

**ONLIES AT WORK: FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SENSE OF  
BELONGING OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE THE  
SOLE EMPLOYEE IN A ROLE  
IN A SCHOOL**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The concept of belonging is considered an essential need, and the impact of belonging has been studied by many. However, limited research has been conducted on the impact of belonging of those who work in schools, especially those who are the only individuals engaged in their role, known as Onlies. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the factors that contribute to the sense of belonging for the Onlies. Data were collected from a survey, that was distributed nationally online (n = 233), and individual interviews (n = 6). Results indicate that Onlies have less of a sense of belonging than NonOnlies, those individuals who have a cohort, such as teachers who teach the same grade level. Sense of belonging for Onlies is positively related to administrator support and negatively associated with school problems. Recommendations for practices school leaders can implement to support the people who work in their schools are made, such as creating a climate of inclusion, working to create satisfactory workplace conditions, and providing moral support to school staff.

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. None of my grandparents graduated high school, and to be able to receive a doctoral degree is simply amazing. I attribute this to my parents' belief in the value of education. To my mother, who did not get to attend college, but should have been given that opportunity, thank you for showing me what a strong woman can do. To my father, who embodies the characteristics of a lifelong learner, thank you for giving me brain teasers from an early age and showing me the beauty in the struggle of finding a solution, instilling in me the zest of learning, and believing I could do anything I set my mind to do.

It is dedicated to my children: Elizabeth, Kat, and Jake, who checked references, patiently answered my statistics questions, acted as proofreaders, or provided feedback. It is also dedicated to my husband, Josh Berberian, who listened to my frequent ramblings about my research, answered data questions, worked on formatting, held down the fort at home, and did not flinch when I said I wanted to go back to school yet again.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to all the Onlies working in schools. I recognize the unique and sometimes challenging position you are in, and I thank you for all you do for families, students, teachers, administrators, and staff in schools. I see you. I value you. I appreciate you.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

School districts and the schools within them are complex organizations with various factors that influence their overall functioning, and these include the employees who work within their walls. According to Bellah and colleagues (1991), institutions have norms and expectations for people individually or in groups, and these are reinforced by consequences and influenced by morals, power, and the availability of resources. Individuals compare and identify themselves within the structure and standards of the institution. Adhering to the social norms of an institution can allow for the success of an individual as well as promotion of the collective good (Bellah et al.,1991). The question arises of what other factors promote the well-being of individual employees in schools?

In the United States, schools are structured into different levels – elementary school, middle school, and secondary/high school. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), elementary school is “A school that offers more of kindergarten through grade 4 than grades 5 through 8 and no grades 9 through 12.” Middle school is “A school that offers more of grades 5 through 8 than higher or lower grades but does not offer both kindergarten through grade 4 and grades 9 through 12.” Finally, secondary or high school is “A school that offers more of grades 9 through 12 than grades 5 through 8 and no kindergarten through grade 4” (USDOE, n.d-a). In addition to different levels, schools are also designated as public, public charter, or private. Private schools are further identified as Catholic, other religious, or nonsectarian.

Public schools are publicly funded while private schools are not (UDSOE, n.d.-a). For more complete definitions of the types of schools, please refer to Appendix A.

School staff include principals and grade-level/subject area teachers as well as school psychologists, reading specialists, school counselors, nurses, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, behavioral specialists, and instructional assistants, among others. Often, grade-level teachers (e.g., all second-grade teachers) or content area teachers (e.g., all math teachers) are part of a learning team. Considering school district websites, elementary schools traditionally have a principal, classroom teachers who teach specific grade levels (e.g., first-grade, second grade, etc.) or special subject areas (e.g., music, art, physical education, etc.), various building-level specialists (e.g., school counselors, school nurse, speech-language pathologist, etc.), administrative assistants, instructional assistants, lunch and recess aides, and custodians. Some elementary schools also have an assistant principal and security guards. In middle and high schools, these same personnel are present. Teachers, however, are more specialized in the subject matter they teach (e.g., math, science, etc.) and they may teach multiple grades. Schools frequently have Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to allow for staff collaboration to support student achievement and teacher development (DuFour, 2004; Vescio et al., 2008).

According to Hord (1997), successful PLCs have common elements, including shared leadership from the school principal, teacher involvement in decision-making, shared visions and goals, and peer feedback. In his concern that the term PLC was being used so frequently and was losing its meaning, DuFour (2004) shared what he considered the fundamental concepts of a PLC. These include a focus on and commitment to student

learning and achievement as well as ensuring a “culture of collaboration” (p. 8) where teachers can hone their skills and improve their practice. In their review of the literature on PLCs, Sai and Siraj (2015) noted that “The interactions of teacher peers are very necessary and very important to perfect the process and outcomes of teaching and learning” (p. 65). The authors reported the various definitions and conceptions of a PLC, and most entailed collaboration and sharing among teachers, school leaders, and possibly other school staff members.

Based on a business model, PLCs aim for collaboration, and the purpose of this collaboration is for professional development that should lead to improved teacher instruction and ultimately improved student learning (Vescio et al., 2008). Promoting a sense of belonging of teachers participating in PLCs is not the goal; however, some studies indicate that participation in PLCs promotes the well-being of teachers, including belonging (Owen, 2016). Klatt et al. (2023) noted, though, that there are several differences between PLC organization, and “These variations are significant, particularly with *special* subjects like physical education where singleton teachers are placed on teams that may not be conducive to the teacher’s development” (p. 170). A music teacher called for PLCs for music educators because he believed they were promising, not only just for improved student learning, but also to allow for collaboration and reduce the isolation of music teachers (Verdi, 2022).

### **School Staff Shortage**

In addition to the current teacher shortage that exists (Balgopal, 2022; Blad, 2022; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2016), according to the October 2022 staffing survey conducted by the Institute of Education Science (IES, n.d.), there appears to be a

limited number of qualified candidates applying for certified non-teaching staff positions in school districts. The Institute of Education Science is a multi-agency group, that was established in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Respondents were from 2400 public schools from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, Sutchter et al. (2019) examined the issue of teacher shortages in the United States. Using data from the Schools and Staffing Survey, they found that 55% of the respondents noted dissatisfaction as a critical factor for leaving the profession. Teachers were dissatisfied with a wide range of issues, including salary, limited decision-making input, autonomy, and accountability practices. Dissatisfaction has also led employees to be less committed to their jobs and only willing to perform the basic requirements included in their job description, also known as “Quiet Quitting” (Buscaglia, 2022; Mahand & Caldwell, 2023). While those employees remain in their jobs, they are likely not performing to the best of their ability.

In general, as seen on their websites, numerous school districts across the United States revealed a need to fill open positions for teachers as well as other school staff members, including nurses, counselors, school psychologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, behavior specialists, social workers, and speech and language pathologists (please refer to Table 1.1 for a sampling of open positions across the United States). It is noteworthy that these positions were available in the middle of the school year. Schwartz and Diliberti (2022) conducted a survey of 359 leaders from the American School District Panel regarding staff shortages in schools. In addition to reporting teacher shortages, twenty percent of the respondents reported “considerable shortages” (p. 6) of school nurses and school psychologists as well as shortages in school counselors (14%)

and social workers (13%). Given the demand for teachers and school specialists, an argument can be made that effort should be made to entice individuals to enter the field as well as create environments to increase retention of employees/decrease attrition.

School District	Behavior Specialist	Couns.	Nurse	OT	PPT	School Psych	SLP	SW	Teacher
Adair County, MO									•
Ann Arbor, MI		•	•			•	•	•	•
Appling, GA			•			•			•
Attica, KS			•					•	•
Bangor, ME				•			•		•
Bismarck, ND		•		•	•		•		•
Boston, MA			•			•		•	•
Canyon, UT		•			•	•	•	•	•
Castle Rock, WA						•			•
Davidson County, NC		•							•
Eagle, CO		•			•	•	•		•
Exeter, NH									•
Harford County, MD			•			•	•		•
Kenton County, KY					•	•	•		•
Liberty, IL									•
Monroe County, MS									•
Philadelphia, PA		•	•	•	•	•	•		•
Plainville, CT			•			•			•
San Antonio, TX	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Santa Monica-Malibu, CA						•	•		•
Smyrna, DE	•			•		•	•		•

Figure 1.1 Job openings in the U.S. (February 2023)

### Theoretical Framework

Several theories regarding human motivation have emerged over the years, and they have all included some concept of belonging as an essential need. Murray (1938) described primary and secondary needs for individuals in creating a theory of personality. One of the secondary needs is affiliation, which Murray described in the following way: “To form friendships and associations. To greet, join, and live with others. To co-operate and converse sociably with others. To love. To join groups” (p. 83). Maslow (1943) proposed a theory of motivation, which included the hierarchy of basic needs, and the “love need,” which included belonging, follows once the physiological and safety needs of an individual have been met. In addition to needing to belong, people have the desire

to be a member of or have a place in a group. Lack of love/belonging can lead to maladjustment. Alderfer (1969) presented and tested the E.R.G. theory as an alternative to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. E.R.G. theory was based upon three needs: existence, relatedness, and growth. Relatedness entails "relationships with significant other people" (Alderfer, p. 146), which includes coworkers as well as superiors and subordinates. Deci et al. (2017), in describing Self-Determination Theory (SDT), noted that "a small set of basic psychological needs" (p. 22) mediates the effect of environmental factors on the motivation of employees. Included in that small set of psychological needs are autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

In their review of literature testing the idea of belonging as a fundamental need, Baumeister and Leary (1995) found that belonging is more than just being affiliated with people or groups because interactions must be frequent and supportive in order to promote well-being and fulfill the need to belong. Kachchhap and Horo (2021), in their study of teachers, reported, "satisfying the need to belong can help improve the performance of employees" (p. 779). They also noted that thinking about employees' sense of belonging could decrease attrition. In their review of numerous studies about belonging as a core personality trait, DeWall et al. (2011) concluded that "...it is possible that most thoughts people have, emotions they feel, or behaviors in which they engage are (consciously or unconsciously) motivated by how each response can satisfy the need to belong" (p. 1307). In her extensive review of the literature regarding student belonging in schools, Osterman (2000) answered the questions of "Is the sense of belonging important in an educational setting? Do students currently experience themselves as members of a community and how do schools influence students' sense of community?"

(p. 359). She concluded that sense of belonging for students is vital, as it is linked to a variety of positive outcomes, including improved motivation, engagement, performance, and quality of learning.

In light of that conclusion, this research examined the impact of being the only person engaged in a particular role (“Only”) on sense of belonging and being considered a valuable and contributing member of the school community. The information garnered from this study will be beneficial for school leaders to assist them with understanding the steps necessary to provide support to all staff, including those staff members who may not have a cohort, so that they feel as if they are part of and valued members of the school community.

In their review of the conceptual issues of belonging, Allen and colleagues (2021) noted the general consensus that belonging is a fundamental need of people; however, ideas related to how to measure the concept and "satisfy the need of belonging" (p. 88) vary. They identified four components as part of their sense of belonging framework, which were used for this research project: competencies, opportunities, motivation, and perceptions.

- *Competency* for belonging includes those skills necessary to interact based on social and cultural norms.
- *Opportunities* to belong refers to "...the availability of groups, people, places, times, and spaces that enable belonging to occur" (p. 92).
- *Motivation* to belong refers to the human need to belong and entails a desire to connect and interact with other people.

- *Perception* of belonging refers to individuals' thoughts and feelings about their own experiences.

As a dynamic framework, the other three areas (competency, opportunities, motivation) can also be impacted by thoughts and feelings (perception). For this study, one hypothesis is that individuals who participated in the research have the necessary skills (competencies) to interact and be part of a group, as they all needed to meet the requirements set forth by the states in which they work in order to meet certification standards to fulfill the duties of their roles, some of which include practicums and/or internships (based upon a review of state department of education websites regarding certification requirements). This research, thus, is focused on the characteristics and attitudes of the Onlies as well as the opportunities available to them, their motivation to belong, and perceptions of their own belonging in the schools where they work. The impact of school and district leadership on their sense of belonging and job satisfaction is also examined.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Belonging is a complex topic that has been studied, conceptualized, and theorized by many. As such, this literature review described the conceptual understandings of belonging along with some of the major theories of motivation and personality that include belonging as an essential need. Information regarding the importance of belonging at work along with the benefits of having a sense of belonging and the negative impacts when belonging is thwarted was discussed. As inclusion is often paired with belonging, it is important to include conceptualizations of that concept as well.

Creating change in schools to support all staff likely requires reform of some practices. School leaders should promote a climate geared to collaboration and collective well-being. Dewey (1907) noted that success in education is often focused on competition and thus tends to promote the success of the individual rather than promote the common good, what is good for society as a whole. According to Dewey, a society consists of a group of people connected by working alongside each other in a similar fashion toward a common goal. Attaining that goal requires cooperation, interaction, compassion, and the exchange of ideas. Dewey felt that the needs of an individual were just that, individual, while the needs of society allowed for cooperation and support to meet the collective purpose. Changing this mindset from one that is not only geared toward individual success but to the success for all members of society, in this case, all members of the school community, especially Onlies or those employees who may easily be forgotten, can likely assist with reform.

Knowledge of social capital theory could also be beneficial for reform planners. Penuel et al. (2009) describe how interactions between teachers have been found to play a role in how changes are enacted in the classroom. The benefits of examining teacher social networks include obtaining a clearer view of the school community structure as well as what causes changes in behavior and viewpoints. In essence, knowledge of social networks allows for an understanding of the success of initiatives promoting collaboration. Examination of the social networks also allows evaluators to see who the experts are in schools. These unofficial leaders can be valuable assets with regards to reform efforts. Penuel et al. noted that social capital theory “can also be used to analyze the efficacy of reform coaches for improving teachers’ access to expertise and resources and for facilitating the change process” (p. 126).

Based on their extensive review of 82 studies regarding teacher collaboration, Vangrieken et al. (2015) noted that, when teachers were able to collaborate with others, there were numerous benefits and few drawbacks to students, teachers, and the school. Among many others, benefits included improvement in instruction, teacher motivation, efficiency, and morale along with student learning and understanding. There were also gains in goal achievement, innovation, and resource and idea sharing as well as a reduction in feelings of isolation for teachers. Possible negative consequences, which were far outnumbered by the benefits, included conflict, competitiveness, and conformity. There is strong support for collaboration between teachers just as there are benefits for employee sense of belonging. Feeling as if one belongs can lead to better employee performance (Lam & Lau, 2012), job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011a), and overall well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) while thwarted belonging has

been found to be associated with aversive and self-defeating behaviors (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; DeWall et al., 2011; Thau et al., 2007; Twenge et al., 2002) and employee turnover/turnover intentions (Renn et al., 2013).

In a review of the literature, belongingness in schools and work is currently a popular topic; however, it is mainly focused on students and their sense of belonging in school (Osterman, 2000) or employees and their sense of belonging in the workplace without a focus on schools (Allen et al, 2021; Antonsich, 2010; Brimhall & Mor-Barak, 2018; Bryer, 2020; Canlas & Williams, 2022; Ellemers et al, 2013; Filstad, Traavik, & Gorli, 2019; Goodenow, 1993a; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Kern & Allen, 2018; Lampinen et al, 2018; McClure & Brown, 2008; Thau et al, 2007; Waller, 2021). There is some research on teachers and their sense of belonging (Kusumawati & Al, 2021; Nislin & Pesonen, 2019; Pesonen et al., 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011a; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011b; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019); however, limited research exists about other school professionals and their sense of belonging (Renn et al., 2013). Thus, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the conditions required for school professionals, who are the only individuals engaged in their particular role in their school building (referred to as Onlies in this study) to feel as if they belong and are engaged, contributing, and valuable members of their school community. This research is important because, as Baumeister and Leary (1995) concluded in their seminal work about belonging as a fundamental need, “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). Results of this study, then, will add to the limited research regarding the factors impacting the Onlies’ sense of belonging in schools.

## **Belonging as a Concept**

There are various conceptualizations of belonging in the literature, although all seem to be relatively similar. Goodenow and Grady (1993) reported student belonging as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment" (p. 60). In their discussion of belonging as "a vital mental health concept," Hagerty et al. (1992) provided the following definition for belonging: "...the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment" (p. 173). They also noted that systems include organizations or relationships, and environments can be natural or cultural ones. They further distinguish two dimensions: valued involvement and fit. Valued involvement is described as the perception of being needed, valued, and accepted while fit relates to how an individual's traits are complementary to the organization or relationship. When studying organizations in Spain and making them more inclusive, Bryer (2020) noted that "The work of belonging therefore encompasses those skills and sensibilities by which people actively orientate themselves towards and connect with the concerns of others, gaining a sense of social acceptance or validations, and building deep and lasting relations" (p. 644).

Filstad et al. (2019) noted that "Belonging is always a situated and dynamic experience. It is about belonging here and now, through activities, common goals, achieving something together, being proud of the workplace and being part of something on equal terms" (p. 129). To formulate this conceptualization, Filstad and colleagues examined how employees interpreted belonging at work. Using snaplogs from fifty-one participants, researchers identified the following themes related to belonging: belonging

as being a part of (i.e., relationships and/or activities), belonging as becoming (e.g., a computer represented the various types of interactions and connections with others), belonging as experiencing boundaries (i.e., the absences of things that indicated a lack of belonging, e.g., closed doors, empty spaces), and belonging as performing (i.e., shared activities in and out of work).

In order to create their own definition of belonging based on the conceptualizations of belonging of others, Mahar and colleagues (2013) reviewed 40 articles related to belonging spanning approximately 20 years. Based on that review, they defined the sense of belonging as:

...subjective feeling of value and respect derived from a reciprocal relationship to an external referent that is built on a foundation of shared experiences, beliefs or personal characteristics. These feelings of external connectedness are grounded to the context or referent group, to whom one chooses, wants and feels permission to belong. This dynamic phenomenon may be either hindered or promoted by complex interactions between environmental and personal factors. (p. 1031)

In their study of third-year nursing students, Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) conceptualized belonging as:

...a deeply personal and contextually mediated experience that evolves in response to the degree to which an individual feels (a) secure, accepted, included, valued and respected by a defined group, (b) connected with or integral to the group and (c) that their professional and/or personal values are in harmony with those of the group. The experience of belongingness may evolve passively in response to the actions of the group to which one aspires to belong and/or actively through the actions initiated by the individual. (p. 2872)

Regardless of how belonging is conceptualized, people want belonging and acceptance (Leary et al., 2013). Leary et al., creators of the Need to Belong Scale (NTBS), conducted nine studies in which participants, ranging in sample size from 82 to 815, completed the NTBS and other scales. Overall results of completed scales indicated

that people typically want to belong and be accepted, but their level of desire to do so varies.

### **Belonging and Inclusion**

Review of the concept of inclusion must also be considered when studying belonging, as the two concepts are often connected. Like belonging, there are various conceptualizations with overarching similarities. Thus, there seems to be a general consensus with regards to a basic understanding of the topic. Brimhall and Mor Barak (2018) defined inclusion as "the extent to which employees feel valued for their unique characteristics and have a sense of belonging, thus feeling comfortable about sharing their 'true selves' within the work organization" (p 475). Shore et al. (2011) conceptualized inclusion as "the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness" (p. 1265). They included a framework of inclusion which detailed high belongingness and value in uniqueness as inclusion, where the "Individual is treated as an insider and also allowed/encouraged to retain uniqueness within the work group" (p. 1266). The other, less beneficial areas in their framework, included exclusion (low belonging/low value in uniqueness), differentiation (low belonging/high value in uniqueness), and assimilation (high belonging/low value in uniqueness).

When studying inclusion, Ellemers et al. (2013) hypothesized that when individuals felt included, it supported the "...the development of a positive team identity" (p. 21). They surveyed two groups of the Royal Netherlands Armed Forces who took part in NATO peacekeeping missions. Based upon the surveys that were completed by

soldiers and their supervisors, the relationship between perceived respect and inclusion was positive and significant. The more participants felt respected, the greater the sense of inclusion with the team. Research also revealed a positive relationship between feelings of inclusion and team identity. This positive team identity along with another part of the study related to the willingness of an individual to invest in the team resulted in positive ratings by supervisors. Although the teams studied were involved in life or death situations, which indicates a lack of generalizability, researchers noted that their results can be important for other teams working in high stress environments.

Sharing her rationale for the importance of and studying leadership and inclusion, Boekhorst (2015) described climate for inclusion as "...the shared perception of the work environment including the practices, policies, and procedures that guide a shared understanding that inclusive behaviors, which foster belongingness and uniqueness, are expected, supported, and rewarded" (p. 242). Jansen et al. (2014) in their own conceptualization of inclusion, noted that, in addition to belonging, authenticity should be a part of it instead of uniqueness. As such, they defined inclusion as "...the degree to which an individual perceives that the group provides him or her with a sense of belonging and authenticity" (p. 373). In this idea, individuals can be unique or similar to the group; the important aspect is that they are able to be authentic. Additionally, Jansen et al. further theorized that the group is central to the perceptions of the individual, as "...in the process of inclusion, it is the group rather than the individual that has primary agency" (p. 181). They used their conceptualization in their development of the Perceived Group Inclusion Scale (PGIS) to measure student and employee feelings of inclusion and based it on two dimensions - belonging and authenticity, in which belonging had

subgroups of membership and affection, and authenticity had subgroups of room for authenticity and value in authenticity.

Results of 213 surveys completed by staff members of a health service organization were analyzed as part of Brimhall and Mor Barak's (2018) study. They found support for their hypotheses that feelings of job satisfaction were positively associated with the workplace climate as well as with both climate for inclusion (employees' perceptions that they were appreciated and valued) and climate for innovation (individuals felt more at ease sharing innovative thoughts). Results of Brimhall and Mor Barak's study also found a negative association between climate for inclusion and employee age. They hypothesized that older workers might feel excluded because of their age and possible age discrimination. Their sample was diverse; however, all respondents worked in one healthcare organization.

In providing evidence-based practices for promoting inclusions in schools, Scorgie and Forlin (2019) noted that, "It is highly possible to be situated in a classroom, workplace or community and still feel isolated, overlooked, marginalized or alone - that is feeling as if perceived as 'other'" (p. 4). This is important to consider for staff as well.

### **Belonging Theory – Motivation to Belong**

As noted, Murray (1938), Maslow (1943), Alderfer (1969), and Deci et al. (2017) argued that belonging, affiliation, or relatedness is a fundamental human need. This need must be fulfilled in order for individuals to reach self-actualization or self-determination. Baumeister and Leary (2017) examined the empirical data in an effort to provide evidence to support the theory of belonging as a fundamental motivator. They reported that belonging is a fundamental, and almost universal, need for people. They

further noted that in order for belonging to occur, interactions between the same people must be frequent, positive, caring, stable, and long-term. There is growing evidence supporting the positive impacts of feeling as if one belongs along with the detrimental impacts when belonging is thwarted or threatened (Haldorai et al., 2020; Kachchhap & Horo, 2021; Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009; Thau et al., 2007). Results of Baumeister and Leary's review revealed the possibility that the interactions between individuals only need to be neutral and not necessarily positive. Individuals are satisfied with a few close relationships so do not require more than that in order to receive the benefit. It can be argued, then, that if people feel as if they belong in other areas of their lives, they may not seek that at work. However, Baumeister and Leary concluded that, "At present, it seems fair to conclude that human beings are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to belong, that is, by a strong desire to form and maintain enduring interpersonal attachments" (p. 522).

According to Yuval-Davis (2006), belonging refers to feeling as if one is "at home" somewhere and has an emotional attachment. They argue that belonging can relate to an individual's categorical place in society (social location) along with the position of power that category entails. These include gender, age-group, and professional roles. That position is a dynamic one; thus, belonging is a fluid concept. An individual's identification of multiple categories (e.g., gender, race, class, etc.) determines their social location. Belonging entails "emotional investments and desire for attachments" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202) and "therefore, is not just about social locations and constructions of individual and collective identities and attachments but also about the ways these are valued and judged" (p. 203). Similarly, Antonsich (2010) described the two lenses

through which to analyze belonging - place and politics. Place-belongingness encompasses the sense of feeling "at home" somewhere while the politics of belonging entails an individual's place in society with regards to identity and citizenship. Antonsich noted that belonging is primarily based on feeling "at home"; it is shaped by "politics of belonging" (p. 653). In their phenomenological study of employees, McClure and Brown (2008) interviewed individuals about their sense and experience of belonging at work. They found that, as new employees, individuals wanted to be invited, to connect, to establish trust with colleagues, to be recognized for the work they do, and to be engaged and needed. Issues of exclusion and competition interfered with feelings of belonging. Overall, McClure and Brown concluded that belonging at work can assist with self-actualization and self-reflection of the individual.

Gere and MacDonald (2010), in their review of empirical studies supporting belonging theory identifying belonging as an essential need, noted that "In particular, it has become clear that the need to belong has strong effects on people's cognitions, emotions, and behaviors, and a chronically unmet need has many negative consequences that can profoundly affect an individual's life" (p. 110). Similarly, Baumeister and Leary's (2017) review found connections between the belonging need and "cognitive processes, emotional patterns, behavioral responses, and health and well-being" (p. 522). They further reported that this need could be one of the most influential and collective theories to describe human nature. Thus, this dissertation was designed to add to the literature regarding belonging in the workplace, especially to address the paucity of research regarding other school professionals' sense of belonging in schools.

## **Thwarted Belonging and Social Exclusion**

When needs are not met, individuals may substitute other needs, which do not address what they actually need. Thus, the thwarting of needs is linked to psychological ill-being (Deci et al., 2017). Deci and Ryan (2000) reviewed numerous studies that linked the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs to "psychological health and well-being" (p. 244). They noted that even with changes, the need of relatedness tends to remain steady. "Thus, need-thwarting conditions lead to specifiable patterns of behaviors, regulations, goals, and affects that do not represent the optimal development and well-being that would occur in supportive environments but which would have had some adaptive value under adverse conditions" (p. 254).

## **Impacts of Belonging**

Since belonging is considered an essential need for humans, an understanding of the sense of belonging of employees at work can provide valuable information for leaders. Benefits to belonging as well as the adverse impacts of thwarted belonging will be discussed. Having this information can assist leaders in their efforts to promote belonging or create a climate of inclusion in the workplace.

## ***Belonging at Work***

Fulfillment of the need to belong can occur at work if employees develop relationships with colleagues and their leaders (Shore & Chung, 2022). In Davila and García's (2012) study of organization identification and commitment, 292 workers from one business completed questionnaires that measured their affective commitment to the organization, sense of belonging, value consonance, perceived support, organizational citizenship behavior, and intent to remain with the organization. Results of the

questionnaires revealed that workers' sense of belonging was associated with commitment to the organization, value consonance, organizational citizenship behavior, and intent to stay. Davila and García further reported that colleague support predicted sense of belonging. Using a comparative design, Sargent et al. (2002) studied the impact of the buffering effect of belonging on depressive symptoms. Naval recruits in basic training (443 participants) were assigned to one of two groups: those who had a clinical diagnosis of depression and those who did not have the diagnosis (control group). Participants completed the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II), Sense of Belonging Instrument, psychological experience (SOBI-P), and Sailor's Health Inventory Program (SHIP). They also provided general information regarding demographics and family medical history about substance abuse and mental health illness. Results of the BDI-II and SOBI-P indicated a negative moderate correlation, as depression symptoms increased with a decrease in belonging. Individuals with a strong sense of belonging and exposure to family history of alcohol abuse were less likely to develop symptoms of depression than those with similar exposure to alcohol abuse who had a weaker sense of belonging.

One hundred fifty-six mental health workers were surveyed by Somoray et al. (2017) in their cross-sectional study, in which they examined the effect of sense of belonging at work and personality on professional quality of life and found that a sense of belonging at work was the highest predictor of "...compassion satisfaction and low levels of burnout in the current study" (p. 58). Somoray et al. concluded that employees who felt appreciated and supported by colleagues and the workplace had increased feelings of joy in helping clients and decreased feelings of burnout in their

positions. Results supported the idea that workplace belonging should be cultivated, especially to support well-being and attention.

### ***Benefits in Educational Settings***

The advantages of a sense of belonging at work suggest that belonging for employees who work in educational setting would reap the same benefits. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011a) explored the factors that impacted job satisfaction and motivation to leave the teaching profession for teachers, and whether those factors were mediated by sense of belonging and physical and emotional fatigue. Questionnaires were completed by 2569 teachers from 127 elementary and middle schools in Norway. Researchers found moderate positive correlations between sense of belonging and value consonance, support from supervisors, and positive and supportive relationships with colleagues. There was a weak positive correlation between sense of belonging and relations with parents. Belonging was “indirectly related to motivation to leave the teaching profession, mediated through job satisfaction” (p. 1034). There was a negative relationship (weak) between belonging and emotional exhaustion. Teacher exhaustion was negatively related to belonging. "These results indicate that job satisfaction is a key variable for mediating the effect of belonging and exhaustion on the motivation to leave the profession" (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011a, p.1036). These results suggest that leaders should be attentive to employees' feelings of fatigue, job satisfaction, and belonging in their efforts to retain staff. When German teachers were surveyed, it was revealed that aspects of teacher well-being, specifically positive emotions, relationships, and achievement, were predictors of job satisfaction (Dreer, 2024).

To examine the impact of mere belonging, defined as "...small cues of social connectedness to another person or group in a performance domain" (p 529), Walton et al. (2012) conducted four experiments. Participants in the study included a range of 27 to 116 American and Canadian undergraduate students. Each experiment included a possible social interaction or social connections/belonging for participants. Results indicated that mere belonging boosted motivation for achievement.

Discussing the qualitative portion of the mixed methods study of nursing students and their experience of belonging in their clinical practical placements, Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2009) analyzed surveys that were completed by 362 third-year nursing students at two schools in Australia and one in England. Eighteen of the students who completed the survey were recruited to be interviewed. From those interviews, a definition of belongingness was created, and common themes from their interviews revealed that belonging was promoted by qualified and consistent mentorship in a process that was structured and formal. The attitude of the clinical manager influenced the staff's attitude toward the students. Those leaders "...who were accepting, supportive and inclusive" (p. 2875) increased students' feeling of being welcomed and part of a team. Students who felt as if they belonged had greater confidence. Having a sense of belonging also enabled students to be more open to and confident in learning, and they ultimately became more competent in the nursing profession. In contrast, Lam and Lau (2012) conducted a study of schoolteachers (kindergarten to secondary school) in China who worked in a more isolated fashion rather than teams. Five hundred thirty-two teacher-supervisor pairs were surveyed, and results revealed the prevalence of loneliness enabled by inadequate relationships. Lam and Lau concluded that their study highlighted the importance of

workplace loneliness and its negative effect on job performance since they found that workers who are not lonely might do more work than is required of them and feel more supported by their organization. The study also revealed that the relationship between the employees and leaders mediated the association of workplace loneliness and organizational citizen behavior for individuals and the organization. For school administrators, this information suggests that positive interactions between school staff and school leaders can lead to a higher likelihood of staff engaging in organizational citizen behavior, behaviors that support the school. Those teachers may provide support for less experienced teachers and also provide information for improving leadership and schools.

Attachment to the organization also impacts belonging, as revealed by a study conducted by Raza et al. (2020). They studied 40 faculty members of a private university in Thailand. Participants completed a workplace belongingness scale and a job crafting scale. They found that workplace belonging was enriched by workers' emotional attachment to their organization, including commitment, affection, and sense of inclusion. They also found that job crafting and affective commitment, also known as emotional commitment, were positively associated. If employees feel attached to their schools (have school spirit), this could increase feelings of belonging as well.

Various factors contribute to a sense of belonging. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011b) studied 231 Norwegian school teachers who taught grades one through ten (elementary and middle school) from nine schools. Participants voluntarily completed a questionnaire that measured their perceptions of goal structure, value consonance, feeling of belonging, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, and motivation for leaving the teaching

profession. A positive relationship was found between teachers' feeling of belonging and value consonance while a negative relationship was found between belonging and performance goal structure (emphasis was placed on competition and test scores). Although a positive linear correlation existed between the sense of belonging and job satisfaction, this relationship was not statistically significant. They cited a small sample size as one of the limitations of this study. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2019) also studied 760 Norwegian elementary and middle school teachers as part of a larger study. Researchers found that teacher self-efficacy was not associated with belonging. Teachers' sense of belonging was positively associated with job resources (supportive colleagues, supervisory support, and value consonance). They reported that the results were not surprising regarding the relationship between feeling supported and sense of belonging. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2021) also studied collective teacher culture as a part of the same larger study reported above. Participants, 760 Norwegian teachers who taught students in grades one through ten, completed questionnaires about shared goals and values, value consonance, collective teacher efficacy, and supportive colleagues (collective culture factors) as well as autonomy, feeling of belonging, and job satisfaction. All of the collective culture factors were positively and moderately correlated with autonomy, belonging, and job satisfaction.

### ***Negative Impacts of Thwarted Belonging and Social Exclusion***

There are various impacts when people's desire to belong is thwarted or they are socially excluded (DeWall et al., 2011; Haldorai et al., 2020; Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009; Renn et al., 2013; Thau et al., 2007; and Twenge et al., 2002). In their review of numerous studies regarding belongingness as a core personality trait, DeWall et al. (2008) provided evidence that there was an increase in aggression when individuals were

socially excluded. Additionally, when people are excluded, they demonstrate more prosocial behaviors and self-regulation when those behaviors are connected to acceptance; they demonstrated fewer prosocial behaviors and less self-regulation when the outcome was not connected to acceptance. Social exclusion is also linked to reduced self-regulation. Self-regulation depended upon an individual's acceptance to a group - if they were already accepted, they performed worse; if there was the possibility of acceptance in the future, they performed better. Individuals who are socially excluded may also exhibit attitudes that are in accord with those who might provide acceptance or affiliation even if those attitudes lead to undesirable behaviors (DeWall et al., 2011).

Ostracism contributes to a lack of belonging (Haldorai et al., 2020). In surveying 402 hotel employees in Thailand regarding their sense of belonging at work, Haldorai et al. examined the mediating impact of workplace belonging linking workplace ostracism and work engagement. Results indicated that when workers felt ostracized, their feelings of belonging decreased, which also reduced their work engagement. Feeling ostracized had a negative impact on employee sense of belonging, which could adversely impact their job performance.

When individuals do not feel as if they belong, they may engage in self-defeating behaviors (Thau et al., 2017). In a field study, researchers surveyed Dutch employees (200 participants) about their feelings of belonging (both actual and desired), and then also asked their supervisors (16 participants) to rate their employees on their engagement in interpersonal harmful and helping behaviors. In all, they received 129 matched responses for employees and supervisors. Thau and colleagues found that thwarted belonging in an organization, i.e., when the desire to belong is viewed as greater than the

actual sense of belonging, was associated with behaviors considered to be self-defeating. Workers, whose perceived sense of belonging was less than they hoped for, were rated by the supervisors as demonstrating more harmful and less helpful interpersonal behaviors at work. These self-defeating behaviors did not reduce the gap between the hoped for belonging with reality. Thau et al. (2007) argued that results of their study provide indirect evidence to support their argument that thwarted belonging interferes with behaviors supporting goal attainment. "Our findings suggest that creating more socially inclusive rather than socially alienation work environments may be a very effective way of reducing interpersonal harmful behaviors and increasing prosocial ones" (p.846).

In a series of experiments, Twenge et al. (2002) studied the relationship between social exclusion and self-defeating behavior. Participants in their four experiments included a range of 31 to 50 undergraduate students. In their first experiment with 50 participants, students were most likely to engage in risk-taking behavior upon hearing that they would lose their current relationship later in life (i.e., future alone group) compared to those students who were told that they would have gratifying relationships in the future (i.e., future belonging group) or that they would be prone to accidents in the future (i.e., misfortune control group). In the second experiment, the same experiment as just described was conducted except the participants, 36 undergraduate students, completed a different personality scale. Similar results occurred, as students in the future alone group were again most likely to engage in self-defeating behavior. Thirty-one undergraduates participated in the third experiment, which was an extension of the first two experiments. It further supported the results, as the future alone group again chose the self-defeating behavior significantly more than the students in the other two groups.

In the final experiment, 39 undergraduates were faced with the same conditions as in the first experiment and also completed an additional scale. Instead of being assessed for risk-taking behavior, they were assessed for procrastination. Individuals who were assigned to the future alone group were more likely to procrastinate than those in the other two groups. Results of all four experiments provided evidence that with social exclusion comes an increase in self-defeating behaviors. Twenge et al. reported that "...self-defeating behavior arises when people pursue positive outcomes that carry substantial risks or costs (p. 614).

Leaving the profession or the intent to do so can also occur when individuals feel socially excluded (Renn et al., 2013). Renn et al. collected data from 284 counselors and teachers along with 68 direct supervisors of the counselors and teachers from a nonprofit agency. Participants completed surveys, and researchers followed up with the agency seven months later to determine if turnover had occurred. Results revealed a statistically significant positive association between social exclusion and turnover, social exclusion and turnover intention, turnover intention and turnover, and social exclusion and impaired time management. Impaired time management was also statistically significantly positively associated with turnover intention and turnover.

Counterproductive work behavior was found to be related to workplace exclusion based upon the questionnaires completed by 105 utility company employees in the United States (Hitlan & Noel, 2009). Exclusion from supervisors was positively related to organizational counterproductive work behavior, and exclusion from colleagues was positively related to both interpersonal and organizational counterproductive work

behavior. An example of organizational counterproductive work behavior was stealing while arguing was an example for interpersonal counterproductive work behavior.

Adverse effects can also occur for students as well (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009). Based upon semi-structured interviews, Levett-Jones and Lathlean found that students who did not feel as if they belonged felt unmotivated, anxious, disempowered, and isolated. Their sense of belonging was hindered by value dissonance, and they were also less likely to question practices with which they did not feel comfortable, and instead they complied and conformed. Review of the literature on the impact of a sense of belonging or lack thereof provides further support for Baumeister and Leary's (1995) conclusion that "...both actual and potential bonds exert substantial effects on how people think" (p. 505).

### **Effective School Leadership**

In their metaanalysis of studies of school leadership and student achievement in kindergarten to grade 12 schools in the United States, Marzano et al. (2001) identified 21 responsibilities of school leaders to support student achievement. The responsibilities relevant to this project include affirmation, communication, contingent rewards, culture, input, ideals/beliefs, relationships, resources, situational awareness, and visibility. For the complete list, please refer to Appendix B. According to their review, school leaders should recognize successes as well as failures (*Affirmation*). In doing so, they should also reward and acknowledge achievements by individuals (*Contingent Rewards*). In addition to maintaining and promoting communication among and with students and teachers (*Communication*), an effective school leader also creates a community that promotes common beliefs about schooling (*Ideals/beliefs*) along with cooperation (*Culture*).

Effective leaders also allow for teachers' involvement in decision and policymaking (*Input*) and ensure that they have what they need (i.e., professional development, materials, etc.) in order to perform their jobs (*Resources*). Being aware of what is happening in the school building (*Situational Awareness*) as well as the personal characteristics of school employees (*Relationships*) also emerged as responsibilities of effective leaders. In addition to knowledge of individuals, school leaders should have worthwhile interactions and communication with students and teachers (*Visibility*).

In Great Britain, Day, Harris, and Hadfield (2001) gathered information from multiple sources (head teacher, teachers, parents, students, other staff, etc.) to discover attributes of effective school leaders in high achieving schools that received positive ratings from inspectors and leaders were reputed to be effective. In their case studies, in addition to noting that all leaders had a set of core values (please see Appendix C for the list), they found that effective leaders:

...were identified as being reflective, caring and highly principled people who emphasised the human dimension of the management enterprise. They placed a high premium upon personal values and were concerned more with cultural than structural change. They had all moved beyond a narrow rational, managerial view of their role to a more holistic, values-led approach guided by personal experience and preference. (p. 36)

These leaders shared their values and vision. They had integrity and led with optimism, respect, trust, and intention. They also understood the contextual nature of their schools and responded to the specific needs of them. Thus, they also exhibited adaptive leadership, in that they knew when to take sole responsibility and when to include others in managing issues. Finally, the effective leaders worked to highlight the favorable qualities of their staff through collaborative leadership. They provided praise and opportunities for professional development and decision-making, allowed for autonomy,

and offered support. In all, the leaders were invested in teachers and members of the school community.

### **How Leaders Promote Belonging at Work**

Given the benefits of belonging on employees including their well-being and job performance along with the negative impacts of thwarted belonging, it can be argued that school leaders should work to create an environment that fosters a sense of belonging among their school's employees. Various studies have indicated that appreciating, recognizing, liking, and valuing workers (Goodenow, 1993a; Raza et al., 2020), creating opportunities to build relationships (Bryer, 2020), and promoting respect and trust among workers (Fox & Wilson, 2009) are necessary to fostering belonging among employees.

As Canlas and Williams (2022) noted:

Without a clear understanding of factors that influence perceptions of belonging leaders lack direction in building inclusive workplaces and reaping the beneficial business outcomes these have the potential to bring, including increased employee engagement, performance, and innovation. (p. 1)

Thus, it is apparent that in order to feel as if individuals belong, they must feel liked, valued, and respected (Goodenow, 1993a). Bryer (2020) reported that her study revealed that organizations can promote organizational belonging by helping their members see the value in developing and seeking relationships with others. She cautioned, though, that the benefits of collaboration and participation would not occur if the aim was for increasing revenue rather than for the sake of collaboration and participation of employees. Perhaps this could be the same for teachers when the aim of collaboration is solely to support student achievement.

In the study conducted by Raza and colleagues (2020), results revealed that "...appreciative leadership positively enhances workplace belongingness" (p. 436). When

workers feel appreciated and recognized by leaders, sense of belonging at work is boosted. Although this study was conducted in another country in a single university, it provides support for the connection of leadership and feelings of belonging of employees. Three secondary science teachers from the United Kingdom, culled from a larger study of eleven participants, shared their experiences as beginning teachers. They found that in-school peer relationships were important, and establishing relationships required mutual trust and respect (Fox & Wilson, 2009).

### **The Impact of Principal Leadership on Belonging**

How principals lead, the climate they foster, and programs they implement can impact teacher sense of belonging. Gündogdu (2022) studied the relationship between preschool teachers' occupational sense of belonging and principals' sources of power. Three hundred ninety-six preschool teachers in Turkey completed surveys. Results revealed a positive relationship between principals who lead with referent or reward power and preschool teacher occupational sense of belonging, as those types of power were found to be “meaningful predictors” (p. 14) of belonging. In their study of the factors that influence teachers' feelings of belonging, Kachchhap and Horo (2021) surveyed 186 teachers about their sense of belonging, organizational climate, and perceived organizational support. A positive and moderately strong relationship was indicated between sense of belonging and organizational climate. According to Kachchhap and Horo:

This finding suggests that the way communication within an organization is passed, management control is set, and other practices that create the organizational climate is related to how an employee feels like they fit in. Further, it is also related to whether employees feel like their work is valued by their organization. (p. 781)

A positive and moderately strong relationship was also found between sense of belonging and perceived organizational support. Kachchhap and Horo concluded that their "...model suggests that perceived organizational support and organizational climate are significant predictors of sense of belonging" (p. 782) with organizational climate being the better predictor of the two.

Co-teachers and belonging were studied by Pesonen and colleagues (2021), and they created a conceptual model of factors impacting teachers' feelings of belonging. They noted that the relationship between teachers and colleagues, school climate, and leadership all contribute to a teacher's feeling of belonging. Other individual factors of teachers also have an impact (e.g., mental and physical well-being, job performance and satisfaction, and motivation). "Planning, division of work and shared responsibilities and commitment" (p. 430) were elements that enhance sense of belonging for co-teachers, and shared responsibilities, support, trust, respect, knowledge of each other, similar instructional beliefs, and taking advantage of strengths of each other also contributed to sense of belonging. Results also revealed areas that hindered sense of belonging, which included lack of the following: respect, planning, agreement of instructional beliefs, follow through with plans, and comfort between teachers. "Our findings encourage practitioners and teacher educators to pay attention to individual and team reflection skills to give teachers tools to develop their sense of belonging and thus successful co-teaching teams" (p. 432). This study had a small sample size so findings cannot assume to be transferable.

Bickmore and Curry (2013) used semi-structured interviews to examine seven novice school counselors' perception of an induction program in addressing their

professional and personal needs. They were interviewed in the fall and spring. Five principals and one assistant principal were also interviewed in the fall to gain more information about the induction process and what structures were in place to support the counselors. Participants were school counselors who were the only individuals in their positions or part of a counselor team in their elementary or secondary schools. Sense of belonging along with respect, competence, autonomy, camaraderie, and collegiality were identified as personal needs. Results of the interviews revealed that there was no consistent factor that met the personal or professional needs of all of the counselors; however, collaboration, mentoring and support from the principal were areas that met some of the counselors' needs. Results also revealed that there was limited planned support for the novice counselors, as assumptions were made about who would provide the support. Counselors reported that when their needs were met, they were usually due to structures in place rather than those that were part of the induction planning. "Principal informal interactions and collaboration contributed to meeting personal needs in a variety of ways including increasing novice counselors' sense of competence, belonging, respect and collegiality" (Bickmore & Curry, p. 23). As this was a qualitative study with a very small sample size, these results are not transferable; however, they provide information about how certain needs, including belonging, can be met by the school principal.

Creating a positive school climate overall is also a consideration for principals. Capp et al. (2022) conducted a case study of two school districts and found that climate is significantly impacted by school principals, and they seem to have the greatest influence on it. Thus, turnover or change of administrators also influences climate. Staff members in that study believed that they had a role in creating climate for their students. They did

not, however, seem to recognize the impact of school and district administrators and colleagues on the climate in relation to their own experiences. Participants did not see district leadership as having a role in school climate.

When teachers feel they could approach the principal, who they also viewed as supportive, their job satisfaction and self-efficacy were impacted (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016). Aldridge and Fraser surveyed 769 Australian school teachers and found that in addition to the relationship between leadership style and self-efficacy and job satisfaction, affiliation also impacted those variables. Their job satisfaction and self-efficacy was also positively associated with affiliation.

### **Factors Impacting Belonging in Educational Settings**

Knowledge of the factors that foster a sense of belonging can be beneficial for leaders. One hundred and thirty-five health care managers completed a questionnaire for Lampinen et al. (2018). Their qualitative analysis resulted in common themes regarding the promotion or prevention of feelings of belonging. Factors related to fostering belonging included common values, effective conversation culture, leadership structure, open interaction, planned vision, and support and encouragement. Factors thwarting belonging included lack of common time, leadership and management problems, negative work atmosphere, organizational problems (e.g., financial, lack of shared/common goals and vision, etc.), and structural solutions in the organization (e.g., hierarchy of the organization, change, etc.). Principals, as leaders of their schools, have the power to promote policies and procedures that influence the sense of belonging of school employees. When creating the climate for inclusion, they should also take employees who have solo status into consideration. Review of some of the research on areas where

principals can support belonging as well as the impact of being the sole member of a specific group are discussed below.

### **Impact of Solo Status of employees**

Research suggests that solo status can influence job performance (Thompson & Sekaquaptewa, 2002; White, 2008), professional growth opportunities (Crocker & McGraw, 1984), self-efficacy (Bristol, 2018; White, 2008), and job satisfaction (Crocker & McGraw, 1984). Research regarding solos status tends to be based on gender or race; it does not consider being the only person engaged in a particular role in a building. The following conceptualization for the term, solo status, was provided by White (2008): "When everyone in a group shares a common social identity except one individual the one who is different from the majority has solo status" (p. 1171). In her study of individuals with solo status, White found that situational and individual factors in conjunction with solo status can determine an individual's job performance. White concluded that "It is possible, perhaps likely, that individuals who accept solo status tend to be those who appraise working on the relevant tasks as solos as challenging and who believe that they have the ability and resources to cope with the performance pressures associated with being a solo" (p. 1183).

Another definition of solo status was provided by Thompson and Sekaquaptewa (2002) in their review of the literature highlighting how solo status can adversely impact women and racial minorities. They describe solo status as "...the situation of any individual who finds himself or herself to be the only representative of his or her social category present" (p. 184). Their review found that women and African Americans were more negatively impacted in the classroom and at work than men and Whites. These

detrimental effects included, among others, underperformance, feelings of isolation, greater scrutiny upon and more stringent critique of them, and being viewed as less capable.

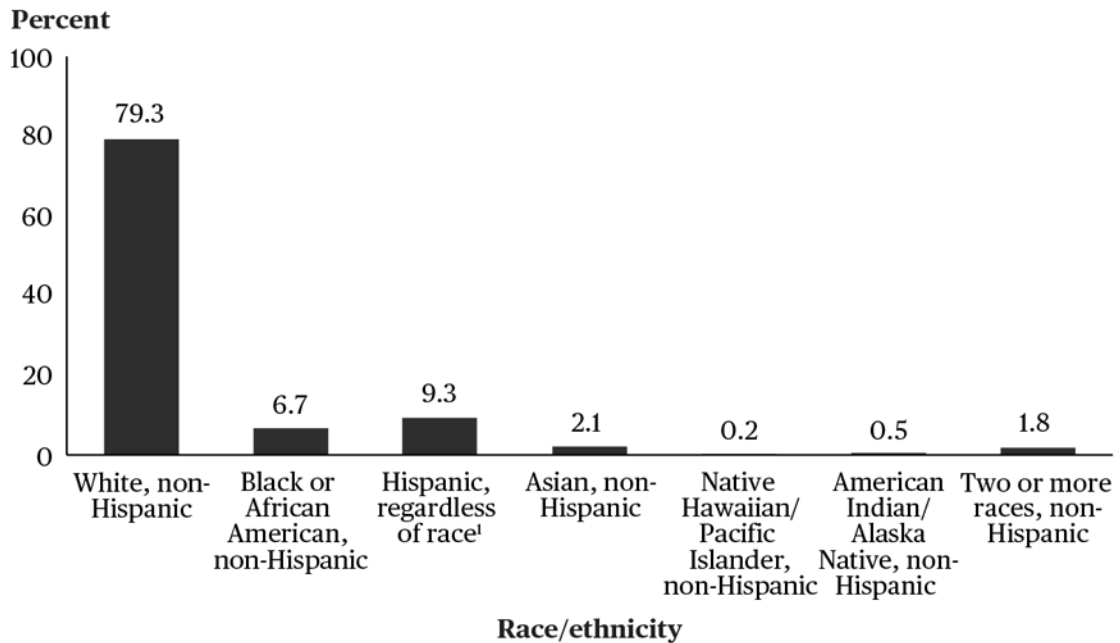
In their research on solo status males or females in a group, Crocker and McGraw (1984) studied 156 white male and female undergraduate students and their perceptions and experiences on making decisions in a group context. In discussing the impact of being a "solo," the only female or male, at work, Crocker and McGraw reported that, "Social isolations of solos may deny them access to informal but important sources of information and opportunities within the organization, and may also decrease their satisfaction with their work life, undermining commitment to the job" (p. 359). Crocker and McGraw noted, "One of the most important findings of the present study is that the consequences of having solo status were dramatically different depending on what the social category of the solo person was" (p. 368).

Although not labeled as having solo status, Bristol (2018) studied Black male teachers in an urban school district. He found that when those teachers were "Loners," the only Black male teacher, they were more likely to want to leave the school compared to Black male teachers who had at least three other Black male teachers (Groupers) in their building. Other differences between Loners and Groupers included Loners' belief that they had less of a chance to impact school policy and that others feared them due to their race. In contrast, Groupers "were less likely to report racial tension as an issue at their schools" (p, 345). Thompson and Sekaquaptewa's (2002) findings also note the benefits when individuals have peers of the same race or gender. When solo status and the

corresponding issues were removed, those individuals demonstrated higher performance that was similar to their more advantaged (male or White) colleagues.

Though the focus of the reports was not on having solo status or being an Only, interviews with Black and Latinx educators revealed that these teachers often feel that they are not valued for their intellect, knowledge, or skills, are underappreciated, and they oftentimes feel that they must prove themselves (Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Griffin, 2018). Black and Latinx teachers are not given opportunities for professional advancement as well (Griffin & Tackie, 2016). Griffin noted that understanding the diversity of teachers of color is necessary for creating a diverse workforce. This is especially important in light of the data regarding race/ethnicity and disproportionate number of educators of color compared to the general population.

Using data from the National Teacher and Principal Survey from the 2017-2018 school year, the National Center for Educational Statistics (USDOE, n.d.-b) reported that 79.3% of teachers were white which is greater than the national population from the 2020 census, which found that 58.9% of the U.S. population was white (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Please refer to figure 2.1 for more details. Thus, it is possible that teachers or other school professionals of color may have solo status and also be an Only.



<sup>1</sup> Hispanic includes Latino.

NOTE: Teachers include both full-time and part-time teachers. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.-d) National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), “Public School Teacher Data File,” 2017–18.

*Figure 2.1 Percentage Distribution of Teachers by Race/Ethnicity: 2017-2018.1*

### **Retaining Teachers and Onlies**

Given the shortage of teachers and school specialists, various strategies and supports have been recommended for school leaders in order to assist with retention. Watkins (2005) recommended strategies for principals in recruiting, retaining, and developing novice teachers related to induction programs. He noted that principals must prioritize the retention and cultivation of good teachers. Recommendations included providing mentorship and coaching, creating opportunities for discussion and growth through study groups with novice and experienced teachers, and engaging in action research which would allow teachers to evaluate their own practice. Principals must support these endeavors by providing time for teachers to engage in these activities, and

they must also follow up on recommendations that have emerged from the study groups and teacher research. Although he discussed ways to support new teachers, his recommendations could possibly benefit school specialists as well. Watkins stated that "Principals fill many crucial roles in the operation of schools, but none more important than the retention and development of new staff members" (p. 86).

While principal support was not found to have a statistically significant impact on school employees' sense of belonging, principal support was found to have an impact on teacher retention in hard to staff schools in a study conducted by Hughes, Matt, and O'Reilly (2015). In their survey of administrators and teachers, results also revealed a disconnect between teacher and principal views of the amount of support received, as principals felt that they gave more support to their teachers than teachers reported.

In effort to retain school psychologists in the field, Young et al. (2021) analyzed surveys completed by 134 school psychologists from one state in the United States of America. In the top five reason for why school psychologists remained in the field, "Being part of a team that creatively solves problems that lead to improved student outcomes" (p. 589) was the fourth reason. Regarding questions related to job satisfaction and engagement, the majority of school psychologists reported that they enjoyed working with their colleagues, believed that their opinions were valued at their school, and that others believed their job was important. Participants also noted that they were acknowledged and felt supported by administrators and were also acknowledged for doing a good job by teachers. Young et al. concluded that effective collaboration and administration were areas that contributed to school psychologists' feelings of job satisfaction. Generally, though, there is limited information regarding Onlies in schools,

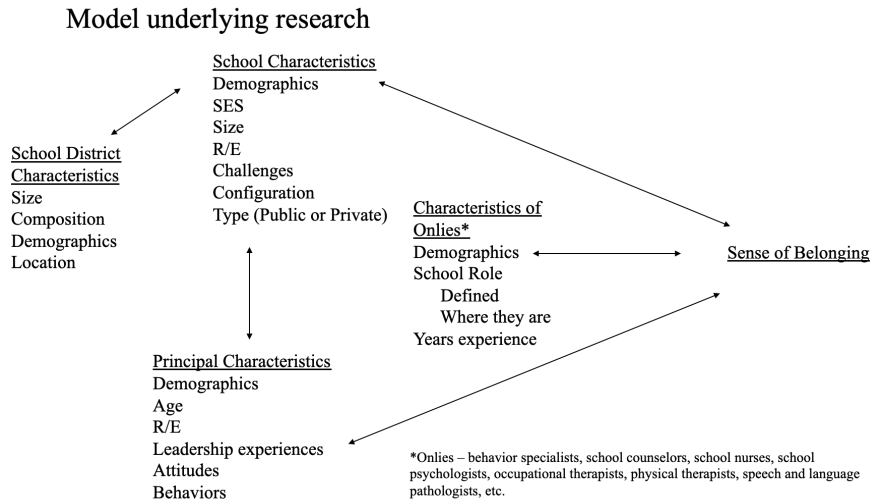
including their experience and sense of belonging at work. Thus, this project aimed to discover factors that contribute to promoting or thwarting sense of belonging to make recommendations to school leaders so that they can work to create environments that support Onlies as well as other school staff. Additionally, it is hoped that the information gathered can also support the retention of teachers and other school professionals.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this project are:

1. To what extent does being an Onlie impact sense of belonging?
2. What is the relationship between motivation to belong and sense of belonging for Onlies?
3. What impact do demographic characteristics have on Onlies' sense of belonging?
4. Controlling for differences in demographics, what are the factors and opportunities that contribute to a sense of belonging for Onlies?
5. What practices can principals/school leaders implement to foster a sense of belonging for all who work in schools? How do leadership styles affect an individual's sense of belonging?

For the research model, shown in Figure 2.2, the Onlies are identified as behavior specialists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, reading specialists, school counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, social workers, speech and language pathologists, and other non-administrator certified employees in schools who are the only individuals engaged in a role in their school building. Please note that not all variables listed in the model were able to be considered.



*Figure 2.2 Model Underlying the Research Proposal*

## Hypotheses

Seven hypotheses are made regarding this research project. While one is focused on teachers, the remaining six are focused on the Onlies. These hypotheses are:

- H<sub>1</sub> Individuals who belong to a cohort, such as teachers who teach the same grade or subject in the same building have a greater sense of belonging than Onlies.
- H<sub>2</sub> The more motivated Onlies are to belong, the more they feel they belong.
- H<sub>3</sub> Onlies will have a greater desire to belong compared to NonOnlies
- H<sub>4</sub> The greater the sense of connection for Onlies, the greater their sense of belonging in their school.
- H<sub>5</sub> The more support available to the Onlies, the greater their sense of belonging.
- H<sub>6</sub> The more Onlies feel they belong, the greater their job satisfaction.
- H<sub>7</sub> School leaders and principals can promote belonging for school employees by creating opportunities for collaboration, providing relevant professional development, and acknowledging them for who they are and what they do.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the factors that contribute to the sense of belonging for individuals who are the only individuals in a particular role in a school, the “Onlies.” The knowledge gained will ultimately assist school leaders in their efforts to create a climate of belonging in their buildings with the hopes of retaining and recruiting school professionals who are satisfied with their jobs and engaged in beneficial work practices.

For this research, a modification of Goodenow and Grady’s (1993) definition of belonging was used. Thus, belonging is the extent to which individuals, especially Onlies, feel personally valued, accepted, supported, and included by colleagues and administrators in the school environment in which they work.

#### **Research Approach**

A mixed methods approach was taken for this study. In her review of the rationale for a mixed methods approach, Mertens (2020) reported that this approach allows information to be clarified and enhanced. The design of this study followed the pragmatic approach in that the data were collected independently with a brief period of time between the two (Mertens). Babbie (2016) described explanatory studies as those attempting to explain why things occur or people have certain beliefs. During the first phase, surveys were distributed to school employees, mainly teachers and specialists who work in public and private elementary, middle, and high schools. Quantitative analysis was conducted on survey results. Interviews were conducted with selected survey

respondent volunteers for the second phase of the study. Qualitative analysis was conducted on interview results to determine common themes. In this way, a greater understanding occurred from the breadth of information gained from the surveys.

### **Sampling and Recruitment**

Targeted participants were school employees who engage in jobs that require certifications from their state department of education. These included classroom teachers, school psychologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, reading specialists, speech-language pathologists, behavior therapists, school nurses, social workers, special area teachers (e.g., gifted, music, art, physical education, and library), and others. Thus, purposeful sampling occurred (Mertens, 2020). Particular attention was paid to those individuals who were the only employees engaged in their particular roles in their school. As noted, they will be referred to as Onlies.

To gather information from a diverse number of individuals representing various geographic regions and schools, a descriptive survey was used. This type of survey was chosen because as Mertens (2020) described, this "...approach is a one-shot survey for the purpose of describing the characteristics of a sample at one point in time" (p. 190). Information about the study along with links to the survey were posted in professional groups on Facebook (e.g., School Counselors Connect, School-based Occupational and Physical Therapists, School Psychologist to School Psychologist, School SLP Insiders, School Nurses, School Social Workers, Special Education Teachers) that include members from around the country. These Facebook groups are private groups that required permission to join. Surveys were posted by the researcher or the administrator of the group. The same information was also sent via email to school email addresses that

were listed on publicly available and accessible school or school district websites. Emails were sent to a sampling of school employees from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Lists of every school in each state and the District of Columbia were obtained from the National Center of Educational Statistics website. The lists were randomized, and then a varying number of schools comprising all grade levels (PK to 12) were picked from the top of the list. Employee email addresses were obtained from school websites. Surveys were sent in September 2023, which was the beginning or close to the beginning of the school year for many schools. That time of year was purposefully determined, as timing can greatly impact response rates (Mertens, 2020).

An online survey was used. There are advantages and disadvantages of using technology as part of the survey dissemination and completion process. They tend to have lower costs, allow for quicker response time, can reach a wide audience, and can include more personalized questions for recipients. Additionally, the collection, scoring, and reporting of data is automated, and using technology such as email allows researchers to reach a larger group of individuals (Greenacre, 2016; Mertens, 2020). Disadvantages include the lack of direct observation due to “lack of personal connection” (p. 331) and issues with survey question interpretation (Mertens & Wilson, 2019). To address some of these concerns, Mertens and Wilson recommend personal interviews with some participants to gather more information. Thus, the final question of the survey asked participants if they were willing to take part in an interview. To ensure that their personal (identifier) information was not connected to their survey responses, a link to a different form was provided once respondents submitted their completed survey, so that interested

participants could share their contact information to be contacted for the interview.

Interviews occurred by videoconferencing or telephone with chosen volunteers.

At the start of the process, respondents were informed of the intent of the study, ensured of the confidentiality of results, and asked to complete the survey or participate in the interview if they consented. In addition to survey statements and questions, demographic information was collected as controls, among them were gender, race/ethnicity, year of birth, role of respondent, number of years of experience in their roles, division level of their school (i.e., elementary, middle, or high school), their level of education, and information about their school (e.g., zip code, discipline issues, chronic student absenteeism, etc.).

### **Data Collection Methods and Analysis**

Five research questions guided this inquiry. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The survey data were analyzed with univariate, bivariate, and multivariate statistics while the interview data provided support to offer greater depth to the survey results through descriptive and thematic analysis. The data collection source and method of analysis used are described in Table 3.1.

*Table 3.1*

#### *Methodological Approach*

Research Question	Data source	Analysis
To what extent does being an Only impact sense of belonging?	Survey	Univariate, bivariate, and multivariate statistics
	Interview	Descriptive and thematic analysis

*Table 3.2 continued*

Research Question	Data source	Analysis
What is the relationship between motivation to belong and sense of belonging for Onlies?	Survey	Univariate and bivariate
	Interview	Descriptive and thematic analysis
What impact do demographic characteristics have Onlies' sense of belonging?	Interview	Descriptive and thematic analysis
Controlling for differences in demographics, what are the factors and opportunities that contribute to a sense of belonging for Onlies?	Survey	Univariate, bivariate, and multivariate statistics
	Interview	Descriptive and thematic analysis
What practices can principals implement to foster a sense of belonging for all who work in schools, especially Onlies?	Interview	Descriptive and thematic analysis

### **Survey Construction**

In their review of the conceptual issues of belonging, Allen et al. (2021) noted the general consensus that belonging is a fundamental need of people; however, ideas related to how to measure the concept and "satisfy the need of belonging" (p. 88) vary. As Allen and colleagues (2021) reported, there is no standard belonging assessment measure.

Thus, the survey designed for this study was adapted from the Teacher Questionnaire of the National Teacher and Principal Survey (USDOE, 2017), the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993b), and the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell,1996). Demographic and newly designed questions were also included. Survey

questions are related to sense of belonging at work, desire for belonging, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with school and district leadership.

**National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS)** The Teacher Questionnaire of the NTPS developed and implemented by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) under the U.S. Department of Education (2017) is a 40-page, publicly available questionnaire. It was retrieved from the NCES website. (USDOE, n.d.-c) Twenty-two items related to professional development and support, school problems (truancy, discipline, etc.), and teacher engagement were used in the survey for this study.

**Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (PSSM)** The PSSM Scale is an 18-item scale that assesses sense of belonging for students in schools (Goodenow, 1993b). When discussing the rationale to develop the PSSM scale, Goodenow noted the following:

Despite the convergence of several themes in recent developmental and educational psychology on the importance of belonging, very little empirical research has directly addressed this issue. An important constraint limiting research on belonging has been the absence of psychometrically sound measures of the construct. (p. 81)

Reliability for the scale was found to be strong in studies with different samples (alpha ranged from .803 to .884). Overall, research on the PSSM scale indicates that it is a valid and reliable scale of sense of belonging. Nine items were drawn from this scale.

**UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3)** The UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3) is a 20-item scale that assesses feelings of loneliness and social isolation (Russell, 1996). It was updated to include research from samples other than mainly college students. This version was tested on various individuals, among them public school teachers. Analysis of data resulting from studies revealed that this updated version had internal consistency

(alpha ranged from .890 -.940) as well as validity (based on correlational analyses). Eight items were used from this scale. As loneliness has been found to be positively associated with work alienation, which in turn is negatively associated with job performance (Santas, Isik, & Demir, 2016), assessing feelings of loneliness was considered necessary.

**Newly Designed Items** The remaining items asked questions related to demographics or were newly designed to assess individuals' sense of belonging, inclusion, connectedness, and job and administrator satisfaction. See Table 3.2 for further details.

*Table 3.3*

*Summary of Survey Construction*

Source	Domain (# of items)
Control variables	Age (1) Gender (1) Race/Ethnicity (1) Level of Education (1) Educational work experience (3)
Newly designed	Information about current school & role (6) Perceptions others have (3) Signs of belonging (7) Support provided (2) Job satisfaction (1) Satisfaction with administrator leadership (10)
Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993a)	Sense of belonging in school for students; questions adapted for adults (9)
Teacher Questionnaire National Teacher and Principal Survey (USDOE, 2017)	Professional Development & Support (8) School problems (7) Teacher engagement (7)
UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell,1996)	Feelings of loneliness (8)

## Reliability

Questions in the survey were related to demographics about the individual (gender, race/ethnicity, role/position in school, number of other people in same role, years of experience) and the school (location, types of problems in school). Seven scales were developed, they were: support received, feelings of connectedness to others, feelings of inclusion in the building where the individual spent most of the time, building support, job satisfaction, principal support, and overall administrator support. Two types of summative scales were constructed for each domain: a breadth scale and a depth scale that included both breadth and intensity. The first was composed of a summation of presence of each item and the second was where the Likert items were summed. Those items, while ordinal in nature, were used as indicators of intensity. Reliability testing was conducted for items within each group using Cronbach's alpha methodology. Items had fair to strong reliability (see Table 3.3). The survey was pilot tested prior to distribution. In the analyses, the breadth scale did not provide as much meaningful information as the depth scale and thus was excluded from discussion.

*Table 3.4*

*Reliability of survey questions*

Scale	No. of items	$\bar{x}$	s	Max	Min	$\alpha$
Access to learning and collaboration	4	2.51	1.304	5.00	0.00	0.638
Feelings of connectedness	8	34.71	8.53	96.21	10.00	0.801
Feelings of inclusion & belonging	21	78.17	14.78	105	36.00	0.938
Support in building	8	30.13	6.59	48.00	12.00	0.753

*Table 3.4 continued*

Scale	No. of items	$\bar{x}$	s	Max	Min	$\alpha$
Job Satisfaction	8	76.30	9.80	95.00	53.00	0.854
Support from principal	3	12.38	3.43	18.00	3.00	0.747
Support from district administration	8	35.79	8.03	48.00	10.00	0.887

Ratings were based on five to seven-point Likert scales. Examples of survey statements with response options are included below. The full survey can be found in Appendix E.

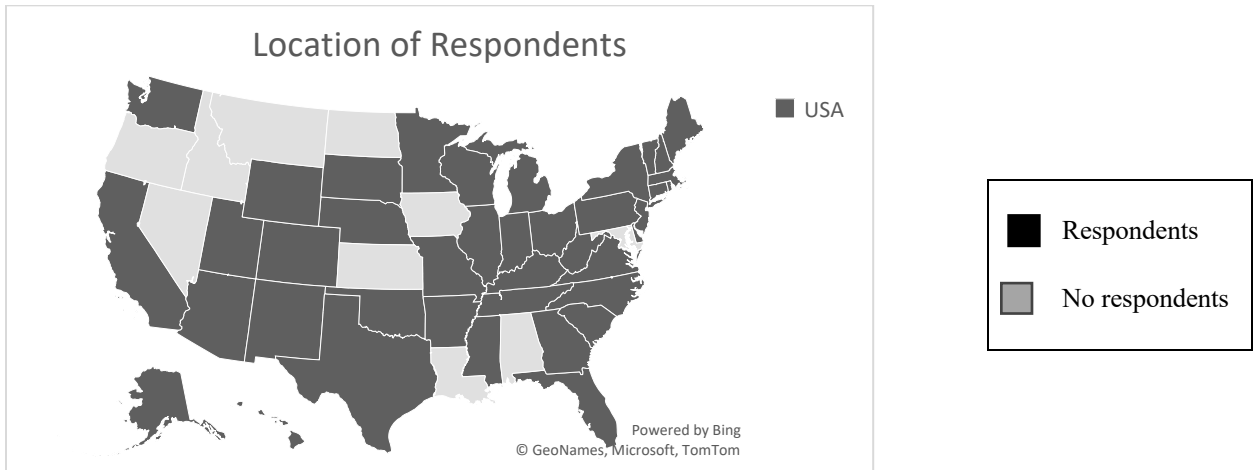
To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

- I am “in tune” with those in my school.
- I lack companionship.
- I feel alone.
- I am part of a group.

### **Sample Characteristics**

#### ***Survey Respondents***

Two hundred thirty-three people completed the survey and two hundred twenty-four of the respondents shared the zip code where they worked. Respondents were located across the continental United States as well as Alaska, Hawaii, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Overall 40 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands were represented. The largest percentage of individuals worked in Pennsylvania (66, 29.5%) followed by New York (18, 8%), Virginia (12, 5.4%), Texas (11, 4.9%), and Illinois (10, 4.5%). With the exception of Washington state, the Pacific Northwest was not represented. Please refer to Figure 3.1 and Appendix F for more details.



*Figure 3. 1 Location of respondents across the United States of America*

Respondents worked with students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. Many worked in more than one building. As schools vary in composition, it is unknown if individuals who worked with both elementary and middle school students worked in a K-8 building or two buildings – one elementary and one middle school. Please refer to Table 3.4 for more details.

*Table 3.5*

*Survey Respondents and Schools in Which They Work*

<b>Level</b>	<b>One building</b>	<b>Multiple buildings</b>	<b>Total</b>
PK-K	68	31	99
Elementary grades (1-5)	98	43	141
Middle grades (6-8)	72	20	92
High School grades (9-12)	71	17	88

Over 90.0 % of the respondents were white, while 10 (4.3%) respondents identified as Latinx/Hispanic, nine (3.9%) as African American or Black, two (0.9%) as Asian Pacific Islander, and one (0.4%) as Native American. The vast majority of respondents were white women (189, 81.1%) followed by white men (22, 9.4%). See Table 3.5 for further details.

*Table 3.6*

*Survey Respondents Race/Ethnicity by Gender\**

Group	Female	Male	Total
African American or Black	7 (3.0%)	2 (0.9%)	9 (3.9%)
Asian Pacific Islander	1 (0.4%)	1 (0.4%)	2 (0.9%)
Latinx/Hispanic	9 (3.9%)	1 (0.4%)	10 (4.3%)
Native American	1 (0.4%)	0 (0%)	1(0.4%)
White	189 (81.7%)	22 (9.4%)	212 (90.6%)
Total	207 (88.8%)	26 (11.2%)	233 (100%)

$\chi^2= 4.968, p < .291, \text{Cramer's } V = .146$

\*Percentages are of the total distribution

Given that less than ten percent of the respondents were not white, a variable of NonWhite was created. Here, 211 (90.6%) of the respondents were white, while 22 (9.4%) were in the NonWhite category. See Table 3.6 for more details.

Table 3.7

Survey Respondents NonWhite/White by Gender\*

Group	Female	Male	Total
NonWhite	18 (3.0%)	4 (1.7%)	22 (9.4%)
White	189 (81.1%)	22 (9.4%)	211 (90.6%)
Total	207 (88.8%)	26 (11.2%)	233 (100%)

$\chi^2= 1.209$ ,  $p < .272$ , Cramer's V = .072

\*Percentages are of the total distribution

There are numerous professional roles in school settings besides teachers, and many individuals employed in those roles completed the survey. On a percentage basis, most respondents were teachers (91; 39.1%) followed by school nurses (71; 30.5%), and then school psychologists (51; 21.9%). The remaining respondents were a behavior specialist (1; 0.4%), occupational therapists (4; 1.7%), physical therapist (1; 0.4%), school counselors (5; 2.1%), social workers (7; 3.0%), and speech and language pathologists (2; 0.9%). Given the small percentage of those specialists, they were combined into a new variable of other service providers (20; 8.6%).

Results indicate that gender is related to school role ( $\chi^2= 30.217$ ,  $p < .001$ ). On a percentage basis, males (23, 88.5%) were more concentrated in the teacher category than females (68, 32.9%). The remaining categories, percentagewise, were virtually all females. Three of the male respondents were not teachers, composing 1.2% of the total number of the sample. This was different from the female nonteacher respondents who encompassed more than half (59.7%) of the total sample. See Table 3.7 for more details.

Table 3.8

*Respondent Role in School by Gender*

Group	Teacher	School Nurse	School Psychologist	Other Service Providers	Total
Female	68 (74.7%)* (32.9%)**	70 (98.6%) (33.8%)	50 (98.0%) (24.2%)	19 (95.0%) (9.2%)	207 (88.8%) (100%)
Male	23 (25.3%) (8.5%)	1 (1.4%) (3.8%)	1 (2.0%) (3.8%)	1 (5.0%) (3.8%)	26 (11.2%) (100%)
Total	91 (100%) (39.1%)	71 (100.0%) (30.5%)	51 (100%) (21.9%)	20 (100%) (8.6%)	233 (100%) (100%)

$\chi^2= 30.217$  ,  $p < .001$ , Cramer's V = .360

\*Column percent

\*\*Row percent

Teacher respondents were more apt to be in the NonWhite category (61; 67%) than White category (30; 33%). For the nonteacher respondents, school nurses (65, 91/5%), school psychologists (45, 88.2%), and other service providers (15, 75%) were more apt to be in the White category; however, the racial composition was not related to school role ( $\chi^2= 5.129$  ,  $p =.163$ ). Please see Table 3.8 for details.

Table 3.9

*Survey Respondents Race/Ethnicity by Role*

Group	Teacher	School Nurse	School Psychologist	Other Service Providers
White	30 (33.0%)	65 (91.5%)	45 (88.2%)	15 (75.0%)
NonWhite	61 (67.0%)	6 (8.5%)	6 (11.8%)	5 (25.0%)
Total	91(100.0%)	71(100.0%)	51 (100.0%)	20 (100.0%)

$\chi^2= 5.129$  ,  $p =.163$ , Cramer's V = .148

Respondents varied in age from 23 to 72 years (Mean = 43.9 years). On a percentage basis, more of the respondents were in their thirties (50; 21.5%), forties (72, 30.9%), or fifties (63, 27%) than twenties or sixties and older. In all, 28 (12%) of the respondents were in their 20s and the fewest number of respondents (20, 8.6%) were sixty years of age or older.

With regards to race, there was no relationship between respondents' race and age, as there was limited dispersion for the NonWhite category ( $\chi^2= 6.448, p = .168$ ). There was greater dispersion among the White category than the NonWhite category. White respondents at the ends of the age distribution (in their twenties or sixties and older) made up 10.4% and 8.5% of the respondent total respectively. The bulk of the White respondents were in the thirties through fifties categories (30s: 45, 40s: 66, 50s: 60). Please see Table 3.9 for details.

*Table 3.10*

*Age Category of Respondents by Race*

Group	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s & up	Total
White	22 (10.4%)	45 (21.3%)	66 (31.3%)	60 (28.4%)	18 (8.5%)	211 (100%)
NonWhite	6 (27.3%)	5 (22.7%)	6 (27.3%)	3 (13.6%)	2 (9.1%)	22 (100%)
Total	28 (12.0%)	50 (21.5%)	72 (30.9%)	63 (27.0%)	20 (8.6%)	233 (100%)

$\chi^2= 6.448, p < .168, \text{Cramer's } V = .166$

There was also a wide range of ages of respondents in different roles. However, there was no statistically significant relationship between age and the different roles in which respondents were engaged ( $\chi^2 = 18.677, p = .097$ ). Please see Table 3.10 for details.

*Table 3.11*

*Age Category of Respondents*

Group	Teacher	School Nurse	School Psych	Other Service Provider	Total
20s	12 (13.2%)	3 (4.2%)	10 (19.6%)	3 (15.0%)	28 (12.0%)
30s	19 (20.9%)	12 (16.9%)	11 (21.6%)	8 (40.0%)	50 (21.5%)
40s	27 (29.7%)	26 (36.6%)	14 (27.5%)	5 (25.0%)	72 (30.9%)
50s	27 (29.7%)	19 (26.8%)	14 (27.5%)	3 (15.0%)	63 (27.0%)
60s & up	6 (6.6%)	11 (15.5%)	2 (3.9%)	1 (5.0%)	20 (8.6%)
Total	91 (100.0%)	71 (100.0%)	51 (100.0%)	20 (100.0%)	233 (100%)

$\chi^2 = 18.677$ ,  $p = .097$ , Cramer's V = .163

When considering the highest degree earned from a percentage basis, most respondents had earned a master's degree (134, 57.5%), followed distantly by those with a bachelor's degree (63, 27.0%). School nurses were the only respondents who worked with associate degrees, as they can work in school settings with that level of education, based on state requirements, such as in Texas (Texas Health and Human Services, n.d.). Please see Table 3.11 for details.

*Table 3.12*

*Position and Highest Degree Earned*

Group	AA	BA/BA	MA/MS	Doctoral	Total
Teacher	0 (0.0%)	17 (18.7%)	69 (75.8%)	5 (5.5%)	91 (100.0%)
School Nurse	15 (21.1%)	40 (77.5%)	16 (22.5%)	0 (0.0%)	71 (100.0%)
School Psych	0 (0.0%)	5 (9.8%)	33 (64.7%)	13 (25.5%)	51 (100.0%)
Other Provider	0 (0.0%)	1 (5.0%)	16 (80.0%)	3 (15.0%)	20 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 114.748$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cramer's V = .405

## ***Onlies***

Individuals were identified as Onlies if they were the only person engaged in their job in their school building, such as a school nurse, school counselor, school psychologist, gifted teacher, etc.. On a percentage basis, most school nurses (65; 91.5%), school psychologists (45; 88.2%), and other service providers (15; 75.0%) who responded were classified as Onlies. In all, one-third of teacher respondents (30; 33.0%) were the only individuals who taught their subject. Results indicate that there is a relationship between the Onlies and NonOnlies status and position in school ( $\chi^2 = 77.421, p < .001$ ).

Percentagewise, approximately two-thirds (66.5%) of the respondents were identified as Onlies. The remaining third (78, 33.5%) had at least one other person engaged in the same role. The majority of Onlies were not engaged in teaching (125; 80.6%). Of all 233 respondents, only 17 nonteachers (7.3%) had at least one other person who held the same position in their school. As reported, school nurses were mainly the sole nurse in their building (65, 91.5%) followed by school psychologists (45, 88.2%) and other related service providers (15, 75.0%). Thus, those who were engaged in a non-teacher role were more apt to be an Only. Please see Table 3.12 for details.

*Table 3.13*

### *Role of Onlies and NonOnlies*

Group	Teacher	School Nurse	School Psychologist	Other Providers	Total
Onlies	30 (19.4%)	65 (41.9%)	45 (29.0%)	15 (9.7%)	155 (66.5%)
NonOnlies	61 (78.2%)	6 (7.7%)	6 (7.7%)	5 (6.4%)	78 (33.5%)
Total	91(39.1%)	71(30.5%)	51 (21.9%)	20 (8.6%)	233 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 77.421, p < .001, \text{Cramer's } V = .576$

While most specialists (school nurse, school psychologists, other service providers) were the only person in their position in their school, all had at least one other person in the same role in their district. On a percentage basis, most respondents had five or more individuals engaged in the same role (181, 77.7%); however, almost 10% of respondents only had one other person in their role in the district (23, 9.9%) Please refer to Table 3.13 for more details.

*Table 3.14*

*Number of Other Individuals in the Same Role in the District*

Group	Teacher	School Nurse	School Psychologist	Other Providers	Total
1	4 (4.4%)	11 (15.5%)	5 (9.8%)	3 (15.0%)	23 (9.9%)
2	2 (2.2%)	1 (1.4%)	2 (3.9%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (2.1%)
3	3 (3.3%)	4 (5.6%)	5 (9.8%)	2 (10.0%)	14 (6.0%)
4	1 (1.1%)	7 (9.9%)	2 (3.9%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (4.3%)
5 or more	81 (89%)	48 (67.6%)	37 (72.5%)	15 (75.0%)	181 (77.7%)
Total	91 (100.0%)	71 (100.0%)	51 (100.0%)	20 (100.0%)	233 (100.0%)

$\chi^2= 20.6, p < .057, \text{Cramer's } V = .172$

Onlies consisted of primarily White (93.5%) women (93.5%). Further, NonWhite Onlies accounted for a small amount (6.5%) of all the Onlies in the study. This was not much different than the NonWhite NonOnlies, who represented 15.4% of the sample. From a percentage standpoint, NonWhite respondents were just as likely to be the only person in their role (10; 45.5%) as having at least one other person performing the same job (12; 54.5%). This was different from White respondents, as more than two-thirds were Onlies (145; 68.7%) compared to NonOnlies (66; 31.3%). On a percentage basis,

Whites were more apt to be an Only (145; 93.5%) compared to NonOnlies (66; 31.3%).

Please see Table 3.14 for details.

*Table 3.15*

*Distribution of Onlies /NonOnlies Status by Race/Ethnicity*

Group	White	NonWhite	Total
Onlies	145 (68.7%)	10 (45.5%)	155 (66.5%)
NonOnlies	66 (31.3%)	12 (54.5%)	78 (33.5%)
Total	211 (100.0%)	22 (100.0%)	233 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 4.843$ ,  $p = .028$ , Cramer's V = .144

There was a statistically significant relationship between gender and Onlies/NonOnlies status ( $\chi^2 = 10.349$ ,  $p = .001$ ). On a percentage basis, females were more likely to be Onlies (145; 70.0%) than Males (10; 38.5%). Please see Table 3.15 for details.

*Table 3.16*

*Distribution of Onlies /NonOnlies Status by Gender*

Group	Female	Male
Onlies	145 (70.0%)	10 (38.5%)
NonOnlies	62 (30.0%%)	16 (61.5%)
Total	207 (100.0%)	26 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 10.349$ ,  $p = .001$ , Cramer's V = .211

There was no statistically significant relationship between the age of respondents and Onlies /NonOnlies status ( $\chi^2 = 3.577$ ,  $p = .466$ ). Please see Table 3.16 for details.

Table 3.17

*Age Category of Respondents*

Group	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s & up	Total
Onlies	15 (9.7%)	34 (21.9%)	52 (33.5%)	40 (25.8%)	14 (9.0%)	155(66.5%)
NonOnlies	13 (16.7%)	16 (20.5%)	20 (25.6%)	23 (29.5%)	6 (7.7%)	78 (33.5%)
Overall	28 (12.0%)	50 (21.5%)	72 (30.9%)	63 (27.0%)	20 (8.6%)	233(100%)

$\chi^2 = 3.577$ ,  $p = .466$ , Cramer's V = .124

There is a statistically significant relationship between Onlies/NonOnlies status and the highest degree earned. On a percentage basis, NonOnlies were more apt to have a Master's degree as their highest degree (57, 73.1%) than Onlies (77, 49.7%). The reverse is true for those holding Bachelor's degrees. In all, two-thirds of the respondents had graduate degrees (155; 66.5%). Please refer to Table 3.17 for more details.

Table 3.18

*Highest Degrees of Onlies and NonOnlies*

Group	Undergraduate degree		Graduate degree		Total
	AA	BA/BS	MA/MS	Doctoral	
Onlies	13 (8.4%)	49 (31.6%)	77 (49.7%)	16 (10.3%)	155 (100.0%)
NonOnlies	2 (2.6%)	14 (17.9%)	57 (73.1%)	5 (6.4%)	78 (100.0%)
Overall	15 (6.4%)	63 (27.0%)	134 (57.5%)	21 (9.0%)	233 (100%)
	78 (33.5%)		155 (66.5%)		

$\chi^2 = 12.137$ ,  $p = .007$ ., Cramer's V = .228

### *Interview Respondents*

Once respondents completed the survey, they were given the opportunity to sign up to be interviewed. Forty-eight people responded that they would be interested in being interviewed. Volunteers were chosen by random selection and emailed. Ultimately, six people were interviewed. Their years of experience ranged from 3 to 29 years with time in their current school ranging from 1 to 7 years. A sample of some of the interview questions are below, and a profile of the interviewees is included in Table 3.18. Please refer to Appendix G for the full interview protocol.

1. Can you give me an example when you felt included by a school leader?
2. Can you give me an example of when a school leader made you feel excluded?
3. What advice would you give school/district leaders to make employees feel included?
4. Can you give me an example of what you do to connect with colleagues or work to belong in your school?

*Table 3.19*

### *Interview Participants Characteristics*

<b>Position</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Years worked in school (in field)</b>	<b>Method of Interview</b>
School Nurse	Female	White	7 (7)	Phone
School Psychologist	Female	African American	3 (3)	Google Meet
Teacher	Female	White	2 (29)	Google Meet
School Psychologist	Female	White	1 (18)	Phone
Teacher	Male	African American	4 (10)	Phone
School Nurse	Female	White	7 (10)	Phone

## **Conclusion**

This study was conducted to gain a better understanding of the needs of those who work in school buildings. It could be argued that some people work best as Onlies while others want to be part of a group. Thus, this information is important for school leaders so that they can develop and implement practices as well as create a school climate that best supports not only students and teachers, but nonteaching staff and those who are Onlies as well. The surveys provided a broad range of experiences and beliefs while the interviews gave more detailed explanations of responses and allowed for a deeper understanding of the perceptions of survey respondents.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This study examined the factors that contribute to sense of belonging and inclusion as well as job satisfaction for professional staff working in schools. It explored whether being the only person in a role in a school building (the Onlies) impacted those perceptions/feelings of belonging, inclusion, support, and job satisfaction. It also attempted to determine practices that school leaders can implement to create a sense of belonging for all school employees.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. To what extent does being an Only impact sense of belonging?
2. What is the relationship between motivation to belong and sense of belonging for Onlies?
3. What impact do demographic characteristics have on Onlies' sense of belonging?
4. Controlling for differences in demographics, what are the factors and opportunities that contribute to a sense of belonging for Onlies?
5. What practice can principals/school leaders implement to foster a sense of belonging for all who work in schools, especially Onlies?

#### **Variables Studied**

In addition to the control variables used for statistical analysis, the other variables (scales) used to answer the research questions included School Problems, Access to Learning & Collaboration, Professional Support, Sense of Connection, Sense of Belonging, Support in the Building, Job Satisfaction, Satisfaction with School Principal, and Satisfaction with District Leadership and Procedures.

Correlation analysis was conducted on the variables. Notably, there was high correlation between the Sense of Belonging and Sense of Connection scales. Those two variables were also highly correlated to the Support in the Building scale, including colleagues and principals understanding professionals' roles, feeling valued and seen, and being included. Surprisingly, the Access to Learning and Collaboration scale, having the availability of professional development opportunities (e.g., school/district professional development, opportunity to attend conferences or take college level courses) and time to work with colleagues (e.g., common planning time, peer collaboration), was not correlated to the Sense of Connection, Sense of Belonging, Job Satisfaction, or Satisfaction with the School Principal or District Leadership scales. Please refer to Table 4.1 for more details.

Table 4.1

Correlation Matrix for Variables Used for Statistical Analysis

	School Problems	Access to Learning & Collaboration	Professional Support	Sense of Connection	Sense of Belonging	Support in Building	Job Satisfaction	Satisfaction with School Principal	Satisfaction with District Leadership & Procedures
School Problems	1	0.076	-0.254	-0.196	-0.304	-0.298	-0.156	-0.166	-0.286
Access to Learning & Collaboration		1	-0.261	-0.072	-0.100	0.044	0.015	-0.102	-0.141
Professional Support			1	0.254	0.410	0.342	0.146	0.301	0.388
Sense of Connection				1	0.656	0.663	0.356	0.301	0.400
Sense of Belonging					1	0.715	0.555	0.580	0.691
Support in Building						1	0.384	0.331	0.508
Job Satisfaction							1	0.460	0.658
Satisfaction with School Principal								1	0.631
Satisfaction with District Leadership & Procedures									1

**Research Question 1: To what extent does being an Only impact sense of belonging?**

*H<sub>1</sub> Individuals who belong to a cohort, such as teachers who teach the same grade or subject in the same building, have a greater sense of belonging than Onlies.*

Respondents answered questions about the number of other people who engaged in the same role in their building as well in their district. Two-thirds of the respondents reported that they were Onlies (155; 66.5%); however, most had at least one other person with the same position in the district (please refer to Tables 3.13 and 3.14 for more details).

On average, the difference between the responses of Onlies and NonOnlies about feelings of belonging and connectedness was statistically significant. Using one-way ANOVA, there was a statistically significant difference between the means of Onlies ( $\bar{x}$  =33.2) and NonOnlies ( $\bar{x}$  =37.7) on the Sense of Connection depth scale ( $p < .001$ ). Responses describing how connected individuals feel revealed the Onlies feel less connected than those in the NonOnlies group based on their ratings of survey items, such as, “I feel alone,” “I am part of a group,” and “I have a lot in common with those around me.”

Results indicated that on average the Onlies have less of a sense of belonging than NonOnlies. Based on one-way ANOVA, there was a statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) difference between the means of Onlies ( $\bar{x}$  =76.3) and NonOnlies ( $\bar{x}$  =81.9) on the Sense of Belonging scale. Responses to questions in the belonging and inclusion scale, such as, “I feel as if belong in this school,” “I have at least one person I can talk to if I have a problem,” and “I have a support network in this school” revealed a statistically significant

difference between the responses. Thus, the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between being an Only and sense of belonging is rejected. Results indicate that those who belong to a cohort, such as teachers who teach the same grade or subject in the same building, have a greater sense of belonging than Onlies. Please refer to Table 4.2.

*Table 4.2*

*Descriptive – ANOVA Difference Between Means of Sense of Belonging and Connection for Onlies and NonOnlies*

Scale	Group	$\bar{x}$	s	Max	Min	F
Sense of Connection depth	Onlies	33.2	7.2	47	10	15.541*
	NonOnlies	37.7	10.0	96	19	
Sense of Connection breadth	Onlies	3.6	2.4	8	0	10.856**
	NonOnlies	4.7	2.5	8	0	
Sense of Belonging depth	Onlies	76.3	14.8	105	36	7.71***
	NonOnlies	81.9	14.1	105	48	
Sense of Belonging breadth	Onlies	4.4	4.6	18	0	11.081**
	NonOnlies	6.6	5.4	18	0	

\*Significant at the  $p < .001$  \*\*Significant at the  $p = .001$  \*\*\*Significant at the  $p < .05$

Respondents were given the opportunity to share additional information on the survey and during interviews about how being an Only impacted their sense of belonging. Feeling isolated emerged as a common theme on both surveys and interviews. In summing up her feelings, a school nurse, who is an Only, shared on the survey, “This job feels lonely often.” Another nurse noted in the survey that, “I work in a good school environment but still often feel isolated/ disconnected.” In an interview, another school nurse shared that she felt like an island. Using the same terminology, one interviewee shared, “I’m a school psychologist island.”

Other common themes emerged regarding how principals and colleagues impact sense of belonging, including being valued, acknowledged, and included. According to interviewees, sense of belonging was promoted when the principals seemed to value Onlies' time and thoughts, especially when they asked for their feedback, opinions, and concerns, and they also invited them to participate in team/school meetings. When they were introduced to school staff, included and acknowledged in communication, felt heard, and were integrated into the staff, Onlies felt a greater sense of inclusion and belonging.

Conversely, lack of communication (e.g., not being told necessary information, not being included on emails, given last minute notification of things, etc.), not being included in meetings or planning, and not being acknowledged or thanked contributed to a lower sense of belonging, according to those interviewed.

**Research Question 2: What is the relationship between motivation to belong and actual sense of belonging for Onlies?**

To gather information about their desire to belong as well as their actual belonging, survey respondents were asked to rate statements such as, "I just want to get my work done and not interact with colleagues," "I want to have friends at work," "I feel as if I belong in this school," and "People ask me to join in after work activities.

***H<sub>2</sub> The greater the motivation for Onlies to belong, the greater their sense of belonging.***

To explore the relationship between the desire to belong and the actual belonging of Onlies, bivariate correlations were conducted on the depth variables. There was a strong correlation between the desire to belong and actual belonging depth scales ( $r = .754$ ). When the data were run with just the Onlies subset, while the correlation was still very strong, it was slightly lower (Onlies  $r = .745$ ). Please refer to Table 4. 3

Table 4.3

*Correlation Matrix Motivation and Actual Belonging*

	Onlies	Desire To Belong Depth	Actual Belonging Depth
Onlies	1	-.165	-.234
Desire To Belong Depth		1	.754
Actual Belong Depth			1

***H<sub>3</sub> Onlies will have a greater desire to belong compared to NonOnlies***

An ANOVA analysis showed that on average, the difference between the responses of Onlies and NonOnlies about their desire to belong and actual belonging was statistically significant ( $p < .001$  and  $p < 0.05$ ). Using one-way ANOVA, there was a statistical difference between groups when the means of Onlies ( $\bar{x} = 24.9$ ) and NonOnlies ( $\bar{x} = 26.4$ ) were compared for the desire to belong depth scales. This difference is significant ( $p < .05$ ). Contrary to the hypothesis, these results indicate that Onlies reported less of a desire to belong than NonOnlies.

There was also a statistical difference ( $p < 0.001$ ) between the groups when the Actual Belonging scale means between Onlies ( $\bar{x} = 76.9$ ) and NonOnlies ( $\bar{x} = 84.8$ ) were compared. These results indicate that Onlies have a lower sense of belonging than NonOnlies. See Table 4.4 for more information.

Table 4.4

*Descriptive – ANOVA Difference Between Means of Desire to Belong and Actual Belonging for Onlies and NonOnlies*

Scale	Group	$\bar{x}$	s	Max	Min	F
Desire to Belong depth	Onlies	24.9	4.0	34	11	6.328**
	NonOnlies	26.4	4.6	34	11	
Actual Belonging depth	Onlies	76.9	15.9	107	38	13.356*
	NonOnlies	84.8	15.1	106	43	

\*Significant at the  $p < .001$  \*\* Significant at the  $p < .05$

Interviewees provided thoughts on why some people did not have a desire to belong at work. Common themes, including lack of mental resources and a protective response to feeling excluded, emerged. Interviewees noted that people just might not have the mindset for the effort involved in belonging. They do not feel included or feel forgotten, so they do not want to give more of their time or energy into belonging. If there is a high level of turnover, people do not want to invest time and energy into establishing relationships if their colleague is going to leave.

Their personalities could also impact their interactions (e.g., they might be introverts). Respondents posited that school employees might not have the “emotional resources” necessary for the work required to belong; their “social battery” may need to be refueled by not interacting with peers. They might not connect with colleagues - they “didn’t find the right tribe.” Some people might find work stressful, so they just want to get the work done and go home, or they might go to work for the paycheck only. A middle school math teacher noted that some people do not want their life to be their career; they have family and friends outside of school that meet this need for belonging.

Others might dislike the leadership or culture of the school so do not want to put in the effort.

Individuals who were interviewed also noted that Onlies need to make an effort in order to increase connections with colleagues. They cannot just want to belong; they must actively work to do so. They felt that effort increased the sense of belonging. However, individuals who were interviewed also shared that if the effort was not reciprocated, working to belong did not feel worthwhile. Since they do not always feel included, they did not want to give more of their time.

**Research Question 3: What impact do demographic characteristics have on Onlies’ sense of belonging?**

*Variables*

Variables used for analysis of the Onlies included those related to respondents’ age, gender, race, type of degree earned, and number of years respondents worked in their current school. These served as control variables. Refer to Table 4.5 for more information.

*Table 4.5*

*Frequency Data for Onlies Data*

Regression variable	Mean/ Proportion	Standard deviation	Max	Min
Female	0.94		1	0
Age	44.3	10.5	66	22
White	0.94		1	0
Had Graduate degree	0.60		1	0
Years worked in current school	8.41	8.2	33	1
Sense of Belonging scale	76.29	14.8	105	36

To ensure that there was no multicollinearity between the independent variables, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. Minimal correlations were found between sense of belonging and gender ( $r = 0.01$ ), age (0.060), race (0.038), and highest degree earned ( $r = .007$ ). There was a small correlation between sense of belonging and years worked in the current school ( $r = .251$ ). Refer to Table 4.6 for more details.

*Table 4.6*

*Correlations Matrix for Onlies*

	Female	Age	White	Has a graduate degree	Number of years in current school	Sense of Belonging
Female	1	-.024	.038	-.054	.054	.010
Age		1	.175	-.046	.498	.060
White			1	.107	.049	-.004
Has a graduate degree				1	0.132	.007
Number of years in current school					1	.251
Sense of Belonging						1

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### ***Regression Analysis***

Regression was conducted to measure the impact of the demographic variables on the dependent variable of Sense of Belonging. Analysis resulted in a  $R^2$  value of .094, indicating that 9.4% of the variance in the Sense of Belonging scale was explained by the independent variables taken together. The F stat of 3.894 ( $p = .001$ ) allows for the rejection of the null hypothesis. Not unexpectedly, the more years a respondent was in their school, their sense of belonging increased by .489 point. Refer to Table 4.7 for more details.

Table 4.7

*Regression of Sense of Belonging by Control Variables for Onlies*

Regression variable	Regression coefficient (B)	Beta	t
Female	1.372	.023	.288
Age	-.130	-.092	.986
White	.032	.001	.007
Has a graduate degree	-1.085	-.036	-.444
Number of years in current school	.550	.303	3.263*
Constant	76.766		9.702

$R^2 = .071$ ,  $F\ stat = 2.261$ ,  $p = .051$

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .001$

In interviews, no respondents discussed their gender, age, race, or number of years spent in the building as part of their sense of belonging. While there was no mention of the degree earned as being a factor in school belonging, a school nurse shared that she wished colleagues understood that she was credentialed, as she did not always feel respected by others.

**Research Question 4: Controlling for differences in demographics, what are the factors and opportunities that contribute to a sense of belonging for Onlies?**

This research question focused on what factors and opportunities contributed to a sense of belonging for Onlies so that school leaders have a better understanding of what can be done to promote belonging and inclusion in schools and districts. Variables used for the regression analysis included gender, race, age, having a graduate degree, number of years in the current school, the number and type of problems that occur in schools, Satisfaction with Principal Leadership scale, and Satisfaction with Administrator

Leadership and Procedures scale. Other variables that did not have statistical significance were omitted from the regression analysis. These included opportunities for learning experiences and time to work with colleagues, other professional support provided, job satisfaction, feelings of connectedness with colleagues, and support in the building. Please see Table 4.8 for more information about the means, standard deviations, and range of variables.

*Table 4.8*

*Variables Studied in Regression Related to Sense of Belonging for Onlies*

Regression variable	Mean/ Proportion	Standard deviation	Max	Min
Female	0.94		1	0
Age	44.3	10.5	66	22
White	0.94		1	0
Had Graduate degree	0.60		1	0
Years worked in current school	8.41	8.2	33	1
School Problems	17.45	5.5	28	7
Sense of Belonging scale	76.29	14.8	105	36
Satisfaction with school principal scale	12.35	3.4	18	3
Satisfaction with district leadership and procedures scale	35.68	8.3	48	10

***Correlation between Scale Regression Variables***

To ensure that there was no multicollinearity between variables used in the regression, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. High correlations were found between sense of belonging and satisfaction with the school principal ( $r = .660$ ), sense of belonging and satisfaction with district leadership and procedures ( $r = .722$ ), and

satisfaction with the school principal and satisfaction with district leadership and procedures ( $r = .631$ ). A moderate negative correlation was found between sense of belonging and school problems ( $r = -.348$ ). A small positive correlation was found between sense of belonging and number of years in current school ( $r = .251$ ). Please refer to Table 4.9 for details.

Table 4.9

Correlation Matrix for Variables Used for Statistical Analysis

	Female	Age	White	Has a graduate degree	Number of years in current school	School Problems	Sense of belonging	Satisfaction with School Principal	Satisfaction with District Leadership & Procedures
Female	1	-0.024	0.038	-0.054	0.054	-0.064	0.010	-0.035	0.053
Age		1	0.175	-0.046	0.498	0.044	0.060	-0.036	0.001
White			1	0.107	0.049	0.017	-0.004	0.271	-0.017
Has a graduate degree				1	0.132	-0.114	0.007	0.535	0.003
Number of years in current school					1	-0.130	0.251	0.075	0.144
School problems						1	-0.348	-0.231	-0.274
Sense of belonging							1	0.660	0.722
Satisfaction with School Principal								1	0.694
Satisfaction with District Leadership & Procedures									1

Regression analysis was conducted to measure the impact of variables on the dependent variable of sense of belonging.

### ***Regression Findings***

In all, An  $R^2$  of .616 showed that 61.6% of the variation in the Sense of Belonging scale, the dependent variable, was explained by the entered independent variables taken together. The F stat (29.233,  $p < .001$ ) was statistically significant. The demographic variables were entered as controls. Controlling for those variables, regression analysis determined positive and negative relationships in the Sense of Belonging scale with the variables below with statistical significance at the  $p < .05$ ,  $p < .01$ , or  $p < .001$  levels. Refer to Table 4.10 for more details.

- Number of years in the current school - For every one year more in a school, the sense of belonging score increased by .266-point.
- Problem behaviors – For every additional school problem, including high absenteeism, lack of parental involvement, apathy, etc. sense of belonging decreased by .391-point.
- Satisfaction with principal leadership – For every one-point increase in satisfaction with the principal’s leadership, such as, encouraging and promoting collaboration, promoting professional development, and not having favorites, there was a 1.368-point increase in sense of belonging score.
- Satisfaction with district leadership and procedures - For every one-point increase in satisfaction district leadership, including satisfaction with job placement, workplace conditions, professional advancement opportunities, fair

evaluation process, etc., there was a .793-point increase on the Sense of Belonging scale.

Table 4.9

Regression of Sense of Belonging Scale by Demographic and Depth Variables for Onlies

Regression variable	Regression coefficient (B)	Beta	t
Female	-1.606	-.027	-.517
Age	.009	.006	.100
White	-1.503	-.025	-.469
Has a graduate degree	-1.202	-.040	-0.752
Number of years in current school	.266	.147	2.378*
School Problems	-.391	-.146	-2.698**
Satisfaction with principal	1.368	.316	4.367***
Satisfaction with district leadership and procedures	.793	.443	6.020***
(Constant)	38.911		5.525

$R^2 = 0.616$ ,  $F stat = 29.233$ ,  $p < .001$

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Sense of belonging can be impacted by a variety of factors, and being the only person in the role in school can contribute to feeling a lack of belonging. Some survey respondents noted that there is no one to talk to, people do not understand their role, they have not established relationships with colleagues, or they are not respected. On the survey, an experienced teacher shared:

I love being a teacher. My family is in this community. I have no connections at this school in my third year here. This has never happened before. I feel there is a good old boys' network of family and alumni that cannot be broken into.

An occupational therapist reported the following:

I receive a lot of support via phone and zoom calls with my same-position peers as needed throughout the week. Even though this support is not at the building level, it helps me to do my job. However, this support does not affect my sense of belonging and/or the respect I receive within the building I work in.

A nurse reported the following:

As the only nurse, I feel others don't understand my role and I don't have a peer I can confide in or discuss scenarios with. Nursing also isn't given the respect it deserves in the school setting. I get students sent to me for things that shouldn't be my role (e.g. a student not in dress code), which decreases my ability to focus on the health needs of students

Sharing her view about being an Only, another school nurse reported that, "It's very difficult to be the only nurse in the building. I don't really have a group to belong to. I do have great collaboration with nurses in the other district buildings."

Individuals who were interviewed discussed the mutual responsibility for belonging and creating opportunities to promote belonging. They reported that shared experiences help, and this can occur during and after the workday. To foster belonging, respondents noted that staff members should eat lunch or plan together, volunteer for things to meet new people, participate in school activities, spend time with staff outside of the school day, and have face-to-face meetings.

Being visible and available to others as a resource, collaborating, and getting involved all contribute to making connections and ultimately improving sense of belonging. A theme mentioned by those interviewed entailed being a strong self-advocate and putting forth the effort to building relationships. Respondents noted that Onlies should "promote yourself," "assert yourself," "put yourself out there," "insert yourself," "pick up the phone and make the call," "let people know what you are doing," and "take

the initiative.” One interviewee commented that, “Everyone wants a connection so be bold.”

Making the effort also requires communication and relationship-building, including, mingling, getting to know people, doing thoughtful things for others, greeting colleagues, having conversations, and making connections by remembering personal details about each other. One respondent acknowledged that making this effort and participating could be difficult because “It is a double-edged sword because [someone] doesn’t want to attend functions if they are not included.”

Three hypotheses were made regarding factors impacting sense of belonging for Onlies.

***H<sub>4</sub> The greater the sense of connection for Onlies, the greater their sense of belonging in their school.***

Correlations conducted revealed a strong relationship between Sense of Connection and Sense of Belonging scales for Onlies ( $r = .755$ ). When the correlation between the Sense of Connection and Sense of Belonging scales for all respondents was examined, there was a slight decrease ( $r = .656$ ).

***H<sub>5</sub> The more support available to the Onlies, the greater their sense of belonging.***

Results indicate that the null hypothesis can be rejected, as Onlies had greater sense of belonging when they had support from their principal, including not feeling as if the principal had favorites, being given professional development opportunities, and encouragement and opportunities to collaborate with peers. Additionally, Onlies had a greater sense of belonging when they believed they were evaluated fairly, were included in their school, received support to do their job, their job responsibilities were clearly

outlined, had positive workplace conditions, and were satisfied with their level of autonomy. Please refer to Table 4.10.

***H<sub>6</sub>: The more Onlies feel they belong, the greater their job satisfaction.***

Please see Table 4.11 for more information about the means, standard deviations, and range of variables used to study data related to this hypothesis.

*Table 4.10*

*Variables Studied in Regression Related to Onlies' Job Satisfaction*

Regression variable	Mean/ Proportion	Standard deviation	Max	Min
Female	0.94		1	0
Age	44.3	10.5	66	22
White	0.94		1	0
Had Graduate degree	0.60		1	0
Years worked in current school	8.41	8.2	33	1
School Problems	17.45	5.5	28	7
Sense of Belonging scale	76.29	14.8	105	36
Job Satisfaction scale	48.66	8.5	65	32

***Correlations between Regression Variables***

To ensure that there was no multicollinearity between variables used in the regression, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. Based on bivariate correlational analysis, there was a statistically significant high positive relationship between the Sense of Belonging and Job Satisfaction scales for Onlies (.565). Please refer to Table 4.12 for more details

Table 4.11

*Correlations Matrix for Variables and Job Satisfaction for Onlies*

Variable	Female	Age	White	Has a grad degree	Number of years in current school	Sense of Belonging	Job Satisfaction
Female	1	-.024	.038	-.054	.054	.010	-.001
Age		1	.175	-.046	.498	.060	.024
White			1	.107	.049	-.004	.064
Has a grad degree				1	0.132	0.007	-.060
Number of years in current school					1	.251	.011
Sense of Belonging						1	.565
Job Satisfaction							1

### ***Regression Findings***

Regression analysis was conducted to measure the impact of control variables and sense of belonging on the dependent variable of job satisfaction. Regression analysis resulted in a  $R^2$  value of .349, and p-value of  $< .001$ . This suggests statistically significant findings and that the independent variables examined affect 34.9% of the job satisfaction scale. With regards to the demographic variables, there was no statistically significant relationship between gender, race, age, or having a graduate degree and job satisfaction. There was a statistically significant negative relationship between number of years in the current school and the job satisfaction scale for Onlies. Controlling for those variables, regression analysis determined a positive relationship between the Job Satisfaction scale and the Sense of Belonging scale with statistical significance at the  $p < .001$  level. Refer to Table 4.13 for more details.

- Number of years in their school - Controlling for the other demographic variables, for Onlies, for every additional year they were in their school, there was a .174-point decrease in the Job Satisfaction scale.
- Onlies - All other things being equal, for Onlies, for every 1-point increase in the Sense of Belonging scale, there was a .345-point increase in the Job Satisfaction scale.

Table 4.12

*Regression of Variables for Job Satisfaction Scale for Onlies*

Regression variable	Regression coefficient (B)	Beta	t
Female	-.709	-.021	-.310
Age	.045	.056	.0712
White	2.426	.071	1.038
Has a graduate degree	-.825	-.048	-.703
Number of years in current school	-.174	-.167	-2.074*
Sense of belonging	.345	.605	8.785**
(Constant)	20.685		4.269

$R^2 = 0.349$ ,  $F\ stat = 13.199$ ,  $p < .001$

\* $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .001$

**Research Question 5: What practices can principals/school leaders implement to foster a sense of belonging for all who work in schools, especially Onlies?**

How leaders lead and interact with teachers and staff can impact job performance, job satisfaction, and overall school climate. There are various practices that principals can implement to promote sense of belonging.

***H<sub>7</sub> School leaders and principals can promote belonging for school employees by creating opportunities for collaboration, providing relevant professional development, and acknowledging them for who they are and what they do.***

***Interview and Survey Data***

School district leaders play an integral role in promoting, or thwarting, a sense of belonging for all staff in schools. A school nurse reported that, “Our school culture is special in that we truly feel like a school family, staff and students/families alike. We are fortunate to have strong leaders who cultivate this level of community.” Generally, those who offered comments on the survey had more to say about how principals and other school leaders adversely impact sense of belonging. Practices interfering with sense of belonging tended to be related to specialists not being able to do their job, being evaluated with measures not designed for their roles, professional development that was not relevant to their jobs, or lack of understanding of their roles, communication, dissemination of or access to information, or support. A On the survey, a teacher shared that:

These questions have been difficult to answer because last year was the worst year in my professional career due to a lack of support from my administrator (principal) and team. We have a new principal this year and I am hoping there will be a shift in focus that includes real collaboration, not just others who make the decisions and I have no voice.

Being evaluated fairly and relevantly was a common theme among survey respondents, especially among social workers. One respondent noted:

I work as a school social worker and I am sometimes doing so many duties, it's hard to do the job I was hired to do. I am often evaluated on the same rubric as the teachers even though our jobs look so different.

Another social worker shared:

With respect to evaluations, I feel more of a peer-to-peer model would be better. Most admins don't understand our job. In [initials of district], a colleague gets input from 'above' and 'below' you and then discusses that feedback with you and ways to improve as warranted.

The lack of understanding of the work professionals do and not clearly outlining responsibilities were also revealed as common themes and can impact sense of belonging. A school nurse commented that, "I don't feel like anyone one (administration, principal) has any idea what we do behind the scenes and how much organization and paperwork is involved in school nursing." A school counselor further shared that:

The role of a school counselor is becoming muddied more and more every year..administration would really benefit from an overview of what our role is supposed to be. Instead we are thrown random tasks that negate our entire [master's] program. This [must] change sooner than later, counselors are becoming fed up.

A social worker who completed the survey shared:

Teachers are great. Administrators are out of touch. Very toxic supervision, no clear job duties and [a lot] of difficulty setting limits or getting compensated. Love the families and staff. Very dissatisfied with current leadership.

A nurse reported, "Our district offers no PD for school nurses. Our state dept of education does not fully embrace the nursing role in the schools. The rules/legalities are very gray." These respondents identified areas that indicate the need for school leaders to have a greater understanding of specialists' roles, more relevant professional development opportunities, evaluation systems that are created for nonteachers, and overall feelings of support.

Interviewees were asked to give advice for what practices school leaders could implement to foster a sense of belonging. Including Onlies in meetings, initiatives, and discussions, asking them to participate, and giving them a voice by asking for feedback, input, and their perspective could make Onlies feel valued and foster belonging. It was

also noted that school leaders should work to understand the role and responsibilities of Onlies, and sharing information about Onlies should start with on-boarding, induction, and at staff meetings. A school nurse noted that principals should “include information about the Onlies and let people know that they are degreed professionals” who are credentialed with educational backgrounds. Other respondents noted that leaders should put all the Onlies together so they could be their own community as “an island of misfit toys.” They should have opportunities to meet throughout the school day with common planning and lunch times. Interestingly, the availability of these opportunities was very weakly correlated with sense of belonging, as shown by the correlation matrix of variables. Pairing individuals with another person in the district with the same job or providing a mentor could also foster belonging according to the those interviewed. Having professional support and sense of belonging variables were moderately correlated based on survey results. Please see Table 4.9 for more details.

## **Conclusion**

Results of this study revealed that, on average, Onlies had a lower sense of belonging than NonOnlies. Having at least one other person engaged in the same role in the same building increases sense of belonging. Onlies also had less of a motivation to belong than NonOnlies. It is unclear why this is the case. Except for the number of years spent in a school, other demographic characteristics, such as gender, race, age, and level of education, did not have a statistically significant impact on sense of belonging. The variables revealed to have an impact on sense of belonging for Onlies included number of problems that occur in schools, satisfaction with principal leadership, and satisfaction with administrator leadership and procedures. Results indicate that school leaders could

benefit from having an inclusive leadership style in an effort to foster belonging in their schools. Leaders can establish rapport with their staff, ensure that they have the necessary knowledge, resources, and support to do their jobs, create PLCs for professional employees, and make all individuals feel valued and respected for the work they do. In all, leaders should work to create a positive school climate that promotes sense of belonging and increases job satisfaction for their staff.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

Belonging, or concepts similar to it, has been discussed and studied for decades (Alderfer, 1969; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943; Murray, 1938). As noted, Baumeister and Leary determined that belonging is an essential need. Research revealed the numerous benefits of belonging at work as well as the adverse impacts of thwarted belonging. Results of this mixed methods study provide a launchpad for discussion and action for how school leaders can support and promote belonging for Onlies as well as other staff in their schools, especially as they work to improve school climate, job satisfaction, and retention of their staff.

#### **Findings**

Responses from surveys and interviews revealed that most demographics did not have a significant impact on sense of belonging; however, this was not unexpected given the lack of diversity in the study. Sense of belonging for Onlies was positively related to administrator support and negatively associated with school problems. Results also revealed that, on average, Onlies have less of a sense of belonging compared to NonOnlies, as they had a more than five-point lower Sense of Belonging depth scale mean compared to NonOnlies. In addition to having less of a sense of belonging in schools, Onlies also had less of a desire to belong. It is unknown why this is the case. Support from the principal and district leaders, including providing good workplace conditions, promoting collaboration, and conducting fair evaluations, led to an approximately one-point increase in the mean of the Sense of Belonging scale scores for

Onlies. Although not reported, when statistical analysis was conducted, administrator support led to an increase in the Sense of Belonging Scale score for NonOnlies as well.

As evidenced by the correlations reported in this study, there is a strong positive relationship between sense of belonging and job satisfaction. These results support those of Aldridge and Fraser (2016), who studied Australian high school teachers and discovered that school climate, including staff affiliation and principal support, is positively associated with job satisfaction and teacher self-efficacy. As job satisfaction is one way to retain school staff (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011a), and there is a shortage of school professionals (Schwartz & Diliberti, 2022), ways to promote employee satisfaction appear to be critical for decreasing attrition of school staff, especially Onlies.

Surprisingly, the availability of learning experiences (e.g., taking college courses, attending conferences) and time with colleagues (e.g., common planning time, peer collaboration) was not highly associated with sense of belonging for Onlies according to survey results; however, having a principal who encouraged and supported collaboration and professional development was moderately associated with sense of belonging. A strong positive correlation between sense of belonging and overall support in the school building was found. This support included being noticed and included and having relevant professional development. Results indicate that school leaders could promote belonging with an inclusive leadership style. They should establish working relationships with, provide the necessary resources for, respect the expertise of, and valued the staff who work in their schools.

## **Limitations**

There were limitations in this research, indicating possible implications for results as well as recommendations for future research. The sample was not a racially diverse one and not representative of the population, as most respondents were White. Thus, it was necessary to combine individuals of different races into one category.

Surveys were disseminated online. Use of online surveys can threaten the validity of the results since there is no personal interaction between researchers and respondents. There is no opportunity to clarify responses if questions arise or probe for deeper responses (Greenacre, 2016; Mertens & Wilson, 2019). This was addressed somewhat by the personal interviews that were conducted with some respondents; however, there were only six interviews completed. Online surveys suffer from self-selection bias as well (Greenacre, 2016).

Other staff members who contribute to the functioning of schools, including administrative assistants/secretaries, custodians, cafeteria staff, and instructional assistants, were excluded from this study. These individuals often have a great impact on students, teachers, principals, and other professionals. They likely could provide valuable insight into daily operations of schools, so it might be prudent to consider their sense of belonging as well.

The sampling technique was a nonprobability sample of convenience. Although nonprobability sampling is popular in research (Couper, 2017), no generalizable conclusions can be drawn from results. Additionally, there was a small sample size of some specialists, including, BCBA's, counselors, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, and social workers. There are likely other

professional roles that exist schools, such as IEP facilitators, Literacy Coaches, Lead teachers, etc., that were also not included or considered.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

Although results of this study are not fully generalizable, recommendations for effective practice for school leaders can be suggested. As belonging is an essential need, educational leaders could work to foster a sense of belonging for all who work in their schools. This is critical from an ethical, responsible, and practical leadership standpoint. As much of the research about belonging in schools is focused on student belonging, school leaders need not ignore the other inhabitants of their schools. Thus, ethically, they need to consider the well-being of all staff, especially Onlies, as well as the factors contributing to that well-being, including sense of belonging and inclusion.

Results of this study support four of the responsibilities of school leaders as posited by Marzano et al. (2001). Providing school professionals with the support they need through resources and professional development (Resources), fostering collaboration (Culture), conducting fair and relevant evaluations (Affirmation), and interacting with all staff without appearing to have favorites (Visibility) all contribute to sense of belonging. Thus, school leaders could consider these actions best practices if promoting belonging is a priority.

From an ethical standpoint, school leaders might consider the four paradigms endorsed by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) – Ethics of care, critique, justice, and profession – when leading their schools and districts. For the purpose of this research, three paradigms are highlighted. The ethics of care viewpoint mandates that district leaders make recommendations that enable students to feel secure and safe in schools.

While students are at the center of this paradigm, which is based on care, concern, and connection, this research suggests that this paradigm could be considered for school staff as well. Questions to be posed by district administration when making decisions or determining policy include those about who will be impacted and what possible consequences will result. These leaders should listen to others, observe what is happening, and respond thoughtfully (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). In all, leaders should consider the belonging and inclusion of staff, particular Onlies.

The ethics of critique paradigm urges us to question the status quo, especially regarding gender, class, and race. While not the focus of this study, this paradigm could be used in identifying and addressing the school problems that interfere with sense of belonging. Questions principals and school district leaders should ask include,

- How can the school/district increase student attendance?
- How can the school/district decrease tardiness/promote arriving to school on time?
- How can the school/district increase parent involvement when this might be very challenging due to socio-economic or culture impacts?

Additionally, principals should pay particular attention to employees with solo status who are also Onlies.

Shapiro and Stefkovich mainly discuss ethics in relation to how leaders make decisions and policies that impact students. Even when discussing the ethics of profession, the focus is on students; however, school district administrators need to be guided by the professional standards set forth by their certifying bodies as well as those of their district employees. Building administrators need to ensure that what they are

asking professionals to do allows them to uphold their own professional ethical standards too.

As Onlies do not have a cohort with whom to ask questions and discuss specifics of their role, principals giving them the opportunity to meet with other people in the same role could provide the support they need. As having someone who engages in the same job/position/role appears to increase sense of connection and belonging for school employees, school leaders could create opportunities for Onlies to collaborate with their same-role colleagues in the district. As noted in the introduction of this study, many schools have established professional learning communities (PLC). Results of this research indicate that implementation of PLCs for all school staff by district administrators could possibly assist in fostering a sense of belonging.

Given the relationship between sense of belonging and job satisfaction along with the adverse effects of not being satisfied at work, it is important that school leaders create a climate that increases job satisfaction of teachers as well as specialists, especially Onlies. Principals may wish to consider the climate of their school building, particularly if they are concerned with retention of teachers and school specialists. This is especially important for retaining teachers and specialists of color. Griffin (2016, 2018) of the Educational Trust, whose mission is closing opportunity and achievement gaps for youth, especially those who are marginalized, argued that it is necessary for school leaders to consider, understand, and examine the working conditions, climate, culture, and professional development policies associated with race and ethnicity so that they can do what is necessary for the recruitment and retention of teachers of color.

In this study, information and support from leadership contributed to sense of belonging. Thus, various practices could be implemented by district leaders, including Human Resource Directors, such as providing clear job descriptions, understanding the job requirements of their professional employees, and having realistic expectations for what professionals can and cannot do within their roles. School administrators could allow for autonomy by not micromanaging tasks or schedules of those individuals and trust the expertise of professionals to do the jobs they are credentialed to do. Providing satisfactory workplace conditions, including ensuring that Onlies have the requisite resources to do their job successfully, is also integral to fostering belonging and job satisfaction. Additionally, principals should provide the moral support needed for the job, including interacting with the Onlies, and providing opportunities for leadership roles or professional growth/advancement. Furthermore, as schoolteachers and nonteaching professionals are evaluated, those district leaders, who are responsible for evaluation of staff, should conduct fair and relevant evaluations for specific professional roles is necessary to ensure that professionals receive feedback that is beneficial for them and feel valued for the work they do. In the past, nonteacher professionals were evaluated with the teacher evaluation form regardless of their role, making the evaluation not as meaningful as it could have been.

As inclusion and connection were highly related to sense of belonging, including all employees is necessary. Additionally, creating an environment of inclusion for all staff, including Onlies, to foster sense of belonging may well be another responsibility of building principals. Overall, in addition to fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion, principals may wish to ensure that the support they are providing is effective in retaining

teachers and other school staff so that all members of the school community, including students, benefit.

Although possibly beyond their control, district and building leaders could work to reduce the number of school problems encountered in their schools. Sense of belonging and school problems were negatively related. As such, reducing discipline issues, increasing attendance, improving relationships with parents, among others, may also be a focus to promote sense of belonging. Poverty was one school problem listed on the survey; however, a study indicated that poverty did not have a strong impact on school climate. Although their study is not generalizable, when Capp et al. (2022) interviewed teachers about school climate, they found that socio-economic status did not feature in their conversations.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research revealed several areas for possible future research, and studies could be conducted to examine various issues that arose. Replicating the study with a larger sample size, including a more diverse group of individuals with regards to race, using a probability-based sampling technique, and creating an updated survey, including revising some questions that were unclear, may produce more robust results. Questions related to type (public, private, or parochial) and size of schools could offer other helpful data.

Since there were differences among variables regarding impact on sense of belonging, further examination of the effect of factors such as peer collaboration opportunities and relevant professional development could provide more detailed information of what opportunities school leaders could provide and promote to increase sense of belonging. Additionally, as principals have the most influence on school climate

(Capp et al., 2022), exploration of the impact of climate on sense of belonging could yield more nuanced and deeper information about how principals could lead.

Studies indicate that there are benefits to teacher practice and student learning when teachers are engaged in PLCs (DuFour, 2004; Vescio et al., 2008); however, the impact on sense of belonging requires further study. Additionally, although, interviewees who are Onlies reported a desire for a PLC, the possible benefit of those communities for nonteaching professionals is unknown.

Although the availability of mentoring, peer consultation, and coaching were not indicators of sense of belonging, additional exploration may reveal new information about the impact of those supports. Mentoring is frequently a part of induction programs in schools. First year teachers who receive mentoring have less of tendency to leave the teaching profession or transfer schools (Smith et al., 2004). Studying the impact of mentoring on sense of belonging for both the experienced and novice professional could be another avenue to explore.

Results of this study found that Onlies have less of a desire to belong than NonOnlies. This result was surprising and warrants further study. Did Onlies start their careers with less of a desire to belong or was this the result of being an Only? What are the factors that contribute to the desire or motivation to belong?

As this study consisted of mostly white women, further study of the impact of being an Only on sense of belonging with a more diverse sample could provide beneficial and more varied information for school leaders. This is especially important given the dearth of teachers and other professionals of color who work in schools (USDOE, n.d.-d).

An additional research question could discuss the level of impact of being an Only with solo status has on belonging.

Most respondents worked as teachers, school nurses, and school psychologists. The question arises of whether there was a reason for the larger response rate for those professionals. Delving into possible reason for the higher response rate could provide more details about how to support individuals engaged in those roles. Research could possibly determine a difference between the role of Onlies and their sense of belonging.

The following issues composed the School Problems scale: poverty, poor student health, student tardiness, absenteeism, and apathy, teacher absenteeism, and lack of parental involvement. Additional research into which problems had the greatest impact on sense of belonging and the size of their effect could be beneficial in determining how to prioritize addressing the problem.

Finally, if the expectation is that school leaders will create a climate of belonging and inclusion in their schools, it may be helpful to study their sense of belonging as well. Areas to consider include the impact of a school leader's sense of belonging on the ability to foster a sense of belonging for others, the factors that promote sense of belonging for school leaders, and the relationship between the sense of belonging of leaders and sense of belonging of teachers, specialists, and other school staff.

## **Conclusion**

School leaders are faced with numerous challenges as they manage the overall operations of their schools and districts. Much emphasis is placed on the needs of students, especially regarding their achievement and growth. In addition to creating a climate for academic success, school leaders must also consider the social, emotional,

and behavioral functioning of students as well. As noted, there is an abundance of research on fostering sense of belonging and inclusion of students, yet there is limited research of sense of belonging of school professionals, especially those who do not teach or who are the only person engaged in their role in a school. Administrators may lose focus of or not consider the well-being, including their sense of belonging, of school staff, especially Onlies, if this is not made a priority. As they work to create a positive school climate, school leaders may wish to think beyond the impact of that climate on student achievement and well-being. Similar to the research about belonging, the research on school climate tends to focus on the impact on and importance of it for students (Cemalcilar, 2010; Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020; Demiroz, 2020; Kalkan & Dagli, 2021; Vang & Nishina, 2022). However, some research has shown that principals can create a climate that is supportive of teacher development by having inclusive leadership practices, fostering relationships, supporting people as they adjust to change, and nurturing diversity (Drago-Severson, 2012).

Findings suggest that, as they develop policies or engage in reform efforts, school leaders may wish to devote time and effort into creating a climate of belonging and inclusion not just for their students but the staff, especially Onlies since they were found to have a lower sense of belonging than NonOnlies, as well. Ultimately, with a greater sense of belonging, schools could benefit by increasing job satisfaction and retention of employees, which in turn would benefit their students. The benefits of belonging indicate that fostering it is a worthwhile endeavor for school leaders, and they should prioritize it if they would like to reap the benefits that greater sense of belonging brings to the workplace, their schools.

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## APPENDIX A

### GLOSSARY

From the NCES Glossary

**Private school** Private elementary/secondary schools surveyed by the Private School Universe

Survey (PSS) are assigned to one of three major categories of religious orientation (Catholic, other religious, or nonsectarian) and, within each major category, one of three subcategories based on the school's religious affiliation provided by respondents.

**Catholic** Schools categorized according to governance, provided by Roman Catholic school respondents, into (i) parochial, (ii) diocesan, and (iii) private Catholic schools.

**Other religious** Schools that have a religious orientation or purpose but are not Catholic. Other religious schools are categorized according to religious association membership, provided by respondents, into (i) Conservative Christian, (ii) other affiliated, and (iii) unaffiliated schools. Conservative Christian schools are those "Other religious" schools with membership in at least one of four associations: Accelerated Christian Education, American Association of Christian Schools, Association of Christian Schools International, and Oral Roberts University Education Fellowship. Affiliated schools are those "Other religious" schools not classified as Conservative Christian with membership in at least 1 of 11 associations—Association of Christian Teachers and Schools, Christian Schools International, Evangelical Lutheran Education Association, Friends Council on Education, General Conference of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Islamic School League of America, National Association of Episcopal Schools, National Christian School Association, National Society for Hebrew Day Schools, Solomon Schechter Day Schools, and Southern Baptist Association of Christian Schools—or indicating membership in "other religious school associations." Unaffiliated schools are those "Other religious" schools that have a religious orientation or purpose but are not classified as Conservative Christian or affiliated.

**Nonsectarian** Schools that do not have a religious orientation or purpose and are categorized according to program emphasis, provided by respondents, into (i) regular, (ii) special emphasis, and (iii) special education schools. Regular schools are those that have a regular elementary/secondary or early childhood program emphasis. Special emphasis schools are those that have a Montessori, vocational/technical, alternative, or special program emphasis. Special education schools are those that have a special education program emphasis.

**Public charter school** A school providing free public elementary and/or secondary education to eligible students under a specific charter granted by the state legislature or other authority, and designated by such authority to be a charter school.

**Public school or institution** A school or institution controlled and operated by publicly elected or appointed officials and deriving its primary support from public funds.

## APPENDIX B

### 21 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SCHOOL LEADER

From Marzano, et al, 2001

<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>The Extent to Which the Principal...</b>
1. Affirmation	Recognizes and celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges failures
2. Change Agent	Is willing to challenge and actively challenges the status quo
3. Contingent Rewards	Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments
4. Communication	Establishes strong lines of communication with and among teachers and students
5. Culture	Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation
6. Discipline	Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus
7. Flexibility	Adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent
8. Focus	Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention
9. Ideals/Beliefs	Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling
10. Input	Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies
11. Intellectual Stimulation	Ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture
12. Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices
13. Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices
14. Monitoring/Evaluating	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning
15. Optimizer	Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations
16. Order	Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines
17. Outreach	Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders
18. Relationships	Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff
19. Resources	Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs
20. Situational Awareness	Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems
21. Visibility	Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students

## APPENDIX C

### CORE VALUES OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

Day, et al. (2001, p. 27)

Effective leaders:

- were clear in their vision for the school and communicated it to all its constituents;
- focused upon care and achievement simultaneously;
- created maintained and constantly monitored relationships recognising them as key to the cultures of learning;
- were reflective in a variety of internal and external social and organisational contexts, using a variety of problem-solving approaches;
- sought, synthesised, and evaluated internal and external data, applying these to the school within their values framework;
- persisted with apparently intractable issues in their drive for higher standards;
- were prepared to take risks in order to achieve these;
- were not afraid to ask difficult questions of themselves and others;
- were entrepreneurial;
- were 'networkers' inside and outside the school;
- were not afraid to acknowledge failure but did not give up and learnt from it;
- were aware of a range of sources to help solve problems; and managed ongoing tensions and dilemmas through principled, values-led contingency leadership.

## APPENDIX D

### SURVEY EMAIL/POST LETTER

Impact of belonging on workplace well-being

Hello Educator,

My name is Michelle Downs, and I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at Temple University in Philadelphia, PA. Formerly a middle school science teacher, I currently am a school psychologist in a suburban elementary school. I have a strong interest in belonging and its impact on well-being as well as job performance and satisfaction for teachers and specialists in schools.

In order to collect information about school employees' sense of belonging, I am using a survey. If you are willing to complete the [survey](#), which should take no more than 10-15 minutes, I would greatly appreciate it. It can be found [here](#). Your participation is completely voluntary and, by completing this survey, you are providing your consent to participate in this study. Completion of this survey and participation in this research will not impact your employment nor will it be shared with your school administrators. Results will be confidential.

Participants who complete the survey will have the chance to earn one of four \$25 Amazon gift certificates as compensation for the survey aspect of this research. Once you have completed the survey, you can access the link for the gift certificate raffle. This link will not be connected to survey responses.

The final question of the survey asks if you would be interested in participating in an individual interview regarding your experiences as a school employee. If you would like to take part in the voluntary interview, you can click on a link to share contact information, which will not be connected to your survey responses to ensure anonymity. Anyone who volunteers and is selected for an interview will receive an additional \$25 gift certificate of their choosing.

I know that you are likely very busy. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts about belonging at work with me. If you have any questions, please reach out to me at [Michelle.Downs@temple.edu](mailto:Michelle.Downs@temple.edu).

[Consent Form](#)

Thank you!

## APPENDIX E

### RESEARCH SUBJECT CONSENT FORM

**Title:** *Accepting and Valuing the Onlies*: Factors influencing the sense of belonging of individuals who are the sole employee in their particular role in a school

**Investigator:** Judith Stull, PhD (principal) and Michelle Downs, M.S. (student researcher)

**Daytime Phone Number:** 610-731-9282

#### RESEARCH CONSENT SUMMARY

You are being asked for your consent to take part in a research study. This document provides a concise summary of this research. It describes the key information that we believe most people need to decide whether to take part in this research. Later sections of this document will provide all relevant details.

#### What should I know about this research?

- Someone will explain this research to you.
- Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether you take part is up to you.
- If you don't take part, it won't be held against you.
- You can take part now and later drop out, and it won't be held against you.
- If you don't understand, ask questions.
- Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

#### How long will I be in this research?

We expect that you will be in this research for about 10 to 15 minutes while completing the survey. For those who volunteer to participate in an interview, you will be asked to meet for a 30 to 60 minute interview with the researcher. Collection of the survey data and interview data will take place from August 2023 to May 2024.

#### Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the factors that contribute to the sense of belonging for individuals who are the only people in their particular role in a school, the "Onlies." Gaining this knowledge should ultimately assist school leaders in their efforts to create a climate of belonging in their buildings with the hopes of retaining and recruiting school employees who are satisfied with their jobs and engaging in beneficial work practices. For the purpose of this research, a modification of Goodenow and Grady's (1993) definition of belonging will be used. Thus, belonging is the extent to which individuals, especially Onlies, feel personally respected, valued, accepted, and included by colleagues and administrators in their school work environment.

### **What happens to me if I agree to take part in this research?**

Participants will complete a brief 10 to 15 minute survey between August 2023 and May 2024. The survey will be the extent of involvement for the majority of participants. Participants will be anonymous. Participants will be given the opportunity to provide their contact information to voluntarily participate in a one on one interview between August and December 2023. The interviews will be held in person and on campus. The interview time is expected to last from 30 to 60 minutes. The interview will be done in a conversational style with the researcher asking questions about participants' experiences of belonging at work. Participants will be asked questions about their background, perceptions, experiences of belonging as well as advice about fostering belonging for school leaders and other employees. The interview responses will be used as data for this study.

### **Could being in this research hurt me?**

There are no expected risks or discomfort for participating in this research. Although, it may cause participants to reflect on their experience of belonging at their school.

### **Will being in this research benefit me?**

It is not expected that you will personally benefit from this research.

## **DETAILED RESEARCH CONSENT**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. A person who takes part in a research study is called a research subject, or research participant.

### **What should I know about this research?**

- Someone will explain this research to you.
- This form sums up that explanation.
- Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- If you don't understand, ask questions.
- Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

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**Compensation**

Survey recipients will have the opportunity to win one of four \$25 gift cards via a raffle once they have completed the survey. Emails will be collected separately from the survey. In addition, survey recipients who volunteer and are selected to be interviewed and complete an interview will be given a \$25 gift card.

**What are my responsibilities if I take part in this research?**

If you take part in this research, you will be responsible to complete an online survey.

**Could being in this research hurt me?**

There are no expected risks or discomfort for participating in this research. Although, it may cause an individual to reflect on their college experience.

In addition to these risks, taking part in this research may harm you in unknown ways.

**Will being in this research benefit me?**

There are no benefits to you from your taking part in this research. We cannot promise any benefits to others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to others include informing institutional practices and programs for undergraduate students, particularly transfer students.

**What happens to the information collected for this research?**

Your private information will be shared with individuals and organizations (if applicable) that conduct or watch over this research, including:

- The Institutional Review Board (IRB) that reviewed this research
- Temple University

We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

We protect your information from disclosure to others to the extent required by law. We cannot promise complete secrecy.

Data collected in this research might be de-identified and used for future research or distributed to another investigator for future research without your consent.

**Who can answer my questions about this research?**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think this research has hurt you or made you sick, talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page.

This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or [irb@temple.edu](mailto:irb@temple.edu) if:

- You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.
- You are not getting answers from the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone else about the research.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

**Can I be removed from this research without my approval?**

N/A

**What happens if I agree to be in this research, but I change my mind later?**

Participation is entirely voluntary. No consequence will follow whatever your decision.

**APPENDIX F**  
**SURVEY INSTRUMENT**

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Other. Please specify

In what year were you born?

What is your Race/ Ethnicity?

- African American or Black
- Asian Pacific Islander
- Latinx/ Hispanic
- White
- Other

Please indicate the degrees you have earned. Check all that apply.

	Yes
Associate's degree	
Bachelor degree	
Master's degree	
Doctoral degree (e.g., PhD, EdD, MD, JD, DDS)	
Other. please explain	

For how many years have you worked in schools?

- 1
- 2 - 4
- 5 - 9
- 10 - 14
- 15 and more
- Other. Please explain

In how many buildings do you have responsibilities?

	None	One	Two - five	Six - ten	More than 10
pK - K					
Elementary grades (1 - 5)					

	None	One	Two - five	Six - ten	More than 10
Middle grades (6 - 8)					
High School grades ( 9-12)					
Other					

In what year did you begin working in the school you are currently in? \_\_\_\_\_

We need a bit of information about where you are currently working. What is the name of the school district? \_\_\_\_\_

Where is the district located? City and state please. \_\_\_\_\_

Currently, what is your position? Check all that apply.

- BCBA
- Counselor
- Nurse
- Occupational therapist
- Physical therapist
- Reading specialist
- School psychologist
- Speech language pathologist
- Social worker
- Teacher. Please specify subject area..
- Other. Please explain.

Counting yourself as one, how many others are in the same position as you?

	1	2	3	4	5 or more
In the building you where you spend most of your time?					
In the district?					

In your opinion, how often is each of the following a problem at your school?

	Almost everyday	Moderately often	Somewhat often	Rarely
Student tardiness				
Student absenteeism				
Teacher absenteeism				

	Almost everyday	Moderately often	Somewhat often	Rarely
Student apathy				
Lack of parental involvement				
Poverty				
Poor student health				

	Yes	No, but I would like to do this.	No, I am not interested.
Professional development led by a school or district professional			
Peer collaboration			
Common planning time			
Attending conferences			
College level courses			
Other. Please specify			

What types of support have you experienced?

	Yes	No, but I would like to do this.	No, I am not interested.
Formal Mentoring			
Informal mentoring			
Coaching			
Peer consultation			
Other. Please list.			

Please indicate how often each of the statements below is descriptive of how you feel in the building you spend most of your workday?

	Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Most of the time	Always
I am "in tune" with those in my school.						

	Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Most of the time	Always
I lack companionship.						
There is no one I can turn to.						
I feel alone.						
I am part of a group.						
I have a lot in common with those around me.						
I am outgoing and friendly.						
There are people you work with who you really understand.						
I just want to get my work done and not interact with colleagues.						

If you work in more than one building, please base your responses on the building where you spend most of your time. To what extent do you think that the following are a problem.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree
I feel as if I belong in this school.					
People value the work I do.					
People see me as a resource.					
People ask me to join in after work activities.					
I feel that I am supported by my principal.					
The administration trusts me.					

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree
I have at least one person I can talk to if I have a problem.					
I have a support network in this school.					
I am comfortable walking into the faculty room when others are there.					
I have people with whom I can eat lunch.					
It is important for me to feel connected to my colleagues.					
I want to have friends at work.					
My colleagues understand the work I do.					
I have dedicated space in which to work.					
I am proud to be associated with my school district.					
I have similar professional values as my colleagues.					
My role is identified and included in district and school-wide correspondence.					
I feel appreciated.					
There is an overall sense of community in my building.					
I trust my colleagues.					
I agree with the mission and values of my school.					

In the past few years have you made significant changes in how you do your job?

- No
- Yes. They are:

Again thinking about the building where you spend most of your time, please respond to the statements below.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
My school district provides the professional development I need						
People in my building notice when I am good at something.						
Teachers in my building are not interested in what I do.						
I am included in lots of activities in my building.						
I wish I were in a different building.						
I feel very different from most of the teachers in my building.						
I wish that I had more colleagues in my building who do what I do.						
I feel that the principal understands what I do more than the teachers.						

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The stress and disappointments involved in what I do at this							

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
school aren't really worth it.							
Those at this school like being here; I would describe us as a satisfied group.							
I like the way things are run at this school.							
If I could get a higher paying job, I'd leave as soon as possible							
I think about transferring to another school..							
I don't seem to have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began.							
I think about staying home from school because I'm just too tired to go.							
There is a great deal of cooperative effort among the staff.							

My principal

	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Encourages and promotes collaboration.						
Promotes professional development						
Sometimes seems to "have favorites."						

We'd like to ask about your job experience and the school you are currently working in. ALL responses will be kept anonymous. How satisfied are you with:

	Very satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Moderately dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
How satisfied are you with your job description or assignment (e.g., responsibilities, grade level, or subject area)?						
How satisfied are you with your degree of autonomy?						
How satisfied are you with your workplace conditions (e.g., facilities, resources, technology, within school safety)?						
How satisfied are you with the school administration?						

	Very satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Moderately dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
How satisfied are you with leadership roles or professional advancement opportunities?						
How helpful is the support you received in doing your job?						
How fair has the formal evaluation process you've experienced?						
How satisfied are you with your level of inclusion in your school?						

Is there anything you would like to add? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be willing to be interviewed? This is to help us better understand the survey responses. No names will ever be attached to any comments made. If you answer yes, please click the link below.

- Yes
- Sorry, not at this time

**APPENDIX G**  
**SURVEY RESPONDENTS**

*Table 3.X*

*Survey Respondents by States*

State	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Alaska	2	0.9	0.9
Arizona	4	1.8	2.7
Arkansas	2	0.9	3.6
California	9	4	7.6
Colorado	3	1.3	8.9
Connecticut	4	1.8	10.7
Delaware	2	0.9	11.6
Florida	4	1.8	13.4
Georgia	4	1.8	15.2
Hawaii	2	0.9	16.1
Illinois	10	4.5	20.5
Indiana	3	1.3	21.9
Kentucky	1	0.4	22.3
Maine	2	0.9	23.2
Massachusetts	5	2.2	25.4
Michigan	6	2.7	28.1
Minnesota	2	0.9	29
Mississippi	3	1.3	30.4
Missouri	1	0.4	30.8
Nebraska	1	0.4	31.3
New Hampshire	2	0.9	32.1
New Jersey	4	1.8	33.9
New Mexico	1	0.4	34.4
New York	18	8	42.4
North Carolina	3	1.3	43.8
Ohio	7	3.1	46.9

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Oklahoma	1	0.4	47.3
Pennsylvania	66	29.5	76.8
Rhode Island	4	1.8	78.6
South Carolina	5	2.2	80.8
South Dakota	3	1.3	82.1
Tennessee	2	0.9	83
Texas	11	4.9	87.9
Utah	2	0.9	88.8
Vermont	1	0.4	89.3
Virgin Islands	1	0.4	89.7
Virginia	12	5.4	95.1
Washington	5	2.2	97.3
West Virginia	1	0.4	97.8
Wisconsin	3	1.3	99.1
Wyoming	2	0.9	100
Total	224	100	

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## APPENDIX H

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Interviewee characteristics:
  - a. Gender
  - b. Years of experience
  - c. Race/Ethnicity
  - d. Position in school
2. Please give me an example when you felt included by a school leader?
3. Please give me an example of when a school leader made you feel excluded?
4. Have you noticed other people being included and seeming not to belong?
5. Have you ever noticed other people being excluded? Please describe or explain what happened?
6. Have you noticed practices that would make people feel as if they didn't belong? Please describe or explain what happened?
7. What advice would you give school/district leaders to make Onlies feel included?
8. What advice would you give Onlies about belonging?
9. Please give me an example of what you do to connect with colleagues or work to belong in your school?
10. There are times that some people might not focus on belonging at work, why do you think that is?
11. Is there anything you would like to add?