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CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

The Impact of Belonging on Retention Rates of Teachers of Color in Suburban School Districts

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Scott Wild

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2024

The dissertation of Scott Wild is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

California State University, San Marcos

2024

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And to those who may stumble upon this dissertation. I hope you seek to challenge the systems in which you work so that all students may see themselves represented in their educational journey.

VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Impact of Belonging and Othering on Retention Rates of Teachers of Color in Suburban
School Districts

by

Scott Wild

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California San Diego, 2024
California State University, San Marcos, 2024

Professor Amanda Datnow, Chair

Teacher retention is a critical issue for the American education system and society as a
whole. Much research has focused on teacher recruitment, pathways to teacher credentialing,
and factors that support teacher retention, including positive organizational conditions and
administrative support. Teachers of Color make up a numerical minority in America's
classrooms despite student demographics shifting to an increasingly diverse composition.
Research supports the importance of Teachers of Color for students, both minority and non-

minority. Despite this understanding, numerous barriers exist for Teachers of Color in America's classrooms. Recent research has shown that increased attention to organizational conditions and how teachers experience their workplace influences their employment decisions.

Focusing on a suburban school district in Southern California, this mixed methods research study examines how Teachers of Color experience their workplace, and how experiences of belonging and othering influence their desire to stay or depart. Drawing upon Bronfenbrenner's (1999) Ecological Systems Theory, the study puts forth an original framework placing the Teacher of Color in the center of four contexts; self, school, district and community. Findings show that school context most influences belonging, that positive relationships with colleagues and administrators are positively associated with belonging, and that a teacher's individual purpose is central to this theme. District equity policies are also positively associated with belonging for Teachers of Color. The implications for administrators and educational leaders hold promise in fostering belonging and increasing retention for Teachers of Color in suburban school settings.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Retaining current teachers who staff America's classrooms is essential in providing quality learning opportunities for all students. In 2002, teachers made up 4% of the entire civilian workforce. By 2020, the number declined to 2.3%, with teachers ages 25-34 as the largest group departing the teaching profession (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Over the past two decades in California, the number of teaching candidates set to enter the profession declined by 50% (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Insufficient supplies of qualified teachers harm student learning opportunities and student achievement (Ladd & Sorensen, 2016; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). The shortage results from candidates not choosing to enter the profession and current teachers departing for reasons other than retirement (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Teacher retention must be addressed (Ingersoll, 2002). Teacher turnover or educator churn remains a significant factors that school districts must overcome (Ingersoll, 2003). Mitigating teacher turnover and increasing retention include positive working conditions, administrative support, and positive peer relations (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Boyd et al., 2011; Dixon, Griffin & Teoh, 2019; Goings et al., 2018; Ladd, 2011). Yet teachers continue to depart the profession, and recent social contexts compound the challenges associated with teacher retention (Zamaro et al., 2022).

Other challenges exist within the problem of teacher retention. Teacher demographics are not representative of the student demographics, with approximately 80% of public school teachers identifying as White (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019). While Teachers of Color[1] only represent twenty percent of the total teaching workforce, students of Color makeup fifty-three percent of all public school students (National Center for Education Statistics,

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[1] Teacher of Color is intentionally capitalized. See Key Terms for further explanation and context.

2019; National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). The discrepancy is heightened in suburban schools where Teachers of Color are less frequent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Within California, the data paint a similar picture. Sixty-three percent of the teaching workforce is White, yet only twenty-three percent of the student population is White (California Department of Education, 2022).

Nearly one-third of the public school districts in California are located in suburban communities, serving over one-third of the total student population (Reed, 2021). While 52% of students identify as Latino, 24% White, and 10% Asian, the teaching workforce is majority White, with only 20% of California teachers identifying as Latino (California Department of Education, 2022). Students of Color and White students alike benefit from Teachers of Color (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Thus, the need to retain Teachers of Color, particularly in suburban school districts is a concern that school districts and their leaders should actively address. In addition to the traditional challenges that all classroom teachers face, Teachers of Color identify numerous reasons for departure including racial battle fatigue (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020), bearing the costs of being a Teacher of Color (Dixon et al., 2019), and racialized school climates (Grooms et al., 2021). Too often, the burden for improving the school climate and addressing oppression systems rests squarely on the shoulders of Teachers of Color (Dixon et al., 2019). However, site and district administrators could take on these roles.

Greater diversity in the teaching profession positively impacts on all students' educational experiences and outcomes (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Students of Color demonstrate greater academic achievement and social-emotional development in classes with Teachers of Color (Carver-Thomas, 2018). White students also show similar benefits when taught by Teachers of Color (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Evidence consistently shows that students provide

more positive rankings of Black and Latino teachers compared to White teachers, even when controlling for student academic and demographic characteristics (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). This is particularly true for Black students' impressions of Black teachers, though the same parallel does not exist for Latino students and Latino teachers. Asian-American students also demonstrate favorable perceptions of Black teachers (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Teachers of Color are more directly able to leverage their experiences and identities to build rapport with students, particularly minority students. Described as cultural synchronicity, higher levels of multicultural awareness are linked to better classroom environments (Ingersoll, 2017). Academically, socially, and emotionally, the benefit of having a Black teacher for just one year in elementary school can persist over several years, especially for Black students from low-income families (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

Context of the Study

Within these challenges exists an opportunity to increase retention for Teachers of Color, particularly in suburban school districts. Research identifies that the perceptions that teachers have of the school administration have by far the greatest influence on teacher retention decisions (Boyd et al., 2011; Goings et al., 2018). Teachers feel more empowered and committed to their organization when administrators provide pathways for teachers to participate in shared decision-making (Ulrick, 2016). Building strong relationships with the people they interact with each day helps Teachers of Color feel safe, foster trust, and feel like they belong (Dixon et al., 2019). Belonging is a dynamic process that is constantly negotiated between people and groups, and is fundamental to achieving self-worth (Allen, 2020; Brewer, 1991; Gee, 2000; Maslow, 1954).

Future research considering how site administrators can work foster feelings of belonging through intentional management of workplace conditions may positively impact teacher retention rates in public school classrooms. Schools are ripely positioned to bring people together not only through civil discourse but also through intentional systems and culture building practices. It is my interest to see how Teachers of Color in suburban school districts experience belonging and othering and how this influences retention rates.

Statement of the Problem

Teacher retention is a critical issue for the American education system and society as a whole. America's labor force has a national teacher shortage, and the shortage impacts both student learning and teacher retention (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Dee, 2004; Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Multiple factors contribute to teacher shortages, teacher attrition, and teacher retention, including teacher-preparation and teacher-support programs, workplace and organizational conditions, and school administration (Boyd et al., 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2017; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Ladd, 2011). These factors hold particular influence on Teachers of Color, who continue to make up less than twenty percent of America's public school teachers (Bednar & Gicheva, 2019; Brill & McCartney, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

School administrators have a particular influence on organizational conditions through their interactions with teachers which impacts a teacher's decision to stay or depart the profession (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Ingersoll et al., 2017). Site leaders play critical roles in shaping school culture and organizational conditions. Recognizing that belonging is fundamental and essential, research is beginning to understand the importance that belonging holds on school culture (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Jose et al., 2012; Maslow, 1954). For

teachers, job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion affect feelings of belonging and play into teacher employment decisions (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Understanding the impact of belonging on teacher retention is not fully understood within academia, and research within this sphere holds promise.

Purpose of the Study

This study examines the experiences of Teachers of Color in one suburban school district located in Southern California near a major city center. The purpose is to better understand how they experience their school sites, the conditions that the schools and district create for Teachers of Color, and how experiences of belonging and othering influence employment decisions. The study seeks to offer insight into how the conditions, experiences, and school, district and community contexts inform a Teacher of Color's desire to stay or depart the suburban school district.

A suburban school district in California provides a unique setting to gather data and conduct research. A suburban school district is a territory outside of a principal city and in an urbanized area (Reed, 2021). In California, almost one-third of the 942 public school districts are considered suburban school districts. This comprises over 4,200 schools and serves over 2.6 million students with the dominant demographic being Latino at 52% (Reed, 2021). Tremendous student diversity exists across race, socio-economic status and academic readiness. Additionally, the geography across California adds to the diversity of a suburban school district. The notion of a "suburban school district" often paints a homogenous picture, however across California, they offer tremendous variety. In sum, suburban school districts are not monoliths. This study seeks to understand how Teachers of Color experience one southern California district and how belonging and othering inform their employment decisions.

This study considers two main areas. The first is teacher retention. Teachers experience many contexts throughout their employment that influence their employment decisions. Examining factors that influence both teacher retention and teacher attrition, the dissertation will identify these factors, review the literature, and discuss how teacher retention for Teachers of Color is specifically influenced. Systemic influences on research include the individual context (a Teacher of Color's own experiences), school context factors such as school leadership, professional interactions and working conditions, and district contexts such as district leadership, district policies and implementation of these through practice. Additionally, the study looks at external contexts, including local, state and national events that may amplify or diminish the intensity of the experiences that Teachers of Color describe. It is important to account for this because in the last decade, people of Color continue to be overt targets of racism, and the public school system remains an area of high focus by both citizens and politicians seeking to provide influence.

The second area centers on concepts of belonging. Though belonging has been studied in other academic and social areas, teacher belonging, particularly for Teachers of Color, is an area that is currently understudied. Within belonging, I will identify operational definitions for belonging and othering. I then provide existing research first on the concept of belonging, and then research within school belonging. I explore how belonging within the school setting is impacted by various contexts and factors including working conditions, relationships with colleagues and administrators, and how policies and practices influence how a Teacher of Color experiences belonging and othering within these settings. I will return to these concepts in Chapter 2. These concepts help frame the research and our understanding of how teachers experience their professional world.

Research Questions

Focusing on a suburban school district located near a major metropolitan center as a research site, I seek to understand how Teachers of Color experience their school and district and how concepts of belonging and othering influence teachers' employment decisions. The study is driven by a primary research question and three research sub-questions.

Overarching Research Question: What influences Teachers' of Color sense of belonging and their decision to remain or depart their school and district?

This overarching question seeks to explore influences that may include lived experiences, workplace interactions, relationships and conditions, school district policies, as well as community contexts, including local, state and national. To better understand the various elements of the primary research question, I include three sub-questions that intend to further recognize and understand the experiences of Teachers of Color.

SQ1: How do Teachers of Color experience belonging in a suburban school district?

SQ2: How does the site context influence Teachers of Color's employment decisions?

SQ3: How do district and community contexts influence Teachers of Color's employment decisions?

Through a mixed methods approach, the study provides insights through both quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for a rich understanding of the participants' perspectives. The study is guided by a conceptual framework that draws upon Bronfenbrenner's (1999) Ecological Systems Theory. The conceptual framework is modified to center Teachers of Color in the system while considering how school, district and community contexts influence their experiences and employment decisions. A detailed explanation is provided in Chapter 2.

My Interest in this Topic

My interest in teacher retention has evolved over time as a career educator and has been influenced by my own experiences, positive and otherwise. I began my teaching career at a high school in suburban Maryland in 2000, and at the time had to work three additional part-time jobs, soccer coach, bartender, and tutor, just to make ends meet. This drove my curiosity about teacher pay, and after my second year, I strongly considered departing the profession in search of more lucrative options. My interest in retention continued when I relocated to Southern California in 2002 and worked at a high school. *No Child Left Behind* drove national practices, and the principal fostered a culture and workplace environment that lacked connection and empathy. This mechanical approach, void of both my and the students' humanity, drove me from teaching temporarily. After earning my master's degree, I returned to the classroom. Curious as to how teachers experience schools, a formative event shaped me deeply in my early years as an administrator. During a staff meeting, a Teacher of Color shared their story of immigrating from another country as a young child, fleeing political persecution, and how they experience both our school site and America as a minority. They shared this because of a microaggression said during a previous staff meeting. The hurt that was caused stuck with me, and while I didn't know it at the time, it now compels me to better understand through research how Teachers of Color experience schools, and what I as a school leader can do to foster better working environments for all teachers, including Teachers of Color.

Significance of the Study

Research on school belonging for all teachers, particularly Teachers of Color, remains underdeveloped. Teacher belonging may be influenced by peer-to-peer interactions, representative curriculum, administrative support, and representative racial/cultural parity

between the staff, students, and community. By focusing on a suburban school district in a diverse region of Southern California, the study hopes to provide deeper insight into how Teachers of Color experience their places of employment, the conditions they encounter at both their school site and throughout the school district, and how these experiences influence their desire to stay or depart their current workplace. The conclusions drawn and themes that emerge may serve to better identify ways that school districts, school sites and school leaders foster belonging for Teachers of Color, how Teachers of Color experience othering, and what direct steps districts, sites and leaders can take in this process. This study may ultimately serve to influence school leaders' understanding of how to best support Teachers of Color, enhance teacher retention rates, and drive both policy and practice at the site and district levels.

Key Terms

Teachers of Color (TOC) - Teachers of Color share socio-political histories of marginalization by education institutions, structures, policies, and practices, as well as transformative pedagogical and resistant community-based practices, in which positioning them from a group standpoint when theorizing and conducting research affords more comprehensive and complex understandings of their experiences (Dilworth & Brown, 2008). The term Teachers of Color will be capitalized in my writing to acknowledge this collective history and give credence to more contemporary efforts to view group standpoints from a perspective of solidarity to create equitable and engaging educational opportunities (Carter Andrews et al., 2019).

Teacher - At times, the term teacher will be used synonymously with Teacher of Color throughout the dissertation. When used, it accounts for the definition above.

Suburban School District - Suburban districts[2] are generally located within a large metropolitan area but outside of a principal city (Reed, 2021).

Belonging - Belonging or being fully human means more than having access. Belonging entails being respected at a basic level that includes the right to both co-create and make demands upon society (Powell, 2021).

Othering - A set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities (Powell & Menendian, 2016).

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[2] For the purposes of this research, the term school and school district will only account for public schools. Private, charter, and online schools are not accounted for within this definition.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Several bodies of work help to inform this study. First, I review literature on the current teacher shortage and elements that influence teacher attrition. Next, I provide research specific to Teachers of Color, including systems and social factors. I include research on teacher retention for all teachers as well as Teachers of Color, noting the impact that administration and organizational conditions have in this process. Then, I establish research on concepts of belonging and othering, research within the field of education, and identify an opportunity for future research specific to suburban public school districts. Finally, I offer a conceptual framework that contextualizes the experiences that Teachers of Color have in a suburban school district and how these may then inform their employment decisions.

Teacher Shortage

Since 2002 in California, the supply of teaching candidates has declined by more than 50%, and there are shortages in curricular areas that mirror national trends. Shortages result from teachers leaving the profession, with two-thirds of the demand resulting from departure for reasons other than retirement (Carver-Thomas, 2018). With a demand of roughly 25,000 new hires across the state, California issued over 12,000 intern credentials, permits and waivers in lieu of teaching credentials to fill the need of the state's teaching supply problem (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018). The University of California and California State University systems provide roughly 60% of the state's new teachers annually. With a 70% decline in enrollment in teacher education programs, the number of teachers who complete those programs is equally low, resulting in fewer teacher candidates who are appropriately prepared to enter the workforce. The shortages are more acute in critical subject areas. In special education, two out of three teachers begin with inferior credentials, while about half of new mathematics and science

teachers enter under-prepared. These teachers often enter without field work or teaching

practicum experience (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018). The result is teachers entering the

profession are often ill-prepared. Therefore, a key indicator of the teacher shortage in California

is the frequency of issuing substandard credentials and permits, which are only to be issued when

fully credentialed teachers are not available to fulfill the position (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021).

Previous research confirms teachers operating on these permits are more likely to teach in

schools that serve low-income families and students of Color, and high turnover rates continually

occur as schools struggle to replace these teachers annually (Carver-Thomas & Darling-

Hammond, 2017).

　　　　School staffing problems occur for various reasons beyond a shortage of teacher

candidates. Departures from the teaching profession are more common, particularly in the

subject areas of special education, mathematics, and science. Age also influences decisions,

making departures more common among beginning teachers and veteran teachers (Cochran-

Smith et al., 2012). To address attrition concerns, the default response is to focus on increasing

supply. School systems are modifying professional requirements and lowering qualification

standards to fill vacancies which results in more underqualified teachers. The data shows that

the supply of teachers is not the only, nor primary, factor for staffing problems (Ingersoll, 2002).

Rather, staffing issues result from current teachers departing for other opportunities.

　　　　Teacher departures include both "movers" and "leavers", and the disruption in staffing

creates a "revolving door" effect that is problematic (Ingersoll, 2003). The "revolving door"

occurs when a relatively large workforce of teachers flows in, through and out of schools

(Ingersoll, 2002). Teachers migrating from one district to another does not impact overall

supply. Nonetheless, it is disruptive to school staffing. Migration accounts for the majority of

the teacher movement, more so than retirement and permanent departure. The degree to which the "revolving door" occurs varies greatly depending on school factors such as poverty rates, geography, and student demographics.

More recent analysis provides nuanced insight into the national teacher shortage. Teacher shortages result from increased student enrollment, lowering the pupil-to-teacher ratio, and teacher attrition. While enrollment in teacher education programs has declined from 2008 - 2014 by over 30%, this may be due to the national economic influence of the Great Recession of 2008, in which significant layoffs occurred (Podolsky et al., 2016; Sutcher et al., 2016). Additionally, disruptions due to temporary attrition occur when teachers depart the profession, only to return in later years. Therefore, recruitment efforts alone will not resolve staffing problems.

Teacher retention must also be addressed (Ingersoll, 2002). Neither the shortage of math and science teachers, nor minority teacher shortages are a result of insufficient production of new teachers. Rather, as noted above, these problems with staffing derive significantly from a "revolving door" in which teacher turnover occurs prior to retirement (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Challenging the idea that shortages are caused by an imbalance between supply and demand, many beginning teachers depart the profession due to dissatisfaction and the desire to seek different career paths. Better working conditions must be addressed to increase retention efforts (Ingersoll, 2003).

Attrition: Why Teachers Leave

Teacher attrition remains a significant problem in American education. Approximately 90% of the demand for new teachers results from teachers who depart the profession. Of this number, more than two-thirds of the demand is caused by teachers who leave for reasons other

than retirement. The departure creates and compounds teacher shortages that generally result due to voluntary pre-retirement attrition (Carver-Thomas, 2018). International school systems outperforming the United States, including Singapore, Finland, and Canada, maintain annual attrition rates between 3% and 4%. Should the United States reduce attrition by 50% to align with these successful nations, teacher shortages would all but vanish (Sutcher et al., 2016).

One meta-analysis from Borman and Dowling (2008) offers deep insights into the reasons for teacher attrition. Analyzing 34 studies of 63 attrition moderators, their study sheds light on two outcomes in the teaching profession: attrition and retention. The study examines factors including teacher demographic characteristics, teacher qualifications, school organizational characteristics, school resources, and school student body characteristics. Their research synthesis provides valuable insight into reasons why teacher attrition occurs. For example, teachers who are female, White, married, and have a child are more likely to depart the profession. Attrition is greater among teachers who do not have a graduate degree, and those with specialized degrees in science or mathematics. Attrition increases for teachers employed in urban settings, with schools serving communities of low socio-economic status, and schools that lack formal collaboration opportunities, teacher networks, and have little or no administrative support. Additionally, insights from the meta-analysis emerge including four significant themes: 1) attrition from the education profession is not considered "healthy attrition" due to turnover being higher than supply, 2) factors that influence attrition include personal and professional dimensions, and these are likely to change throughout a teacher's life and career path, 3) work conditions predict attrition, and 4) conditions including administrative support, salaries, and collaboration/networking opportunities are positively related to retention (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Teacher Movers

Teacher turnover occurs when a teacher leaves their current site and migrates to another school. *Teacher movers* are "those who move to different teaching jobs in other schools" while staying in the profession (Ingersoll, 2002, p. 18). While movers do not necessarily change the raw number of teachers in the profession, they create staffing challenges. As many as 90% of new hires nationally account for teacher movers, thus creating a "revolving door" in which teachers come and go from site to site or depart the profession temporarily. These departures occur for family or personal reasons, pursuing different work, and at times result from school staffing decisions and dissatisfaction with work. Dissatisfaction results from poor administrative support, problems with student discipline, and poor salary (Ingersoll, 2002).

Teacher Leavers

A more granular examination into influences of attrition further explains a teacher's decision to depart the profession. Location of teaching impacts teacher departure. Increased rates of teacher turnover occur in schools serving a higher proportion of students of low-income families and students of Color (Loeb et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2018). In California, poor working conditions and low salaries serve as predictors for teacher attrition and departure (Loeb et al., 2005). Rates have increased for "leavers" significantly in the past twenty years. In 1992, 5.1% of public school teachers left the teaching workforce. This rate jumped to 8.4% in 2005. This rate is significant representing approximately 90,000 teaching vacancies that need to be filled annually across the United States (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Recruiting and retaining teachers who commit to the profession remains a critical cause. While natural attrition for teachers occurs annually, and turnover in staff can serve to improve and enhance the total system, teacher retention remains a significant issue. Teachers are not only

departing the profession due to retirement. In fact, this remains a secondary reason for departure. Rather, upwards of 90% of the demand to hire new teachers is a result of teachers leaving the profession for reasons other than retirement (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

Why Teachers of Color Leave

Teachers of Color comprise a critical portion of America's teaching force. Just 20% of teachers are Teachers of Color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Yet 53% of America's students are minorities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). This discrepancy is significant. Educational research underscores the benefits that students have when taught by Teachers of Color. Student achievement models indicate that students taught by an own-race teacher significantly increase math and reading achievement for Black students (Dee, 2004). The benefit of having a Black teacher for just one year in elementary school can persist over several years, especially for Black students from low-income families (Carver-Thomas, 2018). After controlling for student demographics and academic characteristics, students have more positive ratings of Latino and Black teachers than White teachers. This is especially true for Black students who learn from Black teachers (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). While the teaching force is increasingly diverse, a numerical data gap persists with regard to minority student/teacher representation because the raw number of non-White students is increasing rapidly (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Yet shrinking the gap in asymmetry continues to be problematic, as fewer Teachers of Color apply to education undergraduate programs (Redding & Baker, 2019).

For Teachers of Color, departure rates are higher [19%] than that of their White peers [15%] (Carver-Thomas, 2018). One reason is *racial battle fatigue*. Smith (2009) defines this as the psychological, emotional, physiological, energy, and time-related cost of fighting against

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racism (p. 298). This occurs more frequently when Teachers of Color work in predominantly White spaces. Research notes that Teachers of Color experience microaggressions within educational settings (Endo, 2015). Within suburban school districts, this also occurs. Teachers of Color working in traditionally White spaces experience a number of negative social and emotional responses, including hypervigilance, self-censorship, hyper-visibility and hyper-invisibility, social withdrawal, and adopting dominant paradigms, practices, norms and roles expected for Teachers of Color. The psychological toll, coupled with the stressors of teaching that exist for all teachers, leads to increased departure rates (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). For Black men in particular, racial battle fatigue is amplified at historically White institutions. Climates that include mundane, extreme, environmental stress (MEES) contribute to feelings of racial battle fatigue (Smith et al., 2011). For Teachers of Color, racialized school climates and racialized experiences are associated with negative psychosocial outcomes in primarily White schools, further contributing to racial battle fatigue and potential attrition (Dixon, Griffin & Teoh, 2019).

A problematic assumption exists for Teachers of Color, particularly for Black men. Pabon (2016) notes that while Black male teachers account for less than 2% of the teaching workforce, they are often expected to serve as father figures for all Black male students. In addition to the other challenges all teachers face that result in teacher attrition, the added assumption that Black males are a monolith, and will support all minority students, particularly Black boys, creates unrealistic expectations and pressure. To simply recruit Black men to serve a role minimizes the complexity of their humanity and may deter more Black men from serving in America's classrooms (Pabon, 2016).

While recruitment efforts at the state and federal levels continue, simply widening the net to attract more teacher candidates will not be a unilateral solution to decrease attrition. Relying on policy that adds more candidates to the pool who are not qualified and ill-prepared to teach may further erode total working conditions and actually increase turnover (Ingersoll, 2003). Rather, initiatives and programs that seek to provide teachers with positive workplace experiences including workplace relationships, work conditions, training and support both through programs and leadership all assist in the reduction of teacher attrition, thus allowing teachers to more confidently meet the demands of serving as a classroom teacher (Brill & McCartney, 2008). If done intentionally, teacher retention rates may increase.

Social Influences of Teacher Attrition

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a fundamental shift in how educators attempted to teach, and is dramatically impacting teacher departures (Zamaro et al., 2022). Adding to an already stressful profession, the pandemic exacerbated teacher stress levels and increased teacher departures (Diliberti et al., 2021). Forced to shift to remote instruction, teachers went from a classroom inside of a physical classroom to teaching from a remote space, whether their living room, classroom or other space. This shift placed new and unique burdens on teachers including re-understanding instructional practices, learning new technology, and accounting for individual differences with students who may have exceptional needs (IEPs, MLL, 504, etc.). The pandemic shifted the teaching and learning experience from in-person to a virtual model. Steep learning curves and continual challenges that exacerbate already existing problems led to an increase in early teacher retirement (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021). In one recent study of seventeen California school districts across the state, interviews of superintendents and human resources administrators show teacher shortages remain at critical levels, high workload and

teacher burnout are major concerns, and retirements and departures further reduce teacher supply (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021). Urban and rural school districts alike suffer similar impacts (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021).

While anecdotal evidence is readily apparent about how the pandemic caused an increase in stress and anxiety for teachers, we also see indications that teachers who are getting their preliminary teaching credential in California are not clearing their credentials within five years (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2022). From 2016-17 to 2020-21, there was a 13% decline in teachers who cleared their credential as an upgrade from their preliminary credential. Additionally, California teachers who cleared their credentials as renewals declined 10.8% from 2018-19 to 2020-2021, a raw number of over 8,000 teachers (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2022). Teacher workload, teacher mental-health, and teacher burnout are also prominent themes of the COVID-19 pandemic (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021).

Retention: Influential Factors

A great deal of literature exists dedicated to understanding factors that support recruitment and retention (Borman & Dowling, 2008, Boyd et al., 2011, Carver-Thomas, 2018, Dixon et al., 2019, Ingersoll et al., 2017). While strides continue to both recruit and retain quality educators, some argue that the aim of a diverse and representative workforce may be less about recruitment and more about retention (Dixon et. al., 2019). The following section addresses research on factors that influence teacher retention.

Preparation Programs

The manner in which a teaching candidate enters the teaching profession influences their degree of retention. There are two ways in which a teacher may enter the profession: *Traditional Preparation Programs* (TPP) and *Alternative Certification Programs* (ACP). TPPs include

university-based experiences for undergraduate students in which an individual has coursework coupled with fieldwork prior to entering the profession. The fieldwork typically includes one or more student-teaching experiences with a supervisor. TPPs, while longer in duration, also come with a greater financial burden. Conversely, for-profit companies and non-profit organizations offer ACPs to prepare post-baccalaureate teaching candidates (Van Overschelde & Wiggins, 2020). The pathway chosen holds significant consequence on teacher retention. For new teachers, those who access Alternative Certification Programs depart the profession at higher rates than TPP trained teachers (Boyd et al., 2012). Recent studies show participation in TPPs by minority candidates decreased 5% while ACP participation increased 1%, a significant difference (Van Overschelde & Wiggins, 2020). Though ACPs offer financial advantages and often quicker pathways to licensure and the classroom, they may not fully prepare candidates for the various rigors of the classroom.

Field placement influences teacher retention. In his study of almost 3,000 New York City teachers, Ronfeldt (2012) finds the conditions in which a teacher candidate experiences the classroom influences retention. The study evaluates how field placement in "easier-to-staff" schools compares to "harder-to-staff" schools, and the impact this has on retention and student learning. The findings are significant. Teacher candidates show more effectiveness at raising student test scores and are more likely to retain employment in New York City schools after five years of teaching. Further, increased retention and student achievement still occurs when these teachers transition to "harder-to-staff" schools and work with underserved students (Ronfeldt, 2012). While support during teacher candidacy increases retention rates, support once employed results in positive outcomes as well.

Teacher education programs should consider creating environments and conditions where pre-service teachers feel welcome and valued (Bjorklund et al., 2020). Regardless of entry path, Teachers of Color report gaps in preparation programs (Kohli, 2019). Training programs, even those oriented toward social justice, fall short in preparing teacher candidates to navigate racially charged climates. This gap is amplified for Teachers of Color, leaving them at greater risk of departing the teaching profession (Kohli, 2019). However, a model to address healthy racial climates and prepare teacher candidates exists so that all candidates have time and space to wrestle with racial literacy and consider optimal conditions for racial literacy as they enter the workforce (Kohli et al., 2021).

Induction Programs

Beginning teachers may have opportunities to participate in induction programs intended to provide mentorship, guidance and support for new teachers. Induction programs are in place as school districts recognize the necessity to provide an environment in which new teachers may further learn the craft of teaching and increase their opportunities for success as professionals, thus increasing retention, preventing human capital loss, and more positively impacting student learning (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Empirical evidence supports the claim that formal systems of support via induction programs positively influence commitment and retention for new teachers (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011;Wong, 2004). Participation in induction programs by public school teachers has grown from 40% in 1990 to 80% in 2008.

Induction programs go beyond individual mentorship in that they provide a comprehensive system of support by creating connections between new and veteran teachers, offering structured learning communities and fostering systems of sustainability that enhance teacher retention (Wong, 2004). When participating in full induction programs, 82% of teachers

remained; with no induction or mentoring program, "movers" and "leavers" totaled 40%

(Ingersoll, 2003). However, potential pitfalls exist within these programs. If structured and

implemented poorly, mentoring and induction programs may lead to increased teacher attrition

(Brill & McCartney, 2008). Programs such as California's Induction Program, formally known

as the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (BTSA), may serve as an example

for other districts and states when seeking model induction programs that support retention.

Ultimately, induction programs foster connections between new and veteran educators by

creating a learning community through sustainable, structured, and intensive training programs.

This is likely to sustain teacher commitment, energy and desire to remain in the teaching

profession (Smethem, 2007). They allow new teachers to benefit from more experienced

colleagues, while also bringing new methods and strategies to support students to their

classrooms. This relationship can be mutually beneficial, thus valuing both participants'

contributions. Successful experiences are founded on mutual respect in which teachers'

contributions are valued and enhance belonging (Wong, 2004).

Organizational Conditions

Teachers often make employment decisions based on levels of compensation and the

quality of their work conditions. Ladd (2011) defines *working conditions* to "include a variety of

harder to measure components such as the quality of school leadership, opportunities for

development and quality of facilities" (p. 235). In an analysis of North Carolina teachers, Ladd's

research seeks to understand how a teacher's perceptions of their work conditions may predict

their desire to stay or leave. Additionally, the study seeks to understand the relationship between

working conditions and one-year actual departure rates. Working conditions include both

physical and organizational structures, and affective environmental features that are sociological,

political, psychological, and interpersonal in nature. Ladd (2011) found that a teacher's perception of working conditions is highly predictive of their intention to leave their current site. What is less clear is whether the teacher will actually take action and depart the school. However, most salient within the conclusions is that school leadership and the relationships within hold the most predictive power over intentions to depart (Ladd, 2011). Separate studies of California and New York teachers offer similar conclusions: teaching conditions, working conditions, including large class size, poor facilities, and lack of resources are the strongest predictors for teacher turnover (Loeb et al., 2005; Boyd et al., 2011).

While interactions with administration greatly influence retention decisions, they do not work in isolation. Recent research uncovers that additional factors contribute to career choices of teachers. Specifically, collegial support, that is the degree to which colleagues positively interact and partner with another, and positive school culture are both closely linked to teacher retention (Johnson et al., 2012). Johnson et al. (2012) defines school culture as "the extent to which the school environment is characterized by mutual trust, respect, openness, and commitment to student achievement" (p. 14). This includes student discipline, teacher-parent interactions, and the conditions that either contribute or detract from positive exchanges (Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Multiple in-school and out-of-school factors contribute to a teacher's desire to stay or depart. Kersaint et al. (2007) conducted a study analyzing what motivates teachers to make career moves. The study accounts for six factors that may contribute to the desire to stay or leave the teaching profession including *time with family, administrative support, financial benefits, family responsibility, paperwork,* and *joy of teaching*. For teachers who left the profession, family responsibility and time with family are of most significance. This includes the

need to care for family members such as children or the elderly, and the desire to spend more time with loved ones rather than at work. The financial benefits of quitting teaching in search of more lucrative work moderately impacts decision making on retention. The amount of paperwork is also of medium importance for all leavers and stayers. Though the joy of teaching offers low influence on teacher retention, administrative support moderately influences teacher retention, having greater sway over male leavers than female leavers, and African-American and White leavers than Latinx leavers. (Kersaint et al., 2007).

Impact of Administration

School administrators play significant roles in teachers' career decisions. One of the most important actions a school administrator at the school or district level can do to improve student achievement is to attract, retain, and support the continued learning of well-prepared and committed teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003). The perceptions that teachers have of the school administration has by far the greatest influence on teacher retention decisions (Boyd et al., 2011; Goings et al., 2018). Boyd et al. (2011) note that administrative support refers to the degree that principals and other school leaders improve their teaching practice and make work easier through help and support (p. 307).

Perception of administration is a greater influence than any other school working condition. When administrators provide pathways for shared decision-making to teachers, teachers report higher degrees of empowerment and organizational commitment (Ulrick, 2016). Sulit (2020) notes that when utilizing a distributive leadership framework, school administrators may positively impact teacher retention by considering degrees to which they offer support, teacher responsibility, work/family balance, teacher autonomy and shared decision-making.

School or district policy that lends guidance to administrators and teachers is needed to provide consistent levels of support for teachers to remain in classrooms (Sulit, 2020).

School administrators have multiple responsibilities including staff decisions, fostering positive school culture, running and maintaining school systems, being an instructional leader and establishing norms for various stakeholders (Carver-Thomas, 2018). How administrators execute these various duties contribute to teacher retention. To enhance retention at the site level, administrators should key in on cultivating collective voice. The organizational factors that hold the strongest impact on teacher retention are the levels of collective faculty decision-making influence at individual school sites, and the instructional autonomy levels teachers hold in their classrooms (Ingersoll et al., 2017). Schools that foster high levels of faculty decision-making demonstrate higher retention rates for both minority and nonminority teachers.

Because administrators heavily impact retention outcomes, they must also be skilled in working with diverse teachers. Cross (1989) offers seminal work on the cultural competence continuum, creating a framework to guide practice that previously does not exist. Cultural proficiency shifts one's paradigm from viewing cultural differences as problematic to learning how to interact effectively with other cultures (Lindsey et al., 2018). An administrator's ability to effectively work with diverse teachers has implications for retention. The relationship between administrative influence and retention proves to be very strong, showing the need for site-based leadership to foster voice and provide platforms and pathways for decision-making influence for all teachers, but particularly for Teachers of Color (Dixon et al., 2019). Through proper implementation, systems, including distributive leadership, will further enhance teacher retention rates (Ingersoll et al., 2019; Sulit, 2020). However, the opposite approach has dire

consequences. Poor school leadership increases teacher departures in the form of "movers" and "leavers" by more than fifty percent (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

Retaining Teachers of Color

Administrators can take numerous intentional steps to enhance teacher retention, particularly rates for teachers of Color. For Teachers of Color in predominantly White schools, systems of support are especially crucial. Dixon et al. (2019) outline multiple steps in the retention process including schools that affirm Teachers of Color, their identity and humanity. Additionally they note that principals who provide formal and informal pathways for Teachers of Color, mentorships and curricular autonomy also support retention rates (Dixon et al., 2019). Critical Professional Development (CPD) increases retention as teachers associated with like-minded individuals engage in critical analysis of racial elements of schools (Kohli, 2019). This increases what Kohli (2019) calls "racial literacies" and thus improves teacher retention. Bednar and Gicheva (2019) describe the impact that workplace support has for Teachers of Color, particularly in schools where they are the representative minority. Support from school administration is instrumental in maintaining retention, particularly at schools in which less than 10% of total teachers are Teachers of Color. Increased focus and support for beginning teachers strengthen the results. To increase supportive practices for minority teacher retention, school districts should appoint administrators with track records of providing workplace support, thus increasing diversity through proactive retention practices (Bednar & Gicheva, 2019). However, this may not be enough. Merely focusing on retaining Teachers of Color, though important, can also serve as a distraction to the larger issue of "unsupportive contexts," or institutionalized racism, that get reinforced and reproduced through school systems (Grooms et al., 2021). To

address unsupportive contexts for Teachers of Color in education, we turn to the concept of belonging.

Belonging

An individual and their sense-of-self is fundamental to developing and maintaining their identity (Brewer, 1991; Gee, 2000). Central to this is belonging. In his description of human needs, Maslow (1954) identifies belonging as an essential component to achieving self-worth. A sense of belonging is pervasive, compelling and something individuals continue to seek, find and maintain. To obtain this need requires two conditions: interactions that are frequent and pleasant, and occur in a framework or setting in which both parties demonstrate care for the other's welfare (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Baumeister and Leary provide the belonging hypothesis, noting interactions that are more stable, positive, and consistent will be more satisfactory. Belonging also correlates to increased meaningfulness in one's life (Lambert et al., 2013). Powell and Menendian (2016) describe belonging as the "unwavering commitment to not simply tolerating and respecting difference but to ensuring that all people are welcome and feel that they belong in the society" (p. 32). Belonging is not static but rather a dynamic process negotiated between groups and individuals (Allen, 2020). Belonging is more than care, connection or having access to various settings. Rather, belonging includes respect at a fundamental level that includes the rights of all parties to co-create and make demands upon others, society and political institutions (Othering & Belonging Institute, 2019). The process of co-creation embraces the notion that newcomers are welcome in the process of culture building (Powell, 2021). To recognize the significance the concept of belonging holds in the human psyche, Baumeister and Leary (1995) note, "The desire for interpersonal attachment may well be

one of the most far-reaching and integrative constructs currently available to understand human nature" (p. 522).

School Belonging

Within the school environment, school belonging is "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school social environment" (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Additional definitions frequently include three operational qualities including a) school-based relationships and experiences, b) student-teacher relationships, and c) individual's general feelings about the school experience in total (Allen et al., 2018). High levels of belonging at work positively correlate to work engagement, feeling valued, and feeling like their work matters (McClure & Brown, 2008; Waller, 2020). School belonging has been associated with increased levels of happiness, school functioning, self-esteem and other positive characteristics (Jose et al., 2012; Law et al., 2013; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009; O'Rourke & Cooper, 2010). Though previous research provides insight into understanding levels of school belonging and the influencing factors, until recently the focus has been mainly on students rather than adults. In one study, research found that teachers who desire to belong work to make their identities fit, and as time progresses, their colleagues will be more accepting (Bjorklund, 2021). Future research may consider correlatives for student belonging, some which may offer insight into levels of teacher belonging.

Insights on school belonging for students may offer guidance to fostering adult belonging in school settings. In a meta-analysis across fifty-one studies that includes over 67,000 participants, Allen et al. (2018) examined factors that impact school belonging. School belonging occurs at various levels, including the individual, the microsystem (peers, family, colleagues), mesosystem (school's social and organizational culture), and macrosystem (school

policy, norms, and cultural values). Ten themes that influence student school belonging emerge including *parent support*, *peer support*, *teacher support*, *academic motivation*, *emotional stability*, *personal characteristics*, *gender & race*, *ethnicity*, *extracurricular activity involvement*, and *environmental/school safety variables*. While most all factors correlate to school belonging, the most strongly associated with belonging are individual factors including self-esteem and optimism, and micro-level factors, including peer and adult support. Building an individual's self-esteem, creating deeper senses of community, and fostering meaningful relationships across stakeholders are critical to increasing student levels of belonging (Allen et al., 2018). While the research focuses solely on students, recognizing that the need for belonging is universal may offer parallel insights into adults.

While the need for belonging is fundamental to humanity, the ability to create belonging is not innate to all individuals. Understanding how to relate to one's workplace and the people with whom an individual interacts continues to evolve, and people need help to learn these skills and contexts. This sense of belonging that emerges is what we take with us, and what others take with them as a result of the interactions (McClure & Brown, 2008). Therefore, the skills of creating positive degrees of belonging in individuals and workplaces can be learned, cultivated and nurtured through intentional practice.

Degrees of belonging directly impacts one's self-esteem (Maslow, 1954). This concept is true for teachers. Support from a teacher's supervisor and positive relations with workplace peers are both positive predictors of teacher belonging (Allen et al., 2018). While belonging may foster positive feelings in an individual, limited degrees of belonging may have the opposite outcome. Emotional exhaustion, negative job satisfaction, and desire to leave the profession all positively correlate with low levels of belonging (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). When individual

belonging levels are low or a person is viewed negatively by peers and colleagues, social anxiety may develop leading to greater rates of withdrawal and isolation (Poston, 2009). Feelings of isolation are more challenging for new teachers who are often placed in "sink or swim" and "trial by fire" situations upon entering the profession with limited resources and connection upon which they may draw for support (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). International research conducted by Lam and Lau (2012) including 532 school teachers across eighteen schools finds both citizenship behavior and performance of role/duties decreases as loneliness increases. Teachers show signs of avoidance and feelings of neglect when experiencing prolonged levels of loneliness at work (Lam & Lau, 2012). Further, low levels of belonging are strongly correlated with symptoms of depression (Cockshaw et al., 2014).

Schools are often directly led by one or more school administrators. Thus, the direct influence an administrator may have on levels of teacher belonging is tremendously high (Urick, 2016). Implications for school administrators are clear; peer-to-peer and team level support structures that foster social connection are needed to alleviate loneliness and increase levels of belonging (Lam & Lau, 2012). School administrators should pay close attention to degrees of job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, and feelings of belonging in their teaching staff (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

Focus on teacher belonging holds influence over student experience and academic learning as well. With the passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that replaces the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), policy demands that practice place greater focus on student belonging rather than assessment and accountability measures. With this change, the concept that school climate directly influences on a child's social, academic, and emotional growth experiences continues to emerge. The manner in which school adults work together profoundly

influence how students make sense of their school experience (Walls et al., 2019). The adult relationships within the school setting serve as important forces of student academic success, social/emotional learning, and feelings of support (Walls et al., 2019).

Othering

While belonging provides the conditions for an individual to co-create within a culture, *othering* fosters a different set of dynamics and outcomes. Powell and Menendian (2016) provide the term *othering*, defined as "a set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities" (p. 17). This process denies an individual their full humanity based on them being less than, or threatening the favorite group (Othering & Belonging Institute, 2019). Within the process of othering, a set of common conditions and processes cultivate both group-based inequality and marginality, potentially resulting in segregation, oppression, and even assimilation - all results that dehumanize (Powell & Menendian, 2016).

Research on othering exists within non-education fields including philosophy and the self (Brons, 2015), nursing and health care (Canales, 2000; Johnson et al., 2004), and intercultural communication (Dervin, 2012). Within education, research on othering includes anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2000), online learning (Phirangee & Malec, 2020), teachers' use of language (Nilsen et al., 2017), and student identity and sexuality in education (Epstein et al., 2000). While not a comprehensive list, research about how othering exists within educational systems and experiences exists. However, research on belonging and othering specifically related to the experiences of Teachers of Color remains underdeveloped.

Opportunity for Future Research

        This review examined studies related to teacher retention, retention rates for Teachers of Color, the influence of social contexts on employment decisions, and the concepts of belonging and othering. Retaining Teachers of Color, while important, will not change the dynamics ingrained within the entire education system (Grooms et al. 2021). Little is known about how belonging informs teachers' employment decisions. This study seeks to build upon existing research and understand how Teachers of Color experience belonging in suburban school districts. The gap in the current existing research allows this study the opportunity to consider the topics and understand how belonging may inform employment decisions for Teachers of Color working in suburban school district settings. Teacher turnover, or educator churn (Ingersoll, 2003), remains a significant factor that districts must overcome. Teachers of Color face additional obstacles than their White peers, making departure rates higher (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Within this recognition is the understanding that the climate in which educators operate influences their desire to stay or depart. Too often, the burden of improving the school climate and addressing oppression systems rests squarely on the shoulders of Teachers of Color (Dixon et al., 2019). Educational leaders at both the site and district levels should take steps to improve systems and practice to alleviate this burden. A resource for educational leaders in their support of Teachers of Color exists in the original conceptual framework put forth in the next section.

Conceptual Framework

        Drawing upon Bronfenbrenner's (1999) Ecological Systems Theory, a framework that allows one to examine how an individual exists and interacts with various systems, I put forth an original conceptual framework for studying the experiences of Teachers of Color. Bronfenbrenner's framework looks at four systems including the micro-, meso-, exo- and

macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). Bronfenbrenner's (1999) theory places the child in the center and how these systems impact development. Similarly, the framework to be used in this study identifies four contexts that may influence the Teacher of Color. They include the individual context, school context, district context and community context(s). Individual contexts include any past and current lived experiences that have shaped their perspectives, including microaggressions, cultural assets and individual beliefs. School contexts include daily interactions with work colleagues, administration and students while at school. School contexts may also include working conditions, curriculum, levels of autonomy, and both formal and informal leadership opportunities. District contexts seek to describe interactions with district personnel, and the conditions that the suburban school district creates through policy and practice. This may include district policies, administrative regulations, hiring and retention efforts, and focus (or lack thereof) on diversity, equity and inclusion. Community contexts may include local community influences such as community actions related to the school or school district, local current events, and interactions with or around the school district and school board. Further, community contexts may expand as wide as state and national events, both current and past. The framework then draws upon scholarly work on belonging and othering to consider how these contexts influence a Teacher of Color's experiences with belonging and othering. The graphic below provides further understanding.
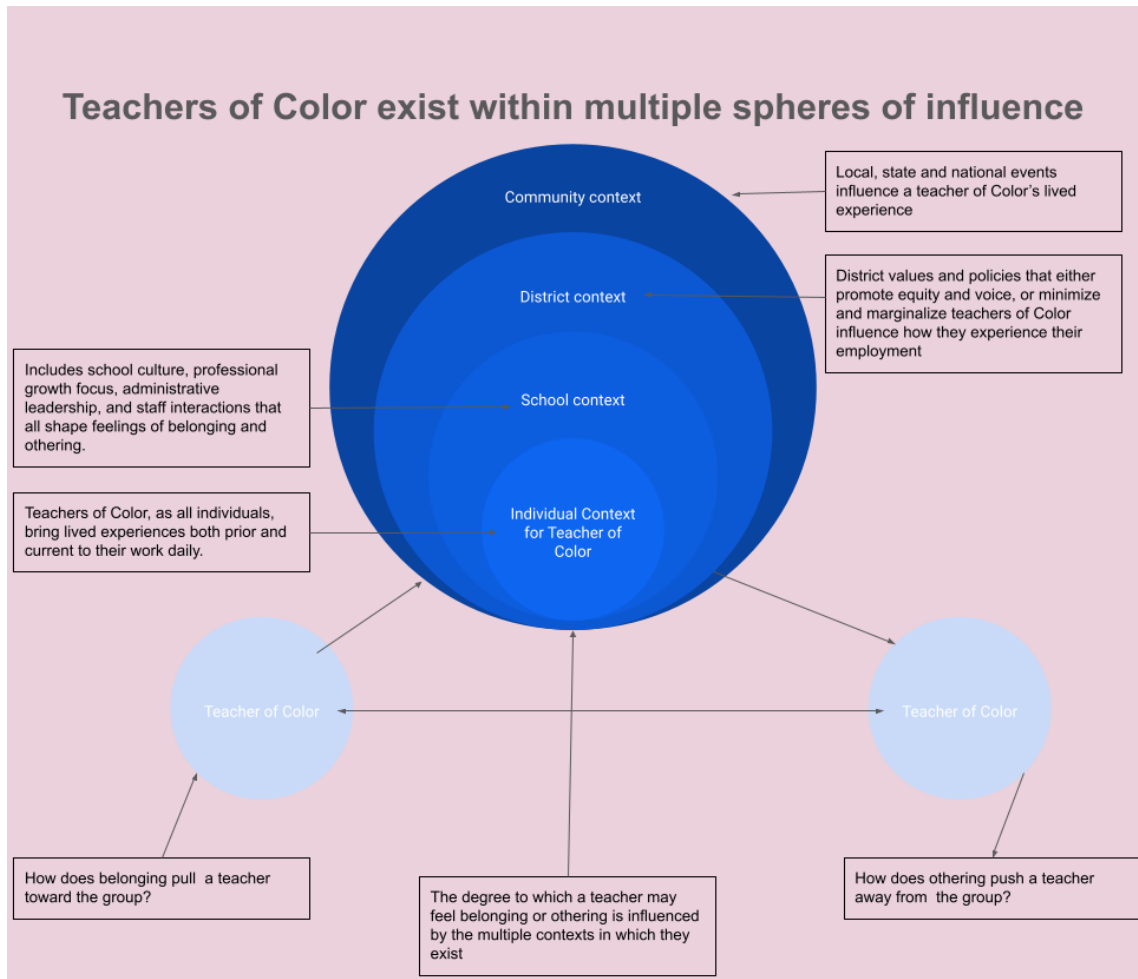
Figure 1

Four Contexts for Teachers of Color in Suburban School Settings

Given the current climate of both public education and the United States of America, it is evident that retaining high quality teachers should be a primary focus for school and district leaders in America's public schools and public school districts. Capturing research that seeks to understand individual Teachers of Color's experiences, as well as the factors that influence their decisions, may then inform site administrators and district leadership who operate and co-exist in these spaces. The conclusions may provide a framework to inform educational leaders' actions, decisions and policies.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Review of the Study Purpose

This study sought to better understand the Teachers of Color and their workplace experiences, how these experiences amplified or minimized feelings of belonging and othering, and how this influenced their decision to stay or depart. Further, the study sought to examine how school and system contexts influenced teacher retention and feelings of belonging. To do so, the study was driven by one overarching question and three sub-questions. A mixed-methods approach was used, utilizing a survey, artifact analysis and semi-structured interviews to gather data in a suburban school system.

To recap, the research questions included:

RQ: What influences Teachers' of Color sense of belonging and their decision to remain or depart their school and district?

> **SQ1:** How do Teachers of Color experience belonging in a suburban school district?
>
> **SQ2:** How does the site context influence Teachers of Color's employment decisions?
>
> **SQ3:** How do district and community contexts influence Teachers of Color's employment decisions?

The first research question sought to understand what a Teacher of Color experiences at their school each day. This included interactions in the classroom and other school settings with both staff and students. The second question sought to understand the conditions that the site and district create. Rather than focusing on the individual Teacher of Color, this question hoped to better understand how the settings in which Teachers of Color are asked to work informed their employment decisions. Finally, the third question hoped to recognize district contexts as

well as those outside of the school district's locus of control, specifically community and social contexts, and to what degree they informed a Teacher of Color's employment decisions.

Research Design

This study involved a mixed-methods, exploratory design including both quantitative and qualitative measures. Quantitative methods include statistical methods and "are especially useful for looking at relationships and patterns, and expressing these patterns with numbers" (Rudestam & Newton, 2015, p. 31). Specifically, "descriptive statistics describe these patterns of behavior" (p. 31), and this study leveraged descriptive statistics for this purpose (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The quantitative measure included a survey instrument (Appendix A) that participants completed online. The survey was adapted from existing surveys on belonging including the *Psychological Sense of School Membership* scale (PSSM) (Ye & Wallace, 2014). An earlier version of the survey instrument was piloted eighteen months ago with approximately 60 participants. This allowed for direct feedback and the opportunity to assess the validity and reliability of the research instrument.

Qualitative research offers many strengths including "understanding the meaning, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, experiences, and actions they are involved with or engaged in" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 30). In choosing to understand how Teachers of Color experienced their school sites and what meaning this created, qualitative methods aided in this discovery. Further, qualitative methods helped "understand the particular contexts within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 30). This approach helped to understand how belonging or othering influenced a teacher's actions, particularly their desire to stay or depart the school site. The qualitative measure included semi-structured interviews (Appendix C) with teachers and a review of district

documents pertaining to teacher retention including a review of the school district website,

school board policies and resolutions, recently added courses of study, and individual school

websites.

Site and Sampling

Located outside of a major urban center in southern California, this study focused on

Teachers of Color in a unified public school district serving kindergarten through twelfth grade

and serves many schools across the district. This study involved two elementary schools, two

middle schools and two high schools as research locations. The elementary schools are language

immersion schools and provide a larger pool of Teachers of Color in comparison to other

elementary schools in the district. The middle and high schools were selected based on size,

geography, and staff diversity. The school district is naturally bisected by a major freeway, and

offers local differences based on geographic location. As such, the sites selected include three

schools on either side of this natural divide. The intention was to offer maximum variability

across the district and samplings that are representative of the entire district. The six schools

selected comprise over 300 teachers. Table 1 offers further details:

Table 1

Demographic Information of Six Research Sites

Name of school	Type	Number of teachers	Number of students	Student ethnicity
Eastside ES	Elementary	~26	~676	60% Latino 23% White 9% Two or More 3% Asian 2% Black 2% Filipino
Westside ES	Elementary	~24	~475	36% Asian 30% White 13% Two or More 11% Latino 7% Filipino 1% Black
Eastside MS	Middle (6-8)	~54	~1164	41% White 20% Latino 17% Asian 13% Two or More 7% Filipino 2% Black
Westside MS	Middle (6-8)	~51	~1175	38% White 20% Asian 20% Latino 13% Two or More 8% Filipino 1% Black
Eastside HS	High School (9-12)	~83	~1788	45% White 18% Latino 17% Asian 11% Two or More 6% Filipino 2% Black
Westside HS	High School (9-12)	~86	~2400	39% White 20% Latino 14% Asian 12% Two or More 10% Filipino 4% Black

Through purposeful sampling, Teachers of Color at each of the six school sites had the

opportunity to complete the survey. At the end of the survey, participants indicated their

willingness to participate in the interview portion of the research study. I then examined the data

to identify the number of Teachers of Color indicating willingness for further participation.

From this subset, I selected one to two participants from each of the six school sites to participate

in the interview portion of the study. In selecting the teachers, many factors were considered

including racial and ethnic parity, years of experience, years at the school site, and participant

availability.

Data Collection

Data collection included three phases outlined below.

- ○ **Phase 1**: Quantitative survey administered to teachers at elementary, middle and high schools
- ○ **Phase 2**: Individual semi-structured interviews with ten Teachers of Color
- ○ **Phase 3**: Analysis of district policies, websites, and other relevant documents that were publicly available

The first phase of research used a survey developed from multiple pre-existing surveys,

including the Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) scale (Ye & Wallace, 2014).

The instrument is attached as Appendix B to the dissertation. Within the survey instrument, the

descriptive measures contained information about race, ethnicity, gender, years teaching in the

district and overall. Additional questions examined the experiences that Teachers of Color have

at their site, resources of support, and attitudes toward colleagues, administration, and the

district. Using Qualtrics as the survey platform, multiple rounds of emails were sent to teachers

at each site. The email described the purpose of the study, a request for their participation and an

accompanying hyperlink inviting them to complete the survey. The survey was anonymous, but

did include a request for further participation, allowing the researcher to follow up with

individuals who wanted to participate in the semi-structured interview. Participants indicated

whether they were willing to participate in the interview phase of the study. Twenty-one survey

respondents expressed interest in interview participation, and from this, ten individual interviews

occurred.

Phase two included semi-structured interviews with ten Teachers of Color. Prior to

conducting the interviews, the protocol was first piloted on two Teachers of Color not affiliated

with the study to determine efficacy. This occurred four months before the implementation of

the study. Selection of interview participants was done to achieve parity across school location

and level (elementary, middle and high), and racial/ethnic parity was also considered. Interviews

with the ten study participants lasted approximately sixty minutes. Nine interviews were

conducted using the digital interface Zoom, while one interview was conducted in person. All

interviews were recorded using Zoom or a handheld recorder. The interview questions offered

participants an opportunity to further share about their experiences within the school district,

specifically about feelings of belonging, moments of othering, and how these experiences shape

their desire to stay at the school or depart. The interview protocol is included in Appendix C.

After completing each interview, I wrote field notes capturing thoughts about the interview and

the participant.

The third phase of research focused on gathering and analyzing district documents, data,

policies and initiatives that may influence teacher retention and belonging. This includes

documents available on the school district's website, including board policies and resolutions,

administrative regulations, and content focused on diversity, equity, inclusion, and/or belonging.

The district website indicates that in recent years, the district school board passed a resolution on

equity, added courses for high school students in the areas of ethnic studies and ethnic literature,

and currently dedicates an entire section of the district website to diversity, equity and inclusion. The superintendent of the school district also provided a dedicated statement that takes a stance on anti-racism. These policy shifts signal more supportive working conditions for Teachers of Color, and the research tried to better understand their impact. To further explain the methodological choices of the entire research study, the table below explains how the selected data collection methods informed each research question.

Table 2

Research Questions Aligned to Data Collection Methods

Data Collection	Sub Question 1	Sub Question 2	Sub Question 3
Survey	X	X	X
Interviews	X	X	X
Website and Document Analysis		X	X

Data Analysis

Surveys. The survey data was collected through Qualtrics ^{XM}, an online survey platform. The total number of teachers across the six school sites is 324, although the total number of Teachers of Color across the six school sites was unavailable. Thirty teachers began the survey and twenty-nine successfully completed it. Response rates differed across the school sites. Forty-five percent of the respondents were high school teachers, twenty-four percent were middle school teachers, and thirty-one percent were elementary school teachers. Survey data was downloaded and then moved into SPSS statistical software to be cleaned and analyzed.

Once the data was cleaned, frequency tables, descriptives and correlation tables were created. Frequency tables were created for nominal variables Q1-Q3, Q9_1 to Q9_6, Q21_1 to Q21_6 and Q22_1 to Q22_6. No descriptives were created because nominal variables do not require this. Frequency tables were created for all ordinal variables including Q4-Q8, Q10-Q31 and Q24_rev, Q26_rev-Q28_rev and Q30_rev. Descriptive statistics were created including mean, median, standard deviation and Quartile1 and Quartile3 (25th and 75th percentiles). Frequency tables were created for scale variables (the "count" variables for Q9, Q21 and Q22) showing how many people selected 0...6 of the Q9, Q21 and Q22 items. Correlation tables were created for all variables Q9_X, Q21_X, Q22_X, Q10-Q20, Ques23, Q24_Rev, Ques25, Q26_Rev, Q27_Rev, Q28_Rev, Ques29, Q30_Rev, Ques31. Because Exploratory Factor Analysis works on the logic of linear relationships, it was determined to treat the Likert items as scale (continuous) thus the table uses Pearson r as the correlation. A separate correlation table was created for only Q9, Q21 and Q22 nominal (0/1) items to use the phi coefficient as the measure of correlation. This was mainly done as a precursor to the Exploratory Factor Analysis. The EXAMINE procedure was done on all Likert items to examine their distributional properties. This was for purposes of the Exploratory Factor Analysis in case it mattered, however the Exploratory Factor Analysis was ultimately not possible. A final correlation table with only the Likert items (using the reverse items when appropriate) was created. The output was saved as SPSS and Excel. The data set was unchanged so no new data were created.

Factor analysis, a data reduction technique, was attempted as it summarizes underlying patterns of correlation in the data and groups closely related items (Pallant, 2020). Specifically, exploratory factor analysis allowed for the exploration of interrelationships among the variables, in this case ethnicity, belonging, and employment decisions (Pallant, 2020). However, prior to

running an EFA (Exploratory Factor Analysis) the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was computed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of sampling adequacy is a "need to know" explanation as this tests both individual variables and the set of variables as a whole for whether a factor analysis is even applicable. Values below .6 are considered "miserable" (term by Kaiser). Values .6-.7 "mediocre", .7 to .79 "middling", .8 and above are "meritorious" and better. The measure was 0.52 with only six items measuring above 0.6 and only two items of those six above 0.7. Since this and sample size of $N = 29$ it was determined an Exploratory Factor Analysis was not interpretable. Thus, frequency tables and a correlation matrix were most suitable to interpret the data.

Interview Data. All interviews were downloaded from Zoom and saved as both audio and video files to my password-protected laptop. Each recording was then uploaded to Descript editing software for transcription and scrubbed to eliminate filler words such as "um". I printed each transcript and read them individually to absorb the content and build an understanding of the participant's experience. After the third interview, I began to see trends and patterns and developed a code sheet. The goal of coding is to break and rearrange the data into categories to make new comparisons and develop new concepts (Maxwell, 2013). I reviewed the transcripts and recordings using open coding, analyzing them for emerging (emic) themes from the participants' experiences. Each code was identified by a word such as *belonging* or *relationships*, and I created a definition for each code. As I began coding the first two to three transcripts by hand, I noticed that parent codes such as relationships needed child codes that were more specific. This resulted in individual child codes specific to interactions and relationships that each participant had with various stakeholders, and included both positive and negative codes. I developed a code sheet that included forty-four unique codes with definitions in a

digital code book, then applied them to the relevant segments in each interview. This allowed me to identify trends or themes in the participants' lived experiences. During the hand-coding process, a forty-fifth code emerged. This will be discussed at length in Chapter Four. All codes and definitions can be found in Appendix E. Subsequently, all ten interviews were hand-coded with me highlighting significant quotes and labeling them with a number from 1-45 that matched the codes on the code sheet.

In providing a more efficient and effective way to code and interact with the data, each transcription was moved to MAXQDA, and all transcripts were re-coded on that platform, checking each code for accuracy and ensuring that all content within the transcript was captured properly. MAXQDA then allowed me to identify which codes emerged most from individual transcripts as well as from all ten interviews. Looking at code frequency data, MAXDQA showed me which codes emerged for each individual and across the ten interviews. Additionally, I identified the least frequent codes which also provided rich data. I created an Excel database of significant quotes for each code within the most frequent codes. In sum, this array of quotations for all participants allowed me to easily see themes in how each participant experiences their school setting as a Teacher of Color. Member checking occurs when a researcher "systematically solicits feedback about your data and conclusions from the people you are studying" (Maxwell, 2013, p.126). On occasion, I used this strategy to check for accuracy and ensure that the participants believe their experiences are accurately captured in the coding of the data.

To better understand the degree to which the four contexts from the conceptual framework impact a Teacher of Color, the forty-five codes were organized into each context

based on their definition[3]. The most emergent codes from qualitative data are below. A

comprehensive list of codes and definitions can be found in the Appendices.

Table 3

Most Frequent Codes in Each Context

Individual	School	District	Community
Purpose (58)	Positive staff interactions & relationships (70)	Ineffective district policies (20)	Negative community interactions & relationships (9)
Background (33)	Othering (47)	Effective district policies (9)	Positive community interactions & Relationships (8)
Racial identity (29)	School Involvement (42)	District support (7)	
Leaving district (12)	Positive administration interactions & relationships (36)	Negative district interactions & relationships (7)	
Desire to stay (4)	Belonging (30)	Positive district interactions & relationships (5)	
Leaving school (3)	Positive student Interactions & Relationships (29) Representation (25) Negative administration interactions & relationships (25)		

   Documents. A school district website serves as a digital information hub that provides

families and the public with various sources of information germane to the district. Conscious

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[3] Definitions of each code can be found in the appendix.

choices occur by the developers of the webpage to place certain information in a more forward position. In examining the school district website, I was able to find and examine district content describing policies and initiatives that may influence a Teacher of Color's work experience and feelings of belonging. The documents were examined for emergent patterns and relationships.

Ethical Considerations

Before, while, and after collecting any data, I took earnest steps to protect the research participants. Prior to beginning research, the study was approved by UCSD's Institutional Review Board who then provided permission to conduct research.   The school district provided permission to conduct the research. All teacher participation throughout the study was completely voluntary, and participation required a completed consent form (Appendix A). Participants were reminded during both phases of the study that they may stop at any time if they wish.

Confidentiality ensures that other than the researcher, no one knows the identity of the participants in the study (Kaiser, 2012). Informed consent occurred for both the survey and interview phases. Informed consent is the researcher's obligation to the research participants to provide detailed information on the purpose of the study (Gubrium et al., 2012). The consent forms (Appendix A) included assurances to the study's participants that confidentiality will be maintained (Kaiser, 2012). After the survey, only the researcher had access to the database, and access only occurred via password protected website and a password protected laptop device. For the interview phase, all transcripts, fieldnotes and codebooks were securely locked and stored on password-protected devices that were only available to me.

Positionality

I am a White male who has served in public education as a teacher and administrator for two decades. As such, I have not had the same perspectives and experiences as Teachers of Color. I grew up in an area of the Northeastern United States that was predominantly White, in a family and community that permitted racist comments and contextualized them as "just jokes" or "only kidding." I began to see this as morally wrong while in junior high school, and this shift put me on a path to change. I chose a career in public education, and for the past twenty years, have served as a classroom teacher, school administrator, and educational program facilitator. My work allowed me to teach in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and California at both the middle and high school levels. Additionally, I have facilitated educational programs across the United States and internationally. I intentionally sought opportunities to learn about other cultures and now as a professional, advocate for justice. Though they have grown my perspective and understanding, my lived experiences are limited to that of a White male. Despite my efforts to research, listen, and better comprehend how Teachers of Color experience our educational systems and structures, I will never truly understand. That subjectivity may appear in my research and writing despite my best efforts to be cognizant of this potential bias.

I also recognize that as a White male who serves in the professional position as a school principal, I have the opportunity to facilitate change at a local site level. This recognition combined with the belief that the American education system was fundamentally created for and by wealthy, White males creates a strong desire to positively disrupt systems that continue to marginalize and "other" Teachers of Color. To that end, I may offer findings in the research that act as a confirmation bias to the flaws and outcomes I wish to see. It is important that my subjectivity, while recognized, does not influence the research. I also recognize that in my semi-

structured interviews, I may have heard and coded responses through a different lens, identified different emergent themes, and probed in a way that is different from a person of Color.

Finally, I conducted research in a locale where I worked both as a teacher and administrator. My insider status allowed me to serve on various equity teams as the district engaged in intentional work around diversity and equity for both students and staff. During this time, I built relationships with others throughout the district, and this may have influenced both how others respond to me as a researcher and how I heard their responses. This may shape what I wished to hear; that Teachers of Color do have space and feel as though they belong. This potential subjectivity lends itself to confirmation bias. To counter this, it was important that I remained deeply curious, stayed humble as a researcher, and then continued to be curious, particularly through the interviews, coding the research, and writing the findings.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to better understand how Teachers of Color experience their suburban public school and school district, and how these experiences shape their desire to either remain at or depart their school and school district. This chapter presents the findings of the mixed-methods research, including the quantitative survey results, themes and findings from qualitative interviews, and findings from the analysis of the district website, policies, and documents that may influence levels of belonging. I first explain demographic data to provide the reader with an understanding of the study's participants. Next, I provide statistical analyses of selected survey questions to identify key results that will help answer the research questions. Drawing on qualitative data, I provide six assertions that emerge from the qualitative analysis. I then summarize the findings within the original conceptual framework to structure the key elements that emerge from each of the four contexts.

Conceptual Framework

As noted, modeled on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1999), I developed an original conceptual framework placing Teachers of Color and their lived experiences in the center of the model, while also considering how other contexts including the school context, district context and community context influenced levels of belonging. Refer to figure 1 and a detailed explanation is in Chapter 2.

The framework seeks to better understand how various factors influence a teacher within these contexts, how they pull a teacher closer to the contexts thus increasing belonging, and how they may push a teacher further away from the contexts through othering thus decreasing belonging. The findings highlight six assertions that demonstrate how individual and school contexts hold high levels of influence, while the district has moderate influence and community

contexts have low influence. The levels of influence relate to desire to remain or depart at the

school setting. The sections below provide findings from the mixed-methods research.

Quantitative findings were not as robust as I conceptualized due to low response rates to the

survey. However, meaning can still be made from the data. The data from the interviews and

document analysis provide opportunities to draw conclusions. Findings are explained below.

Phase 1: Quantitative Findings

The survey was administered via Qualtrics to thirty certificated Teachers of Color across

six different school sites within the suburban school district. The total number of completed

surveys was twenty-nine (n=29). The total number of teachers across the six school sites is 324,

although the total number of Teachers of Color across the six school sites was unavailable.

Response rates differed across the school sites. Forty-five percent of the respondents were high

school teachers, twenty-four percent were middle school teachers, and thirty-one percent were

elementary school teachers.

The majority of teachers who completed the survey identified as female and represent a

range of ethnicities. Data about respondents' gender and ethnicity are below in Table 4:

Table 4

Frequency Distribution by Demographics (Gender and Ethnicity)

Gender	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	22	75.9	75.9
Male	7	24.1	100.0
American Indian	1	3.4	3.4
Eastern Asian (China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan)	4	13.8	17.2
Black or African American	2	6.9	24.1
Latino/Hispanic	8	26.6	51.7
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	3.4	55.2
Two or More Ethnicities	5	17.2	72.4
My choice is not listed	3	10.3	82.8
Prefer not to say	1	3.4	86.2
South-Eastern Asian	4	13.8	100.0
Total	29	100.0	100.0

Respondents' ethnicities represent a vast range with the highest-percentage group identifying as Latino/Hispanic. While Eastern Asian and South-Eastern Asian were also well represented, the data show representation of individuals who identify as two or more ethnicities.

Additionally, the respondents displayed a range of work experience at their school site. The distribution shows a reverse curve with the most respondents either being new to their site (less than 3 years) or working for a length of time at their current school site (13 or more years).

Table 5

Frequency Distribution by Years Worked at School Site

Years at Site	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-3 years	9	31.0	31.0
4-6 years	3	10.3	41.3
7-9 years	4	13.8	55.1
10-12 years	4	13.8	68.9
13 or more years	9	31.0	100.0
Total	29	100.0	100.0

Additionally, survey respondents displayed a range in terms of total years serving as a teacher in their career. Fifty percent have taught for thirteen years or more, while 13.3% have taught three years or less.

Respondents were asked about how interactions with various stakeholders influences their feelings of belonging. Positive interactions with students, colleagues and administration served to foster strong and meaningful feelings of belonging. Interactions with parents and community influenced feelings in which teachers felt like they did not belong.

Table 6

Frequency Distribution of Influences of Belonging (both positive and negative)

Influence	Indicates Belonging (n=29)	Indicates Not Belonging (n=29)
Interactions with Colleagues	93.1% (n=27)	6.7% (n=2)
Interactions with Administration	72.4% (n=21)	27.6% (n=8)
Interactions with Students	100% (n=29)	0% (n=0)
Interactions with Parents/Community	65.5% (n=19)	34.5% (n=10)
Alignment with District Values	41.4% (n=12)	58.6% (n=17)
Alignment with Community Values	41.4% (n=12)	58.6% (n=17)

When delving deeper into the participants survey responses, the data provide indicators that pull Teachers of Color toward the school context. Using a 5-point Likert scale (5 indicating always, all, or extremely), the mean was 3.6 or higher in "pull" questions with welcoming and district pride both above 4.0. Feelings of being welcomed into the school, and the ability to be one's self foster a sense of belonging to both the school and district contexts.

Table 7

Survey Questions Showing Factors That Pull TOC toward Contexts

Question	Mean	Standard Error
How well do the people at your current site understand you?	3.66	0.181
How connected do you feel to the staff at your site?	3.62	0.175
How welcoming have you found this school to be toward you personally?	4.07	0.156
I am able to be my true self and am accepted for who I am	3.93	0.156
Degree that administration fosters a school culture where you feel that you belong	3.79	0.182
I feel like a real part of my school site	3.97	0.136
I feel proud of belonging to this school district	4.17	0.141

The data also provide indicators that shed light on what may push Teachers of Color further from the school context. Questions that were negatively worded were reverse-coded. The data show that push experiences such as derogatory comments sometimes occur (mean= 1.72). Feeling like one cannot be accepted, or that one needs to minimize a part of themselves may serve to push teachers away from school culture. However, the respondents did indicate this minimally, and the desire to depart the school and/or school district was relatively low for most respondents.

Table 8

Survey Questions showing Factors That Push TOC From Contexts

Question	Mean	Standard Error
It's hard for people like me to be accepted here (reversed)	3.79	.0144
Sometimes I don't feel as if I belong here (reversed)	3.76	0.177
I feel very different from most other teachers here at this school (reversed)	3.28	0.221
I have to minimize parts of my true self so that I fit in	2.34	0.167
Has a colleague made a comment or action that was derogatory to you based on your race/ethnicity?	1.72	.0156
I wish I worked at a different school (reversed)	4.24	0.128
To what degree have you considered leaving this school site?	2.38	0.207
I wish I was in a different school district (reversed)	4.24	0.162
To what degree have you considered leaving this school district?	2.21	0.201

The quantitative findings, despite the low number of survey respondents (n=29) still provided insight into how Teachers of Color experience their school sites and district. Eighty-six percent were happy to work at their school and ninety-three percent recognized that their administration team fosters a school culture of belonging. However, thirty-eight percent of respondents shared they are considering leaving their school site. The consideration to depart the district declines to twenty-eight percent, which may recognize that within the district, Teachers of Color still may find a different school to work. Other key metrics indicate that respondents

had negative interactions and experiences with racism and othering. However, the data indicated most respondents feel proud to belong to their school and to a slightly lesser degree, the school district. This is influenced in part by the positive interactions with others at school including colleagues, administrators and students.

The survey responses provided an overview of how a sample of Teachers of Color in the suburban school district view their experiences. To see how individual teachers make meaning within their school sites, the interviews provided a more granular understanding.

Phase 2: Qualitative Findings

Before delving into the qualitative data in depth, I will first provide an overview of the code frequencies, as they help to illustrate how the key assertions emerge from the data. When initially coding the data, over forty themes were created to account for factors that influenced workplace experience, belonging and othering, and employment decisions. See Appendix E for codes and code frequencies. However, a theme that was not originally identified, but emerged was coded as *purpose*. This code emerged as the most frequent code in the data set.

Table 9

Most Frequent Codes Using All Individual Codes

Code	Frequency	Percent
Purpose	n=58	8.67%
Othering	n=47	7.03%
School Involvement	n=42	6.28%
Positive Staff Relationships	n=40	5.98%
Background	n=33	4.93%
Positive Staff Interactions	n=30	4.48%
Belonging	n=30	4.48%
Racial Identity	n=29	4.33%
Representation	n=25	3.74%
Microaggressions	n=22	3.29%
Positive Administration Relationships	n=22	3.29%
Negative Staff Interactions	n=21	3.14%
Positive Student Interactions	n=20	2.99%
Working Conditions	n=20	2.99%
Ineffective District Policies	n=20	2.99%
Total Codes Above	n=459	68.6%
*Codes Not Listed Above	n=210	31.4%
Total Codes	n=669	100.0%

Upon further analysis of the data, codes that addressed both interactions and relationships, for

example positive staff interactions and positive staff relationships, were combined to consider

the total impact of the various groups (students, staff, administration, district, parents and community). This is shown in the table below.

Table 10

Combined Positive Relationship Codes

Positive Code	Frequency	Percent
Positive Staff Interactions & Relationships	n=70	10.4%
Positive Admin. Interactions & Relationships	n=34	5.1%
Positive Student Interactions & Relationships	n=29	4.3%
Positive Parent Interactions & Relationships	n=15	2.2%
Positive Community Inter. & Relationships	n=8	1.2%
Positive District Inter. & Relationships	n=4	0.6%
Total Positive Codes	n=160	23.9%

The same combining of codes was done for negative relationship codes. This is shown in the table below.

Table 11

Combined Negative Relationship Codes

Positive Code	Frequency	Percent
Negative Staff Interactions & Relationships	n=27	4.0%
Negative Admin. Interactions & Relationships	n=25	3.7%
Negative Parent Interactions & Relationships	n=12	1.7%
Negative Community Inter. & Relationships	n=9	1.3%
Negative District Inter. & Relationships	n=7	1.0%
Negative Student Interactions & Relationships	n=5	0.7%
Total Negative Codes	n=85	12.4%

Recognizing the emergent codes from the tables above, positive codes were significantly more frequent than negative codes. Both staff and administration codes were most frequently occurring on the positive and negative sides.

Who are the Survey Participants

To better understand the themes that emerged in the qualitative findings, it is necessary to understand more about who the participants are, and the contexts in which they work. Each of the ten Teachers of Color brought lived experience, and a passion for making a difference, and were courageous enough to share their stories. The participants[4] included:

Alison: Two or more ethnicities, female elementary school teacher

Ana: Latina, female elementary school teacher

Keely: Southeast Asian, female elementary school teacher

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[4] All names listed are pseudonyms that the participants selected themselves.

Louise: East Asian, female elementary school teacher

Al: Black, male middle school teacher

Dorothy: Two or more ethnicities, female middle school teacher

Leila: Filipina, female middle school teacher

Emma: Latina, female high school teacher

Michael: Two or more ethnicities, male high school teacher

Sarah: Filipina, female high school teacher

The middle and high school teachers serve in schools in which the staff demographics are predominantly White. In contrast, the elementary school teachers serve in dual-language immersion (DLI) schools that present more parity among the staff's race and ethnicity. While each teacher expressed deep passion for teaching and helping students in myriad ways, each teacher also candidly expressed the challenges they face as a result of being a Teacher of Color.

From their stories and lived experiences, I draw six assertions that hopefully provide insight into how Teachers of Color experience suburban public schools. The assertions describe what factors influence a teacher's sense of belonging, contextualize their experiences in a suburban public school, and provide an understanding of what factors are most and least significant in their employment decisions. The assertions include that 1) positive relationships significantly pull teachers in, 2) othering and microaggressions regularly occur, 3) district policy impacts site experiences, 4) connection & involvement are significant factors, 5) parents and community hold less influence, and 6) above all, purpose carries the day.

Finding 1: Positive Relationships Significantly Pull Teachers In

Colleagues Matter

Anecdotally, we often hear teachers speak about connecting with their students and making a difference. While teachers typically only get one school year to work with their students, the longest lasting relationships on a school campus are with other teachers and staff. These relationships tremendously influence the degree to which Teachers of Color experience belonging at their school site. Positive staff interactions and relationships, coded together, account for the most frequently appearing code. Across ten interviews, the positive staff relationships code appeared 70 times, demonstrating that when positive interactions occur with colleagues, it holds significant weight in pulling a teacher closer to the culture of the school and increasing feelings of belonging.

Interview participants described the importance that department and grade-level colleagues have on how they experience their school. Sarah, a Filipina female, is a veteran teacher at her high school. She notes that "In the department I work in specifically, they are a second family to me. I know that I can rely on somebody in my department to help me solve the possible problem and find a solution." Sarah has worked at her school for over a decade and fostered multiple positive relationships that go beyond instructional practices. The relationships with her colleagues, centered in the school context, serve to provide a connection point, a support system for her to endure all the challenges that teachers face, and increase the likelihood of her staying at her school. She said that the relationships "have been essential for having me stay here and not have teacher burnout."

Emma, a Latina high school teacher with less than three years of teaching experience, is learning the intricacies of the teaching profession while trying to navigate her school's culture.

She noted various experiences that have been both positive and challenging, feeling both included and isolated. One of her department colleagues went above and beyond to make her feel seen for her birthday, decorating her room, getting cupcakes and a birthday gift. With joy in her voice, Emma happily shared that "Especially as a newer teacher, (when) someone (is) going out of their way, it makes you feel like, 'okay, cool, I'm part of the crew.'" Spending time together during the school day helped Emma get connected to other teachers across her campus. Emma stated that "Maybe the biggest thing would be the dynamic of my colleagues. I know they're very nice people. I enjoy their company. We eat lunch together." However, in another instance limited connections, as colleagues were discussing their own college application and attending college, Emma felt left out. In addition to the difference in age between her and her colleagues, the discussion of college cost and living expenses left a disconnect during a particular conversation. Emma shared that,

> They talk about the colleges they went to and how much it costs them. And I feel a little uncomfortable because I went to (a local college), I don't relate to that (going away to college). And, I don't relate to that because… (of) the income thing growing up.

The conversations and experiences Emma had with her colleagues impacted her career trajectory: "I don't know how long I'll be able to do this. I like it. I really do, but it's also very exhausting." The interactions may not drive Emma from the teaching profession, but unlike Sarah whose department is like a second family, the limited connection Emma feels with her colleagues may hasten any potential departure she is considering.

Al, a Black middle school teacher, is also in the early part of his teaching career. So far, Al's connections with his colleagues have been positive: "Staff members are very supportive. If I'm having a rough day, I know that there are people that I can go and talk to that will be supportive." In addition to finding respite with colleagues from the travails of being a new

teacher, Al has experienced moments of authenticity that increase his feelings of belonging to his school. He noted that authentic conversations can be about curriculum or other elements of the teaching profession, but more often occur when discussing topics like supporting students, lived experiences as a Teacher of Color, or other higher-risk conversations. He explained,

> It really just comes down to being able to have authentic conversations with other staff members. Whether it's about my experiences or about supporting another student that we both share. I found that a lot of the people on my grade level team are very supportive.

Al shared that he enjoys the interactions he has with the students and staff, and feels like he is a valued member of the school. Though it took a bit of time, Al described how the connection to staff impacted his feelings of belonging: "I feel like after some time when I started to get to know different staff members, it increased that sense of belonging on campus."

Dorothy has been at her school for many years and also has a leadership role on her campus. Her time at just one school site has allowed Dorothy to build many quality relationships with her colleagues that are "... friendly. I think they're respectful. I believe that they're genuine." Dorothy discussed the positive relationships she has with her peers on six different instances during the interview: "I feel that my relationships (with staff) and being a woman of Color has been very positive. The people that I work with now, there is more diversity than when I first started. So I've always felt welcomed." The multiple decades together has allowed her to foster deep relationships, and create connections and feelings of belonging. She explained "The staff that I work with, they see what I do, they know how I'm guiding these students and there is a deep appreciation and respect for what I do." The positive relationships culminated in Dorothy being nominated as teacher of the year by her colleagues.

Similar to Dorothy, other interview participants consistently speak to the benefit that positive interactions with their colleagues have. Interactions may be about students, curriculum

or job related topics. Sometimes they are more personal connections related to their own interests, or the degree to which they feel part of the school and school culture. Emma regularly connects in conversation with another teacher who is Latino, Michael advocates for his colleagues as a site union representative, and colleagues often come into Leila's classroom before or after school to ask questions about various work-related topics. These positive interactions with colleagues served to strengthen the ties Teachers of Color feel at their school sites, resulting in greater feelings of belonging. This same theme emerged when discussing interactions with site administrators.

Relationships With Administrators Matter Too

As noted in the literature review in Chapter 2, a teacher's relationship with the school administrators holds great influence on how they experience their school. The role of the administrator is vital in establishing the school culture as well as creating connections with Teachers of Color. Interview participants iterated this assertion as well. All ten participants mentioned positive interactions and relationships with their administrators, while four of ten participants also noted some negative interactions and relationships with their administrators. Simple gestures like visiting classrooms, checking in and saying hello each day can go a long way for Teachers of Color on suburban public school campuses. Sarah, a high school teacher with more than thirteen years in the district, frequently mentioned the strong bonds she has with her administrators. This is due, in part, to classroom visits so that administrators see what is occurring in the classroom. She noted that "I've had admin come in (unannounced) and observe classes when I'm teaching…I actually think that it's good that they come in and view the classroom… I do like checking in. I think that's important." Alison, an elementary teacher with less than three years in the district, notes the formal process of observations has helped

strengthen the teacher/administrator relationship. She recalled that "This year was an observation year for me, so I have seen (the principal). She's been in my room periodically throughout the year. And just checking in pretty often too. I'm friendly with her, sure."

Support from school administrators is a key influencer in fostering belonging for Teachers of Color in suburban public schools. This support occurs once administrators understand and recognize the needs of each teacher, and dialogue about challenges Teachers of Color incur. Alison's elementary school principal provides needed assistance during crucial moments of the year. She explained "I have felt supported in that my administration understands my unique needs. They understand I'm taking on a bigger load with more kids and that I need more support during conferencing, during progress reporting time, more support during assessment." Sarah feels this support from her high school administrators during challenging IEP meetings with parents. Al has a connection with his administration that allows for an "open-door policy" when he feels like he needs to talk through situations: "I know that their doors (are) open and they are willing to have a conversation with me about whatever I'm feeling, or whatever I need or whatever concerns I have with students, they are there for (me)."

Teachers also reflected that when their administrators are also people of Color, or advocate for equity work, this strengthens their connection and sense of belonging. Michael, a bi-racial high school teacher echoes this saying that "(I) work well with our new principal. I definitely think he comes from a more empathic approach. So workplace relationships, I think he really focuses on those - you know, unity, equity, belonging." A relationship-centered approach that embraces empathy emerges as a key component in fostering relationships. Michael shares that his administrators' voices are ones of advocacy, thus taking the burden from Michael having to be the only person to speak up when injustice occurs. During an all-staff

meeting in which the topic was how the staff was going to teach an all-school lesson on equity, a White teacher expressed discomfort. Feeling it necessary to address the comment, Michael was about to speak up before an administrator did. He explained "I'm glad to have other people of color on administration now, expressing my sentiments and not being the only person (of Color)." This shared responsibility lessened the strain that Michael felt, and gave him the understanding that others, including leaders on his campus, advocate for values that are important to him.

Like Michael, Louise feels a stronger connection because her administration shares racial and cultural similarities. As a veteran elementary school teacher, she spoke about how she further identifies with her site leadership: "I get along with both of them. Not just because they're Asian. I think it's because, of course, there's a piece there. I think being Asian, there's a piece there where we do have a lot of cultural similarities." Seeing her ethnicity represented in her school leadership is not the primary reason that she feels connected to her administration. But for Louise, she leverages these cultural connections to bridge the relationship, thus strengthening her feelings of belonging to her school site.

Conversely, negative interactions and relationships with school administration can push Teachers of Color away from feeling connected to school culture. For new teachers, inconsistency in administration may foster discontent. Emma had multiple administrators evaluate her throughout her two-year probationary period. Despite putting in twelve-hour days and working tirelessly to improve her craft, the inconsistency in feedback and coaching, due to administrator turnover, left Emma confused and frustrated. She stated "The only thing consistent is that I've been observed by different people." Emma has had three different administrators evaluate her in three years, and the inconsistency in voice, in coaching style, and in specific

feedback given makes it challenging for her. She added "I think that maybe puts me a little stressed out because it's different points of view that tell me I'm doing fine, but they also tell me areas of growth, right?" It wasn't the feedback process nor the constructive criticism that created dissonance for Emma. Rather it was the lack of relationship due to administrator turnover that compounded her stress. Emma went on to say "I don't really feel a connection to the administrators and I actually don't think I can retire being a teacher." For Emma, this lack of connection pushed her away from her school context and served as one factor that decreased her likelihood of retention.

On multiple occasions, Leila, a teacher who has served in her school district for multiple decades, felt frustrated by her middle school administration. Her frustration centered on lack of follow through, inconsistent communication, and inconsistent implementation of school policy. Keely, an elementary teacher who identifies as Southeast Asian, noted that her principal rarely, if ever, visited her classroom. With this absence comes a lack of knowledge of her strengths as a teacher that led to a disagreement about what grade she would teach in the upcoming school year. Expressing her views, she felt like the school principal never listened:

> You need to listen. You have to do what you have to do…It doesn't mean if I have the credentials, I can teach wherever. I know that as a teacher, as a professional, I can do that. But you also need to know where my strength lies.

This frustration led to sentiments of not feeling heard or understood, and Keely went on to express that she thought more about departing her school site. The negative interactions with administration can push Teachers of Color away. Instances of othering including microaggressions can have the same negative effect.

Finding 2: Othering and Microaggressions Regularly Occur

While the participants in this study shared multiple instances of positive interactions and relationships, these same Teachers of Color also described various negative interactions. Working across school sites in which they are often in the racial minority, six of the ten participants spoke about one or more times they encountered microaggressions. Mentioned twenty separate times across the ten interviews, the microaggressions code accounted for 3.29% of the total codes (n=22). Michael, a high school teacher who is involved in many facets of his school, spoke of multiple instances of microaggressions that span from cultural incapacity to cultural blindness. During a conversation with a colleague, the other individual expressed surprise stating, "I didn't know you are a person of color." When Michael affirmed his race to his colleague, her cultural blindness appeared in the response: "I just thought you had black hair. I don't see color." This microaggression, the notion of not seeing color, left Michael aghast and frustrated. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated event. Michael described more overtly negative experiences including an interaction of cultural incapacity. While at a school dance in which Michael and other colleagues chaperoned the students, a conversation ensued about a school program that included diversity training: "The teacher told me flat out and in front of students that equity is bs. And I was at prom. So I had to keep my professional face on in front of students." Despite high levels of professionalism, the minimizing of equity work also directly minimized Michael. In no uncertain terms, this colleague told Michael that he was "less than". On the one hand, this comment lessened the relationship he has with this colleague. But it also increased the empathy Michael has for students of Color who encounter moments like this throughout their time at school: "I see how that student of color is experiencing (it) and therefore I feel that too." These cumulative moments led to growing frustration that Michael

carries with him, upset that some staff members continue to perpetuate marginalization, in itself

a form of othering Michael endures.

Michael reflected on another time in a staff meeting about a schoolwide initiative in

which teachers were tasked to teach lessons to their students about anti-bias, and some

colleagues did not want to engage in the work:

> There are points of frustration where I do come across these things like doing a
> No Place for Hate lesson, where I have to sit in the room full of people saying,
> '*well, I'm uncomfortable. I don't want to teach this.*' and I just want to tell them,
> '*You know, excuse my language, tough shit. Suck it up.*'

But Michael often stayed quiet, feeling that the burden of speaking up was not always worth the

effort to change how his colleagues acted and felt. These feelings, akin to Smith's (2009)

description of *racial battle fatigue*, are something that Al, the only Black teacher at his middle

school, also expressed. At various times in his three-year tenure, Al's colleagues approached

him for insight on working with Black students. But this practice of White teachers going to the

sole Black teacher on campus is problematic. Al conveyed that "I see sometimes there's the

expectation of the sole black teacher being the spokesperson for the black students on campus.

And that's been a thing in the last week or so…that whole spokesperson thing." This example of

cultural pre-competence places undue burden on Teachers of Color by White teachers, often at

the expense of the Teachers of Color. Though some teachers see this as leveraging cultural or

racial assets, the dependence on Teachers of Color to serve as the savior for students of Color

perpetuates systemic racism and relieves White teachers and administrators from carrying equal

weight in serving all students. As it did with Al, this practice can push Teachers of Color away

from school and district contexts.

Various elementary teachers spoke about microaggressions they encountered. Alison, a

young biracial teacher gaining experience at a dual-language immersion (DLI) school, spoke of

the time a colleague ignorantly referred to Hispanic Heritage Month as "The month we celebrate Mexicans." Similarly, Keely works at a different DLI elementary school in which students are separated into the dual-language track and the English-only track. Often the English-only students attending the school are under-resourced economically, while the DLI students are more financially resourced. Colleagues across the school setting continually address the students to Keely as "your students", rather than "our students". This word choice, clearly defining a line in the school, created a separation that Keely felt divided her peers and harmed the comprehensive school culture. Finding frustration with her colleagues' approach, Keely vented to me: "Excuse me. Don't say that. Don't say 'your students'. That's just not okay." She went on, with conviction in her words, and told me that when, "They say things like 'your students', we have corrected it."

Four of the participants, serving on their school's equity committee, experienced microaggressions as a result of participating in work that is expressly designed to combat racism. During the school district's first meeting held virtually, Michael, who is bi-racial, depicted these moments: "I felt othered in the very first meeting. They asked us to go into breakout rooms based upon our race and they had *other* as a category. Because I didn't fit into one single category, I let everybody know." He thought to himself, "'This is a messed up box. Why am I in *other*?', before asking the group 'Do you really want kids to feel this way?'" Leila has also felt othered in staff meetings. She disclosed hearing microaggressions and was told early in her career that she was hired only because of her race. As a result, at times Leila struggles with feelings of loneliness. As one of only a few Teachers of Color on her campus, she recounted to me that working at her site is "a lonely place to be though." She paused deeply for a few moments before reiterating that "I have to say, It's a lonely place to be. It's lonely." Repeating this was not for effect, but rather emphasized the depth of the feelings she carried, often

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unbeknownst to her colleagues. Leila, when gathering with colleagues, often feels like an outsider: "There isn't anybody like me. I'm always acutely aware when I walk into the library for [a meeting]. I am always aware that I look different than everybody else." Asking her what may help, Leila said

> If I had a little bit of back up, I think I would be braver in saying *'whoa, just so you know, when you say that, this is what I hear.'* Or to be able to say '*whoa, ouch. Could you say that again?*

While her staff demographics may not change immediately, support could come in allyship from other teachers and administrators.

The loneliness Leila describes is similar to what Al experiences at his middle school. As a Black male, he leads a club for Black students at the school. This club serves as an affinity group, allowing students to come together, build community, connect, and benefit from Al's mentorship. But working in a suburban school in which the majority of teachers are White, he received an anonymous report that the club made White teachers uncomfortable. Despite his encouragement to reach out to him, no one ever did. With probably too much empathy, Al shared that "I can understand somebody not feeling comfortable with speaking to the black guy about how uncomfortable they are about the black student union. I guess I can understand that, but it just definitely does make you feel alienated." White discomfort by one or more staff at his middle school serves only to other Al and sends the message that "you don't belong here." The theme of staff discomfort continued in another example Al provided: "Another big thing that has influenced my sense of connection with other staff members is that we've had pushback to some of the work that we're trying to do." Beyond his work with the Black Student Union, Al's involvement includes his site equity team and PBIS team.

> There are people that will smile to your face and not really tell you how they feel
> ... then it comes out in an all-staff meeting or in in some of our surveys that we do

for our union...I feel like there are people that are uncomfortable with the direction that we're going and that has definitely affected my willingness to be open with everybody.

Al experienced many microaggressions that are influenced by his staff culture and how colleagues choose to interact with him. Al closed his thoughts by saying "It creates the environment where once again, I feel alienated." These experiences led Al to regress back to his classroom rather than venture into the hallways and staff lounge with his peers: "I sometimes have weeks where I stay in my classroom and I don't walk around and I just don't feel like interacting with people." Microaggressions and experiences of othering have led to loneliness, isolation, and pushed Teachers of Color further from the school context. But participants also shared that the creation and promotion of particular district policies, specifically policies that focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, hold a positive effect.

Finding 3: Connection and Involvement are Significant Influences

While relationships with teachers and staff are primary factors within the school context, additional opportunities beyond the walls of the classroom exist for connection. These can further enhance belonging for Teachers of Color, and from the ten interviews, three unique codes emerged. These include school involvement (n=42), representation (n=25), and decision making (n=13).

The school involvement code includes the degree to which a Teacher of Color is involved in school experiences beyond their teaching duties. This may include committee work, instructional programs, or other avenues. Of the ten teachers interviewed, nine of the ten held additional responsibilities beyond classroom teaching. This included instructional responsibilities such as piloting new programs and serving as site coordinators for English Language Learners or Response to Intervention. Additionally, three of the ten participants serve,

or have served, as directors of their school's Associated Student Body. Other ways in which the

Teachers of Color held school involvement included serving as grade-level lead, site union

representative, and teaching other teachers during after-school professional development

programs. Finally, the district tasked each school to create an equity committee in which

participants would engage in structured professional development with site and district

colleagues. Six of the ten participants interviewed served in this role.

For all participants with high levels of school involvement, this served as a positive

experience. One ASB Director shared that "I get to oversee clubs and different student

organizations." This involvement fostered more connection with students while also allowing

her to interact with her colleagues in a different manner. She went on to say that "I get to put on

events that are inclusive for the entire school," and that this inclusivity is fundamental to her

ethos as a teacher.

Al's involvement at school included mentoring students in a school club. Describing the

role that the club plays at his middle school, Al shared that it's designed for and by Black

students, and serves as a space for them to come together to create community, safety and

belonging. In this role, not only does Al facilitate connection for students, but leading this club

further connects him to the school culture. He stated "One of the clubs that I run is a safe space

for a lot of these students to come and share their experiences. I'm pretty involved." He paused

before assessing the progress made: "I feel that we are getting to the point where we're doing a

better job." His school involvement also involved the opportunity to partner with the district

initiative to facilitate student empathy interviews. Because of his positive connections with

students on his campus, Al had the opportunity to help select students for the interviews.

Additionally, his work with Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports (PBIS) provided another

point of connection to look at student data, partner with colleagues, and discuss strategies to present the data to staff. Throughout these various ways of being involved at his school, Al recognized a larger shift happening across his campus. He notices increased diversity and representation, sharper focus on listening to students, and making space for them, all of which played a role in the degree to which he expressed connection and belonging.

At her elementary school, Louise trained new teachers, worked on curriculum development, helped new students get enrolled, and sat on panels to hire new staff. Michael's school involvement included various roles across his campus. Each role provided an opportunity to connect with his colleagues in meaningful ways, strengthening how connected he feels to his school site. For Michael, Alison, Al and Ana, their various school involvements allow them to have a greater voice on their campus. The ability to share their thoughts and opinions not only made them feel more seen and heard, but provided an opportunity to advocate for students, programs and initiatives that were important to them. Alison had an opportunity to craft policy for her school that included a Memorandum of Understanding. This allowed her "to make sure that I could advocate for the support that I need." Additionally, Alison shared that in participating in this work, she could more clearly describe the expectations that her position holds both for her and anyone who may apply in the future. Alison appreciated the collaboration, the leadership opportunity, and the opportunity to be part of the process. With voice often came the opportunity to make decisions that impact the school campus. Participants described the various ways of involvement as positively correlated to their level of belonging. Participants also shared that the creation and promotion of particular district policies, specifically policies that focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, hold a positive effect on belonging.

Finding 4: District Policy Impacts Site Experiences

A review of the suburban school district's policies, administrative regulations and website provides insight into the emphasis placed on equitable practices. Distinct policies can be linked to participant feedback about the degree to which they feel that the district's policies influence their experience. The school district created dedicated school board policies about non-discriminatory practices, recruitment and selection of staff, and equity. One policy specifically addresses its goals, objectives and plan around equity. A portion of this policy says that "Addressing the needs of the most marginalized learners requires recognition of the inherent value of diversity." The policy continues by declaring that in order to provide high quality educational opportunities to all students, there must be a commitment to equity and equitable practices. The district directly acknowledges institutional bias that a school district and system may have, and recognizes its role in either perpetuating or dismantling this bias. To that end, the policy notes that "the district shall proactively identify class and cultural biases as well as practices, policies, and institutional barriers that negatively influence student learning."[5]

Board policy also includes the allocation of financial resources dedicated to district programs that promote equity and inclusion in the school district. Multiple participants in this study engaged in these programs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the school district developed site equity teams, partially in response to numerous student posts on social media detailing negative racial experiences they endured while students in the district. Of the ten participants interviewed, six were on their site equity teams. Leila shared that the district's response to have each school site create and build an equity team was a step in the right direction. Ana concurred, noting that "the equity committee does give me a little bit of hope in

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[5] To maintain participant anonymity, citations of the district website that may identify the district used for the study have been omitted.

that sense." Al has also been part of the work, noting the positive action steps his site has taken. One element of site-based equity teams involves increased focus on the levels of representation that exist within grade level curriculum. Al noted that sites are recognizing opportunities for growth:

> We've been incorporating more equitable representation and the things that we do in the curriculum… There is an attempt to shift the culture of the school to being more supportive of the diversity that we have and I've been a part of a lot of that work.

The participants recognize some of the efforts that the district has made to bring this policy into practice. These policies resulted in staff training across the school district, they provide more representation in the curriculum for all students K-12, and they are providing additional space for Teachers of Color to have a voice of advocacy. In their own way, these policies are positively influencing the levels of belonging the participants feel, thus increasing retention. But these policies alone are not a silver bullet. In experiencing the implementation of these new initiatives and practices, the participants also see limitations and challenges that arise along the way. Despite the definitive language of the board policy, Al is critical of the sincerity of the district's policies: "They're showing that they are attempting to be supportive of inclusion and equity and diversity and everything else, but in some cases it feels disingenuous." Though some may be critical, they are recognizing the changes in the curriculum that are positively impacting students.

The board policy includes the adoption of curriculum and instructional materials that accurately reflect student diversity. At the elementary level, Ana had the opportunity to pilot a new curriculum for social studies. She commented,

> The most important rationale for switching to TCI [Teachers' Curriculum Institute] was the issue of equity. Being able to have a more balanced view on history (and) having a lot more representation. The first curriculum that we had

was a lot of White-dominant culture and TCI brings in a more balanced narrative of history.

Al sees this shift occurring at his middle school, and noted this is positive for both students and his own experience: "We've been incorporating more equitable representation and the things that we do in the curriculum. I think there is an attempt to shift the culture of the school to being more supportive of the diversity that we have."

Across the district, additional curricular changes occurred at the high school level by offering ethnic studies and ethnic literature classes. Asked about the impact that she sees this having on her campus and students, Sarah shared that "I think it does (have an impact). I think that it opens up the lens for multiple perspectives. It's important for students to read texts from different cultures, different representations." She continued saying that, "It also gives students and teachers an idea of what life is like with different perspectives which is pretty powerful." The inclusion of ethnic studies and ethnic literature courses at the high school level will be codified into law for the 2025-26 school year across the state of California.

On the front page of the district's website, there is a section titled "Equity and Inclusion". The dedicated section provides additional information on their racial equity and inclusion plans, resources, programs, events, learning opportunities and systems improvements. Recognizing the impact that school districts and their policies play in deconstructing racism, a message from the superintendent reads "Our families trust us to provide their children with a safe and equitable learning environment. Yet racism exists." The statement continues to declare the district's position and role: "Schools play a powerful role in changing people's perceptions, and we are called upon to work together to be explicitly anti-racist."[6] This definitive and powerful

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[6] To maintain participant anonymity, citations of the district website that may identify the district used for the study have been omitted.

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statement from the Superintendent both recognizes racism and the school district's role in

dismantling systems that perpetuate racist practices. The message concludes by challenging the

community to take a stand and "replace complacency and denial with commitment and resolve."

This call to action for both school district employees and community members provides a

pathway upon which programs, and subsequently teachers and staff, may engage in practices that

create space for all stakeholders, particularly Teachers and Students of Color who have been

historically marginalized. However, policy alone cannot be the answer. The practices that occur

at individual school sites must provide pathways for Teachers of Color to be involved, have a

voice, and advocate for important issues.

An analysis of the websites of the schools where participants work holds interesting

findings. Neither of the elementary schools have information directly related to or addressing

equity or diversity on their websites. One of the two middle schools has information that details

committees and action plans the school uses to focus on equity, however the documentation is

two to three years old and has not been updated. One of the two high schools has a section of the

school's website dedicated to equity, diversity and anti-racism. While the school district has

definitive policies, there is inconsistency across the schools that were analyzed in both

recognizing and labeling the implementation of policies and practices that focus on diversity and

equity. This inconsistency may influence how the stakeholders at the sites recognize, emphasize

and employ the policies. Sarah, who works at one of the schools that highlights equity on their

website explained that "As far as school culture is concerned with me being Filipino, I can't

really say that there's any connection." While policy contributed to how Teachers of Color

experience their work, parents and community contexts are less impactful.

Finding 5: Parents and Community Hold Less Influence

Parental interactions are a frequent occurrence for public school teachers. While this may occur more regularly at the elementary level than at the high school level, teachers know that working directly with parents is part of the work of being a teacher. The findings show that, while an important component, these interactions do not hold significant influence on the levels of belonging and employment decisions for these Teachers of Color when compared to the school and district contexts. Four positive and four negative codes were used for the ten interviews, and positive parent codes identified fifteen total segments, while negative parent codes accounted for twelve total segments. The infrequent mention of parents as impactful, either in a positive or negative manner, shed light on how Teachers of Color view these interactions. Participants were directly asked about parents, and despite the inquiry, collectively did not delve deeply into their interactions with parents. While they were able to recognize the importance of parents on a student's school experience, the interactions were less relevant in how teachers experienced belonging and othering in their work.

Throughout the interviews, all ten participants discussed the community context with less frequency when compared to the school and district contexts. With four specific codes focused on community interactions and relationships, nine total segments were coded negative and eight segments positive. While participants did mention community interactions, it did not factor into their feelings of belonging or othering to a degree that would directly influence employment decisions. Nonetheless, some participants described affinity for the communities in which they teach. Ana teaches at an elementary school that serves as a hub for the community. She expressed passion for serving the students and parents in her school, noting that "It's honestly a phenomenal place to work in. We have a very tight community." Dorothy, who has served her

middle school for over two decades, shares a similar sentiment. Leveraging her leadership role on campus, she notes: "I am really trying to reach out to the community, trying to invite parents onto campus, especially after COVID." Dorothy goes on to say that "I have a real heart for this community. I have seen this community change dramatically (for the better) over the course of my time here." Louise is a first-generation immigrant to the United States. Initially, Louise didn't feel as connected to the school or the community. Over time, she became more involved and now feels a deeper sense of connection. She described that "Now I'm more comfortable because I'm more involved at my work and in my community. I was volunteering at Little League, I was a board member, and I was doing the grill." At her site, she is able to leverage her cultural and linguistic skills to serve the dual-language needs: "When I talk to Chinese parents (in Mandarin), the shared cultural background makes the conversation so much easier." This connection to the community held importance for Leila as well. Having grown up in the community and school district as a child, and now serving as a veteran teacher, Leila described a profound sense of responsibility to her work. This is her home, and she shared that "I'm a teacher here. I lived in (this community) for many years. I live in (a neighboring community) now, but I'm still, I feel very connected to the community and I have an interest in making the school good." Not all participants felt this same connection or positive relationship when interacting with the community.

Al, a Black male who comes from a long line of educators, has deep ties to the district. After graduating as a student from the district, he served as a coach before becoming a school teacher. Al experienced negative community interactions both as a child and adult, all based on his race. Recently, while shopping at a grocery store that employed him years before, he was met with mistrusting eyes by his former store manager. He recalled "When I walked in, he

looked over at us, he stopped, he kept walking and then he backtracked and looked at us again, like he was watching us. And I was like, 'Hey, man, you know me.'" A simple visit to the grocery store in the community that he works and lives amounted to being racially profiled. Despite efforts of focusing on diversity, equity and inclusion within his school site, work in which he is very much involved, Al went on to succinctly summarize his view of the lack of progress he sees: "We are shifting the culture in the district, but the community's culture isn't shifting." Despite this assessment, these experiences have less of an influence on Al's belonging and desire to stay or depart the school district.

Michael, who also spent a portion of his childhood growing up in this suburban school district prior to moving away, reflected on what he sees now as an educator in this district. With concern in his voice, he shared,

> There's a lot of hate being spewed out about these communities and people don't want to take any time to actually learn about other communities. They just want to say, 'well, we don't agree with this, so we're not going to support it.

Michael noted a lack of care by segments of the community throughout the district to engage in meaningful conversations, and this serves as a barrier to bringing people together. He also stated in a matter-of-fact manner that, "Racially I don't fit." However, the community context did not hold strong influence on Michael's desire to stay or depart the school district. While the community context is not the strongest factor that influences a Teacher of Color's sense of belonging, one code within the individual context has more effect than the others: purpose. All the participants are deeply driven to be change agents within their district in service of their students. While each has their own lived experiences and their own reasons to continue teaching despite the challenges they encounter, this drive is their purpose.

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Finding 6: Above All, Purpose Carries the Day

Within the concept of one's purpose, Teachers of Color spoke about how their purpose allowed them to care for their students, who are often in the minority. Defined as "the Teacher of Color expressing a purpose that drives their work at their school site", this code was the most frequently identified code (n=58). Nine of the ten participants interviewed had codes describing their purpose that drives their work. Greatly influenced by their lived experiences and background, many shared that their educational experiences as children impacted their career choice. Al comes from a family of educators and grew up, in part, in this area. Sarah chose to teach special education because of family members with disabilities. While in high school, Sarah also had a mentor who was a Teacher of Color and she noted how this made a positive difference for her. Michael reflects fondly on his teachers across all three levels and the positive impact they had on him. However, Leila had a slightly different experience. She grew up in the area, experienced racism as a student, but chose to stick around. Now as an adult, she serves as a teacher, lives and raises her family within the district boundaries. Each participant's lived experiences are unique to themselves. Yet despite other negative codes including othering (n=47) and microaggressions (n=22), their purpose served as a driving force that outweigh all other negative factors.

Within this theme of purpose, participants repeatedly discussed a desire to serve students and be agents of change. Frequently throughout the interview, Leila shared her deep passion for her community, her school, and how this is personal since her own children attended the schools within the district. Despite the racism lived through as a child and still as an adult, Leila said:

> Somewhere along the line I figured it out. I am the one that has to make the change…I can't look around and wonder how somebody is going to make this (better) for the kids that look different or that are different. I have to be the one.

Her spheres of influence go beyond the walls of her classroom and the school. She hopes her impact spreads into her community:

> I care to make the kids better, not just better students, better people. I want my community to be solid and good and tolerant. I want that for my children…I want them to experience different things than what I did as a young adult.

Having worked at her middle school for multiple decades, Dorothy shares a similar purpose. Like Leila she both works and lives in the community. Her roles at her school allow her to have a sphere of influence that goes beyond the classroom. Dorothy's primary goal is to foster space and belonging: "The students that I work with, it's about making sure that everyone here has a voice, that everyone belongs here, that everyone has a space here." Additionally, as a Teacher of Color, Dorothy wants to model that possibility exists for all students: "You (the students) can do a lot of things…I want them to see that our race doesn't limit us."

Michael's purpose centers on advocacy for all students, and he recognizes the position he holds as a Teacher of Color in service of students who may identify with him: "I want to be a person that stands up for students of Color. But not just students of Color, all students and students from every single avenue of life." This purpose comes in part from his current experiences as Teacher of Color who has endured microaggressions at his site. He sees similarities to what his students face: "Because I notice a lot of the time that the students on the receiving end or the staff members on the receiving end happen to be students of Color or staff members of Color." Michael embraces the challenge that being a Teacher of Color in a suburban school district presents, and in no way was he going to shy away from serving as an agent of change. He explained "I've definitely noticed that there's a deficit-language culture and I try to be an interrupter to it." This desire inspires him to continue to take on leadership roles as he

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considers pursuing administration. In his work, Michael is compelled by his belief that "I'm saving lives with education."

Serving at her elementary school which is identified as a Title I school and thus serves a larger number of students from low-income families, Keely first focuses on students' basic needs before she is able to focus on instructional practices. She shared that "Some students of mine have come hungry or dirty, not showered for I don't know how long, or haven't had a chance to even change their clothes (and they) have a very different need." While these conditions aren't true for all students on her school campus, Keely advocates for her students when she feels that not everyone does, or will. Advocacy equates to purpose for Keely: "Let me say that…if I'm going to stay here, I will fight for the students regardless, and I will speak to get what we need." Keely shared an example of scrambling to find money for class t-shirts for her students. A tradition at her school is that each elementary class adopts a college or university, and then on specific days, wears a t-shirt with the university logo on it. To afford the shirts, teachers rely on parent donations. But Keely's students and families cannot always afford to donate. Keely did not want her students showing up at the school's assembly without their college shirt, so she fought vehemently to find a way to get money for the shirts. Absent support from the administration, the PTSA or other teachers, Keely eventually found a way to make it happen. This purpose is what grounds her at her school site, compelling her to stay: "So I tend to fight, like I need to stay and I shouldn't give up, I think about the kids…if nobody's going to speak and if I make a run for it, then there you go." Implicit in her last words is that if she leaves her site and her students, they will continue to struggle. For Keely, this is not an option. She is deeply compelled to provide access and opportunities to her students by providing quality education: "It

influences your practices with your students to not just advocate for them, but to do things that better them."

Sarah identifies deeply with her students of Color, and is able to leverage her lived experiences as a cultural asset as she works with her students. Though caring for all students is critically important to Sarah, she holds a special place in her heart for marginalized students who, at her site, are sometimes the students of Color:

> Those are the students that I have just set my eyes on because I feel like they are the underdogs. They're the ones who have constantly been criticized often for whatever reason. They're typically students of Color. I feel because they have encountered a lot of issues wherever they may come from, and for me, it pulls at my heartstrings. I want them to do well. I want them to experience success, whether it be a baby step or a small success.

Sarah notices that, while her workplace experience as a Teacher of Color is tremendously positive, that's not always the case for her students: "Most people treat me great most of the time or all the time, (but) I see that our kids aren't experiencing the same thing, and so I have to be that person for those kids." Her advocacy is influenced by her experiences as a child, having had a mentor who cared for her. Her purpose is clear as she now plays the role of mentor for her students.

Al's lived experiences, which includes first being a student in the community and now teacher, hold profound influence on his purpose, and as a teacher, is able to engage in practices that advocate for his students. He noted that "I can talk with my students of Color that are experiencing these things in the community, experiencing these things at school and I can offer them valuable insights into how I navigate my world." Al's past shapes his present interactions: "I was fortunate enough to have educators that knew how to navigate this life (of) being a Black male and…passed on wisdom to me." Al has quite literally gone from student to teacher and this increases his commitment and sense of belonging. He conveyed that "I feel the incentive to stay

here because I see the impact that I can have on the lives of the students." Though Al has endured microaggressions, been challenged by staff for leading a club that supports students of Color, and at times seeks respite in the walls of his classroom rather than being more visible, he holds profound value for his role as a teacher at this school in this district. He paused deeply before saying "I don't know if I was destined to be at this place at this time, but I know that it's been a good thing, and I've been able to be supportive to people that need somebody like me here."

Other participants share similar passions in expressing their purpose. Dorothy's commitment is to create space for all students so they feel safe, seen, and heard. After many decades, this commitment continues to burn strong: "I love this school. I really believe that this is where I'm supposed to be." Ana loves being in the classroom, and has a deep passion for serving underserved populations. Equity and social justice are important to her. She sees that through her advocacy, she can improve the education system. And as Alison continues her career, she shared that she hopes to see increased diversity in suburban schools. Specifically, she wants "to work towards seeing more teachers of Color or more people of Color in education." Though unique in their identity and life experience, the ten teachers who shared their stories all share the common purpose for serving students, placing notable emphasis on students who are often underserved, underrepresented, or marginalized. It is this purpose, coupled with positive relationships and effective leadership that seems to pull them closer to their school context despite examples of othering that all have endured.

Summary

The research findings indicate that each Teacher of Color brings lived experience, both past and present, that influences how they experience a suburban school setting. The participants

expressed deeply how their individual contexts created a purpose for why they teach, and the impact they hope to have on students. The individual context held great strength in determining a desire to stay or depart their school setting despite negative occurrences, including racist comments, microaggressions, and experiences of othering. Similarly, the school context, including the interactions with students, staff and administration, also significantly factors into a Teacher of Color's sense of belonging. Positive experiences, particularly with other teachers and administrators, pull a teacher toward the school context, while negative experiences push the Teacher of Color away from the school context. Of interest, the district context does hold influence on a Teacher of Color's experience, but often in an indirect manner. Through policy, programs and funding, teachers reported positively when describing involvement with district led initiatives. Finally, despite a recognition of community contexts, mostly which were locally occurring events, respondents indicated that these held lower levels of influence on their feelings of belonging and subsequent employment decisions.

All the participants are driven by a purpose unique to themselves. But the commonality of serving as agents of change in service to their students is the common thread. Yet Teachers of Color are only able to step into that purpose if many conditions are created. Policies that promote equitable practices and initiatives are important so that Teachers of Color feel seen, protected and cared for by the school district. Policies that encourage programmatic changes, whether considering instructional materials, allocating money for professional development, or language in board policy that communicates value sets, influence how Teachers of Color experience this suburban school district. Meaningful points of connection within their workplace also positively influence belonging. Providing Teachers of Color opportunities for involvement in committees, decision making, leadership, and program initiatives allows Teachers of Color to

both advocate for students and develop deeper connections to the fabric of the school. More important than connections to programs are connections to people. This research overwhelmingly shows that Teachers of Color thrive in suburban public schools when they have positive relationships with colleagues and administrators, which serve to increase feelings of belonging. Higher levels of belonging positively contributed to the desire to stay at their current school site.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION, INTERPRETATION & DISCUSSION

Overview of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine how Teachers of Color experience suburban public school settings. The research utilized a mixed methods study consisting of survey data, semi-structured interviews, and an analysis of public documents available on the school district's website. The overarching question this research sought to answer is "What influences Teachers of Color's sense of belonging and their employment decisions?" Though not part of my original consideration, a teacher's individually defined purpose that compels them to enter the teaching profession emerged as a primary influence. The study concluded that individual experiences, both prior to becoming a teacher and while working at the school site, held great influence over the degree to which the teacher felt like they belonged to the school. Within this suburban school district, teachers were able to navigate their various school settings and find a place in which, for the most part, they felt like they belonged. Belonging was, and is, a dynamic process influenced by multiple external factors outside of the teacher context.

A major factor is the school context and all that exists within this space. This primarily includes interactions with students, colleagues, administrators, and leadership opportunities. These all served as opportunities of being seen and heard in relation to their racial and ethnic identity, and feeling like others at their school site understand and connect with this identity, thus increasing feelings of belonging. As teachers described their feelings of belonging as being moderate or high, so too was their commitment to stay at their school site and within the teaching profession. Despite all having multiple examples in which they experienced othering, Teachers of Color described a commitment in service of their students and the advocacy they can provide on behalf of their students.

Within the overarching question, I also sought to understand how Teachers of Color experience belonging and othering, how the site culture and conditions influence employment decisions, and how district and community contexts influence employment decisions. Findings reveal that belonging and othering for Teachers of Color occur across all of the contexts; school, district and community. Most salient to the teachers' levels of belonging and othering are the experiences that occur at the school site. This demonstrates that the school site is the most significant context, followed by the district and finally the community contexts. District contexts can enhance levels of belonging through intentional policy and purposeful leadership. This may serve to buffer moments of othering that Teachers of Color experience across all three contexts. Further, policy can act as a conduit for change within the district. Though participants did not directly draw this connection, they did reference it in their descriptions. Specifically, they did not overtly state that district policies about equity fostered belonging. But they did state that equity initiatives provided pathways to share stories, advocate for change, and allowed for leadership opportunities. Finally, the community context held the least amount of influence on teachers' sense of belonging. Though Teachers of Color recognized that all three (school, district and community) contexts produced experiences of othering, the positive experiences, relationships within the school context and ability to find purpose in their work in service of students and their school site outweighed the negative for the majority of the participants.

Connecting Key Findings to Existing Literature

In this study, work conditions in the school context were positively attributed to teacher satisfaction and teacher belonging. The findings align with prior research including Ingersoll (2003) who described that to increase retention efforts, better working conditions must be addressed. Additionally, Borman and Dowling (2008) state that work conditions predict

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attrition, and that conditions such as administrative support and collaboration opportunities are positively related to retention for teachers as a whole. This held true for the teachers in this study. Moreover, Teachers of Color often felt connected to their schools when they were able to build and maintain positive and supportive relationships with colleagues and administration, when pathways for connection and leadership exist, and when school districts create and promote definitive anti-racist policies, initiatives and practices.

School belonging is an area that continues to be researched. This study hopes to shed more light on what fosters school belonging in suburban school settings for Teachers of Color. Belonging is a dynamic process that involves the co-creation of meaning (Powell, 2021). This process connects directly both to the conceptual framework and the results from the data. Teachers mentioned factors that pull them toward the school and district contexts, as well as factors that push them away. This co-creation of meaning provides a fluid and ever-changing process that is directly impacted by the experiences Teachers of Color have within both the school and district contexts. The results of this study also connect to prior research on belonging in which researchers note that high levels of belonging at work positively correlate to work engagement, feeling valued, and feeling like their work matters (McClure & Brown, 2008; Waller, 2020). The teachers in this study, particularly those who expressed deeper connections to their schools, expressed that their work matters predominantly through their purpose.

Another key finding of this study centers around administrative support. Teachers repeatedly described and discussed the influence that their various administrators had on how they experienced their school settings. Often teachers discussed positive experiences in which administrators listened, checked in, humanized, advocated and supported the teachers through various situations. Similarly, a previous study by Ladd (2011) indicates that school leadership

and the relationships within hold the most predictive power over intention to depart. My study affirms this assertion, as most of the participants actively sought to remain at their school setting. These findings support previous studies on the importance that administrators have on teacher retention (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Boyd et al., 2011; Goings et al., 2018). Additionally, Teachers of Color felt a deeper connection to their school settings when provided the opportunity for leadership. These pathways afforded the chance to advocate for important issues, and support other students including students of Color, thus positively influencing their sense of belonging. These findings align with Dixon et al. (2019) who found that the aim of a diverse and representative workforce may be less about recruitment and more about retention. Though all teachers in this study were in the representative minority within their various school settings, intentional retention efforts focusing on positive relationships and workplace culture had a positive impact on Teachers of Color. Bednar and Gicheva (2019) find that support from school administration is instrumental in maintaining retention particularly in school settings when Teachers of Color make up less than ten percent of the total staff. My study supports the aforementioned studies. However, Bednar and Gicheva (2019) go on to describe the importance of having administrators who are specifically trained to work with Teachers of Color. The need to have an understanding of not just how to support teachers, but also how to foster a positive workplace culture, both which are necessary for retention and belonging. Steps to focus on working conditions must go beyond the individual and also consider the systems of the institution as a whole. Merely focusing on retaining Teachers of Color, though important, can also serve as a distraction to the larger issue of "unsupportive contexts", or institutionalized racism, that get reinforced and reproduced through school systems (Grooms et al., 2021). This area is one to further be explored and will be addressed later in the implications section.

While findings from this study related to findings from prior studies, this study brings additional value to existing literature by addressing some gaps. Specifically, research on how Teachers of Color experience belonging in suburban school districts is less developed. This study may inform researchers and practitioners alike about how to better understand and support teachers in these settings. It is important for educational leaders to seek to understand how Teachers of Color define their own purpose, and how leaders may provide pathways for teachers to engage in this work in a manner that is unique to each Teacher of Color. This research finds that centering the teacher within the school context in a manner that validates both purpose and identity may raise overall levels of belonging within the school setting. Additionally, these steps assist in fostering more consistent retention rates. This research also raises that while microaggressions occur for Teachers of Color who work in suburban school settings, these problematic instances may be countered by advocacy and allyship from both colleagues and administrators. However, to simply accept microaggressions and similar forms of othering as status quo may only perpetuate systemic bias.

Recommendations for Future Research

More research is needed to support Teachers of Color in America's schools. This study focused on one suburban district in California. To further understand the manners of supporting Teachers of Color, the opportunity for more research around belonging, othering, and bridging exists. Future research may include focusing solely on school and district administrators. Specifically, researchers may wish to examine staffing practices, staff training and capacity building, the examination of district policies and their intended versus actual effects, or perhaps replicate the study in different settings (urban, rural or a state other than California).

This research study examined Teachers of Color as an aggregate. Though the research accounted for each individual's ethnicity, more research could be done on how specific ethnicities experience belonging and othering in school settings. Additional research may wish to focus more deeply on the four contexts (self, school, district and community) analyzed in this study. Specifically, future research may choose solely to examine district policies across multiple suburban districts to see the degree that policy impacts belonging. Future research may also look at community contexts in different geographic locations across and outside of California, particularly where community value sets may be more conservative, or where public education is more politicized and criticized. Finally, future research efforts that are purely quantitative, including a much larger sample size, or purely qualitative may further contribute to our understanding.

Limitations of the Study

The intention of this study is to better understand teacher retention for Teachers of Color who work in suburban school districts. The research hoped to show what factors influence a teacher's decision to stay or leave a suburban school district, and how feelings of belonging and othering influence these decisions. Teachers of Color who work in suburban settings often operate in spaces in which they are the minority. The aim was to gain further perspective on how they experience these work spaces so that districts, district leadership and site leadership can take this understanding to create better conditions for Teachers of Color. Obvious limitations existed within the study. The first is that my positionality may have limited the responses that participants provided during the interviews, as well as my ability to see emergent themes since I am not a person of Color. Second, the participants self-selected into the survey and semi-structured interviews, and so selection bias perhaps limited the scope of available

perspectives. Third, while the study focused on belonging among Teachers of Color and the climate and conditions they experience in their workplace, additional factors outside of belonging may have influenced their desire to depart the school site and/or profession. Since 2016, the United States has been the backdrop for numerous events that directly impact people of Color. Numerous events like the murders of Breanna Taylor and George Floyd, larger Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate movements, and the social inertia from the Trump presidency may have influenced feelings of belonging or othering. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic that drastically changed how schools operate from March 2020 through June 2022 may have informed a teacher's employment decision. This study attempted to understand to what degree, if at all, social and community contexts influence a Teacher of Color's feelings of belonging. However, while the study recognizes these influences as addressed in the conceptual framework, the study cannot fully account for these dynamics and their influence on the individual. Thus, the research may be limited in the scope and degree to which conclusions may be made.

Another limitation of this study exists within the concept of "suburban school district". While this study took place using a suburban school district in Southern California, the 296 suburban school districts across the state of California vary in size, demographic make-up and geography. Therefore, any hope at applying the findings from this research to other suburban school districts in California must be tempered, and include the recognition that while themes in working conditions, teacher experiences and other factors may be similar, we may not take conclusions from this study and immediately generalize findings to other suburban districts.

Implications for Policy and Practice

While the scope of this study is limited to one suburban school district in California, the results and subsequent implications hold promise for educational leaders as they seek to better

support Teachers of Color. Implications are relevant for teacher retention, district policy, hiring practices, and the leadership of both school and district administrators as they work to build the culture and conditions in which all staff and students can flourish.

Equity in public education ought to rest at the forefront of decision making as educators seek to better support all students. Significant examples exist in federal legislation that created legally binding services and supports through Individualized Education Programs and 504 plans. Other systemic approaches, including Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Restorative Practices, seek to see the whole child and provide for their needs so they can better access and experience various educational settings. However, the approach to supporting teachers lags far behind the efforts in supporting students. Often teachers are presented as a monolith, but just like students, each teacher has a variety of needs at any point in time in their career. The call for seeing teachers as individuals, particularly Teachers of Color, is now. Just as we see students for all their strengths and assets, and differentiate accordingly, so should we take the same approach in supporting all teachers, especially Teachers of Color in suburban school districts. But how can we do this in a manner that both accounts for a systemic approach and differentiates for individual needs? The implications from the research hope to partially address this. Briefly, this can occur through specific and defined policy, better guidance for administrators on cultural proficiency, and institutionalize training so that they are annual and not simply a "one-off" initiative. Ideally the results will positively disrupt current systems, give administrators more skills to support all teachers, and positively impact student learning. As representative minorities within the suburban school setting, policies that increase representation also serve to lessen code switching and masking that Teachers of Color may do to avoid instances of othering. Therefore, district policy, training and initiatives that directly address

equity may shift school cultures in a way that provides opportunities for Teachers of Color to bring their authentic self to work each day. By doing so, they can more easily leverage their cultural assets and strengths within their teaching.

Based on Bronfenbrenner's framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1999), I created an original framework centering Teachers of Color within their various workplace contexts. At times marginalized in their work experiences, this framework serves to provide a lens through which educational leaders, both at the district and site levels, can utilize to better support Teachers of Color. Using the framework, I conclude that each teacher enters the profession with a purpose that compels them to teach. Participants frequently expressed supporting current and future students who are also racial or ethnic minorities, who have similar lived experiences, and students who can view these teachers as part of their support system within their learning experience. As such, administrators are invited to recognize the significant value that Teachers of Color provide to all students within a suburban school district. Value particularly for students of Color exists by providing adult role models who understand and empathize with cultural and other lived experiences. Additionally, Teachers of Color serve as role models for all students. To increase both teacher retention and feelings of belonging, administrators would benefit from using an individualized lens of equity to see and support the Teachers of Color at their school site. Just as educators shift how they continually differentiate and support all students, we must continue to build our network of resources in supporting Teachers of Color. This original framework and the conclusions from the research can serve these areas of need.

Additionally, the framework indicates that district contexts influence Teachers of Color. Suburban school district leaders, ranging from board members to the superintendent, and from directors to site principals, would benefit from recognizing the importance that specific and

targeted policy hold on positively influencing belonging and retention rates for Teachers of Color. Suburban school districts who wish to lessen the disparity between teacher demographics that are often majority White, and provide more parity that matches the diversity of many student bodies, should seek to create and codify equity policies and programs. These policies serve as a compass for district values, showing to all stakeholders that diversity and equitable practices that not only care for Teachers of Color, but serve all students, are primary to the school district's mission and vision. Additionally, they pave the way for district programs, whether focused on student learning, staff development, or curriculum development. Ultimately, this framework can be used in service of all students, particularly students of Color; whose voices and experiences continue to exist at the margins of the public education system. It is my hope that this framework allows leaders to better support Teachers of Color, and thus have a positive impact on all students who attend suburban public schools.

Implications for Teacher Retention

This study, though small in scope and scale, illuminates aspects of teacher retention that educational leaders and district policy makers in suburban districts may wish to consider related to both policy and practice. Prior research sheds light on factors that contribute to teacher retention and teacher departure (Borman & Dowling, 2008, Boyd et al., 2011, Carver-Thomas, 2018, Dixon et al., 2019, Ingersoll et al., 2017, Ladd, 2011). Focusing retention efforts of current teachers rather than increasing the supply of new teachers may be a more pragmatic approach to the teacher supply issue for suburban school districts. However, researchers are only recently beginning to consider how the concept of belonging impacts retention decisions. For Teachers of Color, who typically are in the numerical and racial minority in suburban school districts, feelings of belonging serve as a key element in their decisions to stay or depart the

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school setting in which they currently work. Too often, experiences with othering within the school context lessens, and even at times inhibits, feelings of belonging. Thus, educational leaders at district offices and school sites alike who wish to maintain or improve teacher retention rates ought to focus more on how Teachers of Color experience their school and district contexts, and what intentional steps these leaders can take to increase feelings of belonging among their staff. Further, this will lessen the unsupportive contexts that Teachers of Color endure in some suburban school districts (Grooms et al., 2021).

Hiring with Purpose

The United States continues to evolve demographically. Between 2030 and 2060, individuals identifying as Non-Hispanic/White will no longer be the numerical majority in the United States (Vespa et al., 2020). While Teachers of Color comprise a critical portion of America's teaching force, just 20% of teachers are Teachers of Color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Yet 53% of America's students are minorities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). This discrepancy is significant. Suburban schools and the teaching profession as a whole are often staffed by a majority of White teachers and administrators. My research indicated that Teachers of Color were often aware of the racial and ethnic disparity within their various school settings. Yet greater levels of belonging helped strengthen the bonds these teachers felt to their schools. While experiences varied from person to person, and in no way are generalizable to all teachers or Teachers of Color, connections that foster belonging increased when teachers had others with similar racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as similar lived experiences, with whom they can connect. Frequently connections occurred when teaching students from similar backgrounds, but connections with colleagues are more positively associated with belonging and retention. It is not sustainable to expect Teachers of Color to

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remain in the numerical and ethnic minorities while continuing to shoulder the myriad

responsibilities of teaching students, while also shouldering the additional work of fighting racial

injustice. Therefore, administrators and districts should seek to staff campuses in a manner that

fosters increased focus on diversity. This is not a request nor a rejection of affirmative action.

However, it is a recommendation to intentionally cultivate a staff that is more representative of

the students they have the privilege to serve. Within Southern California, a variety of teacher

education programs exist within Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI), and school officials tasked

with hiring efforts may benefit in partnering with HSIs local to their district. The lived

experiences, perspectives, and advocacy that Teachers of Color bring is tremendously valuable to

our public schools. Administrators and districts in suburban settings may wish to examine the

parity between staff and students while taking measurable steps to engage in intentional hiring

practices.

Implications for Site Administrators

School administrators are tasked with the complex responsibility of running a school site.

This includes staffing, evaluations, master schedule, school safety, and managing day-to-day

operations. Arguably the primary role of a school principal is to create and foster a school

culture in which all staff and all students can flourish. Recognizing that our public school

systems do not do enough to support Teachers of Color, herein lies an opportunity for change.

While examining both the urgent and the important, administrators may be challenged with the

many duties within the job description. But hiring and retaining quality teachers, including

Teachers of Color, is critical to providing the care and challenge that students need to flourish.

To that end, administrators tasked with hiring and supporting teachers must be afforded training

about how to effectively support for Teachers of Color in the workplace. Merely focusing on

retaining Teachers of Color, though important, can also serve as a distraction to the larger issue of "unsupportive contexts," or institutionalized racism, that get reinforced and reproduced through school systems (Grooms et al., 2021). Most administrators care deeply for their teachers and staff just as they do for their students. Just as we provide equitable approaches and opportunities for our students, we must engage in the same manner with our staff. Public school administrators are encouraged to consider the individual and collective needs that Teachers of Color have in suburban school settings, particularly when they are in the representative minority. Administrators will want to consider the conceptual framework that establishes how the four contexts (individual, site, district, and community) pull toward or push away individual teachers.

The skills of fostering belonging in individuals and workplaces can be learned, cultivated, and nurtured through intentional practice. One such method is to provide additional training around cultural proficiency and positive school culture. The teachers in this study referenced district equity training that administrators participated in alongside the teachers. The teachers saw value in these training opportunities. However, this study did not directly measure if administrators engaged in this, nor the degree to which this may have impacted the participants. Regardless, site administrators would benefit from comprehensive training centering on cultural proficiency that occurs yearly, similar to training on human resources practices or updated educational laws and requirements. Districts may greatly benefit by institutionalizing anti-racist and equity-based practices in the same way school districts focus on supporting students with equally important needs. This understanding may encourage school and district administrators to modify how they both see and work with Teachers of Color, and place greater value on their lived experiences and cultural assets. Additionally, site administrators are encouraged to seek out opportunities for both training and dialogue about fostering belonging and positive

workplace culture. Teachers of Color cannot be an afterthought, nor can the apathy toward culturally responsive supports and systems that some districts have continue. To simply dismiss the importance of training in cultural proficiency in service of current Teachers of Color is to dismiss the importance that these teachers have in service to all students, particularly students of Color.

For White administrators such as myself, the implications of this study may hold even greater weight. Too often, the burden of improving the school climate and addressing oppression in school systems rests squarely on the shoulders of Teachers of Color (Dixon et al., 2019). Educational leaders at both the site and district levels should take steps to improve systems and practices to alleviate this burden. While school safety for all stakeholders is undoubtedly the most primary element of our work, staffing decisions including teacher retention is one of the more influential factors on student success. Though lessening over the past twenty years, the teaching demographic continues to be predominantly White. Students within suburban schools are growingly diverse, yet the ethnic and racial disparities between staff and students remain. To that end, White administrators like me may wish to first recognize the cultural disparity that exists between student and teacher demographics. This recognition, coupled with intentional training and the influence that administrators have in hiring decisions, provides ample opportunities to shift how students experience their school settings. Hiring new staff who better represent the student demographics provide dual benefits. Students benefit by seeing staff who look like them and may have similar lived experiences, and Teachers of Color are more able to embrace their self-identified purpose which for many participants was to advocate for students who otherwise may be marginalized. This dually benefits the belonging for both teachers and students, thus improving school culture in total.

Implications for Districts

Findings from this study address how the suburban school district created language taking a stance in favor of anti-racist practices, embracing the need for diversity, equity and inclusion, and developing both programs and practices that support this position. School and district policy that lends guidance to administrators and teachers is needed to provide consistent levels of support for teachers to remain in classrooms (Sulit, 2020). Suburban school districts will want to take note of how this positively impacts Teachers of Color. If they do not exist already, districts should create and implement board policy and administrative regulations that define specific equity policies to support both students and Teachers of Color. The findings of the research show the importance that district policies have on positively influencing belonging for Teachers of Color. They serve to frame district values by stating what is important and codifying the district's position around diversity, equity and inclusion. Further, they serve as an umbrella under which practices increased space and representation. Policies that establish a position on equity signal to stakeholders within the school district a belief about how all, particularly those who have been historically marginalized, are valued and cared for. While this does not cause belonging in Teachers of Color, the policies created a framework that included practices and initiatives that positively influenced belonging in teachers. This evolution will positively disrupt their current practices in service of all people.

Districts can take specific steps to engage in this work. These initiatives include school-wide programs that focus on anti-bias, curriculum that teaches multiple perspectives and an array of diverse literature, and programs that create space for teachers, including Teachers of Color, to step into leadership roles. These roles serve to position teachers in a manner to advocate for students, provide a viewpoint that other teachers without the same/similar lived experiences can

provide, and be seen by their peers as trusted colleagues who are part of the school culture. Though the research did not analyze the absence of district systems, one may imagine that without equity-based district systems in place, inequities will perpetuate. This will only result in further disenfranchising Teachers of Color and Students of Color, the latter who make up the numerical majority in California suburban public schools (Reed, 2021). While this may seem performative on the surface, the absence of such a policy provides the pathway for inequities to perpetuate, thus fostering greater opportunities for the marginalization of Teachers and students of Color. School districts that do not yet have such policies are encouraged to create them, and then to provide funding for continuous training that focuses on building the skill sets of all staff, and especially site leaders. This may include administrators, counselors, Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs), Intervention Coordinators, and union representatives. By engaging in these steps, a district can further build capacity in the staff and systems.

Policy alone may not be sufficient enough for systemic progress. It is recommended that districts who truly wish to sustain high retention rates for Teachers of Color engage in annual training for all staff members that is similar to existing annual training mandated by human resources. Opportunities may include courses in belonging and othering, anti-bias practices, cultural proficiency, and implicit bias. By institutionalizing training around cultural competency that is similar to mandated reporter training, school safety training and others, teachers, administrators and other staff may slowly develop better support and care for Teachers of Color.

Fostering Supportive Contexts

The school and district contexts greatly influence how teachers experience their work. If we truly seek to provide space, representation, and voice for all students, which this researcher and practitioner does, then school districts and their leaders should work to develop systems of

support by creating policies and implementing intentional and effective practices. Prior research indicates that unsupportive contexts and systemic racism can get reinforced and reproduced through school systems (Grooms et al., 2021). To shift this, district and site leaders should first recognize the influence that unsupportive contexts may have on both belonging and retention for Teachers of Color, and then develop strategy to shift the pendulum from unsupportive to supportive. In no way is this notion binary, but rather a dynamic process that continues to evolve. To facilitate these shifts and foster more supportive contexts for Teachers of Color, site administrators and district leaders alike are encouraged to focus on a few areas. This includes recognizing the individual and collective needs that Teachers of Color may have beyond the needs of other teachers. To engage in this work requires elevating the cultural competency of those involved through intentional and continuous training and dialogue. Districts may foster more supportive work contexts should they engage in the development of specific equity policies that are codified into board policy and remain steadfast in the implementation of multiple initiatives and programs. Such initiatives may center around staff development, curriculum development, intentional hiring practices, and most importantly, targeted support for Teachers of Color and the site administrators charged to support them. School administrators are culture builders who must provide the necessary conditions of both care and challenge for all teachers and students to thrive. Should these steps occur to foster greater levels of belonging, I am hopeful that retention rates for Teachers of Color will improve.

RP3

To more readily access actionable steps for educational administrators, I encourage them to utilize RP3. The acronym stands for *relationships, purpose, pathways* and *policy*. These four focal areas can help frame actionable steps administrators can take that may create the conditions

for Teachers of Color to feel a greater sense of belonging within school contexts. The figure is below, and then a more detailed explanation follows.
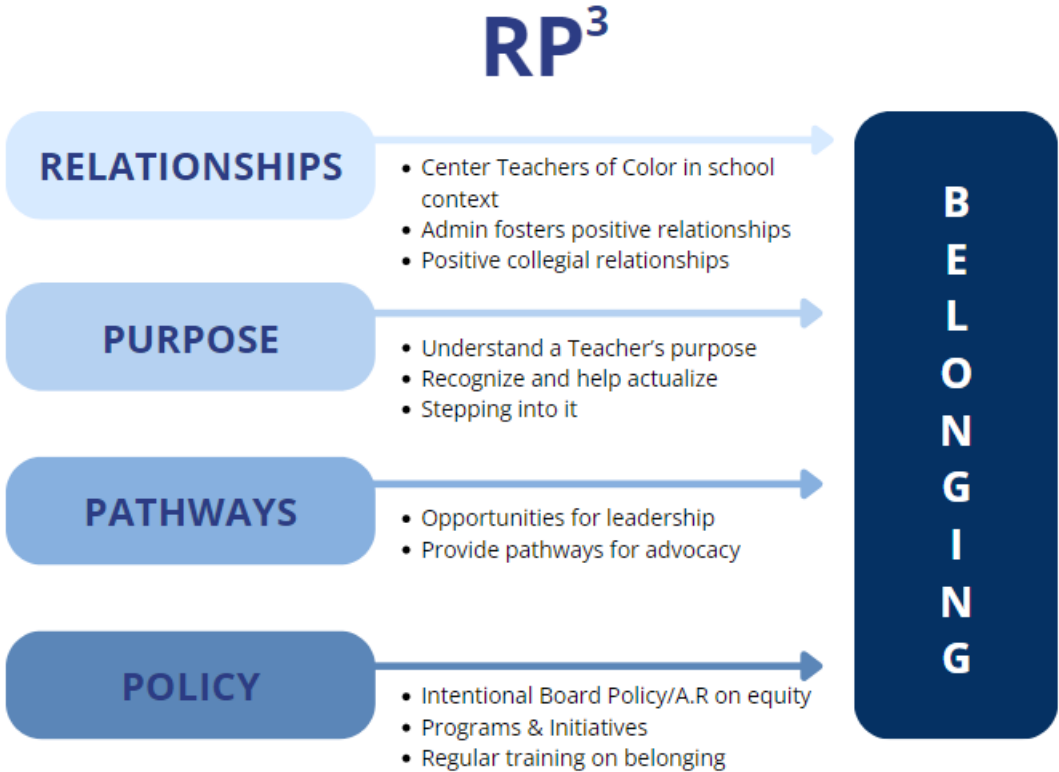
Figure 2

RP3: Relationships, Purpose, Pathways, and Policy

Positive relationships are central to the success of a healthy and functioning school site. For administrators, understanding how to foster and sustain relationships with teachers and staff is critical so that the school can effectively operate in service of all students. Though educators typically see students as individuals, recognizing their strengths, their needs, their backgrounds and stories, this perspective is not as frequently used when interacting with staff. To that end, administrators would benefit from evolving their approach by centering Teachers of Color on their staff in a manner that considers their background, story, strengths, assets, and needs they

may have to thrive. In doing so, this will pull Teachers of Color closer to the school context and increase belonging. Further, the figure notes that positive relationships among colleagues is equally critical to foster and sustain belonging. To foster healthy relationships among teachers, administrators may consider steps including teacher mentors to work with and support new teachers, affinity groups for teachers, and consistent opportunity for teachers and staff to connect about both work-related and non-work-related topics. These steps will benefit the school context and provide further opportunity for belonging.

Teachers of Color, like most all teachers, chose the craft of teaching for specific reasons. As they grow into and stay in the profession, their purpose for engaging in this work becomes increasingly clear, as it did for the teachers in this study. Administrators who wish to foster positive school contexts for Teachers of Color ought to regularly engage in conversation with their teachers to identify the purpose for their work. Once this occurs, the administrator and teacher together can develop ways to actualize this purpose within the classroom, across the school site, and do so in a manner that aligns with the mission and vision of the school site. In doing so, administrators can support the co-creation of meaning for Teachers of Color within the school context, thus strengthening feelings of belonging. Through regular dialogue with teachers that help identify strengths, assets, needs and purpose, administrators can better provide intentional pathways for Teachers of Color to engage in leadership opportunities, create connections with students and staff across campus, and advocate for all students through their voice.

Finally, administrators, both at the site and district levels, can utilize RP3 figure when considering how their school and district policies can strengthen belonging for Teachers of Color. Districts without board policy and administrative regulations that speak to diversity,

equity, inclusion, and belonging fail to take a stand. By not intentionally addressing the importance of anti-racism across their school systems, districts send a clear message. However, as in the research findings in this study, when districts have specific and intentional policy and regulations around equity, the policies serve as a conduit to engage in programs that elevate voice, provide multiple perspectives, and see that the district values Teachers (and people) of Color. District policies then allow schools to engage in regular programs and activities that can evolve practice; whether it be in the areas of curriculum, staff training, or school culture.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, school districts and their leaders need to institutionalize regular and consistent training and staff development around belonging. Administrators and teachers regularly engage in training around state testing protocols, safety training, and mandated reporting procedures. All of these are critically important for the functionality of a healthy school system. However, administrators and leaders cannot expect to foster belonging when they have not developed an understanding first of what the word *belonging* means, and second the factors that influence feelings of belonging. To this end, the inclusion of regular and consistent training for school leaders about belonging would close the gap by both raising the importance of this concept in flourishing school cultures and by providing steps in how to increase belonging in Teachers of Color, and all staff alike. These actionable steps can ultimately support administrators in fostering positive school contexts for Teachers of Color while also lessening negative school contexts.

Closing Thoughts

Ultimately, while this study focuses on Teachers of Color, it is also in service of students, and selfishly, my own children. My children are both White and Native American, and have yet to encounter a Teacher of Color in their suburban school setting. My children will likely not

have a Teacher of Color until at the earliest middle school, and possibly not until high school, if at all. Within this statement lies great sadness, especially when their classmates contribute to a rich tapestry of racial and ethnic diversity. Frequently they share stories of their peers, their rich and diverse backgrounds, their cultures and religions, and the beauty that exists within. They express joy in learning about those who are both similar and different from them. Though my children have yet to use the term "cultural assets", they can speak about this idea practically. I think of the many children across the suburban school districts who do not benefit from learning from Teachers of Color. It is my hope that this research contributes to shifting the narrative. In a suburban school district in which White administrators are often in the majority, we must take on the role of educational ally on behalf of Teachers of Color. These intentional practices will help foster positive workplace culture, increase belonging, and ultimately assist in teacher retention. All of these are positively associated with student learning, particularly for students of Color.

This study and the research that lies within tell a story. It is one of optimism, hope, and promise. The teachers who shared their narratives in a profound, passionate, and direct way tell stories of purpose. Their purpose is to make a place even though one may not exist, to advocate for all children including those who are underrepresented, and to foster a school culture that embraces all. To them, I extend my gratitude. The determined individuals who teach hold the power to shape our children's minds. Our children deserve to see themselves in the fabric of the schools they attend, and this research hopefully showcases a few of those steps that we, the administrators and leaders within the system, can take to create a better tomorrow for our teachers.

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Appendices List

(Brief Description)

The following includes a list of appendices and brief descriptions. See full appendix descriptions as separate documents.

A. Participation Consent Form: This form was emailed to possible participants explaining the purpose of the study, time commitments and possible risks.

B. Confidential Survey Questions: This questionnaire, administered through Qualtrics includes the questions that participants were asked and how each question speaks to the research questions in the study. Participants only saw the survey questions and not how they aligned to the research questions.

C. Semi Structured Interview Protocol: The script, questions and probes were only seen by the researcher. The protocol was used to guide the 60-minute interviews.

D. Definition of Codes: This document provides the 45 codes and their definitions.

E. Code Frequencies: This document provides all codes and the frequency that each appeared in the transcripts.

F. Additional Frequency Tables: The tables include relevant data used in the findings.

University of California, San Diego

Consent to Act as a Research Subject

TITLE: School Belonging for Teachers of Color

Who is conducting the study, why you have been asked to participate, how you were selected, and what is the approximate number of participants in the study?

Scott Wild, a student in the Joint Ed.D. program in Educational Leadership at UCSD/CSUSM, is conducting a research study to find out more about how Teachers of Color experience belonging and othering, and to what degree that informs employment decisions. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a teacher in the school district. There will be approximately 30 participants in the survey phase of this study, and 8-12 participants in the interview phase of this study.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand how Teachers of Color experience belonging and othering in a suburban school district. The findings from the study have the potential to inform the field about teacher retention particular to Teachers of Color, improve practices by site and district leaders, and support improved policies.

What will happen to you in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, the following will happen to you:

 You will be asked to participate in an online survey that will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. The survey is anonymous unless you decide to provide your contact information, then it will remain confidential. Participating in the survey is voluntary. You can choose to stop participating at any time in the process.

You will be asked to participate in an interview asking you about your experiences as a teacher, work contexts, and perspectives on your employment decisions. The interview is expected to last approximately 1 hour and will be audio-recorded to improve the accuracy of the researcher's notes. Interviews will take place at your school/work site or another local location of your choosing. Interviews can also be conducted on Zoom if that is more comfortable for you. Participating in the interviews is voluntary. Audio recording is also voluntary. The audio recording will be studied by the research team for use in the research project. Your name will not be identified. You may request to stop the recording at any time or to erase any portion of your recording. You can choose not to answer any question at any time for any reason. You may decide not to answer some or any questions, and can stop the interview at any time or erase any portion of the taped recording. You can withdraw from the study by telling the researcher.

At the completion of the study the researchers will provide a report with the results of the study which will be shared with participants. The researchers may also discuss the results at scientific meetings, conferences and in research papers. The results will present information only in summary form so you will not be identified by name. Quotes may be used in reports and presentations, but they will not be connected with specific individuals. Any information that could identify you such as your name, specific position, or school name will not be used in any reports. Pseudonyms will be used to refer to individuals and places. We will use confidential study ID numbers rather than names to record information. Only the interviewers will know which ID number refers to each participant, and only the interviewer will hear the interviews or see written summaries of the interviews.

How much time will each study procedure take, what is your total time commitment, and how long will the study last?

For the survey, your approximate time commitment is between 15-20 minutes. If selected for the interview, you will be asked to participate in 1 interview, lasting 60 minutes. Your total time commitment will be 60 minutes.

What risks are associated with this study?

Participation in this study may involve some added risks or discomforts. These include the following:

1. A potential for the loss of confidentiality. All possible care will be taken to protect the confidentiality of your records including but not limited to keeping data on a password protected server and following standard UCSD security protocols to maintain confidentiality. Research records will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. Research records may be reviewed by the UCSD Institutional Review Board and San Diego State University.

2. You will be asked personal questions about your professional beliefs, background, and experiences. There is the possibility that this may lead some participants to feel some mild emotional discomfort or embarrassment. Please be advised that you are under no obligation to discuss any topic which makes you feel uncomfortable, and you may choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable and still remain in the study.

3. To minimize risks related to the political, social or economic context in which participants live, researchers will code all data using confidential ID numbers rather than names to record information. You can choose not to answer any question at any time for any reason. You may decide not to answer some or any questions, and can stop the interview at any time or erase any portion of the taped recording. Additionally, at no time will district administrators be granted access to individually identifiable principal responses thus eliminating the possibility of either intentional or unintentional bias toward principals. Any information that could identify you such as your name or school name will not be used in any reports. Pseudonyms will be used to refer to individuals and places.

Because this is a research study, there may also be some unknown risks that are currently unforeseeable. You will be informed of any significant new findings.

What are the alternatives to participating in this study?

The alternatives to participation in this study are simply not to participate.

What benefits can be reasonably expected?

There will not be any direct benefit to you from participating in this study. The investigators, however, may learn about teachers' experiences and beliefs about their work and school reform and society may benefit from this knowledge. You will be informed of any significant new findings. There will be no cost to you for participating in this study.

Can you choose to not participate or withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of benefits?

Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw or refuse to answer specific questions in an interview or on a questionnaire at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. If you decide that you no longer wish to continue in this study, simply inform the researchers.

You will be told if any important new information is found during the course of this study that may affect your wanting to continue.

Can you be withdrawn from the study without your consent?

The PI may remove you from the study without your consent if the PI feels it is in your best interest or the best interest of the study. You may also be withdrawn from the study if you do not follow the instructions given you by the study personnel.

Will you be compensated for participating in this study?

There is no compensation for participating in the survey phase of the study. If you are selected for the interview, you will receive a $50 gift card to compensate you for your time and for participating in the study.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?

There will be no cost to you for participating in this study.

Who can you call if you have questions?

Scott Wild has explained this study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may reach Scott Wild at (858)-204-5589.

You may call the Human Research Protections Program Office at 858-246-HRPP (858-246-4777) to inquire about your rights as a research subject or to report research-related problems.

Your Signature and Consent

You have received a copy of this consent document.

 You agree to participate in the study.

_____ _____

Subject's signature   Date

 You agree to the use of audio recording as indicated above.

_____ _____

Subject's signature   Date

Appendix B: Confidential Survey Questions

The survey will be administered using the online platform Qualtrics at Qualtrics.com. Below are the survey questions. Choice options are omitted but are presented on the survey in both Likert scales and multiple choice responses.

Survey Question	Addressed Research Question
1. With what gender do you most identify?	descriptive
2. With what ethnicity/ethnicities do you most identify?	descriptive
3. Please select your current school site.	descriptive
4. How many years have you worked at your current school site?	descriptive
5. In total, how many years have you worked in **this** district?	descriptive
6. How many total years have you served as a teacher in your career?	descriptive
7. How well do the people at your current school site understand you?	SQ 1
8. How connected do you feel to the staff at your current school site?	SQ 1
9. I enjoy spending time with my colleagues at work by (check all that apply):	SQ 1
10. How welcoming have you found this school to be to you personally?	SQ 1
11. How much respect do students at your school show toward you?	SQ 1
12. How much respect do other staff at your school show toward you?	SQ 1
13. How much do you matter to others at your school?	SQ 1
14. At my school, I am able to be my true self and am accepted for who I am.	SQ 2

15. At my school, I have to minimize parts of my true self so that I fit in.	SQ 2
16. In your time at **this** school, has a colleague made a comment or an action that was derogatory to you based on your race or ethnicity?	SQ 1
17. How happy are you with your choice to work at this school?	SQ 2
18. To what degree have you considered leaving this **school site**?	SQ 3
19. To what degree have you considered leaving this **school district**?	SQ 3
20. To what degree does your site administrator/administrative team foster a school culture where you feel that you belong?	SQ 2
21. Which of the following influences the degree to which you feel that you belong (check all that apply?	SQ 1
22. Which of the following influences the degree to which you feel that you **do not** belong (check all that apply?	SQ 1
23. I feel like a real part of my school site.	SQ 1
24. It is hard for people like me to be accepted here.	SQ 1
25. Other teachers in this school take my opinions seriously.	SQ 2
26. Sometimes I don't feel as if I belong here.	SQ 1
27. I feel very different from most other teachers here at this school.	SQ 1
28. I wish I worked at a different school.	SQ 3
29. I feel proud of belonging to this school.	SQ 1
30. I wish I were in a different school district.	SQ 3
31. I feel proud of belonging to this school district.	SQ 1
32. This survey is part of a larger study about teachers'	N/A

experiences in a suburban school district. The next component of the study involves one-on-one interviews. People who are selected to interview will receive compensation in the form of a $50 gift card to Amazon. Would you be willing to participate in the interview portion of the study?	
33. Please provide your name, phone number and primary contact email in the space below if you are willing to be contacted for future parts of this study.	N/A

Appendix C: Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Interview person #_____   Pseudonym chosen:_____

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

RQ 1: What influences Teachers' of Color sense of belonging and their decision to remain or depart their school and district?

> **SQ1:** How do Teachers of Color experience belonging and othering in a suburban school district?
> **SQ2:** How do the site culture and conditions influence Teachers of Color's employment decisions?
> **SQ3:** How do district and community contexts influence Teachers of Color's employment decisions?

Begin Script:

"Thank you for agreeing to be part of this study. For this project, I am interested in exploring how teachers of Color* feel when they are at work. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may choose to skip any questions you do not want to answer or stop the interview at any time. This interview will be audio-recorded. Please let me know if you'd like me to stop or pause the recording at any time. Do you agree to participate in this interview?"

*Explain the usage of "Teachers of Color" as the terminology most widely accepted by researchers and practitioners. Also provide space for the subject to describe how they wish to be identified.

Lead in: What brought you to teaching in the first place? What brought you to this district in particular?

1) Tell me how you came to work at this school? What does a typical day look like? [SQ1]
   PROBES:

   - How long have you been here?
   - Grade(s) taught? Subjects taught? Other roles?
   - Did you choose to work at this site specifically?

2) What is it like working at this school site? [SQ2]
   PROBES:

   - working conditions
   - Interactions with students, parents & community
   - Levels of autonomy

- Support & leadership opportunities

3) What are 3 words you can use to describe your relationships with your <u>colleagues</u> (teachers, counselors)? [SQ1]

    PROBES:

- Discuss students, Planning & implementing curriculum
- Professional growth or other work issues
- Interactions on personal levels about non-work-related topics
- What experiences with your colleagues stand out as memorable and positive?
- What experiences with your colleagues stand out as memorable and negative?

4) What are 3 words you'd use to describe your relationships with your <u>administrator(s)</u>? Feel free to differentiate between each. [SQ1]

    PROBES:
- Do they visit your classroom?
- Level/degree you feel supported?
- Do they identify with you as a person in any way?

5) To what degree do these relationships (with colleagues and administration) influence how much you feel like you belong at this school? [SQ1]

    PROBES:
- Explore degrees of belonging for both colleagues and admin

6) On a scale of 1-10 (1 being low involvement, 10 being high involvement) how much do you get to be involved in decision making at this school? In what ways? [SQ1]

    PROBES:
- grade-level/curriculum team
- School leadership opportunities

7) Where do you see yourself in the culture of the school? School district? [SQ2]

    PROBES:
- Curriculum
- Visuals that display pictures and/or value sets
- Think about things like your values, beliefs and other elements of "what makes you, you."
- People who look like you, think like you, have similar stories as you

8) Where do you feel most connected and least connected when you are at this school? [SQ1]

Define othering: *A set of structures that produce marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human differences based on group identities*

9) Can you describe a moment(s) in which you felt a lower sense of belonging or even othered? [SQ1]

       PROBES:
- What contributed to this?
- Who was involved?
- What is the result or impact of this experience?
- Who do you turn to (professionally or personally) when this occurs?

10)To what degree do you think that your site and district see you, hear you and support you as a teacher of Color? [SQ1 & 2]

Probes:
- What steps do you see that are taken that provide support?
- What steps do you see that aren't taken?
- To what degree does this have an impact on your employment decisions?

11) To what degree do you think the school district's policies and actions support you as a teacher of Color? [SQ2]
       PROBES:
- Equity resolution by school board
- Equity forums
- Development of new curriculum (ethnic studies/ethnic literature)
- No Place For Hate schools

12) Does your racial identity impact your work? Does this impact occur more with students, with staff, with parents and/or community? [SQ1]
- In what ways may this be an asset?
- In what ways might this be a challenge?

13) Have you ever given consideration to leaving this school or the district altogether? [SQ3 & 4]

       PROBES:
- What is the primary reason?
- What other factors?
- Where would you go if you left?
- What's keeping you here?

14) To what degree do you feel seen and understood by the parent community? [SQ2 & 4]

15) Can you talk a little about the past few years? A lot has happened including Covid-19 and subsequent mask protests, ███████████Instagram account, Black Lives Matters, and a number of political and social stories that create a lot of energy around teaching. As a teacher of Color, how have you experienced this within this school community? [SQ4]

      Probes:
- Where do you get support from as these instances have occurred?
- Ask about school board
- Ask about local community and/or parents challenging curriculum
- Ask about book banning

16) In what ways do you think the experiences that you have had as a teacher of Color in this district will influence your career path in the years ahead? [SQ3 & 4]

17) Is there anything else you wish to share about your experiences at this school and in the district that I didn't ask you in the earlier questions?

Thank you for your participation. I am going to turn off the recorder now. If you would like a copy of the transcript, please contact me and I will provide you one.

Total time: approximately 60 minutes

Appendix D: Definition of Codes

Background	Personal and professional history including life experience, teaching experience and education
Typical Day	Experiences that occur on most days while they are at work
Working Conditions	The physical space, systems and structures in which the teacher works including facilities, classrooms, schedules and materials
Autonomy	Degree to with the teacher has independence in their professional duties from their administrators
Administrator Support	Instances where the teacher describes positive support provided by the administrator
Positive Staff Interaction	Interactions with other teachers, counselors and staff that are positive
Negative Staff Interaction	Interactions with other teachers, counselors and staff that are negative
Positive Student Interaction	Interactions with students that are positive
Negative Student Interaction	Interactions with students that are negative
Positive Administration Interaction	Interactions with site administration (principal and assistant principals) that are positive
Negative Administration Interaction	Interactions with site administration (principal and assistant principals) that are negative
Positive District Interaction	Interactions with district staff who do not work at the school site that are positive
Negative District Interaction	Interactions with district staff who do not work at the school site that are negative
Positive Parent Interaction	Interactions with parents that are positive
Negative Parent Interaction	Interactions with parents that are negative
Positive Community Interaction	Interactions with the community at large that are positive
Negative Community Interaction	Interactions with the community at large that are negative

Positive Staff Relationships	The amount and quality of positive relationships with other teachers, counselors and staff
Negative Staff Relationships	The amount and quality of negative relationships with other teachers, counselors and staff

Positive Student Relationships	The amount and quality of positive relationships with students
Negative Student Relationships	The amount and quality of negative relationships with students
Positive Administration Relationships	The amount and quality of positive relationships with the principal or assistant principal(s)
Negative Administration Relationships	The amount and quality of negative relationships with the principal or assistant principal(s)
Positive District Relationships	The amount and quality of positive relationships with district staff and leadership who do not work at the school
Negative District Relationships	The amount and quality of negative relationships with district staff and leadership who do not work at the school
Positive Parent Relationships	The amount and quality of positive relationships with parents
Negative Parent Relationships	The amount and quality of negative relationships with parents
Positive Community Relationships	The amount and quality of positive relationships with the community at large
Negative Community Relationships	The amount and quality of negative relationships with the community at large
Belonging	Instances or the degree to which teacher feels they belong at their school site
Othering	When interactions with others lead to feeling marginalized based on their race or ethnicity
School Involvement	Instances or degree to which teacher is involved in school experiences/responsibilities beyond their teaching duties
Decision Making	Opportunities for teacher to make decisions that impact the

	school site
School Culture	Reference to the atmosphere and environment at the site
District Support	Degree to which the teacher believes district leadership provides support as a Teacher of Color
District Policies	Degree to which the teacher believe district policy supports them as a Teacher of Color
Racial Identity	Reference to their own racial identity
Leaving School	The teacher has considered leaving their current school site
Leaving District	The teacher has considered leaving the school district

Desire to Stay	Teacher expresses a desire to stay at the school to serve as an agent of positive change
Representation	Instances or the degree to which the teacher see their racial/ethnic identity represented in the school culture or setting
Lack of Representation	Teacher expresses a lack of ethnic/racial representation in their school or district setting
Microaggressions	Teacher experiences a microaggression from another person
Purpose	Purpose for teaching or engaging in their work

Appendix E: Code Frequencies from Interviews

	Frequency	Percentage
Purpose	58	8.67
Othering	47	7.03
School Involvement	42	6.28
Positive Staff Relationships	40	5.98
Background	33	4.93
Positive Staff Interactions	30	4.48
Belonging	30	4.48
Racial Identity	29	4.33
Representation	25	3.74
Positive Administration Relationships	22	3.29
Microaggressions	22	3.29
Negative Staff Interactions	21	3.14
Positive Student Interactions	20	2.99
Working Conditions	20	2.99
Ineffective District Policies	20	2.99
Negative Administration Interactions	16	2.39
Decision Making	13	1.94
Administrator Support	13	1.94
Autonomy	13	1.94
Lack of Representation	13	1.94
Leaving District	12	1.79
Positive Administration Interactions	12	1.79
Negative Parent Interactions	11	1.64
Positive Parent Interactions	9	1.35
Negative Administration Relationships	9	1.35
Effective District Policies	9	1.35
Positive Student Relationships	9	1.35
School Culture	7	1.05
Negative Community Relationships	7	1.05
District Support	7	1.05
Positive Parent Relationships	6	0.90
Positive Community Relationships	6	0.90
Negative Staff Relationships	6	0.90
Negative District Relationships	5	0.75
Negative Student Interactions	5	0.75
Typical Day	4	0.60
Desire to Stay	4	0.60
Positive District Interactions	3	0.45
Leaving School	3	0.45
Negative Community Interactions	2	0.30
Positive Community Interactions	2	0.30
Negative District Interactions	2	0.30
Positive District Relationships	1	0.15
Negative Parent Relationships	1	0.15
Negative Student Relationships	0	0.00
TOTAL	669	100.00

Appendix F - Additional Frequency Tables

The survey instrument asked questions about how teachers experience their school sites, their perceptions and interactions with others at the school site, influential factors of othering and belonging, and the degree to which they consider leaving the school or school district.   Below are additional frequency tables that were used in the study.

Table 12

Frequency Distribution about TOC Ability to be True Self and Accepted

Years at Site	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	0	0.0	0.0
Rarely	1	3.4	3.4
Sometimes	8	27.6	31.0
Often	12	41.4	72.4
Always	8	27.6	100.0
Total	29	100.0	100.0

Additionally, this included times in which they have to minimize parts of their true self to fit in.

Table 13

Frequency Distribution about TOC Minimizing Parts of their True Self

Years at Site	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	6	20.7	20.7
Rarely	9	31.0	51.7
Sometimes	12	41.4	93.1
Often	2	6.9	100.0
Always	0	0.0	100.0
Total	29	100.0	100.0

The range indicates that for respondents, the inability to be their true self and feel accepted comes with a need to minimize parts of their identity. This impacted how they feel compared to most teachers at the school (Table 14) and how frequently they encounter derogatory comments based on race (Table 15). The comments influence how often they feel as if they do not belong (Table 16).

Table 14

Frequency Distribution about TOC Feeling Different from other Teachers at their Site

Years at Site	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	5	17.2	17.2
Infrequently	8	27.6	44.8
Sometimes	8	27.6	72.4
Frequently	6	20.7	93.1
Always	2	6.9	100.0
Total	29	100.0	100.0

Table 15

Frequency Distribution of Hearing Derogatory Comments about Race/Ethnicity

Years at Site	Frequency	Valid Percent	CumulativePercent
Never	15	51.7	51.7
Rarely	7	24.1	75.9
Sometimes	7	24.1	100.0
Often	0	0.0	100.0
Always	0	0.0	100.0
Total	29	100.0	100.0

Table 16

Frequency Distribution about TOC Sometimes not Feeling like they Belong

Years at Site	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	7	24.1	24.1
Infrequently	11	37.9	62.1
Sometimes	8	27.6	89.7
Frequently	3	10.3	100.0
Always	0	0.0	100.0
Total	29	100.0	100.0

Despite respondents indicating varying levels of feeling different or like they do not belong, many indicated pride in belonging to their respective school (Table 17) and to the school district (Table 18). Teachers of Color expressed that they frequently or always feel proud of belonging to their school, though the responses about district pride skewed lower with more respondents stating they sometimes or frequently are proud.

Table 17

Frequency Distribution for Feeling Proud of Belonging to This School

Years at Site	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	0	0.0	0.0
Infrequently	1	3.4	3.4
Sometimes	3	10.3	13.8
Frequently	15	51.7	65.5
Always	10	34.5	100.0
Total	29	100.0	100.0

Table 18

Frequency Distribution for Feeling Proud of Belonging to This District

Years at Site	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	0	0.0	0.0
Infrequently	2	6.9	6.9
Sometimes	8	27.6	34.5
Frequently	14	48.3	82.8
Always	5	17.2	100.0
Total	29	100.0	100.0