, educators and community members require knowledge concerning Native American students' academic achievement and challenges that contribute to low graduation rates among Navajo high school students at public schools (Gregg, 2017; T. S. Lee, 2017; Mackey, 2017). Administrators with personal knowledge of the low achievement of AI/AN students suggest alternative explanations from their perspectives with knowledge of the AI/AN culture; in critical race theory (CRT), these alternate explanations are called counter stories (Hartlep, 2009).

Tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit), an outgrowth of CRT, is a framework that provides an educational application that uniquely applies to this study. The seventh tenet

of TribalCrit stresses the dynamics of philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future; considers the adaptability of groups; and recognizes differences between groups (Brayboy, 2005). Further, Indigenous beliefs, thoughts, philosophies, customs, and traditions of individuals and communities provide the foundation to analyze schooling practices, self-education, and experiences of Indigenous people (Brayboy, 2005). The omission of the educators' perspectives creates a gap in the research about practice that points to the need to examine school administrators' and educators' counter stories concerning the challenges of Navajo high school students to achieve academically (see Agbo, 2011; Aud et al., 2010; Patterson & Butler-Barnes, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to examine the perceptions of school administrators concerning challenges they face when supporting the academic success of Navajo high school students, and the strategies they use to address these challenges. Understanding of the ways by which onsite administrators identify and address issues related to Navajo high school students' retention and academic performance informs the gap in practice and adds to the overall knowledge base. Administrators from public and tribally controlled high schools in New Mexico helped me address the purpose of my study.

Research Questions

The following research questions, informed by literature, directed the study:

RQ1: How do administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools describe the needs of Navajo students and the kinds of challenges they encounter to achieve academically?

RQ2: How do administrators in public and tribally controlled high school prioritize their approach and planning to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically?

Conceptual Framework

The theory guiding the design and administration of the study is tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit), which emerged from critical race theory (CRT) and is rooted in the multiple nuanced based and geographically located epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities (Brayboy, 2005). The roots of CRT spawned in an effort to address the civil rights for African Americans and initially provided an awareness of systems and structures of racism within the dominant culture. However, CRT did not address the proclivities and nuances of other cultures. As a result, Latino critical race theory and Asian critical race theory, along with TribalCrit paradigms, were developed to meet the specific needs of those populations (Brayboy, 2005). TribalCrit consists of nine tenets that Brayboy (2005) outlined as an emerging theory to address issues of Indigenous people in the United States. I further discuss the elements of this conceptual framework in Chapter 2.

CRT was originally conceptualized and espoused by Bell (1980) in the critique of the Brown v. Board of Education legislation and the Civil Rights Act (1964). Solorzano and Huber (2020) explained, “Although race and racism are at the center of a critical race

analysis, they are also viewed…with other forms of subordination" (p. 3). CRT values experiential knowledge as a way to inform thinking and research and provides five key elements from which to discern basic insights, perspectives, and research methods (Donnor et al., 2017; Padgett, 2015; Solorzano, 1998). The five elements of CRT are (a) the centrality of race and racism as a social construct, (b) the challenge of dominant ideology, (c) interest convergence, (d) the commitment to social change, and (e) the importance of storytelling and counter-storytelling (Hartlep, 2009).

Few studies have examined current challenges in AI/AN education using applicable elements of the TribalCrit paradigm. Brayboy (2005) stated that narrative accounts and testimonies are valued as key sources of data. Using the TribalCrit tenet that tribal philosophies are central to understanding lived realities of Indigenous peoples (Brayboy, 2005) and counter stories based in theory and practice, along with insights from administrators who agreed to participate in interviews at high schools educating Navajo students, I examine academic challenges likely contributing to the lack of academic success among Navajo high school students.

By using the TribalCrit framework, I advance dialogue through tribal philosophies and beliefs that are central to understanding lived realities, differences, and adaptability (see Brayboy, 2005) to answer the research question of how administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools describe the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically. This study examines the phenomenon of current practices of administrators in Navajo public and tribally controlled high school systems in New Mexico. The interview questions were designed to examine administrators' views of

challenges to the academic success of Navajo high school students based on the conceptual framework. During the analysis process, I categorized the data using open and pattern codes to identify themes to effect potential change to the challenges identified in this study and highlight potential barriers associated with those findings.

Nature of the Study

I used a basic qualitative research design to collect data through semistructured interviews to provide context related to this study. Qualitative research takes place in a real-world setting where the phenomenon studied occurs naturally and the goal is to uncover and interpret meanings (Yin, 2018). In the field of education, basic qualitative studies are among the most common forms of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). Caelli et al. (2003) stated that because qualitative research does not align with a single approach, nor is guided by established theoretical assumptions, a basic qualitative approach provides an appropriate means by which qualitative data may be examined. A basic qualitative study identifies and explores a phenomenon, a process, or the perceptions and experiences of participants in a natural setting (Merriam, 1998). I chose a basic qualitative research approach because this method permitted me to address the problem and purpose of this study to answer the research question that investigates high school administrators' perceptions of Navajo students' academic achievement using interviews.

I am the sole researcher of this study. Administrators who work with Navajo students at public and tribally controlled high schools were purposively selected. I used interviews to collect data to investigate the perceptions of eight high school

administrators working on the Navajo Nation at public and tribally controlled high schools. An interview protocol based on the conceptual framework using other studies with similar data collection approaches was used to prepare open-ended interview questions. As the sole researcher, I interviewed the administrators, took notes, recorded each session, and transcribed each interview.

Using content analysis to find open and pattern codes revealed multiple facets of the phenomenon and provide a deeper understanding of barriers and challenges of graduation rates based on administrators' perceptions of academic success of Navajo high school students (see Baxter & Jack, 2008). Open and pattern coding can be developed into categories to reveal emerging themes and are commonly used in basic qualitive studies (Bengtsson, 2016; Hoon Lim, 2011). Using open-ended questions in the interview process allowed the participants to answer the research questions, from which categories emerged. From the codes and categories, emerging themes led to a narrative from the data to summarize the findings from this study. To provide validity of the findings, member checking was used to ensure accuracy of findings (see Creswell, 2003; Yin, 2018). The data collected and examined assists in understanding challenges from administrators, while also identifying supportive initiatives and plans to target strategies for Navajo student success.

Semistructured interviews were used to ascertain the challenges to Navajo high school students' academic achievement and low graduation rates. Data were gathered from interviews of administrators and analyzed using open and pattern codes to

determine themes of potential challenges to Navajo high school student academic achievement. The study concludes with a narrative and summary.

Definitions

Terms unique to this study are operationally defined as follows:

American Indian/Alaska Native: The United States Office of Management and Budget standard defines American Indian or Alaska Native as a person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment (Office of Management and Budget, 1997).

Bureau of Indian Education (BIE): Formerly known as the Office of Indian Education Programs, the BIE was renamed and established in 2006 as a program within the Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs. As of 2008, the BIE funded elementary and secondary schools located on 64 reservations in 23 states; of these, 58 are BIE operated, and 125 are tribally operated or controlled (U.S. Department of the Interior, n.d.).

Native American: As a general principle, a Native American/Indian is a person who is of some degree Indian blood and is recognized as an Indian by a Tribe and/or the United States. It is important to distinguish between the ethnological term "Indian" and the political/legal term "Indian." The protection and services provided by the United States is because of the spherical trust relationship between Tribe and the United States (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.).

Navajo: A Navajo is a Native American tribe in the Southwest United States with a tribal enrollment of 399,494 members according to the 2020 Census report via the Navajo Nation Office of Vital Records (Romero, 2021).

Navajo Nation: The Navajo Nations is a federally recognized tribe and land appropriated to the Navajo people via the Treaty of 1868 and additional agreements thereafter between the Navajo Nation and the United States Government (Smithsonian – National Museum of the American Indian, 2016). The Navajo Nation boundaries are located in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah.

Public School: According to the New Mexico Statutes Chapter 22, Article 1, Subsection 22-1-22 (New Mexico Compilation Commission, 2022), public school means part of a school district that takes attendance, offers instruction, and is recognized as either an elementary, middle, junior high, or high school or any combination of those.

Tribally Controlled Schools: A tribally controlled school receives a grant under the Tribally Controlled Schools Act of 1988 or is determined by the Secretary of the Interior to meet the eligibility criteria of section 5205 of the Tribally Controlled Schools Act of 1988. The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (Public Law 93-638) authorized other government agencies to enter into contracts with, and make grants directly to, federally recognized Indian tribes (U.S. Department of the Interior – Bureau of Indian Education, n.d.).

Terminology Used in This Dissertation

The terms Native Americans, American Indian, Indian, Native, and Indigenous peoples are commonly used interchangeably in academia. Typically, these terms are used

as generalizations. There are several concerns about these designations suggesting racist overtones, overgeneralizing of specific groups, and labeling people by names given by other groups (Dunbar-Ortiz & Gilio-Whitaker, 2016). The terms Indigenous, Native, Native American, American Indian, and Alaska Native are frequently used interchangeably; the confusion is a product of colonialism (Cross et al., 2019). It is proper to use tribe names when discussing specifically (Krueger, 2021). Certain terminology in federal and state agencies differ with their use of terms referring to Indigenous populations. Therefore, completely eliminating these terms is difficult because specific nomenclatures are referenced in treaties, federal and state legislation, and other historically significant documents. I acknowledge those terms and their historical place. In this study, I use the terms Indigenous, Native American, Native, and American Indian interchangeably, and when applicable I will use the tribe names.

Assumptions

Assumptions are aspects of a study presumed to be true, but not substantiated or demonstrated, which may weaken or influence the research and limit the reader (Fiss, 2009). There are four assumptions in this study. First, I assumed that the participants were knowledgeable of the barriers and challenges faced by Navajo students attending New Mexico public and tribally controlled high schools and had expertise to respond to the interview questions that answered the research questions. Second, it was assumed the participants of this study would answer honestly and candidly although potentially having experienced similar educational backgrounds to the phenomenon of this study (Wargo, 2015). Third, it was assumed New Mexico public and tribally controlled high schools

within and surrounding the boundaries of the Navajo Nation are limited by more social and educational barriers than school districts outside the Navajo Nation. Fourth, I assumed that the state educational agency and tribal educational agency reports would have complete data and plans to address academic achievement and high school graduation rates.

Scope and Delimitations

Scope and delimitations are boundaries placed on the scale of the study that relate to characteristics of the study and the focus of the population examined (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The scope of a study explains the extent to which the research area will be explored in the work and specifies the parameters within which the study will be operating. Delimitations are the boundaries a study and part of defining the scope (Creswell, 2003). This case study focused specifically on an underrepresented and minimally researched student demographic via interviews with administrators of Navajo public and tribally controlled high schools located in New Mexico. This research is intended to identify patterns, barriers, and achievement gaps of Navajo students in secondary education. Additionally, the research may bring forth discussions and potential plans to address Navajo student achievement and graduation rates.

I invited eight high school administrators from similarly student-populated New Mexico public and tribally controlled high schools within the region. Each school is comparable in several categorical areas including demographics and poverty rates. I did

not include participants from elementary and middle school administrators, teachers, other school staff, or school board members.

The sample is also limited to public and tribally controlled high schools located on the Navajo Nation, specifically in New Mexico. There are several public high schools within or that border the Navajo Nation, although most vary in student population. I did not include public and tribally controlled high schools located in Arizona nor Utah, of which some are located on the Navajo Nation. The focus is on New Mexico schools for clarity, to help target initiatives from one state, rather than including potential factors, reasons, and initiatives from other states. The focus is also on schools that consist of students in Grades 9-12. I did not include traditional elementary and middle schools or kindergarten through eighth grade schools regardless of public or tribally controlled school systems. The findings of this study may provide limited transferability because the purpose of this study addresses a specific tribal group, schools with high AI/AN student population, and administrators of those schools with their specific barriers and challenges.

Limitations

Each methodological approach in research has constraints that may affect the findings of a study. Limitations of any study contain possible weaknesses that could affect the results of a qualitative case study usually out of control of the researcher depending on research design or other potential factors (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Limitations in this qualitative study include (a) a small sample size of participants, (b) researcher bias, and (c) transferability of the findings.

The first limitation of this study is the small sample size. Sufficiency of the sample size is measured by depth of data rather than frequencies; therefore, samples should consist of participants who best represent the research topic (Morse et al., 2002). The small sample sizes and context findings of qualitative research are viewed as significant factors that limit transferability in settings other than that in which the research was originally conducted (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Gobo, 2004; Pearson et al., 2011; Sharp, 1998). The geological size and ruralness of the Navajo Nation limited the number of administrators who were able to participate and be interviewed. The Navajo Nation extends into the states of Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, covering over 27,000 square miles that is larger than 10 of the 50 states (Navajo Nation, n.d.). Administrators participating in interviews were expected to answer honestly and candidly during the interviews and provide information to address the concerns and barriers in this research and study.

The second limitation of this basic qualitative study is potential researcher bias; Morse (2015) suggested there are multiple researcher biases to be aware of involving anticipation, sampling patterns, and questioning. Ravitch and Carl (2020) stated that positionality and social identity is a complex, multifaceted, and systematic process in qualitative research. I am a member of the Navajo Nation, have working relationships with the schools in the area, and am a product of these school systems. As the sole researcher for this study, I was subject to biases during the interview process and analysis of the data.

In qualitative research, it is expected that researchers will make efforts to put aside values to describe respondents' experiences more accurately (Ahern, 1999). To address my bias, I used reflective journals and bracketing as an active and ongoing commitment to the work of becoming aware of and addressing my role as a researcher during the research process and analysis of the findings (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Bracketing is a way for the researcher to demonstrate validity of data collection and analysis processes, while reflexivity is the ability to put personal feelings, preconceptions, and interests aside for researchers (Ahern, 1999). Data were collected from high school administrators at public and tribally controlled high schools to seek supported information and collect data to investigate the perceptions of challenges to academic success for Navajo high school students. By using journal and bracketing, I was able to reconsider previous research encounters in light of new knowledge from coursework, literature, and field experience (see Meyer & Willis, 2019).

The third limitation of a qualitative study is transferability. Transferability implies that enough information about meanings and contexts in a study of a setting or population can provide sufficient information to apply to a different specific setting, group, or population (Maxwell, 2021). However, transferability is in keeping with qualitative methods where the purpose is to add new insights and to enhance transferability (Bembridge et al., 2011). Although the strengths of qualitative research are recognized within the field of scholarly research, the use of qualitative findings remains problematic because of the lack knowledge about how the findings may be applied from one setting to another (Pearson et al., 2011). In addition to the size of the Navajo Nation, location of

schools, and school types, the transferability of the study may be limited because this study targeted a specific tribal group, schools with high AI/AN student population, and administrators of these specific schools who have specific barriers and challenges.

Significance

This study addressed the gap in practice in the research regarding the support required for Navajo students to become successful academically. Results of the study can inform efforts of school districts, administrators, and educators to improve academic success of Navajo students in high school. Using interviews, this basic study identifies possible challenges to academic achievement and graduation rates and may inform pedagogical practices of teachers of Navajo students. This research brings targeted awareness of educational gaps, barriers to Navajo student success, and ideas and plans from the lens of specific high school administrators. Results can assist tribal policymakers and public-school leaders in creating a holistic plan to benefit Navajo students, while still adhering to federal policies (Reyhner & Eder, 2015).

Data from the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED, 2022b) depicted issues with Native American graduation rates showing trends from 2019 to 2021 that support the educational learning gap of American Indian/Alaskan Native in comparison to all other subgroups. With current graduation rates and recent state demographic comparisons, the problem is current, relevant, and significant as highlighted from the historical trend data that reveals a continuing educational gap in graduation rates.

Successful Navajo students will bring positive social change through educated experts in various fields of work, provide a stronger workforce while lowering unemployment rates, and positively influence their communities by achieving educational success. The Navajos have a long history of dedication to education for their people. A few days before his death in 1893, the great chief Manuelito, Hastinn Ch'il Haajiin, said, "My grandchild, education is the ladder. Tell our people to take it" (Dine College, n.d.). This study contributes to conversations among Navajo communities with secondary education institutions, tribal and state educational departments, along with tribal, state, and federal legislators to positively influence social change resulting in higher academic achievement and graduation rates among Navajo students in high school.

Summary

In Chapter 1, the low academic achievement and graduation rates of Navajo students was depicted. There is limited research on the gap in practice regarding the perceptions of administrators to mediate these problems. The problem statement supports the rationale of additional research and provides examples of various attempts to state the expectations, problems, and barriers concerning Navajo high school students' academic achievement. The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to examine the perceptions of school administrators concerning challenges they face when supporting the academic success of Navajo high school students and the strategies they use to address these challenges. I used TribalCrit as the conceptual framework to answer the research question for the study. Using a basic qualitative approach, I selected eight administrators to participate in this study. I used semistructured interviews to collect the data, and analyzed

the data using content analysis to produce findings for administrators and various stakeholders of Navajo students. The significance of the study demonstrates the importance of social change this research can bring to multiple Navajo schools, educational departments, school districts, communities, and students. In Chapter 2, I provide a detailed review of the conceptual framework and use seminal and current peer-reviewed literature to support the purpose of this.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following is an exhaustive review of current literature pursuant to the present research study focused upon why little is known about administrators' perceptions concerning Navajo high school students' academic achievement in New Mexico public and tribally controlled schools. Navajo high school students have challenges with successful academic achievement (Desai & Abeita, 2017). Public and tribally controlled high schools with Navajo student populations struggle to identify educational best practices (Nelson-Barber & Johnson, 2019). Information concerning these challenges from public and tribally controlled high school campus administrators is scarce (Ali et al., 2014; Desai & Abeita, 2017; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010; Gentry & Fugate, 2012). Prior researchers have focused studies on system designs and flaws with curriculum (Patterson & Butler-Barnes, 2017). The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to investigate and understand how administrators from public and tribally controlled schools can contribute to the problem of low academic achievement of Navajo students. The findings of the present study can help provide necessary planning and support for administrators in the various school systems, thus improving academic achievement for Navajo students.

In the literature review, I provide background information on tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit), address the differences in public and tribally controlled schools, examine teachers' roles working with Indigenous students, discuss the effects of historical trauma, and review literature pertaining to administrators who support the academic achievement of Navajo high school students. The literature validates the data of

underperforming Navajo students, the necessity for culturally appropriate curricula, and the need for administrators and educators to teach students who come from similar backgrounds. In Chapter 2, I also explain the literature search strategy I used to obtain peer-reviewed articles, provide a critique of the conceptual framework, and present a review of current literature related to the key concepts of this problem. This chapter concludes with a summary of the literature and a transition to the research approach I used for this study in Chapter 3.

Literature Search Strategy

I used various databases to examine literature and articles related to the research topic. These resources include Education Source, ERIC, Gale Academic Onefile Select, Google Scholar, ProQuest, PsycINFO, SAGE Journals, SocINDEX, and Thoreau Multi-Database Search. I started my search by using the following terms and keywords: *tribal critical race theory*, *American Indian education*, *BIE*, *tribally controlled schools*, *public schools,* and *public education.* I proceeded by combining the key terms to find the most relevant information and included synonymous terms to assist with capturing more resources. Some searches required keeping the term *American Indian education* as one of the search options to warrant search results. When I did not specify American Indian education, the search yielded more articles, but the literature was not relevant to the research topic. I focused on peer-reviewed articles within a specific time frame of 5 years. In a subsequent iteration of the search process, I expanded my search to include *administrators' perceptions*, *teachers' perceptions*, *tribal sovereignty*, *historical trauma*, and *critical race theory.* However, several keyword combinations such as *American*

Indian education, *administrator perspectives,* and *tribal critical race theory*, *American Indian education* generated no current peer-reviewed journal article results. This search process exhibits the lack of peer-reviewed articles and reaffirms the gap in literature about practice on the topic of administrators' perceptions of challenges to support student achievement for Navajo high school students.

This research study includes specific terminology; therefore, I reviewed information regarding *tribal sovereignty*, *historical trauma*, and *American Indian education* separately. In addition, administrators' perceptions were broadened to include perspectives, along with also including teachers' perceptions and perspectives to distinguish prior studies' emphasis on teacher input rather than administrator input. I used additional synonymous terms to search the demographic of Native American, American Indian, Navajo, and other names to help with the search, because of the variance of terms used in articles. Furthermore, the general demographic terms are used interchangeably in various fields of academia, along with educational terms crossing over in other disciplines.

Conceptual Framework

The study employs Brayboy's tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit) as the conceptual framework. TribalCrit derives from critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework that focuses on Native American-specific experiences using nine tenets. CRT believes that racism is endemic in society, whereas the TribalCrit central tenet is that colonization is endemic to society (Padgett, 2015).

Bell originally developed the foundation for CRT in two law review articles to address civil rights issues of African Americans. Bell's theory emerged from law as a response to critical legal studies and civil rights scholarship (Milner, 2008). CRT developed foundational assumptions of underlying components that African American peoples encounter from racism. CRT also provided a framework to address educational inequality. Bell (1976) argued that equal educational opportunity is more than the desegregation of schools, but rather equality should consist of African American community's interests, performance, priorities, and provide opportunities in education through civil rights and Brown vs. Board of Education. Bell (1980) explained quality education for African Americans was to improve the existing schools and employ CRT as a scholarly agenda to move towards equal educational opportunity from civil rights.

Bell's work on CRT established three basic assumptions: (a) racism is ordinary and ingrained in society; (b) interest convergence is embedded in United States systems, and White powerholders will only work to advance racial justice if there is convergence between personal interests; and (c) context matters, therefore, lived experience is a tool for highlighting the counternarrative (Blessett & Gaynor, 2021; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Zuberi, 2011). CRT centered on race and racism and specifically exposed contradictions in law; scholars considered the framework as a new set of research assumptions gathering key areas of data when used by fellow CRT scholars (Brayboy, 2005; Solorzano, 1998). CRT allowed researchers to analyze issues and topics concerning racism oppressing not only African Americans but also Hispanic/Latino Americans and Indigenous People in the United States (Blessett & Gaynor, 2021).

CRT is described as a theoretical framework based in activism (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011) and is committed to using social justice (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001) to investigate and challenge racial inequality throughout society. Krueger (2021) explained that CRT used in modern context reveals how and why structures, institutions, and context place race and racism in society as personally experienced. CRT in education is continually growing and becoming a major concept in the field. CRT has expanded to include additional theoretical byproducts including Latino critical race theory, LatCrit (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001), Asian critical race theory, AsianCrit (Chang, 1993), and TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005).

Brayboy (2005) expanded the CRT framework to include experiences of Native Americans through different tenets that highlight colonization, racism, and White supremacy as major contributors that hinder self-determination, sovereignty, and Indigenous-centered theories. Indigenous scholars believe there are many examples of political endeavors that fail to consider American Indians as a unique population, and that traditional critical theories exclude American Indians (Grande, 2000). Native Americans can use TribalCrit to uncover hidden and obvious inequalities that happened and continue to arise. TribalCrit expresses current ideologies for Indigenous people. Indigenous populations in the United States have unique needs in all facets of life including educational practices, complex policies involving both federal and state governments, and social change morés. Within TribalCrit, Brayboy (2005) defined nine tenets that cover the various facets of Indigenous life. Several of the TribalCrit values specifically relate to education. Indigenous communities tend to use a similar vernacular in dealing with local

governments, school districts, states, and federal entities. Brayboy synthesized that language into specific focal points that provide a theory to address current Indigenous issues as follows:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.

2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain.

3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities.

4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.

5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.

6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.

7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.

8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.

9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change. (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429-430)

Indigenous communities are unique in the same sense that European nations or peoples of Asia, Africa, and the Americas may exhibit distinctive social values. The range, variation, and complexities that Indigenous people experience is vast. However, the TribalCrit paradigm provides a theoretical approach towards addressing Indigenous values.

Reflecting on the history of the negative actions to subjugate the Indigenous population, the TribalCrit paradigm provides a change mechanism for Indigenous people and communities. TribalCrit offers opportunities to challenge the status quo and emphasize specific foundations and theory of how to address Indigenous issues in a meaningful and unique way. Indigenous communities are influenced by colonial, historical, and present-day issues that distinguish them from other tribes and communities within the United States (Nelson-Barber & Johnson, 2016). The TribalCrit framework provides an analytical and practical ideology for researchers to study the dynamic culture of Indigenous peoples and acknowledge the historical relevance to current problems of colonization, genocide, assimilation, and oppression that shape the experiences of Native Americans (Daniels, 2011).

Addressing Indigenous issues through the TribalCrit paradigm has been a complex process. TribalCrit imposes the need to end assimilation and colonization while exploring a deeper understanding of Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, the tenets of TribalCrit support advocacy of the unique political status of tribes and nations that support Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty (Sabzalian et al., 2021). Although the Federal Government recognizes Native American sovereignty via the U.S.

Constitution, treaty negotiations, Supreme Court cases, and Congressional legislation, Indigenous communities are often placed as a racial/ethnic minority rather than citizens of their nation or tribe (Brayboy, 2005; Calderon, 2009; Grande, 2015; Sabzalian et al., 2021; Wilkins & Stark, 2018). Padgett (2015) used TribalCrit to explore Native American epistemologies and lived experiences to engage Indigenous perspectives. Both CRT and TribalCrit create the possibility of exposing and confronting continued colonization in educational settings and societal structures (Haynes Writer, 2008). Using TribalCrit translates to researchers and scholars developing Native American epistemologies and lived experiences to engage Indigenous perspectives (Krueger, 2021). Developing TribalCrit into mainstream educational systems, institutions, tribes, state and federal agencies, and present-day society provides the rationale for the discussion of expanding the voice, thought, ideology, and dialogue that addresses issues for Indigenous peoples.

TribalCrit is a broad theory addressing a wide range of phenomena related to the culture of the Indigenous population; therefore, I employed four of nine tenets within this study. Tenet 5 of the paradigm allowed me to investigate the perceptions of administrators concerning challenges to support the academic achievement of Navajo high school students that reflect the Indigenous culture, knowledge, and power. Tenet 6 of TribalCrit allowed me to understand administrators' perceptions of both governmental and educational policies likely resulting in assimilation issues for Navajo high school students' academic achievement. Tenet 7 highlighted the lived realities of Indigenous people that is central to their understanding. Tenet 8 was a focus for the present study. By

interviewing administrators in Navajo high schools, I sought to understand how each describes the phenomena of the educational challenges for Navajo high school students to provide an authentic story of how to increase academic achievement for these students. Tenets 5, 6, 7, and 8 helped me to direct the focus of this study through an Indigenous lens, point out embedded educational areas of assimilation, highlight lived realities of Indigenous people, and reveal stories and accounts that can be used as theory legitimately.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

The literature review includes information from journal articles, current research, specific websites, and limited works related to the purpose of study to understand administrators' perceptions of challenges to support academic achievement for Navajo high school students. I discuss the history of education of Indigenous students, explain topics relating to tribal sovereignty, and describe the differences in various types of educational settings and systems. I also address literature related to the challenges of supporting academic success required in the educational setting for Navajo students by administrators and classroom teachers. In this section, I provide information from previous research and studies and connect those findings to the current study.

History of Indigenous Education

Indigenous people are commonly understood through imagery from movies, advertisements, products, and mascots, which further labeled and named them inaccurately and stripped their humanity (Krueger, 2019). When genocide and termination policies failed to conquer the Indigenous population, widespread American

ideologies of assimilation and civilizing Indigenous people into Western culture became accepted norms in America. The skewed and inaccurate views infiltrated the educational system (Krueger, 2019).

In time, colonization initiatives sought to assimilate Indigenous populations by removing children from families and culture, attempting to change their worldviews, and educating them through a European, westernized, and Christian lens (Choate, 2019; Grande, 2015). Historians of Manifest Destiny, a 19th century religious doctrine, justified and rationalized annexation and expansion across the North American continent and failed to consider how race, religion, and politics demonstrated a gap between Manifest Destiny and its actual effect on the residents of the West, specifically Indigenous peoples (Beyreis, 2018). President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830 advocated a genocidal project of extermination and/or removal of Native population that was interpreted as a divine mission to expand west (Grand, 2018). The nature of colonial schooling is that educational policies and structures default to serve the needs of the colonizer and continue to oppress the colonized communities (Khalifa et al., 2019).

The destruction of Native American culture to conform and adhere to formal western educational thought was believed to be the only alternative to civilize Native Americans. This ideology was stated by Pratt (1892), founder of Carlisle Indian Board School, who said, "the only good Indian is a dead one…all the Indian there is in the race and should be dead. Kill the Indian in him and save the man" (p. 46). The First Nations people in Canada encountered similar policies directed towards their children. Prior to residential schools, reports indicated little could be done with the Indian child, "who goes

to a day school [and] learns little and what little he learns is soon forgotten, while his tastes are fashioned at home, and his inherited aversion to toil is no way combated" (Davin, 1879, p. 2). Eighty residential schools were situated in provinces across Canada by 1933 (Kirkness, 1999). Indigenous people who survived extermination, cultural annihilation, assimilation, and the destructive practices of White settlers to eliminate and erase Native Americans were subject to continual discrimination for generations (Grand, 2018).

Education of Indigenous Students

American Indian education, or Indian education, refers to the entire educational system and includes a variety of institutions within this system. The types of educational systems and institutions available are determined based on the location of a state and its boundaries within a tribal nation. Resources, opportunities, equity, supports, and relationships will vary, like state and tribal relations. Examining the philosophy and delivery of American Indian education has been contentious between Native American communities and Euro-American educators and politicians for generations (Hornback, 2019). The roots of Indian education and policy were driven by Euro-American civilization (Meza, 2015), and early treaties stipulated children should attend school and learn farming or an occupation (Treaty with the Navajo, 1868). However, priorities shifted to assimilation into Western culture, and students were encouraged to learn English, become an individual, work to understand possession of private property, and convert to Christianity (Pratt, 1892).

Historically, government programs for American Indian education are rooted as tools for assimilation on Indigenous people (Huffman, 2008; Laukaitis, 2006; Watras, 2004). Moreover, American Indian education is widely accepted to have developed from the U.S. Federal Government to civilize the American Indian (Newton, 2017). Beginning in 1889 within a 3-year span, 12 boarding schools were opened based on the philosophy of forced assimilation (Robinson-Zanartu & Majel-Dixon, 1996). American Indian education was completely controlled by the federal government until the 1920s (Hornback, 2019). Education was provided to Indigenous children in federally funded mission schools, off-reservation vocational boarding schools, and on-reservation boarding or day schools (Watras, 2004).

In 1927, the U.S. Secretary of Interior commissioned the Meriam Report (Reyhner & Eder, 2017), and its findings submitted to congress concluded Native Americans were subject to unreasonably harsh conditions and recommended significant changes of federal programs for American Indians (Watras, 2004). The Meriam Report was published in 1928 exposing an exposition of Indigenous education that included a multitude of findings revealing that Native Americans who were very poor were confined to reservations, lacked economic opportunity or self-sufficiency, and were not provided adequate education. Recommendations to improve Indian education included replacing curriculum, discontinuing the reliance of child labor in boarding schools, reducing boarding schools, increasing day schools on reservations, and sending American Indian students to public schools when locally available (Meriam, 1928). Subsequently, the Indian Reorganization Act and the Johnson O'Malley Act were passed by federal law in

1934 (McCoy, 2005). These acts began the process of funding to reduce the federal government's control of American Indian education and transferred the responsibility to the state, and later to tribal governments (Watras, 2004).

By the 1970s, as tribal influence increased in American Indian education, tribal organizations and governance were made possible via the Indian Education Act of 1972, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act of 1975 (Public Law 93-638), the Impact Aid Amendment of 1978, and the Tribally Controlled College Assistance Act of 1978 (Hornback, 2019). Despite these changes, student academic achievement in Native American schools remained significantly lower than the performance of students in other American school systems (Hornback, 2019). Native Americans have lower high school and college completion rates than all other groups (Reyhner & Eder, 2017). Native American schools inadequately serviced, and continue to underserve, Indigenous students by providing poor school experiences across the nation (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). The result of this negligent concern is apparent when comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous school academic achievement and graduation rates (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010).

Prior research of Indigenous populations concluded that interventions that honor cultural-related traditions and build on Indigenous heritage improve mental health (Goodkind et al., 2012; LaFromboise & Low, 1989). Educating teachers and administrators on bias, cultural competence, and how to make students of all ethnicities feel included and respected is important within education systems (Gloppen et al., 2018). Indigenous communities concluded that high school dropout stemmed from differences in

school expectations and Indigenous students' perceptions that their teachers did not care or understand their needs (Lee & Quijada-Cerecer, 2010). Castagno (2021) suggested most teachers in Navajo schools are constrained by lack of curricular resources or by mandates to use one-size-fits all scripted curriculum provided by their districts.

Explanations for poor academic achievement of Indigenous students has stymied researchers and Native peoples. Moving forward in Indigenous education, educators and administrators must look at education differently and focus on solution-based strategies for student academic achievement. Rather than providing content in the manner it has been taught and presented for decades, educators need to begin to reflect on what skills and methods are best used to deliver curricula to Indigenous students for appropriate learning. Education is provided to Navajo Nation students in three settings derived from tribal sovereignty.

Tribal Sovereignty of Indigenous Education

Native American tribes within the present borders of the United States are sovereign nations. Currently, 574 Native nations are federally recognized in the United States (National Conference of State Legislators, 2020). Although the sovereignty of Native nations is inherent (Cobb, 2005; Lomawaima, 2000; Lyons, 2000; Wilkins & Stark, 2018), federal recognition of Indigenous sovereignty is ignored and undermined (Sabzalian et al., 2021). Terms like sovereign, nation, and treaty have been eroded to terms such as ward, tribe, and agreement by the United States Government to modify the meaning of the terms and definitions (Lyons, 2000). Historical structures since settler colonialism, whether intentional or out of ignorance, sought to erase Indigenous

sovereignty and eliminate Indigenous lands and life (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2006). Tribal nations more commonly discuss sovereignty and resilience rather than assimilation and conformity.

Tribal sovereignty allows Indigenous families the choice of selecting a school system to which to send their children in hopes of meeting and providing the proper educational needs for their children. Indigenous families have options consisting of public schools, BIE campuses, and tribally controlled schools. Recognizing these anomalies of tribal sovereignty, the educational characteristics of the different educational entities located on and near the Navajo Nation boundaries, which serve Navajo students, is explained in the following sections. Tribal sovereignty of Indigenous education offers families options of selecting which school system—public, BIE, or tribally controlled—to send their children.

Public Education

Public schools that are located within or that border the Navajo Nation are unique entities. In the State of New Mexico, the site of this study, there are several public-school districts that Navajo children attend. Public schools and districts that have Indigenous student populations can apply for additional funding opportunities targeting their Indigenous student populations via the New Mexico Public Education Department and its Indian Education Department. Public (and charter) schools within the district are administered by oversight of the local school district that reports to the state. Challenges for Indigenous students in public schools are evident.

American Indian youth struggle in the K-12 public school system (Castagno et al., 2016). As a collective group, American Indians have the lowest scores on standardized assessments, low high school and college completion percentages, and less representation in college prep and advanced classes (Brayboy et al., 2012; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002). Barriers of Indigenous students attending public schools are not limited to academic performance.

Public schools serving Indigenous students continue to have less-qualified teachers, fewer resources, and maintain poorer relationships with Indigenous communities than public schools serving White students (Lees, 2016). These limitations lead to barriers including a lack of support for teacher housing along with a high cost of goods and services needed to operate a school within the Navajo Nation (Castagno, 2012). The school districts also encounter transportation issues in terms of isolation, dirt roads, rural-addressing complexities, and crossing jurisdictional boundaries of counties, states, and tribes. Addressing issues and barriers between multiple governing establishments such as districts, local, state, and tribal entities usually limit immediate action responses and solutions. These entities work together occasionally but must be mindful of jurisdictions and sovereignty, which takes thoughtful and considerate collaboration that is often not prompt. The same can be said with regards to next school system.

Bureau of Indian Education

The second educational opportunity for Navajo Nation students is provided by the BIE, also known as bureau-operated schools. To explain the current function of the

schools, information concerning the historic background of BIE schools is needed. BIE roots were developed from the Department of War in an era of colonization of Native Americans. Beginning in 1775, Benjamin Franklin headed the Indian Affairs committee, created by the Continental Congress, which included Indian tribes in the U.S. Constitution (U.S. Department of the Interior, n.d.). The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was established to oversee treaty relations with tribes by the Secretary of War in 1824, which would later be named the U.S. Department of the Interior (U.S. Department of the Interior, n.d.). The BIE was established from the amalgamation of the U.S. Department of the Interior and the BIA.

Originally, the BIE was controlled by the U.S. Department of the Interior and called the Office of Indian Education Programs. However, the title was officially renamed the Bureau of Indian Education in 2006 to reflect its structure under the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs (U.S. Department of the Interior, n.d.). The bureau is headed by a director who manages all education, policies, procedures, and finances for education of Ingenious students. The BIE is a federal agency and funding for these schools comes from the federal government budget. The mission of the BIE is to provide a quality education from early childhood through life and to maintain the tribes' cultural diversity (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2016).

As of 2017, the BIE oversees 183 schools on 64 American Indian reservations in 23 states (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2016). The BIE schools vary in size, services, and grades offered. Some of these schools provide residential services and some also offer early childhood programs. Additionally, BIE schools may include an adult

education program in conjunction with their early childhood program. Although not as prevalent, there are still some BIE boarding schools that accommodate dormitories for their students who live at the campus during the week. Other students attend BIE day schools and are provided daily transportation from their homes to the BIE campus location.

In the state of New Mexico, the site of this study, there are 22 BIE schools, 17 of which are located within the Navajo Nation. Students enrolled in BIE schools perform lower than American Indian students attending public schools (U.S. Bureau of Indian Education, 2015). BIE schools experienced a major restructuring of their educational system in 2014. Parents perceived BIA, now BIE, schools as problematic, more so than tribally controlled or public schools, in terms of not valuing Indian children or cultures (Robinson-Zanartu & Majel-Dixon, 1996). The challenge for BIE campuses is to continue educational improvement for Indigenous students and provide researched-based reforms to increase academic achievement.

Tribally Controlled Schools

Indigenous children may obtain education through a third school system offered through individual tribes. Tribally controlled schools are also referred to as grant or contract schools. Oversight of tribally controlled schools comes from the tribe; however, the funds originate from the BIE. The Indian Education Act in 1972 and Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act in 1975 authorized the federal government to enter into contracts and issue grants directly to Native nations to administer schools (McCoy & Villeneuve, 2020). These schools transitioned from an assimilation ethos that

was prevalent in public school education to an educational culture emphasizing Native values and languages within these newly created tribally controlled schools.

The United States government created a blueprint in 2016 for reform which gave control of schools to tribal nations as an effort to reduce centuries of deficits (L. Lee, 2017). Instruction that was once perceived as demoralizing Indigenous people became a system for Indigenous communities to repurpose schools to protect culture, language, and reshape distinctive Indigenous mental, spiritual, and moral qualities (McCoy & Villeneuve, 2020). Many Indigenous students failed in public and private schools because the curriculum did not relate to the students, and teaching strategies used to instruct Indigenous students failed to engage learning (Pang et al., 2021), which led to the development of the Rough Rock Demonstration School in 1966 (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2015; Grande, 2015) that became the first Bureau of Indian Affairs school run by Indigenous people (Pang et al., 2021).

Within New Mexico there are 19 tribally controlled schools and two residential dormitories. Of those campuses 10 schools and one residential dormitory service Navajo students within the Navajo Nation. The central similarity between BIE and tribal schools is their means of funding that is obtained from the same federal financial agency. However, there is a difference between how the two entities administer the schools. BIE schools report directly to a line office that is supervised and controlled by the BIE director; tribally operated schools are accountable only to a federally recognized tribe or a tribal education department within the reservation. Analogous to BIE schools, tribally controlled campuses provide a collection of various school offerings to Indigenous

students based on the community's needs. Tribally controlled schools are more diverse with some schools providing education at campuses ranging from Grades K-12. In the 1960s and 1970s, variations of kindergarten through 12th grade schools grew (McCoy & Villeneuve, 2020) making tribally controlled schools an inviting option for Indigenous students and families.

In summary, Indigenous learning in Western society is arguably still a new concept, has negative connotations, and is viewed as a deterrent to Indigenous tradition, culture, and language. Public schools, as well as BIE and tribally controlled school systems, within or that border the Navajo Nation, encounter unique challenges to properly educate Navajo students. Indigenous populations experience various forms of education, such as tribal teachings about culture, tradition, and history usually passed on from generation to generation, and then transition to the public-school experience, which causes a cultural disconnect and leads to poor school performance (Beck, 2000; Watras, 2004). Student mobility and transferring between public, BIE, and tribally controlled schools presents issues of student attendance, student focus and importance of schooling, and academic consistency. Educators in American Indian schools have noted difficulty with lack of resources for teachers and fewer professional development opportunities than those in urban communities (Reyhner, 2016). Retaining and recruiting the best teachers, whether coming from the community or elsewhere, presents additional challenges. In this exploratory qualitative study, I examine the perceptions of administrators at public and tribally controlled multiple-school systems to observe findings and provide recommendations from their experiences and stories of the

challenges to support the academic success of Navajo students throughout the Navajo Nation.

Historical Effects of Indigenous Education

The narrative and history concerning the education of Indigenous students must be addressed to understand the current attitudes towards Euro-American westernized education. The phenomena of the near extinction of the Indigenous peoples continues to present adverse effects that are absorbed into the culture from generation to generation (Allery, 2017). To understand this historical trauma, the following key concepts need to be understood.

First, early schools, mostly boarding schools, had strategic goals and objectives to strip away cultural identity through dropping Native names and assigning American identities. Next, Indigenous children were forbidden to speak their Native language. Westernized culture infiltrated the school system and fostered a change in students' appearance through uniform clothing and cutting their hair. In addition, Native children were encouraged to forget Indigenous religious traditions and adopt Christianity. Finally, these students were purposely compelled by White culture to assimilate western morés to destroy Indigenous values and traditions.

Educational colonization of Indigenous peoples is observable in other countries. Like the way the United States inaugurated boarding schools for Native American children, First Nation peoples in Canada, Aboriginals in Australia, and British-run Indian schools in India sought to colonize the educational systems of native-born children.

Educational institutions built on colonial structures continue to pose problems for Indigenous children and other communities worldwide.

Indigenous people first identify historical traumatic events, such as boarding schools, as key factors towards the deterioration of American Indian/Alaskan Native values (Brave Heart et al., 2011). Education became a tool by which tribal ways of living were changed or eliminated (Crazy Bull & Lindquist, 2018). Researchers' findings support the long history of suffering experienced by American Indians, such as massacres, forced relocation, and child removal to boarding schools, as factors that continue to influence Indigenous youth—exhibited by high rates of substance abuse, mental health problems, suicide rates, and abusive behaviors that undermine the Indigenous family and community (Brave Heart et al., 2011; Campbell & Evans-Campbell, 2011). Historical effects of Indian education are still relevant. Political, historical, and cultural conflicts between the United States and American Indian tribes continue to contribute as obstacles for Native American students (Hornback, 2019). With increased awareness and education of Indigenous people, stakeholders are looking at the educational implications of historical trauma in Native American communities. Findings from this exploratory qualitative study examine the perceptions of administrators' challenges to support the academic success of Navajo high school students.

Administrators of Indigenous Schools

Administrative roles for any organization are comparable to the performance required of school leadership. However, administrators have individual perceptions concerning beliefs, values, and management styles. Principals and administrators of

Indigenous schools may encounter unique situations to leaders not serving significant Indigenous student populations. Nevertheless, Indigenous school principals must fulfill the duties and administrative responsibilities of school leadership and academic accountability.

The school principal, leader, or administrator serves a critical role in K-12 education (Grissom & Leob, 2011; Murphy, 2017). Effective principals have been found to rely on a network of other principals (Smylie et al., 2020). School leadership, aside from classroom instruction, is the most important school-related factor known to contribute to student learning (Louis et al., 2010). Researchers' findings found the difficult task of principal administration included the ability to serve both the local district and school while (a) translating educational policy from the central office to the classroom, (b) dealing with day-to-day problems at the campus site, (c) carrying diverse responsibilities of leadership and learning, (d) serving local stakeholders, and (e) translating policies created by elected officials and legislative bodies (Rousmaniere, 2013). Administrators of Indigenous schools face these challenges in addition to unique community responsibilities. In this section, I address the importance of hiring effective administrators for Indigenous campuses, the leadership skills required of administrators of Indigenous schools, the importance of effective administrators of Indigenous schools to advocate for academic achievement, and the role of administrators with teachers of Indigenous students to increase academic success.

Hiring Administrators for Indigenous Schools

Hiring principals for schools within the Indigenous community requires diligence and care to select an effective administrator. The process may include interviews with potential candidates to obtain the specific personality characteristics and leadership traits required for the community. Indigenous and minority peoples expect school leaders to possess balanced and selfless leadership traits (Henderson et al., 2015) because when these characteristics are absent, school leaders reproduce school management approaches similar to those of colonial times that result in a disconnection of education and school activities for Indigenous families and students (Khalifa et al., 2019). Native scholars argue that researchers, school leaders, and educators must acknowledge Indigenous knowledge systems, foundational traditions, and self-determination to counteract the legacy of Westernized education and colonial narratives (Brayboy et al., 2012; Waterman & Harrison, 2017). Districts that have large populations of Indigenous students provide a type of cultural training for teachers to be aware of surface-level cultural norms; however, no such training exists for administrators who are expected to know these Indigenous students, families, and communities.

The workforce throughout many Indigenous nations lacks properly certified and trained administrators, specifically in education. In communities with Indigenous populations, where unemployment has peaked at over 28% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021), obtaining qualified candidates in teaching sectors is a major concern (Al-Asfour, 2018). School leaders are responsible for many functions of a school, including the academic achievement of students, which is essential to carefully selecting appropriate

administrators. School principals play an important all-encompassing role of supporting the school, staff, and student performance; therefore, creating effective and clear hiring policies to hire the best performing school principals is essential (AlShehhi & Alzouebi, 2020; Fullan & Leithwood, 2012). Hiring principals, administrators, and school leaders in any school system is important because of the magnitude and multiple responsibilities administrators must possess in the operation of a school. Additional factors such as cultural significance and other unique components of leadership in an Ingenious community is discussed in the next section.

Competencies Required for Administrators of Indigenous Schools

A school principal, administrator, or leader who serves Indigenous students must possess an abundance of skills and wealth of knowledge concerning both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Indigenous educational leaders use their language, knowledge, history, and ethnic backgrounds (Elsaid & Elsaid, 2012; Gay, 2002; Lovett et al., 2014) to enhance cultural similarities of their families and students to improve student behavior and school culture (Hohepa, 2013). The complexity of the administrative role requires a principal to be creative, understanding, and possess critical thinking skills.

School administrators and leaders who work at schools with Indigenous students, families, and communities may be expected to understand the magnitude of cultural relevance, disenfranchisement of equitable educational opportunities, and colonialism and lasting effect on Indigenous peoples. Findings from Preston et al. (2017) reinforced the need for principals to have knowledge of worldviews, promote school communities and relationships with the locals, and encourage culturally focused instruction.

Responsive leaders are aware of their community's history of colonialism and current challenges but continue to promote student teaching and learning by acknowledging students' traditional teachings and values (Gay, 2002; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2019). Supportive administrators who possess the willingness and ability to conduct meaningful cultural practices are crucial in Indigenous communities (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2015). Administrators are required to exhibit the ability to address equity from the leadership choices they make while prioritizing the creation of supportive learning environments for Native American students (Caffrey, 2021). Administrators must acknowledge their moral obligation to Native American students (Johnson, 2018) and solicit opinions of Native American students within their educational institutions (Caffrey, 2021). The demands for administrators of Indigenous schools require knowledge, training, and empathy.

School administrators of Indigenous schools must possess and develop complex skills to approach Indigenous student populations. In Khalifa et al. (2019) the authors provided insights on post-colonial schooling and determined that schools must decenter Western colonial approaches to leadership through new approaches. Principals play an important role to provide a foundation of academic learning, implement leadership and management skills, and serve as an encourager for all stakeholders (O'Brien et al., 2021). Principals are also tasked with achieving educational goals that requires dedicated administrators who focus on service and learner support (Carr, 2000). Educational leaders who continue to practice colonial leadership structures meant to eliminate Indigenous cultures, norms, languages, and epistemologies of their Indigenous roots create

dysfunctional learning environments (Hohepa, 2013; Minthorn & Chavez, 2015). Native Americans practicing traditional ways tend to view formal Westernized education detrimental to tribal culture, traditions, and identity (Red Horse, 1980). Indigenous leadership emphasizes the importance of relationships between people presently, those who came before, and future generations (Henderson et al., 2015). Administrators of Indigenous campuses need to have skills to challenge colonial structures and confront oppressive educational practices in hopes of supporting the academic success of Indigenous students.

Administrators of Indigenous Schools and Academic Achievement

Administrators of Indigenous schools bear the responsibility to address the academic success of the student population. Effective school leadership relates to improved student achievement (Day et al., 2011; Dinham, 2008; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Louis et al., 2010; Moffitt, 2007; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). Principals who are able to culturally communicate with students is a requirement that is needed by leadership in Indigenous schools. A lack of effective leadership, including a conflicting comprehension of backgrounds in culturally based communication styles, was found to play a role in poor student academic achievement (Hall et al., 2013; Urrieta, 2016). Hall et al. (2013) observed the influence of educational leadership communication and achievement gaps at the student level with a predominant focus on intercultural development and little with intercultural competence. The findings suggested various barriers and more training for educators and administrators would be conducive to all.

Student academic achievement is an ongoing challenge for Indigenous students that administrators struggle to address with meaningful strategies and solutions. Students of each major ethnic group in America have made some educational progress in the last decade; however, the advancement of Native American students has remained relatively the same in comparison to other ethnic groups, which has contributed to the widened achievement gap between their White peers (Red Road, 2021). In 2016, the national high school status completion rate average was 93%. Ninety-four percent of White students graduated high school, but only 75% of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students graduated, which was the lowest of all identified groups (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The gap in high school completion between White and AI/AN students was 19%. In 2017, the national average high school dropout rate was 5.4%. White students ranked 4.3% and AI/AN ranked the highest at 10.1%, with 13.3% of AI/AN males the most likely to drop out of high school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Additionally, only 70% of the Native students who start kindergarten will graduate from high school, compared to a national average of 82%. Students attending BIE schools have an even lower graduation rate of 53% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020a). Indigenous students continue to remain statistically low academically compared to their peers and the achievement gap remains the same, or in particular cases the gap in academic learning increases.

The New Mexico Public Education Department (2022a) state assessments for the 2021-2022 school year, aligned with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, resulted in below-average learning in all testing areas for Indigenous students compared

to other racial and ethnic groups. In English Language Arts (ELA), 60% of Asian American students, 52% White students, 32% African American students, and 29% Latino/Hispanic American students scored proficient or above, and less than 20% Native American students scored proficient or above. In Early Literature (Early Lit) similar results were observed. Forty-nine percent of Asian American students, 40% White students, 26% African American student, and 24% Latino/Hispanic American students scored proficient or above, and less than 20% Native American students scored proficient or above. Mathematics testing results indicated that 55% of Asian American students, 41% White students, and less than 20% of African American, Latino/Hispanic American, and Native American students scored proficient or above. Finally, in science 59% of Asian American students, 54% White students, 27% African American students, and 28% Latino/Hispanic American students scored proficient or above, and less than 20% Native American students scored proficient or above.

The graduation rate of public high school students in the United States was 85% in 2017, in New Mexico the graduation rate was only 71%, which was the lowest nation-wide. Additionally, New Mexico had the third highest dropout rate in the nation at 8.6% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020b). National data showed that New Mexico public school students rank near the highest in dropout rates and rank the lowest in completion of high school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020a). Data from within New Mexico shows the gap between the various groups of students, with Indigenous students performing the lowest in nearly every educational subject category (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2022a). Therefore, it can be inferred that

Indigenous students attending public schools in New Mexico are the lowest performing student demographic in the lowest performing state.

A contributing factor to inequitable education within the Navajo Nation is poverty. Underachievement of Indigenous students is an ongoing cycle of continued poverty and limited self-determination of Indigenous communities and people (Fryberg et al., 2013; Harrington & Pavel, 2013; Meza, 2015; Verbos et al., 2011). Different percentages of families deal with a lack of essential resources including electricity, and in some situations, a lack of running water. Throughout the Navajo Nation it is estimated that 40% of families do not have running water nor do 30% have electricity in their homes (Dig Deep & U.S. Water Alliance, 2020). Additionally, wireless technology is unavailable for these families and students. It is estimated that approximately half of Native American children in school do not have access to reliable internet at home (Irish, 2020). Administrators of Indigenous students can meet the needs of students that may lead to better student academic achievement.

Multiple Indigenous communities world-wide have taken different approaches to addressing unique barriers in education to increase the academic success of Indigenous students. In New Zealand, a government-initiated strategy to encourage Māori students to achieve academically directed principals to provide education using Māori-distilled values to engage learning (Ministry of Education, 2008). Canada initiated a provincial preparation program for school leaders to educate First Nations children. Educators are trained on the importance for school leaders to have the knowledge and skills to effectively manage organizational resources–physical, financial, and human–to build and

maintain a safe, efficient, and inclusive school environment for Indigenous students. However, the process fails to acknowledge chronic underfunding of reservation schools dating back to the establishment of the Indian Residential Schools and continues for First Nations students (Manitoba Education, 2014). Attempts to instill cultural values to address learning and expand academic success in schools have been minimally successful because of underfunding cited as an ongoing barrier. These instances are examples of ways some educational entities and Indigenous students are attempting to address academic achievement; however, Indigenous educational practices in the United States may vary among different communities.

Educational approaches for Indigenous students within the United States are evident but lack data surrounding school leadership. In the United States, Indigenous students are underachieving in kindergarten through Grade 12 when compared to non-Indigenous students (Faircloth et al., 2015; Meza, 2015). School leaders in Indigenous schools face challenges to meet specific cultural priorities and close the achievement gap, as measured via Westernized standards (Meza, 2015). Researchers' findings indicate that cultural responsiveness and cultural-based learning can positively increase student academic performance (Cheriani et al., 2015; Singh & Espinoza-Herold, 2014; Singh et al., 2016). However, there continues to be a scarcity of information, research, and knowledge concerning school leadership and learning in Indigenous schools where community values are different than mainstream schools (Ciotti et al., 2019). Information regarding the correlation of cultural components and positive academic success is

available; however, a gap in the literature about practice exists to determine the connection to school leadership.

School leaders require specific knowledge and understanding of cultural components for Indigenous students to decipher underachievement and lower academic performance. The school principal's role to include cultural values and integrate culture and education into the school system is crucial for student achievement (Sahlan, 2014). Examining the role of school leaders' possible treatments is essential to determine the effect on student performance (Gebhard, 2017; Mackie et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017). Culture, values, and communication influence the effectiveness of school leadership; therefore, the importance of these ideas and methods for indigenous education require more attention and research (Cajete, 2015; Gebhard, 2017; Higgins et al., 2013; Mackie et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017). School leaders have the ability to affect school initiatives and student learning in various capacities through their leadership and decisions, although more research is needed for Indigenous students and communities. Administrators of Indigenous students should possess Indigenous-focused cultural and informal experiences along with specific tribal knowledge to provide detailed guidance to educators who work directly with Indigenous students and oversee their academic growth and performance.

Administrator Leadership of Learning for Indigenous Students

Administrators of Indigenous schools need to ensure the academic success and learning for Indigenous students. Classroom instruction is the number one contributor that influences student academic achievement and success (Leithwood et al., 2004). Many teachers enter classrooms inadequately prepared to address the needs of Indigenous

students, resulting in low academic success (Belgarde et al., 2002; Lees, 2016; Writer, 2010). Different factors contribute to the potential effectiveness of classroom teachers ranging from experience, certification, training, and knowledge of their students.

Administrators realize the important of training teachers to include skills and techniques to engage Indigenous student learning. Partnerships and programs for teachers with tribal organizations are present on reservation lands in the southwest and plains of the United States (Castagno, 2012; Stachowski & Mahan, 1998; White et al., 2007). However, there is little current information about this topic. In a seminal study by Stachowski and Mahan (1998), the researchers studied the process used by a midwestern university that sent candidate teachers to BIA and public schools on the Navajo Nation to prepare them to teach diverse students and engage in community collaboration. Although this practice appeared to be a harmless attempt to assist teachers' preparation, it negatively influenced Navajo students by placing novice teachers who lacked experience in classrooms without proper certification, training, and knowledge of the students they served. Writer (2001) found that teacher candidates had assumptions about indigenous people and cultures based on hurtful, inaccurate stereotypes and biases.

The literature concerning teacher preparation programs recommended field experience with Indigenous children and has prompted changes in resources and approaches to work area with Indigenous populations (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Lees, 2016; Pewewardy, 1998; Writer, 2001; Zeichner, 2010). Administrators are open to dialogue regarding the needs to educate minorities. Although studies have validated university and community collaboration to be a positive influence for diverse classrooms

(McDonald et al., 2011; Murrell, 2000), the diversity among Indigenous tribes is complex (Lees et al., 2016). However, the narrative is focused on recruiting Indigenous people to become teachers in Indigenous communities.

Educators of Indigenous students are tasked with bridging education and cultural knowledge for Indigenous student success and familiarity. Indigenous teacher education programs can practice and support critical Indigenous consciousness to address false narratives, identify Native presence, and promote listening and learning from Indigenous perspectives (Kulago, 2019). Researchers have sought alternative investigations of Indigenous education that reach beyond schooling and are supported through tribal-specific innovations, epistemologies, and priorities (Warren, 2014).

Administrators have examined studies from other countries to assist them to locate appropriate teachers for Indigenous schools in the United States. Researchers' findings from New Zealand found that quality education for Māori students included teaching practices imbued with cultural knowledge, spiritual well-being, and environmental elements (Durie, 2006; Turketo & Smith, 2014). Gallop and Bastien (2016) examined academic success in Canadian institutions, and although improvements are apparent quantitively, many challenges still exist for Aboriginal students in Canada. Indigenous educators must seek to improve educational outcomes that respect and sustain Indigenous ways of knowing (Nelson-Barber & Johnson, 2019). The development of Indigenous educators to serve Indigenous youth is important for helping tribal nations to build a strong present and future community (Anthony-Stevens et al., 2020). Lees (2016) concluded that administrators and universities need to address teacher programs that

reconsider curriculum to address all students, partner with indigenous communities, meet with school and tribal leadership, network with tribal entities, and develop communication with those that provide tribal resources.

Native teachers in the classroom allow students to identify with someone from their community and engage in learning activities. Native students' interactions with Indigenous faculty and staff have been found to increase learning and development (Larimore & McClellan, 2005) because Indigenous educators and leaders have a familiarity with Native students and their communities (Tippeconnic, 2005). Authentic experiences and working relationships with Indigenous communities help to break the cycle of teachers as agents of assimilation (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009). Professional development that may support Navajo schools is a model that is teacher driven, long term, and collaborative across grade levels, content areas, and school types; however, curriculum in Navajo schools is standardized and disconnected from Indigenous culture and knowledge (Castagno, 2021). Along with discrepancies in Indigenous education are a host of specific logistical barriers that may affect Navajo students' ability to adequately learn and be successful academically. It is important for administrators to address challenges that hinder academic achievement to allow Indigenous educators to focus on teaching rather than barriers, tensions, and communication gaps.

In summary, administrators in schools need to implement measures to remove colonial oppression by empowering Indigenous people, guiding self-determination, and bridging education policies and requirements to include Indigenous thought and a Native viewpoint. Further research should focus on ways administrators can create a supportive

learning environment for Native American students (Brayboy, 2005). However, little research is found in the peer-reviewed literature concerning the perceptions and actions of principals who influence Aboriginal and Indigenous student success (Preston et al., 2017). The conceptual framework of TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005) is used by researchers and scholars to critique colonizing school structures and policies that are oppressive of Indigenous people, self-determination, and education. This study examined the perceptions of administers' challenges to support the academic success of Navajo high school students.

Summary and Conclusions

Indigenous students have options when selecting a school to attend; those school systems include public, BIE, and tribally controlled schools. The data and findings from the peer-reviewed studies and research articulated in this chapter depict similar themes of these school systems: low academic achievement, low graduation rates, and high dropout rates. Although these studies share data and highlight gaps in performance, information addressing the potential barriers is limited or nonexistent.

There exists a gap in the research about practice concerning challenges administrators experience to support the academic success of Indigenous high school students. Researchers' findings revealed educators and tribal leaders providing culturally responsive schooling may help to increase academic achievement (Castagno et al., 2016). Despite the various options of schooling for Indigenous students in public, tribally controlled, and BIE settings, quality culturally responsive education remains a challenge.

When searching for information about this topic, I found information and findings from research articles concerning low Indigenous academic scores, low graduation rates, and high dropout rates. Some research, based on data from students' academic scores, presented findings suggesting potential reasons for issues and possible practices to consider (Nelson-Barber & Johnson, 2016, 2019). Literature on administrators serving Indigenous students is limited because published studies mainly focused on teachers' perceptions or experiences of working with Navajo students. However, studies examining school administrators' perceptions about challenges to support the academic success of Indigenous students was limited and underrepresented. The collective lack of administrator input in general is concerning because school administrators determine the allocation of resources and funding, hire teachers, establish curriculum, and guide the learning strategies to be used in the school environment. Additionally, school administrators are the spokespersons for families and students. This critical voice is lacking in the literature.

The basic qualitative study examined administrators' perceptions of challenges to support the academic achievement of Navajo high school students. Limited research has been offered on the administrators' role in identifying the challenges that may support academic achievement for Navajo high school students. This study provides additional research of administrators identifying challenges that will help support Navajo high school students. In Chapter 3, I address the methodology for this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of school administrators concerning challenges they face when supporting the academic success of Navajo high school students, as well as the strategies they use to address these challenges. In Chapter 3, I address the research design, rationale for selecting this design, and define my role as the researcher. In the methodology section, I provide information on the process to select participants for this study and discuss the process and procedures that were used for participation and data collection. I also describe how I developed the interview protocol, the plans to interview participants, and define the process of how I analyzed the data. Finally, I explain the steps to establish trustworthiness for this study, detail ethical procedures, and summarize Chapter 3 for this study.

Research Design and Rationale

Administrators of Indigenous schools need information to help increase student academic achievement for Navajo high school students. Peer-reviewed articles have provided findings concerning the poor grades and low graduation rates of Indigenous students (Bordelon & Atkinson, 2020; Creighton, 2007; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Masta, 2018). However, little is known about the subsequent topic of how school administrators address these issues through administrative decisions.

School administrators in New Mexico with high Indigenous student populations encounter unique challenges to meet Indigenous students' academic needs systemically. In this study, I investigate how high school administrators determine strategies and

employ their administrative role to increase student academic achievement for Navajo high school students. The research questions that address the problem of this study are as follows:

RQ1: How do administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools describe the needs of Navajo students and the kinds of challenges they encounter to achieve academically?

RQ2: How do administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools prioritize their approach and planning to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically?

I used a qualitative approach to investigate this problem. Qualitative research is a methodological pursuit of understanding how people view, approach, and experience the world and make meaning of their experiences and specific phenomena (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). In a qualitative study a researcher collects data and interprets the information to distinguish meaning (Polit & Beck, 2006) and studies experiences through the lens of the participants (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Essential components of scholarly qualitative research include acknowledgement of the purpose and motive of the study, alignment between the approach and data collection method, and recognition of bias that may affect the researchers' analysis of the data (Caelli et al., 2003). The researcher analyzes and shares the experiences of the participants to help address the problem of the study.

Qualitative researchers interact with study participants to interpret their experiences and analyze those experiences. Qualitative research uses various methods that are complex (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). I used a basic qualitative approach to make

connections and present findings using a real-world setting (see Caelli et al., 2003; Yin, 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2020) explained qualitative research focuses on understanding experiences of participants with reliability. Qualitative research includes a topic of interest, problem, or question that the research attempts to answer (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Qualitative research offers various attributes that help establish principles.

Using a basic qualitative approach, I focused on the answers the participants provide to the research question to learn their perspectives, experiences, decision-making processes, and strategies as administrators from interviews. A basic qualitative approach is the best approach for this study because I selected specific principals and assistant principals to interview who are knowledgeable about the phenomenon of this study (Caelli et al., 2003). A basic methodological approach allowed me to conduct semistructured interviews with the participants to answer the research question of this study. The findings of this study provide recommendations and suggestions for administrators to address the low academic achievement Navajo students experience.

Role of the Researcher

For this basic qualitative study, I was the sole instrument to collect and interpret the data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020). As such, it was important to reveal my positionality as the researcher (see Wall et al., 2004). I have 8 years of experience as an administrator with public, Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), and tribally controlled schools. I work with multiple school districts and agencies in a southwestern state in my present position. In this study, I interviewed high school administrators using interview questions and an interview protocol to assist with understanding the collected data. The participants of this

study would not be educators whom I supervised or with whom I have personal relationships. I do not work with any school participating in this study; however, I know some of the employees. Thus, I took specific measures to mediate potential bias.

I served as the interviewer and observer to collect data for this qualitative study. I was responsible for interviewing high school administrators at public and tribally controlled school systems. As the researcher, I developed the protocol for the interview before the interviews and created the interview questions. I facilitated the interviews, and I took notes and recorded the session using an audio recorder during the interviews. After interviews were completed, I transcribed the interview responses, as well as analyzed and interpreted the data collected using content analysis to develop various categories and themes related to the participants' responses.

To prevent any researcher bias, I frequently monitored my work and attempted to maintain research integrity to ensure the data collected were an honest representation of participants' responses (see Yin, 2016). I also used a reflective journal for self-examination and bracketing (see Ahern, 1999). Including bracketing during the interview process helps identify a researcher's predisposition and reduces potential influence of bias during the research study (Yin, 2018). Bracketing helped me to identify preconceptions and biases (see Wall et al., 2004) concerning how principals address barriers for Navajo students' academic achievement. Journaling and self-reflection allowed me to document my preconceptions prior to the research process and prevent bias during data collection, analysis, and the interpretation of potential research findings.

Methodology

A basic qualitative study is an appropriate approach to collect data for this study that examines administrators' perceptions of challenges to support the academic achievement for Navajo high school students in public and tribally controlled schools in a southwestern state. The data were collected during semistructured interviews consisting of eight high school administrators representing public and tribally controlled schools. In this section I explain how I selected the participants for this study and the interview protocol I used to conduct participant interviews. I also detail the procedures to select participants and explain the data analysis process.

Participant Selection

I used purposeful sampling to identify possible participants for this study. When selecting participants, the researcher must consider who is knowledgeable about the topic and will provide targeted information relating to the phenomenon of the study (Yin, 2016). Purposeful sampling allows a researcher to collect relevant and detailed information from participants' real-life experiences and occurrences related to the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2016). I identified participants who could expand the study and provide answers to the research questions.

I invited 8 high school administrators of public and tribally controlled schools with American Indian enrollment in a southwestern state to be participants. Using the purposeful sampling method, I identified school administrators capable of providing data to answer the research questions. Purposeful sampling is the deliberate selection of an individual based on the qualities the person possesses (Tongco, 2007). The standard

sample size for qualitative research is between one to 10 persons because individuals can generate a multitude of ideas and words that become a large amount of data (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The researcher decides what needs to be known and finds individuals who can and are willing to provide the information from their knowledge or experiences (Bernard, 2002; Lewis & Sheppard, 2006). Purposive sampling is the most appropriate sampling process to examine the perceptions of administrators' challenges to support the academic success of Navajo high school students.

I focused this study by using administrator participants of high schools in the state of New Mexico that provided findings of this study to address initiatives unique to schools in the state. Because of the limited number of campuses in New Mexico serving Navajo high school students, I chose to solicit participants from public school districts and also use a non-site design to include other administrators in tribally controlled schools.

Public and tribally controlled school districts have different procedures for researchers who conduct studies. To acquire access to participants from the public school districts for this study, I obtained a letter of approval from public school districts to conduct interviews at each district. To solicit participants from tribally controlled school districts, I used a self-designed flyer to send to administrators by email. Additionally, I also sought approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct a basic qualitative study in these school districts.

After I received formal approval to conduct the study from the university's IRB and each school district, I used information from the district and school websites of the

public schools to obtain the names of potential participants. The participants at each public school were voluntary and included principals, assistant principals, and school administrators. Because the structure of tribally controlled school systems is organized differently, I invited the head school administrators at these schools to participate in the study using a non-site design model.

The criteria for the participants of this study were that each administrator possess an administrative license issued by the state and work at a campus with at least 30% Navajo high school student enrollment. Student demographic populations were verified using public files of state reported data for the public schools. To ensure participants met the criteria, I consulted the publicly listed educator licensure website that lists the names of teachers and administrators who are certified in the state. I examined state public files to identify campuses that met the criteria of Navajo students on each campus.

Once I had the list of potential participants from each of the public school districts and had confirmed they met the critical for this study, I sent emails using my Walden University email account to the school administrators' work emails. I stated clearly in the subject line of the email that this was a request for their participation in an educational research study. The same process was used to contact administrators using the non-site design model. I selected names meeting the criteria for this study from public information on the school websites. Then, I sent a self-designed flyer, using my Walden University email, requesting participants to contact me if interested in volunteering for this research study within 5 days. When I did not gain a sufficient number of responses, I sent a second email to the participants or called them directly to solicit their voluntary participation in

this study. I requested that those participants who agreed to participate in this study respond by email with the words "I consent."

Once I confirmed those participants willing to participate, I scheduled a time to conduct the interviews with each participant individually using a videoconferencing program. Two days prior to the interview time, I sent a confirmation email to the participant with the agreed upon date and time to ensure there were no conflicts with the schedule. Because I purposefully selected administrators from school districts and tribally controlled schools to participate in this study, based on the criteria of the study, the participants each had knowledge of working with Navajo high school students and make decisions that may support student academic achievement. In the next section, I provide details on the instrument used.

Instrumentation

In this study, I used individual semistructured interviews to collect data. Semistructured interviews allow adaptation to collect information through in-depth questioning (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Semistructured interviews contain questions that are created in advance to focus the participant to answer the research questions and allow the researcher to prompt to gather additional information.

I used an interview protocol (see Appendix) to structure the conversations with the participants and prepare scripted questions. I created the interview questions based on literature sources and the TribalCrit framework to establish sufficiency of the data collection instrument to answer the research question. The semistructured interviews were conducted to collect data to examine and understand high school administrators'

perceptions concerning the support of Navajo high school students' academic achievement. I used the interview protocol to also obtain demographic information and share information about the purpose of study, confidentiality requirements, and questions from participants (see Yin, 2016). Any demographic details shared in the final study are masked to prevent readers from deducing a participant's identity. Within the interview guide provided space for bracketing notes and thoughts I had during the interview process. I used a digital recording device for each interview to accurately record all information from which I made transcriptions to examine and analyze the data.

To ensure the content validity of this interview protocol, I collaborated with two educational leaders who did not participate in the study but have experience with Indigenous leaders, schools, and students. Administrator A is a former superintendent, assistant superintendent, and has been a principal of various public-school districts for 17 years. For the past 20 years, Administrator A has advocated for American Indian leadership in public education at the university level. Administrator B has been a professor at the university level for 8 years and is an advocate for American Indian education through teaching, thought, and action. I asked these administrators to provide feedback on the interview protocol questions and made modifications based on their input and included recommendations to ensure the validity in the interview protocol.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Selecting participants for this study was a crucial step to ensure productive responses during the interviews for this study to answer the research question. Researchers must understand the purpose and goals of the research when selecting

participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). I used purposeful sampling to include participants who had knowledge about the academic progress of American Indian/Alaska Native high school students and who are licensed administrators of Navajo high schools. The following sections describe how I recruited the participants for this study, arranged their participation in the interview process, and began data collection.

Procedures for Recruitment for Public Schools

The steps by which I selected and recruited the public-school participants for this study and how I facilitated their participation to collect data are as follows:

1. Obtained approval from each school district in study.
2. Obtained formal Walden University IRB approval.
3. Reviewed the public records of the high schools in the district to determine schools that had a minimum of 30% Navajo student population.
4. Contacted the district's human resources department to acquire the names of potential participants for this study.
5. Confirmed potential candidates were licensed administrators.

Procedures for Recruitment for Non-Site Design Schools

The steps by which I selected and recruited the non-site design participants for this study and how I facilitated their participation to collect data are as follows:

1. Obtained formal Walden University IRB approval.
2. Reviewed records, if any, or school policies of enrollment to determine schools that have a minimum of 30% Navajo student population.

3. Sent potential participants a self-designed flyer that sought potential participants who were New Mexico PreK-12 licensed administrators working in a high school setting to contact me to be part of this study.
4. Verified that responding administrators retained a New Mexico PreK-12 Administrative license.
5. Sent an email with the consent form for non-site design administrators to each potential participant willing to be part of this study requesting they respond to the email with the words "I consent" in their reply email.

Before beginning this study, I obtained approval from the Walden University IRB to conduct the study and protect the rights and confidentiality of each participant. Next, I obtained letters from the appropriate individual or group for each school and school district. Each public and tribally controlled school district has a specific process to obtain approval for participants to be part of a study. In addition to each district having a unique process, none of the district websites provided pertinent information, checklists, or flow chart showing the steps required to obtain approval for conducting research in their district. Because working with a federally recognized tribe includes an extra layer of approval to protect the sovereignty and well-being of the Indigenous people, the non-site design worked best for participants at tribally controlled schools.

Public School District 1 in this study had no formal approval process for research to be collected in the district, and I was able to receive a letter of cooperation from the Executive Director of Support Services. Public School District 2 in this study required a formal process through submission to the district's school board for review and

consideration for approval. I prepared an email and sample letter of cooperation letter for the school board to review during a work session prior to the school board meeting. I attended this session, presented the purpose of the study, and answered questions that arose pertaining to the school district's potential involvement in this study. The school board approved the request to participate and issued a letter of cooperation signed by the School Board President.

To increase the number of participants for this study because of the limited number of high schools that enroll Navajo students at the high school level in New Mexico, I employed a non-site design. The Navajo Nation did not have an IRB process. Potential tribally controlled school participants participated as individuals through the non-site design, which does not require Navajo Nation approval. I did not ask volunteer participants who responded to the non-site design invitation to speak on behalf of their particular school, but rather to respond to the interview questions of this study from their personal expertise as it relates to the perceptions of school administrators concerning challenges they face when supporting the academic success of Navajo high school students and the strategies they use to address these challenges. Before recruiting additional administrators from tribally controlled schools using the non-site design, I verified that each potential administrator met the criteria of this study.

I selected eight participants for this study who were certified administrative principals, assistant principals, or school administrators from public and tribally controlled high schools located in a southwestern state. Participants who had an administrative license from the state and work in high schools that have a minimum of

30% Navajo high school student populations were selected to be part of this study. To identify these schools and school districts, I verified student demographic populations using public files of state reported data for the public schools. Tribally controlled schools require Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood documentation to enroll students in their schools. In 1975 the Federal government provided Native American tribes the authority to operate educational programs that served Indigenous people. To provide services to eligible persons, Native American people must present evidence of tribal membership documentation based on Indigenous ancestry (The 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act). Therefore, all students enrolled in these schools are Native American.

Once I determined the campuses in school districts that met the criteria of this study, I contacted each school district's human resources department to determine potential individuals who may participate in the research study. Using state files that were publicly available, I confirmed that each school leader was certified with an administrative license and was employed at a campus with a minimum enrollment of 30% Navajo high school student populations. Once I received permission to ethically begin the research for this study, I contacted potential voluntary participants.

Procedures for Participation for Public Schools

Having determined potential participants for this study, I took the following actions to recruit administrators for the interview process:

1. Obtained a letter of cooperation from the public school district.

2. Selected school administrators at each school district to receive an individual email inviting them to be part of this study.
3. Sent an electronic initial email and consent form to recruit eight school administrators to participate in this study.
4. This email included the study's purpose, explained the voluntary nature of the study, and requested consent.
5. Sent a follow-up email or called potential administrators after 5 days when sufficient responses were not received.
6. Obtained informed consent by email for each confirmed participant.
7. Scheduled one-on-one interviews with each individual participant using a videoconference call program upon confirmation of participation.
8. Sent an electronic confirmation reminder to participants 3 days prior to the scheduled interview.

Procedures for Participation for Non-Site Design Schools

Having determined potential non-site design school participants based on the criteria for this study, I took the following actions to recruit administrators for the interview process:

1. Selected names who met the criteria for this study from the public information on the school websites.
2. Emailed the self-designed flyer to potential participants.
3. Waited for administrators interested in participating in this study to respond.

4. Sent a follow-up email or called administrators who did not respond to the consent email within 5 days.
5. Emailed the non-site design consent form to potential participants.
6. Obtained informed consent by email for each confirmed participant.
7. Scheduled one-on-one interviews with each individual participant using a videoconference call program upon confirmation of participation.
8. Sent an electronic confirmation reminder to participants 3 days prior to the scheduled interview.

After I received approval to collect data from the Walden University IRB and the public and tribally controlled high schools, I recruited eight appropriate participants who met the criteria of the study using the aforementioned steps. Using my Walden email, I contacted each potential participant in a non-coercive manner and sent an invitation to voluntarily participate in the proposed research. To ensure that the participants identified this email correctly, rather than as an unsolicited bulk mail solicitation, I placed in the email subject line "invitation to participate in an educational study." In the body of the email, I included the study's purpose, explained the voluntary nature of the study, and requested consent. I asked each administrator who was willing to be part of this study to respond with the words "I consent" in their reply email. I requested the administrators to reply to the email within 5 days and followed up with participants after 5 days by a further email or phone call if I did not receive a response.

After I received consent responses from participants, I scheduled interviews that were conducted via video conferencing because of the logistic and geographic challenges

of these school districts located around the Navajo Nation. To ensure that interviews were conducted during a time that would not interfere with administrative duties at the schools, I requested each participant select a conducive time that included 45 – 60 min during which the interview could be conducted in a private setting to reduce interruptions and allow information to be kept confidential. Three days prior to the scheduled interview time, I emailed confirmation notices to the participants with their selected time for the interview to prevent any potential scheduling conflicts.

At the beginning of each interview, I informed participants of the nature of the study, potential benefits of participation, and assurance of confidentiality. I reiterated Walden University's requirements of confidentiality through the protection rights of participants and data storge requirements to maintain the data for at least 5 years beyond the completion of the study. The timeline of consent and completion of interviews was 1 month.

Procedures for Data Collection

The interviewing process is a strategic step in qualitative research. Accurately acquiring precise data that answer the research questions of a study allows researchers to present authentic insights from the analysis process (Yin, 2016). The data collection procedure was as follows:

1. Conducted the semistructured interview using a videoconference platform.
2. Assigned participants a confidential coding number.
3. Transcribed participants' interviews.

I scheduled one 45 – 60 min interview with each participant. The interviews were conducted using a video-conferencing program. I did not schedule meetings immediately before or after the designated allotted time, and I identified a specific location to help limit any disruptions during the interviews; I also asked the participants to comply with similar scheduling arrangements. I planned to be mindful of rescheduling interviews when interruptions occurred because principals and assistant principals have demanding schedules that often involve meeting with students, teachers, staff, and parents, but the occasion did not arise.

I conducted the semistructured interviews using questions and probing questions. Before beginning the interview, I sought to introduce and maintain a professional but relaxed setting to achieve an interview milieu conducive to obtaining the answers to the research questions of this study (see Yin, 2016). To maintain confidentiality, I assigned each participant a number in the transcripts. At the beginning of each interview, I requested permission from the participants to record the interview using the videoconferencing program to save a recording for transcription of the interviews for future analysis. I also used my cell phone to record the interview as a supplementary audio source should the original recording fail. Prior to beginning the interview, I reviewed the consent form and explained that participation in the study was voluntary. Participants could request to be removed from the study at any time without question, though none did so. If a participant had decided not to participate, I planned to send a confirmation email acknowledging their request and expressing thanks for their time and consideration. No responses from participants who chose to leave the study would have

been included in the data analysis. None of the participants declined voluntary participation in this study.

During the interview I took notes using the interview protocol and bracketed any bias that I experienced (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020; Wall et al., 2004). I used my notes to ask follow-up questions, provide explanations, or clarify information, acronyms, and programs that may differ between public and tribally controlled school systems (see Yin, 2016).

At the conclusion of the interview, I provided an opportunity for the participant to ask clarifying questions related to the study or add any information that may be helpful to answer the research questions. I shared with the participants how I would secure all interview data with password protection on my person computer and that I would keep paper files in a locked cabinet for at least 5 years after completion of the study, as required by Walden University. I informed the participants that after I completed analyzing all the interviews, I would send them the findings of the study for member checking the potential discoveries. No additional meetings or follow up time was needed for this basic study.

After each interview, I saved a copy of the digital recordings to a password-protected USB drive and transcribed the recordings within 3 days. I printed out the transcripts and read and read them again to ensure that each draft reflected the content of the interview process. Yin (216) suggested that the transcription was the first step of the analysis of the data. I included any reflection notes I made during this process to augment the coding and analysis stage to follow.

Data Analysis

The data collection and data analysis steps are separate yet connected iterative processes of a qualitative study (Ravitch & Carl, 2020; Yin, 2016). I used semistructured interviews and probing questions to answer the research question of this study: How do administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools prioritize their approach and planning to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically? The data analysis included the following steps:

1. Organized and assemble the data.
2. Read and reviewed data.
3. Created a priori and initial codes.
4. Identified patterns and categories.
5. Named the emerging themes.
6. Sent the findings to participants and requested feedback.
7. Wrote the findings and recommendations for the study.

To understand the meaning of the data collected from the interviews, I used content analysis to code the data and to look for patterns and categories to identify emerging themes that answered the research question of this study. Content analysis is a comprehensive process that permits the researcher to interpret information from the data collected (Bengtsson, 2016). This analysis approach allows the researcher to organize the data to provide credible and authentic inferences from the data (Polit & Beck, 2006). Content analysis proved suitable for this basic qualitative study to examine the

perceptions of administrators' challenges to support the academic success of Navajo high school students.

I used a five-phase cycle to analyze data: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding (see Yin, 2016). This analysis process allowed me to integrate the content analysis procedures and code the data, look for patterns, and observe categories that allowed me to observe emerging themes. The findings were used to interpret and narrate answers to the research question of this study.

Compiling

The first part of Yin's (2016) five-phase data analysis requires the researcher to compile the data. I transcribed the interviews and included notes I collected during the interview process. Becoming familiar with the interview transcripts is an important step in the analysis process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After transcribing the interviews, I printed the transcript copies to review and make hand-written notes in the margins that connected to the framework of this study. I read the interview transcripts and made notes to develop the transcribing language to arrange the data in a useful order (see Yin, 2016). I also highlighted words to document similarities in the data to help me with the initial coding process. I used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to gather and compile the raw data from the notes and transcripts of interviews conducted during this study. The process of compiling assisted me with increasing familiarity with the data, which is the beginning step of the data analysis process (see Yin, 2016).

Disassembling

The second step of Yin's (2016) five-phase data analysis is disassembling data. Data are deconstructed and coded into smaller parts to help provide a perspective of the data (Bengtsson, 2016). Coding is the process of giving meaning to data and can be a word or a phrase that describes the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). First, I used a priori coding to identify connections and relationships to the conceptual framework of this study. Next, I created initial codes by identifying common words or phrases from the raw data. Coded data helps to identify patterns that may be used to help form categories (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). I continued to add columns to the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to code the patterns from the data. The spreadsheet gave structure to the data analyzation process and provided a visual representation of data. After each coding process, I used pivot tables and filters to observe relationships to allow potential patterns to develop. This process was iterative and required me to address each coding process with the raw data to ensure authenticity in the analyzation steps.

Reassembling

The third step of Yin's (2016) five-phase data analysis is to reassemble the data from the initial codes and patterns to observe categories and identify emerging themes. Reassembling involves a cyclical process of several cycles of observation (Bengtsson, 2016). Reassembling helps to regroup and sequence the data to observe similar categories and identify emerging themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). In the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, I created columns to develop categories from the pattern codes. During the reassembling process, I continued to review the original data to ensure alignment

between the pattern codes and original data (see Bengtsson, 2016). I used pivot tables and filters to assist me to observe the emerging themes of this study. This step required additional cycles of refinement to ensure the data were accurately interpreted.

Interpreting

The fourth step of Yin's (2016) five-phase data analysis is interpreting the data. I used the collected and analyzed data to develop a precise interpretation of the emerging themes and form the basis of the entire study (see Yin, 2016). The process to identify themes is based on the analysis of codes, patterns, and categories that emerge from the data (Bengtsson, 2016). As I interpreted the data, I revisited the disassembled data to consider any discrepant data that may not support the emerging themes (see Yin, 2016). I closely adhered to the data collection and analysis procedures to ensure validity in the data (see Yin, 2016). The interpretation of the summarized data helped to answer the research question of this study and provided implications for practice and social change.

Concluding

Yin's (2016) final phase of data analysis is providing a conclusion to the study that answers the research question. Providing conclusions to the data analysis process may offer lessons learned for new research, challenges to stereotypes, new ideas, theories, and discoveries, or a call to act (Yin, 2016). I used participants' words from the collected data to present the themes and conclusions of the study (see Bengtsson, 2016). During this stage of analysis, I asked the peer reviewers who originally assisted me to validate the interview instrument to review the findings and conclusion of this study. I also had the participants member check the findings to ensure the interpretations did not

exceed the data and scope of this study (see Yin, 2016). Both the peer reviewers and participants approved the findings of this study. I examined all the data to determine data that may conflict with emerging themes. To conclude the data analysis, I used selections from the transcripts of the raw data to provide a narrative to illustrate the themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies frequently gather data using researcher-developed sources and analyze data using reflective nonnumerical approaches making validity and reliability necessary aspects of the basic approach I used for this research. Trustworthiness ensures validity of the research and verifies that the data and conclusions are dependable and reliable (Yin, 2016). Trustworthiness also seeks compatibility between the research study design, research questions, purpose, and the overall analysis process (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Systematic organization is an important aspect of trustworthiness to influence an audience that the data and findings are accurate (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). In the next sections, I explained steps I used to establish trustworthiness in this study using credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility of a study verifies proper collection and interpretation of data. Credibility seeks internal validity so a study can measure what it intended to measure (Shenton, 2004). Credibility ensures the data are collected and interpreted to support the findings and conclusions of the study from the perspective of the participant in the

research (Yin, 2016). I used reflexivity, peer reviewers, and member checks to provide credibility of this study.

First, to ensure credibility I addressed the limitation of potential bias in the data collection process by using a reflective journal and bracketing. Reflexivity journaling helps to decipher the process by which decisions are made, increases self-awareness, and enables researchers to navigate the qualitative research process (Meyer & Willis, 2019). I maintained a reflexive journal prior to data collection, during the interview process, and through the analysis stage to help me develop a strategic and careful method of consideration to address challenges that I encountered (see Meyer & Willis, 2019). Bracketing helps demonstrate the validity and process of data collection to allow the reader to assess the validity of a study that is free of researcher influence (Ahern, 1999). During the interview process of this study, I bracketed any thoughts or biases to the responses of participants that occurred to maintain credibility. Bracketing has no set method or set of procedures; instead, a researcher must be aware of their own orientation towards oneself throughout their study (Wall et al., 2004).

Second, I sought to ensure the credibility of this study by using the professional expertise of two experienced educators as peer debriefers. Both educational leaders selected for this study have doctoral degrees, unique knowledge, and experience concerning Indigenous school leadership practices. I asked the educational leaders to provide feedback on the instrumentation tool that was used for this study. I made modification and changes based on their recommendations to increase credibility.

Credibility also can be supported by reviewing themes from this study that accurately reflect the participant experiences and perceptions about specific leadership practices (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020). I asked the participants to member check the themes from the analysis to ensure the findings accurately reflected their responses during the interview process of this study. I also asked the peer debriefers I used to review the findings of the study to ensure the interpretations did not exceed the data, findings, and scope of the study.

Transferability

Ensuring transferability is an essential part to help establish trustworthiness in qualitative research. Transferability addresses external validity and how the findings of a study are applicable and relevant to others (Burkholder et al., 2016). Transferability takes into account the local conditions in a qualitative study (Yin, 2016). To increase the transferability of this study, I used details to describe the data collection and analysis of the research. I also varied the choice of participant selection to make this study potentially applicable in other contexts or settings.

For this study, I used specific descriptors to portray the participants, setting, and findings from the study to provide possible application and comparisons to other perspectives. Using detailed descriptions allows others to recreate findings and enhance transferability to other studies and locations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Providing detailed descriptions of the data collected allows other researchers who read this study to determine if the findings are applicable, relevant, and transferable to their context (see Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013).

The second means by which I sought to promote transferability was to use multiple variances in participant selection. I invited principals in public and tribally controlled high schools, who could offer various perspectives and experiences to contribute to the study's data and findings. Broadening the diversity of the administrators in this study helped to increase transferability.

Dependability

Dependability addresses the reliability of a qualitative study (Yin, 2016). To establish dependability, qualitative researchers use consistent procedures for collecting data, analyzing data, and reporting findings in a comparable context where similar results would be obtained (Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2020). I created an audit trail and used a reflexive journal to provide dependability and trustworthiness of this study. Documenting the process helped reveal the process of the study and ensure the study was conducted in an ethical manner. I also included detailed documentation to determine how I selected the categories and themes of the study. I used an audit journal to include details of implementation through data collection, field notes, memos, and reflexivity journaling (see Shenton, 2004). Using techniques that included an audit trail and reflective journals helped to reveal my thinking and account for any changes that may have occurred within the research process and provide a rationale to ensure dependability in this study.

Confirmability

Confirmability, in a qualitative study, seeks to mirror objectivity used in quantitative research. Confirmability relates to the extent that the results can be confirmed or corroborated by others (Yin, 2016). Confirmability includes steps to ensure

a study's findings come from the experiences and ideas of the participants rather than the preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). To increase confirmability of this study I used bracketing, reflexivity, member checking, and peer debriefers.

First, to ensure credibility I addressed the limitation of potential bias in the data collection process by using a reflective journal and bracketing. Bracketing helps demonstrate the validity and process of data collection to allow the reader to assess the validity of a study that is free of researcher influence (Ahern, 1999). During the interview process of this study, on the interview protocol document, I bracketed any thoughts or biases to the responses of participates that occurred to maintain credibility.

I used reflexive journaling during data collection and data analysis to prevent researcher bias. Reflexivity journaling helps to decipher the process by which decisions are made, increases self-awareness, and enables researchers to navigate the qualitative research process (Meyer & Willis, 2019). Prior to conducting the interviews and immediately after each interview, I used the reflexive journal to document my personal biases, beliefs, ideas, and thoughts from the participants' responses to prevent bias during the data collection process (see Ahern, 1999). Additionally, I reflected on any potential biases that I have that could influence the credibility of the study during the data analysis process.

Member checking and peer briefing are steps I employed to increase confirmability. Upon completion of the study, I asked the same two educational leaders to review the findings of the analysis. I also asked participants to member check the findings to reduce potential researcher bias and also confirm that their experiences and

perceptions were collected and documented accurately. This process not only helped to increase the confirmability of this study but also helped me to be aware of my biases of the research (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020).

Ethical Procedures

Qualitative research must follow ethical procedures, codes, and scholar integrity (Yin, 2016). Research integrity depends on ethical standards that are imperative to provide confidence that a study's results are truthful, valid, and reliable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers follow codes of ethics established by the federal government, universities, and other professional organizations to perform research to limit ethical dilemmas (Yin, 2016).

I abided by all ethical procedures required to conduct a research study by acquiring IRB permissions, recruiting participants, ensuring confidentiality, treating the data collection and analysis process with authenticity, and managing materials and files related to research with integrity. To ensure of each of these ethical steps, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program. I obtained approval to conduct research with Walden University and the other school districts participating in this study to adhere to ethical principles. The IRB approval number for this study is 04-18-23-0652038.

I did not contact any potential participants until I received all approvals; once I receive IRB approval, I began recruiting participants for this study. I sent individual emails from my Walden University account to school administrators who met the criteria for this study. I sent a summary of the research study and included the voluntary consent.

Individuals who agreed to participate in this study were asked to reply "I consent" to participate in the study. The consent informed the participants that the study was voluntary and that individuals could choose to leave the study at any time. If a participant chose not to participate in this study, I planned to thank the individual for their time and consideration; however, this situation did not occur during this study. I worked with the school administrators to schedule an appropriate time to conduct their interviews during a time that would not interfere with school responsibilities. When a participant missed an interview or had to leave during an interview, I established a time that met with their approval for a future date.

Confidentiality is required in a qualitative study (Yin, 2016). To ensure confidentiality of the participants in this study, I assigned each participant a number. During the interview process and in the data analysis, I used the assigned number for each participant. I will store all data collected from the duration of this study for at least 5 years beyond the completion of the study as required by Walden University. The data from electric documents is saved to a USB drive with password protection. Any hard copies of data will be stored in a locked cabinet at my home. I will ensure proper destruction of all data after 5 years of the completion of the study by shredding paper materials and destroying USB drives.

By using multiple procedures to conduct this research study, I ethically addressed the research question and documented truthful and detailed findings. Through acquiring IRB permissions, recruiting purposeful participants, ensuring confidentiality, and treating the data collection and analysis process with authenticity and integrity, I was able to

derive useful and authentic findings. The findings from this study create important implications needed to address the significance of this study and assist administrators who serve Navajo high school students.

Conducting research within the boundaries of the Navajo Nation as an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation may produce biases and challenges for this study. As a member of the Navajo Nation, I have preconceived notions and biases, however, I acknowledged these influences by journaling. Additionally, I addressed any potential conflicts that arose by following the procedures and protocols from Walden University as well as other the institutions included in this study.

Summary

In this chapter, I explained the proposed research methodology I used to examine the perceptions of administrators' challenges to support the academic success of Navajo high school students. I discussed how participants for this study were be selected, the instrumentation protocol, and my role as the researcher. I detailed the procedures of collecting data and explained the content analysis process I used to analyze and interpret the interviews using coding to observe emergent themes.

I described steps taken to ensure trustworthiness of this qualitative study and to limit and reduce researcher bias using credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I also explained specific procedures taken to assist the ethical treatment of participants. In Chapter 4, I address the results of this study to answer the research question based on tribal critical race theory.

Chapter 4: Results

Although there are limited studies addressing low AI/AN graduation rates in the scholarly literature, there is a deficit of research from administrators' perceptions confronting not only challenges, but also subsequential remedies for public schools to address this ongoing trend. Schools in a southwestern state with high AI/AN student populations face unique challenges that need to be examined and identified. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of school administrators concerning challenges they faced when supporting the academic success of Navajo high school students and the strategies they used to address these challenges. Using an interview protocol, I conducted semistructured interviews to obtain data from eight participants in this study. I analyzed the data collected from these interviews using content analysis to develop categories and create themes based on the conceptual framework for this study. TribalCrit was the framework for this study. Two research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools describe the needs of Navajo students and the kinds of challenges they encounter to achieve academically?

RQ2: How do administrators in public and tribally controlled high school prioritize their approach and planning to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically?

In this chapter, I present the research data and the findings from this study. I discuss the setting, data collection, data analysis, results, and provide evidence of the trustworthiness of this research. I conclude with a summary.

Setting

I conducted this study using five high schools in a southwestern state. Eight school administrators were purposely chosen to participate in this study to answer the research questions concerning the perceptions and challenges for students to achieve academically. School administrators for this study included principals and assistant principals who held a state administrative license and worked at a school where more than 30% of the student population is American Indian/Alaska Native.

Because of the limited number of public schools in this southwestern state that include Navajo Nation students at the high school level, I obtained participants who met the criteria for the study using two approaches. First, I obtained partner organization agreements from two public school districts. Because I initially failed to receive approval from tribally controlled schools, I recruited participants by developing a non-site design approach as approved by Walden IRB. Each tribally controlled school within the Navajo Nation has its own local school board and local sovereignty. Tribally controlled school participants participated through a non-site design, which did not require Navajo Nation approval. Approval at each location consisted of obtaining each participant's individual specific approval to participate. Administrators from the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools were not included because I received no response from them.

Of the public-school districts in this study, one enrolls over 15 schools including three high school campuses and serves over 11,000 students, according to 2022 district public records. The demographics within the district include approximately 30% White, 30% Hispanic, and 34% American Indian students. The second public school district included over 10 schools with three high school campuses. This district serves approximately 6,000 students according to 2019 district public records. The demographics of the district revealed 6% Caucasian, 1% Hispanic, and 91% Native American students.

Tribally controlled schools must determine that their students meet the designation of an eligible Indian student under 25 Code of Federal Regulation. The first requirement is that a student is a member of or is at least one-fourth degree Indian blood of a tribe, as determined by United States through the Bureau of Indian Affairs of their status as Indians (Indians, 2005). Therefore, all students attending a tribally controlled school are American Indian, and the school student demographics are 100% American Indian. Tribally controlled schools range from campuses that include kindergarten to Grade 12 or consist of a specific grade range based on the need of each specific community. Tribally controlled schools also vary with campus sizes and building designations based on factors of student population, residential programs, and range of student grade levels.

Demographics of the Participants

Participants in this study represented various districts throughout a southwestern U.S. state. Each of the eight administrators held an administrative license from the state

and worked at a high school that had a minimum of 30% American Indian/Alaskan Natives. I conducted the interviews over a period of 8 weeks. The interviews varied in time but stayed within the allotted 45-60 min interview window. Each interview was recorded and transcribed no more than 2 days after the scheduled interview.

Of the eight principals who participated, two were high school principals, and six were high school assistant principals. The eight administrators had a wide range of experience in education, from 9 to 34 years. As administrators, the participants' years of experience ranged anywhere from a first-year administrator to 29 years of experience. Two administrators were in their first year of administrative experience and both worked at tribally controlled schools. Typically, tribally controlled schools have higher turnover rates of staff and even more with administrators (Christman et al., 2008). Six participants were female, and two participants were male. To ensure confidentiality, I assigned each participant an alpha numeric identifier. The demographics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Position	Years in education	Years as administrator
1	Female	Assistant Principal	23	14
2	Female	Assistant Principal	18	2
3	Female	Assistant Principal	17	3
4	Male	Principal	15	8
5	Male	Assistant Principal	18	11
6	Female	Principal	34	29
7	Female	Assistant Principal	9	1
8	Female	Assistant Principal	18	1

Data Collection

Ethical procedures are required in all research studies. I was the sole researcher and the primary instrument of this study. During the data collection process, I followed the procedures presented in Chapter 3. Following IRB approval (no. 04-18-23-0652038) from Walden University, I reviewed the data from the state's website to identify schools within specific districts to identify high school campuses with more than 30% American Indian/Alaskan Native student population.

I sent each potential public-school candidate an email to request their participation in this study. I selected potential participants by reviewing public records of high schools that comprised of a minimum of 30% Navajo student population. I was able to identify administrators using the school websites, which also listed the means to communicate with these individuals. I also used the public administrative teacher licensure database of this southwestern state to confirm potential candidates' licensure. I sent each email invitation from my Walden University email address and requested to participate in a doctoral study in the subject line. In compliance with the Walden University IRB ethical standards, each email invitation included the consent form to provide potential candidates with information about the purpose of the study and the interviewing process for data collection. The consent form described the voluntary nature of the study, the confidentiality process, risks, and benefits for participating in the study, each participant's right to privacy, along with contact information for Walden University staff if potential participants had additional questions.

Recruitment for non-site design administrators included several additional steps. First, I had to review records of schools and their policies to determine the enrollment. For tribally controlled schools, students must possess a Certificate of Indian Blood (CIB) to be enrolled. Therefore, all tribally controlled schools have 100% American Indian student populations. Next, I sent a self-designed flyer to potential participants who held an administrative license and worked at schools with secondary grade levels. Once I received emails about interest in participation, I then sent an email to the participant asking them to respond saying "I consent" and acknowledge their understanding of the study and realization that their participation is voluntary. Upon receiving responses, I scheduled a videoconference interview with each participant for 45-60 minutes. These sessions were arranged at the convenience of the participants.

Recruiting more participants for this study included a non-site design because of the limited number of high schools that enroll Navajo students. Tribally controlled school participants who responded to the non-site design invitation agreed to speak on behalf of their individual personal expertise and experience rather than on behalf of the particular school at which they were employed.

I created an interview protocol (see Appendix) to accompany the interview process and followed the protocol with each participant. The interview questions were based on the conceptual framework: TribalCrit (see Brayboy, 2005). Semistructured interviews allowed participants to provide responses that answered the research questions (see Yin, 2016). I used prompts and follow-up questions when necessary to encourage participants to elaborate or clarify responses, and I rephrased the questions based on

participants' responses during the interview process (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Yin, 2016). Before I interviewed the participants, and to be fluent with each question and become familiar with the protocol, I rehearsed the interview protocol and questions with an Indigenous educator who was not part of this study. This educator had over 5 years of teaching experience and 10 years of administrative experience and worked in both public schools and tribally controlled schools.

Each interview was conducted virtually, but only the audio recording was saved. I also had a backup voice recorder to ensure the interviews proceeded professionally and to make certain that I had an authentic recording with each participant to make the transcriptions. At the beginning of each interview, I referred to the protocol and welcomed each participant, reminded them that the interview was being recorded for the purpose of transcribing and analyzing data, and asked each participant if they had any questions before the interview began. Additionally, I verified that each participant returned the consent form, reminded participants of the study's purpose, and assured the participants that their responses would be held in confidentiality. I thanked each participant for volunteering their time.

I conducted interviews over a period of 8 weeks because of the difficulty of finding administrators in campuses who met the criteria of this study. I followed the interview protocol with each participant to encourage them to speak openly about their experiences and perceptions concerning barriers of Navajo students to achieve academically and what approaches and planning were implemented to address these challenges. To increase the trustworthiness of this study I used reflective bracketing when

I encountered biases to the participant's responses (see Ahern, 1999). I also wrote anecdotal notes in a reflective journal before and after the interview process to ensure dependability (see Shenton, 2004). No interview exceeded 60 minutes, nor were there any follow-up interviews required or scheduled. Each interview was videorecorded, but I used only the audio transcriptions to analyze the data to comply with the Walden IRB approval process.

The only unusual circumstance that arose during the data collection process was the use of a backup recording device I used to transcribe one interview. The virtual recording failed during one section of the interview, but the additional audio recorder was able to capture what was missed, and I was able to document the entire transcription. Additionally, I found the record feature on the videoconference program did not accurately transcribe some Indigenous words. However, I corrected and verified the accuracy of the interview recordings when I reviewed each transcript of the audio recordings. I saved the audio recordings onto a USB drive with password protection. Any hard copy written transcriptions from each interview are stored in a locked cabinet at my home office.

Data Analysis

I used content analysis to organize and analyze the interview data (see Bengtsson, 2016). The data analysis process allowed me to identify themes from the raw data collected during eight semistructured interviews. I listened to each recording multiple times to accurately transcribe the raw data. I read and re-read each transcript to help me understand the responses from each participant and to assist me with coding and

analyzing the data I collected (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020; Yin, 2016). As described in the methodology, I employed Yin's (2016) five-phase data analysis cycle: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. Because qualitative data analysis is an iterative and recursive process, I repeated these phases of analysis to ensure I represented only authentic findings from the data (see Bengtsson, 2016). I used content analysis to narrow the focus from the raw data and to find codes, patterns, and categories to reveal themes based on the conceptual framework of this study (see Bengtsson, 2016). Using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, I began the analysis process by compiling the raw data from each participant's interview.

Coding Strategy

Compiling Data

The initial analysis step to compile the data required that I read and review the interview transcripts over and over to become familiar with the content and make connections to the TribalCrit framework (see Brayboy, 2005), which was the conceptual framework for the study. Understanding and knowing the interview transcripts was an important step of the analysis process to develop the transcribing language and to arrange the data in a functional order (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016). Reading the interview transcriptions multiple times, targeting specific sections, and recording my thoughts in a reflective journal helped me to recognize and acknowledge any bias. I highlighted words and phrases that seemed important or were repeated by the participants in their interviews. Compiling the data of a qualitative study is an important step of the analysis process because it determines the interpretation and finding of a study (Cibils,

2019). During this phase of analysis, I was able to observe the data that lead to the second stage of analysis of decontextualizing the data.

Disassembling

Yin's (2016) next phase of qualitative analysis is the disassembly or decontextualizing of raw data. The first step of disassembling was to evaluate the transcripts from the interviews and determine which statements and comments were significant to answer the research questions of this study. I also evaluated statements participants made in context to the foundational conceptual framework of this study. Based on their responses, I looked to assign each response to one of the four conceptual framework constructs. I cut and pasted statements from the raw data of the transcriptions and placed them into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet into clearly delineated columns that connected the participant and the role of the participant to the raw data. Once I completed compiling the data into the spreadsheet, I deconstructed the data into smaller fragments (see Bengtsson, 2016; Yin, 2016) and used a priori coding to identify and determine key words and phrases that aligned with themes of the TribalCrit framework (see Brayboy, 2005). The four constructs from the conceptual framework that I used in this study are (a) concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens; (b) governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation; (c) tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples but also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups; and (d) stories are not separate from

theory – they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being (Brayboy, 2005; Martinez-Cola, 2019). Once the raw data were placed in the Microsoft spreadsheet, I then used the conceptual framework of this study to create a priori codes: assimilation, stories, new meaning and lived realities, and differences and adaptability. Table 2 illustrates how I determined a priori codes from the raw data.

Table 2

Sample a Priori Coding

Participant	Excerpt from interview	a priori code
2	In general, to me the biggest challenge that I see is that we just don't have a lot of Navajo staff and teachers or administrators.	Assimilation
3	So it can be that's where that idea of maybe it's a cultural misunderstanding and something like I've mentioned with the English, for example, maybe it's the lack of technology because they still live out on the reservation. And they don't have the electricity to do the work on their computers, or those kind of things.	New meaning
4	[Navajo families play] such a big part of the Navajo culture…. Just this idea of leaving home or leaving your land is really not something that's always accepted right within that community. And so the thought of going and moving away, and that type of thing is sometimes a hurdle.	Lived realities; differences and adaptability
5	I think it is just being able to listen and advocate for them and do it. Just listen and have a discussion, and I don't have to provide answers and I can share my own experiences, or I can bring other people.	Stories

Next, I continued the iterative process to disassemble the data and used open coding to identify connections based on similarities to inductively provide insight on the meaning of the data (see Bengtsson, 2016). In this phase I evaluated repetitive words, phrases, or ideas that the participants discussed in the interview process and placed them in a clearly labeled column on the Microsoft spreadsheet. Using a pivot table, I compared the open codes to the a priori codes. I repeated this step to create a second open code to further synthesize the data and ensure I had accurately aligned the a priori coding and

conceptual framework. This step allowed me to begin to observe connections with the conceptual framework to the research questions and other scholarly literature. Table 3 shows how I used the a priori coding and first and second set of open codes that I developed during this analysis process.

Table 3

Sample showing use of a Priori Code to Open Coding

a priori code	First open coding	Second open coding
Assimilation	Non-Indigenous teachers have trouble relating to Navajo culture and incorporating curriculum.	Lack of cultural knowledge
New Meaning	It's the lack of technology because they still live out on the reservation.	Poverty
Lived realities; differences and adaptability	This idea of leaving home or leaving your land is really not something that's always accepted right within that community.	Native issues
Stories	I can share my own experiences, or I can bring other people.	Connection

Reassembling

In the next phase of data analysis, I reassembled and analyzed the data several times to ensure the codes were a correct interpretation of the data (see Bengtsson, 2016; Yin, 2016). First, I reviewed the transcripts to determine if any noncoded data should be used to further augment the analysis of the data to answer the research questions of this study. Next, I reviewed the raw data to ensure alignment between the open codes and raw data to help identify patterns to form categories (see Bengtsson, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Reassembling allowed me to observe, sequence, and regroup the data to develop categories based on similarities that helped to interpret the data and identify emerging

themes (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020; Yin, 2016). Then I reviewed the phases of disassembling and reassembling data to ensure accurate emerging themes from the categories to help me form the foundation of the entire study (see Yin, 2016).

During the analysis process and upon review, I realized that the second coding that I performed on the data actually created patterns from the data. I took information from these emerging patterns to develop categories. I ensured that the alignment from raw data to open codes to patterns supported answering the research questions by developing categories. The data from the pattern coding emerged into three categories to answer the research questions. Table 4 shows how I used pattern coding to reveal three main categories.

Table 4

Sample of Open Codes and Corresponding Categories

Pattern coding	Category
Lack of cultural knowledge	Cultural specific planning strategies
Poverty	Challenges of Navajo student academic success
Native issues	Cultural specific planning strategies
Connection	Academic success approaches

Interpreting

The next phase of Yin's (2016) data analysis is interpretation. I used pivot tables for open codes, pattern codes, and categories within the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to analyze the data to identify developing themes. Several times I reviewed the data to make certain I was analyzing the data without bias. I referred to my journal and made reflective comments about this process (see Ahern, 1999). At times, I thought the data might say something different than what I saw emerging in the analysis process. I reread the

transcripts to ensure fidelity. I wanted the data to reveal what the input from the participants said in their interviews rather than to project my thoughts and bias during the analysis. To complete this phase, Bengtsson (2016) stated that the researcher should interpret the collected data to find and explain themes. A fourth category seemed to appear on the pivot tables that addressed academic success traits for Navajo high school students to succeed; however, the responses from the participants did not provide adequate data to include this category in the analysis process. Three themes emerged from the data in relation to the research questions of this study that described the challenges Navajo students encounter to achieve academically and how administrators prioritized their approach and planning processes to address these challenges. Table 5 provides an example the interpreting stage of analysis.

Table 5

Categories and Corresponding Themes

Category	Theme
Challenges of Navajo student academic success	1. Administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools describe Navajo family dynamics including poverty and adult responsibilities as challenges that Navajo students encounter to achieve academically.
Academic success approaches	2. Administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools prioritize their approach to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically by (a) addressing all student issues (b) seeking to incorporate Native classes within the school (c) ensuring Native faculty and support staff are employed to build authentic relational connections with the students, and (d) focusing on the achievement gap between Navajo students and other groups.
Cultural specific planning strategies	3. Administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools prioritize their planning to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically by (a) addressing Native issues, (b) hiring Native staff, (c) seeking to increase cultural knowledge, and (d) accepting cultural characteristics into the classroom.

Concluding

To conclude the analysis of the data, I used the three identified categories that emerged in the analysis process to develop themes. Themes included multiple

components to meet and address the research questions and included key phrases of the data. I returned to the spreadsheets and reviewed the pivot tables I created during the coding process. These pivot tables confirmed the three themes that emerged, based on the relationships among the codes that addressed the research questions for this study.

1. Administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools describe Navajo family dynamics including poverty and adult responsibilities as challenges that Navajo students encounter to achieve academically.
2. Administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools prioritize their approach to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically by (a) addressing all student issues (b) seeking to incorporate Native classes within the school (c) ensuring Native faculty and support staff are employed to build authentic relational connections with the students, and (d) focusing on the achievement gap between Navajo students and other groups.
3. Administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools prioritize their planning to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically by (a) addressing Native issues, (b) hiring Native staff, (c) seeking to increase cultural knowledge, and (d) accepting cultural characteristics into the classroom.

Discrepant Data

To be certain I accounted for all the data during the analysis process, I searched for any conflicting data that may have appeared to rival the emerging themes (see Yin, 2016). Participant responses included different perspectives based on diverse experiences of each administrator. Based on the data analysis, I did not discover any examples of

discrepant data. Therefore, no examples of discrepant data would be conflicting to the emerging themes in this study.

Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of school administrators concerning challenges they face when supporting the academic success of Navajo high school students and the strategies they use to address these challenges. In this study, I interviewed eight principals or assistant principals of high schools in a southwestern state. Six participants were employed at public schools and two participants worked for tribally controlled schools. I completed semistructured interviews for each participant and used content analysis (see Bengtsson, 2016) to analyze the data. The data I collected in this study were grounded to the conceptual framework of TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005). I aligned the interview questions to the research questions. Three themes emerged from this study to answer the research questions. The research questions in this study were:

RQ1. How do administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools describe the needs of Navajo students and the kinds of challenges they encounter to achieve academically?

RQ2. How do administrators in public and tribally controlled high school prioritize their approach and planning to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically?

Using semistructured interviews participants provided in-depth responses about their experiences, challenges, practices, and reflections that support the academic success

of Navajo high school students. From the analysis of the data, three themes emerged. In the next section, I examine each theme and explain the relation to the research questions of this study using participant responses from the interviews.

Research Question 1: Describe Needs and Challenges

RQ1 asked: How do administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools describe the needs of Navajo students and the kinds of challenges they encounter to achieve academically? Theme 1 reveals the results for this question.

Theme 1: Challenges of Navajo Student Academic Success

The first theme that emerged from the data is that administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools describe Navajo family dynamics including poverty and adult responsibilities as challenges that Navajo students encounter to achieve academically. The participants mentioned factors that Navajo students faced while in school that influence academic progress. In the following section, I present the supporting categories of this theme.

Poverty. The first category that emerged as a determining factor for challenges of Navajo students' academic success, according to the participants, was poverty. Six of eight school administrators mentioned poverty, socioeconomics, and government assistance programs as factors influencing Navajo student academic success. For example, Participant 8, an assistant principal at a tribally controlled school, stated that "Poverty is so rampant in our area. Families are utilizing government assistance like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), food stamps, Medicaid, etcetera." Many educational challenges stem from Indigenous

students and families not having the basic necessities of a steady income, worrying about how and where the next meal will come from, and lacking running water and working electricity in homes. Luxuries such as a reliable internet, adequate cell phone service, alternative places to study, or even living within at least 10 miles of the school are considered luxuries in Navajo communities.

Poverty for many on the Navajo reservation may include lack of food, household and school supplies, and limited transportation. Navajo families in poverty link their current status to the generational trauma they have experienced. The opportunity to break the cycle of poverty within a family is a challenge but one that could have a lasting effect. Participant 1, an assistant principal with 14 years of experience in this community, stated,

> So we have a lot of [Navajo] students who have like generational trauma, or we have generational poverty … hunger issues … kids who can't afford to get school supplies. … There is a huge population with a combo of all of those [reasons] that are that are affected by poverty, transportation issues. … We got kids who can't participate in after school activities and things like that. Clubs or sports because simply it is transportation for them. You know. How are they going to get home after football practice?

Participant 1 describes the implications of poverty; it affects more than basic needs and inhibits students from participating in school activities.

Participant 4 shared how students from any ethnic background struggle in poverty. Participant 4, an administrator with 8 years in public schools with over 30% Indigenous students stated, "When we really look at our school and at the students who

struggle oftentimes that comes down to socioeconomic status as a big challenge or a barrier." Academic success often declines as a priority when shelter or housing, food and meals, and water and electricity are also not a guarantee.

Adult Responsibilities. The participants not only noticed poverty as a challenge for Navajo student academic success, but also commented on the regular necessity of Navajo students to take on adult responsibilities as early as age 13. The second element of Theme 1 revealed that the participants observed that Indigenous students assume the role of caretaker in the family for both younger children and even adult parents. Participant 1, the assistant administrator at a public high school stated, "I've got kids here who are raising their parents … they are the caretakers." The participant school administrators encounter students in these situations and are knowledgeable of the specific ways students' lives at home affect educational success.

The school administrators of this study described a variety of adult obligations Indigenous high school students face. Some students are parents themselves. Other Navajo youths may be responsible for younger family members or care for adult family members who are addicted to drugs or alcohol. Participant 1 noted, "I've got kids here who are raising their parents in a way. They are caretakers. They are the caretaker for their parents." Participant 6, a principal with 29 years in administration explained,

> I would say that, you know, these kids come from a lot. I mean they're dealing with a lot with home. I mean if you have a situation where you don't know if your lights are going to be turned on. We have a lot of students who are couch surfing. You know, there's a lot of alcohol in the homes.

In summary students who live in poverty and take on adult responsibility roles at home become acquainted with life situations as teenagers and are often challenged to choose between earning an education or helping the family survive from day to day. The data revealed that administrators at both public high schools and tribally controlled school perceived that poverty and adult responsibilities influenced academic success of Navajo students.

Research Question 2: Prioritize Approach and Planning

RQ2 was: How do administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools prioritize their approach and planning to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically? Themes 2 and 3 revealed the results for this question. Theme 2 addresses the current academic approaches that school administrators employ to manage the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically. Theme 3 addresses the second aspect of RQ 2 that provides responses to how high schools that serve Indigenous students plan future changes and adjustments to increase the academic success of Navajo students.

Theme 2: Academic Success Approaches

The second theme that emerged from the data is that administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools prioritize their approach to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically by (a) addressing all student issues (b) seeking to incorporate Native classes within the school (c) ensuring Native faculty and support staff are employed to build authentic relational connections with the students, and (d) focusing on the achievement gap between Navajo students and other groups. Participant

school administrators determined their approaches to address challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically. In this next section, I detail the categories of this theme.

All Student Issues. The first category of Theme 2 that emerged is that according to participants, all students benefit from student-centered approaches used in the educational high school setting. Seven of the eight participants perceived all student issues to be a determining factor for Navajo students to achieve academically. These issues include approaches, strategies, and plans that administrators implement through teachers for the entire student population to benefit all students. For example, Participant 3, an assistant principal at a public high school stated, "We encourage teachers to have what we call common formative assessments, so that they're all asking the same question, so that they have the exact same data to share and have those [student academic] discussions." Participants generally believed that when administrators implement practices throughout the entire school, educators are accountable to the same expectations to promote student growth academically for all learners. When educational programs are provided by the administration and teaching staff with fidelity and equitability, all students have an improved opportunity to achieve academic success.

School approaches of practices are thought to help promote student learning and benefit all students' issues when procedures are the same for all students. Participant 8, an administrator in a tribally controlled school, supported school-wide practices for students and stated, "Intervention time is created into our master schedule for English language arts and mathematics." Because students in general face academic challenges,

educational approaches that work well for Indigenous students may also be applicable to the success of other ethnically identified students. Participant 4, a principal in the public school system, shared their approach of grouping and identifying the academic needs of all students by adopting processes through a "multi-layered system of support … to get to the root cause of what's going on" in order to provide support for each student to achieve academically.

Participant 3, an assistant principal, used another approach that was appropriate for the academic success of all students. During meetings with the administrator and faculty members, the team used a process that investigated all aspects that might influence a student's behavior and academic achievement that was called "the '5 Whys. [We'll] look at data … ask that why question and continue to ask why until you can't ask why anymore." This process is used to determine the root cause of issues within schools based on low-scored student assessments with an intent to benefit all students.

Other school administrator participants shared their practices to address academic success approaches for all students. Participant 6, a principal in public schools, further supported these school-wide approaches and stated,

> Our leadership team is looking at [grading procedures] for all students. But again, it's not just the Navajo students. It's all of our students, especially the seniors. They are looking at ways to try and motivate them this year, which was difficult.

Based on the participant responses of this study, approaches are crucial for academic success for all students, not just Indigenous students. School administrators prioritize

strategies and approaches not only for Navajo student academic achievement but also use inclusive techniques that increase learning for every student.

Native Classes. The second category of Theme 2 to prioritize approaches that address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically, is the need to offer Native classes within the schools. Seven of the participants described the various classes provided at their sites and mentioned they offer Navajo language classes, Navajo cultural classes, Navajo history, and Navajo government classes to support students' needs to be eligible for the Chief Manuelito scholarship, a Navajo Nation award that recognizes high school graduates who attain distinguished academic success. The school administrator participants also mentioned the various Indigenous clubs and cultural activities that occur on their campuses to promote academic success approaches unique to Navajo students.

Participant 2, a public-school assistant principal, perceived that teachers should incorporate Indigenous culture across all subject matter taught in school to support academic success, stating, "We all live in this community and culture … it should be something that goes across the curriculum, and I'm seeing more teachers embrace that." Participant 8, the assistant principal of a tribally controlled school agreed and stated, "Over the summer, our summer enrichment academy was successful in incorporating Navajo culture. We offered Navajo STEM, sewing, and agricultural classes." The high school administrator participants of this study perceived the importance of including Native classes in schools to be a vital academic success approach for Navajo student academic achievement.

Along with offering various specific classes to Navajo students, teachers are given some flexibility in non-public schools to adopt Indigenous works and curriculum that normally are not represented in textbooks. Participant 7, an assistant principal at a tribally controlled school explained, "Educators are encouraged to explore literature and resources that are relevant, but more importantly to get to know the students, the community, and cultural customs." Participant 8, also from a tribally controlled school stated, "Our teachers have been great at questioning curriculum and getting involved in the adoption process [to include] what is missing in their curriculum." In the classroom, teachers also look to implement a unique method of teaching for student success. Participant 8 added, "I see them [teachers] trying to incorporate Native language in their instruction; trying to merge contemporary methods of teaching with Native American culture and language."

The data of this study showed that the administrators perceived Native classes and appropriate curriculum offered in schools with at least 30% Navajo Nations students increases the opportunity for Indigenous students to be academically successful. Navajo students who take specific Native classes in high school become eligible for substantial scholarship pathways. Those students who earn this opportunity are also more likely to achieve academically.

Connection. The third element of Theme 2 revealed that participants believe that creating a relationship and connection between an adult educator or staff member and a Navajo student improved academical success. Fifty percent of the participants perceived the benefit of students making a personal connection with someone on campus. These

connections may be precipitated by the school staff purposefully reaching out to a student or may occur by an innate relationship cultivated between a teacher and student.

Participant 1, an assistant principal, explained how they arranged meetings between Indigenous staff and students and stated,

> I say, "Hey, would you mind talking to this kiddo and maybe talking to the family?" Because she's a Native American woman [staff member], and I am not, and they [the Indigenous student and family] might just have a different level of trust or connectivity with her.

The participants of this study perceived that recognition of staff who are from similar backgrounds to those of students can best serve Navajo students and families to advocate and understand their needs. Participants took the position that it is important for Indigenous families to create connections with school communities to support and address academic success approaches for Navajo students.

School administrators who were participants in the study expressed personal connections between staff, especially those who are from similar backgrounds, is of the utmost importance for Native students. The initial contact between the Indigenous students and faculty member is usually to meet the immediate needs of the student. Frequently these contacts build into a relationship that broadens from academic support with the student to into a supportive caring community. Participant 5, the assistant principal at a public school, stated,

> I think it is being able to listen and advocate for them [Navajo students]. Just listen and have a discussion, and I don't have to provide answers, but I can share

> my own experiences, or bring other people in. Just meet their immediate physical needs first, and then we can get the academic part of it in there.

Participant 4 also explained,

> I think that's how you engage kids. It's how you make them feel like they're part of the school. They're more apt to come to school because they feel like they're part of this community and they feel like they can contribute to this community, and that's our ultimate role.

Part of the challenge is encouraging Navajo students to feel connected to their school.

To many Native Americans, schools of all designations are viewed negatively in large part because of early U.S. government policies that required Indigenous students to attend school and were forcibly taken from their parents, placed in dormitories, and assimilated into Western culture. Many students could not endure those policies to its entirety; others died at those same schools and never saw their ancestral lands or parents again. Based on school administrator responses in this study, they perceived the need to prioritize strategies for Navajo students to achieve academically by encouraging relationships between students and teachers, counselors, or other staff members.

Achievement Gap. The final element of Theme 2 addresses the priority of current approaches used at high schools that enrolled at least 30% Navajo high school students to address the achievement gap. For decades there has been a widening achievement gap between Native American and White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Native American students score significantly lower on academic achievement tests than White students (National Center for Education

Statistics, 2016). Consequently, Native American students also have lower graduation rates than Whites (Gion et al., 2018). Five of the eight participants of this study emphasized the importance of prioritizing strategies to address the achievement gap to ensure Navajo student academic achievement.

School administrator participants in this study explained ways that the achievement gap exists within their schools and how they focus their approaches to address this dilemma. Participant 7, an assistant principal of a tribally controlled school commented,

> The first step is to meet them where they are at. Understand their areas of growth and challenges. This allows educators to fill in the achievement gaps with reteaching concepts and providing support to the students. We do this by administering pre-assessments. … Targeted support is provided in the form of intervention classes, academic tutoring, and differentiation.

Participant 8, also the assistant administrator at a tribally controlled campus, shared, "Very few students are at grade level. In general, there are obvious achievement gaps due to language and other issues." The current aggressive approach this campus has taken to address the achievement gap was further explained by Participant 8.

> We have been meeting in established grade-level Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to discuss student data and progress. Teachers have identified target students who need more interventions or possibly a referral for special education services. We have been implementing an [intervention] model to address achievement gaps. We have built in intervention time into our master

> schedule for English language arts and mathematics. We have offered summer school to help students develop or refine their skills. We have been working with teachers to review and revise their curriculum maps. Our consultants have been working with teachers to implement teaching strategies geared toward English language learner (ELL) students, engagement strategies, and refining formative assessments.

School administrator participants identified the achievement gap in specific areas. For example, they labeled exactly how many students were statistically in the achievement gap category and targeted potential explanations as to why students were in the category. Participant 6 stated, "We feel like there's probably a 2-year gap of catching up. … It's the reading scores. The kids just don't read. Students come to high school and they're reading at the second-grade level."

In the location at which this study was researched, there could be more than 12 different local educational agencies each having individual school boards, administrators, policies, guidelines, and requirements of completion that provided policies for students before entering high school. Because of these unique procedures of educational government, Participant 2 found that their campus had,

> So many kids that are coming in with gaps … especially at the high school level. They need all the course requirements for graduation, everything. … I think our Native American counselor does a really good job of trying to meet kids in the middle and find out what they need. We do have a pretty open sort of like grading policy in which kids are always allowed to reassess throughout the semester.

High schools receive students at all academic levels, which requires attention for each student to determine paths towards planned instruction and intervention to reduce the achievement gap.

School administrator participants expressed various outreach strategies to address student needs academically. Individually designed studies and campus-wide programs were instituted to address these academic gaps. Participant 6 stated, "We don't address it [low scores and intervention] because they're Native American. We address it because they have a low reading scale score, and they have to be in an intervention class." Participant 7 shared how they support Native American students and explained, "Targeted support is provided in the form of intervention classes, academic tutoring, and differentiation." Other school initiatives that were mentioned included specific practices used. Participant 8 stated,

> In established grade-level professional learning communities teachers discuss student data and progress. Teachers have identified target students who need more interventions or possibly a referral for special education services. We have been implementing a multi-tiered system of supports model to address achievement gaps.

Ultimately, the school administrator participants interviewed prioritized their approach to academic student achievement by addressing the needs and best practices that benefited all students, providing Native classes, encouraging connections to build relationships between the educational faculty and students, and providing best-practice strategies to address the achievement gap for Navajo students. Each of these principals

shared academic success approaches that revealed the findings of Theme 2 in response to RQ 2 of this study. Theme 2 detailed specific categories to prioritize approaches for Navajo students to achieve academically.

Theme 3: Cultural Specific Planning Strategies

The third theme that emerged from the content analysis is that administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools prioritize their planning to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically by (a) addressing Native issues, (b) hiring Native staff, (c) seeking to increase cultural knowledge, and (d) accepting cultural characteristics into the classrooms. As I analyzed the data from the interview transcripts of this study, the findings supported categories that answered RQ2. The data revealed how administrators strategize their planning to address issues that face the academic success of Navajo students.

Native Issues. The first category from the findings of Theme 3 is that administrators must prioritize their planning by addressing Native issues to assist Navajo students to achieve academically. All eight participants expressed that addressing Native issues was their highest priority for future planning to ensure academic success for Indigenous high school students. These Native issues will be presented in the order of significance that the administrative participants of this study believed to be challenges that influence high school Navajo students' academic progress.

Substance Abuse Factor. Substance abuse within AI/AN communities affect student academic outcomes. Participant 2, a public high school administrator, noted the influence of substance abuse disorders and shared, "I do have Navajo students that

struggle with drug and alcohol addiction." This principal observed students and Indigenous families misusing alcohol and drugs despite being in this administrative position for only 2 years. The access to certain drugs including methamphetamine and opioids has become easier lately with dispensaries opened throughout the area. The history of alcoholism on Native American reservations is well known. Most Indigenous families play an active role in the substance abuse problem by assuming their own child's academic success and ultimately their life trajectory. Participant 5 stated,

> They [Navajo students] don't get the encouragement they need. It's more of a put down in different things. And I remember the experience that I had when I was younger with my own aunt. She just told me that I was going to be a drunk just like my dad was. Even 30, 35 years later, I still remember that day. I think that [taunt] drove me. That was my motivation drive. But for some of these kids, it's not. It's more of a put down.

Participants stated that drugs and alcohol addiction within the homelife and Navajo community suggested that behavioral addictions are challenges Navajo high school students encounter to achieve academically.

Family and Home Risk Factor. Navajo families experience common Native issues that include struggles, tragedies, and hardships. Indigenous high school students may have to cope with familial disorders, anxiety, and transient issues. Participant 5, an assistant principal with 11 years of administrative responsibilities elaborated,

> We hear stories of, "well, my mom had to work and [I] have to take care of with my siblings" and different things like that. And then you have tragedies like we

> had one parent that overdosed, and the student had to take care of the kids [siblings] and grandma. I see more and more where grandparents or other relatives are the ones stepping up and take the initiative to raise their kids. Some of these kids are unfortunately … on their own and being able to help them in a system and different aspects of finding a place for them. I think they have a lot on the line.

Participant 6 an administrator with 20 years of experience shared,

> It's a daily struggle. And I just wish we had more support for these [Navajo] kids. I wish we had more social workers that were there to help them [Navajo students]. We do have a lot of services in terms of clothing and homelessness, all those kinds of things. But the biggest struggle [is] the kid [who] comes into your office and they're not thinking about academics. They're wondering if they're going to go home, and what's going to be happening at home. That's the biggest thing.

Some families experience home risks that require them to move from place to place within the reservation and even to other parts of the country. Participant 2 stated,

> A chunk of them [Native students], they're pretty transient in that they might live with auntie here for a year, and then they move somewhere in Arizona, and they're living with a grandmother for a year, and then they're living with dad somewhere else.

Participant 5 commented, "Instead of focusing [on their school studies], unfortunately, you have kids that they don't know where they're going to spend the night or don't know if they're going to have food at home or not."

The home life for Navajo students is not the same as the home lives portrayed in suburban America in the media or on television, instead these young people face harsh living situations. Participant 6 noted, "Home situations, in terms of struggling, are unstable in terms of domestic abuse, alcohol, unemployment." Within these homes, some Navajo families also face the reality of three generations living under one roof because of poverty and health complications. Participant 4 stated that "the multi-generational living situations" is what most families are financially forced into; this is the typical family arrangement for most Navajo families. Participants viewed family and home risk situations as factors that require high school administrators of public and tribally controlled campuses to strategically prioritize plans to ensure Navajo students achieve academically.

Cultural Differences Risk Factor. Navajo traditions are unique and include their own cultural customs. Education in public schools or tribally controlled schools may reflect differences between the expectations of the school and the Navajo family view of the future for their children. Many indigenous students do not have educational role models with whom to identify. Participant 4, a principal with 8 years of administrative experience commented,

> The perception of education from the home and the family [is] very traditional in their [Navajo] culture. … Our students struggle … they just don't see people in their family who have gone off and pursued college. They tend to stay close to their home and family. … Such a big part of the of the Navajo culture. You see, you know, just this idea of leaving home or leaving your land [reservation] is

> really not something that's always accepted right within that community. And so the thought of going and moving away, and that that type of thing, is sometimes a hurdle.

Some school administrators recalled their own experiences and how they could identify with the Indigenous students' perceptions of education. Participant 7, a school administrator for a tribally controlled school shared,

> An experience I had as a person who attended reservation schools growing up, was the lack of representation in Native American teachers. Teachers who are retired from public schools [and returned to teach at] the reservation to coast [bide their time], and the lack of teachers due to the high turnover rate were detrimental to my education achievement and progress. I had to play catch up during high school, because I was behind my peers in public school. It is important to invest in young Native teachers.

The families of Navajo students often rely heavily on their teenage children to step into significant roles to help the family sustain itself. Participant 4 observed,

> There can often be family barriers. Oftentimes the students take on a bigger role within that family to support the family unit. Again, that speaks to the Navajo culture of family and connectedness and taking care of one another.

Navajo families may also create distinct value choices for their children who may have to decide between cultural expectations to support the family or pursuing higher education. Participant 5 explained,

> They [Navajo students] are accepted in these prestigious schools and colleges… but most of them last a semester … come home. … I think part of that hindrance, a little bit, is coming from the home as well. They're [Navajo parents and families] constantly calling and sharing their problems and sharing what's going on at home. … The hard part is that sometimes I think they don't realize that they are hindering these kids—their own children [from continuing academic learning.]

School staff notice these patterns and will challenge and seek to encourage these students at times. Participant 5 asked students,

> "Hey, why are you back? Why? How come you're not over there [in college]? You had a full ride scholarship." [The student responded] "Well, my family needed me." That's the hard part is that sometimes I think they [Navajo parents and families] don't realize that they are hindering these [Navajo] kids [who are] their own children.

Sadly, it is the divergent viewpoint of cultural family traditions and or conventions that interferes with Navajo high school students' academic success. The participants of this study stated that they must address and prioritize their planning concerning these family risk factors to increase Navajo student's achievement in the classroom.

Socioeconomic Risk Factors. Additional Native issues that interfere with Navajo students' academic achievement, according to participants, include socioeconomic challenges. Indigenous reservations lack basic access to most first-world amenities that make it difficult for consistent attendance in the school setting. Participant 4 shared,

> We have a learning management system where kids access homework assignments, test quizzes, everything else. A lot of our school resources, books and things move to online programs and, so if you don't have that internet at home, whether that be due to socioeconomic challenges or just a rural living situation they have less access to that educational piece.

Socioeconomic risk factors also include the missed opportunity be exposed to schooling at a young age. Participant 8 stated, "They don't participate in early childhood programs before enrolling in our school." School learning and higher instruction may be important to some Navajo families, but when the opportunity is presented for Navajo families and students to commit to educational pursuits, their actions do not reflect such values. Participant 5 explained,

> Their most important thing is just get through high school, get their diploma and get it done. It's just that's what it is. They don't have a beyond vision in a way, [to see] where are they going to be.

The participant responses for this study agreed that Native issues are crucial for academic success and achievement. According to participants, risk factors include substance abuse, family and home factors, cultural differences, and socioeconomic issues, which all portend to the challenges of Navajo students' academic success. School administrators perceived the need to prioritize their planning strategies and approaches for Navajo student academic achievement to address challenging Native issues to increase learning and academic success.

Native Staff. The second element of Theme 3 is the perception of the administrators concerning the significance of providing Native staff to increase Navajo student academic achievement. All eight participants emphasized the need for hiring native staff on their campuses. Participant 2, the administrator of a public school campus, shared,

> To me the biggest challenge that I see is that we just don't have a lot of Navajo staff or teachers or administrators. About 40% of our students are Native American, most of them Navajo, but only about 5% of our teachers are [Navajo].

Participants in this study examined the need to have sufficient numbers of Native teachers or staff to meet the specific needs of Navajo students. Participant 5 observed,

> Native teachers are wonderful examples of their perseverance and the challenges they face and continue to face. Being where they're at, what they had to do, overcoming the loneliness and the separation from their family in order to go to school.

Participant 7 concurred with the need to support native teachers in the high school setting and stated,

> They also have to have at least one adult who will be there to guide and support them … a teacher, a staff member, or a coach that can reach a student will have a lasting impact on a student to benefit their academic successes. … Young Native teachers can understand the unique cultural contexts and challenges faced by Native American students but also serve as positive role models and advocates.

Participant 8 supported the importance of native faculty and staff and noted, “It helps that the teacher also has a similar cultural background as their students. They can understand or recognize and adapt to the changing needs of their students.” Indigenous teachers are able to understand the complexity of their students’ lives based on their own unique experiences and knowledge of their students’ backgrounds. Administrators in public and tribally controlled high school prioritize their planning each year to increase Navajo students’ academic achievement by ensuring Native teachers and staff are hired on each campus.

Cultural Knowledge. The third category that emerged from the data for Theme 3 is that administrators, faculty, and staff who work at a high school campus with a minimum of 30% Indigenous populations of student need to possess a basic understanding of Indigenous cultural knowledge to ensure the academic achievement of Navajo high school students. Five of the eight participants perceived that a lack of empathetic cultural knowledge deters students’ learning. Two most frequently shared reasons provided by Native American students for being absent and dropping out of school were teachers’ attitudes towards Indigenous students (Gilliland, 1999). Native American students do not like to be singled out or called upon in classrooms, which is a common practice and strategy used by teachers (Cleary & Peacock, 1998). Given certain cultural norms of different Native American families, classroom grades may not appeal to Native American students in the same way they would for non-Native American students (Sorkness & Kelting-Gibson, 2006). Different results, like test scores and grades, from

current educational system norms are not always deemed priorities for Native American families.

Administrators who are not Indigenous struggle to incorporate, implement, and plan educational practices into the classroom and curriculum that address student achievement for Indigenous students. Participant 2 stated,

> I didn't grow up in this part of the country. I grew up out east, and so [I don't have] a lot of knowledge in my upbringing [about Indigenous culture]. And so I'm always learning, too, which I do think is a challenge for some of our teachers. … I think a lot of it is just general ignorance of not having any exposure. … So, I think that's probably the biggest challenge teachers have. … Teachers are uncomfortable incorporating things in the curriculum and they don't know it very well themselves.

Administrators and teachers who work in Indigenous communities have limited access to research concerning cultural knowledge. Building cultural awareness requires that administrators maintain constant conversations with faculty and staff who work with Navajo students. Participant 2 added that they felt like, "there's always a little bit of trepidation. People are just afraid that they don't know enough that they don't want to be culturally insensitive, and so then they shy away from it." Some staff who are non-Native and work with Indigenous students face unique challenges to be supportive of Native culture and not be insensitive to the contemporary and traditional realities of Native Americans.

Because of the lack of training and information that educational administrators and faculty have when hired, school districts seek to supplement professional development and provide assistance to schools within the district. Participant 2 commented that their school district does onboarding with new faculty and staff, "but there's never really conversation about different cultural needs. I think a lot of it is that people [non-Native teachers/staff] are almost afraid to talk about it [Indigenous cultures], because they're afraid they'll come off insensitive if they do."

School districts with onboarding and professional development processes may inform employees about logistics and district policies but steer away from Indigenous cultural training. These types of initiatives for non-Native staff offer the potential to breakdown misconceptions and provide realistic background information of Navajo students. Participant 3 explained, "I think the biggest hurdle that I had, and I continue to have, is I am a different race, and so, being able to connect with them [Navajo students], there's an automatic barrier that's there." Participant 7 expressed, "Some educators do not have the background knowledge that is needed to work with Navajo students, which can encompass understanding cultural and traditional norms."

In an effort increase cultural awareness issues and inform administrators, faculty, and staff concerning appropriate policies and practices, districts will frequently provide educational consultants to schools. However, participants found that such training may not be appropriate or knowledgeable about local situations. Two participants mentioned the importance of knowing about cultural and traditional norms but identified contradictory information related by contracting companies from different states that do

not know how to address specific needs of Navajo students. Participant 8 shared sentiments about outside training and asserted,

> A pet peeve is utilizing companies or consultants that are non-Native. For example, our district has a contract with a company out of [a western state] to train our educational specialists. We are fed their trainings and given their books. Granted it is helpful information, but there are times I question how it relates to our population. Our consultants are non-Native. It just makes me wonder if they truly understand our plight. We need more products and services from Indigenous educators.

School participant administrators in the study discussed numerous ways that staff experience barriers with insufficient understanding and information of cultural knowledge to support Navajo student academic achievement. Faculty and staff who are non-Native must receive Ingenious cultural training and development. Planning culturally specific strategies for Navajo students that faculty can use is a concern for the participant school administrators in this study.

Cultural Characteristics. The fourth category identified in Theme 3 was that administrators must prioritize planning to accept and encourage Indigenous cultural behavioral traditions in the classroom. Six of the eight administrative participants believed this factor to be an essential dynamic of classrooms to support Navajo students to achieve academically. The participants emphasized the importance of understanding unique cultural characteristics of Navajo students' behavior in classrooms.

Without cultural knowledge, it is difficult for educators to determine the students' understanding and comprehension of content. Participant 2 noted, "They're [Navajo students] a little more quiet; they're not as outgoing … and sort of get overshadowed. Navajo kids tend to be more timid, more introverted, and not so gregarious." Participant 4 observed that Navajo students, "tend to be some of our quieter students and more reserved … that goes back to kind of their culture." Participant 6 also supported the necessity of addressing unique characteristics of Navajo students in the classroom and included, "Our [Navajo] students are so quiet, they're not loquacious; they don't like to get up and present." This quiet cultural demeanor is not indicative of a lack of classroom participation on the student's behalf but is a recognized social moré of Indigenous characteristics.

Participant school administrators reflected on possible reasons for the different classroom characteristics of Navajo students. Adults and elders in the tribal community are highly esteemed and revered. Because of the age difference between a student and teacher, Indigenous children may address and respond to administrators and teachers in the school environment in a particular cultural manner. Participant 8, an assistant principal at a tribally controlled campus commented, "A majority of our teachers are older. They would probably be considered elders in their respective communities, no disrespect or negativity of age, they just have a lot of wisdom to share from experiences, observations, and reflections." The distinction of cultural specific planning approaches for cultural characteristics is identified, observed, and known by administrators; however,

strategies and modifications to address these characteristics are not provided by school districts to support Navajo student success.

In summary, I used semistructured interviews to examine the perceptions of school administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools concerning challenges they face when supporting the academic success of Navajo high school students and the strategies they use to address these challenges. Table 5 reveals the three themes that developed from the data after analyzing the transcripts of the participants' responses to the RQs. From the content analysis of the collected data, Theme 1 answered RQ1 that sought to discover the perceptions of high school principals and assistant principals concerning the needs and challenges of Navajo student academic success. Themes 2 and 3 answered RQ2 and revealed the strategies by which administrators prioritized their approach and planning to address the challenges of Navajo high school students to achieve academically.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of school administrators concerning challenges they face when supporting the academic success of Navajo high school students and the strategies they use to address these challenges. Trustworthiness requires systematic organization for an audience to provide evidence that the data and findings are correct (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Trustworthiness in qualitative research is developed through evidence from procedures used throughout data collection and interpretation (Yin, 2016). I used credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability strategies to confirm the trustworthiness

of this study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020; Yin, 2016). Trustworthiness seeks compatibility between the research study design, research questions, purpose, and overall analysis process (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). I address these components of trustworthiness in the following sections.

Credibility

Credibility is foundational to a trustworthy study. Credibility is a collection of procedures used by the researcher to gather and handle all data to the degree that makes one trust the validity of a study's findings (Bengtsson, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2020). As the researcher for this study, developing a plan with procedures was important to ensure credibility. In this study, the participants were high school administrators who held state licenses and their schools were comprised of more than 30% Navajo student populations. I used member checking, reflective journaling, and member checking to ensure credibility.

A method to enhance credibility of qualitative research is member checking (Shenton, 2004). The first way I sought to provide credibility for this study was by asking the participants to validate the findings (see Yin, 2016). Using member checking ensures the accuracy of the data analysis. Bengtsson (2016) stated that the interview responses and developed findings establish credibility by aligning the findings with participant experiences. I sent an email to each participant that reported the themes and findings of this study and requested each participant to reply to the email with their confirmation, acceptance, or disagreement of the findings. There were no changes or modifications to the findings of this study.

The second measure to provide validation of a qualitative study is by reflectivity (Yin, 2016). Using a reflective journal during the research process establishes credibility and allows the researcher to view potential biases that could skew the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). I used a reflective journal prior to and during the data collection process to document any potential bias to increase credibility (Meyer & Willis, 2019).

The third way I established credibility in this study was by using peer debriefers. I coordinated with two educational leaders as debriefers, who did not participate in the study. The leaders provided feedback on the protocol and interview questions and provided recommendations and suggestions for the interview process. Their feedback was focused in the areas of time, questions, and use of specific wording.

Transferability

Another element of trustworthiness in qualitative studies is transferability. Transferability refers to the ability of a study's results that may apply to a broader context and with a different audience (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). I used descriptive details to explain information of the study, data analysis, ways that participants were selected, participant responses, and the data collection process (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020). In the protocol I provided background information of the study, potential benefits of participation and interview responses of the study. I also determined which participants met the criteria of this study of holding an administrative license and working in a school with a minimum of 30% Navajo student population. From participant responses and the data collection process, I used content analysis to analyze the data and developed three themes.

Another component of transferability I used for this study to be applicable in a novel setting was by inviting participants who not only had the expertise to answer the research questions but also represented two aspects of Indigenous high school environments. I used the interview protocol to conduct interviews with each participant to obtain data to address the research questions (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020). I asked probing questions during the interview process to gather detailed responses to the interview questions and had participants from public and tribally controlled schools to expand the range and variety of experiences from the data. I used procedures to collect and analyze data to share findings that could be used in similar context and comparable results would be gathered (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Although qualitative study is not generalizable (Shenton, 2004), by using detailed descriptions and transparency of this study's process, others who read this qualitative research may find applicability in other locations.

Dependability

Dependability ensures reliability in a qualitative study. Dependability in a study requires the researcher to be transparent with all the processes used to recruit participants in order to collect and analyze the data (Yin, 2016). I created an audit trail and used a reflexive journal to provide dependability and trustworthiness of this study.

I provided documentation of all the procedures I used in this study. All details are described so that if another study were to be conducted using similar situations and methods with the same participants the results would be comparable (see Shenton, 2004), I practiced the interview protocol with a peer to understand the protocol and modify areas

to establish probes and flow during the interview process. Each interview was audio recorded while I also took notes. I transcribed the data and used the audio recording to transcribe the interview for consistency and accuracy. I ensured that the data answered the research questions and aligned to the conceptual framework of the study. The steps I used to analyze the data are described and illustrated in the tables presented in this chapter. The thorough procedures for collecting and analyzing data ensured dependability for the study that may be used to produce similar findings.

Reflective journaling also provides dependability for this study (Yin, 2016). Because qualitative research is subjective in nature, it is necessary for the researcher to be continually reflective while gathering and analyzing data. As the only researcher in this study, I used a reflective journal to analyze my thoughts and impressions during and after each interview. It was also important for me to reflect on any bias I may have had while analyzing the data. On one occasion, I observed the results of the analysis that I believed to be different to what I thought it would be. However, I maintained integrity to the findings as they reflected the perceptions of the eight participants of this study. These techniques of audit trail and reflective journals assisted my thought process during the analysis of this study by helping eliminate potential biases and increase dependability of this study.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the final element to constructing a trustworthy qualitative study and is comparable to objectivity in quantitative studies. Confirmability in a qualitative study means the findings correctly reveal the experiences and ideas of participants, and

not the preferences or opinions of the researcher (Burkholder et al., 2016; Shenton, 2004). To achieve confirmability in this study, I used bracketing, reflexivity, member checking, and peer debriefers.

First, I used bracketing (see Ahern, 1999) on the interview protocol document during the interview process. Bracketing helped me center my thoughts on what the participant was responding to during the interview rather than on my innate reaction or belief to an answer. As the sole researcher of the study, I also used a reflective journal to document potential biases to establish confirmability. I documented any biased thoughts and opinions I had that could influence the credibility of the study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2020; Yin, 2016). I recorded my thoughts in a document on my computer in a reflective journal after each interview. Reflexivity helps the process of decision making, increases self-awareness, and allows researchers to navigate qualitative research (Meyer & Willis, 2019). Next, to increase confirmability of this study, I requested feedback from participants. I asked participants to member check the three findings of this study to limit any potential researcher bias, confirm participant experiences, and document data accurately. Finally, I used peer debriefing to reduce researcher bias and establish confirmability of this study to accurately represent participant perspectives and the research findings. The two educational leaders that assisted as debriefers provided feedback on the protocol and interview questions, provided recommendations and suggestions for the interview process, and affirmed the themes that emerged from the data.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of school administrators concerning challenges they face when supporting the academic success of Navajo high school students and the strategies they use to address these challenges. Three themes were identified:

1. Administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools describe Navajo family dynamics including poverty and adult responsibilities as challenges that Navajo students encounter to achieve academically.
2. Administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools prioritize their approach to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically by (a) addressing all student issues (b) seeking to incorporate Native classes within the school (c) ensuring Native faculty and support staff are employed to build authentic relational connections with the students, and (d) focusing on the achievement gap between Navajo students and other groups.
3. Administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools prioritize their planning to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically by (a) addressing Native issues, (b) hiring Native staff, (c) seeking to increase cultural knowledge, and (d) accepting cultural characteristics into the classrooms.

The first theme addressed RQ1. The second and third themes addressed RQ2. In Chapter 5, I explain the interpretations of the findings, discuss the data recommendations and the study's limitations, present potential future implications and social change from the research, and draw conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of school administrators concerning challenges they face when supporting the academic success of Navajo high school students and the strategies they use to address these challenges. Administrators are tasked with supporting the academic achievement of Navajo high school students using their personal knowledge and experience of directly working with Navajo students. To date, there have been few studies addressing this issue from the perspective of administrators. A basic exploratory qualitative study best suited this study (see Yin, 2016). I used purposeful sampling and interviewed eight principals or assistant principals of high schools in a southwestern state. Six participants were employed at public schools, and two participants worked for tribally controlled schools. I collected data using videoconference calls and used the same interview protocol for each participant. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. I aligned the interview questions to the research questions. The research questions in this study are as follows:

RQ1. How do administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools describe the needs of Navajo students and the kinds of challenges they encounter to achieve academically?

RQ2. How do administrators in public and tribally controlled high school prioritize their approach and planning to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically?

The conceptual framework of this study was the TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005) that postulates nine tenets directly related to the education of American Indians. I used four of

the elements from the TribalCrit theory to address academic success issues of Navajo high school students. Using the TribalCrit framework allowed me to corroborate the findings of this study to tribal philosophies and beliefs central to understanding realities, differences, and adaptability as theorized in the conceptual framework. Three themes emerged from the data:

1. Administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools describe Navajo family dynamics including poverty and adult responsibilities as challenges that Navajo students encounter to achieve academically.
2. Administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools prioritize their approach to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically by (a) addressing all student issues, (b) seeking to incorporate Native classes within the school, (c) ensuring Native faculty and support staff are employed to build authentic relational connections with the students, and (d) focusing on the achievement gap between Navajo students and other groups.
3. Administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools prioritize their planning to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically by (a) addressing Native issues, (b) hiring Native staff, (c) seeking to increase cultural knowledge, and (d) accepting cultural characteristics into the classrooms.

In Chapter 5, I interpret the findings, address the limitations, provide recommendations and implications, and provide a concluding statement for this study.

Interpretation of the Findings

Using a basic exploratory qualitative study, the findings of this research identified the challenges of Navajo student academic success and the academic success approaches and cultural specific planning strategies used by administrators of public and tribally controlled schools in a southwestern state. These findings help fill the gap in the literature about practice that describe the perceptions and processes of high school administrators, with at least 30% Navajo high school student enrollment, concerning the academic achievement of Navajo high school students. Using the eight interview transcripts, I reviewed, analyzed, and organized the data into codes, categories, and themes. The three emergent themes developed from participant feedback based on the interviews and experiences of the participant school administrators are presented in the following section.

Challenges of Navajo Students to Achieve Academically

The first theme of this study provided a response to RQ1: How do administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools describe the needs of Navajo students and the kinds of challenges they encounter to achieve academically? Theme 1 is the following: Administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools describe Navajo family dynamics including poverty and adult responsibilities as challenges that Navajo students encounter to achieve academically. Based on Brayboy's (2005) TribalCrit, Tenet 6 notes that influential governmental and educational policies, which attempt to conform Indigenous peoples, create problems within the Indigenous community. From the time of colonization, there have been initiatives to assimilate and educate Indigenous

populations through a westernized ideology (Choate, 2019; Grande, 2015). Colonial schooling in educational policies and its structures move to serve the needs of the colonizer (Khalifa et al., 2019). Approaching educational challenges of Indigenous peoples using Indigenous-based solutions, thoughts, and ideas may limit conformity of colonization in education and allow Indigenous communities to begin to make progress.

Researchers' findings corroborate the perceptions of the school administrators in this study that the ongoing cycle of continued poverty in Indigenous communities is a contributor of underachievement of Indigenous students (Fryberg et al., 2013; Harrington & Pavel, 2013; Meza, 2015; Verbos et al., 2011). Poverty throughout the Navajo Nation is cited in the educational literature. Over 28% of Natives live in poverty, almost double the national rate of 15.5%, which is the highest of any racial or ethnic group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Dispossession of Indigenous land and forced removal was the first form of homelessness in the United States and led to continued poverty spanning centuries (Empey et al., 2021). Approximately 40% of families do not have running water in their homes, and 30% of the community do not have electricity in their homes (Dig Deep & U.S. Water Alliance, 2020). Average Native household income is $37,227, in comparison to the national average $53,657 (Jernigan et al., 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Poverty is one of the greatest separators in society and also limits educational opportunities and success for students who come from impoverished families.

Indigenous families have unique educational needs, and poverty presents inequalities and lack of opportunities for student academic success. Schools located in

low socioeconomic income areas have noted elevated levels of behavior problems, as well as students identified with elevated levels of depression and anxiety symptoms (Coley et al., 2018; Goodman et al., 2003). The effects of poverty on Indigenous families and students establishes inequity in educational systems that do not provide adequate opportunities to succeed. Indigenous people need specific supports, funding, and growth strategies that are tailored to their specific needs and academic goals.

Indigenous families delegate adult responsibilities to their oldest child who is often the child in high school. The participants of this study also perceived that high school students assuming an adult role in the Indigenous family lead to academic challenges. There is little research on how Indigenous students cope with adult responsibilities; however, protective factors of family support and cultural identity are supported as meaningful in literature (LaFromboise, 2006; Riser et al., 2019; Sarche et al., 2009). Those adult responsibilities consist of providing care for grandparents and elders, babysitting younger siblings, finding employment for additional family income, assuming responsibility for family livestock, and acting as the adult while parents are away from the home. Numerous times, it may be a combination of these responsibilities. As a result, Navajo high school students struggle to achieve academically (Desai & Abeita, 2017). Poverty prevents Native American students the accessibility to resources, technology, and learning opportunities that benefit their chances to achieve academically.

Academic Success Approaches

Themes 2 and 3 of this study provide a response to RQ2: How do administrators in public and tribally controlled high school prioritize their approach and planning to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically? The second theme is the following: Administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools prioritize their approach to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically by (a) addressing all student issues, (b) seeking to incorporate Native classes within the school, (c) ensuring Native faculty and support staff are employed to build authentic relational connections with the students, and (d) focusing on the achievement gap between Navajo students and other groups. Theme 2 identified strategies that are implemented in the high school to address the academic challenges of all students. However, Navajo high school students experience distinctive challenges with successful academic achievement (Desai & Abeita, 2017). The participants of this study perceived Navajo students require specific approaches that are meaningful to the Indigenous population to achieve academic success. The findings of this study corroborated Brayboy's (2005) TribalCrit, Tenet 5 that when Indigenous peoples' perspectives are considered, the meaning of culture and knowledge changes to reveal new implications.

Similar to the findings of this study, the literature confirms that general approaches to address all student issues using research and evidence-based programs and differentiated strategies help most, but not all, students achieve academically (Castagno et al., 2021; Cosenza, 2015; Opper, 2019). Educational research concerning approaches to individualized learning, differentiated instruction, and learning plans, are in the

literature; however, researchers are unaware of strategies designed specifically to assess the use of culturally responsive practices in schools specifically serving Indigenous students (Castagno et al., 2021). Academic approaches and curricula used to address and improve Indigenous student achievement are provided by local districts as a default method of instruction because there is limited information provided on which specific instructional programs is best for Native American students. However, the literature suggests that Indigenous-centered pedagogy seeks to replace curricula and adapt to learning styles of Indigenous students through diverse ways of development, resulting in achievement (Grande, 2004). American Indian students are among the most understudied and under-served students in the United States even with evidence of constant academic underachievement (Brayboy & Maaka, 2015). It can be challenging for teachers to engage in culturally responsive instructional practices (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; McCarty & Lee, 2014). Indigenous people have always had their own language, culture, and beliefs that supported teaching, learning, and education that transferred for generations (Reyhner & Eder, 1992). Most states offer supports, provide approved curriculum, identify specific indicators and standards, and hold public schools accountable through student grades and oversight.

Based on the findings of this study, the second component of this theme reveals that administrators perceive that offering Native classes is a priority to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically. Offering classes that help students remember their Native language, embrace their culture, and learn their unique history to support Native students' learning and desire to be successful in school was an

approach that administrators used to address the academic challenges of Navajo learners. Supportive administrators and educators who possess the willingness and ability to conduct meaningful cultural practices are crucial in Indigenous communities (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2015). Many Indigenous students failed in public schools because the curriculum does not relate to the students (Pang et al., 2021). When determining best practices for Indigenous education, it is important to acknowledge that the education of Indigenous students is unique (Allison-Burbank et al., 2022). The importance of providing Native language and cultural classes within their schools provides a space for students to demonstrate, highlight, and practice their culture and learn what was once prohibited.

The third component of this theme reveals that administrators understand the importance of recruiting and hiring Native faculty and support staff who can establish genuine bonds with Indigenous students. American Indian students are an underserved population within public schools and enter school with deficits. Recruiting Indigenous personnel would provide role models and staff to relate to the students (Kirk & Goon, 1975; Powers, 2005; Sanders, 1987).

Native educators and staff help to build authentic connections with Native students (Shotton et al., 2013). Native Americans suffer the highest suicide rate of any ethnic group (Arias et al., 2021), thus increasing the need for Native faculty and support staff to provide encouragement for Indigenous students and influence positivity in the school environment. The mental health of communities living on Native lands is influenced by educational and historical trauma (Brave Heart et al., 2011; LaFromboise,

2006; Talaga, 2018; Witko, 2016). The need for schools and teachers to meet social, emotional, and physical needs before attempting to educate Native American students may best meet their needs to be academically successful. Prior research of Indigenous populations concluded that interventions that honor culturally related traditions and build on Indigenous heritage can improve mental health (Goodkind et al., 2012; LaFromboise & Low, 1989). Providing personal connections between educators and administrators with students helps develop emotional support that is often lacking from their own families and not part of a teachers' regular duty.

Native educators who are able to identify and connect with Native students is a fundamental contributor to academic success. Scholarly research suggests building trusting relationship between staff and students positively influences students' academic success (Brayboy, 2005; Champagne & Stauss, 2002; Gentry & Fugate, 2012). Despite historical influences of colonial schooling, tribes like the Navajo Nation are reinstating their own learning and developing the youth to be confident and healthier emotionally (Nelson-Barber & Johnson, 2019). Increasing the need for Native faculty and support staff is the finding that students supported by mentors are more likely to meet their goals (Denetdale, 2011; Talaga, 2018). In Navajo public schools, teachers who have knowledge in teaching, cultural norms, and language can help a student's ability and motivation for a more positive educational experience (Manning et al., 2020). Hiring Native teachers who identify with Indigenous students is important to enhance the students' cultural identity, mental health, and academic achievement.

Finally, based on the findings of this study, administrators documented approaches that are used to reduce the achievement gap of Navajo high school students. Researchers and national studies validate the administrators' knowledge of the achievement gap between American Indian students and other groups (Mahnken, 2018; Riser et al., 2019; Talaga, 2018). The nature of colonial schooling is that educational policies and structures default to serve the needs of the colonizer and majority but continue to oppress the colonized communities (Khalifa et al., 2019). Indigenous schools and students have failed to adapt to a westernized educational system that was forcibly imposed approximately 150 years ago through the U.S. War Department that developed in an era of colonization of Native Americans (Carroll, 1947; U.S. Department of the Interior, n.d.). This westernized mindset has deteriorated the learning environment and academic achievement of Native American students so that Indigenous schools are the lowest performing subgroup nationally (Campbell & Evans-Campbell, 2011; Castagno et al., 2016; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010; Hornback, 2019). Finding a balance between two different mindsets in the miseducation of Native people must be corrected to help Indigenous students (Allison-Burbank et al., 2022).

Student academic achievement in Native American schools has remained significantly lower than the performance of students in other American school systems (Hornback, 2019). To meet the academic needs of Indigenous students, a collective approach is vital to improve educational outcomes (Allison-Burbank et al., 2022). Educational disparities begin before students enter kindergarten (Mitchell et al., 2011; Sarche et al., 2009). As a group, American Indians have the lowest scores on

standardized assessments (Brayboy et al., 2012; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002). The results are apparent when comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous school academic achievement and graduation rates (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010). The findings of this study reveal a controversial conclusion that Native American schools have not solved the problem of low academic performance and achievement despite attempts to increase learning and graduations of Native Navajo students. Administrators must increase approaches to reduce the achievement gap for Native students.

Cultural Specific Planning Strategies

The third theme is the following: Administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools prioritize their planning to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically by (a) addressing Native issues, (b) hiring Native staff, (c) seeking to increase cultural knowledge, and (d) accepting cultural characteristics into the classrooms. Theme 3 also answered RQ2 and revealed how the administrators design plans to solve issues that hinder the academic progress of Navajo students. This theme supports Brayboy's (2005) TribalCrit Tenet 7, that the tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future of Indigenous peoples are important for understanding their lived realities, but they also demonstrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups. The TribalCrit framework provides an analytical and practical ideology for researchers to study the dynamic culture of Indigenous peoples and to acknowledge the historical relevance to current problems of colonization, genocide, assimilation, and oppression that shape the experiences of Native Americans (Daniels, 2011).

The first element of this finding reveals the administrators' realization of the need to address Native issues as a priority to plan and address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically. From this study, addressing Native issues that lessen unexcused attendance, cause behavior issues, and limit learning in schools may help administrators to prioritize their planning and approach for Navajo students to be successful academically. The results from this study, when comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous school academic achievement and graduation, reveals the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in schools (Reyhner, 2017; Schellekens et al., 2022). Compared to students in public schools, students in tribally controlled and BIE schools have lower performance, even though these schools have more independence and tribal sovereignty to develop their approach, planning, and prioritizing of strategies (U.S. Bureau of Indian Education, 2015). More specifically, some state public schools with high American Indian student enrollments are mitigating lawsuits against them because the school districts fail to meet Indigenous student's educational needs (Yazzie, Martinez v. State of New Mexico, 2018). Despite this awareness Native American schools continue to perform inadequately for Indigenous academic achievement. Understanding how education learning problems persist throughout an Indigenous student's academic progress calls for a unique learning model that addresses Native issues and can be used to correct the problem of equitable academic achievement for Indigenous students (Allison-Burbank et al., 2022).

The second element of this study's finding is that administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools need to prioritize their planning to hire Native staff to

increase Navajo students' academic success. Research is lacking in this area; however, there are references to the implications towards Native staff and their importance within Indigenous schools. Training teachers and administrators on bias, cultural competence, and how to make students of all ethnicities feel included and respected is important within education systems (Gloppen et al., 2018). Hiring Native American teachers and administrators is important, but currently a challenge. Teacher onboarding at schools with high American Indian student populations lack information on cultural awareness although it is identified as an important contributor to make students feel included and respected.

Although there is limited literature that addresses the benefits of hiring Native staff, studies that address Latino American and African American teachers coming from students' same background is available. Cultural mismatches of students and teachers can produce unhealthy relationships and deficit views of students (Doran, 2014; Ramirez et al., 2016). When cultural mismatches occur for African American students, these students are taught using inadequate curricular and pedagogical methods that are incongruent with their culture (Irvine, 2010; Ostrander, 2015). The lack of cultural alignment between teachers and students is a national issue related to unfair educational practices based on race in school discipline and academics (Puchner & Markowitz, 2015; Ramsay-Jordan, 2020). Students and teachers from similar backgrounds improves successful academic progress in classes with same-race or same-ethnicity teachers (Grissom et al., 2020). The findings of this study denote that administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools need to hire Native staff to increase Navajo students' academic achievement.

The third element of this theme reveals that administrators of this study need to increase cultural knowledge for educators and staff in public and tribally controlled high schools. Lack of cultural awareness is a crucial factor for Native American cultures in U.S. schools (Leverson et al., 2021). The literature suggests that Native American schools are inadequately serviced and continue to underserve Indigenous students by providing poor classroom experiences (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Public schools serving Indigenous students continue to employ less-qualified teachers, have fewer resources, and maintain poor relationships with Indigenous communities (Lees, 2016). Beliefs that are fundamental elements of Navajo pedagogy can be used to improve engaged teaching in the classroom and increase learning for students (Allison-Burbank et al., 2022). Supporting these findings, the current study reveals that public and tribally controlled high school administrators must provide onboarding and professional development to increase the cultural knowledge (Castagno et al., 2021; Grande, 2004; Lomawaima, 2000; McHenry-Sorber, 2019) of Native students in the classroom.

The fourth element of Theme 3 reveals the need for educators to adapt and accept cultural characteristics of learning in the classroom. Native American students thrive when their voices, ideas, and viewpoints are highlighted (Gentry & Fugate, 2012). There are several concerns about the current educational system and its limitations to address teaching and learning approaches for Native American students. Indigenous peoples in the United States have experienced generational mass trauma as a result of colonialism and cultural genocide (Brave Heart et al., 2011; Pember, 2016; Sebwenna-Painter et al., 2023). Acts of forced assimilation committed at boarding schools include, but are not

limited to, severe punishment for speaking their Native language, destroying, and degrading traditional clothing, removal of long hair, various forms of child abuse by school staff, restricting family contact, and even death (Pember, 2016; Sebwenna-Painter et al., 2023). Calls for a movement to build on culturally centered Indigenous philosophies of learning that will transform approaches to education and inform Native ways of thinking, living, and learning (Allison-Burbank et al., 2022; Vallejo & Werito, 2022) are critical. This history of damage needs to be addressed and acknowledged for Navajo students to succeed in the classroom.

It is a challenge for schools to prioritize planning for Navajo students when cultural characteristics are not recognized or considered for use within the classroom. For instance, teachers can create lesson plans for a student with an Individualized Education Plan using a multitude of modification strategies (extended time, alternative testing) (Higgins et al., 2023; Hustus et al., 2020; O'Brien et al., 2023), but few studies have researched specific cultural characteristics of Navajo students to determine how best to serve Indigenous students, who are the lowest performing group in the United States. Castagno (2021) suggested most teachers in Navajo schools are constrained by lack of curricular resources or by mandates to use one-size-fits all scripted curriculum provided by their districts. Traditional Navajo beliefs are guided on cultural principles of thinking, planning, implementing, and reflection; each principle represents more than the surface-level thinking and each term could guide the inculcation of cultural characteristics of Indigenous students in the classroom (Allison-Burbank et al., 2022; Fowler, 2022; Haskie, 2013). Suggestions and addressing ways to work with Native students in public,

BIE, and tribally controlled high schools for campus administrators is scarce (Ali et al., 2014; Desai & Abeita, 2017; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010; Gentry & Fugate, 2012). However, the learning needs of Indigenous students requires a collective approach to improve educational outcomes (Allison-Burbank et al., 2022). Public and tribally controlled high schools with Navajo students have yet to identify educational best practices (Nelson-Barber & Johnson, 2019). Native American students have uniquely lived experiences that shape their education. Administrators in public and tribally controlled high schools need to prioritize their planning to address this approach to encourage teachers to accept and develop the unique cultural characteristics of Native students in the classroom and determine ways that students understand concepts, develop skills, and achieve academically.

Limitations of the Study

Each methodological approach in research has constraints that may affect the findings of a study. Limitations in any study contain possible weaknesses that could affect the results of a qualitative basic study, which are usually out of the control of the researcher depending on research design or other potential factors (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Limitations in this qualitative study include (a) a small sample size of participants, (b) researcher bias, and (c) transferability of the findings.

The limited sample size of 8 high school administrators is the study's first limitation. Qualitative studies include small purposive samples (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Sufficiency of the sample size is measured by depth of data rather than frequencies; therefore, samples should consist of participants who best represent the

research topic (Morse et al., 2002). Qualitative research requires a small sample size of up to 10 participants who are purposefully identified because they meet the requirements of having knowledge of the topic and are able to address the phenomenon of the study and answer the research questions (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). I selected participants for this study who held an administrative license and worked in schools that had a minimum of 30% American Indian student population in a southwestern state. I made certain to include administrators who could speak directly to the experiences at their schools, which included a variety of diverse student populations. I conducted a semistructured interview with each principal to understand their perspectives to identify the challenges of Navajo student academic success, the academic success approaches, and cultural specific planning strategies.

The second limitation of qualitative research is the researcher's involvement in the study. Knowing the relationship of the researcher to the study helps identify the ways and how a researcher collected data and interpreted the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). I was the only data collector of the data for this study. I kept a reflexive journal during the study to limit bias by explaining the procedures followed and took into consideration the choices I made (see Meyer & Willis, 2019). During the interviews, I used bracketing to document my perspectives of the participants. In qualitative research, it is expected that researchers will make efforts to put aside values to describe respondents' experiences more accurately (Ahern, 1999). To ensure the findings of this study were accurate and did not represent my biases, I emailed the results of this study to each of the participants and peer reviewers to provide input and validate these findings. Although, I had these steps

identified and used these tools to assure reliability, personal bias and perspectives may have emerged into the data of this study, which could be a limitation of this research.

Transferability of the findings for this study is a potential limitation. Transferability refers to a study's results that may apply to a broader context and with a different audience (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). In the protocol I provided background information of the study and potential benefits for participation and participant responses. I asked probing questions in the interview process to gather more direct responses to the interview questions and had participants from both public and tribally controlled schools to expand the range and variety of experiences from the data. I used procedures to collect and analyze data to share findings that could be used in similar context, and comparable results would be gathered (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Transferability is in keeping with qualitative methods, where the purpose is to add new insights and to enhance transferability (Bembridge et al., 2011). Although qualitative study is not generalizable (Shenton, 2004; Yin, 2016), by using detailed descriptions and providing transparency of this study's process, others who read this qualitative research may find applicability in other locations, school districts, and tribes.

Recommendations

This study added to the limited research concerning the challenges of Navajo student academic success and academic success approaches and cultural specific planning strategies used by administrators of public and tribally controlled schools in a southwestern state. The findings of this study uncovered and identified specific themes relating to the challenges of Navajo student academic success, academic success

approaches, and cultural specific planning used by high school administrators. Although research studies have examined data concerning low graduation rates, high dropout rates, and Native language importance opportunities to conduct additional and further research are needed. Further research would benefit administrators to determine which program approaches and planning strategies would increase Navajo student academic achievement.

Additional qualitative studies should investigate the factors and challenges of different Indigenous tribes, school districts, and states. Another recommendation is to conduct similar studies focused on administrators' challenges of academic success for elementary students. A further recommendation for qualitative research would be to conduct studies at high-performing schools in public, BIE, and tribally controlled schools with high American Indian student populations. Findings from these studies may identify best practices for academic achievement for Indigenous students.

Throughout the process of acquiring peer-reviewed literature for this study, I discovered limited research and information that specifically addressed Navajo Nation issues. Studies shared data and highlighted gaps in performance, but information addressing the potential barriers Navajo students experience to achieve academically is limited or nonexistent. This study identified limited information and research concerning specific areas that address the academic success of Navajo student academic achievement. Therefore, additional qualitative recommendations needed for research include the following: identifying cultural characteristics of Indigenous students that may increase classroom learning, determining Native staff and student connections to build

authentic relationships, understanding trust of educational systems from an Indigenous lens, describing family-directed adult responsibilities that Native students assume, and analyzing specialized curricula for Indigenous students. Each of these studies may help to reveal information that would increase learning and academic achievement for Navajo high school students.

This study sought to provide a voice for the experiences and perceptions of administrators who work at Indigenous schools. Further qualitative research is needed to examine school administrators' perceptions about challenges that support the academic success of Indigenous students to allow their stories to be heard and reflected in the literature. The collective lack of administrator input in general is concerning because school administrators determine the allocation of resources and funding, hire teachers, establish curriculum, and guide the learning strategies to be used in the school environment. Lastly, school administrators are often the spokespersons for families and students, and their critical voice needs to be studied and provided in the literature.

Based on the limited sample size of participants, transferability of this study is limited to high school administrators. Although the findings of this study provide useful, important, and added information regarding the challenges of Navajo student academic success and the academic success approaches and cultural specific planning strategies, this study did not include elementary principal's perceptions, additional tribes, pueblos, or nations, or other states.

Implications

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of school administrators concerning challenges they face when supporting the academic success of Navajo high school students and the strategies they use to address these challenges. The implications of this study may provide useful approaches and planning strategies for high school administrators to address the needs of Navajo students in their schools. Additionally, another implication of this study focuses on the challenges Navajo students encounter while attending high school. The implications derived from this study may improve the knowledge base of the gap in literature regarding practice. The implications of this research, identified through the findings of the study, include applications of positive social change and recommendations for immediate application and practice.

Application and Practice Implications

The findings of this qualitative study reveal applications and practices that examined the challenges to support the academic success of Navajo high school students and the strategies administrators use to address these challenges. The following implications are provided to administrators of school districts and high schools with Indigenous students within their jurisdiction.

The first implication for practice is the need for public school district leaders to provide Native classes and hire Native staff to address the achievement gap affecting Native American students. Offering Native classes for students puts them in a position to be eligible for Native American-specific scholarships, reverses over a century of practice

that prevented Native languages to be spoken in schools, allows for students to learn of their culture, and provides a space for Indigenous students to reclaim their identity in a westernized educational system. Hiring Native staff–especially teachers and administrators–in public schools encourages students to build connections to the staff that come from the same communities, have similar beliefs, understand Native-specific struggles, and provides students with advocates in school systems that are historically and presently unapologetic to Indigenous students. Public schools that enroll 10% or more American Indian students should be mindful of the individuals they hire based on their Indigenous student enrollment. Certain schools have Indian Preference requirements to address this need, but border towns often do not enact this policy nor is the staff reflective of its student enrollment. Additional federal funding is provided to schools with Indigenous students, but inequalities still exist in the distribution process, usually at the school-district level. These factors both affect the ability to hire Native staff and influence the potential to provide Native classes for Indigenous students at the high-school level.

The second implication of this study shows that administrators need to provide evidence-based strategies to address the achievement gap for Indigenous students. The minority of Navajo students who are academically successful and graduate high school may be more likely to explore post-secondary options of further education. These students must be provided equitable learning opportunities, resources, and supports. The emphasis of curricula in high schools that service 30% or more Indigenous enrollment needs to emphasize thinking skills and understanding concepts rather than teaching a

curriculum to increase standardized test scores. Preparing students for high-stakes testing does not make schools more equitable nor does it close the achievement gap; it instead deepens discrimination and inequality in public schools (Hornback, 2019; Patrick, 2008; Sebwenna-Painter et al., 2023). Studies that focus on grade point averages of students consider only cognitive aspects and in the process neglect social and cultural contexts in which students learn and achieve (Ali et al., 2014; Allison-Burbank et al., 2022). Strategies, methods, plans, and accountability measures to address the achievement gap between American Indians and other groups at the federal and state level have not been successful. Observing the academic achievement data from the 1990s to now, little to no progress has been identified in Native American student achievement growth (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020b; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019). Input from Indigenous educators who can offer open-minded, risk-taking, solution-based, and accountability-focused solutions from a mindset grounded in TribalCrit is needed to address the American Indian achievement gap. Perhaps then, the pendulum may move towards closing the achievement gap overtime.

The third implication is directed to tribally controlled school leaders to prioritize approaches and planning for Native issues that address school systems and achievement gaps. Tribally controlled schools possess the autonomy to address the needs of its Native student populations; however, these schools do not and have not produced school data to show their academic successes. Autonomy also means maintaining the ability to avoid disclosing school data. Tribal education department employees who control oversight of these schools may have limited educational and managerial abilities. Those persons in

school improvement positions or accountability departments may be comprised of individuals with little experience in the classroom or administrative experience at the school level. School systems whether they are public, BIE, or tribally controlled have administrative and educational gaps amongst themselves, with the BIE and tribally controlled schools at the lower end of achievement (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020a; U.S. Bureau of Indian Education, 2015). Reform, restructuring, rethinking, and revamping tribal education departments is paramount to improve academic success, graduation rates, and college enrollment of Indigenous students. Improving tribally controlled schools through higher accountability and more unique approaches to educating Native American students and revitalizing Native language, culture, philosophy, and history needs to be addressed.

The fourth implication from the findings of this study is for any schools and districts that serve and educate Native American students to develop an Indigenous-specific onboarding of cultural knowledge and cultural characteristics for new teachers, staff, and administrators. Indigenous educators must seek to improve educational outcomes that respect and sustain Indigenous ways of knowing. Public, BIE, and tribally controlled high schools with Navajo student populations struggle to identify educational best practices (Nelson-Barber & Johnson, 2019). It is important for all staff, educators, and administrators to be aware and be held accountable for each student population it serves, and how funding provided to school districts through Impact Aid (Mendez et al., 2011) and Johnson O'Malley funds (Steele, 1974) is required to be used. In the Yazzie Martinez vs. New Mexico case, the state education department failed to uphold fair

educational opportunities and financially limited the success of American Indian and Hispanic children (Rodriguez, 2019). By using focused and specific Indigenous onboarding strategies with new staff, teachers, and administrators, immediate barriers of working with American Indian students may be reduced through understanding and respecting Native American cultures, teachings, languages, practices, histories, and cultural characteristics.

Additionally, this final implication could also include developing connections between staff and students. In many instances, Native youth experiences are more likely to be negative than positive; youth tend to remember peers' use of stereotypes and teachers' unwillingness to assist students (Ricci & Riggs, 2019). Through knowledge and understanding of Indigenous cultures, connections may be made through building on respect, trust, advocacy, and equity.

Positive Social Change Implications

This study's implications could influence positive social change for local educational agencies, tribal education departments, and state educational agencies. Research conducted through Walden University supports social change through academic focus and research (Walden University, n.d.). From the research of this study, recommendations to address challenges of Navajo students, approaches to academic success, and cultural planning strategies may contribute to positive social change. The findings from this study may provide positive social change by empowering school administrators with knowledge and resources to help their Indigenous students' academic achievement and success. Through empowerment of educational equality for Indigenous

students, many young people will find the confidence to be successful, share knowledge of their unique journeys, and close the academic achievement gap that has persisted over the last 5 decades. Indigenous students, families, and communities will directly benefit from this positive social change. By empowering a deeply and historically traumatized Indigenous people, change may start as a tiny ripple and increase to an intertribal movement that could create opportunities of hope and Indigenous revitalization.

Conclusion

High school administrators deal with unforeseen challenges that Navajo high school students encounter and are tasked with identifying strategies, approaches, and plans to address these challenges. Despite previous attempts to increase student academic achievement in Native American schools, achievement remains significantly lower than the performance of other students (Hornback, 2019). Native American schools are inadequately serviced and continue to underserve Indigenous students by providing poor school experiences across the nation (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). District, state, and tribal educational leaders should determine clear and specific learning strategies to implement in classrooms, rather than focusing on sovereignty and single-system approaches of educating Indigenous students.

One consistent form of accountability for public school districts, BIE schools, and tribally controlled schools needs to be created that emphasizes academic proficiency and seeks to increase high school graduation for Indigenous students. Indigenous educators and administrators should work towards enhancing educational system strategies for all schools. Policies must be considered for Indigenous students that include Native staff in

schools, incorporate Native classes, train non-Native staff, understand family dynamics, educate administrators and staff of persistent negative Native issues that decrease educational progress, and address Native issues with useful solutions with academic achievement in mind.

This study may provide useful approaches and planning strategies for high school administrators to address the academic needs of Navajo students in their schools. However, change needs to begin immediately. Positive social change could occur if school, district, state, federal, and tribal leaders not only understand the challenges of Navajo students, but also assume accountability to improve the strategies, approaches, and plans required to address these academic issues for Indigenous students.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Interview Outline	**Observations/Notes**
Date: _____ Interview start time: _____ Participant Code: _____	
I. Introduction and Greeting Hello. My name is Derek Begay. Thank you for being willing to participate in this interview today. The purpose of this interview is to examine the perceptions of administrators' challenges to support the academic success of Navajo high school students. I will be recording the interview, which should last 45 to 60 minutes. I will take steps to maintain confidentiality by assigning you a participant code to ensure that your identity and personal information remain confidential. Please feel free to speak openly as you share your experiences. Do you have any questions before we begin?	
II. Review of Consent Form Before I begin the interview, I would like to review the consent form with you.	
III. Background Information Before we start the interview, I would like to gather some background information on you as an educator and in your current position in an effort to get to know you better. 1. Name: _____ 2. Male: ___ Female: ___ 3. How many years have you been in education? _____	

4. How many years have you been in administration? _____ 5. How many years have you served as a principal with Navajo Nations students? _____ 6. How many years have you served as an assistant principal with Navajo Nations students? _____ 7. How many years have you been principal in your current school? _____ 8. How many years have you been the assistant principal at your current school? _____ 9. What percent of Navajo students are enrolled at your school? _____	
IV. Study Research Question Here is the research question for this study. How do administrators in public, BIE, and tribally controlled high schools prioritize their approach and planning to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically? I have eight questions for you. I'm going to ask you to share your perceptions about administrators' challenges to support the academic success of Navajo high school students.	
V. Interview Questions 1. What challenges do Navajo students experience who attend your school? • Tell me more… • What did you mean by… • What about parental involvement… • Tell me about state/funding formulas… 2. What Navajo cultural influences and initiatives are incorporated in your school? • Please give me examples of…	

• Tell me about classroom participant techniques. • Tell me about language revitalization. • Elaborate more about…	
3. How has the school adopted contemporary realities of Native Americans in curriculum? • Tell me more … • What did you mean by…	
4. How has the school adopted contemporary realities of Native Americans in teaching? • Tell me more… • What did you mean by… • Explain staff and teacher cultural training… • Tell me about classroom participant techniques. • Elaborate on the overrepresentation of Navajo student in special education.	
5. How do you address achievement gaps between Navajo and other students? • Tell me more… • What did you mean by… • State/funding formulas…	
6. What would make an academically successful Navajo student in your school? • Elaborate on… • Tell me about…	
7. How do you plan for the challenges that Navajo students experience to achieve academically? • Tell me more … • What did you mean by… • Tell me about teacher professional development. • Talk to me about parental involvement…	

8. How do you prioritize your approach to address the challenges of academic success for Navajo students? • Tell me more… • Elaborate more… ○ Technology, books, online subscriptions, tutors • What data show this/these help… • What did you mean by… 9. What else would you like to add to our conversation about the challenges you face as an administrator to promote the academic success of Navajo high school students?	
VI. Close of Interview Thank you for meeting with me today and taking time to answer my questions. By participating in this study, you are helping me to further understand administrators' perceptions of prioritizing their approach and planning to address the challenges of Navajo students to achieve academically in high schools. I hope that through the data collected based on your experiences, we will be able to improve practices in our schools with Navajo student populations. Do you have any additional questions for me at this time?	
Turn off recording.	
VII. End of Interview Interview end time: _____	