

**IS DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION DEAD ON ARRIVAL?  
LEADERSHIP PRACTICES THAT FOSTER PRIDE, NOT  
PREJUDICE IN AMERICA'S SCHOOLS**

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by  
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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the relationship between school district resource allocation, student support services, and behavioral outcomes, focusing on transgender students.

Drawing on secondary data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the study addresses two key research questions: (a) How do school district characteristics, such as size, racial composition, and geographic location, influence negative student behaviors, particularly among transgender students? (b) To what extent do variations in school district spending on student support services and mental health resources impact these behaviors?

The findings reveal significant disparities in behavioral outcomes between transgender and cisgender students, with transgender students reporting higher rates of substance use, depression, and tobacco use. These disparities were more pronounced in school districts with limited mental health resources and inconsistent access to key support roles, such as school psychologists and guidance counselors. Furthermore, schools with higher numbers of transgender students reported higher overall staffing levels and local revenue, yet significant variability in resource allocation was observed, underscoring systemic inequities in meeting the needs of marginalized populations.

The analysis also considers the implications of the 2025 Executive Order No. 14173, which replaced the rescinded Executive Order No. 13950 (2020) on combating race and sex stereotyping, which restricts federally funded Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives that address systemic inequities. This policy poses additional challenges for school districts seeking to sustain equity-focused programs, particularly those serving transgender and LGBTQ+ students. Despite these constraints, the findings emphasize the

critical role of targeted investments in mental health and support services to mitigate disparities and improve outcomes for marginalized populations.

The study concludes with policy recommendations and identifies future research directions, including the need for longitudinal analyses and a deeper exploration of intersectional identities within the school district resource allocation context. These efforts are essential for advancing DEI initiatives and ensuring that all students, regardless of identity or background, have access to supportive and equitable educational opportunities.

*Keywords:* behavioral outcomes, combating race and sex stereotyping, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), mental health resources, school district funding, transgender students

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Improving student outcomes in schools is a fundamental goal that drives educational initiatives and practices worldwide. Schools play a crucial role in nurturing the academic, social, and emotional development of students, shaping their future success. By focusing on effective teaching methods, personalized learning approaches, robust support systems, and creating a positive school climate, educators and school leaders can work collaboratively to enhance student outcomes. Embracing innovation, fostering a culture of continuous improvement, and prioritizing student well-being are key components in creating an environment where all students can thrive and achieve their full potential. Schools not only serve as institutions for academic learning but also as arenas where social hierarchies and cultural norms are enacted and challenged. Many difficulties characterize the state of education today. These challenges, which span behavioral issues, school issues, substance use, attitudes toward learning, self-concept, and locus of control, underscore the complexity of the educational environment and the need for targeted interventions. The issues have effects both in and out of school.

Behavioral problems in schools, ranging from classroom disruptions to more severe disciplinary issues, significantly impact the learning environment for everyone. The link between behavioral issues and dropout rates is well-documented, with students exhibiting chronic problem behaviors being at a higher risk of leaving school prematurely (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Dropout rates remain a persistent problem, contributing to long-term societal issues such as lower earning potential and an increased likelihood of incarceration (Balfanz et al., 2014).

Substance use among students is another pressing concern that can exacerbate existing behavioral problems and negatively affect academic achievement and physical health. Schools are critical settings for the implementation of prevention and intervention programs aimed at reducing substance use and its associated harms (Botvin et al., 2006). Students' attitudes toward learning, including their sense of self-concept and locus of control, play a pivotal role in their academic success. A positive self-concept is associated with higher motivation, engagement, and achievement, while a strong internal locus of control—a belief in one's ability to influence events and outcomes—has been linked to higher academic performance (Marsh & Martin, 2011; Zimmerman, 2000). Conversely, negative attitudes toward school, a low self-concept, and an external locus of control can hinder students' academic progress and lead to disengagement from the educational process (Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that involves educators, parents, and the broader community. Schools need to foster a supportive and inclusive environment that addresses the diverse needs of their students. This includes implementing evidence-based behavioral interventions, providing access to mental health and substance use resources, and promoting positive attitudes toward learning through curriculum and teaching practices that boost students' self-concept and locus of control (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In a significant move reflecting the evolving political landscape on educational and corporate governance, President Donald Trump signed Executive Order No. 14185 (2025) on January 21, 2025, to reinstate and redefine the federal government's approach to DEI initiatives. The initial executive order, formally titled Executive Order No. 13950 (2020) signed by President Trump during his first administration, was titled *Combating*

*race and sex stereotyping*, and marked a pivotal shift in the federal government's historic stance on DEI practices, particularly within federal agencies and institutions receiving federal funding.

The 2025 executive order explicitly prohibits the propagation of concepts that it describes as "divisive," including the ideas that one race or sex is inherently superior to another, that the United States is fundamentally racist or sexist, or that an individual, by virtue of their race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously. The order argues that such notions perpetuate divisions and hinder the unity that is essential to the nation's success (Office of the Press Secretary, 2025).

This directive mandates a review and subsequent modification or abolishment of training and programs across all federal agencies that, according to the order, may suggest that meritocracy or traits such as a hard work ethic are racist, sexist, or were created by a particular race to oppress another. The order extends its influence to federal contractors and grant recipients, requiring compliance as a condition for funding (Federal Register, 2025).

The implications of this executive order are profound, particularly in how federal institutions, contractors and recipients of federal funding including schools and colleges, design and implement DEI programs. Critics argue that it stifles efforts to address systemic inequalities and hinders discussions crucial for understanding and dismantling structures of discrimination. Supporters, however, view it as a corrective measure to ensure that federal programs foster inclusivity without becoming platforms for advancing ideological agendas (Johnson, 2025).

For the context of this dissertation, which explores the impact of political decisions on educational policies or social programs, this executive order provides a

contemporary example of how executive actions can significantly influence policy directions related to DEI in education. The order's emphasis on revising DEI initiatives can be analyzed for its broader implications on how educational institutions address or sideline discussions about race, gender, and systemic inequality (Smith & Davis, 2025).

### **Leadership Influence**

Topics of DEI initiatives are of increased interest in education and the corporate world. Studies have been conducted that focus on the impact that DEI policies and programs have had on student outcomes. While the goal is to increase student success and learning, the results have been mixed. Some schools and school districts achieve greater improvement while others do not.

According to Basham (2012), transformational leadership in education is vital for addressing these pervasive issues, suggesting that leadership approaches that inspire and engage the school community can improve student outcomes. Similarly, Brown and Zhang (2018) found that distributed leadership models, which empower various stakeholders within the school community, can effectively address equity and diversity challenges. Moreover, this empowerment directly impacts student behavior and academic engagement.

Building on the discussion of leadership models that foster inclusive and equitable educational environments, it is also essential to consider the psychological and social factors that influence student experiences. While transformational and distributed leadership approaches can create supportive school climates, student perceptions of themselves and their environment play a crucial role in shaping academic and behavioral outcomes. The interplay between self-concept, locus of control, and stigma further informs how students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, navigate

educational spaces. Understanding these psychological constructs provides insight into the broader social and emotional challenges that impact student engagement and achievement. Leadership plays a critical role in shaping school environments that support student success. Transformational and distributed leadership models have been identified as effective approaches to addressing these issues by fostering inclusivity, engagement, and collaboration within school communities. While structural leadership practices establish the framework for implementing educational policies and reforms, the experiences of students—shaped by self-concept, stigma, and societal expectations—also significantly impact their academic engagement and behavioral outcomes.

Building on this foundation, it is essential to examine student perceptions of themselves and their environment, particularly for those from historically marginalized groups. These concepts offer insight into how identity-related challenges may further impact student achievement and well-being. By exploring these factors, a deeper understanding emerges of how educational environments can be structured to support all students effectively, particularly those facing systemic barriers.

This discussion naturally extends to the role of stigma and stereotype threat in education. Social identity plays a crucial role in shaping student experiences, and research highlights how stigmatization can contribute to social exclusion, reduced teacher expectations, and anxiety related to academic performance. For students who are members of underrepresented or marginalized groups, these pressures can create additional challenges in achieving academic success. The concept of stereotype threat, introduced by Steele and Aronson (1995), further illustrates how perceived societal expectations can influence student performance and engagement, reinforcing disparities in educational outcomes.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing inclusive educational policies and leadership strategies that effectively address issues of stigma, discrimination, and equity in schools. By incorporating leadership models that promote student empowerment and fostering environments that mitigate the negative effects of stigma and stereotype threat, schools can create spaces where all students, regardless of background, have equitable opportunities to succeed.

### **Student Perception and Stigma**

The role of self-concept and locus of control in academic performance is critical, as identified by Carter and Budge (2015). A positive self-concept is linked to higher motivation and academic achievement, whereas a strong internal locus of control is associated with the belief in one's efficacy to influence outcomes. These psychological constructs are essential for students' resilience in facing academic and social pressures. However, for students from marginalized groups, the development of a positive self-concept and an internal locus of control is often undermined by stigmatization and stereotype threats (Carter & Budge, 2015).

Erving Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma explains how individuals with certain attributes are devalued in society, leading to a "spoiled identity." In school settings, this stigmatization can manifest through bullying, social exclusion, or lower teacher expectations, contributing to a hostile learning environment for students who are perceived as different. Steele and Aronson's (1995) stereotype threat extends this notion to the academic performance domain, thereby illustrating how the fear of confirming negative stereotypes about one's group can lead to anxiety and reduced performance. This phenomenon has been observed in various contexts, including among students of color,

women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields, and students with disabilities.

Central to Goffman's analysis is the concept of the "stigmatized" versus the "normal." He posits that society establishes the means of categorizing persons and their complement of attributes considered ordinary and natural in each of these categories (Goffman, 1963). Stigmatized individuals are those who do not fit into these categories, leading to a discontinuity between actual social identity and virtual social identity—where the former refers to the attributes a person can prove they possess, and the latter comprises the attributes they are assumed to possess. The gap between these identities creates what Goffman refers to as stigma, an undesired differentness from what was anticipated (Goffman, 1963).

These insights from Goffman's (1963) work are crucial for developing educational policies and practices that recognize and address the various forms of stigma students might encounter. By fostering an environment that challenges societal norms that give rise to stigma, schools can become spaces where all students, irrespective of their physical, psychological, or social identities, feel valued and supported (Goffman, 1963). This approach not only benefits students who might directly experience stigma but also cultivates a school culture of empathy, understanding, and inclusion among all students and staff.

The relevance of Goffman's (1963) analysis to educational settings underscores the necessity of inclusive education practices. These practices should aim to normalize diversity, implement anti-bullying policies that specifically address stigma-related issues (Swearer et al., 2010), and ensure that school curricula and teacher-training programs include components on understanding and combating stigma (Gorski, 2009). Moreover,

school counselors and educators can play a significant role in supporting stigmatized students by providing them with safe spaces to express themselves and strategies to cope with and challenge the stigma they face (Singh et al., 2011).

The interaction between stigmatization and stereotype threats can lead to a cycle of diminished confidence, academic disengagement, and potential dropout among individuals. A stereotype threat, where individuals from stigmatized groups are concerned about confirming negative stereotypes, can result in underperformance and disengagement in academic settings. This phenomenon can impact cognitive performance, motivation, and achievement, especially among individuals from stigmatized groups (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Research has demonstrated that a stereotype threat can have a long-term negative effect on academic learning and performance, emphasizing the harmful consequences of stigmatization on students' educational outcomes. Additionally, the chronic experience of a stereotype threat may cause individuals to disassociate themselves from academic fields, leading to reduced motivation and achievement (Steele, 1997). Moreover, the repercussions of persistent stereotype threats can include disengagement from academic domains, decreased motivation, and negative psychosocial outcomes, particularly among stigmatized groups. Academic disengagement, which is a predictor of dropout and problematic behaviors, is significantly associated with adverse outcomes throughout different developmental stages (Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012).

The awareness of being stereotyped not only affects individual students but can also foster a school climate where diversity is not genuinely embraced, further alienating those at the margins. Thus, addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that goes beyond traditional academic interventions.

The impact of stereotype awareness extends beyond individual experiences, shaping the broader school climate and influencing how inclusivity is perceived and practiced. When schools fail to actively challenge bias and exclusion, students from marginalized groups may encounter environments where their identities are either ignored or openly contested. LGBTQ+ students, in particular, often face additional barriers that affect their sense of belonging, safety, and academic engagement. The experiences of these students highlight the need for policies and practices that go beyond general diversity efforts to specifically address issues of sexual orientation and gender identity in educational settings.

### ***Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity***

Students who identify as LGBTQ+ often face unique challenges in schools, including bullying, discrimination, and a lack of representation in the curriculum. The GLSEN 2019 National School Climate Survey (GLSEN, 2020) found that 59.1% of LGBTQ+ students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and 42.5% because of their gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2020). To support these students, schools can implement inclusive policies, provide access to LGBTQ+-affirmative counseling, and incorporate LGBTQ+ history and issues into the curriculum (GLSEN, 2020).

Empowering LGBTQ+ students to have a voice in their education is crucial for their engagement and well-being. Schools can establish Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), which have been shown to create safer school climates and promote student activism (Russell et al., 2018). Encouraging LGBTQ+ students to participate in school governance and decision-making processes also ensures that their perspectives are heard and valued (Miceli, 2005).

### ***Racial/Ethnic Backgrounds***

Students from minority racial and ethnic backgrounds can experience marginalization and bias that impact their academic achievement and well-being. Research by Carter, Skiba et al. (2017) suggests that racial and ethnic disparities in educational outcomes are exacerbated by systemic factors, including unequal access to quality teachers and resources. Culturally responsive teaching practices and a curriculum that reflects diverse perspectives can help address these disparities (Gay, 2010).

Beyond racial and ethnic disparities, students with disabilities encounter additional challenges that can hinder their access to quality education. Ensuring that all students receive appropriate accommodations and support is essential in promoting an inclusive learning environment. The implementation of legal protections and evidence-based teaching strategies can help facilitate equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities.

### ***Disability***

Students with disabilities may encounter barriers to full participation in mainstream educational activities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates appropriate educational accommodations to support these students (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Inclusive education practices, such as co-teaching models and differentiated instruction, can ensure that students with disabilities receive a quality education in the least restrictive environment (Hehir, 2002).

While disability status presents formalized barriers to education that require institutional support, other forms of social exclusion, such as biases related to physical appearance, can also impact student well-being and academic engagement. Students who do not conform to societal beauty standards may experience bullying or discrimination,

affecting their confidence, participation, and overall school experience. Addressing appearance-related stigma is crucial in creating safe and accepting learning environments.

### ***Physical Attractiveness***

Students perceived as not conforming to societal beauty standards may suffer from bullying and low self-esteem. Furthermore, this behavior can affect their academic engagement (Langlois et al., 2000). Promoting body positivity and implementing anti-bullying programs that address appearance-based teasing are essential steps in creating a supportive school climate (Schneider et al., 2015).

In addition to social biases based on appearance, immigrant students often navigate complex challenges related to language barriers, cultural transitions, and legal uncertainties. These challenges can significantly influence their academic success and social integration. Schools play a vital role in providing bilingual education programs and culturally responsive support systems to help immigrant students adapt and thrive in their new educational environments.

### ***Immigrant Status***

Immigrant students may face challenges related to language barriers, cultural adjustment, and legal status. These challenges can hinder their academic progress and social integration. Bilingual education programs and culturally sensitive support services can help immigrant students thrive in their new educational environments (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010).

As students progress through middle and high school, issues related to identity, belonging, and equitable access to resources become even more pronounced. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives aim to address these challenges by fostering school climates that respect and affirm diverse identities. Implementing DEI strategies at

the secondary level ensures that students from all backgrounds receive the support and opportunities they need to succeed.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in Middle and High Schools**

The DEI initiatives at middle and high schools involve many tactics aimed at fostering a welcoming, inclusive, and equitable atmosphere for students of diverse ages and backgrounds (Banks, 2015; Gay, 2010). As teenagers transition from middle school to high school, they face a greater variety of social groupings, academic obstacles, and personal identities. Nevertheless, DEI projects tackle these developmental phases by prioritizing respect, comprehension, and equitable opportunity for all learners (Khalifa et al., 2016). This narrative delineates the effective integration of DEI within middle and high school environments, encompassing curriculum design, school culture, leadership strategies, student services, and community involvement.

#### ***Curriculum & Instruction Inclusive Curriculum***

In middle and high schools, an inclusive curriculum guarantees that subjects like English, social studies, and the arts incorporate materials and viewpoints that represent a varied range of cultures and identities (Banks, 2015). Middle school students generally engage with fundamental texts and comprehensive historical surveys, whereas high school students frequently investigate more specific subjects and elective courses (e.g., ethnic studies and advanced literary analysis). Integrating varied authors, narratives, and case studies at every developmental stage expands student perspectives, affirms marginalized voices, and cultivates a culture of empathy and respect.

#### ***Culturally Relevant Pedagogy***

Culturally relevant pedagogy encompasses instructional strategies that respect and acknowledge students' cultural backgrounds and experiences (Gay, 2010). In middle

schools, this may emerge as project-based learning connected to local community issues, assisting students in relating academic subjects to their own settings. At the secondary education level, educators can involve teenagers in comprehensive studies of societal and global issues, prompting them to establish connections between historical trends and contemporary events. By acknowledging varied communication styles, linguistic competencies, and learning preferences, instructors at both levels develop classes that engage their students.

### ***Multicultural Education***

Multicultural education introduces pupils to diverse cultures, traditions, and perspectives, enhancing global consciousness from early adolescence to young adulthood (Banks, 2015). Middle schools can present fundamental teachings on cultural and religious diversity, while high schools may explore more intricate subjects such as intersectionality, geopolitics, and comparative cultural frameworks. These methods promote receptiveness to many viewpoints, equipping students to traverse an increasingly interconnected world with awareness and understanding.

### **Educational Environment and Atmosphere**

This narrative describes the effective integration of DEI within middle and high school environments, including creating a safe atmosphere and cross-cultural activities.

### ***Establishing a Secure and Inviting Atmosphere***

Middle and high schools require an environment in which every student—irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status, feels esteemed (Thapa et al., 2013). In middle schools, such initiatives typically focus on managing early teenage social interactions and facilitating the development of constructive peer relationships. In high schools, these measurements of esteem become

increasingly vital as students face heightened social pressures and engage in identity exploration. Anti-bullying rules, visual depictions of different role models, and organized advising sessions help to strengthen an inclusive environment throughout all adolescent grades.

### ***Encouraging Beneficial Engagements***

Educational institutions might facilitate cross-cultural events and organizations—such as culture fairs or diversity committees—to promote constructive contact among students from diverse origins (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Middle schools may introduce lunchtime clubs to promote camaraderie and comprehension among kids transferring from elementary education, whereas high schools may establish sophisticated student-led organizations that organize diversity workshops or enable peer mentorship. By cultivating cultures that honor joint accomplishments and mutual interests, educational institutions mitigate stereotypes and promote empathy.

### **Confronting Bias and Discrimination**

Middle and high schools dedicated to DEI implement explicit procedures to recognize, report, and confront bias and discrimination in all manifestations (Gay, 2010). In a middle school setting, this may entail early interventions to direct children toward effective conflict resolution and fostering respectful communication practices before detrimental social patterns become established. High school administrators and counselors can employ restorative justice approaches to address occurrences with maturity and empathy, equipping students to navigate varied college or workforce perspectives.

Student support services are critical components of DEI initiatives in middle and high schools, designed to address students' academic, social, emotional, and physical

needs. These services aim to create equitable and supportive environments that empower all students, particularly those from marginalized or underserved backgrounds. Mental health and counseling services play a pivotal role in fostering well-being, offering culturally competent counseling tailored to diverse backgrounds, along with specialized support groups for LGBTQ+ students and those facing trauma (Gay, 2010; Kosciw et al., 2020). Crisis intervention services ensure that students in urgent situations, such as bullying or substance use incidents, receive immediate assistance to stabilize and recover (Thapa et al., 2013).

To support students from diverse backgrounds, schools provide tailored services such as LGBTQ+ support initiatives that include affirming counseling, inclusive policies, and representation in curricula and activities (Kosciw et al., 2020). Programs for immigrant and refugee students offer language support and cultural adjustment resources, while outreach initiatives for students in foster care or experiencing homelessness connect them to essential social services (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). Family and community engagement are integral, with schools hosting workshops for parents to support their children academically and emotionally and coordinating with local organizations to address broader challenges like food insecurity and access to healthcare (Thapa et al., 2013).

By integrating these comprehensive support systems into broader DEI efforts, schools create environments where all students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. These services not only address immediate needs but also foster long-term equity and inclusivity, empowering students to reach their full potential in a supportive and affirming environment.

The data-driven insights in Chapter 4 provide a comprehensive analysis of how DEI-focused expenditures impact student outcomes, particularly in addressing behavioral challenges, dropout rates, and academic engagement. However, beyond identifying the effectiveness of these initiatives, it is crucial to examine how school leadership influences the allocation of resources. The extent to which financial commitments reflect institutional priorities determines the long-term impact and sustainability of DEI programs.

### **Leadership and Personnel Development**

This narrative delineates the effective integration of DEI within school environments through staff leadership development, training, and student mentorship initiatives.

#### ***Staff Diversity Training***

Diversity training for educators and administrators guarantees that educational professionals comprehend the varied backgrounds of middle and high school students (Banks, 2015). These training courses may encompass subjects such as implicit prejudice, cultural competence, and inclusive pedagogical strategies. Middle school staff typically concentrate on addressing the distinct developmental and emotional requirements of early adolescents, whereas high school educators examine college and career preparedness through a culturally sensitive lens. In both contexts, self-reflection and communication enable staff to provide equal learning opportunities.

Diverse leadership representation in leadership roles, from principals to department heads, exemplifies inclusivity for adolescents of all ages (Khalifa et al., 2016). Leadership diversity at the middle school level indicates to early adolescents that academic and professional goals are achievable, irrespective of their background. Diverse

administrators in high schools reinforce the notion that all students may pursue leadership and policy-making positions, fostering a sense of promise among those contemplating future careers.

### ***Access to Counseling and Support Services***

Culturally competent counseling services in middle and high schools assist kids in addressing social-emotional difficulties (Gay, 2010). Middle schools may emphasize early emotional interventions, instructing on healthy coping mechanisms and problem-solving abilities. High schools frequently enhance these resources by providing increased confidential alternatives, college and career counseling, and specialist groups that address topics such as gender identity, mental health advocacy, and cultural support clubs. By customizing programs to align with each grade level's developmental milestones, schools assist adolescents in effectively managing stress, exploring identity, and navigating peer dynamics.

In middle and high school settings, DEI initiatives offer the framework essential for equitable learning access, the development of culturally sensitive curricula, and the fostering of inclusive school climates (Banks, 2015; Gay, 2010). By implementing strategic professional development and leadership frameworks, educators can tailor DEI programs to address the changing social, emotional, and academic requirements of adolescents (Khalifa et al., 2016). Moreover, comprehensive student support services, encompassing special education and ELL programs, guarantee that each learner can flourish without encountering unnecessary obstacles linked to ability, language, or history (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The enhancement of community relationships and proactive family involvement solidifies the role of schools within the varied contexts they address. By persistently reassessing and enhancing these strategies across the middle and

high school years, institutions may maintain the principles of DEI, establishing a foundation for socially aware, academically equipped young adults (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Thapa et al., 2013).

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives on fostering a supportive school environment for transgender students from diverse backgrounds, particularly in addressing behavioral challenges, dropout rates, and student attitudes toward self and learning. The findings presented in Chapter 4 provide empirical insights into how variations in funding allocations, leadership decisions, and student support services influence these outcomes. By analyzing the relationships between DEI-focused expenditures and student behavioral trends, this study identifies effective strategies for empowering students, amplifying their voices, and ensuring equitable opportunities for academic and social success, regardless of their demographic backgrounds. The data-driven results reinforce the need for targeted investments in student support services and inclusive policies, further shaping the discussion on how schools can create environments that foster engagement, retention, and positive educational experiences for all students.

The findings presented in Chapter 4 not only highlight the relationship between DEI initiatives and student outcomes but also raise important questions about leadership accountability in funding decisions. While DEI programs are often framed as essential for fostering equity, their actual implementation and financial support vary across institutions. Understanding whether school leaders' budgetary decisions align with stated DEI commitments is critical in evaluating the effectiveness and sustainability of these initiatives.

Evaluating the effectiveness of DEI funding requires a deeper examination of how budgetary decisions align with institutional priorities. While some school districts allocate substantial resources toward student support services and inclusive policies, others may demonstrate inconsistencies between their stated commitments and actual financial investments. This discrepancy highlights the need for a critical analysis of leadership decision-making and fiscal accountability, particularly in ensuring that DEI efforts are more than symbolic gestures.

### **Addressing Leadership and Fiscal Accountability**

The study scrutinizes whether school leaders' budgetary allocations reflect genuine commitments to inclusivity or if they remain symbolic in nature. This exploration goes beyond surface-level observations to examine the alignment between intentions and actions. Thus, the study provides a critical lens on how fiscal policies support (or fail to support) historically marginalized populations.

To critically assess how leadership decisions impact DEI implementation, this study applies an economic lens to budgetary allocations. Financial commitments toward DEI programs, student support services, and inclusive policies reveal underlying leadership priorities and the extent to which inclusivity is embedded in institutional practices. Revealed preference theory offers a framework for analyzing whether DEI funding reflects genuine investment in equity or serves as a symbolic gesture, providing a more nuanced understanding of school leadership's role in fostering educational inclusivity.

### **Revealed Preference Theory**

Incorporating the revealed preference theory into examining school leadership's allocation of funds toward DEI initiatives provides an intriguing economic perspective on

the decision-making process. This theory, originally developed to understand consumer choices without referring to utility or subjective preferences, can be aptly applied to analyze how the financial decisions of school leaders reveal their actual priorities in the context of educational policies (Samuelson, 1938).

The revealed preference theory posits that the choices made by individuals—or, in this case, institutions—can be observed to infer their preferences without needing to rely on stated intentions or beliefs. By examining how school districts allocate their budgets toward DEI initiatives, this approach can reveal the underlying preferences of school leaders regarding the importance of these programs. If a school leadership claims to prioritize DEI, yet the budget allocation does not reflect a significant investment in DEI programs, the theory would suggest that their true preferences do not align with their stated commitments.

Analyzing budgetary allocations using this theoretical lens allows a critical assessment of whether the financial commitments toward DEI are merely symbolic or substantive. This method helps to objectively measure the extent to which DEI is valued within the school system as reflected through fiscal decisions. Furthermore, integrating DEI funding into a broader systemic framework demonstrates how deeply these values are embedded within the operational and strategic frameworks of educational institutions (Marzano et al., 2005).

The concept also reinforces the importance of monitoring and evaluation. Through ongoing assessment of how funds are spent and the outcomes they achieve, researchers can continuously gauge the genuine commitment of school leaders to DEI. This dynamic approach to analyzing revealed preferences over time allows for a nuanced understanding of how commitments may shift in response to internal policy changes or

external pressures, providing insights into the adaptive nature of educational leadership in the context of DEI (Marzano, 2003).

In summary, by applying the revealed preference theory, this research can robustly analyze the actual versus stated priorities of school leaders in the allocation of resources toward DEI initiatives. This economic perspective complements the educational framework, offering a comprehensive analysis of leadership effectiveness in promoting equitable and inclusive educational environments. This integration of economic and educational theories not only enriches the theoretical depth of the study but also enhances its practical relevance, guiding more informed, effective, and transparent policymaking in education.

This study is significant to educators, policymakers, and school administrators because it provides insight into the effectiveness of DEI initiatives in schools. Understanding how these initiatives can be leveraged to support all students, particularly those from marginalized and stigmatized groups, can contribute to the development of more inclusive educational practices and policies. The findings may guide efforts to reduce dropout rates, improve student behaviors and attitudes, and foster a positive self-concept and locus of control among students.

The theoretical framework guiding this study draws from Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma and Steele and Aronson's (1995) stereotype threat, providing a lens to understand the challenges faced by students from stigmatized groups. Additionally, the framework incorporates multicultural education theory (Banks & McGee Banks, 2004) and inclusive leadership theory (Ashikali et al., 2020) to explore how educational leaders can effectively create environments that support diverse student populations.

This research summary focused on how leadership behaviors impact the implementation and efficacy of DEI efforts in school districts. Furthermore, its objective is to find tactics that can improve leaders' ability to promote inclusive educational environments. This review is organized into three primary sections with corresponding questions:

1. Leadership and the incorporation of DEI in education.
2. The influence of leadership practices on initiatives related to DEI.
3. Approaches for improving leadership in educational environments that promote inclusivity.

Are leaders budgeting funds to sustain or add DEI initiatives and programs that successfully support students? Are students' needs and concerns being addressed through school district initiatives, or are school districts and school leaders funding their own agendas?

The DEI-focused leadership development programs have become essential in training and empowering leaders to effectively traverse the challenges of creating inclusive educational settings (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). These programs frequently include elements such as cultural competency training, diversity awareness workshops, and the development of inclusive leadership skills. Effective implementation of DEI programs (Banks, 2015) requires the active involvement of multiple stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, students, and community members. Leaders who aggressively solicit input from a wide range of perspectives are more capable of addressing the distinct needs and concerns of their school communities.

Leadership is crucial in creating inclusive educational settings that embrace diversity and advance equity. To successfully navigate the intricacies of this undertaking,

leaders require specialized instruction and tactics. This research review examines essential approaches to improving leadership in inclusive educational settings, including emphasizing leadership development initiatives, cultural proficiency training, diversity awareness workshops, inclusive leadership capacity building, and engagement with stakeholders.

How do leadership practices impact the implementation and effectiveness of DEI initiatives in school districts, and what strategies can be identified to improve leaders' abilities to create inclusive educational environments? Chapter 1 has set the stage for a comprehensive exploration of the challenges and opportunities within the educational system to support a diverse student body through DEI initiatives. By examining the impact of funding on student negative behavior, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue that creates more inclusive educational environments.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

Leadership in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within educational settings is a multifaceted concept examined through various theoretical frameworks. Scholars have explored transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), distributed leadership (Spillane et al., 2004), and culturally responsive leadership (Gay, 2010) to understand how leadership influences decision-making, budgeting, and school climate. These frameworks provide insight into how board members, superintendents, and principals shape inclusive environments that address systemic inequities and foster student success.

#### **Leadership Styles in DEI Implementation**

##### ***Transformational Leadership***

Transformational leadership is characterized by a leader's ability to inspire and motivate others toward a shared vision. Bass and Riggio (2006) describe four core components: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation. Within DEI efforts, transformational leaders play a pivotal role in fostering an inclusive learning environment by promoting cultural awareness, equity-driven policies, and collaboration among stakeholders (Ihsani et al., 2020; Kearney & Gebert, 2009).

These leaders engage in discourse with teachers, parents, and administrators to highlight the significance of DEI initiatives, often organizing workshops, professional development, and cultural competency training (Rahmawati, 2022; Retna & Ng, 2008). Studies indicate that transformational leadership reduces challenges related to team diversity and enhances cognitive resource-sharing among educators, leading to more

effective teaching practices and stronger school communities (Kim et al., 2012; Mickson et al., 2020).

Additionally, transformational leaders foster an inclusive school climate by enhancing job satisfaction through diversity-related exchanges (McCallaghan et al., 2019). Their ability to empower staff, cultivate cultural responsiveness, and implement innovative instructional strategies makes them instrumental in reshaping educational institutions to be more inclusive and equitable (Chin, 2007).

### ***Distributed Leadership***

Distributed leadership shifts from traditional hierarchical models to collaborative decision-making, emphasizing the shared responsibilities of administrators, teachers, and students in fostering an inclusive school culture (Spillane et al., 2004). This leadership style acknowledges that inclusion is a collective effort, requiring active participation from multiple stakeholders.

In DEI-focused environments, distributed leadership promotes teacher-driven curriculum changes, student-led diversity initiatives, and school-wide cultural exchange programs. For instance, educators may collaborate with administrators to implement culturally relevant curricula, while students contribute by leading peer education programs on diversity and social justice. This model fosters shared accountability and ensures that inclusion is not solely the responsibility of school administrators but is embedded throughout the institution.

Research by Brown and Zhang (2018) highlights that distributed leadership strengthens DEI programs by facilitating participatory decision-making, ensuring that policies reflect the diverse perspectives of the school community. Schools adopting this

model often experience greater staff engagement in diversity initiatives and higher levels of student inclusion and belonging.

### ***Culturally Responsive Leadership***

Culturally responsive leadership focuses on recognizing, valuing, and integrating diverse cultural perspectives into school policies and practices (Gay, 2010). This leadership approach emphasizes the importance of cultural competence, requiring leaders to continuously educate themselves on diverse backgrounds, address systemic biases, and promote equitable learning experiences.

Culturally responsive leaders ensure that curricula reflect diverse voices, policies prioritize equitable student outcomes, and school environments celebrate cultural heritage. They may establish initiatives such as heritage appreciation programs, culturally inclusive teaching practices, and policies that foster cross-cultural dialogue among students and staff.

For example, a culturally responsive leader might develop a program highlighting historical contributions of various cultural groups through student-led projects, art exhibitions, and community events. Such efforts contribute to an environment where students feel seen, valued, and empowered to embrace their identities.

### **Inclusive Leadership and DEI Effectiveness**

Inclusive leadership is essential for creating school environments that support all students (Li et al., 2019). Research suggests that schools led by administrators prioritizing diversity and inclusion experience higher student engagement, academic performance, and social-emotional well-being (Banks, 2015; Purdie-Vaughns & Walton, 2011).

A study by Purdie-Vaughns and Walton (2011) found that students in schools with proactive DEI leadership reported stronger feelings of belonging and higher academic motivation. Inclusive leadership contributes to reducing discrimination, increasing cultural awareness, and improving student-teacher relationships, which in turn enhance overall school climate.

The integration of transformational, distributed, and culturally responsive leadership offers a comprehensive framework for fostering DEI in education. These models collectively inform how school leaders shape inclusive policies, allocate resources effectively, and support marginalized student populations.

### **The Role of Leadership in DEI Success**

Leadership practices directly influence the effectiveness of DEI initiatives (Smith & Turner, 2015). Schools where leaders actively promote open communication, professional development, and diverse perspectives tend to exhibit stronger DEI program outcomes (Grant & Sleeter, 2007). Conversely, schools with inconsistent leadership engagement in DEI efforts may struggle to create lasting change.

Transformational leadership has been particularly effective in aligning school culture with DEI objectives. A study by Leithwood et al. (2008) found a positive correlation between transformational leadership and the success of DEI efforts, highlighting that leaders who emphasize shared vision and collaboration cultivate stronger school communities.

## **Conclusion**

The application of transformational, distributed, and culturally responsive leadership provides a multi-layered approach to advancing DEI in educational institutions. Each leadership style contributes uniquely to building inclusive school environments, ensuring that diverse student populations receive the support needed for academic and social success. As empirical research continues to demonstrate the link between leadership practices and DEI effectiveness, it remains essential for school leaders to continuously evaluate their approaches and implement data-driven strategies to foster inclusivity.

The effectiveness of transformational, distributed, and culturally responsive leadership in advancing DEI initiatives has been well established. However, leadership alone does not ensure the success of these initiatives. Continuous learning, professional development, and the integration of empirical knowledge are equally essential in shaping inclusive educational environments. The next section explores how leaders facilitate professional growth, enhance cultural competence, and implement research-based strategies to strengthen DEI initiatives in schools.

## **Empirical Basis of Knowledge**

Within the field of educational leadership, proficient leaders acknowledge the utmost significance of ongoing learning and professional growth, particularly in relation to diversity and inclusion. Leaders facilitate professional development opportunities to empower educators in enhancing their cultural competence. This equips them with the required knowledge and skills to create inclusive classrooms and effectively support various student populations. Their dedication to enhancing professional growth is evident

through initiatives such as providing diversity training, facilitating continuous learning, and exemplifying a commitment to lifelong learning.

Leaders may arrange diversity training sessions for teachers and staff, focusing on crucial subjects such as cultural proficiency, implicit bias, and techniques for establishing inclusive learning environments (Gay, 2010). In addition, they promote the ongoing education of educators regarding various cultures, identities, and viewpoints (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This is achieved through the provision of resources, publications, and seminars, which aim to cultivate understanding and awareness (Johnson, 2006). Competent leaders show their dedication to lifetime education by actively engaging in diversity training, so exemplifying the ongoing learning process essential for comprehending and advocating for diversity.

While professional development equips educators with the necessary skills to foster inclusive learning environments, institutional leadership is responsible for ensuring that DEI commitments are reflected in financial and policy decisions. Effective leadership extends beyond training and engagement—it requires accountability in budget allocations, policy implementation, and long-term sustainability. The following section examines how leadership practices influence financial decision-making in supporting or hindering DEI efforts in schools.

Leaders who prioritize and welcome varied ideas not only promote professional growth but also cultivate a culture characterized by respect and recognition of differences. This fosters an atmosphere where the distinct backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of all those involved are recognized, encouraging a feeling of acceptance and inclusiveness. The leaders mentioned in the study by Banks and McGee (2004) engage in behaviors such as celebrating diversity, including various voices in decision-

making and curriculum development, and acknowledging the accomplishments of persons from diverse backgrounds.

Grant and Sleeter (2007) investigated the relationship between leadership behaviors and school climate, with a specific emphasis on diversity and inclusion. It was discovered that leaders who advocated for open communication also offered continuous professional growth opportunities and appreciated varied viewpoints that significantly impacted creating positive school environments. These environments were characterized by heightened trust, collaboration, and a sense of belonging among both students and staff.

Nevertheless, the adoption of inclusive leadership techniques is not devoid of obstacles. Common obstacles include resistance to change, limited awareness or comprehension of the value of DEI, and limits on resources. Leaders can surmount these barriers by means of education and training, involving stakeholders, mobilizing resources, developing leadership skills, and making decisions based on evidence (Brown, 2004).

Incorporating educational insights into the analysis of DEI initiatives offers a profound understanding of the interplay between leadership strategies and the successful implementation of these programs. The pivotal role of effective school leadership in shaping educational outcomes through strategic decision-making and resource allocation is essential in the operationalization of DEI initiatives. These insights underline how leaders' commitment and strategic approaches can significantly impact the effectiveness and sustainability of DEI programs within educational institutions (Marzano, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005).

Leadership effectiveness is often defined by the ability to articulate a clear vision and strategically align resources to achieve that vision. In the context of DEI, this involves school leaders not only advocating for equity and inclusion but also committing necessary resources to support these goals effectively. The strategic alignment of resources, according to Marzano et al., is critical for transforming educational environments in ways that foster inclusivity and accommodate diverse student needs (Marzano et al., 2005) By evaluating how school leaders allocate budgets toward DEI, we can determine if there is a genuine alignment between stated DEI goals and actual financial commitments.

The systemic integration of DEI initiatives is the outcome of comprehensive reform that requires incorporating DEI concepts into every part of school operations, including curriculum development, teacher education, student support services, and community involvement (Marzano, 2003). Marzano's study assesses the integration of DEI funding into wider school policies and procedures, offering insights into the extent to which the approach to DEI is either systemic or fragmented across various school districts. The systematic incorporation of DEI initiatives is essential for their effectiveness and long-term viability, guaranteeing that they are not standalone programs but rather essential components of the educational structure.

Supervision and assessment of DEI practices are in line with Marzano's (2010) focus on the significance of monitoring and evaluation. Marzano incorporates a comprehensive examination of the results linked to DEI funding. This entails monitoring the distribution and utilization of funds and evaluating their influence on enhancing the school environment and student achievements. According to Marzano (2010), continuous evaluation is beneficial for improving and strengthening DEI practices. It ensures that the

practices align with their intended objectives and can adjust to evolving educational requirements.

While theoretical and empirical analyses highlight the importance of monitoring DEI initiatives, real-world case studies offer practical insights into how these strategies are implemented. The following section examines school districts that have successfully integrated DEI initiatives, identifying best practices, challenges, and lessons learned from their experiences.

By integrating educational theories into this research, the study not only gains a robust theoretical framework but also a practical approach to examining the effectiveness of DEI initiatives. This comprehensive perspective is crucial for developing actionable insights that can guide school leaders in making informed decisions that promote equity and inclusivity effectively. The alignment of strategic leadership with systemic DEI practices and continuous evaluation forms the cornerstone of effective educational reform, paving the way for creating more inclusive educational environments that cater to the needs of all students (Marzano et al., 2005).

The leadership styles and practices in educational contexts have a substantial influence on the performance of DEI efforts. The combination of transformational and distributive leadership styles, along with behaviors that promote transparent communication, offer chances for professional growth, and appreciate different viewpoints, establish a setting for achieving success in DEI. Although there may be difficulties, employing strategic methods can effectively address them, guaranteeing the effective execution of inclusive leadership strategies and finally cultivating a diverse, fair, and inclusive educational setting.

In the quest to cultivate inclusive and equitable educational environments, the implementation of DEI initiatives has gained considerable attention in contemporary educational discourse. This chapter presents an analysis of DEI initiatives within various school districts, exploring their impacts on student outcomes, teacher satisfaction, and community engagement. Drawing upon empirical research, this chapter synthesizes key findings, elucidating the role of these initiatives in transforming educational landscapes.

In the evolving landscape of education, the implementation of DEI initiatives has become a pivotal aspect of fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments. A review of case studies and empirical research reveals a range of successful strategies and practices employed by school districts in implementing these initiatives. For example, the Seattle school district's DEI program stands out. As documented by Martin and Brown (2020), the school district's approach included comprehensive cultural competency training for educators, a curriculum inclusive of diverse perspectives, and robust community engagement strategies. These efforts resulted in notable improvements in minority student achievement and a significant increase in overall student and staff satisfaction.

In another instance, the Montgomery County public schools in Maryland implemented a school district-wide DEI initiative focusing on closing achievement gaps and promoting inclusive practices. Thompson et al. (2021) highlighted the success of this initiative, noting marked improvements in academic performance among historically marginalized student groups. This was attributed to the school district's emphasis on personalized learning plans, professional development for teachers, and active parental involvement.

Furthermore, Jimerson et al. (2021) found a positive relationship between DEI initiatives and improved academic achievement, particularly among marginalized groups. The role of leadership and community collaboration drives successful outcomes. The Chicago Public Schools' initiative, as analyzed by Williams and Davis (2019), emphasized community partnerships and parental engagement in developing DEI strategies. The school district's commitment to these collaborative approaches led to enhanced community trust and a more inclusive school climate. Additionally, research by Patel and Dexter (2018) emphasized the importance of teacher buy-in for the success of DEI initiatives. Their study found that when teachers were actively involved in DEI planning and provided with adequate professional development, the implementation was more effective, and the impact on student outcomes was more pronounced.

These case studies and research findings demonstrate that successful implementation of DEI initiatives in school districts requires a multifaceted approach. Key components of this approach include strong leadership, comprehensive cultural competency training, inclusive curriculum development, community engagement, teacher involvement, and continuous assessment and adaptation. These elements work together to create educational environments that are diverse and inclusive but also equitable and conducive to all students' success.

In the pursuit of understanding the impact of DEI initiatives in educational settings, examining specific case studies of school districts that have implemented these initiatives offers invaluable insights. These case studies not only illustrate the varied approaches and strategies employed but also provide an understanding of the outcomes and lessons learned from these endeavors.

The Seattle school district's DEI strategy was multifaceted, encompassing several key areas. One of the central elements of their approach was the reform of the curriculum to ensure it reflected a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. This reform was not just about including diverse content but also about embedding inclusive pedagogies that recognized and valued the cultural backgrounds of all students (Martin & Brown, 2020). Another innovative aspect of their strategy was the establishment of student-led diversity panels. These panels provided a platform for students, especially those from underrepresented groups, to voice their concerns and perspectives.

This initiative was crucial in fostering a school environment where students felt heard and valued, contributing significantly to the overall inclusivity of the school culture. Additionally, the school district implemented targeted support measures for underrepresented students. These measures were designed to address specific barriers faced by these students and to provide them with the necessary resources and support to succeed academically and socially within the school environment (Martin & Brown, 2020).

These case studies collectively underscore the potential impact of well-conceived and executed DEI strategies in transforming educational environments. The positive outcomes across all three school districts – improved engagement, reduced disparities, and enhanced inclusivity – highlight the critical role of DEI initiatives in fostering educational equity and excellence. In the realm of educational reform, the Seattle school district's approach to DEI initiatives presents a compelling case study. Their strategy was notably comprehensive, focusing on inclusivity in curriculum design and prioritizing the elevation of student voices, particularly those from marginalized communities. This case

study offers valuable insights into the impact of such initiatives on the overall school environment and student outcomes.

Beyond individual case studies, broader empirical research provides further validation of DEI initiatives' effectiveness across different school contexts. The next section synthesizes research findings to explore how DEI strategies influence student achievement, teacher satisfaction, and overall school climate.

The implementation of DEI initiatives in school districts has been extensively studied, with research highlighting their impacts on various aspects of the educational ecosystem, including student outcomes, teacher satisfaction, and community engagement. These empirical studies provide critical insights into the effectiveness and challenges of DEI initiatives. The impact of DEI initiatives on student outcomes has been a significant area of research in education. Studies have consistently demonstrated that well-implemented DEI strategies can lead to positive changes in student academic performance, engagement, and overall well-being. This narrative review delves into various empirical studies to explore the multifaceted impact of DEI initiatives on student outcomes.

One of the most notable impacts of DEI initiatives is on students' academic performance. Jimerson et al. (2021) found that DEI initiatives were positively correlated with improved academic outcomes, especially for students from marginalized groups. Their research indicated that when students feel represented and included in their educational environment, they are more likely to excel academically. This improvement was attributed to a more supportive learning environment that recognizes and values diversity.

Similarly, a study by Kim and Nguyen (2022) in New York schools showed that sustained DEI efforts led to higher graduation rates and better college readiness, particularly among minority students. This longitudinal study underscored the long-term academic benefits of DEI initiatives, suggesting that they contribute significantly to closing the achievement gap and promoting educational equity. DEI initiatives have also been shown to enhance student engagement. In a study by Thompson et al. (2021), schools with robust DEI programs reported increased student participation in both academic and extracurricular activities. The study highlighted that DEI initiatives create a more inclusive and welcoming school environment, encouraging students from diverse backgrounds to engage more fully in their school community.

Beyond academic outcomes, DEI initiatives positively impact students' social and emotional well-being. A study by Patel and Dexter (2018) noted that schools with active DEI programs reported an improvement in students' sense of belonging and self-esteem. These programs often include activities and curriculums that promote understanding and acceptance of diverse cultures and identities, contributing to a safer and more inclusive school climate. The relationship between DEI initiatives and teacher satisfaction has been an area of keen interest in educational research. Studies have consistently found that the implementation of DEI programs in schools correlates with increased job satisfaction among teachers. This increase in satisfaction is often linked to several key factors, including improved school climates, inclusive curriculums, and enhanced professional development opportunities.

Cooper and Jordan's (2020) research provided valuable insights into how DEI initiatives contribute to a more positive and inclusive school climate, which in turn leads to higher teacher satisfaction. Their study, which was conducted across various schools

that implemented DEI programs, showed that teachers felt more valued and supported in environments that actively promoted diversity and inclusivity. This supportive environment was not just beneficial for students but also for teachers, as it fostered a sense of belonging and respect within the school community.

Beyond policy and community involvement, cultivating school pride is a key component in creating inclusive learning environments. When students feel valued, supported, and connected to their school, they develop a stronger sense of belonging and motivation. The next section examines how fostering school pride through DEI initiatives contributes to student engagement, academic success, and overall school climate.

### **Fostering School Pride: Implications for Leadership and Inclusion**

The concept of school pride has garnered increasing attention in educational research, emphasizing its critical role in fostering a sense of belonging, motivation, and achievement among students. School pride emerges when students feel valued and supported in their educational environments, and empirical studies have highlighted various strategies and factors that contribute to its cultivation. By creating inclusive, supportive, and engaging school cultures, educational leaders can enhance students' emotional connection to their schools, and consequently improving academic and social outcomes.

One study by de Ruiter and Poorthuis (2020), with a sample size of  $N = 134$ , explored the sources of pride among students in a learner-focused school setting. The researchers analyzed over 1,000 pride statements and found that autonomy, individualized learning, and cooperative education environments were significant drivers of students' pride. The study underscores the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation through personalized and collaborative learning opportunities, suggesting that school

pride is enhanced when students feel ownership over their educational experiences. This aligns with broader research on culturally responsive practices that emphasize the value of autonomy and inclusivity in promoting positive student outcomes (Gay, 2010).

A systematic review conducted by Stremfel et al. (2024), synthesizing 86 studies, examined the predictors of students' sense of belonging in schools, a concept closely linked to school pride. The review spanned three decades and identified individual, relational, and organizational factors as critical contributors to a sense of belonging. These included supportive teacher-student relationships, equitable policies, and inclusive school cultures. The researchers emphasized that fostering school pride requires intentional efforts to promote equity and inclusion, particularly for marginalized and underserved student populations. This aligns with the work of Banks (2015), who argued that addressing systemic inequities in education is essential for creating environments where all students can thrive.

Additionally, Turner and Waugh (2007), using a sample size of 247 students across multiple classrooms, examined the roles of shame and pride as invisible emotions in classroom research, emphasizing their pervasive yet often overlooked influence on student engagement and achievement. The study highlighted that schools create numerous opportunities for students to experience pride, particularly through academic accomplishments and positive social interactions. The authors argued that recognizing and amplifying these moments of pride can enhance students' emotional connection to their schools, fostering a deeper sense of belonging and engagement. These findings reinforce the need for educational leaders to create systems and practices that celebrate students' successes and build emotional resilience.

The implications of this research are significant for educational leaders and policymakers. Creating school pride is not a singular initiative but a multifaceted process that requires addressing systemic barriers, fostering inclusivity, and implementing policies that affirm all students' identities. Inclusive policies, such as equitable access to resources, culturally responsive curricula, and clear anti-discrimination measures, are foundational to cultivating an environment where students feel valued (Banks, 2015; Gay, 2010). Moreover, professional development for teachers and administrators can equip them with the skills to identify and promote opportunities for students to experience pride, further enhancing the school culture.

Finally, fostering school pride is a vital component of creating inclusive and equitable educational environments. By prioritizing autonomy, inclusivity, and emotional support, educational leaders can create schools where students feel a strong sense of belonging and pride in their achievements (Banks, 2015; Gay, 2010). These efforts not only improve individual student outcomes but also contribute to a more cohesive and supportive school community, reinforcing the goals of DEI in education.

In addition to the improved school climate, the inclusion of diverse and comprehensive curricula also played a significant role in enhancing teacher satisfaction. Teachers in schools with DEI programs reported feeling more engaged and motivated due to the inclusive and representative nature of the curricula. This engagement was attributed to the curriculum's relevance and its ability to resonate with a diverse student body, thereby making teaching more meaningful and satisfying (Cooper & Jordan, 2020).

Another crucial aspect impacting teacher satisfaction, as highlighted in the study by Emerson and Murphy (2014), is the role of professional development focused on diversity and inclusion. Teachers who participated in DEI-oriented training sessions

reported an increased sense of competence and confidence in managing and teaching in diverse classrooms. This professional development not only equipped teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to address the unique needs of a diverse student population but also enhanced their understanding and appreciation of diversity.

This increase in competence and confidence, as Emerson and Murphy (2014) note, directly influenced teachers' job satisfaction. Teachers who felt more capable and knowledgeable in DEI matters were more likely to experience job fulfillment and effectiveness in their teaching roles. The study underscored the importance of continuous learning and development in DEI for educators, highlighting its positive impact on teacher satisfaction and classroom dynamics.

In summary, the research indicates that DEI initiatives in schools are a significant factor in enhancing teacher satisfaction. By contributing to a more positive school climate, providing inclusive curriculums, and offering professional development opportunities in diversity and inclusion., DEI programs help create an environment where teachers feel supported, competent, and valued. These factors collectively contribute to higher job satisfaction among teachers, leading to more effective and inclusive educational practices.

Community engagement is a critical factor in the success of DEI initiatives. Williams and Davis (2019) analyzed DEI efforts in urban school districts and found that initiatives involving active community participation, such as parental involvement, were more effective in achieving their goals. Furthermore, a Hernandez and Liu (2019) study highlighted that schools with higher levels of community engagement in their DEI initiatives experienced stronger relationships with local communities, leading to enhanced trust and cooperation. The empirical research on DEI initiatives in educational

settings reveals key trends and patterns that are crucial for their success. Two predominant themes emerge from these studies: the comprehensive nature of successful DEI initiatives and the critical role of leadership in their effective implementation and sustainability.

Successful DEI initiatives are characterized by their comprehensive approach, which addresses various aspects of the educational system. Thompson et al. (2021) highlighted that the most effective DEI programs are those that encompass not just one, but multiple elements of the school environment. This includes curriculum reform, where the curriculum is adjusted to be more inclusive and representative of diverse cultures and histories. Such reform ensures that all students see their backgrounds and experiences reflected in their education, contributing to a more engaging and relevant learning experience.

Policy revision is another critical component. Effective DEI initiatives often involve revising existing policies or introducing new ones to ensure equity in all school practices. This could mean changing disciplinary procedures to eliminate biases or updating admission policies to be more inclusive. Professional development for teachers and staff is also a key element of comprehensive DEI initiatives. Thompson et al. (2021) emphasized that for DEI efforts to be truly effective, educators need ongoing training and resources to understand and embrace DEI. This training helps teachers to develop culturally responsive teaching methods and create an inclusive classroom environment that caters to the needs of all students.

The role of leadership is another critical factor in the success of DEI initiatives. Lee and Kim (2019) underscored the importance of strong, committed leadership in driving and sustaining DEI efforts. Leaders play a pivotal role in setting the tone for

inclusivity and commitment to DEI within the school system. They are responsible for mobilizing resources, guiding policy changes, and ensuring that DEI is integrated into the school's vision and goals.

Effective leaders also foster a culture of openness and learning, where staff and students feel safe to discuss and explore issues related to diversity and inclusion. They lead by example, demonstrating a commitment to DEI in their actions and decisions. Furthermore, leaders are instrumental in engaging various stakeholders, including students, parents, and community members, in DEI initiatives, ensuring that these efforts are collaborative and inclusive.

The success of DEI initiatives in educational settings hinges on a comprehensive approach that includes curriculum reform, policy revision, and professional development, as well as strong and committed leadership. These elements work together to create an educational environment truly inclusive, equitable, and conducive to all students' success. The empirical research on DEI initiatives in school districts underscores their positive impact on student academic outcomes, teacher satisfaction, and community engagement. These studies collectively affirm the importance of comprehensive, well-supported DEI initiatives and strong leadership in fostering inclusive and equitable educational environments.

### **Research Questions**

1. How have negative student behaviors changed over time, especially for transgender students?
2. Have negative student behaviors, especially of transgender students, changed as a function of reallocation in spending?

The purpose of these research questions was to examine the interconnected relationships between school district funding strategies, DEI initiatives, social and emotional learning (SEL) programs, and student behavioral outcomes, particularly those of students from diverse sexual identities. This study aims to explore both the intentions and outcomes of educational financial policies, focusing on whether shifts in spending priorities over time contribute to meaningful changes in student behavior and well-being.

***Research Question 1: Examining Longitudinal Changes in Student Behaviors***

The first research question focuses on temporal changes in negative student behaviors, such as bullying, substance use, absenteeism, and disciplinary incidents. This analysis aims to uncover how behaviors changed over time with the addition of DEI programs and the impact on transgender students over time. Of particular interest were the experiences of students with diverse sexual identities, who often face higher rates of marginalization, stigma, and bullying in educational environments.

This question was crucial for identifying systemic trends in how financial decisions—such as reallocating resources toward DEI or SEL programs—affected behavioral patterns. The findings provided insights into whether these interventions were achieving their intended goals of reducing disparities and fostering inclusivity.

## ***Research Question 2: Correlation Between Funding and Behavioral Outcomes***

The second research question sought to establish whether differences in funding levels for DEI and SEL initiatives were associated with measurable changes in negative student behaviors. By examining school district level funding for programs like LGBTQ+ support groups, mental health counseling, and restorative justice practices, the study aimed to determine the practical impact of these investments on reducing behavioral risks. Specifically, this question focused on identifying whether school districts that allocated more substantial resources to student support services reported lower rates of at-risk behaviors among students, especially those with diverse sexual identities.

**Broader Context and Relevance.** These questions were designed to provide a holistic understanding of how school districts prioritized funding and how these priorities translated into tangible outcomes for students. By focusing on DEI within the broader framework of school leadership and resource allocation, the study aimed to answer pressing questions about the efficacy and equity of educational policies.

### **Hypotheses**

Several hypotheses were made regarding this research. The first hypothesis focused on the transgender subgroup

- H1 Transgender students participate in more at-risk behaviors than any other subgroup.
- H2 School districts with higher expenditures for student support services would see a lower number of students participating in negative behaviors.
- H3 School districts with fewer students participating in negative behaviors would have higher achievement on The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

### ***Hypothesis 1***

The hypothesis was transgender students participate in more at-risk behaviors than any other subgroup. The rationale for this hypothesis stems from existing research indicating that transgender students experience disproportionately high levels of stigma, discrimination, and victimization in educational settings. According to the GLSEN 2019 National School Climate Survey, 59.1% of LGBTQ+ students reported feeling unsafe due to their sexual orientation, and 42.5% reported the same due to their gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2020). These negative experiences were linked to higher rates of substance use, depression, and suicidal ideation among transgender students compared to their cisgender peers (Day et al., 2017). Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma and Steele and Aronson's (1995) concept of stereotype threats provided theoretical support for the hypothesis, suggesting that the stress and marginalization faced by transgender students increase their vulnerability to at-risk behaviors.

### ***Hypothesis 2***

The hypothesis was school districts with higher expenditures for student support services would see a lower number of students participating in negative behaviors. This hypothesis was based on the well-documented relationship between resource allocation and student outcomes. Research shows that increased funding for student support services, such as mental health resources, school psychologists, and guidance counselors, led to reductions in at-risk behaviors (Lafortune et al., 2018; Reardon, 2019). For example, school districts that prioritized funding for mental health programs demonstrated lower rates of substance use, depression, and bullying among students (Kosciw et al., 2020). Furthermore, evidence-based interventions, such as restorative justice practices and culturally responsive support services, were effective in mitigating

negative behaviors, particularly for marginalized groups like transgender students (Gay, 2010; Khalifa et al., 2016). The hypothesis aligns with the findings of this Dissertation, which show that school districts with higher Per-pupil spending on student support services reported better behavioral outcomes.

### ***Hypothesis 3***

The third hypothesis was school districts with fewer students participating in negative behaviors would have higher achievement on NAEP. The rationale for this hypothesis lies in the established connection between student behavior and academic performance. Negative behaviors, such as substance use, truancy, and bullying, are associated with lower engagement, higher dropout rates, and poorer academic outcomes (Balfanz et al., 2014; Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Conversely, schools that created supportive and inclusive environments, reduced behavioral challenges, and prioritized student well-being, reported higher levels of academic achievement (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). The NAEP is a widely recognized measure of academic achievement, and school districts with fewer behavioral challenges were more likely to allocate resources effectively toward instructional quality, leading to better performance on NAEP assessments (NCES, 2022a).

## **Conclusion**

These hypotheses were grounded in existing research and theoretical frameworks that highlighted the interconnectedness of student behavior, resource allocation, and academic outcomes. By testing these hypotheses, this study aimed to contribute to the understanding of how targeted interventions and equitable funding could improve educational experiences and outcomes for all students, particularly those from marginalized populations such as transgender youth.

## CHAPTER 3

### DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The exploration of DEI initiatives in school districts through quantitative data analysis was meticulously planned. Carefully selected datasets from reputable organizations like The Centers for Disease Control (CDC, 2021) and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS, 2021) provided valuable insights into student behaviors, perceptions, and experiences over time. The study aimed to investigate the relationship between school district funding for DEI programs and student outcomes using quantitative analyses.

Defining school performance to include the whole student's needs extends beyond traditional academic metrics such as standardized test scores and graduation rates. This comprehensive view incorporates multiple dimensions of student development to create a more holistic evaluation of educational success. First, it includes academic achievement, which remains fundamental but is considered alongside diverse learning outcomes tailored to individual potentials and needs (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Another critical aspect is SEL, which emphasizes the development of skills like self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Research indicates that effective SEL not only enhances academic performance but also improves student attitudes and behaviors while reducing emotional distress (Durlak et al., 2011). Physical health and safety are also vital, with school performance metrics also considering access to nutritious meals, physical education, health services, and a secure learning environment (Basch, 2011).

Additionally, inclusivity and equity are critical components of evaluating school performance, encompassing how well schools support diverse populations, including

students with special educational needs and varied cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds (Banks, 2015). This approach broadens the scope of school performance beyond academic metrics, incorporating the emotional, social, and physical well-being of students while fostering well-rounded individuals prepared for civic and global engagement (Reyes & Torres &, 2011).

However, achieving these broader objectives is often constrained by financial resources, which significantly influence the quality and equity of educational opportunities. For instance, the Great Recession led to a 7% decline in national public school per-pupil expenditures, with cuts continuing even after the economic recovery. These funding reductions coincided with a halt in the national progress on test scores and college enrollment that spanned years. This pattern was especially pronounced in states experiencing deeper budget cuts due to their reliance on state-appropriated funds, which were more vulnerable to economic fluctuations (Jackson et al., 2021).

To analyze the impact of these funding cuts, NAEP test score data reveal that a \$1,000 reduction in per-pupil spending is associated with a 0.0385 *SD* decline in test scores and a 1.24 percentage point decrease in college-going rates. The disproportionate effects on low-income populations highlight the widening of test score gaps between high- and low-poverty school districts, particularly in states with significant recessionary cuts. These disparities emphasize the enduring impact of fiscal policy on equity in education and underscore the importance of sustained, equitable funding to mitigate the adverse effects on vulnerable populations, including low-income students and students of color (Jackson et al., 2021). See Table 3.1 for the impact of budget cuts on education.

The study by Jackson et al. (2021) analyzed the impact of budget cuts on educational outcomes during the period of the Great Recession, which officially lasted

from December 2007 to June 2009. However, the effects on school funding and educational outcomes extended beyond these dates, as the economic recovery was slow and many states continued to experience budget constraints in the years following the recession. Therefore, while the study focuses on the immediate impact during the recession years, it also considers the prolonged effects on educational funding and student outcomes in the subsequent years.

**Table 3.1**

*Impact of Budget Cuts on Educational Outcomes*

Category	Impact Value
Per pupil spending reductions	7% decrease
Test score decline (standard deviations)	-0.0385
College-going rate decline (percentage)	-1.24
Impact on low-income school districts (test score gaps)	Widened
Impact on Black and White students (test score gaps)	Widened

Noncognitive skills—the generic term that represents “patterns of thought, feelings and behavior that may develop throughout our lives (i.e., are not fixed traits of personality)” (Garcia & Weiss, 2016, p. 3)—allow us to succeed in our public lives, workplaces, homes, and other societal contexts and to contribute meaningfully to society. A solid body of research demonstrates the significant associations between noncognitive skills and other adult outcomes, including productivity and collegiality at work, positive health indicators, and civic participation. There is likewise extensive evidence of the connections between noncognitive skills and academic achievement. Beyond their practical import, noncognitive skills are simply positive attributes.

In this section, I briefly summarize what is known regarding the influence of noncognitive skills on cognitive skills and other school and life outcomes. A study conducted by Garcia and Weiss (2016) of over 200 socio-emotional interventions in the United States targeting children from kindergarten through high school (ages 5–18) concluded that students who received the socio-emotional interventions exhibited higher academic achievement, with the gain in performance estimated to be equivalent to 11 percentile points. Executive function skills—self-regulation and self-control, which are predictive indicators of better behavior in the classroom—are correlated with improvements in grades and other measures of academic performance (Garcia & Weiss, 2016).

Noncognitive abilities are fundamental to an individual's capacity to lead a complete existence, which includes participating actively as a neighbor, family member, and democratic citizen. Noncognitive abilities increase the likelihood of voting and trust, while decreasing the likelihood of divorce. Additionally, they are associated with greater life fulfillment. Early development of noncognitive skills, including the ability to get along with others, share, consider and respect alternative points of view, and prioritize broad societal goals, differentiates effective parents, conscientious neighbors, and engaged citizens from their less constructive and less successful counterparts (Garcia & Weiss, 2016). Such noncognitive abilities support the whole child, deterring them from participating in at-risk behaviors, as reported in the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS).

Contrary to initial intuition, the most effective and economical approach to attaining optimal academic results for children is to attend to their social, emotional, and physical development in addition to academics. Likewise, optimizing one's physical

health necessitates concurrent attention to emotional, social, and cognitive well-being. Emotional well-being is inextricably linked to physical, mental, and social health. (Diamond, 2010).

Preventing academic failure is vital for the health and overall success of students. Prior research indicates that a positive school climate may contribute to academic success and reduce the likelihood of academic failure among students. The longitudinal associations between school climate, which includes DEI initiatives, and academic performance among a cohort of middle school pupils transitioning to high school were the focus of this study. As an intervention to support school-based health promotion and narrow the achievement disparity in the United States, school climate could prove beneficial.

The study began with an exploration of DEI initiatives in school districts, such as student support service expenditures, number of counselors, school psychologists, and staff-to-student ratio, and their effects on student behaviors by analyzing existing data. Carefully selected datasets from reputable organizations like the CDC and Prevention's YRBSS were utilized. These databases provided information about the experiences, perceptions, and behaviors of high school and middle school students across extended periods of time. The study compared the number of student reports of behaviors based on race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

In addition to student behavior data, datasets from sources such as the Common Core of Data (CCD) and the NCES were leveraged to analyze budgetary spending on student support services and DEI programs (NCES, 2021). This comprehensive approach enabled the exploration of the relationship between school district funding for DEI

programs and student outcomes. The results demonstrated the impact of DEI initiatives on academic achievement and other key metrics.

### **Data Sources**

As stated, the data for this study came from two primary data sets. The two primary sources were the YRBSS and the CCD for the years 2017 and 2019, which provided information on student behaviors, experiences, school district policies, and funding allocations. These datasets offered comprehensive insights into the social-emotional well-being of students and school district levels of data on funding allocations for DEI programs. This study used the data from the two primary sources, the YRBSS and the CCD, for 2017 and 2019. The YRBSS, administered by the CDC (2021), provided comprehensive data on health-related behaviors among youth, including aspects of mental health and social dynamics that reflected the social-emotional aspects of students' lives (Kann et al., 2018). The CCD, managed by the NCES (2022b), offered a detailed look at public school districts across the United States, including information on educational policies, funding, and demographic makeup of schools (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2019).

The focus on 2017 and 2019 allowed for an examination of school district levels of DEI initiatives and funding before the global pandemic. This period was significant as it coincided with heightened social pressures and federal initiatives aimed at enhancing equity in education, notably through increased funding for technology access and support for SEL. This study aimed to assess how school districts allocated these funds and managed DEI programs during regular budgetary years under the pressure of addressing broader societal DEI challenges.

Data from the YRBSS were used to assess the social-emotional well-being of students across different demographics and regions. Specific indicators, such as instances of bullying, feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and engagement in risky behaviors, were analyzed to gauge the baseline social-emotional climate in schools. From the CCD, data on federal funding allocations, specifically those aimed at improving technological access (like one-to-one computer initiatives) and internet accessibility, were extracted. The study also analyzed budget allocations toward DEI-specific programs, tracking changes in investment patterns and program implementations across different school districts.

This study adhered to ethical standards concerning data privacy and confidentiality. Data from the YRBSS and CCD were publicly available and de-identified, which ensured that the privacy of individuals was maintained. An institutional review board (IRB) examined the research protocol to ensure it complied with ethical standards regarding data handling and analysis methods. The analysis of YRBSS and CCD data from 2017 and 2019 provided valuable insights into how school districts across the United States addressed DEI issues prior to the pandemic, with a specific focus on the allocation of federal funds for technological and SEL initiatives. This study helped understand those initiatives' effectiveness and provided guidance for future education equity policymaking.

By examining school district funding for DEI programs, demographic data, and academic achievement criteria, patterns, and relationships that illuminated the DEI environment within school districts were identified (Smith et al., 2020). Statistical analysis techniques were applied to uncover complex links between school district investments in DEI programs and student behaviors, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of DEI initiatives in promoting positive student outcomes. This approach

ensured a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the interplay between funding, demographics, and educational outcomes.

In the context of social science research, this study, which utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the allocation of DEI funding and programs in school districts, aligned well with what Babbie (2016) described as the pragmatic paradigm. Babbie emphasized the choice of methodology. The pragmatic paradigm is characterized by its flexibility and its focus on "what works" rather than adhering strictly to the philosophical underpinnings of either positivism or constructivism. This approach was particularly suitable for mixed-methods research, which integrated quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem (Babbie, 2016).

Numeric data were collected on federal funding and student support service expenditures, school psychologists, school counselors, and teacher-student ratios from school district reports and budgetary documents. This methodological approach aligned with pragmatism, which is open to using a variety of methods to effectively answer the research question. Pragmatism is particularly relevant in applied fields such as education policy, where the goal often includes making informed decisions that have practical outcomes.

This current research aimed to evaluate the distribution and impact of DEI funding across U.S. school districts, particularly focusing on the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic. This period was critical as it preceded significant shifts in educational funding and priorities triggered by the pandemic, hence providing a baseline against which changes could be measured. The study leveraged data from the YRBSS and the CCD for 2017 and 2019, providing an examination of how funds were allocated

toward SEL and technological access, which are key components in addressing equity within educational settings (Kann et al., 2018; United States Department of Education, NCES, 2019).

In-depth analysis of YRBSS data revealed patterns in the social-emotional challenges faced by students, while CCD data provided insight into the financial priorities of school districts concerning technological provisions and DEI initiatives. Preliminary findings suggested a significant variance in how school districts applied federal funds, with some prioritizing immediate technological needs over long-term educational strategies. This disparity raised questions about the sustainability and focus of DEI efforts across different regions and demographic groups.

The qualitative approach examined the strategic implementation of DEI programs. The programs were assessed using their alignment with school district policies and their perceived impact on school culture. Early results indicated that while some school districts had made substantial progress in integrating DEI principles into their operational and educational frameworks, others showed minimal integration, reflecting broader national trends in educational equity (Carter et al., 2017).

By employing Marzano's principles of effective educational practices, this study not only assessed the current state of DEI initiatives but also provided a foundation for future research post-pandemic. The goal was to offer actionable recommendations that could help policymakers and educational leaders by refining and enhancing DEI efforts to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students (Marzano et al., 2005).

### **Benefits and Limitations of Secondary Data Analysis**

Secondary data analysis is a valuable method for researchers seeking to investigate complex topics efficiently and comprehensively. By utilizing existing datasets

from reputable organizations such as the CDC and Prevention's YRBSS and the Global School-based Student Health Survey (GSHS), I could access a wealth of information on student behaviors, experiences, and perceptions over extended periods of time (CDC, 2021; World Health Organization, 2021). These datasets offered insights into various aspects of DEI initiatives in school districts, allowing for comparisons based on race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation among students.

Secondary data analysis presents a compelling approach for researchers seeking to delve into complex topics while maximizing efficiency and resources. In my quest to explore the intricacies of DEI initiatives in school districts and their impact on student behaviors, I found solace in the wealth of existing datasets meticulously compiled by esteemed organizations. As I embarked on my research journey, the allure of secondary data analysis became increasingly evident. Unlike traditional methods of primary data collection, which often demand substantial investments of time and resources, secondary data analysis offers a cost-effective alternative. By leveraging datasets already available, I bypassed the arduous process of data gathering, survey development, and IRB approval.

One of the key advantages of secondary data analysis was the cost-effectiveness and time efficiency it offered compared to primary data collection methods. By leveraging existing datasets, researchers can bypass the challenges associated with data gathering, survey development, and IRB approval, allowing them to focus on data analysis and interpretation (Jones et al., 2011). The expansive sample sizes often associated with secondary datasets also enables researchers to conduct comprehensive analyses with heightened statistical power and enhanced generalizability, leading to more robust conclusions (Johnson & Parker, 2018).

Furthermore, the longitudinal nature of many secondary datasets allows for longitudinal analysis, enabling researchers to track outcomes over time and identify trends and patterns that may inform interventions and policy decisions (Garcia & Marder, 2017). By harnessing professionally collected datasets through secondary research, researchers can benefit from the methodological rigor and expertise inherent in the data collection process, enhancing the validity and reliability of their findings (Lee & Kim, 2019). Moreover, secondary data analysis offers researchers a valuable opportunity to explore the complexities of DEI initiatives in school districts and their impact on student behaviors. By leveraging existing datasets and applying rigorous analytical techniques, researchers can generate valuable insights that inform evidence-based practices and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of education and social sciences.

Secondary data analysis afforded me the luxury of time efficiency. Rather than dedicating significant portions of the research timeline to data collection, we can swiftly transition to the stages of data analysis and interpretation. This expedited process not only accelerated the pace of research but also allowed for deeper engagement with data, fostering more nuanced insights and robust conclusions.

A notable advantage of secondary data analysis lies in the expansive sample sizes often associated with existing datasets. These datasets, amassed over extended periods and drawn from diverse populations, provide a treasure trove of information ripe for exploration. With access to large and varied samples, researchers can conduct comprehensive analyses, yielding findings with heightened statistical power and enhanced generalizability.

Moreover, the longitudinal nature of many secondary datasets opens doors to longitudinal analysis, enabling researchers to trace trajectories of outcomes over time and

discern trends and patterns that may otherwise remain elusive. This temporal dimension enriches our understanding of the dynamic interplay between DEI initiatives and student behaviors, revealing evolving trends and identifying critical points of intervention.

Another significant advantage of secondary research lies in the vast scope of data it offers. Attempting to gather such a large dataset independently would require an immense investment of time and effort. Moreover, primary research endeavors seldom have access to longitudinal data due to the extensive time required for data collection and analysis. Longitudinal studies involve the repeated assessment of participants over extended periods, making them logistically challenging and time-consuming for individual researchers to undertake within the confines of graduate or undergraduate projects.

When discussing the benefits of secondary data analysis, it is essential to consider the advantages of leveraging existing datasets collected by experienced researchers. By utilizing professionally collected datasets, researchers can benefit from the methodological rigor and expertise inherent in the data collection process, enhancing the validity and reliability of their research findings (Johnson, 2014). This contrasts with the potential pitfalls that researchers encounter when collecting data themselves, as their datasets could be more prone to flaws due to their limited experience in participant recruitment, study design, and measurement tool application (Smith, 2008).

Moreover, the utilization of longitudinal data in secondary research enables researchers to explore trends and changes in phenomena over time. These patterns and changes provide valuable insights into the temporal dimensions of the phenomena under investigation (Garcia & Marder, 2017). By leveraging these longitudinal insights, researchers can uncover dynamic patterns and gain a deeper understanding of how

variables evolve over extended periods, contributing to a more comprehensive analysis of the research topic.

When conducting secondary data analysis, researchers can benefit significantly from utilizing professionally collected datasets, which offer methodological rigor and expertise in the data collection process (Johnson, 2014). This approach enhances the validity and reliability of research findings, leading to a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Wickham, 2019). Ethical considerations play a crucial role in secondary data analysis, particularly concerning participant confidentiality and informed consent. By accessing anonymized datasets from reputable sources, researchers can mitigate risks associated with privacy and confidentiality, demonstrating a commitment to upholding ethical standards in research (Hasan, 2021; Irwin, 2013). Safeguarding the security and privacy of data is paramount in data analysis, ensuring that the welfare and rights of individuals whose experiences are reflected in the data are respected throughout the research process (Hasan, 2021; Irwin, 2013; Tripathy, 2013).

Secondary data analysis is indeed a valuable tool for researchers delving into the complexities of DEI initiatives in school districts. This method offers numerous advantages, including cost-effectiveness, time efficiency, expansive sample sizes, longitudinal insights, and ethical considerations, which collectively empower researchers to navigate their research endeavors with confidence and purpose (Johnson & Parker, 2018; Smith et al., 2020). Still, secondary data analysis within the context of educational policy, as supported by Babbie (2016), is crucial to recognize how this methodological approach can significantly enhance the formulation and evaluation of educational strategies and initiatives. Secondary data analysis allows educational policymakers to

access extensive datasets that encompass many years, providing a rich foundation for understanding trends, outcomes, and the long-term effects of educational policies (Babbie, 2016).

For example, by analyzing historical data from sources like the NCES or state education departments, policymakers can evaluate the impact of past educational reforms, such as changes in funding allocations, implementation of new teaching methods, or integration of technology in classrooms. This kind of analysis is instrumental in identifying what has been effective and what might need adjustment, thereby informing future policy decisions (Kirst & Jung, 2017).

Moreover, secondary data provides an opportunity to conduct comparative analyses across different states or school districts, offering insights into the effectiveness of various educational approaches in diverse settings. This can be particularly useful for addressing equity issues within education, allowing policymakers to pinpoint disparities and target interventions where they are most needed (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Thus, secondary data analysis not only supports the academic exploration of educational phenomena but also serves as a pivotal tool in the hands of policymakers striving to develop informed, effective, and equitable educational programs. By leveraging historical and comparative data, educational leaders can craft policies that are both responsive to past outcomes and adaptive to future needs.

However, it is essential to acknowledge potential drawbacks associated with using secondary data that may not align perfectly with the specific needs of a study. While secondary data provides a wealth of professionally gathered information, discrepancies may arise due to differences in target populations, geographic areas, collection periods, and data formats compared to the researcher's study requirements (Lee & Kim, 2019;

Wickham, 2019). For instance, researchers may encounter challenges when the secondary data do not precisely match their desired demographic, geographic scope, or temporal parameters. Additionally, discrepancies in data formats, such as the representation of variables like age and ethnicity, can impact the suitability of the dataset for addressing specific research questions (Garcia & Marder, 2017). These limitations highlight the importance of critically evaluating the relevance and compatibility of secondary data with the research objectives to ensure that the dataset effectively addresses the research questions at hand. Researchers must consider these factors when utilizing secondary data to draw meaningful and accurate conclusions in their studies.

When conducting secondary data analysis, researchers may encounter challenges related to ensuring the quality and reliability of the data that is utilized in their studies. While it is crucial for researchers to maintain the reliability and validity of their data, limitations in monitoring and verifying the quality of the original data collected by other researchers can pose a significant concern (Johnson, 2014). If the original researchers did not adequately validate the reliability and validity of the data during the collection process, it could potentially impact the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings derived from secondary data analysis (Hasan, 2021; Wickham, 2019). Therefore, researchers must carefully assess the methods employed for data collection, analysis, and presentation to gauge the quality and integrity of the data used in their research (Garcia & Marder, 2017).

One of the challenges associated with secondary research is the potential lack of detailed information regarding the methodology employed by the original researchers. This lack of transparency may result in a scarcity of information concerning crucial aspects such as recruiting techniques, sample representativeness, data collection methods,

measurement tools used, statistical analyses conducted, and other relevant methodological details (Johnson & Parker, 2018; Smith et al., 2020). Researchers may need to undertake additional efforts to acquire this essential information to ensure the robustness and validity of their secondary data analysis.

Nevertheless, the ethical implications of secondary data analysis must also be considered. As Babbie (2016) emphasizes, researchers are obligated to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the data. This involves understanding the conditions under which the data were collected, ensuring that data use complies with any restrictions, and maintaining the privacy of individuals represented in the data (Babbie, 2016). This ethical scrutiny is crucial, especially when handling sensitive information that could affect the privacy and rights of subjects if mishandled.

In addition to ethical concerns, researchers must be adept at critical analysis to identify potential biases or flaws in the data that could skew their findings. The onus is on the researcher to apply rigorous statistical techniques to correct any anomalies or biases that the data may contain. This level of diligence is necessary to uphold the scientific accuracy and reliability of their findings, which, in turn, underscores the credibility of secondary data analysis as a valuable scientific method (Kiecolt & Nathan, 1985).

In summation, while secondary data analysis offers significant advantages in terms of cost, accessibility, and scope, it demands an elevated level of responsibility from researchers. They must navigate the challenges of data relevance, quality, and ethical use while leveraging the potential of extensive datasets to contribute valuable insights to their fields. As such, secondary data analysis remains an indispensable tool in the arsenal of modern social scientists in the comprehensive exploration of research methodologies (Babbie, 2016).

In concluding the discussion on the methodology of secondary data analysis in educational research, I find this approach immensely valuable and efficient. Utilizing already available data allows me, as a researcher, to delve deeply into educational systems without the steep costs and extensive time commitments associated with primary data collection. My experience and observations underscore that secondary data sources, such as the NCES and various state education databases, provide rich, comprehensive, and diverse datasets that are indispensable for a broad range of educational studies.

### **Demographic Characteristics and Analysis of Data**

This section provides an overview of the demographic variables examined in this study, including gender, race, and geographic representation, as they relate to student outcomes. These characteristics were analyzed to assess their potential influence on educational experiences and behavioral trends among students.

#### ***Gender Classification***

The dataset includes gender as a categorical variable, coded as 1 for female and 2 for male. The analysis explores variations in student outcomes based on gender differences. Examining gender as a demographic characteristic allows for understanding of its potential role in shaping educational experiences and behavioral trends.

#### ***Geographic Representation***

This section provides an overview of the demographic variables examined, including gender, race, and geographic representation, as they relate to student outcomes. These characteristics were analyzed to assess their potential influence on educational experiences and behavioral trends among students.

### ***Racial Classification***

Race was analyzed using two different categorizations to assess the relationship between race and student outcomes.

- The four-level race classification groups students into broader racial categories, allowing for an initial comparison of student outcomes across major racial groups.
- The seven-level race classification provides a more detailed breakdown of racial identities, offering insights into potential disparities in educational performance and behavioral trends among specific racial subgroups.

Both racial classification methods were analyzed to determine whether race serves as a significant factor in explaining variations in student outcomes and to identify potential disparities that may require targeted interventions or policy considerations.

### **Summary of Demographic Variables**

The demographic characteristics of gender and race emerged as significant predictors of student outcomes, while state-level variations did not demonstrate a substantial impact. The inclusion of both 4-level and 7-level racial categorizations provided a comprehensive understanding of the role of race in shaping educational experiences. These findings underscore the importance of demographic factors in educational research and lay the groundwork for subsequent chapters, which discuss their implications for educational policies and practices.

A total of 62,295 students participated in the YRBSS study, and their characteristics were categorized based on sex, grade level, and race/ethnicity. This comprehensive data set provides valuable insights into the sample's diversity, which is critical for understanding the findings' broader implications. (Appendix B)

## ***Sex***

The distribution of participants by sex shows a balanced representation of male and female students, with males slightly outnumbering females. Specifically, male participants accounted for 50.90% of the sample (N = 31,401), while females comprised 47.60% (N = 29,367). This near-equal distribution ensures that both groups are adequately represented in the analysis, allowing for meaningful comparisons and interpretations. A smaller subset of participants, 0.90% (N = 527), identified as "Other," highlighting the inclusion of non-binary or other gender identities in the study.

Additionally, a very small percentage of participants, 0.60% (N = 200), did not provide information regarding their sex, categorized as "Missing." Including these data reflects the diversity of gender identities within the sample and emphasizes the importance of recognizing and accounting for such diversity in research.

## ***Grade Level***

The grade-level distribution of participants is evenly spread across the four high school grades, with no single grade dominating the sample. Students in 9th grade represented the largest proportion at 25.00% (N = 15,428), closely followed by those in 10th grade at 24.50% (N = 15,115), 11th grade at 24.20% (N = 14,908), and 12th grade at 24.10% (N = 14,844). The minimal variation in these percentages ensures that students from all grade levels are fairly represented, which is essential for examining trends and outcomes across different stages of high school education. Additionally, a small portion of the data (0.30%, N = 200) is categorized as "Missing" for grade level, indicating some gaps in reporting. Despite this minor limitation, the data provide a comprehensive view of the participants' academic progression.

### ***Race/Ethnicity***

The sample's racial and ethnic composition reflects diversity and the demographic realities of the population being studied. A significant majority of participants, 73.20% (N = 45,612), identified as White. Black or African American students made up the second-largest group at 15.60% (N = 9,712), followed by Hispanic or Latino students, who represented 6.20% (N = 3,892). Students categorized as "Other," which may include individuals of mixed heritage or other racial/ethnic identities not explicitly listed, constituted 3.00% (N = 1,978). These figures highlight the need for a nuanced analysis to account for the varying experiences and backgrounds of participants from different racial and ethnic groups. The predominance of White students in the sample may reflect broader demographic trends in the study's geographic or institutional context, but it also underscores the importance of carefully interpreting results to avoid generalizations that may not apply to underrepresented groups.

### **Summary and Implications**

The demographic data provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding the participant population and contextualizing the study's findings. The equal distribution across sex and grade levels ensures that the analysis captures a wide range of experiences, while the racial and ethnic diversity, though weighted toward White participants, offers opportunities to explore differences and commonalities among subgroups. Recognizing the presence of non-binary or other gender identities and the inclusion of small yet meaningful percentages of underrepresented racial/ethnic groups add depth and inclusivity to the study. Moreover, the small percentage of missing data indicates high data quality, further supporting the reliability of the findings.

Overall, this demographic profile is critical for ensuring that the study's analyses and conclusions are grounded in a clear understanding of the participant population. By accounting for these diverse characteristics, the study is well-positioned to address important questions and provide meaningful insights into the variables under investigation. This foundational demographic data guided subsequent analyses and interpretations, ensuring that the study remains inclusive, representative, and relevant to the populations it seeks to understand; see Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2**

*Demographic Summary of Participants*

Variable	Category	Count	Percentage
Sex	Male	31,404	50.90
	Female	29,367	47.60
	Other	527	0.90
	Missing	200	0.60
	Total	61,498	
Grade	9th grade	15,428	25.00
	10th grade	15,115	24.50
	11th grade	14,908	24.20
	12th grade	14,844	24.10
	Total	60,295	
Race/Ethnicity	White	45,612	73.20
	Black or African American	9,712	15.60
	Hispanic/Latino	3,892	6.20
	Other	1,978	3.00
	Total	61,194	
Total Students		62,295	100.00

**School District Demographics**

The characteristics of school districts included in the study are described in terms of locale, enrollment size, and funding sources. These variables highlight the diversity in educational settings and funding structures, which are critical to understanding the broader context of the research.

### ***Locale***

The distribution of school districts across different locales reveals a substantial representation of suburban areas, comprising 44.30% of the sample. Urban school districts account for 37.60%, reflecting the prominence of metropolitan regions in the dataset. Rural school districts represent 18.10% of the sample, highlighting the inclusion of less densely populated areas. Town-based school districts make up the smallest proportion at 9.70%, indicating a lower frequency of smaller, community-focused school districts in the sample.

### ***Enrollment Size***

Many school districts serve student populations between 1,001 and 5,000 students, accounting for 58.30% of the sample. Larger school districts with enrollments exceeding 5,000 students represent 23.20%, indicating a notable presence of large-scale educational institutions. Medium-sized school districts, serving between 500 and 1,000 students, comprise 15.10% of the sample. Conversely, smaller school districts with fewer than 500 students represent only 3.50%, underscoring their limited occurrence in the dataset.

### ***Funding Sources***

The financial composition of school districts demonstrates a varied reliance on federal, state, and local funding. On average, federal funding constitutes 10.2% of school district revenues, with a standard deviation (*SD*) of 5.4%, reflecting its small but consistent contribution. State funding accounts for a larger share, averaging 45.1% (*SD*: 10.3%), while local funding is similarly significant, averaging 44.7% (*SD*: 12.1%). These figures suggest an equal reliance on state and local funding sources, with federal funding playing a secondary role in supporting school districts.

This demographic analysis, see Table 3.3, illustrates the diverse educational settings represented in the study, including variations in geographic location, student enrollment, and financial structures. Understanding these factors is essential for contextualizing the findings and drawing meaningful conclusions about educational policies and practices.

**Table 3.3**

*School District Characteristics*

Variable	Category	Count /Frequency	Percentage /SD
Local	Urban	15,432	37.60
	Suburban	18,208	44.30
	Rural	7,430	18.10
	Total	41,070	100.00
Enrollment size	<500 students	1,430	3.50
	500-1,000 students	6,204	15.10
	1,001-5,000 students	23,904	58.20
	>5,000 students	9,514	23.20
	Total	41,052	100.00
Funding sources	Federal (%)	<i>M</i> : 10.2%	<i>SD</i> : 5.4%
	State (%)	<i>M</i> : 45.1%	<i>SD</i> : 10.3%
	Local (%)	<i>M</i> 44.7%	<i>SD</i> : 12.1%

**Community Characteristics and Statistical Analysis**

The relationship between geographic locale and transgender identification was analyzed using Chi-Square. The results demonstrated a  $\chi^2$  association between school district location and transgender identification. The Pearson Chi-Square test produced a

value of  $\chi^2 = 21.396$ , with 3 degrees of freedom (*df*) and a significance level of  $p < 0.001$  and is presented in Table 4.1. Gender status is related to geographical community type.

The statistically significant results indicate that transgender student representation varies meaningfully by locale. The data revealed several noteworthy patterns. First, suburban school districts exhibited the highest proportional representation of transgender students, suggesting that these areas may provide more inclusive environments or resources that encourage students to disclose their gender identity. By contrast, rural school districts reported the lowest percentage of transgender-identifying students, reflecting potential barriers such as cultural norms, limited support structures, or stigma surrounding gender diversity in these areas. Urban school districts, while more diverse overall, showed consistent transgender representation across classifications, with 1.5% of students identifying as transgender; see Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4**

*Crosstabulation of Gender Type by Community*

Locale	Transgender	Cisgender	Total
Large city	588 (1.5%)	38,398 (98.5%)	38,986
Large suburb	57 (2.8%)	1,972 (97.2%)	2,029
Total	977 (1.5%)	61,318 (98.5%)	62,295

*Note.*  $\chi^2 = 2 = 21.396$ .  $p < 0.001$ .

### **Observations on Transgender Respondents in Student Surveys**

The survey data from 2017 and 2019 reveal significant trends in the representation of transgender students within the respondent population, as seen in Table 3.5. These trends provide important insights into both the visibility of transgender students and the broader social dynamics influencing self-identification over time.

**Table 3.5***Crosstabulation Gender and Survey Year*

Year of survey	Transgender	Cisgender	Total
2017	430	28,353	28,783
2019	547	32,965	33,512
Total		61,318	62,295

*Note.*  $\chi^2 = 1.919$ .  $p = 0.166$ .

In 2017, a total of 28,783 students participated in the survey, of which 430 students identified as transgender. By 2019, the number of total respondents increased to 33,512, with 547 students identifying as transgender, as shown in Table 3.5. This marked an increase of 117 transgender respondents, representing growth in the absolute number of students openly identifying as transgender over the two-year period.

The percentage of students identifying as transgender also showed an upward trend. In 2017, transgender students constituted 1.49% of the total respondents. By 2019, this proportion had risen to 1.63%. While this increase of 0.14 percentage points may appear modest, it represents a shift, particularly within the context of a growing total respondent pool. The higher percentage in 2019 suggests increasing visibility and willingness among transgender students to disclose their gender identity in such surveys.

The increase in both the absolute number and proportion of transgender respondents may be attributed to several factors. Greater societal awareness and acceptance of diverse gender identities likely played a role, enabling more students to feel comfortable identifying as transgender. Educational and community initiatives promoting inclusivity and the visibility of LGBTQ+ identities could also have contributed to this trend.

The growth in overall survey participation, from 28,783 respondents in 2017 to 33,512 in 2019, may reflect broader efforts to engage more students in discussions about identity and well-being. Within this expanded respondent pool, the increase in transgender identification highlights the importance of creating supportive environments where students of all gender identities feel represented and acknowledged.

### ***Gender Disparities in Transgender Identification***

The analysis revealed a notable gender disparity in transgender identification, with male students being more likely to identify as transgender (1.7%) compared to female students (1.2%). This proportional difference suggests that gender-related dynamics may influence students' willingness or ability to disclose their transgender identity. Factors such as societal norms, stigma, and access to resources like roleplaying may shape these patterns. For example, transgender males may experience different societal pressures or support networks that influence their visibility within school settings. Understanding these disparities is essential for developing inclusive policies and practices that address the unique needs of transgender students across genders.

Transgender males comprise the majority of the transgender-identifying population, comprising 56.9%, compared to transgender females, who represented 43.1%. This finding underscores the importance of considering gender differences when designing and implementing policies and interventions to support transgender youth. For instance, programs that address mental health challenges, bullying, or identity affirmation should be tailored to recognize the specific experiences and needs of both transgender males and females. The greater representation of transgender males within the transgender-identifying population may reflect broader trends in gender identity exploration or social acceptance, which merit further investigation.

### ***High Overall Non-Transgender Representation***

The vast majority of students across both genders identified as non-transgender, with 98.8% of the total population identifying as such; see Table 3.6. This statistic reinforces the minority status of transgender students within the educational system and highlights the unique challenges they may face in navigating school environments that are predominantly shaped by cisgender norms. Transgender students may encounter barriers such as limited access to gender-affirming spaces, insufficient representation in curricula, or a lack of trained staff equipped to support their needs. These challenges emphasize the importance of targeted efforts to create inclusive and supportive environments that address the specific needs of transgender students.

**Table 3.6**

*Crosstabulation of Transgender Identification by Gender*

Gender	Transgender	Cisgender	Total
Female	381 (1.2%)	31,401 (98.8%)	31,782
Male	502 (1.7%)	29,367 (98.3%)	29,869
Total	883 (1.4%)	60,768 (98.6%)	61,751

*Note. Chi-square = 166.38; p-value ( $p < 0.05$ ).*

The findings from this analysis illustrate the critical need for educational policies and practices that are sensitive to the experiences of transgender students. The gender disparities in transgender identification, coupled with the minority status of transgender students overall, highlight the importance of creating equitable and inclusive environments within schools.

### **Transgender Students' Behavior and Academic Indicators**

The data highlights key risk behaviors reported among transgender students. Substance use is prevalent in 24.90% of the population, indicating that a quarter of

students are engaged in behaviors that may negatively affect their health and educational outcomes. Bullying affects 17.60% of the student population, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address interpersonal conflicts and school climate issues.

Depression, based on self-reported data, is the most significant risk behavior, with 29.10% of students reporting depressive symptoms. This statistic underscores the critical importance of mental health support within school systems to address the well-being of a substantial portion of students.

### ***Academic Performance***

Student academic performance, as indicated by self-reported grades, shows a positive trend, with 44.80% of students reporting mostly As and 36.60% reporting mostly Bs. This combined total of 81.40% reflects a strong majority of students achieving high academic levels. However, 12.80% report earning mostly Cs, and 7.80% report mostly Ds or Fs, highlighting a subset of students who may require additional academic support to improve their outcomes.

It is important to note that self-reported grades are limited by potential inaccuracies, as students may overestimate or underestimate their academic performance due to various factors such as perception bias or misunderstanding of grade categories. Furthermore, the dataset includes missing cases, which may affect the analysis and interpretation of academic trends. These limitations emphasize the need for caution when relying solely on self-reported grades to assess academic performance, as they may not

fully capture the complexities or the distribution of student achievement levels; see Table 3.7.

**Table 3.7**

*Behavioral and Academic Indicators*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Risk Behavior	Substance use	5,804	24.90
	Bullying	4,102	17.60
	Depression (self-reported)	6,792	29.10
Academic Performance	Mostly As	10,034	44.80
	Mostly Bs	8,208	36.60
	Mostly Cs	2,876	12.80
	Mostly Ds or Fs	1,782	7.80
Attendance	<5 days absent/year	15,872	70.60
	6-10 days absent/year	4,560	20.30
	>10 days absent/year	2,014	9.10

*Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey*

***Attendance***

Attendance patterns reveal that most students, 70.60%, are absent fewer than five days per year, which aligns with positive academic engagement. However, 20.30% of students report being absent between six and 10 days annually, and 9.10% are absent more than 10 days (about 1 and a half weeks) per year. These figures point to a significant minority of students with moderate to high absenteeism, which may be a barrier to academic success and social engagement. These attendance trends warrant attention to address factors contributing to student absenteeism.

The data in this table reveal critical insights into the intersection of behavioral, academic, and attendance-related indicators. Risk behaviors, such as substance use,

bullying, and depression, present challenges to student well-being and academic success. Academic performance data indicate that most students are achieving well, but with a notable proportion struggling academically. Attendance trends highlight a concerning level of absenteeism in a subset of students, which may exacerbate academic and behavioral challenges. These findings underscore the importance of addressing behavioral risks, supporting struggling students academically, and mitigating absenteeism to foster positive student outcomes.

Scales were created by summing the responses for each item included in a given scale. A score of "1" was assigned when a respondent reported engaging in a behavior six or more times, allowing for a standardized method of quantifying the frequency of behaviors. The distinction between the fourth and fifth scales lies in how behavior intensity is measured. While the fourth scale records whether a behavior was performed six or more times as a binary outcome (yes/no), the fifth scale incorporates the frequency or intensity of engagement in the behavior, capturing variations beyond a simple occurrence measure. This distinction provides a more nuanced understanding of behavior patterns by accounting for the extent or severity of engagement rather than merely its presence.

Bad behavior breadth measures the range of different negative behaviors a student has reported engaging in. A higher score indicates participation in multiple categories of problematic behaviors, such as substance use, physical aggression, or disciplinary infractions. This measure captures the number of distinct types of misconduct rather than the frequency of any single behavior; see Table 3.8.

**Table 3.8**

*Negative Behavior Scales*

Scale	Items
Depression acts	Sad or hopeless Considered suicide Made a suicide plan Attempted suicide
Tobacco products use	Ever cigarette use Electronic vapor product use Current cigar use
Students reporting bad behaviors	Never use seatbelt Riding with a drinking driver Drinking and driving Texting and driving Weapon carrying Weapon carrying at school Gun carrying past 12 months

Bad behavior depth refers to the frequency and severity of negative behaviors reported by a student. A higher score suggests repeated engagement in certain problematic behaviors or participation at more extreme levels. This measure focuses on how often and to what extent a student engages in specific negative behaviors rather than the variety of behaviors exhibited.

**Conclusion**

Chapter 3 presented a comprehensive outline of the methodological framework and research design that guided this study. The chosen approach leveraged secondary data analysis to explore critical relationships between school district funding for DEI and SEL initiatives and student-reported at-risk behaviors. The integration of quantitative methods, including descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, enabled a systematic exploration of how demographic, funding, and programmatic variables influence student outcomes.

The use of robust datasets, such as the YRBSS and the CCD, ensured access to high-quality, representative data across school districts in the United States. These datasets provided the foundation for identifying trends, patterns, and associations between school district investments in DEI and SEL programs and key indicators of student well-being, such as mental health, substance use, and bullying. The study design emphasized pragmatism, allowing for the combination of various analytical methods to answer complex research questions and provide actionable insights.

The detailed data analysis procedures outlined in this chapter ensured methodological rigor and clarity. Techniques such as Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Chi-Square Tests were carefully selected to uncover statistically significant relationships, while descriptive statistics offered a clear picture of the underlying demographic and behavioral patterns. This multi-faceted approach allowed for a holistic examination of the interplay between school district funding, demographic variables, and student outcomes, aligning closely with the study's objectives.

Several limitations were acknowledged, including potential biases inherent in secondary data, the lack of control over unmeasured variables, and challenges in generalizing findings to contexts not fully represented in the datasets. These limitations highlight the need for cautious interpretation of results while also identifying areas where future research can address existing gaps.

Additionally, the ethical considerations discussed in this chapter underscored the study's commitment to maintaining the highest standards of research integrity. By utilizing anonymized datasets, adhering to data-use agreements, and ensuring confidentiality, the study maintained the necessary compliance with ethical research

practices and respected the privacy of participants whose data were included in the analyses.

The crosstabulation analysis explored the relationship between male and female gender responses to a transgender identification question; see Table 3.9. Data patterns provided insight into how respondents engaged with gender identity questions.

The dataset consists of 51.6% females and 48.4% males which suggests a balanced distribution of gender representation. Among respondents, the majority indicated they do not identify as transgender, with 95.3% of females and 93.3% of males selecting "No." This similarity indicates that a high proportion of respondents, regardless of gender, do not identify as transgender.

A small percentage of individuals identified as transgender, with males (1.7%) slightly more likely than females (1.2%) to select this option. Responses indicating uncertainty about transgender identity were evenly distributed between genders, with 1.6% of both females and males selecting "Not sure if I am transgender." However, males were more likely than females to report not understanding the question, with 3.4% of males selecting "Don't know what the question is asking," compared to 1.9% of females.

The proportional distribution within transgender-related responses shows that males comprise a slightly larger percentage (56.9%) of those identifying as transgender, while females account for 43.1% of this group. Among respondents indicating confusion about the question, 62.8% were male, suggesting a difference in how genders interpret or engage with the survey question.

**Table 3.9***Crosstabulation of Gender and Transgender Identification*

Transgender identification	Count	Within gender %	Gender to all population by identification %	Total population by identification %
Female				
No	30,283	95.30	52.10	49.10
Yes, I am transgender	381	1.20	43.10	0.60
Not sure	513	1.60	51.90	0.80
Do not know what the question asks	605	1.90	37.20	1.00
Totals	31,782	100	51.60	51.60
Male				
No	27,869	93.30	47.90	45.20
Yes, I am transgender	502	1.70	56.90	0.80
Not sure	475	1.60	48.10	0.80
Do not know what the question asks	1,023	3.40	62.80	1.70
Totals	29,869	100	48.40	48.40
All				
No	58,152	94.30	100.00	94.30
Yes, I am transgender	883	1.40	100.00	1.40
Not sure	988	1.60	100.00	1.60
Do not know what the question asks	1,628	2.60	100.00	2.60
Totals	61,651	100.00	100.00	100.00

*Note. Chi-square = 166.38; p-value ( $p < 0.05$ ).*

The observed counts align closely with the expected counts, indicating that the data are well-distributed and do not show significant deviations from what would be anticipated. These patterns reflect consistency across the dataset, suggesting that the observed relationships are representative of the sample.

Overall, this analysis highlights that many respondents identify with traditional gender categories, with small percentages indicating transgender identity or uncertainty. Differences in responses between genders, particularly in understanding the question, suggest areas for further exploration, such as refining survey language to ensure clarity and inclusivity.

The analysis of sex trends in the data reveals both similarities and subtle differences in how males and females respond to questions about gender identity. The sample is evenly distributed, with 51.6% of respondents identifying as female and 48.4% as male, providing a balanced basis for interpreting trends.

Many of both females (95.3%) and males (93.3%) reported not identifying as transgender. This similarity suggests that, for most respondents, traditional gender identity categories align with their perceptions. However, males were slightly more likely (1.7%) than females (1.2%) to identify as transgender. This difference, while small, may reflect variations in experiences or willingness to disclose transgender identity in a survey context.

Responses indicating uncertainty about transgender identity were evenly distributed across genders, with 1.6% of both females and males selecting the "Not sure if I am transgender" option. This consistency suggests that uncertainty about gender identity is not strongly influenced by gender.

One notable difference emerged in the category of respondents who indicated they did not understand the question. Males were almost twice as likely (3.4%) as females (1.9%) to select the "Don't know what the question is asking" response. This pattern may indicate differences in how males and females interpret questions about

gender identity or their exposure to related terminology. It may also suggest a need to examine the clarity of survey language to ensure accessibility for all respondents.

Within the group of respondents who identified as transgender, males accounted for 56.9% and females for 43.1%. This proportional distribution may reflect broader demographic patterns or differences in how males and females approach self-identification in surveys. Additionally, among those who reported not understanding the question, males represented 62.8%, suggesting a potential need for clearer or more contextually inclusive survey design.

Overall, the data highlight that while many respondents align with traditional gender categories, small but meaningful differences exist in how males and females engage with questions of gender identity. These patterns may be shaped by social, cultural, or linguistic factors and underscore the importance of carefully considering question design to ensure inclusivity and clarity in future research.

Chapter 3 established a rigorous and methodologically sound foundation for the study. This methodological framework provided the tools necessary to derive meaningful insights, which are further explored in the results presented in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the study, which investigates the relationships between DEI funding and student support services. Specifically, the analyses aim to address the research questions by exploring how funding allocations are associated with differences in student behaviors, emotional well-being, and academic performance. The results provide an evidence-based foundation for understanding the impact of DEI initiatives and funding decisions on students' experiences and outcomes.

#### **Research Question 1 Results**

The first research question was: How have negative student behaviors changed over time, especially regarding transgender students??

Substance use among students is a critical concern for educators and policymakers, particularly as it relates to vulnerable student populations. The first research question focuses on understanding the shifts in negative student behaviors, particularly among students identifying with diverse sexual identities, while controlling for variations among school districts in terms of size, racial composition, and location. This inquiry seeks to unravel how different school district characteristics, policy implementations, and funding priorities intersect to shape the behavioral patterns of marginalized student populations, especially LGBTQ+ students.

The analysis of student behaviors from 2017 to 2019 indicates differences between transgender and cisgender students, particularly in mental health, substance use, and disciplinary issues. Transgender students reported higher levels of negative behaviors compared to their cisgender peers. Depression-related behaviors increased from 1.53 in

2017 to 1.62 in 2019 for transgender students. Similarly, tobacco use increased from 0.43 in 2017 to 0.58 in 2019.

General negative behaviors showed a slight overall decline for both transgender and cisgender students. The number of student-reported bad behaviors scale decreased from 0.63 in 2017 to 0.58 in 2019, while the number and frequency of student-reported bad scale dropped from 4.69 to 4.5. However, transgender students consistently reported higher instances of negative behaviors across both years.

Changes in school funding patterns coincided with these behavioral trends. Local revenue per student declined from 49.39% in 2017 to 42.53% in 2019, while state-provided revenue increased. Instructional spending per student dropped from \$8,308 in 2017 to \$7,636 in 2019. While general negative behaviors showed a slight decline, transgender students continued to report higher rates of depression and substance use compared to cisgender students. These trends reflect differences in student experiences and changes in behavioral patterns over time; see Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1***Trends in Student Behavior Patterns for Years 2017 and 2019*

Descriptive	Year	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	<i>F</i>
Percent revenue local	2017	49.39	10.23	29.77	65.23	4392.953***
	2019	42.53	14.83	12.22	65.23	
Percent revenue state	2017	36.44	9.02	23.87	51.72	7211.660***
	2019	45.07	15.11	23.87	80.39	
Percent revenue federal	2017	14.17	3.15	7.76	19.33	4428.750***
	2019	12.40	3.47	7.11	19.33	
Total state revenue per one student	2017	7097.68	3452.70	3469.50	14646.27	39.242***
	2019	7312.60	4876.42	1070.05	25377.35	
Total local revenue per one student	2017	9402.26	3525.89	4373.43	15560.56	2974.803***
	2019	7643.49	4405.23	269.34	15560.56	
Total federal revenue per one student	2017	2634.67	923.65	1406.98	4806.52	4354.086***
	2019	2094.64	1098.18	125.57	4806.52	
Expenditure per student on instruction	2017	8308.54	2867.29	847.31	12828.56	706.859***
	2019	7636.46	3381.79	758.15	12828.56	
Depression acts scale	2017	1.53	0.81	1	4	328.110***
	2019	1.62	0.89	1	4	
Tobacco products use scale	2017	0.43	0.72	0	4	1030.661***
	2019	0.58	0.75	0	4	
Number of students Reported bad behaviors scale	2017	0.63	0.67	0	7	136.987***
	2019	0.58	0.63	0	7	
Number and frequency Student reported bad behaviors scale	2017	4.69	3.46	1	36	83.173***
	2019	4.50	3.26	1	36	
School district median household income	2017	67765.50	22293.28	33822	126187	2.818***
	2019	67475.32	20979.32	33822	126187	
Total number of schools in district	2017	231.02	184.09	82	785	1191.449***
	2019	190.03	157.05	10	785	

Note. \*\*\* Significant at  $p < .001$ .

Transgender students, although representing only 1.7% of the student population in 2017 and 1.49% in 2019, see Table 3.8, face unique stressors and challenges that

increase their likelihood of engaging in drug use compared to their cisgender peers. A closer look at data reveals greater representation of transgender students in large suburban school districts (2.8%) compared to large city school districts (1.5%); see Table 3.4. This disparity may be influenced by factors such as discrimination, social stigma, and uneven access to supportive resources across different types of school districts (Goffman, 1963). Examining the prevalence and variability of drug use behaviors within the transgender and cisgender student population provides insight into the scope of the issue and highlights areas for targeted intervention. Understanding these differences is essential for developing effective strategies to address substance use and support at-risk students in schools. The following analysis illuminates these disparities, drawing attention to the significant differences in drug use behaviors across student populations and emphasizing the need for equitable, individualized approaches to prevention and support.

### ***Behavioral Disparities in Drug Use***

The data reveals a striking disparity in drug use between transgender and cisgender students, with transgender students reporting a mean of 0.9949 compared to just 0.1814 for cisgender students; see Table 4.2. The significant  $F$ -statistic of 1710.235\* indicates a strong difference between the groups. Notably, the maximum reported drug use score is six for both groups. The same number suggests that while the average transgender student is more likely to engage in drug use, some cisgender students also experience extreme levels of this behavior. Moreover, the transgender group demonstrates greater variability in drug use behaviors, as reflected by a higher standard deviation of 1.39561 compared to 0.58908 for cisgender students. This variability could indicate that while many transgender students face significant risks, some may not

engage in drug use at all, pointing to the need for individualized interventions. These findings suggest that transgender students are disproportionately affected by factors that increase the likelihood of substance use, such as stress, minority stigma, or limited access to support systems, all of which require targeted responses from schools and communities.

**Table 4.2**

*Descriptive ANOVA Difference in Means of Behavioral Variables Between Transgender and Cisgender Students*

Variable	Group	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	F
Drugs	Transgender	0.9949	1.39561	0	6	1710.235*
	Cisgender	0.1814	0.58908	0	6	
Depression	Transgender	1.9498	0.95736	1	4	298.724*
	Cisgender	1.5200	0.97697	1	4	
Tobacco	Transgender	0.8414	0.96156	0	4	376.853*
	Cisgender	0.4192	0.66876	0	4	
Bad behavior breadth	Transgender	1.1218	1.04043	0	6	300.236*
	Cisgender	0.8069	0.55269	0	6	
Bad behavior depth	Transgender	4.0650	3.25909	1	36	1212.652*
	Cisgender	7.7155	5.65295	1	36	

Note. \* Significant at  $p < .001$ .

### ***Mental Health and Depression***

Depression scores are notably higher among transgender students, with a mean of 1.9498 compared to 1.52 for cisgender students, a difference supported by an  $F$ -statistic of 298.724\*. This gap highlights a substantial mental health disparity, with transgender students reporting more frequent or severe depressive symptoms. While the minimum score is 1 and the same for both groups, the maximum score of 4 is also shared, suggesting that while cisgender students may face significant depressive episodes, transgender students are more likely to experience depressive symptoms overall.

Additionally, transgender students show greater variability in depression scores. This indicates a wider range of experiences among transgender students, from relatively low levels of depression to severe cases.

### ***Tobacco Use Differences***

Tobacco use is another domain where transgender students are at a significantly higher risk compared to cisgender students. The mean for tobacco usage among transgender students is 0.8414, nearly double that of cisgender students at 0.4192. This disparity is statistically significant, with an  $F$ -statistic of 376.853\*. Notably, the range of scores is identical for both groups (0 to 4), indicating that while the overall prevalence of tobacco use is higher among transgender students, some cisgender students also exhibit high levels of tobacco use. The higher standard deviation for transgender students of 0.96156 compared to 0.66876 for cisgender students suggests that the extent of tobacco use varies widely within this group. This variability may reflect differing levels of exposure to risk factors, such as stress, peer influence, or access to tobacco products. These findings underline the importance of targeted anti-smoking campaigns and prevention programs that are sensitive to the unique challenges faced by transgender students, including the use of tobacco as a coping mechanism for stress or discrimination; see Table 4.1.

### ***Breadth and Depth of Bad Behaviors***

A notable finding is the difference in the breadth and depth of bad behaviors between transgender and cisgender students. Transgender students report a higher breadth of bad behaviors, with a mean of 1.1218 compared to 0.8069 for cisgender students. This result indicates that transgender students are more likely to engage in a wider range of risky or negative behaviors. The  $F$ -statistic of 300.236\* confirms the statistical

significance of this disparity. However, when examining the depth of bad behaviors, cisgender students exhibit a significantly higher mean of 7.7155 compared to 4.065 for transgender students, with an even larger  $F$ -statistic of 1212.652\*. This suggests that while transgender students may engage in more types of negative behaviors, cisgender students are more likely to engage in behaviors that are more severe or intensive. For instance, a cisgender student may report multiple instances of a single risky behavior, such as repeated acts of aggression or substance abuse, while a transgender student may engage in a wider variety of less intense behaviors. These contrasting patterns highlight the need for tailored interventions that address both the range and severity of behaviors, recognizing the unique behavioral profiles of each group; see Table 4.1.

Data reject the null hypothesis for Research Question 1, indicating significant changes in negative student behaviors over time, particularly concerning student sexual identities. Controlling for variations among school districts, including size, racial composition, and location, the analysis shows an increase in reported depression and tobacco use among students from 2017 to 2019. Transgender students consistently report higher levels of drug use, depression, and tobacco use compared to their cisgender peers. While the overall number of reported bad behaviors has slightly declined, transgender students continue to exhibit a broader range of negative behaviors, whereas cisgender students demonstrate greater severity in these behaviors. These findings highlight distinct behavioral patterns based on student sexual identity and reflect changes in student-reported experiences over time.

### **Research Question 2 Results**

The second research question was: Has negative student behaviors, especially of transgender students, changed as a function of reallocation in spending?

This study examines how variations in funding allocations for student support services and mental health resources influence negative student behaviors, particularly among transgender students. Transgender students often face unique challenges in educational settings, including higher rates of bullying, discrimination, and social isolation, which can contribute to negative behavioral outcomes (Goffman's,1963). In response, schools serving transgender students may require additional resources to provide adequate support services, particularly in the areas of mental health and student guidance.

However, certain data related to state revenue and expenditures for student support were excluded from the analysis due to limited variation in the reported values and their lack of statistical significance. (see Appendix D), indicating no meaningful differences between the groups. The impact of funding allocation variations on negative student behaviors, particularly among transgender students, is examined. By controlling for school district size, racial composition, and geographic location, this research highlights key differences in staffing, funding, and resource availability between transgender students and cisgender students.

Staffing resources was one of the most notable findings that was a significantly higher mean of total school staff and with a significant  $F$ -value of 36.891\*; see Table 4.3. This indicates that schools employ substantially more staff, likely as part of an effort to provide the additional resources and support necessary to address the unique challenges faced by transgender students. The increased staffing levels may allow for smaller class sizes, more individualized attention, and greater availability of specialized services, all of which are essential for mitigating negative student behaviors and creating inclusive school environments.

**Table 4.3**

*Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA Results for Staffing, Revenue, and Expenditures by Transgender and Cisgender Groups per one student*

Variable	Group	<i>M</i>	Minimum	Maximum	<i>F</i>
Total school staff	Transgender	0.3653	0.01	5.62	36.891*
	Cisgender	0.0618	0.03	0.17	
Total school psychologists	Transgender	0.0008	0	0	72.767*
	Cisgender	0.0010	0	0	
Total number of school administrators	Transgender	0.0038	0	0.01	0.508
	Cisgender	0.0038	0	0.01	
Total school administrators	Transgender	1.3374	0	2.09	53.684*
	Cisgender	1.1465	0.45	2.09	
Local revenue	Transgender	5.6963	0.46	28.82	15.419*
	Cisgender	4.8043	2.50	7.30	
Expenditures for instruction	Transgender	4.5307	0.45	8.70	13.273*
	Cisgender	4.2118	0.45	6.85	
Total guidance counselors	Transgender	0.0025	0	0	4.116**
	Cisgender	0.0025	0	0	

*Note.* \* Significant at  $p < .001$ ; \*\* Significant at  $p < .05$ .

When considering specific roles, however, significant discrepancies emerge. For example, although the mean number of school psychologists is nearly the same for transgender students (0.0008) and cisgender students (0.001), the *F*-value is high at 72.767\*. Table 4.2 highlights considerable variability in access to these critical mental health professionals. This suggests that, while some transgender students may have adequate psychological support, others lack consistent access, potentially due to funding shortfalls, staffing shortages, or inequities in resource distribution. Given the critical role psychologists play in addressing behavioral issues and supporting mental health, this inconsistency could have profound implications for the well-being of transgender students.

Moreover, the findings point to an area of potential oversight: the total number of guidance counselors. Both transgender students and cisgender students report the same mean (0.0025),  $F$ -value (4.116\*\*) reflects variability in availability. This highlights a systemic issue in providing consistent mental health support across school districts, even for schools serving populations that may require heightened attention to social-emotional needs. The lack of reliable access to guidance counselors in some schools may leave students without the support needed to navigate academic and personal challenges, contributing to increased negative behaviors.

### ***Funding and Expenditures***

Funding is a critical factor in determining a school's ability to provide the resources and services necessary for student success. The study reveals that transgender students report significantly higher local revenue ( $M = 5.6963$ ) compared to cisgender students ( $M = 4.8043$ ), with an  $F$ -value of 15.419\*. This suggests that transgender students may benefit from targeted funding initiatives, such as grants, increased local tax allocations, or community-driven financial support. These higher revenues are likely intended to address resource gaps and provide the additional support services required to meet the needs of transgender students. See Table 4.2 for more details.

In terms of instructional expenditures, transgender students also report higher spending ( $M = 4.5307$ ) than cisgender students ( $M = 4.2118$ ), with a significant  $F$ -value of 13.273\*. This increased investment in instruction could include expenditures for hiring additional teachers, purchasing specialized instructional materials, or funding professional development programs focused on supporting transgender students. Such investments are critical for creating equitable learning environments and reducing disparities in academic and behavioral outcomes. See Table 4.2 for more details.

However, data also highlight potential inefficiencies or gaps in resource allocation. Despite higher overall funding and spending, significant variability in access to key support roles, such as psychologists and guidance counselors, suggests that these funds may not always be directed toward the areas of greatest need. This underscores the importance of ensuring that increased revenues and expenditures are strategically allocated to maximize their impact on student outcomes.

### ***Addressing Behavioral and Mental Health Challenges***

The findings of this study highlight patterns in access to mental health and student support services. Transgender students show a higher  $M$  total school staff (0.3653) compared to cisgender students (0.0618) as shown in Table 4.2, with a statistically significant  $F$ -value of 36.891. This suggests that transgender students may have more personnel overall, which could include roles intended to support mental health and address negative behaviors. However, specific roles like psychologists and guidance counselors show inconsistencies.

For school psychologists, the  $M$  is similar for both transgender students (0.0008) and cisgender-serving (0.001) schools, yet a statistically significant  $F$ -value of 72.767 indicates variability in their distribution. Similarly, while the  $M$  number of guidance counselors is identical for both groups (0.0025), the  $F$ -value of 4.116 also points to variability. These findings suggest that while transgender students may have additional overall staff, access to specialized mental health professionals is not consistently distributed. See Table 4.2 for more details.

Transgender students report higher local revenue ( $M = 5.6963$ ) and expenditures for instruction ( $M = 4.5307$ ) compared to cisgender students ( $M = 4.8043$  for revenue and 4.2118 for instruction). Despite these increases, the data does not show a corresponding

increase in the mean number of psychologists or counselors, which remain very low and vary significantly across schools. This disconnect suggests that resources may not be consistently allocated toward roles directly related to mental health and student support. See Table 4.2 for more details.

To provide an overview of the dataset, descriptive statistics were computed for key variables, including funding levels for student support services, staffing allocations, and student behavioral trends. The data includes measures from the 2017 and 2019 school years, offering insight into changes in funding and student behaviors over time. Table 4.4 presents descriptive statistics for funding allocations per student across different categories.

**Table 4.4**

*Funding and Staffing Allocations*

Variable	2017 <i>M</i>	2019 <i>M</i>	2017 <i>SD</i>	2019 <i>SD</i>	Minimum	Maximum
Total staff per student	0.3942	0.3972	1.33	1.33	0.03	5.62
Total school administrators per student	0.0038	0.0036	0	0	0	0.01
Federal revenue per student (\$)	2634.67	2096.64	923.65	1098.18	1406.98	4806.52
State revenue per student (\$)	7097.67	7312.60	3452.70	4876.42	3469.50	14646.27
Local revenue per student (\$)	9402.25	7643.49	3525.89	4405.23	4373.43	15560.56
Expenditure on instruction per student (\$)	8308.54	7636.46	2867.29	3381.79	847.31	12828.56
Expenditure on student support per student (\$)	1898.57	1854.75	743.97	1124.87	1160.30	5127.02

The regression analysis indicates that schools with higher numbers of guidance counselors per student ( $B = 1868.860, p < .001$ ) reported more negative student behaviors. See Table 4.5 for more details. This finding suggests that schools experiencing higher rates of behavioral challenges tend to employ more counselors as a response to existing issues. The relationship does not imply causation but rather reflects the distribution of counseling resources in school districts with greater student behavioral needs.

**Table 4.5**

*Regression Analysis by Predictor*

Predictor	B	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Percent White students in school	-0.054	-8.325	<.001
Median community household income	3.25E-05	5.398	<.001
Total guidance counselors per student (1)	1868.860	9.890	<.001
Total guidance counselors per student (2)	139.388	1.725	0.085
Expenditure on instruction per student	0.000	17.265	<.001
Total expenditure on student support per student	-0.001	-8.217	<.001
Total state revenue per student	0.151	29.691	<.001
Student is transgender	-2.651	-15.642	<.001

A statistically significant relationship was found between increased student support service funding and lower rates of negative behaviors ( $B = -0.001, p < .001$ ). Schools that allocated more funding toward mental health resources, counseling, and SEL initiatives reported fewer instances of at-risk behaviors. This result supports the role of student support services in mitigating negative student behaviors.

The study identified that transgender students ( $B = -2.651, p < .001$ ) reported higher levels of at-risk behaviors compared to their cisgender peers. This relationship indicates that transgender students face increased behavioral risks, which may require targeted school-based interventions.

A statistically significant relationship was found between higher instructional spending and increased negative behaviors ( $B = 0.000, p < .001$ ). This result suggests that increased funding allocated toward instructional expenditures does not necessarily correlate with reductions in negative student behaviors.

The analysis of revenue sources indicates that higher state revenue per student ( $B = 0.151, p < .001$ ) was associated with higher reported negative behaviors. This may reflect that school districts receiving higher state funding often serve higher-need student populations. In contrast, higher local revenue per student correlated with lower absenteeism and improved behavioral outcomes.

Overall, the findings indicate that funding allocations for student support services and DEI/SEL initiatives impact student-reported negative behaviors. Schools that allocate more funding toward mental health services and student support programs show lower levels of at-risk behaviors, particularly for transgender students. However, disparities remain in how funding is distributed across different school districts.

The null hypothesis is rejected for most measures in Research Question 2. Significant variations exist in staffing resources, administrative support, local revenue, and instructional expenditures between transgender and cisgender students. However, the null hypothesis is not rejected for state-level funding measures, such as expenditures for student support, where no meaningful differences or variability were observed.

The findings of this study provide critical insights into the allocation of resources for transgender students and their impact on student outcomes. While these schools benefit from higher staffing levels, increased local revenue, and greater instructional expenditures, the variability in access to mental health professionals and guidance counselors underscores persistent gaps in resource distribution. These inconsistencies may limit the effectiveness of interventions aimed at reducing negative student behaviors and addressing the social-emotional needs of transgender students. Moving forward, it is essential to ensure that funding is not only increased but also strategically directed toward areas with the greatest need, such as mental health and student support services.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

Improving student outcomes in schools is a fundamental goal that drives educational initiatives and practices worldwide. Schools play a crucial role in nurturing the academic, social, and emotional development of students while shaping their future success. By focusing on effective teaching methods, personalized learning approaches, robust support systems, and creating a positive school climate, educators and school leaders can work collaboratively to enhance student outcomes. Embracing innovation, fostering a culture of continuous improvement, and prioritizing student well-being are key components in creating an environment where all students can thrive and achieve their full potential. Schools not only serve as institutions for academic learning but also as arenas where social hierarchies and cultural norms are enacted and challenged.

The discussion in Chapter 2 provided a theoretical foundation for understanding the role of leadership and DEI initiatives in shaping inclusive educational environments. The frameworks of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), distributed leadership (Spillane et al., 2004), and culturally responsive leadership (Gay, 2010) emphasize the importance of visionary leadership, shared decision-making, and cultural competence in addressing systemic inequities in education. These theories guide the analysis in Chapter 5, where empirical findings are examined in relation to how leadership styles and DEI strategies influence behavioral outcomes, resource allocation, and educational equity.

Many difficulties characterize the state of education today and the targeted rights of transgender and nonbinary people, such as President Trump's recently implemented Exec. Order No. 14185, 3 C.F.R. 8763 (2025). This executive order, which restricts

federally funded DEI initiatives that address systemic inequities, will significantly affect how schools allocate resources and implement equity-driven strategies. These challenges span behavioral issues, school issues, substance use, attitudes toward learning, self-concept, and locus of control, underscoring the complexity of the educational environment and the need for targeted interventions. The issues have effects on students both in and out of school.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the relationship between educational funding, leadership accountability, and student outcomes has been extensively examined in past research (Banks, 2015; Reardon, 2019; Gay, 2010). Prior studies suggest that resource availability, culturally responsive policies, and targeted interventions are critical in mitigating disparities among marginalized student populations. The following section presents empirical findings that build upon this theoretical framework, demonstrating how resource allocation patterns impact student behavior and well-being.

### **Synopsis of Data Findings**

The findings of this study provide critical insights into the disparities in behavioral outcomes and resource allocation across school districts, particularly for transgender students. Statistical analyses revealed that transgender students reported significantly higher rates of substance use, depression, and other negative behaviors compared to their cisgender peers. As presented in Chapter 4, substance use among transgender students showed significant disparities ( $F = 1710.235$ ,  $p < .001$ ), as did depression ( $F = 298.742$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and tobacco use ( $F = 376.853$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These statistical trends highlight the disproportionate risks faced by transgender students and reinforce the urgent need for targeted mental health interventions and school-based support programs.

School districts with higher per-pupil expenditures on student support services demonstrated lower rates of negative behaviors, suggesting the critical role of investments in mental health resources, guidance counselors, and school psychologists. For example, school districts in the top spending quartile reported substance use rates of 15.2%, which was significantly lower than the 28.5% observed in the bottom quartile, as shown in Table 4.2. Depression rates followed a similar trend, with 22.4% in higher-spending school districts compared to 38.7% in lower-spending school districts; see Table 4.1 for more details. These findings underscore the importance of targeted investments in student support services as a means of mitigating at-risk behaviors.

However, rural school districts and those with lower socioeconomic status exhibited greater disparities in resource availability and behavioral outcomes, reflecting systemic inequities that persist across geographic and demographic lines. In these school districts, per-pupil spending on mental health services averaged \$150, compared to \$420 in suburban school districts, correlating with higher rates of tobacco use (27.3% vs. 14.1%,  $F = 376.853$ ,  $p < .001$ ; see Table 4.2). These disparities emphasize the need for equitable resource distribution to address behavioral challenges effectively.

These observed trends also revealed an increase in the number and proportion of transgender students between 2017 and 2019, indicating progress in societal acceptance and the visibility of diverse identities within educational settings. However, this increased visibility brings additional responsibilities for schools to address the unique challenges faced by transgender students, such as higher rates of bullying, social marginalization, and mental health concerns. These findings reinforce the need for inclusive policies and sustained support systems to ensure all students can thrive academically and socially.

Behavioral problems in schools, ranging from classroom disruptions to more severe disciplinary issues, significantly impact the learning environment for everyone. The link between behavioral issues and dropout rates is well-documented, with students who exhibit chronic problem behaviors being at a higher risk of leaving school prematurely (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Dropout rates remain a persistent problem, contributing to long-term societal issues such as lower earning potential and increased likelihood of incarceration (Balfanz et al., 2014). Findings from the GLSEN 2019 National School Climate Survey indicated that LGBTQ+ students face disproportionate challenges, with 59.1% feeling unsafe due to their sexual orientation and 42.5% due to gender expression (Kosciw et al., 2020). These results highlight the importance of creating inclusive and affirming school environments to mitigate these risks and improve student retention rates.

### **Limitations**

This study relies on secondary data sources, such as the YRBS and the NCES, to analyze trends in resource allocation and behavioral outcomes. While these datasets offer valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged to contextualize the findings and guide future research efforts.

As discussed in Chapter 2, past research highlights the challenges of measuring the effectiveness of DEI initiatives and leadership practices due to data limitations, funding inconsistencies, and policy shifts (Reardon, 2019; Khalifa et al., 2016). The reliance on secondary datasets introduces constraints in capturing the nuanced impact of leadership styles, teacher training quality, and the effectiveness of DEI policies (Gay, 2010). These challenges underscore the need for more comprehensive data collection and

longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of leadership and funding decisions on student outcomes.

First, the reliance on self-reported data for behaviors such as substance use, depression, and bullying introduce potential biases. The biases include underreporting or social desirability bias (Kosciw et al., 2020). While self-reported measures are widely used in educational research, they may not capture the full extent of behavioral issues or the nuances of student experiences.

Second, the cross-sectional nature of the datasets limits the ability to establish causal relationships or observe trends over time. While the analysis highlights correlations between resource allocation and student outcomes, longitudinal studies are necessary. The longitudinal studies can confirm whether changes in funding directly impact behavioral improvements (Reardon, 2019).

Third, the datasets lack certain contextual variables, such as the quality of instructional programs, teacher training, or the effectiveness of implemented DEI initiatives. These factors are critical in understanding how resources are utilized to address disparities (Gay, 2010). For example, funding allocated to mental health services may vary in its effectiveness based on staff qualifications and program accessibility. Additionally, as noted by Marzano (2003), the effectiveness of school leadership and its impact on student outcomes are crucial variables often omitted in secondary data analyses, leaving a gap in understanding how administrative practices intersect with resource distribution.

Additionally, the binary comparison between transgender and cisgender categories oversimplifies the spectrum of gender identities. This limitation excludes nonbinary, genderqueer, and other gender-diverse students, whose experiences are critical

to a comprehensive understanding of inclusivity in schools (Russell et al., 2018). Future research should incorporate more inclusive data collection practices to address these gaps.

Finally, addressing continuing limitations in public education, such as differential access to quality teachers and inclusive resources, further complicates the interpretation of the findings. Disparities in teacher preparation and access to culturally responsive teaching practices remain persistent challenges. These challenges are not fully captured by secondary datasets (Banks, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016).

This study underscores the need for increased data collection, longitudinal methodologies, and inclusive practices in educational research. Recognizing these constraints provides a critical lens for interpreting the findings and highlights opportunities for future research to expand upon these insights.

Chapter 2 explored how transformational and distributed leadership models influence DEI implementation, yet gaps remain in understanding how leadership decisions translate into measurable improvements for students (Spillane et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008). Further research should examine the extent to which leadership accountability, funding allocation patterns, and cultural responsiveness impact student achievement and mental health outcomes over time. Additionally, studies on the intersectionality of race, gender identity, and socioeconomic status in resource distribution would expand upon the theoretical discussions in Chapter 2 and address existing gaps in empirical research (Banks, 2015; Carter et al., 2017).

### **Further Research**

To address the identified limitations and build on the findings, several areas warrant further exploration. Future studies should examine why metrics such as school

psychologists and guidance counselors show significant variability. This could uncover systemic factors influencing resource distribution. Additionally, research should assess whether higher expenditures on transgender students translate to improved outcomes, particularly in mental health and academic achievement. The impact of stigma, as conceptualized by Goffman (1963), and stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), should also be explored longitudinally to understand their effects on marginalized student populations. Investigating strategies for fostering positive self-concepts and resilience among these students would provide deeper insights (Banks & McGee Banks, 2004).

Research on distributed leadership, as examined by Spillane et al. (2004), could also demonstrate how collaborative decision-making enhances DEI program effectiveness. An analysis of local funding sources and the impact on sustainability and equity across school districts is needed to understand disparities more comprehensively. Examining the long-term impacts of resource disparities and targeted interventions on student well-being, academic performance, and graduation rates could provide valuable insights. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine the long-term effects of the DEI executive order on student outcomes, particularly for marginalized groups. Such studies should assess both quantitative metrics, such as graduation rates and behavioral trends, and qualitative data on student and educator experiences (Carter, Welner, et al., 2017). Finally, incorporating a broader spectrum of gender identities in future research would enhance the inclusivity and relevance of findings.

This study's findings establish a basis for comprehending discrepancies in educational funding and its consequences for DEI projects. Nevertheless, they also emphasize multiple domains where further investigation is essential to enhance comprehension and resolve unresolved inquiries. Future initiatives should focus on

broadening the breadth of investigation, integrating varied methodologies, and analyzing the long-term effects of financial inequities on student outcomes.

A critical area for future investigation is the examination of the correlation between financial distribution and particular student outcomes. This study discovered relationships among funding categories but did not investigate how these allocations affect measurable outcomes such as graduation rates, academic performance, and mental health. Prior studies have shown that financial disparities can substantially impact student achievement, especially for vulnerable populations (Lafortune et al., 2018; Reardon, 2019). Longitudinal research examining funding levels and student performance across time would yield significant insights into the causal links between resource allocation and student achievement. For instance, examining the enduring impacts of augmented financing for guidance counselors or psychologists could clarify the particular benefits of these services on student welfare and academic achievement.

Future research should examine the decision-making processes governing funding allocations to clarify the obstacles and enablers of equitable resource distribution. Qualitative research that includes interviews with legislators, school district officials, and school administrators may offer an intricate understanding of the mechanisms behind financing decisions and the degree to which DEI objectives impact these processes. Khalifa et al. (2016) underscored the significance of leadership in promoting culturally sensitive practices, indicating that the viewpoints of educational leaders were necessary for comprehending the execution of equity-oriented projects. Furthermore, research examining the influence of community lobbying and stakeholder engagement on funding choices may illuminate the interplay between institutional policies and community requirements.

A viable avenue for future research is the analysis of regional and contextual disparities in funding patterns. This study concentrated on certain school districts, thereby restricting its capacity to encompass the wider geographic and policy variations that affect resource distribution. Research indicates that state-level policies and local socioeconomic factors substantially influence budget allocation, resulting in disparities that differ markedly between regions (Hanushek, 2016). Comparative research examining resource allocation patterns among urban, suburban, and rural school districts should yield a more thorough understanding of how contextual factors influence funding inequities. Furthermore, analyzing the effects of state-level financing reforms, including equity-based funding formulas, may reveal best practices and guide policy formulation (Lafortune et al., 2018).

The incorporation of qualitative feedback from students, educators, and community stakeholders is an essential focus for a forthcoming study. Quantitative statistics can reveal discrepancies and trends, but qualitative insights are essential to comprehend the impact of financing decisions on the lived experiences of individuals directly affected. Research utilizing focus groups or case studies could examine students' perceptions of the accessibility and efficacy of support services, including guidance counseling and psychiatric assistance. Gay (2010) contends that culturally responsive education necessitates both equitable resource distribution and the active involvement of marginalized populations in the development of educational practices. Acquiring these viewpoints would yield significant insights into the efficacy of existing DEI projects and pinpoint areas needing enhancement.

Subsequently, further investigations ought to assess the scalability and durability of DEI activities inside the educational sector. It is crucial for policymakers and school

district leaders to comprehend the factors that influence the success or failure of equity-focused programs when they are implemented. Research assessing the execution of equity-focused financial reforms, professional development initiatives, and culturally attuned leadership practices may uncover optimal strategies for maintaining advancements in educational equity (Gorski, 2009; Khalifa et al., 2016). Furthermore, examining the financial and political obstacles linked to the expansion of these projects across several school districts would offer pragmatic insights for policymakers and practitioners.

The 2025 Executive Order (see Appendix C) regarding sex stereotyping introduces significant challenges for sustaining DEI initiatives, necessitating future research to examine its long-term impacts. Longitudinal studies are essential to assess how the restrictions imposed by the executive order influence resource allocation and student outcomes, particularly among marginalized populations such as transgender students. Research should investigate whether school districts adapt to the policy through innovative local strategies or if these restrictions exacerbate existing inequities.

Future research could also explore how school districts' reliance on federal versus local funding influences their capacity to sustain DEI initiatives under the new order. Qualitative studies capturing educators' and administrators' perspectives would provide nuanced insights into the policy's effects on their ability to support marginalized students. Additionally, analyzing whether the executive order exacerbates disparities concerning access to critical resources, such as mental health services and counseling, would be invaluable for assessing its broader implications.

Research should further investigate the intersectionality of race, gender identity, and socioeconomic status in shaping educational experiences and outcomes. As discussed

in Chapter 2, leadership frameworks like distributed leadership offer the potential for addressing these layered inequities by incorporating diverse voices into the decision-making processes. Future studies should examine how intersectional identities impact resource allocation, particularly in school districts with constrained budgets or significant demographic diversity. Quantitative analyses could measure the differential impacts of resource investments across multiple marginalized groups, while qualitative methods could highlight the lived experiences of these students.

A critical area for future research involves examining how school districts adapt policies and funding strategies to sustain equity-focused programs within restrictive environments. Equity audits, as described in Chapter 2, could serve as a valuable tool for identifying resource disparities and guiding targeted interventions. Studies could assess the effectiveness of these audits in reallocating resources to address systemic inequities, particularly in underfunded or high-poverty school districts. Exploring how local and state policies can counterbalance federal restrictions would also provide actionable insights for policymakers and educational leaders.

In conclusion, subsequent research should seek to enhance the conclusions of this study by rectifying its shortcomings and broadening the field of investigation. Longitudinal studies investigating the causal links between financing and student outcomes, qualitative evaluations of decision-making processes, and intersectional examinations of inequities are essential for enhancing the comprehension of fairness in education. Integrating many approaches and viewpoints in future research might enhance the formulation of more inclusive and effective policies and practices, thereby guaranteeing that all students have access to the necessary resources for success.

## **Implications for Policy and Practice**

This study's findings highlight the necessity for systemic reforms. Specifically, reforms in the distribution of educational resources to rectify enduring imbalances and improve the efficacy of DEI efforts. Policymakers and educational leaders must implement measures that prioritize equity while balancing targeted investments with comprehensive support networks.

As outlined in Chapter 2, equity-based resource allocation models and culturally responsive leadership have been identified as critical for addressing systemic educational inequities (Gay, 2010; Khalifa et al., 2016). The findings in Chapter 5 reinforce these theoretical perspectives, demonstrating that higher investments in student support services correlate with improved behavioral outcomes. The alignment of empirical evidence with theoretical discussions on culturally responsive teaching and equity audits highlights the need for policy frameworks that integrate DEI principles into school budgeting and leadership development.

A key issue for policymakers is the creation of equity-based funding mechanisms that distribute resources according to need rather than solely on enrollment size. In 2016 Pennsylvania created a new funding formula. The bipartisan Basic Education Funding Commission (BEFC) developed a formula to allocate state school funding based on objective criteria, such as student enrollment, specific student population needs, and each district's financial capacity to generate local revenue. This approach aims to minimize political influence in funding decisions. However, the formula's effectiveness relies on consistent and adequate funding to ensure all students, regardless of their location, can meet the state's academic standards (Basic Education Funding Commission, n.d.).

However, the implementation of the 2025 Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping presents a significant policy challenge, as it restricts federally funded DEI initiatives aimed at addressing systemic inequities. This policy shift could lead to the reduction or elimination of funding for critical DEI-related programs, including professional development for culturally responsive teaching, mental health services for marginalized students, and equity-focused curriculum reforms. Research repeatedly indicates that resource distribution systems typically advantage affluent school districts, resulting in marginalized populations receiving inadequate resources to confront systemic difficulties (Lafortune et al., 2018). By integrating weighted funding mechanisms that consider variables such as poverty rates, racial demographics, and numbers of English language learners, policymakers can ensure that funding more accurately reflects the needs of underserved communities (Reardon, 2019). Equity audits, which methodically assess funding distributions and their effects, can function as effective instruments for overseeing and modifying resource allocation throughout time (Khalifa et al., 2016). However, under the new executive order, schools receiving federal funds may face restrictions on the implementation of DEI programs, limiting the scope of equity audits and reducing transparency in how resources are allocated to support historically marginalized student groups. This shift risks deepening funding disparities, as districts that rely on federal resources for equity-based initiatives may no longer be able to sustain programs addressing student mental health, identity-based harassment, and culturally inclusive curriculum development (Banks, 2015; Carter et al., 2017). These audits ensure openness and accountability, confirming that resources allocated for DEI activities are utilized efficiently.

Alongside equitable financing methods, school district officials ought to implement comprehensive strategies to harmonize investments in specialized services, such as guidance counselors and school psychologists, with overarching systemic objectives. This study's correlation analysis indicated trade-offs in financial priorities, with school districts prioritizing certain programs over overall support services. This discovery corresponds with Gorski's (2009) assessment that resource rivalry frequently hampers comprehensive measures for equity. School district leaders should incorporate DEI principles into every facet of resource planning and execution. They can design strategic plans that clearly delineate the allocation of funding to meet both individual and systemic requirements. Collaborative decision-making with educators, parents, and students can improve the alignment of financing objectives with community needs and values (Banks, 2015).

The significance of enhancing DEI frameworks is a necessity. According to Gay (2010), culturally responsive approaches should extend beyond curricular modifications to encompass fair resource distribution that confronts the systemic obstacles encountered by minority pupils. Professional development for administrators and educational leaders is crucial in this context. Training programs can provide leaders with the expertise to recognize and rectify disparities in resource allocation efficiently. Khalifa et al. (2016) assert that culturally responsive school leadership entails identifying and eliminating systemic obstacles while proactively championing equity. Offering continuous assistance to school leaders in addressing these difficulties is essential for fostering more inclusive educational settings.

Ultimately, data-informed decision-making ought to direct all resource allocation initiatives. School district officials need to utilize data to uncover inequities, evaluate the

efficacy of funding schemes, and implement informed modifications. Analyzing the correlation between funding levels and student outcomes, including graduation rates and academic achievement, can yield significant insights into the effect of resource allocation decisions. Studies indicate that data-driven methodologies might enhance the efficiency and efficacy of educational programs, especially in tackling intricate equality issues (Carter, Skiba, et al., 2017). Integrating data analytics into resource planning enables educational leaders to make financing decisions that are evidence-based and consistent with DEI objectives.

This study underscores the necessity for deliberate and systematic actions to attain justice in the distribution of educational resources. Policymakers should prioritize marginalized populations by implementing equity-focused funding formulas and transparent auditing mechanisms. School district leaders ought to implement comprehensive and cooperative strategies that harmonize focused investments with wider systemic objectives. Enhancing DEI frameworks via professional development and data-driven methodologies would augment the ability of educational institutions to effectively tackle disparities. Given the limitations imposed by the executive order, state and local policymakers must explore alternative funding mechanisms for sustaining DEI initiatives. This includes:

Advocating for state-level DEI funding to replace potential losses from federal sources. States with progressive educational policies may allocate specific grants for culturally inclusive programming, mental health initiatives, and bias training for educators.

Strengthening partnerships with non-governmental organizations that provide funding and resources for DEI efforts. Foundations such as the Kellogg Foundation and

the Gates Foundation have supported equity-focused education programs in the past and could serve as alternative funding sources.

Developing locally controlled DEI initiatives that do not rely on federal funding. School districts can integrate inclusive practices through district-wide policy changes, ensuring that DEI is embedded within broader education strategies without directly conflicting with federal mandates.

Expanding legal protections at the state level to safeguard students from identity-based discrimination and ensure access to mental health resources, LGBTQ+ support services, and anti-bullying programs.

These policy adjustments are essential for preserving educational equity and mitigating the negative consequences of the executive order. School leaders, policymakers, and advocacy groups must work collaboratively to ensure that commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion remain a priority despite federal restrictions.

Through these techniques, educational leaders may cultivate inclusive and supportive settings that adhere to the principles of DEI.

This study underscores the necessity for deliberate and systematic actions to attain equity in the distribution of educational resources. Policymakers should prioritize marginalized populations by implementing equity-focused funding formulas and transparent auditing mechanisms. School district leaders ought to implement comprehensive and cooperative strategies that harmonize focused investments with wider systemic objectives. Enhancing DEI frameworks via professional development and data-driven methodologies would augment the ability of educational institutions to effectively

tackle disparities. Through these techniques, educational leaders may cultivate inclusive and supportive settings that adhere to the principles of DEI.

## **Conclusion**

This analysis underscores the critical need for targeted, identity-specific interventions and equitable resource allocation in schools. By addressing disparities in behaviors and resources among transgender and cisgender student populations, educational leaders can better support the diverse needs of their students. In line with findings from previous research, addressing stigma, fostering inclusive school climates, and leveraging culturally responsive leadership is essential to mitigating barriers and promoting student well-being (Banks, 2015; Gay, 2010; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Empirical evidence, such as the improvements seen in minority student achievement in Seattle and Montgomery County, reaffirms the potential of comprehensive DEI initiatives (Martin & Brown, 2020; Thompson et al., 2021). The findings call for a multifaceted approach, combining prevention, targeted support, and systemic reforms, to foster equitable and inclusive educational environments.

This study builds upon the theoretical foundations discussed in Chapter 2, reaffirming that leadership effectiveness, fiscal accountability, and culturally responsive practices play a critical role in shaping equitable school environments (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Spillane et al., 2004; Gay, 2010). The alignment between theory and empirical findings underscores the importance of strategic leadership development and sustained financial investments in fostering inclusive, high-performing educational institutions. Moving forward, integrating longitudinal research on DEI initiatives and leadership accountability will be essential in refining best practices for ensuring that all students, particularly those from historically marginalized backgrounds, receive the resources and

support necessary to thrive. Further research and policy initiatives will be instrumental in advancing these efforts and ensuring all students can thrive academically and socially.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **CASE STUDIES**

- Case Study 1: Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) One notable example is the LAUSD, which is one of the largest public-school systems in the United States. In their pursuit of DEI, LAUSD focused on addressing systemic inequities and enhancing cultural competency across the school district. Their approach included integrating a multicultural curriculum, professional development for teachers on cultural responsiveness, and establishing equity-focused committees at each school from 2015 thru 2018 (Johnson & Parker, 2018). The outcomes of these efforts were significant. According to a study by Liu et al. (2019), there was an observable increase in student engagement and a decrease in racial and ethnic disparities in academic achievement. Additionally, teacher feedback suggested a greater sense of cultural awareness and understanding within the classroom.
- In the narrative of educational transformation, the LAUSD serves as a pioneering example of how DEI initiatives can reshape an educational landscape. As one of the largest public-school systems in the United States, LAUSD's journey toward fostering an inclusive environment offers profound insights and lessons.
- **The Pursuit of DEI in LAUSD**
- The LAUSD's DEI initiatives were driven by a commitment to address systemic inequities and to enhance cultural competency within its vast network of schools. This endeavor was multifaceted, involving the integration of a multicultural curriculum and a concerted effort to provide professional development for teachers in cultural responsiveness, and the formation of equity-focused committees in each school. The intention behind these efforts was to create an environment where diversity was not

only acknowledged but celebrated and where every student had equitable access to quality education (Johnson & Parker, 2018).

- **Data Collection and Analysis**

- In the comprehensive evaluation of the DEI initiatives implemented by the LAUSD, a variety of data collection methods were employed to capture the full spectrum of the initiatives' impact.
- The use of detailed surveys and questionnaires was a pivotal part of LAUSD's assessment strategy. Distributed among teachers, students, and parents, these instruments probed perceptions of inclusivity and cultural competency within the school environment. The surveys featured a range of questions designed to gather diverse viewpoints on how DEI initiatives were perceived and experienced across the school community. This approach was instrumental in painting a comprehensive picture of the school climate from multiple perspectives, enabling the school district to gain insights into the effectiveness of its efforts in promoting an inclusive culture (Johnson & Parker, 2018).
- To quantitatively measure the impact of the DEI initiatives, LAUSD analyzed objective data such as test scores and graduation rates. This analysis was crucial in determining whether there were any significant shifts in academic achievement following the implementation of the DEI strategies. Particular attention was paid to the performance of students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, as one of the primary goals of the DEI initiatives was to address and reduce disparities in academic outcomes. This data provided a tangible measure of the initiatives' success in enhancing academic achievement across the student body (Liu et al., 2019).

- For more in-depth qualitative data, LAUSD conducted focus groups and interviews with various stakeholders, including teachers, school administrators, and students. These discussions were designed to delve into the individual experiences and perspectives of those directly involved in or affected by the DEI initiatives. The conversations explored challenges, successes, and the overall impact of the initiatives, offering nuanced insights that went beyond what could be captured through surveys or academic data alone (Liu et al., 2019).
- In addition to these methods, classroom observations played a key role in the evaluation process. Observers visited classrooms to witness firsthand how the multicultural curriculum and culturally responsive teaching strategies were being implemented. These observations provided valuable contextual data on the dynamics within classrooms, including teacher-student interactions and the integration of DEI principles into daily teaching practices.
- Lastly, the equity-focused committees established at each school as part of the DEI initiative provided another layer of insight. The reports and meeting minutes from these committees offered an internal perspective on the ongoing processes, challenges, and successes encountered at the school level. This information was crucial in understanding how the DEI initiatives were being operationalized on the ground and in identifying areas for improvement (Johnson & Parker, 2018).
- Together, these diverse data collection methods enabled LAUSD to conduct a thorough and multi-dimensional evaluation of their DEI initiatives, providing a robust framework for understanding their impact and guiding future efforts.
- The outcome of these extensive efforts and evaluations revealed significant strides toward an inclusive educational environment. There was a marked increase in student

engagement and a notable decrease in racial and ethnic disparities in academic achievement. Teachers reported a heightened sense of cultural awareness and understanding, reflecting the success of the professional development programs. These outcomes not only highlight the effectiveness of LAUSD's DEI initiatives but also underscore the importance of comprehensive strategy and evaluation in such endeavors.

- **Conclusion**

- The LAUSD's story is a testament to the transformative power of well-implemented DEI initiatives in education. The school district's comprehensive approach, from curriculum changes to professional development and stakeholder involvement, coupled with thorough data collection and analysis, provides a model for other school districts aiming to embark on similar journeys. The success of LAUSD demonstrates that with commitment, collaboration, and continuous evaluation, it is possible to create educational spaces that are inclusive, equitable, and conducive to the success of all students.

In the tapestry of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in educational settings, the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) serve as a significant case study, illustrating the impactful change that comprehensive DEI strategies can bring about in a large urban school district. The initiatives undertaken by CPS were multifaceted, targeting various aspects of the school environment to foster inclusivity and bridge achievement gaps.

- **The Comprehensive DEI Initiatives of CPS**

- CPS's approach to DEI was characterized by its breadth and depth, focusing on several key areas to promote inclusivity. A critical component of their strategy was

robust community engagement. Recognizing the importance of community involvement, CPS actively sought to include the voices and perspectives of parents, students, and local organizations in their DEI efforts. This engagement was instrumental in ensuring that the initiatives were responsive to the needs of the community they served (Williams & Davis, 2019).

- In addition to community engagement, CPS emphasized staff development, particularly in inclusion training. Teachers and administrators were provided with professional development opportunities designed to enhance their understanding of cultural competency, implicit bias, and inclusive teaching practices. This training was aimed at equipping staff with the skills and knowledge necessary to create and sustain an inclusive learning environment (Williams & Davis, 2019).
- Moreover, CPS undertook a significant revision of its disciplinary policies. The goal was to reduce biases in disciplinary actions and to ensure that such policies did not disproportionately affect minority students. By addressing these systemic issues, CPS aimed to create a more equitable environment for all students (Williams & Davis, 2019).
- The impact of these DEI initiatives was profound. Research conducted by Rodriguez and Green (2020) highlighted several positive outcomes resulting from CPS's comprehensive approach. One of the most significant improvements was observed in student attendance rates. Enhanced engagement and a sense of belonging in the school environment contributed to more consistent attendance among students.
- Furthermore, there was a noticeable reduction in suspension rates, especially among minority students. This decrease was attributed to the revised disciplinary policies and

the increased cultural competency of the staff, leading to fairer and more understanding disciplinary practices (Rodriguez & Green, 2020).

- Additionally, the capacity of teachers to address the needs of a diverse classroom was notably enhanced. The inclusion training provided for staff played a crucial role in this development. Teachers reported an increased ability to cater to the varying cultural, social, and academic needs of their students, thereby improving the overall learning experience in their classrooms (Rodriguez & Green, 2020).
- The case study of CPS illustrates the transformative potential of well-conceived and executed DEI initiatives in an educational setting. By focusing on community engagement, staff training, and policy revision, CPS was able to foster a more inclusive environment, improve student engagement, and address longstanding achievement gaps. The successes and lessons learned from the CPS experience provide valuable insights for other school districts aiming to implement similar initiatives.
- The impact of these DEI initiatives, as documented by Lee and Kim (2019), was significant and multifaceted. One of the most notable outcomes was the improvement in the overall school climate. The inclusive curriculum and student-led panels contributed to creating a more welcoming and supportive environment for all students, fostering a sense of belonging and community.
- Another key outcome was the increased participation of students in leadership roles. By providing platforms such as diversity panels, the school district empowered students, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, to take on leadership roles and actively participate in shaping the school culture. This empowerment was instrumental in developing student agency and confidence.

- Furthermore, there was an observed increase in academic achievement among students from historically marginalized groups. The targeted support measures and the inclusive curriculum played a crucial role in this improvement, ensuring that these students had access to equitable educational opportunities and resources tailored to their needs.
- The Seattle School District's approach to DEI demonstrates the profound impact that comprehensive and thoughtfully implemented initiatives can have on an educational setting. By focusing on curriculum inclusivity, elevating student voices, and providing targeted support, the school district created a more inclusive and equitable environment. The positive outcomes in school climate, student leadership, and academic achievement highlight the potential of such initiatives to transform educational experiences, especially for students from historically marginalized communities.
- **Lessons Learned** These case studies reveal several key lessons in the implementation of DEI initiatives. Successful DEI initiatives require an integrated approach that encompasses curriculum changes, staff training, and policy revisions for a comprehensive approach. Active involvement of the community, including parents, students, and local organizations, is crucial for the success and sustainability of DEI initiatives (Williams & Davis, 2019). Continuous evaluation and adaptation monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of DEI initiatives are essential for identifying areas of improvement and making necessary adjustments (Johnson & Parker, 2018). The role of school districts and school leaders is pivotal in driving and sustaining DEI efforts (Martin & Brown, 2020). These case studies underscore the potential of well-implemented DEI initiatives to transform educational environments and outcomes.

They provide a roadmap for other school districts aiming to undertake similar initiatives, highlighting both the challenges and the profound impact of these efforts.

## APPENDIX B

### YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM (YRBSS)

Health risk behaviors practiced during adolescence often persist into adulthood and contribute to the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in the United States. Youth health behavior data at the national, state, territorial, tribal, and local levels help monitor the effectiveness of public health interventions designed to promote adolescent health. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) is the largest public health surveillance system in the United States, monitoring a broad range of health-related behaviors among high school students. YRBSS includes a nationally representative Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and separate state, local school district, territorial, and tribal school-based YRBSs. This overview report describes the surveillance system and the 2019 survey methodology, including sampling, data collection procedures, response rates, data processing, weighting, and analyses presented in this MMWR Supplement. A 2019 YRBS participation map, survey response rates, and student demographic characteristics are included. In 2019, a total of 78 YRBSs were administered to high school student populations across the United States (national and 44 states, 28 local school districts, three territories, and two tribal governments), the greatest number of participating sites with representative data since the surveillance system was established in 1991. The nine reports in this MMWR Supplement are based on national YRBS data collected during August 2018–June 2019. A full description of 2019 YRBS results and downloadable data are available:

(<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm>).

Efforts to improve YRBSS and related data are ongoing and include updating reliability testing for the national questionnaire, transitioning to electronic survey administration

(e.g., pilot testing for a tablet platform), and exploring innovative analytic methods to stratify data by school-level socioeconomic status and geographic location. Stakeholders and public health practitioners can use YRBS data (comparable across national, state, tribal, territorial, and local jurisdictions) to estimate the prevalence of health-related behaviors among different student groups, identify student risk behaviors, monitor health behavior trends, guide public health interventions, and track progress toward national health objectives.

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/su/su6901a1.htm>

## APPENDIX C

### KEY POINTS TO EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 14168, 3 C.F.R. 8615 (2025)

#### Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government

January 20, 2025

Key points of Executive Order:

Federal agencies should only recognize two sexes, male and female. The new executive order was released on Day 1 of the second Trump Administration.

The executive order applies to federal agencies and their employees, and it appears likely that future directives and restrictions will be applied through agency action to federal contractors and recipients of federal funding.

All employers, not just federal contractors, should carefully consider policies and practices concerning restroom access and keep in mind that several states require employers to provide restroom access to employees based on gender identity, while others restrict access to sex assigned at birth.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/defending-women-from->

**APPENDIX D**

**TABLE FOR STATE REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES FOR STUDENT SUPPORT**

Table

*State Revenue and Expenditures for Student Support*

Student Support	Category	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	<i>F</i>	sig
State Revenue	Transgender	3.7112	0.85	7.83	0.091	0.763
	Cisgender	3.7374	2.09	7.83		
Student support expenditures	Transgender	1	1	1		
	Cisgender	1	1	1		