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High School Teacher Perceptions About Reading Strategies That Support African American and Hispanic Students

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Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Sherrie Sudler

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.

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Walden University

2024

Abstract

High School Teacher Perceptions About Reading Strategies That Support African

American and Hispanic Students

by

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MA, Wilmington University, 2018

BS, Neumann University, 2004

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2024

Abstract

The problem addressed by the study was African American and Hispanic students' literacy scores remain the lowest of all ethnicities at high schools in a district, despite the implementation of numerous initiatives and curricular platforms. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate how high school teachers perceive their implementation of instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement. Using Freire's theory of critical pedagogy, high school teachers' perceptions of their implementation of instructional strategies in reading were explored. Data were collected using semistructured interviews of 10 participants who met the inclusion criteria and volunteered to participate in interviews. Data analysis included a priori coding and open descriptive coding identifying codes, categories, and themes. The emergent themes included findings about (a) culturally relevant and differentiated practices, (b) engagement opportunities that promote social/emotional development and social justice, (c) support from stakeholders providing professional learning and culturally relevant resources, and (d) school and community partnerships. The resulting project, a white paper project with recommendations, was created to inform stakeholders of the study findings and propose actions for consideration. Understanding high school teachers' perceptions of how they implement instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students could inform leaders' decision making regarding how to strengthen instructional practices along with parent and community engagement for this population of students, thereby resulting in improved student achievement and positive social change.

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Dedication

To my parents, Gloria J. Brown, Benjamine J. Brown, Sr. and Edward H. Sudler, Sr. You have all shown the accomplishments of drive, determination, and perseverance for your children to show us a better life and that education is your key to the world. Your time and sacrifice are unmatched. This accomplishment reflects all that you have instilled in me—faith, service, and social justice. I love you!

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

In a northeastern state with a rural, suburban mixed community, standardized test scores have been lower for African American and Hispanic high school students than for their peers of other ethnicities. The problem addressed by the study is African American and Hispanic students' literacy scores have remained lowest of all ethnicities at high schools in one district, despite the implementation of numerous initiatives and curricular platforms. The problem is meaningful at the local study district. For example, campus educators (a) implemented campus-adopted instructional principles, (b) implemented a new curriculum with embedding reading in all content areas, (c) invested in additional assessment platforms to assess student areas for growth, (d) focused on the use of instructional strategies in professional learning communities (PLCs), (e) implemented response to intervention (RTI) and multitiered systems of support (MTSS) classes, (f) provided reading professional development (PD) opportunities focused on strategies for diverse populations, and (g) built a trauma-informed school team aimed at supporting the Hispanic and African American students' needs. The gap in practice is that despite literacy initiatives implemented by district and campus personnel to support African American and Hispanic students, the achievement gap has persisted for these students compared to European American and Asian Americans (College Board SAT Scores for study district 2017-2022). It is possible that the gap in practice is also reflected in the lack of appropriate literacy strategies used in the high school classroom that would benefit African American and Hispanic students, despite literature that reflects the effectiveness

of using culturally relevant pedagogy (J. Kaiser et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2021; D. Thomas & Dyches, 2019). In addition, the gap in practice could reflect the absence of appropriate relationship-building strategies that would benefit African American and Hispanic students, despite the literature that reflects the importance of building positive, trusting relationships to support student engagement, motivation, and a sense of community (D. Thomas & Dyches, 2019), hence the need to further investigate this problem in the local study district. This problem is also relevant at the national level.

On the national level, the gap in performance on literacy assessments for African American and Hispanic students compared to European and Asian American students has persisted. The performance of African American and Hispanic students has been below the average or proficient performance expected on these literacy assessment measures, and this low performance affects the educational opportunities available to these groups, such as access to Advanced Placement courses and college admittance (Medina Coronado & Nagamine Miyashiro, 2019; Peterson et al., 2016). Nam (2023) noted that African American and Hispanic student's college entrance exams were an average of 100 points to 200 points below their European American and Asian American counterparts. Therefore, there is still further need to understand and implement strategies for diverse student populations.

As there is more of a need to focus on reading strategies for diverse learners, there should be a continued focus on culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally responsive resources in the classroom. Researchers have shown multiple-approaches to the problem on a broader scale that are reflected in pedagogical practice to support diverse student

populations in the classroom using various instructional strategies to close reading gaps (Gay, 2002; Marzano, 2004; D. Thomas & Dyches, 2019). When teachers understand and appreciate cultural diversity, they develop high expectations for diverse learners, supporting Hispanic and African American students (Freedson & Eastman, 2016). Teachers with high expectations and responsiveness to cultural differences reflect higher student achievement across all ethnic groups (Peterson et al., 2016). Therefore, culturally responsive teachers who celebrate student diversity prepare students for academic and societal success.

As teachers prepare students for academic and societal success, it is important to for them to understand how to gain professional practices in culturally relevant instruction. Researchers have also reported that teachers want support and PD in instructional strategies to promote student success in reading (Goddard et al., 2000; J. Kaiser et al., 2017; Keyes, 2019). Students with diverse backgrounds gain a better understanding of themselves and others when teachers consider the students' connection to content and needs while planning and delivering instruction. However, differentiated academic support that includes culturally competent strategies is not often included in instructional plans to support students of color (J. Kaiser et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2021). Therefore, this study was needed to investigate the instructional strategies used to support reading skill development for African American and Hispanic high school students.

Rationale

District Initiatives for Reading Instructional Strategies

The problem addressed by the study was that African American and Hispanic students' literacy scores have remained the lowest of all ethnicities at high schools in one district despite the implementation of numerous initiatives and curricular platforms from 2016 through 2024. District and campus educators implemented curriculum and instructional initiatives in 2016 to close the achievement gap for African American and Hispanic students in the local district. District-wide, direct instruction principles were implemented and must be used in lesson design and implementation. The principles include (a) warm-up, (b) connection before content, (c) chunking instruction, (d) responsive instruction, (e) student discourse, (f) feedback, (g) evidence of learning, (h) distributed summarizing, (i) student clarity, and (j) closure. According to both the curriculum director and the principal at the study district, all educators in the study district are expected to use these strategies for best practices for reading instruction. The curriculum director also shared that instructional principles are a common language among this educational group in the high schools in the district, and teachers can plan research-based lessons with a solid foundation. Therefore, many of the instructional principles provide a framework for how direct instruction should be planned and implemented to increase student engagement, student discourse, and student academic success.

District and campus leaders have also implemented a technology tool to analyze and track how student and teacher discourse shapes student direct instruction. The

leading technological platform, TeachFX, is used to assess and analyze classroom discourse. TeachFX is an analytical program that provides support for teachers to assess engagement levels, equity of instructional strategies, and student voice.

For struggling readers, schools have transitioned from RTI programming to MTSS. Like RTI, MTSS uses three tiers of support to reach students (Bender, 2012). With the transition from RTI to MTSS style practices to address student engagement and academic achievement, two key platforms have been adopted: Dreambox for mathematics and iLit for reading. The platforms are used to address each students' learning level. Both platforms are accessible during enrichment time or regular class instruction as a warm-up or exit ticket. Using these platforms, the school leaders have aimed to support teachers and their effectiveness in engaging students, providing equity of instructional strategies, and facilitating student voice.

SAT Scores in Reading

Despite the initiatives outlined above, SAT reading scores reflect a gap based on student race. The focus on improving literacy scores through the various strategies was noted in the study district's 2016–2021 and 2022-2027 strategic plan, 2016-2021 district Teaching and Learning Department meeting minutes, 2021-2022 content-area PLC meeting minutes from the three high schools, and 2019 content-area PD plans from the three high schools. Significant disparities continue in average SAT scores between African American and Hispanic students compared to their European American and Asian American peers (see Table 1).

Table 1

Mean SAT Reading Scores by Race in High Schools at the Study District, by School Year

Student race	2021-2022	2019–2020	2018–2019	2017–2018
African American	472	481	469	471
Hispanic	495	500	467	471
European American	535	530	530	540
Asian American	570	563	543	592

Note. Data from the College Board database of SAT scores.

Another measure other than scores is the percentage of students achieving proficiency in reading on the SAT. Table 2 shows the disparities between proficiency percentages among diverse student groups. Proficiency levels are determined by a score of 480 and higher on the SAT in evidence-based reading.

Table 2

Percentage of Students Meeting Proficiency on the SAT in Reading by Race for the Study District and State, by School Year

Student race	2021-2022		2019–2020		2018–2019		2017–2018	
	Study district	State	Study district	State	Study district	State	Study district	State
African American	38	28	49	36	46	36	47	41
Hispanic	41	33	57	41	47	39	41	43
European American	57	55	71	66	77	73	76	74
Asian American	79	75	86	81	71	81	89	86

Note. Data source: The College Board database of SAT scores.

Whereas 71% of European American students and 86% of Asian American students at high schools in the district scored at the proficient level in SAT reading in 2020, only 49% of African American students and 57% of Hispanic students did. Similar gaps are observed across school years, as shown in Table 2. The problem is not limited to the study district; state scores also showed a disparity (see Table 2).

Conclusion and Summary of Rationale

With a deficit between reading scores on the SAT based on student race and over 1,700 students currently enrolled in the study district, despite a plethora of initiatives, educators need more information to help Hispanic and African American students in reading achievement. According to Nam (2023), African American and Hispanic students are scoring on average 100 points to 200 points below their European American and Asian American peers. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how high school teachers perceive their implementation of instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement.

Definition of Terms

The following definition of terms includes key terms critical to the comprehension of the study. Terms are specific to the study of high school teachers' perceptions of how they implement instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' achievement.

Equity or equitable practice: In teaching, equity is ensuring all students have the resources they need to propel them forward into academic and societal success. Kafele (2013) outlined explicitly how educators' mindsets shape students' self-perception.

Equitable practice sets a tone for positive culture and engagement to build connection with students to promote individualized and equitable learning.

Evidence-based reading: In this part of the SAT reading test, students read passages in the effort to extract citations to analyze common themes in one or various texts. Evidence-based reading is a form of reading used in standardized testing such as the SAT as well as reading instruction (College Board, 2021).

Instructional principles: Instructional principles are an instructional guide developed by administrative team and instructional coaches to identify the instructional focus as outlined in the strategic plan. The instructional principles from Kagan and Kagan (2015) also outlined examples of what each focal area looks like during classroom instruction.

Multitiered systems of support (MTSS): This three-tiered system of supports for student academic, behavioral, and socioemotional success is typically identified by a school-based or district-based team. Tier 1 is universal instruction, Tier 2 is more targeted for students who need additional help, and Tier 3 is more intensive. A connection between academic, community, and social emotional supports is made to promote student academic success (J. Lee et al., 2023; Texas Education Agency, 2021).

Professional learning communities (PLCs): PLCs serve as a team of educators at the building or district level to discuss student progress and outcomes and determine the best resources to support effective instructional practices (J. Jones & Vari, 2019).

Proficiency levels: Proficiency levels are the levels at which students meet educational benchmarks based on the national standards (College Board, 2021).

Proficiency levels are noted as whole numbers for scores; percentages of students achieving proficiency is also a useful metric.

Response to intervention (RTI): RTI is a three-tiered system of supports for student academic and behavioral success identified by a school-based or district-based team. Like MTSS, Tier 1 is universal, Tier 2 is more targeted, and Tier 3 is particularly intensive and differentiated for struggling students (Bender, 2012).

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are significant because findings reveal further insight about the district stakeholders may consider the study findings to support instructional principles modeling instructional strategies that strengthen African American and Hispanic students' reading skills, including increased accountability to stakeholders, continuous improvement of reading interventions for learners, and social change in addressing achievement gaps. The administrative team promotes student success by continuously discussing student achievement and comparing student data across schools, the state, and the country. Educators, lawmakers, and the community become informed on the practices that support students and the areas of need within the learning organization to support improving the education of all students. Closing academic achievement gaps is not instantaneous. However, educators and scholar-practitioners can take direct actions to quickly narrow such gaps (Carey, 2019; Freedson & Eastman, 2016).

With the findings of this study, secondary school educators in the northeastern state may revise practices in reading instruction to better support all students. Improved

reading instruction for all students leads to overall school success. School success from better readers leads to students more likely staying in school and higher graduation rates, which lead to better opportunities in college and as a result promote access to employment. Consequently, as students learn and educators collaboratively plan instruction, data are the key to setting a firm foundation to support the educational community (Miller- Jones & Rubin, 2020). None of the instructional strategies at the local study district have addressed how the use of continual learner-centered strategies inform reading instruction, and materials must be chosen to reflect a diverse population. Reading strategies for diverse learners and academic achievement have the potential to inform the practices of the school community, and, therefore, reflect those ideas into society to promote positive social change. Therefore, gaining more information on teachers' perceptions of the instructional support and resources needed to support African American and Hispanic students could strengthen literacy and reading instruction and improve graduation outcomes.

Research Question

The research question was designed to address the problem of African American and Hispanic reading scores being lower than the scores of other student populations, while understanding the perceptions of teachers who provide reading instruction and their instructional supports and techniques. Understanding teacher perceptions of their instruction could provide some insight into why certain student demographics comprehend the reading curricula while others struggle. Examining high school teachers' perceptions of how they implement instructional strategies in reading to support African

American and Hispanic students' achievement could impact instructional practices and reflection in the future. A single research question (RQ) guided this study.

RQ: How do high school teachers perceive they implement instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement at the study district?

Review of the Literature

The literature in this section provides a review of research that was analyzed related to teachers' instruction in reading to support to African American and Hispanic students. As the gaps in reading achievement were analyzed between African American and Hispanic students versus their European American and Asian American peers, it is clear that some strategies have worked well to further develop students reading skills and some have not. The literature in this section provides a review of the considerations and strategies implemented to further African American and Hispanic students reading success. The conceptual framework of Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy is centered in teachers using instructional materials to engage students in their academic success and societal success. In this theory, teachers engage students with concepts and curriculum and relate to them, and students collaborate with their teachers and peers to make a meaningful influence on their academic future.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study consisted of social and cultural awareness and strategies for educators to promote success in diverse populations of students. Freire (1970) stressed that pedagogy was not about using techniques on students

to strengthen learning but is a process of helping students develop critical thinking as a way of supporting self-determination and civic engagement. Freire (1970) influenced ways that teachers thought about and provided instruction to students. For example, Freire's critical pedagogy focused on concepts to build engagement of students; the educator and student collaborate to critically reflect on their environment to transform it. Freire shared that in critical pedagogy theory, it is important to recognize the ideas of teachers and students both as learners, developing critical literacy to identify equity and encouraging active inquiry. With teachers and students being learners in Freire's theory, there is a focus on collaboration and consideration of the power dynamics in the classroom. Critical literacy is an act of learners reading to understand in a critical way how the text is used and resources provided contribute to or take away from equity (Freire, 1970). Freire also encouraged active inquiry and participation to provide learners with opportunities to make autonomous decisions as they critically reflect and make decisions. Furthermore, Freire shared that a positive learning environment includes care, equity, and trust. Keeping Freire's theory in mind, educators can plan instruction based on providing students with real-life connections and engaging them in discourse. Freire also emphasized the importance of owning mistakes as a teacher, admitting that as teachers, one does not know everything, and that students have knowledge that may be used to help others in the classroom (Freire, 1970). In terms of materials selection, Freire noted that using materials that appeal to the student and connect to their backgrounds and reflected diversity is critical. In addition, Freire noted the importance of giving choice, allowing students to conduct their own research and to consider dialogue with students

around social justice issues to build awareness and critical literacy skills (Freire, 1970). Giroux (2010) described Freire's theory as a way to prepare students for life after their formal schooling and to be active participants in society and a commitment to their future. This means educators should focus on scaffolding their instruction to start with smaller concepts to more in-depth concepts for students to analyze on critical real-world level. Also, education is described as directive in teaching students to inhabit a particular mode of agency, enabling them to understand society and to understand their role and relationship in the world (Giroux, 2010). There was also further reflection on learners continuing to question the norms in society and stand up for social justice (Bauman & Tester, 2001; Cegielski et al., 2023). Freire's critical pedagogy served as a foundation to further explore how teachers can further engage African American and Hispanic students to increase their reading skills. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (2021a) described how educators using student background knowledge develops higher order thinking and leads to better academic outcomes. This further connects to why it is important to research teacher perceptions about reading strategies that support African American and Hispanic students.

Further, Ladson-Billings (2021b) described how Freire's theory on critical pedagogy also addresses multiculturalism in education creates unity and diversity in a social reconstructionist view. For my basic qualitative research, the phenomenon is the academic achievement gap of African American and Hispanic students in reading. Reading strategies for diverse learners include establishing a collective efficacy between various stakeholders, such as district and building administration, parents, specialists, and

teachers. Educating ethnically diverse students relates to the phenomenon of this study that is to understand the gap in achievement of African American and Hispanic students in reading. Thus, understanding teacher perception on their implementation of reading strategies used to support African American and Hispanic students was critical to close the identified gap in practice. Also, Ladson-Billings (2021b) explained that basic pedagogical attributes of instruction include teachers mastering content knowledge and pedagogical skills. However, to appeal to a diverse student population, educators must understand the cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups (Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 2021a). Diversity in education requires educators to practice cultural competency, which is an awareness of what each group of people believes, thinks, and feels based on their interactions with others (Freire, 1970; Moule, 2012). The research outcomes of all of these studies showed that human development and models of instruction are used and include examining one's own practices and chosen supports and materials used in the classroom as an educator. Therefore, using Freire's framework, the basic qualitative study of understanding teacher perceptions about reading strategies used to support the development of reading skills for African American and Hispanic to support student achievement served as a lens to view the information obtained in basic qualitative study. Conducting semistructured interviews of high school teachers to better understand their perceptions provided information that may serve to inform district leaders regarding guiding practices and strategies to close the gap in reading for African American and Hispanic students compared to their European American peers.

Freire's theory of pedagogy of the oppressed and the emphasis of equity, active inquiry, collaboration, student discourse, and student's backgrounds were used to develop the self-developed interview protocol and to analyze the information obtained through interviews. The director of teaching and learning at the study site explained that based on classroom walkthrough trends, district leaders from the teaching and learning department shared a common direct instruction theme of students not being engaged during instruction and with the content. As a result of students not being engaged during instruction and with the content during direct instruction, school leaders have worked toward building an instructional principal framework that promotes student engagement, cognitive-based teaching strategies, and visible learning (see Decristan et al., 2023; McDermott, 2021; Storm et al., 2010). Thus, as there is a focus on the use of direct instruction strategies through the instructional principles, there is a direct correlation to some of the instructional principles that district officials have required teachers use and Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed. For example, Freire's (1970) critical theory of pedagogy aligns with many of the instructional strategies promoted by the study district. Table 3 shows the correlation between how the key attributes of the critical theory of pedagogy aligns with the current instructional principles of the district. For instance, the key attributes of discourse about real world concepts and connection to content and collaboration of teachers and students in Freire's theory aligns with student discourse because students and teachers sharing responsibility for talking in carefully planned, discussion-based lessons. Students are actively involved in the learning of concepts through explaining, questioning, reflecting, synthesizing, and debating. Also, social

justice and restorative practice that creates a sense of community and using culturally relevant resources and instruction representative of students in classroom in Freire's key attributes align with responsive instruction from the instructional principles. Responsive instruction includes research-based instructional tools and practices based on diverse needs, desires, and interests. They align because teachers are using resources relevant to student population during instruction and as support resources. Lastly, preteaching students background information about a concept such as vocabulary or topical issues and information and student voice and student choice from Freire's critical theory of pedagogy aligns with the instructional principle connection before content. Connection before content defines intentional activities throughout the lesson that build relationships, clarify relevance, and promote rigor to allow all students participate equitably. Connection before content aligns because students and teachers make connections with various activities that build a positive classroom environment, therefore engaging students and maximizing instructional time. Hence, as the district stakeholders worked to close academic achievement gaps, the leaders have looked toward aligning direct instruction methods with already researched and developed educational theory to promote the academic achievement of each student.

Table 3*Paulo Freire's Theory of Critical Pedagogy Aligned to District Instructional Principles*

Freire's key attributes	District instructional principle	Points of alignment
Discourse about real world concepts and connection to content	Student discourse is defined as students and teachers sharing responsibility for talking in carefully planned, discussion-based lessons.	Students are actively involved in the learning of concepts through explaining, questioning, reflecting, synthesizing, and debating.
Collaboration (teachers and students)		
Social justice and restorative practice that creates a sense of community	Responsive instruction includes research-based instructional tools and practices based on diverse needs, desires, and interests.	Using resources relevant to student population during instruction and as support resources.
Culturally relevant resources and instruction representative of students in classroom		
Preteaching students background information about a concept such as vocabulary or topical issues and information	Connection before content defines intentional activities throughout the lesson that build relationships, clarify relevance, and promote rigor to allow all students participate equitably.	Students and teachers make connections with various activities that build a positive classroom environment; therefore, engaging students and maximizing instructional time.
Student voice and student choice around assignments and how they complete the work		

Note: Created to compare Freire (1970) and study district Instructional Principles (2021).

By means of the direct instructional focus shifted to student discourse and engagement of students in the content as they are being instructed, the principal at the study site reported that this shift has boosted student learning based on standardized testing data. The principal also shared that in the study district, using materials and teaching strategies that support active engagement and student inquiry, dialogue, and collaboration have been established as instructional strategies to promote student learning

and achievement, and district leaders have required that they are used in classrooms to support instruction. The study is focused on the gap in practice of teachers engaging African American and Hispanic students in instruction, and the instructional strategies they use to strengthen reading skills and achievement to address the purpose of the study and provide insights into the gap in practice identified in the study district (see Freire, 1970). Data analysis included the use of a *A priori* coding, a deductive coding approach, using the conceptual framework, Freire's theory of critical pedagogy. Content analysis was used for qualitative data analysis. Content analysis is "A research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). By employing content analysis, using both deductive, *a priori* coding, and inductive, open coding, to analyze the information obtained from participants, I obtained insights into the gap in reading practice pertaining to African American and Hispanic students compared to European American peers in the study district. Using inductive and deductive reasoning, I used predetermined codes based on the possible relationships of the phenomenon being studied with the framework, in this case; using inductive codes is a way of exploring new information that may be shared by the participants and assigning meaning based on the researcher's analysis of the intended meaning of the participant during the interview (see Peterson et al., 2016).

Review of the Broader Problem

The literature search strategy is important to obtain current peer-reviewed literature that informs the researcher regarding the present state of research related to the phenomenon being studied. In review of the literature, the topics explored included

concepts focused on reading assessments, reading interventions, instructional strategies and practices, PD, and student engagement. The review procedures included using various electronic databases, such as Google alert and RSS feed to receive up-to-date articles about reading interventions and academic achievement of diverse learners. In addition, EBSCO, ERIC, and Sage Publications provided published academic articles and books based on the topics searched, such as reading achievement for diverse learners, curriculum resources to increase reading scores for diverse learners, increasing African American and Hispanic reading scores, increasing African American and Hispanic student engagement, instructional practices for cultural competency, and student collaboration, just to name a few. Keywords related to the phenomenon being studied were used and included *diverse student achievement, diverse student learning, barriers to diverse student learning, reading skill development, African American students, Hispanic students, Latino students, learner-centered literacy strategies, self-esteem and belonging + diverse students, high school, gap in reading scores, students of color, equity, student engagement, historical factors influencing African American achievement gap, teacher-student relationships, grading, assessment, and culturally responsive pedagogy/instruction*. In the next section, I review the topics identified in the literature that inform the state of the educational field related to the phenomenon that was explored in this study.

Learner-Centered Strategies to Engage Students

Research-based instructional strategies provide a solid foundation for reading instruction. As a focus for vocabulary instruction, Banditvilai (2020) and Dietrichson et

al. (2020) both investigated the implementation of learner-centered strategies in reading comprehension and stated that teaching vocabulary as a way to build background engages African American and Hispanic students with the content. Banditvilai researched the importance of literacy in lifelong learning using two instructional methods of building background knowledge and making connections with the content. Cognitive and sociocultural theorists such as Vygotsky (1978) and Erikson (1963) laid the foundation for the best instructional practices of children in elementary schools, according to Banditvilai. The findings were that 57% of the students in the study preferred student-centered literacy instruction over skills-based instruction.

Researchers have noted the importance of using varied teaching strategies for diverse student populations. Chiles (2019), Colwell et al. (2021), and Thomas et al. (2019) explored the topic of supporting diverse students. Thomas et al. focused their research on communities in honors programs by consistently incorporating culturally appropriate instruction. The results showed that institutional practices must meet students at their current academic and social needs. Chiles focused on providing student-centered instruction to promote student success. Chiles suggested that with the mandates schools and educators face during the instructional day, many educators are forced to teach students so they can earn a proficient score on standardized testing. However, Chiles stated that educators must do more to educate themselves on their students' interests and develop standards-based instruction projecting student interest.

Student perception and engagement are important to consider when designing instruction to strengthen student learning. In the Colwell et al. (2021) study, teacher

perception was used as a data tool to understand how students received instruction based on their interests, not the teachers' interests or what has been traditionally taught. In comparison, Coss (2019) conducted a quantitative study examining the relationship between student-centered approaches used in the music education classroom and student engagement and success. Coss shared how learner-centered instructional techniques increase student participation and student connectedness to core content areas. The findings of the study were how student interest used during instruction engaged students and pushed them to participate in their learning. Music and related arts classrooms are specific places students can take risks and include a variety of problem-solving, critical-thinking, and collaborative skills needed for success in society. Coss shared insight into the creative thinking process and how students are comfortable enough in the music class to become divergent thinkers, which is sharing and understanding various viewpoints on a specific issue.

As educators seek to increase learner-centered instruction, students tend to develop higher-order thinking and a deeper knowledge depth. Banditvilai (2020), Castro-Alonso et al. (2021), and Farmer et al. (2019) described the collaborative strategies that promote student understanding and connection to the content, furthering student analysis and relationship to real-world concepts and ideals. Ngoc Diep et al. (2022) and Wetzel et al. (2019) examined the choice of learning activities leading to students solving real-world problems and gaining skills needed to attain societal success. Critical thinking, communication, and metacognition are increased as collaborative learning strategies are used within the classroom. Researchers have explicitly used the terms *inquiry-based*,

problem-solving, hands-on, and participatory opportunities to promote students interacting more with the content (Baldock & Murphrey, 2020; Karan & Brown, 2022; Mao, 2023). As students investigate and participate, they are developing skills for creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving.

Student Collaboration and Cooperative Learning

As a basis for research, compositional and improvisational literature provides support for various student activities for exploratory learning. Listening walks, doodles, and explorations are strategies used to introduce students to peer-assessments and shared learning experiences through lesson assessments, observations, and self-reflection. Coss (2019), Keyes (2019), and Mahur et al. (2019) analyzed the independence of students in solving problems, thinking creatively, and knowing when a good time is to collaborate with peers. Keyes investigated the factors that contribute to graduation rates and student engagement of high school students. The factors included classroom management strategies, time management, students' and teachers' academic mindsets, and teachers collaborating to establish a sense of community among students. Educators fostered relationships among students and employed instructional strategies incorporating consistent culturally appropriate examples to solicit and maintain student engagement (Cherng & Davis, 2019; Keyes, 2019). Making connections with students is imperative to promoting academic success.

The most effective classroom includes grouping students heterogeneously to support one another's logical progression through lessons and create a positive classroom environment (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Mahur et al. (2019) and Maslow (1970) posited

how educators can incorporate student engagement into instructional practices to increase student achievement. The researchers explored questions about cooperative learning, learning structures, lesson planning, team building, collaborative projects and presentations, assessment and grading, and student motivation and competition. As a basic principle, the authors explored the ideas of positive interdependence, individual accountability, equal participation, and simultaneous interaction to promote a learner-centered classroom. Mahur et al. explicitly provided research-based samples from experimental studies and research on cooperative learning to create examples of instructional practices. In addition, the researchers compared achievement gains between a cooperative learning classroom and the traditional classroom. As a result of using cooperative learning to promote a learner-centered classroom, educators can create a space of safety, security, and confidence in the school. Cooperative learning is a staple in students' learning 21st-century skills to prepare them for the future.

Similarly to Mahur et al. (2019), Dukes et al. (2023) explored and reflected on using collaboration as a format to encourage student participation and critical thinking. The ideas analyzed within the text included how to accommodate students of different abilities using team and role management, a reflection of grading options and choice of evaluation, and student engagement to promote a learner-centered classroom. Dukes et al. stated teachers guided and facilitated students in a learner-centered environment by teaching the skills of debate and connecting them to issues in everyday life.

Truckenmiller and Brehmer (2021) analyzed the importance and rationale for teaching vocabulary to students and how instructional practices should reflect student

need. The traditional method of teaching students the vocabulary word along with them searching for the definition was not working in tiered reading class, so a research study developed using various vocabulary-building strategies to increase student knowledge and usage of the words in their assignments and conversation. The strategies focused on mainly creating vocabulary notebooks to have students make real-life connections with the words on the weekly vocabulary list. To research vocabulary building strategies, Truckenmiller and Brehmer discovered students showed they were able to incorporate the words in their everyday conversation and build insight and skill on becoming a life-long learner and applying these skills to everyday life.

Grading and Assessment Practices

Grading and assessment processes influence how the instructional and evaluation process is perceived by students. M. Knight and Cooper (2019) researched ways grading can be restructured to reflect student achievement and comprehension based on student-centered experiences. M. Knight and Cooper more explicitly shared a grading manifesto incorporating rubrics, grading terms and principles, grade book entry samples, and grading policy and impacts of grading on student behaviors and attitudes. This information is used to rethink grading altogether. The grading paradigm needs a positive change, and the researchers compared the traditional grading paradigm with the standards-based grading paradigm to create a more student-centered approach to grading practices.

Teachers' use of equitable practices is critical to students' experiences in educational settings. Hite and Donohoo (2021) and Aguilar (2021) similarly outlined

equitable practices in assessing student academic achievement. Both resources explained the importance of continuing a conversation and dialogue on how to propel students of color forward academically and inevitably socially. Hite and Donohoo examined perceptions of equity through PLCs in which educators discussed their reflection and perception of their instructional practices. On the contrary, Aguilar focused on one-on-one efforts for equitable change in instruction. Aguilar shared stories from the author's role as an equity coach to enlighten classroom educators.

Equitable Instruction

Educators' self-reflection in the education arena is a priority to raise awareness of how one is perceived by the students they serve. Giles and Yazan (2023) and J. Jones et al. (2021) also shared that through collaborative efforts, both one-on-one and in a PLC, a shift in thinking on instructional practices occurs in which educators are motivated to become more self-reflective on their practices to strengthen the impact they have on all students. Through continued PD, dialogue that ensures equitable practice is more likely to change instructional practice and the perception on instructional practice.

Part of that integration of equitable practices includes connecting universal design to culturally responsive practices. Kieran and Anderson (2019) shared the similarities in culturally responsive instruction and universal design. The inclusion or merging of both practices provides better academic support and cultural connections to students of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Similarly, Abacioglu et al. (2020), Kafele (2022), Khalifa (2018), and Banwo et al. (2022) shared insights on providing instruction to African American and Hispanic students. The studies included the positive impact on teachers becoming more

aware of the perceptions they share during the instructional day. Self-reflection is vital in this regard. Khalifa focused more on school-level administration leading the charge to close academic achievement gaps by becoming self-reflective of their own perceptions. Kafele (2022) focused more on classroom teachers and explicitly all educators. As the authors shared some similarities and differences with their research, the overall message was that educators in general have a role of community and influence in shaping how students connect to the curriculum and push to excelling academically and socially.

Researchers have focused on qualitative studies on culturally relevant instructional strategies to close reading achievement gaps; however, a need remains to gather qualitative data to understand teachers' perceptions of these strategies and their need for support during implementation (Cruz et al., 2020; Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). Kelly et al. (2021) concluded that culturally responsive instruction is difficult to implement. Teachers must know their students well, including student culture (Kelly & Djonko-Moore, 2021; Kelly et al., 2021). However, teachers also should consider critical consciousness and social change (Kelly et al., 2021). Such a critical approach can transform a reading curriculum to be more engaging for diverse students (Kelly & Djonko-Moore, 2021). While these researchers share insights on equitable instruction, there are various researchers that share what is going well in providing equitable instruction.

Equitable instruction is in the developing stages. However, some researchers shared what has been working thus far. J. W. Henderson et al. (2020), Cervetti and Wright (2020), Redding (2019), and Thomas and Dyches (2019) shared insights on

teachers having knowledge of their students' background and using that understanding to inventory resources used during classroom instruction. According to these researchers, African American and Hispanic students should have access to books and instructional text that contain ethnically diverse individuals.

Researchers have also shown using diverse material for instruction also supports students seeing themselves within the curriculum and reaching certain levels of success in school and society. Carey (2019) and Larson et al. (2020) shared that exposure to ethnically diverse reading resources propels students forward in other core content areas as well as preparing African American and Hispanic students for college and career options after graduation.

Researchers have also shared that the conversation for diversifying reading content does not just start in high school to prepare students for college and career readiness, but interventions start at an early age of preschool and elementary. DeBrey et al. (2019), Pittman et al. (2020), and Rambo-Hernandez et al. (2019) shared that elementary schools are reviewing the reading curriculum resources, implementing phonemic awareness, developing research-based decoding strategies, and also gaining support from students' families to further support reading and overall academic success. In addition, Fryer Jr. and Howard-Noveck (2020), Grace and Gerdes (2019), and Noguérón-Liu (2020) researched and shared the strong influence that family partnerships have on student academic and social success. They shared that strong bonds that teachers build with home positively impacted student engagement in the content and also gave the family a voice of representation as they collaborated with the school community.

Therefore, research findings have shown that early interventions, family collaboration, and selecting ethnically diverse materials increase student achievement in reading. In addition, building strong relationships between home and school builds relations to motivate students.

While building connections with students and their families, it has also been discovered through qualitative studies the positive effect of recognizing each students' diverse backgrounds and experiences. Randall (2021) and Troyer et al. (2019) both shared how connections with students and their families build an intrinsic support in students where they are extrinsically motivated to fully participate in reading classes and furthermore comprehend text better. This comprehension and motivation do not just positively effect reading success and scores on assessments, but also is positively correlated to other core content area success for students as well. With the interventions and support that are already known to be working with supporting African American and Hispanic students' reading achievement, educators should keep this in mind as we are addressing the learning loss during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are various instances that educators know impact student learning and learning loss. For example, there is learning loss during extended breaks from school like during the summer. There are also reported effects to student learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Dorn et al., 2020; Kuhfeld et al., 2022). Dorn et al. (2020) and Kuhfeld et al. (2022) shared that learning among all student groups was heavily impacted during COVID-19. However, African American and Hispanic students suffered a greater loss due to access to curriculum materials that were aligned to state standards, engaging

to diverse groups of students, and included extra support that scaffolded instructional steps. In consideration of what educators know is working to support African American and Hispanic students reading achievement, there is also a need to also look at the interventions that are not working to support these students.

Reading interventions for students with diverse ethnic backgrounds, specifically African American and Hispanic students have been shown to positively effect student reading skill development if proven methods are utilized. However, there are some interventions and strategies that are not working. According to McFarland et al. (2019), with the positive reading interventions in place to support African American and Hispanic students, there are many more interventions needed that are proven to provide success with reading. McFarland et al. (2019), Merolla and Jackson (2019), and Willis (2019) shared that the current structure of RTI needs further emphasis on students of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Some interventions that have proven to not work are small group tutoring models (Fryer Jr. & Howard-Noveck, 2020). Dorn et al. (2020) stated that just focusing solely on reading scores and not the relationship-building strategies of the students is also something that is not working to support academic achievement. As a more natural approach to learning, educators should be focused on supporting academic, relationship-building, and social emotional success.

Likewise, some of the strategies commonly used in the classroom can further influence African American and Hispanic student reading scores in a negative way. Dumont and Ready (2020) shared that specific strategies such as round robin reading, vocabulary searches, and unsupported independent reading does not address student

misconceptions and lacks a targeted approach to improving reading. Therefore, it is likely with strategies such as the ones noted, African American and Hispanic students that are already at a deficit will become disengaged from the content and curriculum.

Historical Perceptions on African American and Hispanic Achievement Gaps

Since the Supreme Court decision on equal education, the achievement gap in the reflects how African American and Hispanic communities have been at a continuous disadvantage of spoken and unspoken mechanisms in our education system that keep students below their European American and Asian American peers. Merolla and Jackson (2019) and Herring et al. (2022) described how differences in socioeconomic status, family cultural resources, school quality and racial demographics, and bias are linked to African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement. Merolla and Jackson (2019) described the systems that prohibit African American and Hispanic students from achieving academic success, opportunity to earn post-secondary education, and societal success. Some of the systems are instructional resources, district feeder patterns, and parents not being able to have time to provide structures at home due to being at work. Furthermore, Morgan and Cieminski (2023) shared that not only do educators need to understand their own culture and the culture of others, they also need to make certain realizations to effectively interrupt the educational system and provide equitable opportunities for African American and Hispanic students. While teachers have a direct influence with students on a daily basis, there is an importance that educational leaders beyond the building level recognize these differences as well. Part of this realization is incorporating Mezirow's theory of transformative learning to understand how students

develop through stages of intercultural competence and sensitivity (Morgan & Cieminski, 2023). As educators reflect on the realization, it is imperative that they build purposeful learning experiences and welcoming environments to critically reflect on equity and building positive classroom communities.

Teacher Student Relationship and Classroom Community

When teachers build positive classroom communities and foster a positive relationship with their students, students have better academic and social outcomes. Mahoney et al. (2021) and Michael et al. (2023) both shared insights on how teachers can build a positive classroom environment by learning who their students were and meeting them where they are academically, showing care and compassion, and understanding equitable approaches all promote student achievement. This understanding from teachers also teaches students important skills about self-voice and character. Also, according to Wang et al. (2020), classroom climate plays a major role in student academic success. Students who have a positive connection with teachers in the classroom more consistently had positive social associations within the classroom and that built a sense of community thereby resulting in students feeling more comfortable to learn. In addition, Daily et al. (2019) also found that that middle and high school students had higher rates of academic achievement due to a positive classroom and positive school climate. Just as important as a positive classroom and positive school environment, students must also have a sense of belonging and a sense of understanding in their school community to promote academic success. Hussain and Jones (2021) researched the experiences students of color had in various academic environments. Their research findings were that positive perceptions

and connections with diverse peer groups gave students a sense of belonging and encouraged them to engage with the content and school community, therefore promoting student academic success.

The teacher-student relationship and a sense of community is important for student learning. Researchers have established that a student's academic mindset is key to a student feeling they belong in a learning community (Keyes, 2019). Belonging is a primary need for humans and feeling accepted and classroom belonging, or sense of community at both the school and classroom levels; seminal literature has established the importance of meaningful relationships and a sense of belonging for student learning (Goodenow 1993; Keyes, 2019; Ostermann, 2000). Belonging is important for student engagement and engagement is critical to student learning and achievement. In a qualitative study exploring the perceptions of 31 high school students regarding that specific teacher actions contribute to students' belonging and engagement, the researchers found (a) fostering relationships between students and (b) employing teaching practices that encouraged students to participate in the assignments and class activities (Keyes, 2019). The study findings were that students reported not feeling a sense of belonging or trust with teachers who provided few opportunities for connection with other students, strictly enforced rules, were disorganized, and who did not dispense discipline equitably. Students often described these teachers as new teachers or teachers who did not display a sense of excitement and passion about the topic they were teaching (Keyes, 2019). The quality of the relationship is particularly important during the high school years as students often struggle with transition into high school, and high school

students who become disengaged may experience a decline in academic performance, absences, feelings of loneliness, and isolation (Keyes, 2019). Findings from this study raise the question of factors that may influence teachers to build a close and trusting student-teacher relationship thereby strengthening a sense of belonging, and engagement. Overall, there should also be a focus on not only academic success but for personal connections, and kinship bonds in the African American and Hispanic community that are relationships shaped by community, connection, relationship-building strategies, and social and emotional learning supports.

Building School Community

Building trust and a close teacher student partnership is important for African American and Hispanic students. Moreover, extending the development of a community partnership with African American and Hispanic students' families is also an important consideration for teachers who desire to strengthen reading skills and achievement for this population of students. In a case study conducted by Miller- Jones and Rubin (2020), restorative justice practices were used to address racial tensions and to build a sense of community with high school students of color. The leaders, students and community members initiated town hall meetings and focused on giving students the voice and tools to influence systemic change at their high schools. Augustine et al. (2018) argued that attitudes and treatment of students of color can contribute to the achievement gap. Discrepancies in school experiences, resulting in greater discipline infractions for students of color compared to European Americans results in reduced time in the classroom thereby leading to reduced academic time and result in lower achievement

(Morgan & Amerikaner, 2018). J. Jones and Vari (2019) and Castro-Alonso et al. (2021) created resource texts for all stakeholders in education. Castro-Alonso et al. (2021) and Henderson (2023) described the school as a living system. This living system needs all parts working collaboratively and explicitly to facilitate the transition to benefit society. Castro-Alonso et al. analyzed relationships among stakeholders, discussed the role of coaching instruction, and described coaching in the community to aim toward the same vision. The researchers explained everyone's mutual stake in the outcome of students, the schools, and the community. Furthermore, Osterman (2000) described the results of students having a sense of belonging in their school community. When teachers and other building-level stakeholders support students' development, they have a sense of belongingness in the school. Without students having a sense of belongingness from a positive school environment, feelings of rejection and alienation develop (Osterman, 2000). Rejection and alienation lead to behavioral problems, which results in missed instructional time, lower engagement in classroom activities, lower academic achievement, and possibly dropping out of school or other instances of social and emotional distress (Miller- Jones & Rubin, 2020; Osterman, 2000). These stakeholders must come together as a support for students in the community (home for students) and the world at large (beyond the community). Vatterott (2015) explained the transitional process of making teachers and students allies in the instructional journey.

Social and Emotional Learning and Relationship-Building Strategies

While positive classroom and school environments are a key focus of students' engagement and academic achievement to close learning and achievement gaps, social-

emotional learning (SEL) is also a substantial component to incorporate into the curriculum. SEL not only builds a positive classroom environment through positive connects, the use of SEL also creates a sense of belonging while addressing inequitable practices and microaggressions. Ackerman-Barger et al. (2020) shared that African American and Hispanic students shared their experiences with microaggressions and that affected their sense of belonging in the classroom and school. Even more so, J. Jones et al. (2020) shared that racial equity in academic success lies within the role of school climate and the implementation and practice of social and emotional learning. Likewise, Zhao et al. (2023) shared the result of positive and negative school climate on student achievement. Zhao et al. described an additional aspect of how building-level leaders can provide further support to teachers to improve academic achievement in marginalized student populations. Not only does the development and use of SEL improve the academic achievement and social growth, but the use of SEL has also been shown to have a net positive result for all students and also builds a support for diverse student groups, thereby preventing racial disparities from further widening. With a mindset to support all students with SEL resources and supports, and an explicit focus on the whole child, MTSS is a framework to support students' academic, behavioral, relationship-building, and social and emotional success.

MTSS

MTSS is a system of supports that focuses on the positive outcomes of student achievement that center around the whole child, but also builds on the foundation of systems, data, and practice. These foundations all circle equitable practice. Betters-Bubon

et al. (2023), Jackson (2021), and McMahon (2022) all shared how support staff members such as behavioral health consultants, school counselors, and social workers can further support MTSS practices to provide teachers with instructional supports and resources that can positively affect the academic success of students in the classroom. Therefore, as educators are preparing to provide instruction to students, MTSS practices should be implemented. In addition, the use of a multicultural pedagogy is important to incorporate in the MTSS practices as individual student needs are considered.

Preservice Teacher Training on Multicultural Pedagogy

As educators include a multicultural pedagogy into their instructional practices, it is equally or even more important to include resources and training to preservice teachers. Arsal (2019), Nganga (2020), Silva (2022), Subasi Singh and Akar (2021) all shared how training for preservice teachers to better understand cultural differences and various cultural components builds their multicultural pedagogy to better understand how to implement the pedagogy during instructional planning and in the selection of instructional resources for their classroom. These researchers agreed with the conclusions that preservice teachers must understand their own perceptions about the definition of culture and descriptors of culture. Just as similar, Delk (2019) and Oryan and Ravid (2019) shared that as student populations become more diverse, multicultural knowledge of students must increase to be better prepared to instruct culturally diverse students and prepared to acknowledge sociocultural resources and information that students bring to the classroom. Teachers also be comfortable facilitating conversations with their students about culture and diversity, while building a sense of community, respect, and a sense of

belonging with each student. As teachers build their own understanding of multicultural pedagogy through preservice practice and field-based experiences, they can use these opportunities to develop their culturally responsive strategies and to build on their own pedagogy, practices, and data-driven supports to promote academic achievement of African American and Hispanic students.

Culturally Responsive Strategies

Culturally responsive strategies prompt educators to respond to academic achievement gaps by developing instruction that recognizes and highlights the differences of each student. Civitillo et al. (2019), Kieran and Anderson (2019), and Muñiz (2019) shared how important it is for teachers to understand relationships between culturally responsive teaching and culturally responsive beliefs. For teachers to appropriately implement strategies, they have to engage in self-reflection on their own teaching and resources (Muñiz, 2019). While engaging in self-reflection, teachers can build and implement culturally responsive pedagogy that explicitly caters to their students' needs and also to the school community.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Pedagogy is not just about instruction, but it includes the vision, community engagement, school leadership, and teacher instructional practices. Abacioglu et al. (2020), J. W. Henderson et al., (2020), Morrison et al. (2019), and Muñiz (2019) shared that culturally responsive teaching has been linked directly to student engagement, academic success, relationship-building, and social and emotional learning. Abacioglu et al. (2020) researched further to discuss teacher attitudes toward their PD and

implementation of culturally relevant instruction and practices. While furthermore Brown et al. (2019), Jaber (2023), Morrison et al. (2019), and Tanase (2020) shared that there is a need for teachers to receive more PD on incorporating culturally relevant instructional pedagogy into their planning for instruction. Also, O’Leary et al. (2020) discussed how teacher attitude can and should be shifted to embraced diversity and see students as individuals to benefit all students learning. Once all students benefit from the learning experiences, they are able to see a future beyond their current social dynamics (Knight-Manuel et al., 2019). When teachers become more accepting of the diversity of their students and receive training to develop culturally responsive instructional practices, they are able to establish a classroom environment of acceptance with many resources that reflect the diversity of the students.

Culturally Responsive Texts

While teacher attitudes are shaped by analyzing data, participating in PD, and building positive classroom environments, they still work towards incorporating ethnically diverse references and texts that further build a sense of kinship among students. Muñiz (2019) and Nyachae (2021) both shared that teachers are gaining access to culturally diverse materials but are still working toward how to incorporate that into their teaching and other pedagogical practices as a way to build a positive classroom environment. Nyachae furthermore stated that teachers must also feel comfortable with having conversations about various culturally responsive material with diverse groups of students, so they are able to further reflect on the experiences of others and respect specific unique aspects about their students’ diverse backgrounds. According to Kelly

and Djonko-Moore (2021), teachers should be focused on and address the influence of their own identity and understand themselves as well as building a connection with students and using a variety of approaches to transform their literacy curriculum. In addition, Zhu (2023) stated that culturally responsive references and conversations begin with understanding and a personal connection that educators must form with their students to achieve on an academic and social and emotional level. When students are led and supported by a teacher with care, connection and empathy, a supportive reciprocal rapport is built that fosters teacher implementation of asset, equity, and justice-oriented pedagogy (Zhu, 2023). Fowler et al. (2019) even researched the positive influence of teachers using culturally responsive resources when students are assigned homework and their communication with home. Fowler et al. stated that using culturally responsive texts and other resources gives families the opportunity to further engage with their child's education and to be supportive of their academic and social and emotional goals by building a kinship bond and connection beyond the school building. Therefore, engaging students of diverse ethnic backgrounds not only includes PD, and incorporating resources, but may also include forming bonds with students and their families. Some of these bonds are easier to make when the teacher has a similar ethnic background.

Diverse Student Demographics and Teacher Demographics

As student populations become more diverse, it is just as important to consider the bearing of teacher ethnicity and how they make connections with students. Redding (2019) shared that there are several areas affected by having a teacher of the same race or ethnicity. These factors include the teacher receiving more favorable ratings on classroom

behavior and academic performance, meeting or exceeding the standard on assessments, and having more positive behavioral outcomes when assigned to a teacher of the same ethnicity. Carothers et al. (2019) furthermore explained that education institutions' leaders should seek to recruit more teachers of various cultural backgrounds as a means to further support student academic achievement in addition to adopting initiatives that focus on underrepresented student groups. It is also important to analyze how organizations recruit teachers of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Carothers et al. and Redding explained that before students enter postsecondary education, there should be a plan to show students the positive impression they can make if they select a career in education. This is a recruitment effort that many high schools are taking on to further diversify their teacher population and recruit teachers with an understanding of the district educational system (Carothers et al., 2019). Also, Carter Andrews et al. (2019), described that there is a need to further identify ways to diversify the teacher workforce. However, Carter Andrews et al. shared that there are structural, institutional, programmatic, and environmental factors that limit or even push out ethnically diverse teachers. There is also an importance in analyzing policies and work with stakeholders such as district leaders, policymakers, and PD providers to see how to best support teachers of color. While reading research about the continuing change of student demographics, it is also important to understand that teacher demographics can be a contributing factor to the factors that limit teachers from implementing culturally responsive instruction.

Factors Keeping Teachers From Implementing Culturally Responsive Instruction

There are known and unknown factors that contribute to teachers implementing culturally responsive instruction. Some of those factors include teacher attitude, teacher support, and overall systematic changes. Abacioglu et al. (2020), Arsal (2019), and Muñiz (2019) shared that teachers who had a positive attitude about multicultural education, were more likely to engage in critical teacher training, instructional planning, and pedagogical practices to further support ethnically diverse students. Civitillo et al. (2019) and Cruz et al. (2020) further explored teacher attitudes and their bearing on implementing culturally responsive instruction. Civitillo et al. and Cruz et al. stated that when teachers participated in self-efficacy training or reflection activities as professional learning, they were more likely to build positive relationships with students and part of that is validating and celebrating the cultural contributions of each students' cultural and ethnic background. Self-efficacy is exploring and understanding with confidence one's own motivation, behavior, and social environment (Cruz et al., 2020). When teachers practice the action of self-efficacy, they are more inclined to reflect on and voice where they need more support in implementing culturally responsive instruction.

While some teachers may not reflect on where they need help with implementing culturally responsive instruction, some teachers are able to reflect on and voice the areas where they need more support. Hollie (2019) shared that teachers first need support in understanding the dynamics of culturally relevant instruction and create an identity for their classroom to support each one of their students. Hollie shared this preservice teacher training is a major support for teachers to properly embed and implement culturally

responsive instruction in their lessons and overall pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (2021a) further shared that while there have been major changes in culturally relevant instruction, there is still more needed in research and implementation. Therefore, there are additional areas that need development to further support teachers in implementing culturally relevant instruction there are some changes needed at the systemic level to provide teachers with supports to propel students forward further in academic success.

While teachers may have an attitude to shift their culturally relevant instruction, practice self-efficacy, participate in PD in their preservice years, there is still a dynamic of systems that prevent teachers from implementing culturally responsive instruction. Kieran and Anderson (2019) and Ladson-Billings (2021a) explained that with the cultural shifts and social justice issues with African American and Hispanic people in 2019 and 2020, student ethnic diversity is a considerable dynamic to implementing a universal design approach to culturally responsive instruction. Ladson-Billings (2021b) furthered this thought by stating that instructional practices need a hard reset to being more inclusive and build a partnership with students and teachers in the classroom. To build this partnership, teachers and educators in general need to move beyond their implicit biases. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) shared that in the most recent years of education implicit bias impact major components to closing opportunity and achievement gaps in education. According to Darling-Hammond, policymakers and educators can make changes in education in efforts to closing the digital divide, strengthen blended learning, perform a needs-based assessment for students, ensure social and emotion supports, support schools in building stronger community relationships, emphasize the importance

of culturally responsive pedagogy, support extended and expanded learning time, establish wraparound services through support of community schools, preservice teacher training that shapes their mindset to a growth mindset, and advocate and leverage adequate and equitable funding for schools. With these 10 areas of focus for policymakers and educators, there are transformational shifts that can happen in a school environment (Brown, 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2020; & Ladson-Billings, 2021b). Therefore, as there are major gains in teachers implementing a culturally relevant instructional model, there is still more research and practice needed in these areas to further support African American and Hispanic students' academic growth.

Implications

Researching high school teachers' perceptions of how they implement instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' achievement can provide insight for improved instructional practices for high schools in a district in a northeastern state. The research may provide insight on the areas of growth and opportunity in closing academic achievement gaps related to African American and Hispanic students in comparison with their higher achieving peers. Students at the study high schools have shown academic performance gaps between African American and Hispanic students and their European American and Asian American peers on SAT reading scores and other standardized assessments. J. Knight (2018) explained educators must assess the efficacy of instructional supports and strategies provided as well as assess their implementation. Therefore, the results of the research could inform the study district high schools and the district on areas of need for PD or curriculum. A likely outcome

anticipated from the study findings was to create a project developing PD for high school teachers in the study district, although results could move the research in a different direction. The project is presented in Appendix A. Creating positive social change requires continual involvement and research to develop academic and social knowledge (J. Knight, 2018). On a broader scale, findings could inform society of ways to increase student-centered and culturally relevant instruction. Positive social change occurs when scholar-practitioners apply the methods and resources learned about to create change for society.

Summary

The problem addressed by the study is African American and Hispanic students' literacy scores have remained lowest of all ethnicities at high schools in one district, despite the implementation of numerous initiatives and curricular platforms. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how high school teachers perceive their implementation of instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement. A literature review was provided as a foundation for the research. In the next section, I describe the methodology chosen for this study. Specifically, Section 2 includes a description of the study design, participants, data collection, data analysis procedures, coding, data analysis results and resulting project genre, a white paper with recommendations for study district stakeholders.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

In a northeastern state, in a rural, suburban community, the problem is African American and Hispanic students' literacy scores have remained lowest of all ethnicities at high schools in a district, despite the implementation of numerous initiatives and curricular platforms. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate high school teachers' perceptions of their implementation of the instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement. For this qualitative study, semistructured interviews were used to gather teachers' perception of reading instruction and supports in place in the study district. The information from interviews provided a better understanding of the possible of changes to instructional styles and instructional supports to improve reading instruction for African American and Hispanic students. The RQ that guided this basic qualitative study was the following:

How do high school teachers perceive they implement instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement at the study district?

When investigating perceptions of a population, a qualitative design is often used, as results are based on the words and voice of the participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Selecting a methodology for research is aligned directly with the objective of what I aimed to achieve and the procedures I used to gather data. Part of the methodology process included addressing and assessing the design and approach, setting and sample, data collection strategies, and data analysis, which propels

the research forward (see Lambert, 2012). Selection of a basic qualitative study included interviewing participants who met the criteria of being a high school teacher in the study district and teaching a core content class. Weddle (2022) shared that interviews can provide insights to supports teachers need, such as PD.

The best research design for this study was a qualitative method. With the use of qualitative methods, I gathered qualitative data from the participants in the study to understand the perception of high school teachers teaching a core content area.

Qualitative research is the best way to gain information that cannot be quantified in numbers but is relevant to experiences and perceptions (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Aspers and Corte (2019) also shared that qualitative studies are best to understand relationships and to evaluate the themes and trends in relationships. For gaining teacher perceptions, I used qualitative research to understand the perception of teachers. Qualitative researchers contend that this approach enables the researcher to obtain insight of all participants on a personal level in a natural setting to better understand viewpoints on a concept or topic (Johnson et al., 2020),

Other types of qualitative research approach I could have used were grounded theory or phenomenology. Johnson et al. (2020) shared that grounded theory involves testing out a theory and redeveloping that theory over time. Grounded theory was not appropriate as the purpose of this study was not to build a theory from the data.

Phenomenology focuses on the researcher describing experiences as they are lived and the individuality of each person's experiences. Johnson et al. described phenomenology as a more subjective approach as data analysis includes examining experiences that

cannot be fully communicated, as they are inner feelings. Therefore, after reflection on the various approaches in qualitative research, I chose and used the basic qualitative design to focus on one topic and use one collection tool, the interview.

For this qualitative study, I focused on the perceptions and experiences of 10 high school teachers implementing instructional strategies in reading for diverse learners in one district. Teachers may understand the need for diverse instructional strategies to close reading achievement gaps but feel unsure of the exact protocol or best use of strategies (Kelly et al., 2021; Kohar, 2022). The qualitative research method for this study supported the exploration and defining of what was currently being used by teachers by analyzing teacher perceptions of district curricular practices, including how students make real-life connections to the curriculum. Furthermore, this approach helped provide information to describe what current practices. Qualitative studies have focused on culturally relevant instructional strategies to close reading achievement gaps; however, basic qualitative data were needed to understand teachers' perceptions of these strategies and their need for support during implementation (see Freedson & Eastman, 2016; Kelly et al., 2021). The RQ posed provided clarity on teachers' current practices, subsequently leading to findings that may contribute to proposed solutions for stakeholders' consideration.

Participants

The target district for this study was a fast-growing district in the northeastern state with an enrollment of 12,466, according to the district's 2021–2022 annual report. According to the district website, as of 2023, the target district has five early childhood

centers for prekindergarten and kindergarten, nine elementary schools, four middle schools, and three high schools. Based on the College Board database of SAT scores, in the 2010–2020 school year, 49% of African American high school students in the district scored at the proficient or better level in reading on the SAT, as did 57% of Hispanic students. Students in the district have demonstrated a 94% graduation rate, according to the district’s 2021–2022 annual report. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023), for the 2021–2022 school year, High School 1 enrolled 1,586 students, High School 2 enrolled 1,577 students, and High School 3 enrolled 592 students. High School 3 will not be a fully developed high school until 2024; as of 2021–2022, High School 3 only served Grades 9 and 10. High School 1 employs approximately 63 core content teachers, High School 2 employs approximately 61 core content teachers, and High School 3 employs approximately 38 core content teachers.

Criteria

The participants of this study included 10 classroom teachers at the high school level in the study school district in a northeastern state. In the basic qualitative study, participants were specific to the district high school sites in the study district, and I selected participants with a background in the phenomenon of study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The criteria for participants were (a) high school teachers employed in the study district (b) who instructed a core content class and (c) had knowledge of the phenomenon, the academic achievement gap of African American and Hispanic students in reading. Fyer and Howard-Noveck (2020) shared because of lower reading success in middle and high school, interventions to improve reading skills not in just reading, but in

other content areas as well. Furthermore, Carey (2019) shared insights on reading skills improving success in other academic areas, but also bridging societal gaps. The participant selection criteria allowed me to think about the various core content areas where reading skills are essential to student comprehension and success. While examining the core classes such as English language arts, reading, social studies, and science, I noted that teachers had to teach reading skills during instruction to develop students' understanding of the content. Additionally, the district adopted a curriculum embedding reading in other content areas. Participants from the study district have also been involved in regular PLCs to further discuss reading instruction to diverse student groups. Table 4 includes the participant demographics.

Table 4

Participant Demographics

Participant	Role
P1	English language arts teacher
P2	English language arts teacher
P3	English language arts teacher
P4	Science teacher
P5	Social Studies teacher
P6	Science teacher
P7	Science teacher
P8	Mathematics teacher
P9	English language arts teacher
P10	English language arts teacher & Science teacher

Sample Size

Sample size is an important consideration in qualitative research. I interviewed 10 teacher participants who were knowledgeable about the phenomenon and consequently was able to reach saturation in findings. Saturation is achieved when additional

interviews do not produce new findings (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Saunders and Townsend (2016) explained that when interviewing participants from a workplace, 10 to 15 participants may produce saturation. A small number of participants can provide thick and rich data to help me understand the teachers' perception of how they provide instruction in their core content classes to better support reading achievement of African American and Hispanic students. In general, the fewer the participants, the deeper the inquiry per individual, so the data collected have breadth and depth to reach saturation for credibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) shared that a small number of participants provides the researcher with better insights to the interviewees' responses and increases the time that can be spent with each participant.

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

First, I gained Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (approval # 09-01-23-0999717) as well as approval from the study district to recruit high school teachers for the study. I followed a set guide on gaining access to participants through the Walden IRB process. On July 3, 2023, I sent the director of data and assessment the Partner Organization Agreement for Low-Risk, Work-Related Interviews form. I spoke with the directors of assessment and data and inclusive education provided further information about my study, explaining that interviews would take place during noninstructional hours and would not involve students. Following that conversation, I gained approval from the district office and the director of inclusive education.

The school websites publicly list high school teachers who instruct core content classes as well as their email addresses. Thus, I used open public records. I sent an email

to all teachers who met the criteria of being a core content area teacher at high schools in the district. The email included my contact information, the purpose of the study, and the confidential nature of the interview, which lasted less than an hour. Once the invitation emails were sent, I waited for teachers to respond to provide informed consent forms and schedule interviews. I waited for their confirmation and consent through email, where they sent the response to my email with the words “I consent” After scheduling the interview for participants who self-selected into this study and conducting the interview, I shared with participants that they may share the invitation to participate with any potential participants who they thought may be interested in this study. A follow-up email was not necessary as I obtained 10 participants who met the inclusion criteria as specified for the study.

Researcher–Participant Working Relationship

With the basic qualitative design and interviews, building connection and trust with the participants is vital, in addition to establishing and maintaining a neutral stance throughout the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Aspers and Corte (2019) shared that positive relationships in addition to the participant being in their natural environment support the data reaching saturation. For this study, I contacted participants in their preferred communication method and shared some insights about the study such as the problem, purpose, and potentially gaining insights from them as high school core content teachers. As qualitative studies are centered on relationships between the researcher and participants, the researcher’s responsibility is to frame relational considerations as ethical issues; the researcher has to uphold ethical obligations (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin &

Rubin, 2012). These relational issues should always be considered by the researcher to protect the participant, especially with sensitive topics explored in qualitative studies (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). While the use of a protocol is vital in any research, attention to procedures can ensure ethical practices and challenges are handled accordingly.

Protection of Participants' Rights

Participant rights are a constant consideration and a vital part of the validity of the study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) explained, “Qualitative research is multifaceted, complex, contextual, emergent, and relational; critically considering ethics requires attention to the procedural and transactional as well as the relational and sociopolitical” (p. 346). I remembered many ethical considerations to prevent ethical challenges, maintain confidentiality, and prevent harm. Ethical challenges in qualitative research can inhibit the study and diminish its credibility. To uphold the profession and trustworthiness of the study, the researcher has to also be aware of their ethical responsibility (Lodico et al., 2010).

Participants were not approached until the study received IRB approval. I followed all IRB processes to ensure protection of participants from harm as well as confidentiality. Teachers completed a Consent Form before interviews were conducted. The form served as a reminder to participants about the interview and study procedure, clarifying expectations for participating in the study, providing sample questions and noting that the interviews would be audio-recorded. I reminded the participants of the voluntary nature of the study and explained if they decided to join the study now, they could change their mind at any point.

I informed participants that I am required by my university to protect the identities of interviewees and their organizations. I explained that I am only allowed to share interviewee identity or contact info as needed with Walden University supervisors (who are also required to protect participant privacy). I further explained that in any reports, presentations, or publications related to this study, I will only share general patterns from the data, without sharing the identities of individual interviewees or their organizations and containing no identifiers.

I also explained the confidentiality process. I noted that participants would only be referred to by number (e.g., Teacher 1, Teacher 2), and that I would have a single document indicating the identity and code for each participant. All data are stored on a password protected personal computer. The collected information will not be used for any purpose outside of this study. All data will be secured in a locked drawer or password-protected computer in my home for 5 years, per Walden University rules. After 5 years, the data will be destroyed through deletion or shredding.

Data Collection

In this basic qualitative study, the individual interviews of participants were the basis of the study, centered around one phenomenon (see Percy et al., 2015). Interviews of participants in a basic qualitative study are an effective method of collecting data to gain insight into the perceptions of participants. Interviews provide personal reflections and an intimate view of participant experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The qualitative research for this study included one qualitative measure as I sought to understand perceptions about their implementation of the instructional strategies in reading to

support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement. The RQ remained at the center of my study to align the question and phenomenon with my interview questions (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Interview Protocol

Conducting interviews can provide an intimate view of the participants' experiences, ideas, and thoughts, if planned appropriately. Use of a semistructured interview protocol ensured consistency across interviews (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used a researcher-created interview protocol to gather information to answer the RQ.

The first characteristic of a good qualitative interview is that the researcher looks for examples, narratives, stories, and detailed information from the participant as a part of purposeful sampling. Another characteristic of a good qualitative interview includes the interviewer asking open-ended questions that do not guide the participant to answer the question in a specific way. The interviewer asking open-ended questions may even result in the participant "elaborating on answers, disagreeing with the question, or raising a new issue" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 29). The interviewer should be flexible in how they ask questions, what questions they ask, and question wording (Yob & Brewer, 2016). I asked follow-up or probing questions to help glean more information from the participants.

Questions were designed to answer the study RQ: How do high school teachers perceive they implement instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement at the study district? For example, one interview question asked about specific strategies teachers use for African American and Hispanic students. Another question asked how well reading instruction for African

American and Hispanic students is resourced and supported. One question focused on teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the multiple initiatives in the district.

Questions were aligned to the RQ and conceptual framework for the study.

The basic qualitative research also needs validity and credibility. According to Aspers and Corte (2019), qualitative studies need an expert in the field to ensure there is authenticity and reliability. Therefore, I called the expert in a neighboring school district. The characteristics of this district are closely aligned to the district used for my study. The expert serves as the director of diversity, equity, and inclusion for the neighboring district, and earned a doctoral degree from Wilmington University.

The background in diversity, equity, and inclusion in education provided the expert with the ability to recognize questions that would help me ask the most appropriate interview questions as my data collection tool. In addition to the expert reviewing my questions, my committee members also reviewed my interview questions and probes to ensure each one aligns to the RQs, avoids biases and demonstrates credibility. As a whole, the expert and my committee shared that I should focus on the following:

- alignment
- structured, open-ended questions
- probes that focus on getting the participant to go further into detail
- using questions that relate to reading instruction of African American and Hispanic students
- remaining neutral in wording

For this basic qualitative study, the 10 interview questions aligned to provide more insights into the RQ, how high school teachers perceive they implement instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement at the study district. The questions were asked in a semistructured interview of participants who met the criteria of (a) being a high school teacher employed in the study district, (b) providing instruction in a core content class, and (c) having knowledge of the phenomenon, the academic achievement gap of African American and Hispanic students in reading. As expert and committee members validated the interview questions, I also collaborated with committee members about participant inclusion criteria and the interview protocol. In Appendix B, there is a table with the interview questions, and alignment with elements of Freire critical pedagogy theory.

Data Gathering

As a qualitative research study focuses on using interviews to collect qualitative data, the experience of participants makes a significant impact “to achieve fuller development of information within and across individuals and groups while keeping similar lines of questioning that help you to look within and across experiences in ways that help decipher meaning, experience, similarity, and difference” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 147). While watching video resources about interviewing techniques, the best practice for conducting interviews includes the researcher observing participant behavior, not interpreting their behavior. I established a rapport with participants and engaged them in conversation. For example, Liamputtong (2020) shared how the researcher should ask purposive questions that are open ended to engage the participant in self-reflection of

experiences. To establish that rapport with participants, I called participants or emailed them based on their preference to best communicate with them. I reviewed the participant form that reviewed the problem, purpose, and goal of the research. Participants were able to get a better understanding of the study and were more comfortable answering questions. I also gave participants an option for interviewing in person in a private space or on zoom. Seven participants chose to interview in person for no longer than 1 hour, while three participants chose to interview via Zoom. Another example from Liamputtong (2020) showed that an interviewer should make expectations clear ahead of the interview and remind the participant of the guidelines at the start of recording.

Interviews began with reiteration of the purpose of the research, informed consent procedures, that information shared was confidential, and that there were efforts to ensure participant protection from harm. After the initial explanation, I continued the interview with asking interview questions and using probes to better understand the teachers' perception of their implementation of instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement. The most effective interview strategies involve clear goals and explanations, open-ended questions, neutral delivery, and observation of participant body language (Liamputtong, 2020).

Semistructured interviews for this qualitative study involved planning how and when to contact the participant, scheduling the interview, conducting the interview, and coding the interview. I used the semistructured protocol I produced to collect data. Liamputtong (2020) shared the importance of being organized in each process of

interviewing. Therefore, when communicating with participants, I followed an organized procedure to ensure data is captured and reported accurately.

In qualitative research, participants are typically observed or interviewed in their natural setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Despite precautions due to the Coronavirus 2019 virus, participants had the opportunity to be interviewed in person or via Zoom; in either case, the interview were audio recorded. Interviews of participants conducted face-to-face were one-on-one in a room that allowed confidential sharing of information. Locations varied and included seven participants interviewing in a private space in person, while three participants were more comfortable with interviewing via Zoom. Prior to the interviews, I expressed the need to be in a room alone so they can process the questions and feel comfortable sharing their private thoughts. After the interview, each participant received a \$25 Visa gift card. The interviews ranged from 31- 60 minutes.

Data Tracking and Storage

I kept a data collection log describing dates and procedures for every step of the study. I developed and kept a single document indicating the identity and code for each participant, which I needed during the transcription phase. This document is password protected on my personal computer. I also kept a personal reflexive journal throughout the research. All data logs or transcripts were labeled with the participants' numerical IDs only. I used a spreadsheet to track data analysis and codes. All data are secured in a locked drawer or password-protected computer in my home for 5 years, per Walden University rules. After 5 years, the data will be destroyed through deletion or shredding.

Access to Participants

After gaining Walden University IRB approval as well as approval from the study district to recruit high school teachers for the study, I sent an email from my Walden University email address to all teachers who meet the criteria of being a content area teacher at high schools in the district. Content area teachers' emails are listed publicly on the high school websites. The email included my contact information, the purpose of the study, and the confidential nature of the interview, which should last less than an hour. Once the invitation emails are sent, I waited for teachers to respond to provide informed consent forms and schedule interviews. If fewer than 10 teachers had responded to the invitation letter, a follow-up email was sent to those who had not responded. There was no need to send a follow up email.

Role of the Researcher

Ravitch and Carl (2016) explained the positionality of a researcher is the individual's role in context to the study. Acknowledging the researcher's role is vital to identifying and mitigating against researcher bias in the analysis of data. I am an assistant principal at a middle school in the study district. I also served as an English language arts teacher in the district, acting as a teacher leader, providing instructional coaching, PD, and serving as a department chair, while working with district specialists. I do not serve as a supervisor to any potential participants. Within both of these roles, I have built trust and positive relationships where teachers and other professionals not only listen to what I have to say, but also are willing to openly share their perceptions with me and know that I am an advocate for students and equitable education. Teachers in the district who know

me will be confident that our conversations and interview will be confidential. As I do know many teachers, I will have to ensure that I stay on script with my interview to show a neutral position on the topic.

Once all my data were collected, I could then begin to form opinions with the support of the codes, categories, and themes from the interviews. Before analysis, I needed to acknowledge my personal bias with the phenomenon of the study. I have an experience-based bias in the district. I have had to search for diverse curriculum materials to ensure students felt connected to the content. Diverse material was not an expectation or anything that was even discussed in district meetings, curriculum planning, or PD. I also have advocated for having more culturally diverse resources in our curriculum warehouse at each grade level, and that effort is still not solid from elementary through high school.

Data Analysis Methods

Data collected during the interview process were recorded on the computer through an audio recorder called Otter. Once each interview was completed, the audio transcript was analyzed through coding and content data analysis on the perceptions of teachers about their reading instruction of African American and Hispanic students.

Coding

As the researcher in this basic qualitative study, my role was to remain neutral, maintain confidentiality, and establish trust throughout the process. Once I completed the interviews, I organized the transcripts, and field notes to begin the coding process. Analysis begins with the specific codes, and then involves identifying categories and the

emerging broader themes (Saldaña, 2021). Coding cycles project an explanation, meaning, or thought from the data collected. I used qualitative content analysis employing both a Priori coding and open descriptive coding employing Yin's 5-step data analysis process to review the information collected.

I used qualitative content analysis to analyze information collected from participants. Content analysis is "A research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). Saldaña (2021) explained that researchers analyze language-based or visual data in qualitative inquiry to capture the essence or attribute of the data. I also used Yin's (2018) 5-step process, which included (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. Additionally, data analysis included a Priori coding, a deductive coding approach, using the conceptual framework, Freire's theory of critical pedagogy and inductive, open coding, to analyze the information obtained from participants. Using inductive and deductive reasoning, I used predetermined deductive codes based on the conceptual framework, and open codes based on my analysis of the information shared by participants in the interview process. I immersed myself in the data to examine the content of the transcripts. I used a spreadsheet and pivot tables to examine coded text excerpts pasted them into the spreadsheet. Using content analysis, I examined the frequency and possible patterns between deductive and inductive codes assigned to the text excerpts (see Bengtsson, 2016).

Coding is taking a word or phrase that represents the analytic memo about the data for further analysis. Also, coding for qualitative data provides analytical and

reflective processes to support the research focusing on positive social change (Saldaña, 2021). Categories in qualitative research are different from codes and themes because they are defined as the groups of information that includes the organization of codes. Therefore, I combined multiple codes to create categories. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), categories develop from content analysis, where similar pieces of information are placed together. Morse (2015) explained that finding themes in qualitative research is a higher level categorization of codes to elaborate on meaningful categories present in all data sets.

Themes are different from codes and categories because themes of the research emerge after coding is complete and categories are created. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), themes in qualitative research tie the research and findings together to create a meaningful, analytic report of findings and solidify the phenomenon. Overall, codes, categories, and themes are all interdependent to present valid evidence and findings in qualitative research (Morse, 2015). In summary, recognizing a theme in data means involves coding data through several rounds or cycles and then creating categories from the rounds of coding and finally identifying the emerging themes in relation to the RQ and purpose of the study.

Evidence of Quality

In qualitative research, trustworthiness means there are no personal motivations in the findings, and the researcher has addressed any potential bias. For qualitative research, certain elements in a study set a solid foundation in building quality, trustworthiness, and

credibility. According to Shenton (2004), four criteria ensure a trustworthy study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The first criterion outlined by Shenton (2004) is credibility, which is ensuring the measures for the study address the purpose of the study. Credibility develops through adopting well-established research methods when seeking information to support a study, such as employing specific procedures for interviews and using all the questioning types. Also, credibility is established through developing familiarity with participants, tactics to ensure the honesty of participants, iterative questioning, negative case analysis, frequent briefing sessions, peer scrutiny of the research project, reflective commentary, background and experience of the investigator, member checks, thick description of the phenomenon, and examination of previous research-based findings (Shenton, 2004). To establish credibility, I employed Shenton's recommended practices of ensuring confidentiality to ensure honest responses of interviewees, peer debriefing of the findings, systemic process, field journal notes, member checks, and examination of previous research. After data analysis, I emailed a copy of the draft findings to participants for their input, in a process called member checking (see Saldaña, 2021).

The second criterion examined by Shenton (2004) is transferability, which is the application of findings in other situations and other locations. As qualitative studies focus on smaller participant sizes, researchers want to establish that this study was suitable and applicable on a larger scale. Transferability includes assessing the number of organizations taking part in the study and their location. Restrictions of participants are also noted, along with assessing the number of participants involved in the fieldwork,

data collection methods, number and length of the data collection sessions, and the period over which the data collection took place (Shenton, 2004). The use of qualitative studies tends to reduce transferability. Rich description of context in a qualitative study allows readers to determine whether findings may be transferable to a similar setting (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Additionally, although a small sample size could be considered a limitation, the site-specific design was appropriate for this project study.

The next criterion shared by Shenton (2004) is dependability, that is the idea that replication of the study would yield similar results. In qualitative research, replication is difficult and imprecise (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For dependability, however, the researcher can ensure that the work is consistent and that observations and other methods of data collection and reporting remain the same (Shenton, 2004). I used a semistructured interview protocol for dependability. Shenton also explained that the dependability of the research consists of readers of the research developing understanding of a topic by outlining sections devoted to the research design and implementation, the operational detail of gathering data, and reflective appraisal of the project. Overall, dependability consists of researchers using specific sections to their study to share their findings with those that are reading the study for comprehensibility. In this study, I specifically outlined methods and procedures to promote dependability.

The last criterion Shenton (2004) examined to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, and quality was confirmability, that is ensuring the findings capture the experiences and thoughts of the participants and do not include assumptions or biases of the researcher. I reflected on any personal biases I may have had toward the topic so as not to allow my

preconceptions to color data collection and analysis (see Yin, 2018). For this process, I used a reflexive journal to document my thoughts, personal feelings, and decisions during the study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Confirmability also includes an audit trail, that involves the researcher providing specific information on decisions made and procedures followed throughout the study (Shenton, 2004). I kept an audit trail of all processes and data analysis decisions in the study. Discrepant cases were considered and are noted in the findings (Shenton, 2004).

In conclusion, although qualitative research is by nature subjective, I used established criteria to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, and quality, making solid arguments to support positive social change. Describing the limitations of a study makes findings more credible and transparent. The limitations in this study included using a small sample of participants from three schools in one district. Having a small number of interviews and using one study district does not allow for regional or national transferability; however, the objective of this project study was site specific. Additionally, giving rich detail may allow readers to determine whether findings are applicable to other sites.

Data Analysis Results

By means of the five phases of data analysis outlined by Yin (2016), I conducted a qualitative analysis that consisted of (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) concluding. In this section, I define the data analysis process along with illustrations of the coding and analysis to classify codes, categories, and themes. The illustrations of coding, categories and themes emerged from the focal point

of my RQ and problem of focus. The problem I sought to explore in this study was that African American and Hispanic students' literacy scores have remained lowest of all ethnicities at high schools in the study district, despite the implementation of numerous initiatives and curricular platforms. In order to understand the impressions these initiatives and curricular platforms have had on student achievement in reading, I sought the perspective of teachers to understand how these initiatives and platforms have helped and what teachers perceive they still need to better support African American and Hispanic students. To achieve this, I identified individual perceptions of core content high school teachers within the study district about their perceptions related to instructional strategies, resources, and professional learning to support the achievement of African American and Hispanic students. The following RQ guided this study:

RQ: How do high school teachers perceive they implement instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement at the study district?

Participants were explicitly selected from the study district. There were 10 participants (five English teachers, three science teachers, one social studies teacher, and one mathematics teacher). This study depended on data collected from individual interviews. All participants were available for individual interviews, while seven participants selected the private location, and three participants selected to participate via Zoom where the interviews were conducted. All participants had the opportunity to openly share their perspectives about their instructional strategies, resources, and

professional learning to support the achievement of African American and Hispanic students.

A systemic process was used to collect data. For example, there was an interview protocol established to use prior to the interviews, during the interview process and following my interviews with participants. Burck (2005) shared that systemic processes include recursive cycles built into a grounded theory and connections between research categories and framework concepts. In this study there was a connection between the study purpose, RQ, and interview question. I created a uniform recruitment procedure to access participants from publicly available school staff members' email addresses including their role in the study schools. From there, I emailed participants about the research purpose, RQ and requested their participation in individual interviews. Once participants emailed me to confirm their participation, I set a date and time to interview them individually in-person or on Zoom. Seven out of 10 participants were in-person interviews, and three out of 10 participants had interviews through the Zoom platform. During the interviews, I read background information about my study, asked if they had any questions, and then confirmed their participation once again. After participants confirmed their participation, I asked 11 interview questions and used probing questions over a 30 to 60-minute time frame during each semistructured interview. At the conclusion of the interview questions, I informed participants that I would share the data with them once all interviews were complete and transcripts were reviewed to see if there was anything they wanted to elaborate on. Interviews were audio recorded and

transcribed by the Otter application. Following interviews, I cleaned transcripts and began to take notes as part of a field journal and coded the data.

Compiling

I began the compiling process by organizing my audio recordings of individual interviews along with the interview transcripts. This information was organized on an Excel spreadsheet by participant for each round of coding. Participants were color coded and given a different number to keep each person's responses separate and to protect confidentiality. Organizing and reading through the participant interviews and playing the audio recording (recorded with Otter: Transcribe Voice Notes) assisted with evaluating the accuracy of the transcripts and to fully capture what the participants explained as they answered my questions. During the compiling process, it is also vital to record thoughts on data collection and potential analysis process (see Yin, 2016). Therefore, as I compiled the information from interviews, I also referred to my original data with notations.

I read transcripts multiple times by each participant, highlighting the key statements participants made that related to my RQ and problem of focus. According to Yin (2016), while compiling data, it is essential to become thoroughly familiar with the original data in qualitative research to grasp what the participant(s) are describing. After reviewing the transcripts, I copied and pasted the highlighted statements from each participant into the spreadsheet. The spreadsheet organization began with participant number in the first column and the participant statement by interview question in the

second column. Once I completed compiling the data, I moved to the disassembling phase of the process.

Disassembling

During the disassembling process, I sorted data into a Priori codes that were relevant to my RQ, purpose of the student, and Freire's (1970) theory of critical pedagogy. The purpose of this round of data analysis was to review the alignment on reported information from participants in the district of study to the theory of critical pedagogy. The participants showed through their responses that Freire's theory of critical pedagogy attributes are a relevant factor in supporting African American and Hispanic students' success in reading. Participants shared specifically in their interview how students' success and mastery are promoted with making (a) collaboration, (b) culturally relevant, (c) discourse, (d) preteaching/background knowledge, (e) real world connections, (f) social justice/restorative practice/community building/allocation of resources, (g) student choice and voice, and (h) student engagement a priority when planning instruction and that all are imperative with students' motivation and success with academics. Examining the alignment of reported information from participants with Freire's theory allowed me to better see how teachers perceive what strategies they use, where they need support, and areas for further professional learning to support the academic achievement of African American and Hispanic students. I read and reread participant statements and included a third column in my Excel spreadsheet for the a Priori terms based on Freire's theory of critical pedagogy and the district instructional principles. The a Priori codes included (a) collaboration, (b) real world connections, (c)

culturally relevant, (d) student engagement, (e) discourse, (f) preteaching/background knowledge, (g) student choice/voice, and (h) social justice/restorative practice/community building/allocation of resources. Yin (2016) explained this stage of analyzing data is to record impressions, record thoughts on code development, and begin the coding guide. In the disassembling phase, I examined the text line-by-line using both inductive and deductive codes. Through this phase, disassembling is the time to develop code definitions, identify key ideas in relation to the RQ, and continuing to keep track of evidence (Yin, 2016). I examined the pivot table of the a Priori codes and analyzed the frequency of interview responses that aligned with each a Priori code. Appendix C reflects the a Priori codes along with a scholarly definition of the specific a Priori, or deductive code.

Next, I placed the text excerpts in the spreadsheet and reviewed the a priori codes assigned to the text using a pivot table. Appendix D reflects sample text excerpts for a Priori codes by participant. I used a pivot table to examine the breakdown of the a priori codes. I reviewed the data using the pivot tables in the spreadsheet. A total of 859 pieces of text were coded overall.

The next step of disassembling the data included conducting two rounds of open descriptive coding, an inductive coding process. During this process, I used Saldaña's (2021) process described as descriptive coding. In disassembling these data, I identified emerging ideas from the data through open coding. According to Saldaña, in open descriptive coding, exact words from the original interviews are used to capture the full ideas of participants. I immersed myself in the data again and created analytic memos to

help describe a broader understanding of the data and to make possible connections between the open codes and a Priori codes. For the Round 1 of open descriptive coding, I identified 16 codes. I coded the same 859 pieces of text excerpts using a different coding approach from the initial round of a Priori coding. I reviewed the transcripts, and assigned open descriptive codes based on what each participant was communicating regarding the posed interview questions. I conducted two Rounds of open descriptive coding.

After completing the Round 1 of open descriptive coding, I conducted Round 2 of open descriptive coding. In this round of coding, I continued to consider the connection between the textual information from participants in relation to the problem statement and RQ. In Round 2 of open descriptive coding, I examined the data for patterns and similarities to consider how the 16 Round 1 open descriptive codes could be collapsed or organized to represent participants' perspectives about instruction. The 16 Round 1 codes were collapsed into 11 Round 2 open descriptive codes. I created a pivot table to examine coding patterns and to ensure there was consistency in the coding of text excerpts. Once I completed Round 2 of open coding, I began reassembling the data. I collapsed the 16 Round 1 codes into 11 Round 2 open descriptive codes.

Reassembling

I continued my data analysis by reviewing my Round 2 codes and pivot table. From the disassembling phase, I then began to reassemble the data into textual categories. As I kept the RQ and problem as the focal point for this phase, I continued to review data for reoccurring concepts and ideas expressed by the participants. I looked at the

correlation between each round of coding using the Excel spreadsheet and pivot tables. Yin (2016) explained that reassembling data is a process of looking at the data with a different lens and making connections to your RQ, problem, or purpose of study. The identification of key ideas in relation to the RQ and problem statement supported five emerging categories such as (a) culturally relevant pedagogy and practice; (b) opportunity for student engagement in collaboration, discourse with teacher and peers, social and emotional development, social justice; (c) professional learning for teachers to develop instructional practices and selection of resources; (d) support from building and district administration in providing teachers with meaningful supplemental resources to promote equitable access, professional learning and instructional support; and (e) promoting school and community partnership: school to home partnership and school to community partners. Yin (2019) elaborated that categories derive from successful qualitative data analysis of inductive codes and that from there the researcher arrives at themes based on the meaningful constructs analyzed through coding. Reassembling allowed me to take broad data and filter it into more specific data to address the RQ and purpose of the study. Once I completed the reassembling process, I began interpreting the data. The 11 Round 2 Codes were further collapsed into five categories. Appendix E reflects the open descriptive codes for both Round 1 and 2 of open coding, the five categories that were identified from the open coding and four themes that emerged from the identified categories.

Interpreting

Interpreting data is a process of theme development. The function of this phase is to identify patterns further to develop themes, and create findings statements (Yin, 2016). The analysis and action steps in this process is a response to the research, identifying representative data, developing case summaries, and recording analytic decisions (Yin, 2016). The themes that emerged represented the perceptions of teachers and how they explained their current instructional practices, where they need support, and areas of professional learning that can improve their practices to support the academic achievement of African American and Hispanic students. Four themes emerged from the RQ and address overall teacher perceptions of instructional practices and areas of support in this study. Once I completed the interpreting process, I began my concluding analysis of the data as outlined in Yin's (2016) 5-step process. Table 5 reflects the themes and the count of coded text by each of the themes that emerged for the one RQ.

Table 5

Theme Number, Description, and Count of Codes by Theme

Theme number	Theme description	Total
1	Teachers use of culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated practices.	106
2	Teachers emphasize the need for opportunities for student engagement.	358
3	Teachers need of support from district and campus stakeholders.	334
4	Teacher support needed in developing and promoting family and community partnerships.	61
	Grand total	859

Concluding

In the last phase of qualitative data analysis, the concluding process involves a logical connection between the analysis and interpretation of data and the study's purpose. The function of this phase is to apply the conceptual framework and use it to later explain findings; situating the findings in literature (see Yin, 2016). As a restatement, I analyzed individual interview transcripts and listened to audio recordings for context. Next, I conducted a content analysis using one round of a Priori codes and two rounds of open descriptive coding. In addition, I used notes from the interview transcripts and created analytic memos that would support with the disassembling and reassembling process to assign codes to phrases. I continued to review and connect back to the study's RQ and purpose of the study in addition to the pivot tables during each stage of coding, categorizing, and theming. As a final stage, four themes emerged from the process to address this basic qualitative study.

The purpose of the study was to examine high school teachers' perceptions of how their implementation of instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' achievement. To address the RQ, the perspectives of educators include (a) what teachers focus on as a vital part of instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' achievement, (b) areas where teachers feel they have support from district administration but would like increased provisions to support African American and Hispanic students' achievement, and (c) opportunities for teachers to participate in professional learning to support African American and Hispanic students' achievement.

Field Journal

After each interview concluded, I typed notes next to the questions that I asked to help me keep the study purpose and RQ at the forefront of my data review. Sullivan and Sargeant (2011) explained that reflexive journals is a tool to use during qualitative research to support the interviewer with keeping active notes of the participant responses and a way to ensure there is no bias with asking questions. Janesick (1999) clarified that incorporating journal writing as a tool during the research process helps the researcher reflect on the action steps they take during research. While journal writing can support qualitative research in various ways, this reflective tool is for researchers to assess and reassess their procedures, protocols, and techniques during the data collection process (Janesick, 1999). For this qualitative study, I wrote short reflective notes as I was interviewed participants and reflected on how I could ensure the purpose and RQ remained at the forefront of my questioning. After interviews, I made notations next to participant responses in how I see trends emerging in the data, and connections from one participant to the next. The connections that participants had among responses were also highlighted for me to read and reflect before the coding process. The last tool used was member checking; this tool was another way to verify that I accurately conveyed the participants' perceptions in the draft findings of the study.

In review, the four themes emerged from the content data analysis. Themes 1 and 2 focus on the use of culturally relevant and differentiated practice, strategies that focus on opportunities for engagement, discourse, and collaboration to promote social emotional development and a sense of social justice to support African American and

Hispanic student learning. Themes 3 and 4 focus on the participants' needs related to support, materials, and community partnerships to support African American and Hispanic student learning. In the next section, I discuss the themes by RQ and provide interview excerpts by participant to exemplify support for each theme.

Findings Aligned With Research Problem and Questions

The problem addressed by the study was African American and Hispanic students' literacy scores have remained lowest of all ethnicities at high schools in one district, despite the implementation of numerous initiatives and curricular platforms. In this basic qualitative study, the individual interview of participants is the basis of the study, as I sought to understand perceptions about teacher implementation of the instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement. The RQ remained at the center of my study to align the question and phenomenon with my interview questions (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). There are four themes that emerged from the following RQ: How do high school teachers perceive they implement instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement at the study district?

To answer the RQ, I created interview questions and an interview protocol that contained a script of 11 guiding interview questions aligned with the conceptual framework. I focused on analyzing, coding, categorizing, and theming the data in various rounds of reading rereading and analysis.

Theme 1: Teachers' Use of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Differentiated Practices

High School teachers described using culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated practices to support African American and Hispanic students. Participants reported using culturally relevant practices to support the instruction of African American and Hispanic students. All participants (P) described using resources to support cultural relevancy for the students they teach. In their responses, they described elements of the conceptual framework, Freire's theory, such as making real-world connections, intentional student engagement, and highlighting social justice.

I asked participants how they viewed culturally relevant instruction, resources, pedagogy, and differentiated practices to support the instruction of African American and Hispanic students. Most participants stated that they try to build their lessons to help students see themselves in the lesson. P1, P3, and P7 shared that they still modify the curriculum so all students can see themselves in it from a cultural standpoint. Teachers conveyed how they made concerted efforts to get to know each student and tried to build lessons to help students see themselves in the lessons by facilitating community-building activities and using student voices in their lesson planning. P5 and P10 elaborated further that the more students see themselves in the curriculum and examples used during instruction, the more they are engaged in the lesson concepts and can explain their level of understanding and mastery in their own words.

All participants shared the importance of using culturally relevant resources. However, P3 made a statement about the impact on students:

I think using culturally relevant resources lets the students be able to see themselves [or background] in that author and that we're not reading material from a bunch of people that no longer exist, and I hate to put it that way, but I don't think they see the relevance in it [the lesson]. Being able to see themselves in that author is huge for those students. I think it gives them a little bit more pride and I think they take it more seriously because it's someone that they can relate to [because of their ethnic background].

P4 and P6 pointed out that to increase culturally relevant pedagogy, more resources are needed as teachers share culturally relevant resources from their collections. Overall, teachers noted they do not feel like students read books that are culturally relevant from the library, and they sometimes need help finding resources. P8 also shared that there are initiatives by the state that are likely to influence the availability of resources that teachers use due to House Bill 198 (HB198). As a part of the district HB198 committee, P8 explained that

I'm a part of the HB 198 committee, and I am a part of a group of people that are reviewing, curriculum, to make sure it's inclusive, and to make sure that it's [curriculum and instructional resources] are not so far beyond it's also something that all students can access. Culturally relevant resources play a very big role because if they, [students], cannot see themselves in these positions that we want them to be in, they, [students], will not see it. Students have to read about themselves in resources. They have to understand that people of similar backgrounds have made contributions to what they are studying and what they

have accomplished. They have to know what's possible. It's one thing for us to tell students; it's another thing for us to show we learn about people that have made really significant contributions to every field of education, but there are a lot of people now that are still making significant contributions, and students don't know who these people are.

Being culturally relevant from the teacher's perspective also involves using examples from the student's knowledge base of celebrities or community members as a differentiated practice. Half of the participants stated that the examples they used during instruction included a specific curriculum in terms of reading. Teachers want to make reading comprehension easier, but they do not want to change the grade level of the content. All participants stated a continued need to differentiate by practicing culturally relevant pedagogy. They shared that they may differentiate by using culturally relevant content, such as favorite music artists students may know or well-known or famous African American or Hispanic intellectuals they may know, to make a lesson more relevant and exciting. Overall, teachers want students to identify with the material used to introduce content and to teach literacy. Participants also shared that they might even use reading materials that connect to the students' neighborhoods so that students can identify with familiar concepts or similarly shared perspectives. Participants also shared that they can change reading materials and texts based on student interest surveys. Teachers all reported the importance of differentiation using materials and resources that supported African American and Hispanic student engagement to keep relevance and interest in the instruction.

Participants all stated resources provided to students are more beneficial by engraining culturally relevant resources throughout their lesson activities. Some clarified that even more resources could be helpful by stating that some of these achievement gaps would be almost overcome, or if not overcome, at least lessened, if more culturally relevant texts were consistently used. All participants conveyed the importance of needing culturally relevant materials and resources for their students.

Eighty percent of participants also shared that they think culturally relevant resources and real-world connections help with reading because the point is to get students to engage with the reading and comprehend the text. They shared that what some students read or learn about can be motivating or demotivating. Including various cultures has a lot to do with the interests. Students come from various backgrounds; therefore, their interest is peaked when learning about a variety of text they can make connections with. Other participants explained how some teachers use supplemental resources to engage students in a culturally relevant way. P3 expounded that students have shown success with the curriculum resources when they can read passages that relate to their everyday experiences but also with the culture related to their neighborhood and their interests. Also, all participants shared that they generally have difficulty connecting to especially African Americans and Hispanics, when the experiences that students read about do not align with their personal experiences. The same group of participants also found that African American and Hispanic students struggle with vocabulary. Hence, participants also focused on the foundation of building vocabulary first. Then, when students develop their vocabulary skills, they reported that

they could more easily concentrate on inference skills and comprehension skills in terms of the main idea and continue using contextual clues to master understanding of course content.

P3, P4, and P6 shared that making sure that the reading is not directed towards one ethnic group or one class of people is essential as they want to ensure students have a variety of culturally diverse materials that they are accessing. Fifty percent of participants explained that other differentiation practices for African American and Hispanic students, especially for struggling readers, included using strategies like active reading organizers and chunking during an experiment or reading assignments. Active reading organizers and chunking allow for students to stop reading and process what they have just read, while also giving teachers an opportunity to check students' understanding of the text by asking scaffolded questions as another way to differentiate instruction to promote student engagement. P1, P2, P3, P5, and P10 shared that frequently checking for understanding with the students to ensure they meet their needs and confirm their knowledge of the course content and curriculum was essential to maintaining engagement.

Eighty percent of participants also stated that in checking for understanding, they would ask questions about the reading that students just read to better assess their comprehension. Checks for understanding could be the teacher asking students about vocabulary, connections they personally have with the text, or how the text connects to other literature they have read. Also, 50% of participants stated that word choice was a struggle for some Hispanic students, who may be English language learners (ELL), and understanding academic vocabulary was challenging as a part of the checks for

understanding. Thus, the same 50% of participants shared that differentiated practices such as previewing and preteaching those vocabulary words made students more successful and resulted in the students being more included in the class discussion because they felt more comfortable knowing the vocabulary and, therefore, were able to feel more ownership over that activity in class. P3, P6, and P9 reported that previewing vocabulary terms gives students the confidence to have conversations in small groups with their peers and participate in a whole group discussion because they need to figure out what that word means or what is part of the discussion.

Similarly, P4, P5, and P7 stated that allowing students to pull information from different sources again using guided notes, dissection of reading passes, and graphic organizers gives them additional support and increases their access to the information needed to apply the information to assignments. Also, assignments are the application of the content-based vocabulary, and all participants found that once students have a solid background in terms of the key vocabulary words and academic constructs, it is effortless for students to use the proper words in context and apply their vocabulary knowledge to their comprehension to reach academic success and mastery.

All participants reported using culturally relevant practices and materials. All participants underscored the importance of making efforts to get to know their students and to provide relevant materials for their students. In addition, P2, P5, and P10 reported that they supplemented the curriculum from a culturally relevant pedagogy perspective, meaning that they identified unique materials to capture the interests of the African American and Hispanic students regarding their background and culture. Participants all

shared connections with their students and their students' interest in music and sports. They used general interests to embed and highlight their students' background knowledge and culture. Participants noted that they strove to stay within the curriculum but to make it more meaningful by identifying resources pertinent to students' cultural experiences and remaining congruent with the curriculum taught.

Teachers perceived the importance of using culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated practices to support African American and Hispanic students. All participants noted how critical it was to differentiate practices to meet the needs of their students and that also included using culturally relevant strategies and materials. In order to effectively use culturally relevant practices, Participants shared the importance of examining their own perceptions and biases, with P9 adding, "We all have biases." P2, P3, P4, and P5 noted the value of examining one's own perceptions of race and ethnicity in order to increase self-awareness and to design more individualized, culturally relevant practices for their students.

In order to discern personal biases, all participants noted how teacher dialogue supported their personal understanding of their assumptions, thereby enabling them to identify critical culturally relevant strategies, build meaningful relationships with their students, and establish a positive classroom community. As a component of building a positive classroom community, most participants explained that when they say we need to talk about teacher support and working with this population of students, educational leaders need to realize the time and effort required to build good working relationships

with their students, identify culturally relevant strategies and individualized culturally relevant materials.

Theme 2: Teachers Emphasize the Need for Opportunities for Student Engagement

Teachers emphasized the need for opportunities for student engagement. This theme emerged from the findings supporting the increased need for student engagement in collaboration, discourse with teachers and peers, social and emotional development, and social justice. This theme is connected to Freire's (1970) theory of critical pedagogy as constructs in this theory are focused on collaboration, student voice and choice, using background knowledge as a foundation for instruction, and discourse around real-world connections to promote student engagement and social justice.

I asked participants how they perceived that they emphasized opportunities for student engagement through collaboration and discourse with teachers and peers to promote social/emotional development and social justice to support African American and Hispanic students. P4, P7, and P8 illustrated that to create collaborative groups, they put students in groups based on their learning styles and how they scored on tests. Ninety percent of participants reported that they mix students heterogeneously to create a sense of balance in student voice and to support each student in the classroom better.

Mixing students heterogeneously to create balance in student voice and to support each student in the classroom included structured collaboration. Also, P8 stated, "I think collaborative structures and collaborative activities are the most effective. With reading achievement. It inspires more confidence, and inspires a sense of civic duty, because they're holding each other accountable." Fifty percent of participants expounded

on the fact that they also used Kagan strategies, so students have a structured way to collaborate and share through strategies like think-pair-share, where they talk to their shoulder partner about the reading. Also, with their peer participation, P2, P3, P5, P7, and P8 noted that this helps with the overall instruction by keeping students focused on the concepts and engagement of the lesson and helps students better understand the material by hearing the voice of their peers.

Kagan's strategies and other structured collaboration prompt and encourage students to participate during instruction and collaborate with their peers to understand the material better. Eighty percent of participants described that small-group differentiated instruction supports African American and Hispanic students for collaborative purposes. P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10 also explained that, in their classrooms, some instructional strategies they have used are small group instruction for some African American and Hispanic students. Likewise, P2 and P10 explained their experience as being directed toward improving content-related reading and pulling the students into a group in the back of the room for small-group support. Meanwhile, P6 additionally stated, "They are going to learn from each other more than they learned from me." P7 specifically shared that collaborative discourse (where each student has an assigned conversation role) that promotes a connection between curricular topics strengthens student reading comprehension. Fifty percent of participants shared that they try to institute advancement via individual determination (AVID) strategies to encourage students to work and collaborate to strengthen their reading skills. AVID strategies are strategies for students to use in their academic or personal world to organize their

thoughts and actions. The same 50% of participants employed many different techniques and strategies to get students to be more comfortable with reading and doing project presentations, where they had to conduct research in the classroom to strengthen their comprehension.

P7, P8, and P10 then shared that they think there needs to be an AVID class and a space that teaches students just basic strategies that help support learning and organizing themselves in life. For example, P7 and P10 focused on not just providing reading strategies. However, they also described instructing students on organization of life activities and emphasized making the learning experiences more accessible and relatable as a means to promote student engagement.

All participants stressed the importance of collaboration in all aspects of their instruction. Seventy-five percent of participants reported perceiving collaborative structures and activities, such as timed pair share or mixed pair share as the most effective. Teachers observed that students gained more confidence and that the content area of reading, structured as a successful experience can be effectively used to inspire a sense of civic duty. P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, and P9 explained that the more confidence students had within the classroom, the more likely they would engage with the material and participate in lesson activities. Students often hold each other accountable for mastering content, especially in collaborative group activities. P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, and P9 stated that the reflection of student opportunities for collaboration, discourse, and SEL are more likely to promote student engagement through the selection of instructional strategies afforded to students. P9 stated, and P3 and P10 shared, "We also provide a

Saturday Academy that's a voluntary program for students, particularly Spanish and African American students to collaborate with one another." The Saturday Academy program allows students to participate in collaborative and SEL in smaller group settings such as; collaborative vocabulary activities, gallery walks, and community building. Collaborative and SEL also leads to magnifying student voice and choice. Half of the participants shared that they try to give students at least three to four choices for most of the assignments during the Saturday Academy or their regular classes they teach, but they may also have a fifth or sixth choice regarding how students may complete an assignment. For example, if they are assigned a project, they can present it by creating a PowerPoint or a camera activity for a concept explanation. Students may also want to select a video presentation, and then, out of those three, they may also want to have a choice to present the assignment differently. P2 shared, "They have a better understanding of how to advocate for themselves and are more confident with their speaking after participating in SEL activities and collaboration." P4 also shared, "Students can then take that article, research, and information to make some connections or themselves." P5 stated, "I am making one-on-one appointments to prepare students for their reading and research, reading and presentation of their senior project." P7 and P9 explained that they collaborate with students during instruction and assessment. P6, P7, P8, and P9 shared they always like to do is bring real-world examples to them to make further connections to the curriculum and enhance reading comprehension. P4, P6, and P10, all science teachers, shared that they perceived science is all around us, so they always like to bring real-world examples to their lessons and show that to students as a

part of engaged collaboration. For example, when talking about chemical reactions, they talk about it in a way of looking at relationships, so students are talking about how these elements and molecules combine to talk about relationships with people, to provide a direct connection to students.

Real world examples and direct connections to the content provide students engagement and excitement about the material, which promotes their discourse. P3 and P8 shared that there is a challenge with student discourse, stating that some challenges are how social some students are because they will talk about the work that will easily segue into everything else, anything else as a topic.

According to all participants, students also had the opportunity for social and emotional learning to make further connections with the content and one another and to build a sense of belonging in a positive classroom climate. This type of learning creates a more welcoming classroom to promote student collaboration and discourse. Half the participants explained that they believe students, no matter their level, would be willing to take academic and social risks and learn because if teachers build a culture of love, then they also build a culture of trust. In addition, P1, P3, P6, and P9 also shared the importance of student motivation through social and emotional learning activities. The participants conveyed that SEL type activities where they come to know the students by asking them survey questions including where they come from, their interests, favorite food, favorite activities, music, sports, gaming, and technology interests served to help the student connect with the teacher as they were demonstrating a culture of caring by inquiring about who they were and where their interests lay. All participants shared that

they try to get to know each student and build their lesson to help students see themselves in the lesson.

P3 and P6 shared that utilizing focused class-building or team-building activities structures student time to support a positive classroom community and SEL. Class-building and team-building activities promote a sense of collective community in the classroom for students to feel more confident in how they collaborate with one another, engage with the content, and participate in lesson activities. P3, P4, P5, P10 reviewed these activities, and they used content-based activities as they pulled out the meanings of the paragraphs, which helped students succeed by leaving them to their own devices and letting them read independently. These same participants also noticed they receive many students in their classes needing decoding support, and then they ask questions about what is going on and things like that. All participants explained that they ensure they go through and read together as a class and then select the code and unpack passages together. P2, P3, P7, and P10 stated that text annotation while reading supports success and mastery by explaining that students cannot connect with the word and the displayed content. Text annotation promotes student engagement, so they are making real-world connections with the text. Some students are shy about reading because they have that breakdown and comprehension. These participants shared how they have students read a paragraph or specific portion of the text and annotate it to show how to chunk their reading to comprehend the text better. P6 explained that sometimes differentiation involves modeling what reading activities and analysis may look like so students can practice independently.

P1, P3, and P10 also explained that having students say they want to be safe and accepted for who they are is massive in building community and that they must focus on their classroom activities. Safety and acceptance in the classroom is a point where students can let down their guard and participate openly in collaboration, dialogue, and engage with lesson activities and concepts. P2, P3, P4, and P9 shared that their conversations with students go well beyond the content area and how they connect with the content in their natural world. P1, P5, P6, and P8 that their conversations went very deep, and all the students shared, opened up, and then started holding themselves accountable and talked about how they needed to do better. P6 and P8 specified that this caring culture started with teachers sharing their experiences in life and how they make personal connections with the curriculum, showing that because they are teachers, they are not perfect and do not always have all the answers. They reported that they have shown students who they are as human beings by sharing their academic struggles and mistakes in life from a general viewpoint of lessons learned. P6 also said, "They need to know that successful people came from similar circumstances." P4 and P10 also explained that they develop excellent working relationships with students. P9 and P10 create a culture of asking students what they need consistently and regularly. Thus, students will tell their teachers and let them know when they are struggling with the content. With the established close and trusting student-teacher relationship, participants perceived that students let the teacher know when they could benefit from additional help. P3, P6, P9, and P10 also observed that some teachers are too scared to build trusting and deeper relationships with students. P1, P3, P4, P6, P7, and P10 conveyed that they perceived that

some teachers need help understanding how to develop good working relationships with students effectively. They also shared how teachers have got to get other educators to a point where they understand that our students want their teachers' attention and other educators who regularly interact with them. They shared that it is vital to develop positive relationships with students because if they have a negative relationship with their teacher, they are less likely to learn from them.

Similarly, P8 and P10 elaborated on how connections to students happen because of the level of transparency and how they use candid phrases with students to support and communicate their development, such as, "Thank you for your honesty." P6 and P9 reported that these phrases benefit students because they generally want them to tell the truth versus telling a lie and sharing their academic growth and struggles. This transparency encourages students to engage with the lesson activities such as collaboration with their peers and teachers and sharing their voice about the concepts of the lessons. They try to show grace as much as possible when communicating with students.

In addition, most participants explained that to increase student engagement, they think the sense of community starts with on the first day of class to increase student engagement, including building those connections and relationships. P6, P7, and P10 shared that it is the key to building communication and trust. Creating a sense of community in the classroom is vitally important. P6 and P10 talked extensively with students about building, growth, and relational capacity. If teachers do not have the

relational capacity in their room, either between students or even between students and teachers, they will not learn what they need to learn.

Theme 3: Teachers' Need of Support From District and Campus Stakeholders

Teachers perceived they need support from district and campus stakeholders in providing teachers with data-driven professional learning, instructional support (technical support coaching ongoing and systematic just-in-time PD), and culturally relevant supplemental resources/materials to promote equitable access to support African American and Hispanic students. I asked participants about their perceptions of the support from district and campus stakeholders in providing teachers with data-driven professional learning. P9 stated that they had reading intervention programs after school and brought reading assistance from reading coaches to assist students during class. P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, and P10 also explained they meet with instructional coaches in PLCs, stating PLCs are a building expectation by campus and district leaders to meet to examine summative assessments and formative assessment data. P1, P2, P4, P9, and P10 reported that they take the time during PLCs to look at their students' STAR reading assessment scores or their PSAT and SAT school for their high school. They look at the PSAT data, and they also look at NWEA MAP assessment data. They reported using the MAP data, the benchmark given at the beginning, mid-year, and end of the year. Participants also assess the MTSS groups where students receive academic support so they can remain where they need the most support or transition to a new area where further support is needed.

All participants shared that they do have instructional coaches who are available for all teachers. Participants all invite them to a PLC or into their classroom during regular instruction to observe and support the planning and instruction process. P1, P3, and P9 noted that instructional coaches provided support using various instructional strategies, student voice and choice, and specific student collaboration techniques like Kagan structures to enhance student collaboration and engagement with the planned lessons and activities.

P 4 and P7 stated how they could improve their practices if there were an opportunity to look at resources and develop data-driven methods. They shared that their opportunities to review resources and analyze and develop data-driven instructional methods are limited to several times a year such as professional learning days once a marking period. More time to review and analyze resources and data-driven methods for instruction is more important to teachers as they are trying to evolve their lessons to meet the needs of each student. However, they all shared that training for various platforms takes more time than taking the time to review and analyze resources and data-driven methods for instruction.

P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, and P9 reported they would like more support from campus and district leaders more often on their data analysis. The participants shared that there is a need to review how to analyze student data and to dissect the trends in student achievement. They stated that the basis of student achievement in mathematics and ELA is on state testing such as the SATs, and they see where students fall in proficiency in school and district compared to the state average. P2, P3, and P5 also talked about having

in-depth data digs built into activities at the beginning of the year for planning purposes. Then, they can incorporate them towards the middle and end of the year. P2, P4, and P5 shared this more frequent analysis would give an idea of where their students are in terms of ELA reading, writing, and mathematics proficiency.

P4, P6, and P7 explained that there are some excellent resources provided by district leaders. Still, P3, P4, P6, and P7 would like specific training in certain strategies by sharing what they use and relying on implementing many of the AVID strategies, as teachers feel AVID strategies are excellent for the students to help them because they build confidence. P3, P4, P6, P7, P9, and P10 also shared that training for reading comprehension, reading strategies to use across all content areas, and support for all content teachers, not just English teachers may be a good resource. P2 and P7 also pointed out that they have all the suitable support. They feel that African American and Hispanic students need to be more engaged to generate lasting change through PD. There has also been a focus on professional learning and coaching with writing strategies that P3, P4, P6, P7, P9, and P10 found extremely helpful, in addition to reading professional learning; all these things are extra-curricular things that they can implement, and then there is no further conversation on the training taking place. These participants thought if stakeholders were comfortable revisiting professional learning calendars and topics, or if they spread out over time, they would see more success in the data with all students.

Regarding instructional support from campus and district stakeholders, P2, P4, and P7 shared perspectives on what is going well and how they need further support. P3 and P5 shared that there is a need for support required at the district level and that the

district needs to be conscientious and purposeful about frequent classroom trips. P5 shared, “I think the most beneficial thing for district leaders to do when selecting curriculum and resources is to visit the buildings often and not just interact with staff, but all with our kids.” Also, it is essential to make frequent quick trips to PLCs or PLCs to get to know each classroom dynamic and see how students are learning and processing.

P3, P5, and P10 similarly resolved that there should not be one student who lacks resources as long as the state, district, and school can provide the resources for every single student and give them opportunities for student voice and choice, which will make an equitable process. In addition to this point, P2, P4, P5, and P10 explained that there is a need for bringing in more diverse speakers could be more relatable for our students and could better help teachers reach African American and Hispanic students. All participants also shared a need to get enough time to work with the curriculum to analyze how to best provide the content to their diverse groups of students, saying that the district cannot keep changing or trying to get the newest, best thing without data from districts with similar characteristics. They find there is more value in keeping a curricular platform for at least 5 years so they can master the curriculum and learn the elements of the curriculum that best impact and support their students. As a teacher, sometimes, new programs are implemented quickly and without consulting teachers, and they grow comfortable with one, and then there is a switch to a new curriculum. All participants shared that frequent switches in curriculum and expectations often make even the more experienced teachers feel like novice educators, and teachers need more data should be needed to show that the previous curriculum required student improvement. P3 and P9 explained that district

stakeholders were rushing to make things like data look perfect and to have high-achieving students taking AP courses. P4 stated,

They left out some of those important strategized reading and comprehension, and remedial reading programs that I think some of our kids could benefit from.

Campus leaders aim for the top and went straight to the other end offering only AP in my school.

P1, P2, P3, P5, P7, P8, and P9 shared that eliminated non-AP courses reduces course for students where they can get more instructional support. They omitted important strategy pieces like assessing student STAR testing and evaluating remedial reading programs that some students could benefit from.

P4 and P10 also shared that the teachers have to feel supported. They felt district stakeholders wanted them to go in front of students and smile and create a beautiful environment, and then they had to feel supported. The district would need to support teachers and students equally and understand the dynamics of the students they are working with. These same participants think a separation gap exists between our students and teachers and teacher and district leaders. The P3, P4, and P10 shared that the more active the district office is within the school buildings, the more they can understand the culture and make better decisions for students and staff. Therefore, there is a need for district office leaders to be present more frequently within the schools as they make decisions about curriculum and instructional practices.

Half of the participants shared as non-English teachers that they desire and need training in teaching reading during their professional learning days. They felt this type of

training would be helpful specifically in that area of reading and understand more of how they can support students through that training and getting access to resources. Lastly, all participants stated the following regarding the need to look at practices that have worked in the past. P1, P4, and P7 need to look at what moved them to be a top district in the state and lead the country in mathematics, reading, and science. Leaders need to look at some practices that have helped student achievement and success in the past. All participants shared that the pay for teachers is also inconsistent and that depending on their roles in education, such as special education or general education, the expectation increases for them and for the same pay rate as other teachers who only have to focus on curriculum planning and implementation. All participants also spoke about teacher turnover because some teachers find that there is no worth in how the educational system takes place and that significant changes must be made instead of switching from one initiative and curriculum to the next. P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, and P10 explained there is a need to look further into the efficacy of our education system and determine the factors that are affecting student learning and teacher retention. Some factors include teachers' pay for what they are asked to do, continuous initiatives, community conflicts, and students need to get closer to achieving a higher level of mastery. Fifty percent of participants have been teaching for decades, and they are burned out. They reported that they do not want to teach anymore because of all the curricular changes and initiatives that go far beyond academic and social growth for students.

When teachers discussed their need for continued support in culturally relevant practices, they shared the need for support from the instructional coaches and campus and

district leaders. P3 stated, "There is more need for bringing in more diverse speakers that could be more relatable for our students, so that it could better help teachers reach our students that are African American and Hispanic." P2, P5, and P6 clarified they think there needs to be a shift in administrative tasks for teachers to use their creativity to figure out how to implement these cultural sensitivities into their instructional design. P2, P5, and P6 believed there must be time to find these resources and PLC to determine the best ways to engage and motivate African American and Hispanic students. Overall, all participants perceived they need support from district and campus stakeholders in providing teachers with data-driven professional learning, instructional support (technical support coaching ongoing and systematic just-in-time PD), and culturally relevant supplemental resources/materials to promote equitable access to support African American and Hispanic students.

Theme 4: Teacher Support Needed in Developing and Promoting Family and Community Partnerships

I asked participants about their perception of how they encourage school and community partnership and their need for continued support with cultivating school-to-home and community partners to support African American and Hispanic students. Key attributes to developing family and community partnerships included teachers making personal connections with students' families with frequent contact and for them to collaborate with community partners for providing students with real world. Fifty percent of participants explained the importance of district leaders interacting with students by visiting the building to visit them in the classrooms and have individual conversations

with them. P1, P 2, and P7 shared that teachers need to try to meet and greet with students, families, and community partners in school and outside of school and see them in church and at sporting events, games, or other community activities. P2 explained, "If I can get their family to buy in and 'realize that it's imperative because wherever they go, whatever they do, you have to know how to read, comprehend, and understand." The participant further elaborated that they always feel like home to school is a connection; we are not separated, and the parent is the student's first teacher. Fifty percent of participants justified the importance of family connections to school by stating that the parents share the importance of education, and there is high value in talking to parents about postsecondary options for students and how their academics can impact their experiences as tradesmen, business owners, or executives. Also, P6 and P9 shared that they opened up the school building for people in the district to observe their classrooms and the activities they created for families to participate in their child's education, P1, P3, P7, and P10 shared that they also invited stakeholders outside of the district to join activities in the school community for the day. Therefore, participants value increasing family engagement in the learning process and how families can promote student success at home. Overall, each participant shared how teachers have developed and promoted family partnerships to develop a better relationship between home and school.

When participants shared their perspectives on their efforts to develop and promote relationships between home and school, eighty percent of participants shared they have solid relationships with their students' families. P3 and P9 shared that initially developing a relationship with some parents as a support system for students is one of the

challenges they face. P4 also demonstrated that specific topics that they talk about conflict with family values and shared they offered the opportunity for families to voice their perspective on topics in the curriculum that may conflict with their familial beliefs.

P4 said,

Let's understand that when we start talking about evolution, [I explain to the class] it's the science behind it [evolution], not talking about the religious concepts. Whatever you're being taught at home, that's fine. I'm not discussing my perspective on that [religion] here. But, even with that discussion, that's traditionally been the unit where I've gotten the most pushback and debate from students and families.

P4 shared that providing parents with concepts ahead of time and opening a dialogue with them about academic content allows them to collaborate with one another and develop individual supports for students. P1, P4, P5, and P10 also shared they typically like to see that students have the choice between AP and different higher levels of courses. Sharing course descriptions with families and community partners provides a better dialogue on what different students need when they graduate from high school. These participants stated they do not see too many minority students in those classes, and that shows some inequity. These educators shared that it is bothersome that there needs to be more diversity in these courses, and some of the diversity may be the effect of reading deficits among African American and Hispanic students.

P2, P3, and P7 then shared that another experience to add is field trips because field trips and guest speakers could also help students in their careers and see that that's a

potential achievement, they can reach by developing a dialogue with community partners. However, P2, P3, and P7 shared there is great difficulty in planning field trips and getting them approved so students can see their content area in the real world and connect with community stakeholders to see how they can apply what they have learned in school. P2, P3, P5, and P9 also explained there is difficulty in creating community connections, sharing that to inspire students, they need to see people who look like them who are achieving, and most things are done via networking; we need to create networking opportunities for students in school because some of them are not going to get it outside of the schoolhouse.

Lastly, P9 shared that the school has held a few events related to partnerships with families and community members but would like to see more collaboration with the community stakeholders in their building; they have also held a showcase, which is where they have opened up school doors to allow for other schools to come in and see how teachers and students are doing what they are doing how well we are implementing reading strategies.

P2 and P9 also shared that having strong community partnerships, such as guest speakers who support the importance of reading in school and how understanding basic concepts has helped them become more successful throughout their lives. The family and community partnerships also support students, seeing people from similar backgrounds reaching levels of success due to their academic success and mastery. Teachers also hosted events that included family and community partners called Lunch and Learn. Lunch and Learn is where the teachers bring in community partners to speak with

students about their career field or college experiences. Students can connect with community partners and ask about their career and college aspirations. and, in the curriculum, introduced at every grade level.

As participants shared their views on family and community partnerships, they reported how they promoted school and community partnerships and needed continued support with cultivating school-to-home and community partners to support African American and Hispanic students. In this qualitative research study, I examined high school teachers' perceptions of how they implement instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' achievement, which could influence instructional practices and reflection in the future at the study district. To address the RQ, the perspectives of educators included (a) use of culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated practices as a vital instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' achievement, (b) areas where teachers feel they have support from district administration, but would like increased provisions to support African American and Hispanic students' achievement, (c) opportunities for teachers to participate in professional learning to support African American and Hispanic students' achievement, and (d) support to develop and promote family and community partnerships.

Discrepant Cases

In qualitative data, there are sometimes instances of disconfirming or deviant cases or data. After reading and rereading my data, I looked at the commonalities in the data from the multiple rounds of coding, categorizing, and theming. Patton (1990)

explained that identification of disconfirming data is then recognizing examples of data that do not fit the emerging patterns. According to Yin (2016) discrepant data requires modification of the assertion or declarative statement of summative synthesis. During the data collection and process, I practiced objective thinking to reduce bias or direct participants to answer a specified way. Yin (2019) explained that rival thinking is a strategy to ensure credibility and researchers need to vigorously search their data for discrepant evidence. I found no evidence of disconfirming evidence through this process. All participant data had commonalities and fit into the four themes: (a) Theme 1: Teachers' use of culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated practices, (b) Theme 2: Teachers emphasize the need for opportunities for student engagement, (c) Theme 3: Teachers need of support from district and campus stakeholders, and (d) Theme 4: Teachers needed support in also developing and promoting family and community partnerships. As a result of using the rival thinking practice, there was no discrepant cases found; therefore, there is no required modification of the assertion or declarative statement of summative synthesis.

Evidence of Quality

In this basic qualitative study, there were various procedures to address and ensure accuracy of data. I used established criteria, to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, and quality to make solid arguments about my findings. According to Shenton (2004), four criteria ensure a trustworthy study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The quality of this study has evidence through its purpose, RQ, methodology, data collection, and data analysis. With this evidence and using the four

criteria, I have established trustworthiness. As Poucher et al. (2020) explained, coherence in methodology is a guiding principle in ensuring alignment between the research purpose, and RQ. The coherence of the study also shows that the findings are transferable to a wider, and more universal context. Ritchie et al. (2003) shared that findings in qualitative research can be generalized with the framework, but in an empirical sense, qualitative research findings may be not applied to settings beyond their context and sample study. Study findings may possibly be transferable to districts sharing a similar study site and participant demographics. The dependability of a study is the researcher's ability to replicate the study in similar conditions and without bias (Stenfors et al., 2020). For this study, the same research can be replicated with teachers across the state and on a national level due to asking about teacher perceptions on how they provide reading supports to African American and Hispanic students for academic success using the procedures and protocols described in detail in the methodology section. No matter where teachers are employed, the interview questions are questions they can relate to and answer. Regarding confirmability, the researcher examines the link between the data and the findings (Lumsden, 2022). The evidence of confirmability is using direct quotes or statements from the participants to validate the themes that emerged from the data based on the study purpose and RQ. Lastly, reflexivity is another criterion used in assessing the quality of research in a qualitative study. Guba and Lincoln (1989) described a reflexive approach as the researcher being aware of social, ethical, and overall impacts of the research, and creating a fluid relationship with the participants, gatekeepers, and study district stakeholders. In this study, reflexivity was important to assess in terms of how the

study district and how participants' names would be kept confidential and how the findings could be used to set measurable, high yield goals to positively influence student achievement and a variety of other study district stakeholders. I used several tools to assess the quality of research that align with these criteria. I have also used member checking as a valid source related to evidence of quality (see Motulsky, 2021).

Member Checking

As a point of assessing the quality of the study, I shared data analysis with the participants to validate my findings and results. According to Long and Godfrey (2004), trustworthiness of research is built through the processes used for high quality qualitative research. Through the member checking process, I solicited feedback from my participants about the data and interpretations of their responses. Motulsky (2021) specified that validity checks by conferring with participants is regarded as a gold standard in establishing credibility of qualitative research. After each participant interview, I stated the following:

Once all interviews for this study conclude, I will notify you of their completion and offer you an opportunity to review the overall data of the participants, with their identity withheld. Once you review the overall data from participants responses, you will have an opportunity to share if I need to make any adjustments to what you have stated.

This process allowed participants to share if any adjustments needed to be made to their transcripts. I gave participants 7 days to provide feedback about the transcripts. None of the participants suggested changes to the transcripts. Once all participants

responded or did not reply, the transcripts were used for the data analysis process of coding, categorizing, and theming. According to Motulsky (2021), member checking ensures an ethical, valid, and rigorous study in qualitative research. Finishing the member checking process supported me to move into further analyzing the transcripts for each participant. Therefore, using the tools to assess quality of my study, I was able to develop findings and goals that emerged from the four themes.

Summary of Findings

The problem addressed by the study was that African American and Hispanic students' literacy scores have remained lowest of all ethnicities at high schools in one district, despite the implementation of numerous initiatives and curricular platforms. Guided by Freire's (1970) theory of critical pedagogy, I investigated the perspective of high school teachers on they implement instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement at the study district. Freire emphasized the use of instructional strategies teachers use to engage diverse learners in the theory of critical pedagogy.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate how high school teachers perceive their implementation of instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement. Using Freire's theory of critical pedagogy, when teachers provide a collaborative approach to education, develop a sense of community, demonstrate understanding of students' experiences and background, employ real-world applications, and empower students to understand social justice, students become active in their own education and view concepts as a form of

self-development to make connections with the material. In this basic qualitative study, I interviewed 10 participants from the three high schools in the study district in one-on-one semistructured interviews using a self-developed interview protocol. Participants met the criteria of being (a) high school teacher employed in the study district who (b) provided instruction in a core content class and (c) had knowledge of the phenomenon, the academic achievement gap of African American and Hispanic students in reading. In this section, I summarize my findings and goals for each theme and as aligned to the study's problem, purpose, and RQ along with current literature, and conceptual framework. I describe the resulting project, a white paper that reflects suggestions of professional learning and community collaboration, that are coherent with the study findings.

RQ

The study findings addressed one RQ that guided this study: How do high school teachers perceive they implement instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement at the study district? Four themes emerged from this RQ based on the 11 questions and probes I asked 10 participants during their interviews. Theme 1 is teacher use of culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated practices. Theme 2 is teachers emphasize the need for opportunities for student engagement. Theme 3 is teachers need of support from district and campus stakeholders. Lastly, Theme 4 is teacher support needed in developing and promoting family and community partnerships.

Theme 1 is teacher use of culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated practices. This theme is a focus on how educators implement culturally relevant practices

during their lessons and how important these practices are to teaching students with diverse backgrounds in order for them to reach academic mastery. Participants described using resources to support cultural relevancy for the students they teach. Participants described elements of the conceptual framework, Freire's theory, in their responses that such as making real world connections, intentional student engagement, and highlighting social justice. Culturally relevant resources and restorative practice along with preteaching students background information about a concept from Freire's theory of critical pedagogy align with students and teachers making connections with various activities and build a positive classroom environment (D. Thomas & Dyches, 2019). The findings indicate that teachers acknowledge the importance of supporting their instruction with a culturally relevant pedagogy. According to Ladson-Billings (2021b), it is imperative for educators to use student background knowledge and their diversity to develop higher order thinking and lead to better academic outcomes. Participants perceived their instructional strategies supported diverse learners in accessing content in a multicultural viewpoint. Ladson-Billings (2021a) also stated how Freire's (1970) theory on critical pedagogy addresses how multiculturalism in educational practices and instructional development creates unity and diversity in a social reconstructionist view. Moule (2012), in agreement with Ladson-Billings (2021a) and Freire (1970), explained that diversity in education requires educators to practice culturally competency. Educators must be aware of their inclusion of multicultural materials for instructional planning and to incorporate diverse materials and resources to support African American and Hispanic students (D. Thomas & Dyches, 2019). The study findings related to this

theme is for educators to continue to seek ways to practice culturally relevant practices and provide students with opportunities to engage with content and resources with a multicultural focus to engage students.

Theme 2 is teachers emphasized the need for opportunities for student engagement. This means that high school teachers perceive they emphasize opportunities for student engagement through collaboration and discourse with teacher and peers to promote social/emotional development and social justice to support African American and Hispanic students. This theme emerges from the opportunity for student engagement in collaboration, discourse with teacher and peers, social and emotional development, social justice category. In connection to the theme, Freire's (1970) elements of this theory, that served as the conceptual framework emerged that focused on collaboration, student voice and choice, using background knowledge as a foundation for instruction, and discourse around real world connections to promote student engagement, and social justice. Student discourse and collaboration align with the district instructional principles, so students are actively involved in the learning of concepts through explaining, questioning, reflecting, synthesizing, and debating. The findings indicate students' academic success is heavily increased by making connections with peers and with their teachers (Cherng & Davis, 2019; Keyes, 2019). Participants shared the importance of student collaboration, student discourse, and using student voice and choice when building instruction. Mahur et al. (2019) suggested ways educators could incorporate student engagement by using individual instructional practices to increase student achievement. Mahur et al. and Dukes et al. (2023) explored and reflected on using

collaboration as a format to encourage student participation and critical thinking.

Participants shared the importance of continuing to build on student collaboration and the positive results collaboration has on students not only academically but also from a social and emotional standpoint, and subsequently positively influences the school climate and student achievement (see Zhao et al., 2023). Accordingly, educators should continue to emphasize opportunities for student engagement through PD centered around student collaboration, student discourse, and educators using student voice and choice when providing instruction.

Theme 3 is teachers need of support from district and campus stakeholders. This is a focus on how high school teachers perceive they need support from district and campus stakeholders in providing teachers with data-driven professional learning, instructional support and culturally relevant supplemental resources/materials to promote equitable access to support African American and Hispanic students. Participants also shared how there is an expectation to regularly use PLCs, but participants reported they often need support from instructional leaders with fully utilizing their PLCs to support student success. Freire (1970) shared that teacher collaboration, with one another and with students, promotes students developing their own voice in making decisions about their academic and societal future. Participants shared that teachers would like more data-driven PD to support their efforts in utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy during PLCs. They would also like to have more supplemental resources focusing on culturally relevant aspects of the students they teach to provide equitable access to African American and Hispanic students. The findings indicate students' academic success would be better

supported from campus and district stakeholders by providing additional support in data-driven professional learning and accessing diverse supplemental materials as some educators struggle to find these resources to support African American and Hispanic students. Delk (2019) and Oryan and Ravid (2019) shared that as student populations become more diverse, teachers' multicultural knowledge of students must increase to be better prepared to instruct culturally diverse students and to be better prepared to acknowledge sociocultural resources and information that students bring to the classroom. Nyachae (2021) further stated that teachers must also feel comfortable with having conversations about various culturally responsive material with diverse groups of students, so they are able to further reflect on the experiences of others and respect specific unique aspects about their students' diverse backgrounds. Teachers shared that they welcome stakeholders into their classroom to see the diversity of students and to include students in on the conversation on what engages them with instruction. The findings related to this theme are for educators to participate in data-driven professional learning and to be given further access to diverse supplemental materials to provide more culturally relevant instruction to support African American and Hispanic students.

Theme 4 is teacher support needed in developing and promoting family and community partnerships. In this theme, there is a focus on how high school teachers perceive they promote school and community partnership and need continued support with cultivating school to home and community partners to support African American and Hispanic students. Freire's (1970) theory of critical pedagogy not only focused on teacher relationships with students, but with teachers building student relationships in

collaboration with families to their community so they are better prepared to positively contribute to their local community and society as a whole. I asked participants about their perception about how they promote school and community partnership and their need for continued support with cultivating school to home and community partners to support African American and Hispanic students. The findings indicated that while teachers work to build positive connects between home and school, the community partners and school, there is still room this area to grow with cultivating this partnership to create a positive school climate. Castro-Alonso et al. (2021) described the school as a living system. This living system needs all parts working collaboratively and explicitly to facilitate the transition to benefit society. Castro-Alonso et al. analyzed relationships among stakeholders, discussed the role of coaching instruction, and described coaching in the community to aim toward the same vision. The findings related to this theme are for educators to work more collaboratively with community partners and families through an advisory board to determine the best ways to build positive partnerships for the benefit of African American and Hispanic student success. In the next section, I describe the project deliverable, a white paper with recommendations for the study district stakeholders to address the findings of the study.

Project Deliverable

In Section 3, I discuss and describe a deliverable project that is based on the findings, conceptual framework, and current literature in alignment with the purpose and RQ of the study. The project for this qualitative study will be a white paper to suggest data-driven professional learning opportunities focused on analyzing data, accessing

diverse content area supplemental materials, and creating an advisory board to increase school to family and school to community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students.

The project deliverable will be a white paper to focus on the findings and recommending possible solutions. The white paper will be presented to the school board, teaching and learning department, and high school core content teachers during respective meetings. The recommendations in the white paper are for the consideration of campus and district stakeholders:

- create an advisory board to increase school to family and school to community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students
- build teacher capacity by providing professional learning in culturally relevant pedagogy using TeachFX or other learning platforms
- provide data-driven professional learning opportunities focused on analyzing data, accessing diverse content area supplemental materials, and promoting student discourse
- complete an annual needs assessment to provide continuous feedback to the advisory board and all stakeholders to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students

The white paper presents a problem and crafted recommendations based on the findings of this research study. The white paper will illustrate the actions to delivering data-driven professional learning opportunities focused on analyzing data, accessing

diverse content area supplemental materials, and creating an advisory board to increase school to family and school to community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Section 2 included my review of the qualitative research design, methodology, participants, data collection, data analysis, summary of findings, and project deliverable. There are four themes that emerged from data analysis to answer the RQ. I connected the themes to participant responses and literature as well as to the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework was Freire's (1970) theory of critical pedagogy. Freire shared in critical pedagogy theory the ideas of teachers and students both as learners, developing critical literacy to identify equity, and encouraging active inquiry. Freire influenced ways that teachers thought about and provided instruction to students. For example, Freire's critical pedagogy focused on concepts to build engagement of students; the educator and student collaborate to critically reflect on their environment to transform it. Furthermore, Freire shared that a positive learning environment includes care, equity, and trust. I used this framework to direct the recommendations leading to the resulting white paper project genre.

Section 3: The Project

The problem addressed by the study is African American and Hispanic students' literacy scores have remained lowest of all ethnicities at high schools in one district, despite the implementation of numerous initiatives and curricular platforms. Guided by Freire's (1970) theory of critical pedagogy, this study investigated the perspective of high school teachers on they implement instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement at the study district. I explored this problem by conducting a basic qualitative research study at the study district to gain perspective of high school teachers and how they implement instructional strategies to inform campus and district leaders about possible remedies to address some aspects of the problem. I conducted a *A priori* coding that correlated to the conceptual framework of Freire's theory of critical pedagogy attributes and the district instructional principles. Based on the findings in Section 2, I created a white paper to inform and persuade stakeholders at the district by sharing my recommendations about professional learning and development of an advisory board to support the improvement of reading achievement of African American and Hispanic students. When I analyzed the findings, four themes emerged from my individual interviews with high school core content teachers, and those themes focused on a need for (a) teachers' use of culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated practices, (b) teachers emphasizing the need for opportunities for student engagement, (c) teachers need of support from district and campus stakeholders, and (d) teacher support needed in developing and promoting family and community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and

Hispanic students. Therefore, the analysis of the findings in alignment with the white paper development includes recommendations to support the findings of this study to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students.

In Section 3, I describe the goals for the white paper and describe the deliverable project of the white paper to inform and persuade stakeholders at the study district about needs to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students. In addition, I share scholarly literature that supports the project and synthesizes my findings and recommendations. According to Van Mechelen et al. (2023), white papers are a point at which data findings are clustered to set a benchmark on policy recommendations. This project will be a benchmark of where the district can support the academic achievement of African American and Hispanic students.

Description and Goals of a White Paper Project

A white paper was created in response to the findings of this research study. The white paper is a product of research that presents readers with a focus on a complex topic, the problem, and in turn offers a remedy to solve the problem in action steps or for stakeholders to make an informed decision (Pelkmans & Robson, 1986). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate how high school teachers perceive their implementation of instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement. Teachers interviewed as participants in this study expressed collective sentiments in regard to the four themes. The purpose of this white paper is to provide recommendations based on the findings of this study. A white paper is used to inform readers within the industry, illustrate in-depth knowledge and

research about the topic, and present a solution as actionable steps to remedy the problem (Pelkmans & Robson, 1986). The white paper presents a problem and the solution based on the findings of the research. The recommendations in the white paper include (a) creating an advisory board to increase school to family and school to community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students; (b) building teacher capacity by providing professional learning in culturally relevant pedagogy using TeachFX or other learning platforms; (c) providing data-driven professional learning opportunities focused on analyzing data, accessing diverse content area supplemental materials, and promoting student discourse; and (d) completing an annual needs assessment to provide continuous feedback to the advisory board and all stakeholders to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is grounded in Bourdieu's (1977) change theory of habitus. The findings of this study aligned with Bourdieu's theory explaining that teacher resources and parent and community connections support socially diverse student populations. According to Bourdieu's (1977) habitus theory, Bourdieu explained that people develop their thoughts, actions, and words slowly through socialization. The pedagogy from this theory is about social capital and openness to new experiences and readiness to sense and become knowledgeable about new ideas. With the incorporation of the change theory of habitus and theory of critical pedagogy, there is a tie-in to engaging the social dynamics of diverse student populations to support further academic and social development and cultural capital. Bourdieu (2017) stated that building data-driven

resources, and collaborative relationships builds a successful foundation to support students of diverse backgrounds. The goals in this white paper are designed to inform and persuade educational leaders to (a) build teacher capacity to develop more teacher leaders, (b) support further professional dialogue that is explicit to student voice and student data, (c) provide culturally relevant supplemental resources, and (d) gain stakeholder input about culturally relevant pedagogy and build strong community and family partnerships to support the academic achievement of African American and Hispanic students. Therefore, using this framework in alignment with the findings, I will share the rationale for using a white paper.

Rationale

In this section, I discuss the decision of writing a white paper to recommend changes at the study district to support the academic achievement of African American and Hispanic students. The purpose of the study was to examine high school teachers' perceptions of how they implement instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' achievement could impact instructional practices and reflection in the future at the study district. To address the RQ, the perspectives of educators include (a) what teachers focus on as a vital part of instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' achievement, (b) areas where teachers feel they have support from district administration but would like increased provisions to support African American and Hispanic students' achievement, and (c) opportunities for teachers to participate in professional learning to support African American and Hispanic students' achievement.

Review of the Literature

The literature review is an overview of research in relation to the white paper project genre and peer-reviewed scholarly research related to the project genre. The project genre is addressing the study findings and therefore addressing the study problem. I determined the white paper genre would address the problem of the study, which is African American and Hispanic students' literacy scores have remained lowest of all ethnicities at high schools in one district, despite the implementation of numerous initiatives and curricular platforms. I will use the white paper to inform and persuade stakeholders at the district by sharing my recommendations about professional learning and development of an advisory board to support the improvement of reading achievement of African American and Hispanic students at the study district.

In the literature review, I analyze the white paper genre in education, and discuss the findings aligned with writing a white paper. Furthermore, I provide a research overview of the varied aspects of PD with data analysis, culturally relevant supplemental resources, and teaching reading in all core content areas. I also share a research overview of family to school collaboration and community partnerships.

The research overview for the literature review began with a search for peer-reviewed literature published within the last 5 years. The review procedures included using various electronic databases, such as Walden University library using the education Thoreau Multi-Database Search, Google alert and RSS feed to receive up-to-date articles about white papers in education, white paper genres, reading interventions and academic achievement of diverse learners, and school collaboration with families and the

community. In addition, EBSCO, ERIC, and Sage Publications provided published academic articles and books based on the topics searched, such as reading achievement for diverse learners, curriculum resources to increase reading scores for diverse learners, increasing African American and Hispanic reading scores, increasing African American and Hispanic student engagement, instructional practices for cultural competency, and student collaboration, just to name a few. Keywords related to the phenomenon being studied were used and included *white paper genre, white papers in education, position paper, policy recommendation, diverse student achievement, diverse student learning, reading skill development, African American students, Hispanic students, Latino students, self-esteem and belonging + diverse students, high school, gap in reading scores, students of color, equity, historical factors influencing African American achievement gap, teacher-student relationships, culturally responsive pedagogy/instruction, school and family connections, advisory board, and school partnerships with the community*. In the next section, I review the topics identified in the literature that inform the state of the educational field related to the findings of the study.

White Papers in Education to Support Positive Change

The white paper is a project genre to analyze, engage, inform, and propose change. Rodler and Renbarger (2023) explained that white papers can promote positive change and shift mindsets to promote a positive culture. The white paper is a research-based, data-driven report, which offers the full description of a complex topic and presents solutions and suggests possible changes in policy and practice (Franzò et al., 2023). White papers should also provide solutions that are systemic and sustainable to

incorporate the perspective and voice of stakeholders (Franzò et al., 2023; Rodler & Renbarger, 2023). In addition, Franzò et al. (2023) and shared how a white paper can promote collaboration amongst a wider variety of stakeholders and provide not only a systemic change but promote innovation in practices. Karsgaard and Davidson (2023) also shared similar aspects of the usage of a white paper stating that white papers also share the perspectives of the most impacted stakeholder to promote a positive climate change in education that addresses justice, individualization, and emotionality. Castro-Alonso et al. (2021) analyzed relationships among stakeholders, discussed the role of using the white paper to provide solutions to coaching instruction, and described coaching in the community to aim toward the same vision. The researchers explained everyone's mutual stake in the outcome of students, the schools, and the community. In addition, Karsgaard and Davidson (2023) explained that white papers can address the systemic lag in education to promote a positive climate and positive social change. Therefore, a white paper project genre supports stakeholders to analyze, engage, inform, and propose policy and systemic change with the recommendations shared within the project that align with research findings.

Findings Aligned With Writing A White Paper

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate how high school teachers perceive their implementation of instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement. The purpose of this white paper is to provide recommendations based on the findings of this study. The findings of this study focused on a need for (a) teachers' use of culturally relevant

pedagogy and differentiated practices, (b) teachers' emphasis on the need for opportunities for student engagement, (c) teachers' need of support from district and campus stakeholders, and (d) teacher support needed in developing and promoting family and community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students. Helgetun and Menter (2022) explained that public and private sectors of education should focus on supports for teacher PD and enhance the current policies to include practices that teachers can feasibly take into their classroom to promote diverse student engagement and academic success. There is also a broader change in the education environment due to the proposed solutions in education for providing teachers with supplemental resources and with promoting their skill level on data-driven practices through data analysis professional learning (Helgetun & Menter, 2022; Lerman, 2022). Lerman (2022) furthermore substantiated that the proposed white paper aligns to providing equitable access to resources that is one aspect of Freire's (1970) theory of critical pedagogy stating that when marginalized groups of students having access to supplemental resources and teachers providing diverse instructional materials promotes a structural change in education. Additionally, Delk (2019) and Oryan and Ravid (2019) shared that as student populations become more diverse, multicultural knowledge of students must increase to be better prepared to instruct culturally diverse students and prepared to acknowledge sociocultural resources and information that students bring to the classroom. White papers can guide educators in shifting accessibility to content and instructional resources (Lerman, 2022). Not only can the use of white papers be used to shift teachers professional learning to support accessibility and their data analysis of

student success, they can also be used to provide support in the school developing positive relationships with the school and the community.

Using the white paper genre to support the parental input so schools and parents collaborate with one another also has a positive effect to provide educators with an understanding that parents and the community should focus on the diversity of students and their success. According to Kretchmar (2023), parents are mostly invested in their own child's educational outcomes and mastery not the outcomes of other students. However, for the school environment to be successful, the schools must build parent insight to understand that each student and their diverse needs not being met can impact their child in a negative way (Kretchmar, 2023; Maranto et al., 2020). Maranto et al. (2020) also explained that since the COVID-19 pandemic parents are more invested in supporting their child's education, and there is a desire from parents to become more invested in the educational process and being present to support teachers with the home to school connection for all parents and all students. Just the same, Kern (2020) examined the success implementation of parent engagement to promote inclusive practices and student success among diverse populations. Therefore, the analysis of the findings in alignment with the white paper development includes recommendations to support the need for (a) teachers' use of culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated practices, (b) teachers' emphasis on the need for opportunities for student engagement, (c) teachers' need of support from district and campus stakeholders, and (d) teacher support needed in developing and promoting family and community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students.

PLCs

PLC participation is a common format for educators to develop their professional insights and practices. Well-developed PLCs have a positive impact on teaching PD and practice as well as student learning (Weddle, 2022). Teachers in PLCs learn together and collaborate to determine the best strategies to improve student achievement (J. Jones & Vari, 2019). Castro-Alonso et al. (2021), J. Jones and Vari (2019), and Weddle (2022) examined how as educators participated in PLCs, they found more comfort in planning to incorporate more learner-centered strategies within their daily instruction and assessment. PLCs establish a mindset of collaboration and supporting student need regardless of ethnic background. Barber and Klauda (2020) stated collaboration can help teachers determine which principles of student engagement and motivation to apply for teachers' emphasis on the need for opportunities for student engagement to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students.

PLCs provide alignment among educators. Ciampa and Reisboard (2021), J. Jones and Vari (2019), and Weddle (2022) explained the importance of PD to support educators in implementing a learner-centered classroom. Instructional coaches can provide insight and feedback to educators on instructional activities and focus. As the researchers developed their ideas about PD supporting educators and their implementation of learner-centered instruction, methods of observation and informal interviews were a basis for their findings. With instructional coaching, support, and guidance, educators become more willing to experiment with learner-centered activities. PLCs establish a mindset of collaboration and supporting student need.

PLCs can also be useful for curriculum mapping after aligning resources. Weddle (2022) shared insight about cross-disciplinary curriculum mapping. The aims of this curriculum mapping include developing guidelines for the curriculum mapping process, developing a curriculum mapping process, creating a plan for dissemination and sustainability, and initiating student use of the curricular maps in academic experiences. Cross-disciplinary curriculum mapping provides instructional similarities across the content areas. The process can occur in cross-disciplinary PLCs to support PD in using differentiated practices.

Teacher PD: Differentiation

As the literature relates to learner-centered instructional practices and ideals, teacher PD is also a focus to explore the achievement gaps of African American and Hispanic students. Teacher PD is an essential element to academic success. Smets and Struyven (2020) shared that high school teachers that differentiated instruction in their classroom, found that there was a direct correlation between the use of differentiation and the academic success of diverse student populations. With continuous PD and collaborating with instructional leaders, teachers showed success with implementing various strategies associated with differentiated instruction (Smets & Struyven, 2020). When seeking to increase student connection to content and engage with the instructional materials, PD is key to finding better ways to increase students' academic growth. Barber and Klauda (2020) stated teachers should receive PD specific to principles of student engagement in reading instruction, particularly among diverse populations. Keyes (2019), Krawczyk (2019), and Wetzel et al. (2019) shared insights on preparing teachers to

deliver instruction that caters to the learner, regardless of background. The instructional delivery in providing differentiated strategies includes cooperative learning strategies to accommodate heterogeneity (Smets & Struyven, 2020). Keyes, Krawczyk, and Smets and Struyven (2020) all shared that teacher usage of collaborative grouping and strategies also supports students in participating during instruction and promotes academic and social development. Teachers' use of differentiated instruction not only supports student collaboration and building background knowledge, differentiated instruction also is a way to promote student engagement and motivation (Smets & Struyven, 2020). Students with diverse backgrounds and diverse needs in the classroom are able to better reach a level of academic success and academic mastery in a variety of areas (Smets & Struyven, 2020). Bremner et al. (2022) described differentiated strategies for teachers to use, such as grouping, using student voice and choice, diverse content, various assessment formats, strategic use of supplemental resources. Bremner et al. found that using differentiated practices provided an inclusive instructional model and more individualized opportunities for students to access, learn, and master content. Krawczyk and Wetzel et al. explained there are difference levels to differentiation in reading instruction. Similar to the MTSS process, Tier 1 supports are general differentiation strategies that support all students in the classroom that include grouping and teaching background knowledge (Krawczyk, 2019; Wetzel et al., 2019). Tier 2 supports differentiation includes supports for students such as vocabulary and reading comprehension supports like graphic organizers, while Tier 3 supports include small group instruction and modifications to assignments (Krawczyk, 2019; Wetzel et al., 2019). Wetzel et al. also explained that instructional

technology can be used by teachers to differentiate instruction to cater to students diverse and individualized needs. Using a differentiated approach to instruction provides students with a personal connection to the material and teachers use of differentiation can support students with various academic needs (Bremner et al., 2022). This instructional delivery also includes teachers making personal connections with their students and continually assessing their instructional practices to meet the needs of each student.

Teacher PD should include strategies for differentiated instruction. Bremner et al. (2022) and Ciampa and Reisboard (2021) used qualitative methods to gather information on incorporating instructional strategies to support the academic success of diverse students. Ciampa and Reisboard focused on differentiated instruction techniques. Using differentiated instruction and planning for collaborative learning experiences ultimately provides students with a more diverse viewpoint of the content and to see the authentic progression of logical thinking through those same collaborative discussion techniques. Bremner et al. linked differentiated instruction strategies to the following variables within teacher implementation: the teachers' self-efficacy in differentiated instruction, teaching beliefs, teaching experience, PD, teacher certification, and classroom size. The researchers found that differentiated instruction implementation has increased but is still below a critical benchmark in addressing students' diverse needs.

PD: Data Analysis

PD can provide a multitude of resources, strategies, and supports for educators. However, there is a continued gap in evidence and practice among certain areas such as data analysis and teacher use of culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated practices

to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students. According to Popova et al. (2022), the attributes of the most effective teacher PD is incentivizing the participation in professional learning, opportunities for teachers to practice new skills learned from PD, and follow up once teachers return to the classroom by instructional coaches and administration. With these attributes in mind, teachers found that training focused on regularly evaluating student data in literacy promoted a large-scale increase to student access to materials and student mastery on the concepts (Kerwin & Thornton, 2021; Popova et al., 2022). From the research shared in various studies, teachers benefit greatly from follow up as well on professional learning (Popova et al., 2022). Similarly, Sims and Fletcher-Wood (2021) examined weaknesses in PD for teachers they shared that more effective PD is when it is sustained, collaborative, subject specific, draws on external expertise, has buy-in from teachers, and is practice based. Sims and Fletcher-Wood argued that more progress can be made by educational leaders by putting more effort to identifying characteristics of effective PD by looking for alignment between evidence from basic research on human skill acquisition and features of rigorously evaluated PD interventions. In addition to these attributes to developing a data-driven professional learning experience in data analysis, Imants and Van der Wal (2020), stated that regular analysis of student data with campus and district stakeholders creates effective school reform and PD that addresses students individualized needs. As another point, Fischer et al. (2020) and Kerwin and Thornton (2021) shared that the emergence of data-driven approaches supports decision making and efforts to improve educational

effectiveness. Fischer et al. included another layer to data analysis PD by stating the following:

Digital traces of student behavior promise more scalable and finer-grained understanding and support of learning processes, which were previously too costly to obtain with traditional data sources and methodologies. This synthetic review describes the affordances and applications of microlevel (e.g., clickstream data), meso level (e.g., text data), and macrolevel (e.g., institutional data) big data. For instance, clickstream data are often used to operationalize and understand knowledge, cognitive strategies, and behavioral processes in order to personalize and enhance instruction and learning (p.135).

There was also recognition of the importance of not only accessing, analyzing, and using data, but there is also an importance to include data privacy and protection in the PD for staff. Fischer et al. (2020) and Kerwin and Thornton (2021) both explained that providing educators with a foundational understanding of balancing data privacy and protection with data sharing and research also promotes teachers having the power to access resources that better suit the needs of their students. Therefore, data-driven PD promotes the use of resources that are relevant to African American and Hispanic students' academic growth and achievement along with academic mastery.

PD: Culturally Relevant Supplemental Resources

While there is a push in the local area to increase culturally relevant supplemental resources, teachers benefit from having PD to learn more about their students' cultural diversity, but also how to access the resources to support diverse student groups. Ladson-

Billings (2023) and Silver (2022) both shared similar sentiments about PD in the area of culturally relevant supplemental resources stating that when educators without PD on using supplemental resources, their access and usage of these supplemental resources lacks cohesion and fails to capture all aspects of the phenomenon. Therefore, when teachers are incorporating supplemental resources, specifically culturally relevant supplemental resources, the most effective PD includes a consensus around the types of material, who is involved in the teacher-level curriculum supplementation, important dimensions of supplementation, and the overall educational value of supplementation (Silver, 2022). Furthermore, Silver suggested using a teacher curriculum supplemental framework as an analytical tool to understand the effects of using the supplemental curriculum on teachers and students. Likewise, Liu et al. (2021) researched inconsistent use of culturally relevant resources and inconsistent use of culturally relevant supplemental resources, and how a lack of theoretical clarity and consensus on the competence of attributes is a key hurdle in educator development. Aرسال (2019), Nganga (2020), Silva (2022), Subasi Singh and Akar (2021) all shared PD for teachers is needed to better understand cultural differences and various cultural components builds their multicultural pedagogy to better understand how to implement the pedagogy during instructional planning and in the selection of instructional resources for their classroom. Muñiz (2019) and Nyachae (2021) both shared that teachers are able to access supplemental materials but need more support in incorporating them into their regular instructional strategies in order for them to not cause disjointed instruction. Fowler et al. (2019) stated in agreement that when students have more consistent culturally relevant

supplemental material, it engages them to further work toward academic success and mastery. Williams et al. (2021) explained that with the increase of students with diverse backgrounds, teachers, must enhance their practices and skillset to meet the needs of each student. The researchers showed that with consistent course review as a part of an annual need's assessment, in conjunction with using the supplemental materials to effectively support the individual needs of students, that teachers can build a culturally sustaining pedagogy with culturally relevant resources and supplemental resources (Cruz et al., 2023; Williams et al., 2021). Therefore, PD in accessing analyzing and using supplemental culturally relevant resources can support the academic needs of students and support their engagement in reading across all content areas.

PD: Teaching Reading in All Core Content Areas

PD for teachers that supports teaching reading in all core content areas also supports students of diverse backgrounds and experiences reach success and mastery in school. According to Svendsen (2020), McMaster et al. (2021), and Donegan and Wanzek (2021), many educators are unprepared to meet the needs of students with intensive to moderate reading needs. Svendsen (2020) also shared that collaboration among various content areas also has a major positive influence on teacher PD by discussing with peers the most beneficial practices and learning new strategies to support students with various reading abilities from a diverse ethnic background. With PD in reading strategies across the core content areas, educators are more consistent with their usage of strategies to support student academic success and mastery of basic reading skills (McMaster et al., 2021). Teachers in this study (see McMaster et al., 2021) shared

that PD for reading strategies should not just be for English teachers, but for teachers of all content areas because students have to read and comprehend their content as well. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2021) and McMaster et al. (2021) both stated that it is critical for teachers to participate in professional learning to understand how the influence of background knowledge has on reading comprehension in students, and how to incorporate background knowledge and student discourse into the pre-teaching aspect of lessons to engage students and support their academic success and mastery. T. E. Smith et al. (2020) further explained that students use background knowledge and their connection to content along with fluency and decoding to comprehend a passage. Additionally, Stark et al. (2023) examined that students in the secondary content area classrooms further benefit from evidence-based literacy practices and explicit instructional practices to enhance their literacy instruction. Stark et al. (2023) found that the most explicit instructional practices are infrequently utilized across all content areas; and some areas where students could benefit such as reading lengthier text, strategies were not used at all. Therefore, Capin et al. (2021), Stark et al. (2023), and T. E. Smith et al. (2020) shared the importance and positive effect that school-wide literacy models and related professional learning opportunities have on teachers' ability to support struggling readers. Correspondingly, Vaughn et al. (2022) and Capin et al. researched a distributed PD model emphasizing reading comprehension and vocabulary practices across core content areas, and they found that students were able to engage in the material, expand their content knowledge, and reach higher levels of mastery with supports the teacher learned during their PD. Lyon et al. (2021), and Wakeman et al. (2020) shared through

their research an instructional model to teach reading and enhance reading comprehension skills with the use of a station teaching model. In this model, students are grouped by need and rotate through various learning activities that the teacher organizes to engage students in targeted individualized instruction in small groups, so the teacher can provide students with opportunities to extend their learning with more challenging texts in a student-managed system (Lyon et al., 2021; Stark et al., 2023; Wakeman et al., 2020). Wexler et al. (2022) and Green, (2022) both researched student engagement in reading strategies and the use of various strategies impacting reading comprehension and high order thinking across content areas. Research findings were that teachers participating in professional learning to support their usage of reading instruction across the content areas engages students in reading for enjoyment and students making personal connections to the text they are reading (Green, 2022). There is a need from the study findings for increased teacher use of culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated practices, and teachers emphasized the need for opportunities for student engagement to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students. Therefore, as teachers are employing reading across all content areas is important for them to participate regularly in professional learning to engage students in high yield strategies to support their academic success.

Stakeholder Advisory Boards

Advisory boards are one way that school leaders can use the expertise, experience, and perceptions of stakeholders to make more informed decisions. Courtney et al. (2021) shared that advisory boards consist of professionals with domains of

expertise relevant to the school setting. Advisory board leaders use frameworks that best fit their organization and the needs of students to best leverage the unique skills and interests of the members. In agreement with Courtney et al. (2021) and Garner et al. (2021) discussed a framework for establishing advisory boards that includes (a) model's consensus, (b) decision making emphasis on a linear process multi-phase process, and (c) situated perspectives to highlight dynamic relationships between individuals, contexts, and identities. The advisory board begins with a collective commitment to establishing a mission, vision, and core values. Garner et al. (2021) explained that the process of creating an advisory board is one of collective identity exploration that embodies complex dynamic systems. The identity of the advisory board is an exploration of the members' identity and board members' dialogue is incremental and transformational dialogue leading to an emergence of ideas, purpose, solutions and decisions (Baum, 2023; Garner et al., 2021; Ramos-Montañez & Pattison, 2023; Switalski, 2023). These advisory boards also guide the continuous improvement of the educational organization. According to Garner et al. (2021) and Ramos-Montañez and Pattison (2023), advisory boards not only are responsible for the maintenance of educational environment, but also the members propel the growth exponentially to foster innovation and a shared interest to support students. Advisory boards also represent under-researched, and unique and influential factors of student learning and education (Switalski, 2023). In addition, researchers have found that board members' effort and attention on the school and research-based practices guides school and district leaders to consider the content and approach of programs, gauging student learning, obstacles to student success, board

contributions, and emphasis on skills students are taught (Baum, 2023; Switalski, 2023). Likewise, Pack and Peek (2020) shared that effective advisory boards include their members having a solid knowledge and understanding of their role, have limitations in influencing curriculum, encourage engagement with students, have formal procedures for involvement, and are well coordinated with the larger educational institution. However, Fagrell et al. (2020) shared that some advisory boards remain to have uncertainties about the internal decision-making process and organization, therefore leading to a lack of understanding in their overall role and impact on the entire educational organization. Also, boards consist of members that include alumni, staff, families with students attending the school, students, high education leaders, and campus and district leaders. The members of the board are largely composed of members with a close connection to the institution as they are more engaged as program advocates and will contribute more financially (Switalski, 2023). Overall, Fagrell et al. explained that stakeholders on the advisory board influence professional learning for staff members, curriculum development, and curriculum implementation with fidelity. Plus, board members comment on the quality of education and the education students receive predominantly connected to the world and society (Fagrell et al., 2020). Therefore, while advisory boards have the possibility to have a positive effect on the overall educational system and its operations, it is vital to start with a shared vision, mission, and core values. As a reflection for the board members and all stakeholders, an annual needs assessment could provide beneficial information on how to address the most current needs of the educational community.

Annual Needs Assessment/ Program Evaluation

Needs assessments in education is a process for identifying and understanding the needs of the educational organization or the gaps in practices to achieve a specific goal. According to the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (2016) and Müller et al. (2020), annual needs assessments are an indicator of the competencies an organization has set forth as an educational focus. The annual needs assessment is a process that includes a variety of components. Müller et al. found that the majority of instruments rely on self-reported survey or inventory of data and very few tools collect data for across each area of focus. Jayaratne et al. (2021) added that a formal needs assessment identifies needs of students and the educational institution to promote student and educator success. Lemire et al. (2023) described evaluation approaches as the process of data collection used to assess a program, and two evaluators can find two different forms of data collection (quantitative or qualitative) valuable to assess the effectiveness of a program. Jayaratne et al. concluded that approaches to evaluation also consist of stakeholder consideration, input, and needs. While all program evaluation approaches consider the criteria itself and criteria assessment, there are some differences with each approach.

In the objectives-based approach, objectives are at the forefront of the evaluation, and benchmarks are set that includes data collection and assessment of meeting benchmarks. Masini et al. (2020) explained that the benefits of the approach include its simplicity in understanding and implementation as well as keeping the evaluator focus on key characteristics of a program. Lemire et al. (2023) also stated that this process

provides funders and reviewers with a step-by-step account of the program reflecting the goals, objectives, and outcomes. However, Masini et al. also explained that challenges included oversimplification of intricate details and the evaluator's cause to overlook program effects. Lemire et al. examined that the challenges with objectives-based approaches pertain to summative evaluation measures more than formative measures.

The decision-based approach focuses on questions about the data collected and the data collection process to meet the criteria. Lemire et al. (2023) explored this type of approach to a four-step model where program directors ask questions in each category of context, input, process, and product of a program. This approach also includes a combination of formative and summative measures. As Lemire et al. explained, this approach benefits from using a variety of data collection tools such as surveys, questionnaires, interviews, or analyses of records. This approach's challenges include asking the questions that align with each of the four steps of this approach and continued follow-up and communication with the program evaluation committee for review.

In participatory approaches, the criteria are based on stakeholders' perspectives and their perceptions of the program's purpose. Lemire et al. (2023) described some of the benefits: stakeholders that benefit from the program to assess data about the factors that would improve a program and encourage them to use their voice to contribute to program evaluation. The challenges of participatory approaches include that if used as the primary approach, funding sources may question how the criteria are met (Lemire et al., 2023; Müller et al., 2020).

Overall, as Müller et al. (2020) stated, that continuous needs assessment is an effective way to engage stakeholders and understanding their perceptions about the educational setting. Needs assessments serve as a way to connect the school stakeholders to families and community stakeholders.

School to Family Collaboration

School-to-family collaboration is a partnership between school stakeholders and student families. T. E. Smith et al. (2020) explained that school-to-family collaboration is an intervention to capitalize on the connections between families and schools so that teachers and parents have a shared collective commitment to promote developmental activities to promote academic success and bridge barriers for students. T. E. Smith et al. (2020) found that family-to-community connections were effective with all student age groups. However, they were more effective with older students in the P-12 school setting, and the interventions developed from school-to-family collaboration support academic and social-emotional success for students. Esteves and Almeida (2022) and Solone et al. (2020) shared similar outlooks in their research, stating that school-to-family collaboration is essential for inclusive education to be effective and reflective of research-based, data-driven approaches on best practices to support student academic and social-emotional achievement.

Building a solid school-to-family collaborative relationship takes establishing a trusting association. Solone et al. (2020) explained that collaborative partnerships are a trusting relationship between the school and families in delivering inclusive education. Solone et al. also shared that this bond for collaboration must include students and

families with diverse needs to better understand and advocate for support that will promote all students' academic and social-emotional success. Furthermore, Griffiths et al. (2021), in agreement with Solone et al., explained that effective collaboration is associated with positive student outcomes and is critical to providing equitable access and equitable educational opportunities. School-to-family collaboration incorporates sharing resources with families to increase their child's academic development (Griffiths et al., 2021). Solone et al. shared that literacy development in students is significantly dependent on home support. Therefore, teachers making connections with parents to support the home learning experience is a way for students to reach academic mastery further and for the school and home to build a positive relationship that benefits the student. Solone et al. further elaborated on the research, stating that early interventions for reading are a joint effort between the school and the family to promote word recognition, phonics, and decoding. However, school and family collaboration in secondary education includes sharing connections across content areas with families to promote reading comprehension and academic success. Griffiths et al. (2021) and Armstrong et al. (2021) examined barriers to having consistent collaboration between schools and families, and some of the barriers include family's personal negative experiences with schools, obligations to work, or needing more knowledge on collaborating with the school to promote their child's success. Griffiths et al. (2021) and Solone et al. described an iterative process of developing a foundational framework and standard definition and identifying action steps before and during the collaborative process. Castro-Alonso et al. (2021) described the school as a living system. This living

system needs all parts to work collaboratively and explicitly to facilitate the transition to benefit society. Castro-Alonso et al. analyzed relationships among stakeholders, discussed the role of coaching instruction, and described coaching in the community to aim toward the same vision.

Similarly, Armstrong et al. (2021) shared that school-to-family collaboration has pushed forward many policy initiatives that have promoted student success, teacher PD, resource allocation, and systemic educational change. Furthermore, Armstrong et al. found that while there is some research on school-to-home collaboration, there is still a need to continue to explore the positive aspects and the areas of needed improvement that lag in policy and practice. Connections from school to home furthermore promote not just the academic and social-emotional development and success of all students; this collaboration explicitly has a positive impact on African American and Hispanic students (Armstrong et al., 2021; Castro-Alonso et al., 2021). Van Hook and Glick (2020) researched the connections of immigrant families across the United States and their strong connections to having family relationships, relationships with their community, and children and families having a solid relationship with their education and schools in the P-12 setting. School and family collaboration should center their focus on establishing the next generation and preparing students for a productive future in society (Armstrong et al., 2021; Castro-Alonso et al., 2021; Van Hook & Glick, 2020). Even more so, Michael et al. (2023) shared that there are multiple strategies to engage family and community partners, and these strategies play an essential role in how students view and react to their experiences in school and the real world. The findings suggest that

utilizing strategies to maximize engagement creates robust support, resources, and expertise to promote healthy behaviors among students (Michael et al., 2023). The strategies include (a) communication with families and community members, (b) education classes and support for families, (c) volunteer opportunities for family and community members, (d) involvement of families and community members in decision making, (e) reinforcement and follow-up with knowledge and practices in the home environment, and (f) collaborations among school and community to support students and their families (Michael et al., 2023). Therefore, as family partnerships and collaboration grow to support student's academic success, a component also includes strong community partnerships to support student's academic and social-emotional success.

Community Partnerships

Community partnerships increase student engagement and community support of schools. According to Mohale (2023), Michael et al. (2023), Wallerstein et al. (2020), and Farrell et al. (2021), community partnership research has been valued for over 20 years on the approaches, efficacy, and provision of equitable access in education. Wallerstein et al. and Omara (2020) explained that school and community environments offer a wealth of knowledge for students and it is vital for stakeholders in both settings to see and understanding the importance of their role in student development. There is an overlapping element that is explained from the researcher that examines secondary schools employing strategies to foster positive school to community partnerships for equitable and quality education (Omara, 2020). Stakeholders that represent the community include parent teacher organizations (PTO), school board, community groups

and organizations, and educators living within the school community. Collaboration with the school and community stakeholders is a key element to pull diverse community members and parents with diverse backgrounds together to assess how the school can better support student learning and preparedness for postsecondary goals (Omara, 2020). Mohale and Michael et al. both explained that school and community partnerships include stakeholders distinguishing among orientations in service learning, taking on direct expert and support roles, and analyzing the multiple benefits of service learning or project-based learning for students to make connections between what they are learning in school and how it relates to different aspects of society. A key factor in the community partnerships is for teachers dealing with diverse groups of students to allow them to experience the real-world problems that confront school and society through their collaboration with the community partners. M. Medina et al. (2020) shared that community partnerships have developed into community schools with the support of campus and district leaders. Community schools provide a partnership with the school that supports not just the student, but also their family and community goals. Community schools promote family engagement with school and establishes a strong foundation for a partnership between schools and community members (M. Medina et al., 2020). In the full-service community school model, M. Medina et al. (2020) explained that the goal is for improved learning by responding holistically to students' needs. There is also a positive association between teacher academic optimism and the focal features of professional practice which include trust in students and parents as educational partners (Galindo & Sanders, 2022). Community schools also have a responsibility to provide

additional resources to students, families, and communities. Galindo and Sanders (2022) described how community school are an extension of the traditional school setting and they develop similar to any organization, a mission, vision, core values, and goals of the programming offered. Another stakeholder to include in a community partnership would be college or university partners. Their partnership is a key role in stakeholders developing what skillsets students should have upon graduating from their school (M. Medina et al., 2020). Galindo and Sanders also shared this vital role by sharing that the biggest impact on post-secondary options are the partnerships and community experiences with community partnerships. M. Medina et al. (2020) shared that school counselors partnering with community groups and organizations also supports the college and career readiness of students graduating from high school and promotes their academic success by providing equitable access to community members, colleges, and business partners. Business partners provide further experience to students to give them insights to achieving career goals when making decisions about their postsecondary future. Establishing community partnerships does take time, however, and also includes school stakeholders on the campus and district level to support and facilitate those connections with community partners. In addition, Galindo and Sanders shared that community partnerships play a vital role in addressing community characteristics that may impact African American and Hispanic students, such as, parent involvement, crime, and poverty. The community partnerships for African American and Hispanic students provides a sense of resiliency and perseverance (Galindo & Sanders, 2022).

Overall, community partnerships foster an ongoing relationship between schools, families, and the community. M. Medina et al. (2020) shared that schools should seek to identify potential partners, define clear objectives, establish mutual benefits, communicate regularly, involve stakeholders, develop formal agreements, provide training and resources, evaluate efficacy, and plan for sustainability. The benefit of school partnerships with the community includes a foundational bond with the school, families, and the community to which student performance is enhanced, and the community has an opportunity to further develop (Michael et al., 2023; Omara, 2020). Therefore, as educational stakeholders seek to improve all student academic success, especially African American and Hispanic student success, they should consider the benefits of employing community partnerships.

Summary of Literature Review

In this literature review, I discussed the use of white papers in education to support positive change, and how the findings of my study align with creating a white paper project. The researchers use of white papers identified areas of education that needed reform and suggests solutions to the restructuring of education (Campbell et al., 2020; Crutchley, 2020). Through the creation of this white paper, I will provide solutions that include (a) campus and district leaders creating an advisory board to increase school to family and school to community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students; (b) campus and district stakeholders building teacher capacity to provide professional learning in culturally relevant pedagogy using TeachFX or other learning platforms; (c) campus and district leaders providing data-

driven professional learning opportunities focused on analyzing data, accessing diverse content area supplemental materials, and promoting student discourse; and (d) completing an annual needs assessment to provide continuous feedback to the advisory board to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students. The literature review was provided as a foundation for the white paper deliverable and the solutions I recommend. In the project description, I discuss the recommendations in creating an advisory board to increase family and community collaboration and using the voice of the advisory board to increase data-driven professional learning opportunities for teachers at study district.

Project Description

The problem addressed by the study is African American and Hispanic students' literacy scores have remained lowest of all ethnicities at high schools in one district, despite the implementation of numerous initiatives and curricular platforms. An analysis of the data from the project study suggested that educators perceive there is a need for (a) teachers' use of culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated practices, (b) teachers' emphasis on the need for opportunities for student engagement, (c) teachers' need of support from district and campus stakeholders, and (d) teacher support needed in developing and promoting family and community partnerships to support the academic achievement of African American and Hispanic students. Based on the data findings, I resolved that a white paper would be an appropriate project genre to provide possible solutions and recommendations to the study district's stakeholders. The four recommendations proposed in the white paper include the following:

1. Campus and district leaders need to create an advisory board to increase school to family and school to community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students.
2. Campus and district stakeholders need to build teacher capacity to provide professional learning in culturally relevant pedagogy using TeachFX or other learning platforms.
3. Campus and district leaders need to provide data-driven professional learning opportunities focused on analyzing data, accessing diverse content area supplemental materials, and promoting student discourse.
4. An annual needs assessment needs to be completed to provide continuous feedback to the advisory board to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students.

The stakeholder use of annual needs assessment should reflect what recommendations are working and what needs to be revised or changed. The annual needs assessment could also be used as a model for school with similar challenges.

After creating the white paper, I will submit to Walden University for review. Upon obtaining approval to share the findings and recommendations to the study district stakeholders, I will meet with the director of teaching and learning, campus principals, the leadership team, and family and community stakeholders to present the study findings and recommendations of creating an advisory board to increase school to family and school to community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students and the advisory board creating plan about providing data-driven

professional learning opportunities focused on analyzing data, accessing diverse content area supplemental materials to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students. I will share steps to creating the advisory board and stakeholders that should be represented and support those action steps with the conceptual framework. Also, I will share the evidence-based practices to support reading success in African American and Hispanic students such as teachers using culturally relevant supplemental resources, promoting student discourse, and practicing instructional strategies such as collaboration and differentiation to meet the needs of each student but more specifically for African American and Hispanic students to increase their reading success.

Needed Resources and Supports

Resources and supports needed to support the success of the project includes time to meet with key stakeholders, which includes director of teaching and learning, campus principals, the leadership team consisting of teacher leaders and instructional coaches, and family and community stakeholders. To bring these stakeholders together, I will need to draft an email to invite various stakeholders to a meeting to discuss the research findings and present the white paper project genre. In the email, I include an overview of the research findings and the recommendations for change. During the presentation, I will share key aspects about the research findings and white paper, along with sharing a visual through PowerPoint and an infographic to show the plan for implementation. Stakeholders present will also have access to the PowerPoint and receive a print copy of the infographic for further review. After the meeting with the stakeholders to share initial findings and recommendations, I will seek approval and support of following through

with the project. Upon approval of the project, I will request study district personnel at the high school to make copies of the white paper and share in the staff lounge and for district site administrators to share in their weekly staff newsletter.

Potential Barriers

A potential barrier would be enlisting an adequate number of staff members for the project. I have seen where some opportunities for staff have gone unnoticed when placed in the staff lounge or placed in the weekly staff newsletter. A solution to this barrier would be the administration sharing this information at a staff meeting or for me to present a brief overview of the findings and study recommendations at a staff meeting. During the staff meeting, I can also provide print copies of my presentation and white paper, as well as having a sign up ready to collect teacher names, phone numbers, and emails that would be the best to communicate, if they are interested in participating. I also foresee some administrators being hesitant towards a new project since there are already multiple initiatives for student achievement across the study district. To gain administrative support, I will share through the project goals how this project could positively promote student engagement all around, and that families and community partners will have the opportunity to build lasting working relationships with district stakeholders. I will also share the study findings and recommendations in the white paper with families and community stakeholders to enlist family and community partnerships to provide their perspectives and feedback on the project. Because the project is focused on African American and Hispanic students, I would also provide the overview of the project in Spanish to families.

Proposal for Implementation and Timeline

Upon the completion of the doctoral study, I will deliver the white paper to the study district central office administrators. Upon approval of white paper distribution, I will disseminate an overview of the white paper to central office and campus administrators as well as the superintendent. If asked to provide further details, I will have print copies of the white paper and infographic to share with study district leaders.

If the recommendations are approved, I will enlist campus administrators at the high school level to support with developing a planning committee that consists of campus administrators, teacher leaders and instructional coaches, and family and community stakeholders. The committee will develop a mission, vision, and core values that align with the district's strategic plan. The committee will also develop standard operating procedures that include protocols for action steps and norms for meeting conduct. Once the committee sets a foundation for their purpose and goals, they will convene once a week to discuss school disaggregated data by ethnicity. The committee will discuss factors that they perceive are contributors of the data as well as reviewing factors from the research study and white paper. In evaluation of the disaggregated data, the committee will evaluate the current PD content and will propose how that PD needs to change by sharing new topics around the recommendations in the white paper. The committee will decide when and how the professional learning will be delivered. The committee will also develop an annual needs assessment that evaluate the efficacy of the committee's goals and action steps, and what needs to change. Castro-Alonso et al. (2021) analyzed relationships among stakeholders, discussed the role of coaching reading

instruction, and described coaching in the community to aim toward the same vision of increasing African American and Hispanic student success in reading. The researchers explained everyone's mutual stake in the outcome of students, the schools, and the community. The researchers explained everyone's mutual stake in the outcome of students, the schools, and the community (Castro-Alonso et al., 2021). The following steps include the instructional coaches developing and implementing professional learning opportunities with the support of building administrators to focus on data-driven practices in analyzing data, selecting culturally relevant supplemental materials for instruction and student discourse, and building positive relationships with families and the community.

Study district high school instructional coaches and the planning committee will develop and distribute learning resource packets for parents and include the packets on the study district's website and high school websites for how families and community members can support reading success and collaboration between the school, families, and the community to develop a stronger partnership. The committee will also host parent university nights once a month to provide parents instructional resources to support their child at home. I suggest parents are divided into groups of no more than 15 to 20 so they can interact with the materials and interact with one another on a more personalized level. The sessions parents participate in would include reading supports at home, making connections between home and school, community partnerships that support students, and opportunities for parents and students to volunteer in the school or participate in extracurricular activities.

I recommend the project begin implementation during the late weeks of summer break and start full implementation at the start of the school year. The committee will evaluate the pilot every marking period based on the developed evaluation plan. The project will conclude at the end of the third marking period, so the committee can fully analyze the program results and present the results and student achievement scores to the central office and campus administrators, and superintendent. Table 6 reflects the timeline for project implementation and includes the recommended action steps and time frame for each action step. The table reflects the recommendations for the project genre that is focused on (a) campus and district leaders creating an advisory board to increase school to family and school to community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students; (b) campus and district stakeholders building teacher capacity to provide professional learning in culturally relevant pedagogy using TeachFX or other learning platforms; (c) campus and district leaders providing data-driven professional learning opportunities focused on analyzing data, accessing diverse content area supplemental materials, and promoting student discourse; and (d) completing an annual needs assessment to provide continuous feedback to the advisory board to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students. Table 7 reflects the roles and responsibilities of each participant and all stakeholders involved in the recommended project.

Table 6*Timeline for Implementation of Project*

Recommendation	Time frame
Share white paper to the study district central office administrators	1 week
Disseminate an overview of the white paper to central office and campus administrators as well as the superintendent	1 week
Have print copies of the white paper and infographic to share with study district leaders	1 week
Enlist campus administrators at the high school level to support with developing a planning committee	2 weeks
The committee will develop a mission, vision, and core values that align with the district's strategic plan	2 weeks
The committee will also develop standard operating procedures that include protocols for action steps and norms for meeting conduct	2 weeks
Committee will meet weekly to discuss student data, factors contributing to data, professional develop for teachers and student resources	Duration of project
Committee will evaluate the current professional development content and will propose how professional development needs to change by sharing new topics around the recommendations in the white paper	1 week
Committee will decide when and how the professional learning will be delivered	1 week
Committee will also develop an annual needs assessment that evaluate the efficacy of the committee's goals and action steps, and what needs to change	1 week
Instructional coaches developing professional learning opportunities with the support of building administrators to focus on data-driven practices	1 week
Instructional coaches and the planning committee will develop learning resource packets for parents and include the packets on the study district's website and high school websites for how families and community members can support reading success and collaboration between the school, families, and the community to develop a stronger partnership	2 weeks
Instructional coaches implementing professional learning opportunities with the support of building administrators to focus on data-driven practices	Bi-monthly
Instructional coaches and the planning committee will be distributing learning resource packets for parents and include the packets on the study district's website and high school websites for how families and community members can support reading success and collaboration between the school, families, and the community to develop a stronger partnership	Bi-monthly
Committee will also host parent university nights once a month to provide parents instructional resources to support their child at home	Once a month
Committee program annual needs assessment	Quarterly

Table 7*Roles and Responsibilities*

Participant	Role and responsibility
Researcher	<p>Share white paper to the study district central office administrators</p> <p>Disseminate an overview of the white paper to central office and campus administrators as well as the superintendent</p> <p>Enlist campus administrators at the high school level to support with developing a planning committee</p> <p>Facilitate development of a committee mission, vision, and core values</p> <p>Facilitate development of standard operating procedures that include protocols for action steps and norms for meeting conduct</p> <p>Facilitate weekly meetings to discuss student data, factors contributing to data, professional develop for teachers and student resources</p> <p>Facilitate evaluation of current professional development content and will propose how that professional development needs to change by sharing new topics around the recommendations in the white paper</p> <p>Facilitate development of annual needs assessment that evaluate the efficacy of the committee’s goals and action steps</p>
District leaders	<p>Development of a committee mission, vision, and core values</p> <p>Development of standard operating procedures that include protocols for action steps and norms for meeting conduct</p>
Leadership team core content teachers	<p>Participate in weekly meetings to discuss student data, factors contributing to data, professional develop for teachers and student resources</p>
Family and community representatives	<p>Development of annual needs assessment that evaluate the efficacy of the committee’s goals and action steps</p> <p>Developing and facilitating professional learning opportunities with the support of building administrators to focus on data-driven practices</p>
Planning Committee and core content teachers	<p>Develop learning resource packets for parents and include the packets on the study district’s website and high school websites for how families and community members can support reading success and collaboration between the school, families, and the community to develop a stronger partnership</p> <p>Participating in professional learning opportunities with the support of building administrators to focus on data-driven practices</p> <p>Distributing learning resource packets for parents and include the packets on the study district’s website and high school websites for how families and community members can support reading success and collaboration between the school, families, and the community to develop a stronger partnership</p> <p>Host parent university nights once a month to provide parents instructional resources to support their child at home</p> <p>Committee program annual needs assessment</p>

Project Evaluation Plan

The white paper will be used to inform and persuade district and campus administration to act based on the study's findings. Recommendations were based on the study's findings and scholarly literature. The evaluation of the project described will be in the white paper is based on responses from staff surveys and student disaggregated data. The study district regularly uses Google Form to collect data from stakeholders about their experiences and their rating of various aspects of the school or district. The Google form will be sent at the conclusion of the project to staff members and will be analyzed by myself and the project committee. The advisory board will use a survey to ask staff members about the professional learning opportunities they participated, such as the likelihood they will use strategies shown to them, how equipped they feel to address the reading deficits of African American and Hispanic students, and support with family and community collaboration. There will be a second Google Form sent to families and community partners at the conclusion of the project. The survey will ask family and community partners their experience with learning about resources to use with their child at home and the efficacy of the parent university nights. The other evaluation of the project will be the analysis of student PSAT and SAT data disaggregated by ethnicity to see if the project was able to promote an increase in African American and Hispanic student success in reading.

The overall goal of the white paper is to present four recommendations from the study's findings, which includes (a) campus and district leaders creating an advisory

board to increase school to family and school to community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students; (b) campus and district stakeholders building teacher capacity to provide professional learning in culturally relevant pedagogy using TeachFX or other learning platforms; (c) campus and district leaders providing data-driven professional learning opportunities focused on analyzing data, accessing diverse content area supplemental materials, and promoting student discourse; and (d) completing an annual needs assessment to provide continuous feedback to the advisory board to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students. The goals of the white paper is to inform and influence campus and district leaders to (a) build teacher capacity to develop more teacher leaders, (b) support further professional dialogue that is explicit to student voice and student data, (c) provide culturally relevant supplemental resources, and (d) gain stakeholder input about culturally relevant pedagogy and build strong community and family partnerships to support the academic achievement of African American and Hispanic students. The committee of evaluators will seek feedback and data that support the aims of the advisory board through advisory board meetings. These results are measured in short, intermediate, and long-term benefits. The short-term benefits include

- students participating in instruction that engages them
- students participating with their families in school-level activities
- partnerships being built within the community
- students receiving supports from school, family, and community collaboration
- examples of the intermediate benefits include

- students using instructional strategies and applying them to reading text in all classes
- parent university classes offering strategies that families and community partners can use to build reading supports for students and prepare them for postsecondary opportunities

As a result, the long-term benefit is for student reading success and developed rapport with community partners and the school.

Description of Key Stakeholders

The study district has a variety of stakeholders to include in the project implementation. For this initial study, key stakeholders include campus and district administrators, teacher leaders and instructional coaches, and family and community stakeholders. Including these stakeholders in the initial project implementation could provide a larger perspective of how the reading achievement and success of African American and Hispanic students could be further supported. The campus and district-based stakeholders could gain a better understanding of what families and the community partners need to support students when they are not in school. Student parents as stakeholders can gain insight to what strategies are used to provide reading instruction, and they can analyze how students reach academic success and mastery based on ethnicity. Community partners could gain a perspective similar to parents in understanding how students are prepared by the school stakeholders for their academic and social development. The stakeholder involvement in the initial project could inform educational practices and partnerships in the future.

Project Implications

Summary of Positive Social Change Implications

I determined the white paper genre would address the problem of the study, which is that African American and Hispanic students' literacy scores have remained lowest of all ethnicities at high schools in one district, despite the implementation of numerous initiatives and curricular platforms. Factually, African American and Hispanic students have remained at the lowest achievement levels in reading at the study district and beyond. This study shares high school teachers' perceptions and how they implemented instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' achievement. Teachers also shared in the study their perceptions about what they need to increase their usage of reading strategies to support African American and Hispanic students' achievement. J. Knight (2018) explained educators must assess the efficacy of instructional supports and strategies provided as well as assess their implementation. Therefore, the outcomes of this project include professional learning for teachers, academic supports for families, and the development of community partnerships through an advisory board developed consisting of various stakeholders connecting the school to families and the community partners.

Importance of Project to Local Stakeholders and in a Larger Context

The implications for this project in a larger context include possibly more than high school teachers encouraged to participate in professional learning opportunities to support the reading success of African American and Hispanic students. The implications also could be a project repeated not only at the elementary and middle school level but

also on other school communities with a similar problem. In addition, the project could provide families with a concise perspective on strategies educators use at different ages of development to provide reading supports to students. Parents could use the information provided in this project to reinforce instruction at home and possibly become more involved in school throughout their child's education in P-12 years. Beyond the school setting, African American and Hispanic student reading success can provide continue motivation to improve reading skills and community supports.

Conclusion

In Section 3, I discussed the goals for the white paper and describe the deliverable project of the white paper to inform and persuade stakeholders at the study district about needs to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students in reading. In addition, I shared scholarly literature that supports the project and synthesizes my findings and recommendations. I also provided a description of the project that included a timeline of action steps, stakeholders involved, and the project evaluation plan, along with project implications.

In Section 4, I discuss project strengths and limitations as a component of my conclusion. I also include recommendations for alternative approaches, what I learned about the process specific to the study I conducted, and a reflective analysis about my personal learning as a scholar practitioner as it relates to my study. Lastly, I provide a reflection on the importance of the work in the study, implications, applications, and directions for future research that includes a final conclusion to the study.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

In this section, I discuss strengths and limitations of the project, as well as recommendations for alternative approaches of the project based on the findings of this basic qualitative study. The problem addressed by the study is African American and Hispanic students' literacy scores have remained lowest of all ethnicities at high schools in one district, despite the implementation of numerous initiatives and curricular platforms. Guided by Freire's (1970) theory of critical pedagogy, this study investigated the perspective of high school teachers on they implement instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement at the study district. A gap in practice was described in Section 2. The gap in instructional practice displays a need to understand how teachers can better develop as professionals using culturally relevant pedagogy, participating in PLCs that support African American and Hispanic students and develop family and community partnerships. Teacher participants from the study district expressed specific views on a white paper was created in response to the findings of this research study. Teacher participants in the study district perceive there is a need for (a) teachers' use of culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated practices, (b) teachers' emphasis on the need for opportunities for student engagement, (c) teachers' need of support from district and campus stakeholders, and (d) teacher support needed in developing and promoting family and community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students. The white paper is a product of research that presents readers with a focus on a complex topic, the problem, and in turn offers a remedy to solve the problem in action steps or for

stakeholders to make an informed decision (Pelkmans & Robson, 1986). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate how high school teachers perceive their implementation of instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement. Teachers interviewed as participants in this study expressed collective sentiments in regard to the four themes.

In this section, I discuss the study strengths and limitations, alternative approaches, and project development and evaluation. I also discuss reflections about the importance of the work, implications, and directions for future research, and I provide concluding thoughts as a scholar practitioner. Overall, this section provides further conclusion of the study and how future studies can provide further supporting information about the reading achievement of African American and Hispanic students.

Project Strengths and Limitations

This project has a few strengths and limitations. Strengths of the project is that it includes solely core classroom teacher perspective at the high school level. The data shared included teacher perspective from various core content areas such as English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies to understand how they support African American and Hispanic student success in reading achievement. Qualitative research is the best way to gain information that cannot be quantified in numbers but is relevant to experiences and perceptions (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The second strength includes interviewing participants in one on one semistructured interviews. The researcher's findings from individual interviews provides a connection with the researcher and participant. Weddle (2022) shared that interviews can provide insights to

supports teachers need, such as PD. The third strength of the project study was sharing study findings and recommendations through a white paper with the study district. The researchers use of white papers identified areas of education that needed reform and suggests solutions to the restructuring of education (Campbell et al., 2020; Crutchley, 2020). Through the creation of this white paper, I will provide solutions that include (a) campus and district leaders creating an advisory board to increase school to family and school to community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students; (b) campus and district stakeholders building teacher capacity to provide professional learning in culturally relevant pedagogy using TeachFX or other learning platforms; (c) campus and district leaders providing data-driven professional learning opportunities focused on analyzing data, accessing diverse content area supplemental materials, and promoting student discourse; and (d) advisory board completing an annual needs assessment to provide continuous feedback to the advisory board to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students. Therefore, as I sought to understand the teacher perspective about how the support students and how they can receive professional support, it is vital to interview teachers with an understanding of the phenomenon to better support their professional growth in the future.

Limitations of this project include the possibility of this study to gain perspectives from African American and Hispanic students in the study district, themselves to provide their experiences with reading supports and the instructional focuses in their classrooms. Provided this study was about teacher perspective, the findings are limited because there

can be other perspectives to research about the topic. A second limitation also includes the perspective of teachers that teacher related arts classes require reading various types of materials. Teacher perspective from noncore content teachers like career and technical education courses could provide some insights to how students are comprehending reading materials that are college and career focused. Lastly, another limitation is being an administrator at the middle school level in the study district. My connection in the district could have the potential for bias. However, I tracked my biases by recording and analyzing two practice interviews, took notes of my interactions by recording my interviews, kept interview notes on the transcripts, followed IRB recommendations, and worked closely with my committee to review interview recordings and transcripts after each interview.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The problem of the study focused on African American and Hispanic students' reading support from teachers in their core classes. Alternative wording for students could be diverse students or ethnically diverse students. Alternative wording for reading could be literacy support or language arts support for African American and Hispanic students. Possible alternative approaches to the project includes (a) developing a PD series for teachers to support African American and Hispanic students in reading, (b) developing a support class for students scoring in a certain range on the PSAT or SAT, or (c) creating student focus groups with teachers piloting ethnically diverse curriculum in all core content areas that is research-based. These alternate approaches to the project study could provide the study district and future studies with more information about the

efficacy in reading instructional supports to promote academic success with African American and Hispanic students.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

This basic qualitative study was an exploration and journey of the basic qualitative process. As a scholar practitioner, I learned about making positive changes in my local community and how changes in the local community can support change on a larger scale. The study goal was for me to make a positive social change by exploring a problem related to the reading and academic success of African American and Hispanic students. My study was guided by current scholarly literature, educational conceptual frameworks, and data from the study district. With the use of Walden University's IRB, professors, and academic advisors, I was able to research and gather information that not only supported my study but gave me the academic support to conduct my research, organize and collect data, and analyze interview data of teacher perspectives about the phenomenon.

In high school education, quantitative data is often reviewed in formats such as test scores and trends in scores of instructional strands to often guide the professional practices of educators. However, I learned that collecting qualitative data through individual interviews can provide information about experiences and perceptions of internal stakeholders responsible for instructional practices and strategies. The information I gained from interviews supported me with having a better understanding of what teachers do with instruction to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement in reading. This study provided an opportunity to obtain data

related to teachers providing culturally relevant instruction and their utilization of the study district's instructional principles that align with the conceptual framework of Freire (1970). The data from my interviews revealed from my individual interviews with high school core content teachers and those themes focused on a need for (a) creating an advisory board to increase school to family and school to community and (b) partnerships increasing data-driven professional learning opportunities focused on analyzing data, accessing diverse content area supplemental materials to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students. The analysis of peer-reviewed scholarly literature in the first literature review supported the instructional initiatives the study district implements and their importance in educating African American and Hispanic students. The analysis of peer-reviewed scholarly literature in the second literature review were based on interview findings and enveloped ways to support teacher PD and growth to support African American and Hispanic students. The exploration of teacher perspectives about professional learning and growth that supports African American and Hispanic students related to developing an advisory board of campus and community stakeholders that includes parents to analyze the best ways to support ethnically diverse students reading achievement.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

This qualitative study has an influence and importance beyond the study district. For various reasons, in similar districts, African American and Hispanic students have scored on average below their European American and Asian American peers. As a secondary-level educator, I have seen a gap in practice, and this study focused on

understanding the teacher's perspective. As stated previously, the school district could extend this study to include African American and Hispanic students' perspectives to understand better what they have experienced and need in our educational system. To delve into the study, I had to logically and systematically approach the research by extensively reviewing literature related to the topic and learning about different methodological approaches and data collection tools. The analysis and overall writing was an iterative process that caused me to reflect on the subject, the impacts and experiences of teachers, and what possible outcomes could develop for students and their academic success. My experience conducting this study has impacted me positively as an educator, scholar-practitioner, and person.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study prompted me to think and analyze the practices at the study district. The teacher participants as a collective shared experiences and perspectives that other teachers, and campus and building stakeholders could reflect on their instructional practices to support the reading achievement of African American and Hispanic students. These stakeholders can use the information provided through this study to develop culturally relevant instructional strategies and locate supplemental resources, as well as supporting partnerships with family and community allies. Based on the data, I recommend professional learning and PLC support for teachers that are focused on data-driven practices and supplemental resources to promote the academic success of African American and Hispanic students. I also recommend the development of a parent and community advisory board to work alongside teacher leaders and other

campus and district stakeholders to support further academic success of ethnically diverse students. Future research projects may involve qualitative data on all teacher perspective in the high school setting or could also involve the experiences and perspectives of students in the high school setting to further understand the more effective instructional strategies that promote African American and Hispanic student academic achievement in reading.

Conclusion

The problem addressed by the study is African American and Hispanic students' literacy scores have remained lowest of all ethnicities at high schools in one district, despite the implementation of numerous initiatives and curricular platforms. The research examined core classroom teacher perspectives at the study district to better understand their experiences and perspectives about instructional practices and strategies. An analysis of the data from the project study suggested that educators perceive there is a need for (a) teachers' use of culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated practices, (b) teachers' emphasis on the need for opportunities for student engagement, (c) teachers' need of support from district and campus stakeholders, and (d) teacher support needed in developing and promoting family and community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students. Based on the data findings, I resolved that a white paper would be an appropriate project genre to provide possible solutions and recommendations to the study district's stakeholders. The four recommendations proposed in the white paper include the following:

1. Campus and district leaders need to create an advisory board to increase school to family and school to community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students.
2. Campus and district stakeholders need to build teacher capacity to provide professional learning in culturally relevant pedagogy using TeachFX or other learning platforms.
3. Campus and district leaders need to provide data-driven professional learning opportunities focused on analyzing data, accessing diverse content area supplemental materials, and promoting student discourse.
4. An annual needs assessment needs to be completed to provide continuous feedback to the advisory board to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students.

The stakeholder use of annual needs assessment should reflect what recommendations are working and what needs to be revised or changed. The annual needs assessment could also be used as a model for school with similar challenges.

The implications for this project in a larger context include possibly more than high school teachers encouraged to participate in professional learning opportunities to support the reading success of African American and Hispanic students. The implications also could be a project repeated not only at the elementary and middle school level but could possibly have positive impressions on school communities with a similar problem. In addition, the project could provide families with a concise perspective on strategies educators use at different ages of development to provide reading supports to students.

Parents could use the information provided in this project to reinforce instruction at home and possibly become more involved in school throughout their child's education in P-12 years. Beyond the school setting, African American and Hispanic student reading success can provide continue motivation to improve reading skills and community supports.

Therefore, as this study concludes, there is also a need for further research to further understand what instructional strategies, resources, and partnerships positively impact and support African American and Hispanic students' achievement at the study district.

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Appendix A: The Project

**High School Teacher Perceptions About Reading Strategies That Support African
American and Hispanic Students: A White Paper**

By

Sherrie J. Sudler

High School Teacher Perceptions About Reading Strategies That Support African American and Hispanic Students: A White Paper

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Introduction

Addressing the academic gaps in reading for African American and Hispanic high school students at the study district is imperative for several reasons. These reasons include (a) continuous academic achievement gaps compared to their European American and Asian American peers, (b) equitable access to tools and ethnically diverse supplemental resources, and (c) creating social change to close achievement gaps among ethnic demographics. Although the study district has implemented instructional principles, created initiatives, and shared the importance of students' exposure to culturally responsive pedagogy, there continues to be a gap in practice to support the reading achievement of African American and Hispanic students. Therefore, this project has the potential to increase reading success and mastery to support academic achievement of African American and Hispanic students.

The performance of African American and Hispanic students has been below the average or proficient performance expected on these literacy assessment measures, and this low performance affects the educational

opportunities available to these groups, such as access to Advanced Placement courses and college admittance (Medina Coronado & Nagamine Miyashiro, 2019; Peterson et al., 2016). The problem is meaningful at the local study district. For example, campus educators (a) implemented campus-adopted instructional principles, (b) implemented a new curriculum with embedding reading in all content areas, (c) invested in additional assessment platforms to assess student areas for growth, (d) focused on the use of instructional strategies in professional learning communities (PLCs), (e) implemented response to intervention (RTI) and multitiered systems of support (MTSS) classes, (f) provided reading professional development opportunities focused on strategies for diverse populations, and (g) built a trauma-informed school team aimed at supporting the Hispanic and African American students' needs. The study district has seen the disparity in student scores between African American and Hispanic students compared to their European American and Asian American peers at the high school level.

This project has the potential to increase reading success and mastery to support academic

It is possible, that the gap in practice is also reflected in the lack of appropriate literacy strategies used in the high school classroom that would benefit African American and Hispanic students, despite literature that reflects the effectiveness of using culturally relevant pedagogy (J. Kaiser et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2021; D. Thomas & Dyches, 2019). In addition, the gap in practice could reflect the absence of appropriate relationship-building strategies that would benefit African American and Hispanic students, despite the literature that reflects the importance of building positive, trusting relationships to support student engagement, motivation and a sense of community (D. Thomas & Dyches, 2019). According to Wang et al. (2020), classroom climate plays a major role in student academic success. Students who have a positive connection with teachers in the classroom more consistently had positive social associations within the classroom and that built a sense of community thereby resulting in students feeling more comfortable to learn. In addition, Daily et al. (2019), also found that that middle and high school students had higher rates of academic achievement due to a positive classroom and positive school climate. Just as important as a positive classroom and positive school environment, students must also have a sense of belonging and a sense of understanding in their school community to promote academic success. Pedagogy is not just about instruction, but it

includes the vision, community engagement, school leadership, and teacher instructional practices. Abacioglu et al. (2020) and Muñiz (2019) both shared that culturally responsive teaching has been linked directly to student engagement, academic success, relationship-building, and social and emotional learning. Abacioglu et al. (2020) researched further to discuss teacher attitudes toward their professional development and implementation of culturally relevant instruction and practices. While furthermore Brown et al. (2019) and Tanase (2020) shared that there is a need for teachers to receive more professional development on incorporating culturally relevant instructional pedagogy into their planning for instruction. Muñiz (2019) and Nyachae (2021) both shared that teachers are gaining access to culturally diverse materials but are still working toward how to incorporate that into their teaching and other pedagogical practices as a way to build a positive classroom environment.

Teacher professional development should include strategies for differentiated instruction. Bremner et al. (2022) and Ciampa and Reisboard (2021) used qualitative methods to gather information on incorporating instructional strategies to support the academic success of diverse students. Ciampa and Reisboard (2021) focused on differentiated instruction techniques. Using differentiated instruction and planning for collaborative learning experiences ultimately provides students

with a more diverse viewpoint of the content and to see the authentic progression of logical thinking through those same collaborative discussion techniques. Bremner et al. linked differentiated instruction strategies to the following variables within teacher implementation: the teachers' self-efficacy in differentiated instruction, teaching beliefs, teaching experience, professional development, teacher certification, and classroom size. The researchers found that differentiated instruction implementation has increased but is still below a critical benchmark in addressing students' diverse needs. Professional development can provide a multitude of resources, strategies, and supports for educators. However, there is a continued gap in evidence and practice among certain areas such as data analysis. According to Popova et al. (2022) the attributes of the most effective teacher professional development is incentivizing the participation in professional learning, opportunities for teachers to practice new skills learned from professional development, and follow up once teachers return to the classroom by instructional coaches and administration. With these attributes in mind, teachers found that training focused on regularly evaluating student data in literacy promoted a large-scale increase to student access to materials and student mastery on the concepts (Popova et al., 2022; Kerwin & Thornton, 2021).

Creating a district-wide plan for high schools to engage campus and

community stakeholders, including parents could support academic success by (a) creating an advisory board to increase school to family and school to community partnerships, (b) campus stakeholders using advisory board information to develop increased data-driven professional learning opportunities focused on analyzing data accessing diverse content area supplemental materials, and (c) completing an annual needs assessment to provide continuous feedback to the advisory board to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students.

This white paper is the result of a basic qualitative study conducted with high school teachers who teach core content classes at this district. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate how high school teachers perceive their implementation of instructional strategies in reading to support African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement. Based on the findings, three recommendations are suggested to facilitate a district-wide advisory board and data-driven professional learning opportunities for teachers using culturally relevant supplemental resources to support the reading achievement of African American and Hispanic students.

Problem Defined

The problem addressed by the study is African American and Hispanic students' literacy scores have remained lowest of all ethnicities at high schools

in one district, despite the implementation of numerous initiatives and curricular platforms. When I analyzed the findings, four themes emerged from my individual interviews with high school core content teachers, and those themes focused on a need for (a) creating an advisory board to increase school to family and school to community partnerships, (b) increased data-driven professional learning opportunities focused on analyzing data, accessing diverse content area supplemental materials, and (c) completing an annual needs assessment to provide continuous feedback to the advisory board to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students. The analysis of the findings in alignment with the white paper development includes recommendations to support the findings of this study to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students. Therefore, this white paper is to inform and encourage stakeholders at the district by providing input about my recommendations about professional learning and development of an advisory board to support the improvement of reading achievement of African American and Hispanic students.

This white paper was developed to address the reading achievement needs of African American and Hispanic students at the high school level in an effort to close the academic gaps in reading. The recommendations from the study include, development of an

advisory board, data-driven professional learning, and an annual needs assessment on professional learning efficacy. The first recommendation is for this district to create an advisory board

Recommendation #1: Campus and district leaders creating an advisory board to increase school to family and school to community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students.

It is recommended that the district create an advisory board to increase school to family and school to community partnerships. The goal is for campus and district leaders building teacher capacity to develop more teacher leaders Based on the findings of the study and current scholarly literature, African American and Hispanic students benefit from the collective work between their parents and the school as well as collaboration between community stakeholders and the school. One effective way to create this collaboration and partnership between the school and parents and the school and community partners is by creating advisory boards that include various internal and external stakeholders.

Recommendation #1: Stakeholder Advisory Board:

- Maintenance of educational environment
- Representation of under-researched, unique, and

Advisory boards are one way that school leaders can utilize the expertise, experience, and perceptions of stakeholders to make more informed decisions. Courtney et al. (2021) shared that advisory boards consist of professionals with domains of expertise relevant to the school setting. Advisory board leaders use frameworks that best fit their organization and the needs of students to best leverage the unique skills and interests of the members. In agreement with Courtney et al. (2021), Garner et al. (2021) discussed a framework for establishing advisory boards that includes (a) model's consensus, (b) decision making emphasis on a linear process multi-phase process, (c) situated perspectives to highlight dynamic relationships between individuals, contexts, and identities. The advisory board begins with a collective commitment to establishing a mission, vision, and core values. Garner et al. (2021) explains that the process of creating an advisory board is one of collective identity exploration that embodies complex dynamic systems. The identity of the advisory board is an exploration of the members' identity and board members' dialogue is incremental and transformational dialogue leading to an emergence of ideas, purpose, solutions and decisions (Garner et al., 2021; Ramos-Montañez and Pattison, 2023; Baum, 2023; Switalski, 2023). These advisory boards also guide the continuous improvement of the educational organization. According to Garner et al. (2021) and Ramos-Montañez and Pattison (2023), advisory

boards not only are responsible for the maintenance of educational environment, but also the members propel the growth exponentially to foster innovation and a shared interest to support students. Advisory boards also represent under-researched, and unique and influential factors of student learning and education (Switalski, 2023). In addition, researchers have found that board members' effort and attention on the school and research-based practices guides school and district leaders to consider the content and approach of programs, gauging student learning, obstacles to student success, board contributions, and emphasis on skills students are taught (Baum, 2023; Switalski, 2023). Likewise, Pack and Peek (2020) shared that effective advisory boards include their members having a solid knowledge and understanding of their role, limitations in influencing curriculum, encourage engagement with students, have formal procedures for involvement, and are well coordinated with the larger educational institution. However, Fagrell et al. (2020) shared that some advisory boards remain to have uncertainties about the internal decision-making process and organization; therefore, leading to a lack of understanding in their overall role and impact on the entire educational organization. Also, boards consist of members that include alumni, staff, families with students attending the school, students, high education leaders, and campus and district leaders. The members of the board are largely composed of members with a close

connection to the institution as they are more engaged as program advocates and will contribute more financially (Switalski, 2023). Overall, Fagrell et al. (2020) explained that stakeholders on the advisory board influence professional learning for staff members, curriculum development, and curriculum implementation with fidelity. Plus, board members comment on the quality of education and the education students receive predominantly connected to the world and society (Fagrell et al., 2020). Therefore, while advisory boards have the possibility to have a positive impact on the overall educational system and its operations, it is vital to start with a shared vision, mission, and core values. As a reflection for the board members and all stakeholders, an annual needs assessment could provide beneficial information on how to address the most current needs of the educational community.

Recommendation #2: Campus and district stakeholders build teacher capacity to provide professional learning in culturally relevant pedagogy using TeachFX or other learning platforms.

It is also recommended that the district increases data-driven professional learning opportunities through professional learning communities (PLCs) and professional development focused on analyzing data, accessing diverse content area supplemental materials. The goal is for campus and district leaders supporting further professional dialogue that is

explicit to student voice and student data. The increase in these professional learning opportunities through collaboration and data-driven practices give educators and opportunity to analyze data directly related to their students, share experiences, provide perspectives and learn best practices to support the academic achievement of African American and Hispanic students. Professional learning also is an opportunity for teachers to further plan to engage students and support their academic success and mastery.

Recommendation #2: Build teacher capacity:

- Professional dialogue through PLCs
- Professional development in *differentiation*,

Professional learning communities (PLC)

PLC participation is a common format for educators to develop their professional insights and practices. Well-developed PLCs have a positive impact on teaching professional development and practice as well as student learning (Weddle, 2022). Teachers in PLCs learn together and collaborate to determine the best strategies to improve student achievement (Jones & Vari, 2019). Castro-Alonso et al. (2021), Jones and Vari (2019), and Weddle (2022) examined how as educators participated in PLCs, they found more comfort in planning to incorporate more learner-

centered strategies within their daily instruction and assessment. PLCs establish a mindset of collaboration and supporting student need regardless of ethnic background. Barber and Kluda (2020) stated collaboration can help teachers determine which principals of student engagement and motivation to apply with certain students.

*Professional Development:
Differentiation*

As the literature relates to learner-centered instructional practices and ideals, teacher professional development is also a focus to explore the achievement gaps of African American and Hispanic students. Teacher professional development is an essential element to academic success. Smets and Struyven (2020) shared that high school teachers that differentiated instruction in their classroom, found that there was a direct correlation between the use of differentiation and the academic success of diverse student populations. With continuous professional development and collaborating with instructional leaders, teachers showed success with implementing various strategies associated with differentiated instruction (Smets & Struyven, 2020). When seeking to increase student connection to content and engage with the instructional materials, professional development is key to finding better ways to increase students' academic growth. Barber and Kluda (2020) stated teachers should receive professional development specific to principles of student

engagement in reading instruction, particularly among diverse populations. Keyes (2019), Krawczyk (2019), and Wetzel et al. (2019) shared insights on preparing teachers to deliver instruction that caters to the learner, regardless of background. The instructional delivery in providing differentiated strategies includes cooperative learning strategies to accommodate heterogeneity (Smets and Struyven, 2020). Keyes (2019), Krawczyk (2019), and Smets and Struyven (2020) all shared that teacher usage of collaborative grouping and strategies also supports students in participating during instruction and promotes academic and social development. Teachers use of differentiated instruction not only supports student collaboration and building background knowledge, differentiated instruction also is a way to promote student engagement and motivation (Smets and Struyven, 2020). Students with diverse backgrounds and diverse needs in the classroom are able to better reach a level of academic success and academic mastery in a variety of areas (Smets and Struyven, 2020). Bremner et al. (2022) described differentiated strategies for teachers to use, such as grouping, using student voice and choice, diverse content, various assessment formats, strategic use of supplemental resources. Bremner et al. (2022) found that using differentiated practices provided an inclusive instructional model and more individualized opportunities for students to access, learn, and master content. Krawczyk (2019), and Wetzel et al.

(2019) explained there are difference levels to differentiation in reading instruction. Similar to the MTSS process, Tier 1 supports are general differentiation strategies that support all students in the classroom that include grouping and teaching background knowledge (Krawczyk, 2019; Wetzel et al., 2019). Tier 2 supports differentiation includes supports for students such as vocabulary and reading comprehension supports like graphic organizers, while Tier 3 supports include small group instruction and modifications to assignments (Krawczyk, 2019; Wetzel et al., 2019). Wetzel et al. (2019) also explains that instructional technology can be used by teachers to differentiate instruction to cater to students diverse and individualized needs. Using a differentiated approach to instruction provides students with a personal connection to the material and teachers use of differentiation can support students with various academic needs (Bremner et al., 2022). This instructional delivery also includes teachers making personal connections with their students and continually assessing their instructional practices to meet the needs of each student.

Teacher professional development should include strategies for differentiated instruction. Bremner et al. (2022) and Ciampa and Reisboard (2021) used qualitative methods to gather information on incorporating instructional strategies to support the academic success of diverse students. Ciampa and Reisboard (2021) focused

on differentiated instruction techniques. Using differentiated instruction and planning for collaborative learning experiences ultimately provides students with a more diverse viewpoint of the content and to see the authentic progression of logical thinking through those same collaborative discussion techniques. Bremner et al. linked differentiated instruction strategies to the following variables within teacher implementation: the teachers' self-efficacy in differentiated instruction, teaching beliefs, teaching experience, professional development, teacher certification, and classroom size. The researchers found that differentiated instruction implementation has increased but is still below a critical benchmark in addressing students' diverse needs.

Professional Development: Culturally Relevant Supplemental Resources

While there is a push in the local area to increase culturally relevant supplemental resources, teachers benefit from having professional development to learn more about their students' cultural diversity, but also how to access the resources to support diverse student groups. Ladson-Billings (2023) and Silver (2022) both shared similar sentiments about professional development in the area of culturally relevant supplemental resources stating that when educators without professional development on using supplemental resources, their access and usage of these supplemental resources lacks cohesion and fails to capture all aspects of the phenomenon. Therefore, when

teachers are incorporating supplemental resources, specifically culturally relevant supplemental resources, the most effective professional development includes a consensus around the types of material, who is involved in the teacher-level curriculum supplementation, important dimensions of supplementation, and the overall educational value of supplementation (Silver, 2022). Furthermore, Silver (2022) suggested using a teacher curriculum supplemental framework as an analytical tool to understand the effects of using the supplemental curriculum on teachers and students. Likewise, Liu et al. (2021) researched inconsistent use of culturally relevant resources and inconsistent use of culturally relevant supplemental resources, and how a lack of theoretical clarity and consensus on the competence of attributes is a key hurdle in educator development. Arsal (2019), Nganga (2020), Silva (2022), Subasi Singh and Akar (2021) all shared professional development for teachers is needed to better understand cultural differences and various cultural components builds their multicultural pedagogy to better understand how to implement the pedagogy during instructional planning and in the selection of instructional resources for their classroom. While Muñiz (2019) and Nyachae (2021) both shared that teachers are able to access supplemental materials, but need more support in incorporating them into their regular instructional strategies in order for them to not cause disjointed instruction. Fowler et al. (2019) stated in

agreement that when students have more consistent culturally relevant supplemental material, it engages them to further work toward academic success and mastery. Williams et al. (2021) explained that with the increase of students with diverse backgrounds, teachers, must enhance their practices and skillset to meet the needs of each student. The researchers showed that with consistent course review as a part of an annual need's assessment, in conjunction with using the supplemental materials to effectively support the individual needs of students, that teachers can build a culturally sustaining pedagogy with culturally relevant resources and supplemental resources (Cruz et al., 2023; Williams et al., 2021). Therefore, professional development in accessing analyzing, and using supplemental culturally relevant resources can support the academic needs of students and support their engagement in reading across all content areas.

Professional Development: Teaching Reading in All Core Content Areas

Professional development for teachers that supports teaching reading in all core content areas also supports students of diverse backgrounds and experiences reach success and mastery in school. According to Svendsen (2020), McMaster et al. (2021) and Donegan and Wanzek (2021) through their research shared that many educators are unprepared to meet the needs of students with intensive to moderate reading needs. Svendsen

(2020) also shared that collaboration among various content areas also has a major positive influence on teacher professional development by discussing with peers the most beneficial practices and learning new strategies to support students with various reading abilities from a diverse ethnic background. With professional development in reading strategies across the core content areas, educators are more consistent with their usage of strategies to support student academic success and mastery of basic reading skills (McMaster et al., 2021). Teachers in this study (see McMaster et al., 2021) shared that professional development for reading strategies should not just be for English teachers, but for teachers of all content areas because students have to read and comprehend their content as well. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2021) and McMaster et al., 2021) both stated that it is critical for teachers to participate in professional learning to understand how the influence of background knowledge has on reading comprehension in students, and how to incorporate background knowledge and student discourse into the pre-teaching aspect of lessons to engage students and support their academic success and mastery. Smith et al. (2021) further explains that students use background knowledge and their connection to content along with fluency and decoding to comprehend a passage. Additionally, Stark et al. (2023) examined that students in the secondary content area classrooms further benefit from evidence-based literacy practices and explicit instructional practices to

enhance their literacy instruction. Stark et al. (2023) found that the most explicit instructional practices are infrequently utilized across all content areas; and some areas where students could benefit such as reading lengthier text, strategies were not used at all. Therefore, Capin et al. (2021), Stark et al. (2023) and Smith et al. (2021) shared the importance and positive impact that school-wide literacy models and related professional learning opportunities have on teachers' ability to support struggling readers. Correspondingly, Vaughn et al. (2022) and Capin et al. (2021) researched a distributed professional development model emphasizing reading comprehension and vocabulary practices across core content areas, and they found that students were able to engage in the material, expand their content knowledge, and reach higher levels of mastery with supports the teacher learned during their professional development. Lyon et al. (2021), and Wakeman et al. (2020) shared through their research an instructional model to teach reading and enhance reading comprehension skills with the use of a station teaching model. In this model, students are grouped by need and rotate through various learning activities that the teacher organizes to engage students in targeted individualized instruction in small groups, so the teacher can provide students with opportunities to extend their learning with more challenging texts in a student-managed system (Lyon et al., 2021; Stark et al., 2023; Wakeman et al., 2020). Wexler et al. (2022), Green, (2022) researched student

engagement in reading strategies and the use of various strategies impacting reading comprehension and high order thinking across content areas. Research findings are that teachers participating in professional learning to support their usage of reading instruction across the content areas engages students in reading for enjoyment and students making personal connections to the text they are reading (Green, 2022). Therefore, as teachers are employing reading across all content areas is important for them to participate regularly in professional learning to engage students in high yield strategies to support their academic success.

Recommendation #3: Campus and district leaders provide data-driven professional learning opportunities focused on analyzing data, accessing diverse content area supplemental materials, and promoting student discourse.

The goal is for campus and district leaders providing culturally relevant supplemental resources. Professional development can provide a multitude of resources, strategies, and supports for educators. However, there is a continued gap in evidence and practice among certain areas such as data analysis. According to Popova et al. (2022) the attributes of the most effective teacher professional development is incentivizing the participation in professional learning, opportunities for teachers to practice new skills learned from professional development, and follow up once teachers return to the

classroom by instructional coaches and administration. With these attributes in mind, teachers found that training focused on regularly evaluating student data in literacy promoted a large-scale increase to student access to materials and student mastery on the concepts (Popova et al., 2022; Kerwin & Thornton, 2021). From the research shared in various studies teachers benefit greatly from follow up as well on professional learning Popova et al. (2022). Similarly, Sims and Fletcher-Wood (2021), examined weaknesses in professional development for teachers they shared that more effective professional development is when it is sustained, collaborative, subject specific, draws on external expertise, has buy-in from teachers, and is practice based. Sims and Fletcher-Wood (2021), argued that more progress can be made by educational leaders by putting more effort to identifying characteristics of effective professional development by looking for alignment between evidence from basic research on human skill acquisition and features of rigorously evaluated PD interventions. In addition to these attributes to developing a data-driven professional learning experience in data analysis Imants and Van der Wal (2020), stated that regular analysis of student data with campus and district stakeholders creates effective school reform and professional development that addresses students individualized needs. As another point, Fischer et al. (2020) and Kerwin and Thornton (2021) shared that the emergence of data-driven approaches supports decision making

and efforts to improve educational effectiveness. Fischer et al. (2020) included another layer to data analysis professional development by stating the following:

Digital traces of student behavior promise more scalable and finer-grained understanding and support of learning processes, which were previously too costly to obtain with traditional data sources and methodologies. This synthetic review describes the affordances and applications of microlevel (e.g., clickstream data), meso level (e.g., text data), and macrolevel (e.g., institutional data) big data. For instance, clickstream data are often used to operationalize and understand knowledge, cognitive strategies, and behavioral processes in order to personalize and enhance instruction and learning.

Recommendation #3: Data-driven professional learning:

- Analyzing data
- Accessing diverse content
- Promoting student

There was also recognition of the importance of not only accessing, analyzing, and using data, but there is also an importance to include data privacy and protection in the professional development for staff. Fischer et al. (2020) and Kerwin and Thornton (2021) both explain that providing educators with a foundational

understanding of balancing data privacy and protection with data sharing and research also promotes teachers having the power to access resources that better suit the needs of their students.

Therefore, data-driven professional development promotes the use of resources that are relevant to African American and Hispanic students' academic growth and achievement along with academic mastery.

Recommendation #4: Advisory board completing an annual needs assessment to provide continuous feedback to the advisory board to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students

Last of all, I recommend development of an annual needs assessment by advisory board to ensure there is a level of efficacy with their recommendations to the school regarding teacher opportunities and student supports in reading. The goal is for campus and district leaders gaining stakeholder input about culturally relevant pedagogy and build strong community and family partnerships. Advisory board members would develop a survey that goes out to not only students, but to teachers and families. The survey would ask about professional learning opportunities for teachers, student engagement and motivation and also ask about resources provided to parents to support African American and Hispanic student reading success.

Recommendation #4: Annual Needs Assessment:

- **Created and implemented by advisory board**
- **Continuous feedback to stakeholders**

Needs Assessments in education is a process for identifying and understanding the needs of the educational organization or the gaps in practices to achieve a specific goal. According to Müller et al. (2020), annual needs assessments are an indicator of the competencies an organization has set forth as an educational focus. The annual needs assessment is a process that includes a variety of components. Müller et al. (2020) found that the majority of instruments rely on self-reported survey or inventory of data and very few tools collect data for across each area of focus. Jayaratne et al. (2021) added that a formal needs assessment identifies needs of students and the educational institution to promote student and educator success. Lemire et al. (2023) described evaluation approaches as the process of data collection used to assess a program, and two evaluators can find two different forms of data collection (quantitative or qualitative) valuable to assess the effectiveness of a program. Jayaratne et al. (2021) concluded that approaches to evaluation also consist of stakeholder consideration, input, and needs. While all program evaluation approaches consider the criteria itself

and criteria assessment, there are some differences with each approach.

In the objectives-based approach, objectives are at the forefront of the evaluation, and benchmarks are set that includes data collection and assessment of meeting benchmarks. Masini et al. (2020) explained that the benefits of the approach include its simplicity in understanding and implementation as well as keeping the evaluator focus on key characteristics of a program. Lemire et al. (2023) also stated that this process provides funders and reviewers with a step by step account of the program reflecting the goals, objectives, and outcomes. However, Masini et al. (2020) also explained that challenges included oversimplification of intricate details and the evaluator's cause to overlook program effects. Lemire et al. (2023) examined that the challenges with objectives-based approaches pertain to summative evaluation measures more than formative measures.

The decision-based approach focuses on questions about the data collected and the data collection process to meet the criteria. Lemire et al. (2023) explored this type of approach to a four-step model where program directors ask questions in each category of context, input, process, and product of a program. This approach also includes a combination of formative and summative measures. As Lemire et al. (2023) explained, this approach benefits from using a variety of data collection tools such as surveys, questionnaires, interviews, or analyses of records. This

approach's challenges include asking the questions that align with each of the four steps of this approach and continued follow-up and communication with the program evaluation committee for review.

In participatory approaches, the criteria are based on stakeholders' perspectives and their perceptions of the program's purpose. Lemire et al. (2023) described some of the benefits: stakeholders that benefit from the program to assess data about the factors that would improve a program and encourage them to use their voice to contribute to program evaluation. The challenges of participatory approaches include that if used as the primary approach, funding sources may question how the criteria are met (Lemire et al., 2023; Müller et al., 2020).

Overall, as Müller et al. (2020) stated, that continuous needs assessment is an effective way to engage stakeholders and understanding their perceptions about the educational setting. Needs assessments serve as a way to connect the school stakeholders to families and community stakeholders.

Educational Benefits of the Recommendations

Using the recommendations from this study will directly benefit not just African American and Hispanic students' academic achievement, but they will benefit all students' academic achievement by providing teachers with professional learning opportunities, parents and community partners with

resources to support student success and mastery, and create a stronger collective commitment among internal and external stakeholders. Furthermore, stakeholders will gain insight to how to close the gaps in practice to support ethnically diverse students.

Goals of the Project for Campus and Building Leaders:

- **Building teacher capacity to develop more teacher leaders**
- **Supporting further professional dialogue that is explicit to student voice and student data**
- **Providing culturally relevant supplemental resources**
- **Gaining stakeholder input about culturally relevant pedagogy and build strong community and family**

Summary

The recommendations from this white paper are based on research findings from a basic qualitative study. The recommendations are: (a) campus and district leaders creating an advisory board to increase school to family and school to community partnerships to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students, (b) campus and district stakeholders build teacher capacity to provide professional learning in culturally relevant pedagogy using TeachFX or other learning platforms, (c) campus and district leaders provide data-driven professional learning opportunities

focused on analyzing data, accessing diverse content area supplemental materials, and promoting student discourse, and (d) advisory board completing an annual needs assessment to provide continuous feedback to the advisory board to support the academic success of African American and Hispanic students. Stakeholders at this district need to know about this gap in practice, understand the recommendations, and develop an action plan based on the recommendations to create positive academic and social change. Ultimately, it is campus and district leader's responsibility to use these recommendations as a guide to

develop their action steps to implement change in supporting the academic success and mastery of African American and Hispanic students. The benefits of following these recommendations included closing the gap in reading achievement among African American and Hispanic students compared to their European American and Asian American peers, increasing data-driven professional learning opportunities among teachers, and creating a positive social change in the collaboration and partnerships between the school and families and the school and community.

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Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview Questions and Correlation to Conceptual Framework -Freire's Critical Pedagogy Theory

Interview questions	Freire's critical pedagogy theory
1. Describe your experience implementing instructional strategies in reading to support the academic achievement of African American and Hispanic students.	Freire critical pedagogy theory – exploring experiences of using attributes related to Freire
2. What types of achievement gaps have you noticed, if any among students of different ethnic backgrounds?	Exploring understanding and perceptions of participants and phenomenon
3. What specific strategies in reading do you use for African American and Hispanic students?	Freire critical pedagogy theory – exploring strategies to discern attributes related to Freire
4. What are your perceptions about how you use the following to engage African American and Hispanic students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with students(teachers and students) • Engage in discourse about real world concepts and connection to content • Use student voice and student choice around assignments and how they complete the work • Use pre-teaching to provide background information or vocabulary related to the lesson content 	Freire critical pedagogy theory – exploring strategies to discern attributes related to Freire (each attribute is related to the conceptual framework)
5. What are your perceptions about creating a sense of community in the classroom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What strategies do you use to create a sense of community in your classroom? 	Freire critical pedagogy theory – exploring strategies to discern attributes related to Freire (sense of belonging and sense of community)
6. What role do you think that the use of Culturally relevant resources and instruction play in supporting Reading achievement and success of African American and Hispanic students?	Freire critical pedagogy theory – exploring strategies to discern attributes related to Freire (connecting with student backgrounds, experiences)
7. What additional measures have you taken to ensure that all students have equitable access to reading supports in your class? Department? School? District?	Freire components of social and restorative justice
8. What instructional reading strategies and resources do you perceive are effective to support African American and Hispanic students in their academic reading achievement?	Freire critical pedagogy theory – exploring strategies to discern attributes related to Freire (each attribute is related to the conceptual framework)

Interview questions	Freire's critical pedagogy theory
<p>9. What other supports and resources are needed to support African American and Hispanic students?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you describe the ideal supports and resources, if you could ask district and state leaders for anything to support African American and Hispanic students? 	<p>Have you supplemented the curriculum to better support African American and Hispanic students?</p>
<p>10. What content or concepts do African American and Hispanic students have difficulty in connecting to or learning in the subject area of instruction?</p>	<p>Exploring understanding and perceptions of participants and phenomenon</p>
<p>11. What recommendations do you have related to supporting the achievement of African American and Hispanic students?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • resources/materials reading curriculum • teacher support • professional development 	<p>Understanding perceptions of needs to support gap in practice for African American and Hispanic students</p>
<p>Do you have any questions for me?</p>	

Appendix C: A Priori Codes Connected to Freire's Theory and Scholarly Definition

a Priori code	Scholarly definition
Collaboration	Students participating on their own learning outcomes to collaborate in discussions with peers and completing projects, while the teacher provides feedback and asks higher order questions (Giles & Yazan, 2023).
Real world connections	Teachers should focus on the classroom being differentiated to address diverse learners and support their connection to society (Henderson, 2023).
Culturally relevant	Teachers recognize the importance and positive impact to academic achievement of all students through culturally relevant practices in the classroom (Cegielski et al., 2023)
Student engagement	Whitney and Bergin (2018) found that there are various factors that contribute to student engagement and motivation, such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, and family support.
Discourse	Students have various motivating factors that promote their engagement in discourse within the classroom to further support their academic achievement and mastery (Decristan et al., 2023).
Preteaching/background knowledge	Smets and Struyven (2018) described how educational equity can be achieved by catering to the instructional needs of each student through making connections with previous lessons or units and building academic language skills.
Student choice/voice	Through conversation centers and collaboration with teachers and peers, students engage with text and rigorous conversation with other students (. et al., 2020).
Social justice/restorative practice/community building/allocation of resources	Jaber (2023) shares that texts with varied perspectives in society help students reflect on their own viewpoints and develop a consciousness of their voice and other viewpoints within the world.

Appendix D: Sample of Text Excerpts and a Priori Codes

Participant	Interview text excerpt	a Priori code
P1	We put students in groups based on their learning styles, but also based on how they scored on the test. That means our low-level students made high level collaborative groups so they can be in the collaboration pool to continue to communicate their learning processes.	Collaboration
P2	We've got to make sure that the materials, the textbooks, the things that we're talking about, represent their culture as well.	Culturally relevant
P3	One strategy would be using a round robin, the students each take a turn on, if after we have read something, each of them taking on and sharing, something that struck them in the reading and each student taking a turn and sharing. Also, each student gets an opportunity to speak and share maybe something that stuck out to them reading that maybe someone else didn't think of.	Discourse
P4	I have a way to make it, relevant to them, I'm going to do that but there are going to be times where you're like, I'm just going have to teach you the vocabulary that goes with this concept.	Pre-teaching/ background knowledge
P5	I think culturally relevant resources and real-world connections help when it came to reading because the point is, is to get them to read. Selecting what to read as is that can be motivating or demotivating.	Real world connections
P6	Asking those real-world probing questions is important, but in addition it's very important to have a sense of community through community building activities in the classroom.	Social justice/ restorative practice/ community building/ allocation of resources
P7	I would love to and I wish that we could do more field trips. Students can see what's taking place go to a company, maybe a pharmaceutical company, or somewhere where they're actually doing chemistry, and they can see these things taking place. Also, field trips and guest speakers could help them to, you know, their terms of career as well and see that that's a potential you know, so I would say field trips if we could do that. But it's so difficult to do that, you know, it's so difficult to plan those things and do those things in science due to various reasons.	Social justice/ restorative practice/ community building/ allocation of resources
P8	For student voice, there is plenty of room for student voice, but not as much for student voice. During COVID I forced them to engage with feedback that forced them to engage with their experiences with the content like that's just a norm. Everything was discourse driven in my class.	Student choice and voice
P9	Student voice and choice, I think is very, very important. I know in my classroom in terms of student voice and choice is that when we do various problems, I give them maybe three ways to maybe solve a problem to you and of course to get to a solution, but I also give my students the autonomy, the to express themselves in their ways.	Student choice and voice
P10	So, there are times where I may drop one past or personal experiences in order to do some pre teaching. There are times where I may give a reading or a text. In order for them to do that a pre read in order for them to build vocabulary. Sometimes it's even just to pull out or provide background information about something that we're getting ready to do to build their engagement. Other times I may ask a thought-provoking question. Which will get them intrigued and start to sometimes dig into or go research themselves or in the material.	Student engagement

Appendix E: Coding Table

Themes	Categories	Examples of codes
(1) Teachers use of culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated practices	Culturally relevant pedagogy and practice, Professional learning for teachers to develop instructional practices and selection of resources	Culturally relevant, culturally relevant practices, collaboration, academic success/ mastery, feedback, instructional strategies: culturally relevant instruction, social emotional,
(2) Teachers emphasize the need for opportunities for student engagement	Opportunity for student engagement in collaboration, discourse with teacher and peers, social and emotional development, social justice	Discourse, pre-teaching/ background knowledge, real world connections, student choice and voice, student engagement, academic success/ mastery classroom community cross curricular connection feedback, instructional strategies: grouping, instructional strategies: tools, scaffolding, social emotional, student needs
(3) Teachers need of support from district and campus stakeholders	Support from building and district administration in providing teachers with meaningful supplemental resources to promote equitable access, Professional learning and instructional support	Resources, administrative support, classroom community, feedback, instructional strategies: coaching, professional development: data analysis
(4) Teacher support needed in developing and promoting family and community partnerships	Promoting school and community partnership: school to home partnership and school to community partners	Classroom community, social justice/ restorative practice/ community building/ allocation of resources, cross curricular connection, family & community connection, feedback, instructional strategies: coaching, instructional strategies: culturally relevant instruction