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The Impact of Empathy-Building Activities: Implementing the Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate Program

Heidi Blackwell

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**The Impact of Empathy-Building Activities: Implementing the Anti-Defamation League's
No Place for Hate Program**

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Doctoral Dissertation Presented to the Department of Educational Leadership and the College of
Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
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THE IMPACT OF EMPATHY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES: IMPLEMENTING THE ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE'S NO PLACE FOR HATE PROGRAM, a Doctoral research project prepared by HEIDI BLACKWELL in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership.

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Abstract

During the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years, the Anti-Defamation League’s (ADL) No Place for Hate program (NPFH) was implemented in a cooperating high school (COHS) to see if empathy-building activities had an impact on school climate. The purpose of this study was to review the implementation and impacts of a semistructured program on creating safe, welcoming schools. Data collected from schoolwide surveys, focus groups, and group meetings that happened throughout the 2 school years provided information around students’ sense of belonging, connection, and purpose at school, the pros and cons of the NPFH program, and its place in the school moving forward with a commitment to change. Implications and future research were also included.

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Chapter 1

Amid numerous crises affecting people in the United States during the Winter of 2022, the need to understand the experiences of others was more crucial than ever. The COVID-19 global pandemic cast a spotlight on systemic issues negatively affecting the U.S. economy, health care, and education systems (Bonotti & Zech, 2021). The uncertainty of the early 2020s, isolation, and spread of misinformation and disinformation created deep divides in the views of many (Shu et al., 2020). Creating opportunities to build and practice empathy is one way to address this divide.

Empathy is the concept of understanding the feelings of others without physically having the experience that elicits their response (Zahavi & Rochat, 2015). Although empathy happens naturally in most individuals, there is always room to grow in understanding how others' behaviors attach to their feelings. When awareness of the struggles of others increases, people can begin to work together to discover the causes of these issues and address them.

Schools are a microcosm of their surrounding communities. The struggles a local area may face are reflected in the issues school personnel need to address. Annually, school personnel are tasked with identifying areas of need. School improvement plans often treat the symptoms of the problem—grades and attendance—but not the actual root causes of the problem (e.g., school climate).

School climate can be defined as the quality and character of school life (National School Climate Center, 2021, para. 3). By creating a sense of belonging, connectedness, and purpose through exercises such as empathy-building, students, staff, and families feel valued, and their engagement may increase. During my research, I found very few studies that directly linked empathy and school climate. In one example, Montero-Carretero et al. (2021) demonstrated an

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improved school climate and increased empathy skills of staff and students lead to a decline in bullying behaviors on campus. The lack of research on empathy, a critical component of addressing school climate, was worthy of additional research focus.

During a TED talk by Erin Jones, an equity trainer located in the Pacific Northwest, she quoted Grace Lee Boggs, saying, “You cannot change any society unless you take responsibility for it, unless you see yourselves belonging to it and responsible for changing it.” (Jones, 2017, 10:57). Local school district administrators continue to explore ways for students, staff, and families to get involved in making changes to their individual schools. The 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years included comprehensive distance learning for all, transitioning from hybrid or in-person learning; thus, the need to provide activities that created connected school communities was more important during that time than ever.

Key Terms

In this study, it was important to define a few key terms related to the research.

Anti-Defamation League (ADL): ADL is an organization founded in 1913 in response to antisemitic concerns in the United States. Their mission is “to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and secure justice and fair treatment for all” (ADL, 2021, para. 1).

Empathy: Empathy is the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another. This action can encompass either the past or present without having feelings, thoughts, and experiences fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Empathy-building activities: Empathy-building activities are intentionally designed to help learn about others from different backgrounds to increase awareness.

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Microaggressions: Microaggressions are words or actions that may or may not be intended to show discrimination or bias.

No Place for Hate (NPFH) Program: NPFH is ADL’s school-based program designed to address individual school climate issues through empathy-building activities.

School Climate: School climate refers to the quality and character of school life (National School Climate Center, 2021, para. 3).

Problem Statement

According to recent information released by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, there was a 60% rise in reported hate crimes in Oregon from 2019 to 2020 (ADL, 2021). These numbers only reflect incidents when individuals took the time to report and do not include the numerous microaggressions some members of the community endured daily. Individuals who make up a school community—including staff, students, and families—may be unaware of the experiences of others due to their unique worldviews. Therefore, activities that provide a glimpse into the different backgrounds of people can increase awareness and empathy toward others. Although it is impossible to truly understand the challenges another person faces, providing opportunities for individuals to walk in another’s shoes can help create paths toward increased advocacy. Structured group activities have been effective for helping teachers build empathy (Krause et al., 2020). One way school communities can work to create safe school environments for a diverse population is for school committees to plan and carry out empathy-building activities.

Examining multiple perspectives is important for employing equitable practices in personal and professional situations. Population changes continue to impact Oregon schools, as evidenced by comparing the 2001 and 2020 Oregon State Annual Report Cards. On the 2001

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Oregon State Report Card, 19% of the student population self-reported as belonging to a group other than White, whereas in 2020, 39% of the students self-reported as belonging to a group other than White—more than doubling the number of students in 20 years (Oregon Department of Education [ODE], 2001). With these trends, most students served by Oregon schools could soon be children who do not identify as White; however, the backgrounds of school staff do not follow similar trends and continue to be homogenous (ODE, 2020).

Educators, families, and students in a school bring with them a wide range of lived experiences and perspectives. Unfortunately, not all perspectives are equally represented. One obvious example of a mismatch of lived experiences between educators and students occurs when looking at the demographics of Oregon schools. The Oregon State Annual Report Card from 2019–2020 indicated 89% of the teaching staff and 61% of the students across the state self-reported as White, with the remaining population of both groups consisting of individuals who identified as Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, or multiracial (ODE, 2020). These two numbers alone indicate a 28% racial and ethnic gap between the demographics of the school staff and the demographics of the students. A concerted effort by students, staff, and families is needed to increase cultural awareness and promote inclusion of all to address obstacles that may prevent underrepresented students and families from fully participating in their own school experience.

Purpose Statement

This study presented the experiences of participants in a partnership between the ADL, the cooperating high school (COHS), and school community members working together to address individual school climate issues. The case study specifically focused on the experiences of committee members—including students, staff, and parents—who participated in the ADL's

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NPFH program at the large district high school. With the backdrop of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the committee attempted to tackle school climate issues by employing schoolwide empathy-building activities to address school community members' feelings of belonging, connectedness, and purpose.

Over the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years, COHS—a suburban high school in Oregon—implemented ADL's NPFH program to address issues related to their school climate. This effort was not the school or district's first attempt to address bias incidents associated with their district. In 2016, several race-based incidents made the local media channels. The district worked with the greater school community to create an equity resolution in 2017 to demonstrate a commitment to identifying and addressing systemic issues. Since 2018, there has been a teacher on special assignment in the district heading equity efforts, including whole staff trainings, community learning opportunities, staff support groups, and most recently, school and community affinity groups. Individual school leaders also identified equity chairs and equity committees to review data in their own buildings.

The partnership between the ADL and the school district began during the 2019–2020 school year as one school in the district piloted NPFH. At the beginning of the 2020–2021 school year, a local community group collaborated with the ADL and the district to expand the program to more schools. Those involved in the partnership felt it was important students, staff, and families still felt a sense of belonging, connectedness, and purpose to their school communities, particularly with the school year starting off virtually. During the 2020–2021 school year, six of the 13 district schools went through the process of becoming NPFH-certified schools. The district and ADL, with the support of the community group, successfully applied for a grant to

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expand training, curriculum, and support for the 2021–2022 school year, with the goal to get all district schools involved in the NPFH program.

The inclusion of the NPFH program in schools was the first time students, family members, and community supporters were intentionally included in identifying an issue in their own school and leading the planning to address it. Including students and parents in the school problem-solving process was fundamentally a different approach than school personnel had previously taken and recognized the need to include all stakeholders in decision making.

At COHS, the school-based committee—consisting of students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members—formed through district communication channels, including social media and word of mouth. The committee was known as the No Place for Hate Club and met weekly virtually with one in-person session at the end of the school year.

Due to the virtual nature of much of the 2020–2021 school year, it was important to continue to provide opportunities for the school community to learn together. This case study demonstrated how these activities were able to take place virtually. With the need for so many interactions to continue to take place online and through social media, the opportunities to listen and learn for each other and build empathy continue to be crucial moving forward.

Significance Statement

A better understanding of the needs of others, along with how to provide necessary supports to ensure obstacles are proactively addressed, establishes an environment where everyone feels included. Because the gap between school staff diversity and student and family diversity is present nationwide—especially in urban areas—this research is applicable to schools throughout the country. Eisler (2000, as cited in Grant & Sleeter, 2011), stated, “Community and empathy do not come automatically but can be cultivated” (p. 103). A better understanding of the

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needs of others establishes an environment where everyone feels a sense of belonging, connectedness, and purpose. By working together, the school community can address issues, including school climate, more effectively. Three research questions guided this study.

Research Questions

1. To what extent has the Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate Program impacted school-based committee participants' sense of belonging, sense of purpose and sense of connectedness?
2. What did the school-based committee perceive as the benefits and challenges of the Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate Program?
3. To what extent is the No Place for Hate Program implemented in the school?

Chapter Summary

Empathy or understanding the perspective of others is a skill individuals need for success in and out of school. The question is whether empathy building activities through a program like NPFH can positively impact the school climate in a large setting such as COHS. The idea of individual shifts in thinking to support small group efforts and whole school implementation informed this study on empathy and school climate.

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Chapter 2

Literature Review

The studies included represent timely, peer-reviewed publications presenting data around historic injustices of educational systems, empathy, empathy-building activities, and the connection of those concepts to school climate. Positive and negative impacts were noted. Due to the information available, results from district-wide, small-group, and single-school-based programs with a focus on middle and high school students were reported. Emphasis on the effects of empathy and empathy-building exercises were highlighted; however, studies that also demonstrated connections between school climate and achievement, attendance, or school discipline were included, but were not a focus of this review.

Program Need

The U.S. education system continues to fail students and create inequities in the educational experiences they receive. Legislation and legal standards, including *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), Title IX (1972), and the American with Disabilities Act (1975), among many others, have worked to create circumstances where all students have equal access to the education system. Unfortunately, not all students, staff, or families feel safe and welcome in their schools. Despite historical efforts to rectify inequities, they persist in school systems.

In the Declaration of Independence, the document clearly states all men are created equal; however, as measured by high school graduation rates, it is simply not the case that all individuals achieve at the same levels when looking at school success (US, 1776, para. 2). On the 2020 Oregon State Annual Report Card, the state boasted an overall graduation rate of 82.63%; yet, subgroups such as White students graduated at the rate of 83.96%, whereas Black students achieved a graduation rate of 76.29% (ODE, 2020). The groundbreaking work of Ladson-

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Billings (1995) around the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy noted missing information regarding solutions to these prevalent issues and the lack of research examining and explaining success among marginalized groups such as Black students. The need to identify and replicate what works to address longstanding concerns negatively affecting certain groups in a school environment was warranted.

It is reasonable to assume school demographics reflect their local communities. The number of hate crimes remains on the rise (Department of Justice, 2020). Relatedly, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL, 2021) noted, “According to the FBI’s annual release of 2020 hate crimes data, pursuant to the Hate Crime Statistics Act (HCSA), the number of hate crimes in Oregon rose to its highest level ever (280) with the 3rd most per capita” (para. 1). Although implemented reporting systems have led to a 60% increase of hate crimes in Oregon, there are undoubtedly more situations that continue to go unreported (ADL, 2021). Those numbers reflect the collective trauma certain communities, families, and children experience. With historic underachievement of certain groups and sharp increases in bias and hate-related harassment and crimes, real solutions are needed to create safe and welcoming school environments for all students.

The idea of including soft skills, such as empathy, appears to be a topic many can agree on. Wan and Gut (2011) showed most registered voters polled about the education system felt it needed to evolve to allow for student success in the 21st century. Along with understanding technology and the need for creative thinking, those polled identified people skills as important characteristics for new workers entering the workforce (Wan & Gut, 2011). Empathy-building activities provide opportunities to develop skills around listening and learning to understand others and their perspectives that are necessary for the changing world.

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School Climate

The National School Climate Center (NSCC; 2021) defined *school climate* as “the quality and character of school life” (para. 3). The staff, students, and families directly affected by school policies, procedures, and practices should therefore be part of the process, not just considered when concerns arise. Ross (2013) stated:

Equity is a part of all school climate work and from this perspective, the National School Climate Council definition could be modified to describe an “equitable school climate” as referring to the quality and character of school life that fosters children’s, youth’s, and families’ full access to: (1) Appropriately supported, high expectations for learning and achievement; (2) Emotionally and physically safe, healthy learning environments; (3) Caring relationships with peers and adults; (4) Participation that meaningfully enhances academic, social-emotional, civic, and moral development. (p. 1)

NSCC (2021) offered five aspects of a school that can positively or negatively impact the school climate: safety, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning, social media, and the institutional environment.

Safety

All school community members should feel a sense of safety as they walk into school. Maslow (1943) noted the hierarchy of needs begins with physiological needs including food, clothing, and shelter. Once these basic needs are met, Maslow recommended safety concerns be taken into consideration, which include emotional wellbeing, physical procedures, and health guidelines in schools.

When considering safety, the school administration’s interpretation of their policies is reflected in disciplinary practices; for example, when looking at school suspension and expulsion

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rates, it is important to consider how these practices may negatively affect school climate. Lee et al. (2011) studied 289 high schools in Virginia and concluded schools with the highest suspension rates also experienced the highest dropout rate of students. Though much research, such as Lee et al.'s (2011) study, has focused on the individual factors that lead to student dropout rates, it is equally important to consider the schoolwide practices that negatively affect the school climate and graduation rates.

Interpersonal Relationships

Trust is the center of any solid relationship. The relationships that form between staff, students and families must develop from mutual trust and respect. In the film *Paper Tigers*, the importance of student, staff, and community relationships are explored, and positive outcomes shared (Redford, 2015). Even one positive relationship with an adult makes a difference.

Bottiani et al. (2016) explored how students' races impacted their perceived perspectives on school support. The findings confirmed Black students felt less cared for by school personnel relative to their White classmates and suggested the reported treatment was not based on how others were treated, but on the student-teacher relationship (Bottiani et al., 2016).

Teaching and Learning

School personnel are tasked with educating the nation's youth; however, school officials have been challenged to increase student academic performance and address social and emotional needs. Weissberg and Cascarino (2013) explained, "Social emotional skills are critical to being a good student, citizen, and worker" (p. 8). Therefore, school officials must strategically embed opportunities for students to practice topics such as empathy during more traditional teaching and learning activities.

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Much has been reported on the short-term gains of social–emotional programs, but there is less information available around long-term effects. Taylor et al. (2017) reviewed the extended impacts of social–emotional programs and found positive results around student attendance and academics. They also noted a decrease in maladaptive behaviors (e.g., drug and alcohol use and risky sexual behaviors) across all student subgroups, including race, socioeconomic levels, and gender where this information was collected and reported. Effectively implementing programs that address social–emotional skills are key to student success in and out of the classroom.

Social Media

Bullying and specifically cyberbullying is often a reason certain students do not feel safe at school. In the study by Schneider et al. (2012), over 20,000 students in a school district located in the northeastern United States answered a paper-and-pencil survey that included questions around bullying and cyberbullying. Results showed those who self-reported as victimized by bullying also demonstrated lower achievement and attachment levels to school (Schneider et al., 2012). Social media is so prevalent in modern society that opportunities to use it positively could be a potential area of focus for schools to share accomplishments, promote opportunities, and create connections.

Institutional Environment

Empowering school stakeholders, especially youth, and including them as decision makers is a crucial step to addressing school climate. Blankstein and Houston (2011) explained the importance of individual school communities making changes with greater success and how through shared work, school stakeholders can motivate and engage each other. Everyone working together toward common goals creates the energy needed to accomplish them.

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Lyons and Brasof (2020) reported on the concept of student voice in respect to youth leadership, specifically in high schools. Of the 24 studies they examined, none collected quantitative data; however, the qualitative data informed their conclusions that providing authentic opportunities for student voice can effectively build student leadership opportunities and promote positive changes in a school environment (Lyons & Brasof, 2020). There was also evidence to support the fact that efforts should be made to increase inclusive and sustainable practices when engaging all stakeholders in a school toward common building-wide goals (Lyons & Brasof, 2020).

School Climate Programs

School staff often spend time collecting and analyzing data to determine their school improvement goals. Once an area of need is identified, the staff are tasked with determining a course of action to address needs, which often includes implementing new programs. There are several different areas related to school climate and subsequently a vast array of possible programs that can be implemented to address identified issues. Included in this section is a review of different programs with a focus on programs at COHS during the 2020–2021 school year that support the concepts of connectedness, belonging and purpose.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS)

PBIS is a popular program for addressing student behavior by establishing expectations and rewarding those meeting expectations on a regular basis. According to the Center on PBIS (2021), over 25,000 schools implemented PBIS. The program includes several aspects of school climate, including safety, fostering relationships, and creating environments for teaching and learning. The program has been found effective in creating positive school climates; however, there is no information available to show historically marginalized groups specifically benefit

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from the program (Flannery et al., 2018). Increasing cultural competency is needed to truly address the necessary supports of all students in a school.

Extracurricular Activities

Sports, clubs, and other extracurricular activities are an important part of the high school experience. Students have agency to choose their own activities based on areas of interest. Student voice, especially at the secondary level, is important when deciding on the specifics of extracurricular activities (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Scheduling conflicts, lack of staff or community sponsors, or disinterest in offerings are all reasons why students may not take part in these activities. School personnel should actively work to remove these obstacles for students to have a sense of purpose beyond academics at school.

Student Advisory Period

Student advisory periods are one way high school officials have attempted to create a sense of connectedness for students. In Adams' study (2016), students were assigned to a staff member's small advisory group when they joined the school as a freshman or older. These groups met weekly at a designated time schoolwide and engaged in social-emotional learning based on an adopted curriculum. Results concluded almost 40% of the students polled felt more connected to the school (Adams, 2016). Long-term results for this type of intervention were not readily available.

No Place for Hate (NPFH)

The NPFH program was implemented in 1,850 schools and served 1.3 million students during the 2020–2021 school year (S. Nash., personal communication, October 6, 2021). NPFH is a self-directed, antibias, antibullying program that works to make a positive impact on the school climate of an individual school. School committees consisting of students, staff, and

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community members can use free materials and support from their local ADL office to address specific school issues. The program focuses on implementing empathy-building activities to address themes chosen by the student-led school committee. The concepts addressed by the program including student involvement, bullying and violence prevention and social-emotional development have all shown potential for change.

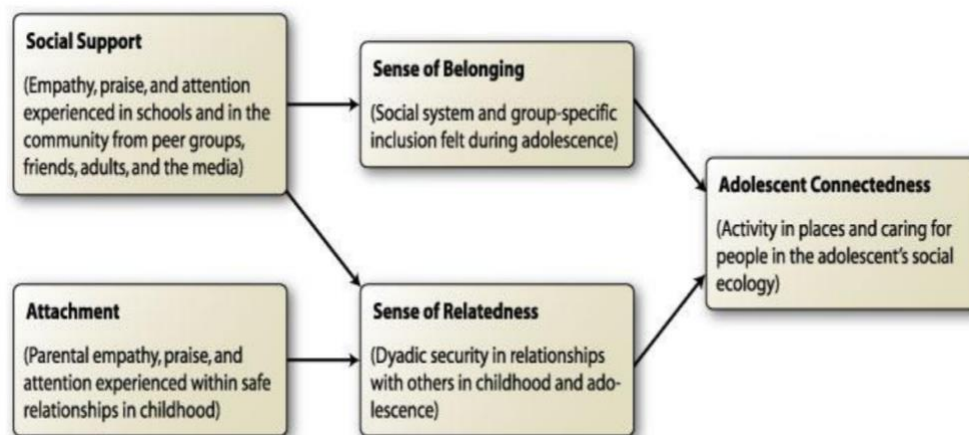
Sense of Belonging, Connectedness, and Purpose

An important part of school climate is how the people in a building feel about each other. The idea of belonging and connectedness can be seen in the offered clubs and activities, teachers and staff who are present in the hallways and classrooms, representative posters on the walls, and books featured in the library. Figure 1 presents a framework for student connectedness in schools by Hemmingway (as cited in Karcher, 2003). According to this framework, affirmative support from a student's peers and families lay the foundation for the sense of belonging and relationships with others, which in turn leads to the ability to care and connect with them. An increase in feeling a sense of belonging and purpose can increase engagement and achievement (Adams, 2016).

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Figure 1

Adolescent Connectedness



Note. From Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness by M. J. Karchner, 2003, ERIC.
<http://adolescentconnectedness.com/>.

Ice et al. (2015) explored the role of student-led community partnerships in relation to school climate improvement, noting, “An effective school climate improvement process engages students, parents/guardians, school personnel, and even community members in a meaningful, democratically informed process of learning, co-leadership, and school improvement” (p. 11).

Building upon the idea that meaningful change comes from engaging all stakeholders, trained student leaders—identified through a variety of sources to represent as many different perspectives as possible—surveyed community members about their relationships with their school system (Ice et al., 2015). This data informed school leadership on public perspectives of the schools and ways to partner for school improvement. The survey indicated an overall positive perception of the school district and contained encouraging feedback in respect to the schools’

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initiative to engage community members (Ice et al., 2015). All members of the school community benefit from ongoing opportunities to work together.

Empathy

The earliest work related to empathy can be attributed to two men, Theodore Lipps and Edward Titchener, in their attempts to explain one's feelings in relation to another. As Segal et al. (2017) recounted:

Theodore Lipps of Germany (1903) took the term "*einflussung*" which was used in art to express how one might feel when viewing beautiful art and applied it to feelings that one has for another person. Edward Titchener of the United States (1909) used the Greek term "*empathia*" meaning "in passion" or "in pain" to describe the inner-feelings one has when seeing the feelings or actions of another. (p. 5)

There are many components of the concept of empathy. Rivers et al. (2016) shared, "Empathizing with another person can be a kind of imaginative activity in which one puts himself or herself in someone else's shoes to understand his or her journey in life" (p. 286). Empathy incorporates cognitive and affective pieces that move an individual to respond, generally, in support of another. Cognitive empathy includes theory of mind or deeply understanding the feelings and actions of ourselves and others logically (Goldstein & Winner, 2011). Affective empathy implies sympathy, or recognizing how others are emotionally affected by a situation, can also lead to the observer taking on the feelings of another (Weisz & Cikara, 2021).

The ability an individual possesses to recognize and respond to others can be impacted by several factors, including gender, culture, and abilities. In terms of gender, Van Heel et al. (2020) found adolescent participants who identified as female showed greater empathetic and

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perspective taking behaviors; however, personality traits of individuals also played a large role.

Also, the idea of nature versus nurture came into play in respect to empathy. Adolescents who displayed both high levels of agreeableness and had strong parental support displayed the highest degree of positive empathic traits (Van Heel et al., 2020).

Hammond (2015) demonstrated the importance of individualism or collectivism in respect to cultural norms. Hammond shared about 80% of the world contains cultures that can be described as collectivist, which emphasizes relationships and community, whereas the other 20% of the world, including Europe and the United States, is characterized as individualistic and praise individual gains and independence. In general, studies related to empathy and culture have focused on children who are part of Western culture and parts of Europe. Cultural differences are generally determined by comparing performance on an empathy task or the tendency to experience empathy using questionnaires across cultural groups (Main & Kho, 2020). Intrinsic cultural values could impact empathy ratings.

Another interesting aspect of empathy includes the work around individuals with special needs. Some individuals, such as those with autism spectrum disorders, struggle to read and respond to others in empathic ways (Decety & Meyer, 2008). In Decety and Meyer's (2008) research, the idea of bottom-up and top-down information processing in relation to empathy was examined. Humans exhibit an automatic physical response (i.e., a bottom-up response) to another's feelings and actions; simultaneously, there is a cognitive (i.e., top-down) response based on previous knowledge and previous scripts. When there is miscommunication in this process, difficulties in prosocial behaviors like empathy can occur.

On the other hand, a deep understanding of empathy can also be used negatively. Bundandt and Willerslev (2015) reported on two ethnographic studies, one involving hunters in

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Siberia, and another included two warring groups in Indonesia. In both cases, a heightened ability to read another being's feelings led to a manipulative or deceptive application with relation to empathy. When one can read and understand the feelings of others and weaponize those feelings to cause sometimes violent actions or reactions in another, that is negative empathy. The use of misinformation and disinformation, especially through social media, that has happened in the United States is one example of how negative empathy shows itself. Shu et al. (2020) noted, "The extensive spread of fake news can have severe negative impacts on individuals and society" (p. 2). Misinformation, disinformation, and fake news preys on the fears of some which has led to dangerous and unsafe behaviors in response.

Empathy and Schools

There are several ways empathy plays a role in the school setting. According to Noddings (1984), the main premise of the school should be to care for those in the school community, and show them how to care for others. In Noddings' work, she focused on the ethic of care and the importance of caring for others, not for personal gain but to help them and the school or organization.

In Ladson-Billings's (1995) study, "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," the author explained students and families described caring teachers in a similar fashion. Those educators did not necessarily use displays of affection; however, those in their charge felt cared for nonetheless. Ladson-Billings (1995) explained:

For example, in this study, the teachers were not all demonstrative and affectionate toward the students. Instead, their common thread of caring was their concern for the implications their work had on their students' lives, the welfare of the community, and unjust social arrangements. Thus, rather than the idiosyncratic caring for individual

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students (for whom they did seem to care), the teachers spoke of the import of their work for preparing the students for confronting inequitable and undemocratic social structures. (p. 474)

One way school personnel can apply empathetic principles is by carefully considering who should be involved in decision-making and using equitable decision-making practices. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2010) described equitable decision making as an inclusive process and challenged organizations to consider, “Who will benefit? Who will be hurt? What are the long-term effects? If I am helped, how should I give back?” (p. 19). Furthermore, time should be spent to truly understand the problem, identify who should be involved in the decision making, and endeavor to get input from all stakeholders.

The importance of including everyone in a school can be exceptionally motivating in respect to taking actions or making changes. In their research, Zahavi and Rochet (2015) argued although empathy does not involve or entail sharing another’s feelings, empathy is an understanding of the needs and wants of others. Waghid and Smeyers (2012) noted individuals must be willing to sacrifice personal gains when making decisions that benefit the larger school community. The South African term, *Ubuntu* [I am because we are] can be used to describe inclusive school communities.

Empathy-Building Activities

Empathy-building activities intend to foster growth in an individual’s empathic abilities. Activities that provide a window into the lived experience of another through perspective taking, role-playing activities, or discussions creates awareness and understanding of others. Rivers et al. (2016) noted, “Empathizing with another person can be a kind of imaginative activity in which one puts himself or herself in someone else’s shoes to understand his or her journey in life” (p.

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286). When school personnel systematically implement these types of activities into their classrooms, the effect on individuals and the organization can be a positive one.

Role playing involves taking part in activities that place an individual in a situation where they experience what others are feeling. A deeper sense of empathy can be expressed by those who took part in a game-based role-playing activity. Krause et al. (2020) explained, “We seek to provide an experience that will influence the thinking of our students, shape their attitude toward others, and create the grounds by which care is given and received and given again.” (p. 95)

In a study by Rivers et al. (2016) focused on role playing, fantasy role players volunteered to complete the Interpersonal Reactivity Index—which looks at seven different aspects of empathy—and the Tellegen Absorption Scale, one of 11 scales that are part of the Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire. The results demonstrated that individuals who play fantasy role-playing games scored significantly higher than the comparison group on the Interpersonal Reactivity Index scale of empathy, confirming the hypothesis that fantasy role-players reported experiencing higher levels of empathy.

Perspective taking provides opportunities to understand the thinking and motivation of another. In his in-depth look at how characters—especially antagonists in books and movies affect consumers—Ercolino (2018) questioned what comes first, the reader’s empathic response or their identification with a character. Either way, he concluded those who feel empathy more deeply are more impacted by the behavior in the stories (Ercolino, 2018). Through reading books or watching movies, individuals can learn about characters that match their own background or unfamiliar ones.

Acting can also provide deep learning experience to understand others. A study by Goldstein and Winner (2011) demonstrated engagement in acting classes specifically predicted

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theory of mind skills in eight to 11-year-olds independently of socioeconomic status, age, and verbal IQ. Spending time portraying individuals from different backgrounds can increase skills related to empathy, such as theory of mind or the ability to understand the wants, beliefs, and feelings of others (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985).

Taking part in discussions is perhaps the most important aspect of empathy-building activities. Hearing the stories of others, especially someone the listener is familiar with, leads to greater understanding. The work of Gilligan (2011) explained the importance of taking in a story of another. She offered the idea that making space for people to share their stories and listening with the intent to learn and believe can lead a listener to grasp the experiences of others (Gilligan, 2011).

Furthermore, empathy training can lead to the ability to reach a compromise after a dispute. In Klimecki's (2013) study two groups, one who underwent compassion training and another that took part in memory activities, responded to situations that were presented to them regarding conflict. The results showed compassion training led to better conflict management. Klimecki (2013) shared, "Although lacking causal evidence and relying on self-reports, these correlational findings are promising, as they suggest that people who are more empathic and compassionate use more adaptive conflict management strategies" (p. 313).

People have automatic physical empathetic responses as well as cognitive responses, but perceptions are based on one's own limited previous experiences. Strukus (2011) explained individuals are always limited by their personal experience, noting, "When we watch another's movement what we simulate is our own experience of the movement, not the experience of the other. There will always be a gap between what we perceive and what we experience" (p. 103).

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When individuals come together in a community setting such as a school, empathy-building activities can create safe spaces for learning. Studies have shown empathy-building activities can bring about increased positive, empathic actions (Ercolino, 2018; Gilligan, 2011; Goldstein & Winner, 2011; Krause, 2020; Klimecki, 2019; Rivers et al., 2016; Strukus, 2011). The effectiveness of empathy-building activities for individuals or organizations, however, has often been determined through self-reports or observations; therefore, findings may reflect socially acceptable answers and behaviors (Doty et al., 2017). More objective means to measure the effectiveness of empathy-building activities are needed. Furthermore, there are no clearcut data on the type, intensity, and timing of activities to show which ones truly lead to creating caring individuals and organizations (Malti, 2016). Empathy-building activities lead to increased awareness and understanding of the struggles of others, but the question remains whether these activities can lead to lasting changes in an individual or organization (Main & Kho, 2020).

ADL

The ADL is an organization leading the fight against hate and extremism. The organization was founded in 1913 in response to an increase in antisemitism and it continues to work for equity issues related to the Jewish people and all experiencing injustices. According to ADL (2021), “The ADL’s ultimate goal is a world in which no group or individual suffers from bias, discrimination or hate” (para. 1).

ADL’s education department provides educational programs, training, and resources. The antibias and bullying-prevention programs for grades PreK–12, known as NPFH, supports educators, students, and family members in understanding and challenging bias, building ally behaviors, and challenging injustice (ADL, 2022). The topics discussed in the trainings help

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provide tools to address school climate issues, including bullying and bias, by fostering empathy among stakeholders.

Chapter Summary

Not all students and families feel safe and welcomed at their school or in their communities. By spending time examining how empathy and empathy-building skills can positively affect school climate, a greater sense of belonging, connectedness, and purpose can occur. This study includes information about the collective work done as part of a school-based committee in the NPFH program to bring empathy-building activities to their building. I also shared information on the effectiveness of including students in the decision-making process of addressing schoolwide issues and the need for long-term commitment for true change to occur.

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Chapter 3

Methodology

This study used qualitative methods to explore the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) No Place for Hate (NPFH) program at a suburban high school located in the Pacific Northwest. The case study highlighted the school-based committee participants' sense of belonging, connectedness, and purpose in relation to their school because of the program, along with positive and negative aspects of the program and overall impact.

Research Questions

1. To what extent has the Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate Program impacted school-based committee participants' sense of belonging, sense of purpose and sense of connectedness?
2. What did the school-based committee perceive as the benefits and challenges of the Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate Program?
3. To what extent is the No Place for Hate Program implemented in the school?

Design

In a case study, there is a thorough exploration of an activity or event based on extensive collection of data (Creswell, 2012). This research study examined a school committee's thoughts and feelings about belonging, connectedness, and purpose after planning and participating in empathy-building activities related to school climate. The relationship between the variables of belonging, connectedness, and purpose, along with a focus on empathy-building, was examined to determine the influence of one on the other.

With case studies, results reflect individuals and their unique situations. Seawright and Gerring (2008) called it a "heroic role" to choose an example that accurately reflects a much

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larger population; however, solid evidence from a variety of sources can reliably support a case study's results and conclusions. The validity of case studies has been called into question due to their subjective nature. There is a belief that a case study researcher works to prove their theory is correct instead of accurately reporting the results (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Still, information gathered and shared by the researcher should simply be reported as facts with supported conclusions.

A case study was a justified method for this study, as the approach provided participants an opportunity to share their lived experiences of participating in the NPFH program in their school community. A case study also allowed school data and artifacts to be included along with the history of the program, especially in relation to the district.

The NPFH program is not a structured curriculum or training, but rather a self-directed series of steps a school goes through to address one aspect of their school climate (ADL, 2021). First, a volunteer committee of students, staff, and families work together to identify an area related to school climate. Second, school stakeholders are asked to sign a promise or pledge agreeing that they will strive to create a safe and welcoming school community. Then, each school committee plans and holds three empathy-building activities throughout the school year to address the school's individual needs. All schools that complete the steps become certified and receive a "No Place for Hate" banner to hang in their buildings.

Focus Group

Focus groups involve group interviews with a representative sample of a population. The idea of group interviews can sometimes call into question confidentiality and validity in respect to collecting data; however, the importance of relationships and ability to report back detailed information can be seen as big strengths of this data collection method (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013).

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Confidentiality is key when working with potentially sensitive information. Because of the group aspect of the setting, there is a possibility information could be shared outside of the focus group. Therefore, setting clear expectations and permission to pass and not participate in any part of the discussion are key to developing trust (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). Especially with groups who have some type of prior relationship, such as the individuals who participated in the focus groups for this study, trust building was already established.

Focus groups are relationship-based discussions. Although the facilitator poses questions that should be addressed during the time together, focus groups should also be given freedom to take the conversation where it needs to go. Managing a focus group can be difficult for the facilitator—conflict and contradiction often happen during focus groups, leading to the discovery of underlying issues (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). At times, questions may not be answered, and follow-up interviews or questionnaires may be needed to supplement the information obtained during the discussion. Morgan (1998) shared:

From an instrumental point of view, focus groups are an exercise in information gathering. In practice, however, they are all about relationships. The focus group discussion itself is a set of temporary relationships, but the larger project also involves a series of more fateful relationships. Often, projects involving focus groups are designed in the hope of having long-lasting effects, and this process of making a difference may begin with the relationships in the project itself. (p. 83)

The makeup of the focus groups should not show favoritism of one opinion nor single representation on a topic. A representative sample of the population should be included as well as open-ended questions. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013) reported on the importance of participants in the focus group to feel safe and comfortable to share. Morgan (1998) shared,

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“Most importantly, if you use focus groups you will gain powerful insights into the feelings of those that will be most affected by these changes” (p. 5).

Sampling and Population

The individuals included in this study were part of a district located in the metropolitan area of a large city in the Pacific Northwest. Demographic information from the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) Adapted School Report Card from the 2020–2021 school year showed approximately 8,000 students enrolled in the school district. Seventy-seven percent (77%) self-identified as White, 14% Hispanic, 6% multiracial, and 1% or less identified as Asian, American Indian/Native Alaskan, Black/African American, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

Also included on the 2020–2021 adapted school report card was the district’s on-time graduation rate of 84%, which exceeded the state average of 80%. However, several subgroups were not achieving at the same levels, including students who qualified for free-and-reduced lunch (77%) and students with disabilities (68%). Twenty-seven percent (27%) of students in the district were eligible for free-and-reduced lunches. Fifty percent (50%) of Latinx students were in the free-and-reduced-lunch program. There were 1260 students receiving special education services in the district at the time of this study.

Per-pupil spending is another factor that can positively or negatively impact student success. According to U.S. Census (2019), the overall average spending for students across the United States is \$12,612 per pupil; Oregon reported an average of \$11,920 per pupil during that same timeframe. The district spends \$12,536 per pupil.

The large community high school included in this study had a population of approximately 2000 students. National Center for Education Statistics (2021) listed the student–

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teacher ratio as 22:1, with the national average being 16:1. School demographic and graduation rates mirrored those reported of the district. Additional information from the ODE-adapted State Report Card (2020) indicated for all reported groups over a 3-year period, 81% of students attended daily. For students on free-and-reduced lunch, the number fell to 69%, and students with disabilities comprised 73%.

The participants in this study took part in the NPFH school-based committee associated with the high school. The committee consisted of students, parents, staff members, and administrators who volunteered to be part of or support the student-led club. Starting in December 2020, the committee began meeting weekly via Zoom. Due to COVID-19 global pandemic restrictions, the club meetings and activities were all completed virtually during the 2020–2021 school year. At least one of the students who attended the weekly meetings was part of the online high school associated with the district, whereas the others attended comprehensive distance and hybrid learning through the high school. The activities for the 2021–2022 school year were also conducted virtually.

Administration and Procedures

Internal Review Board approval was completed before beginning the focus group. Informed consent from adult participants and parental and individual consent from the student participants was obtained. Confidentiality was of the utmost importance when collecting data and reporting information.

Data for the first research question in relation to the sense of belonging, sense of connectedness, and sense of purpose were collected through a schoolwide survey. Information was also obtained from the focus groups conducted.

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The second and third research question more broadly focused on the benefits and challenges of the program along with current implementation. Information was collected from a variety of resources. For the focus group, group members came together via Zoom and shared their thoughts around the NPFH program. A follow-up questionnaire with the same questions was also sent to the participants for additional comments. An attempt to establish the impact of the program on the school climate was made. The video files and transcriptions were password protected and housed in a single, protected folder connected to the university email.

Although input from the focus groups and follow-up questions informed these questions, the bulk of the information was gathered from other data to which I had access, such as committee notes, reflections, and debriefs of the various activities completed as part of the program.

Analysis

Several rounds of coding of the information took place. From the literature review, key concepts and phrases emerged that were helpful with the coding process. I used the Zoom transcription feature to capture information from the focus group. For the initial coding states, I hand coded the transcription and artifacts. I then used Dedoose, a web-based software application used for analyzing qualitative and mixed methods research, to triangulate these codes. Using the codes, I developed categories of information to finally determine and report on overall themes.

Validity was determined through a triangulation of the data. *Triangulation* is defined as “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). Individuals representing a variety of backgrounds were interviewed, data related to the

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NPFH program and school climate were compiled, and member checking of information ensured a thorough case study was conducted. Table 1 shows each research question for this study, along with the methods used to collect and analyze data to answer them. The bulk of the information came from the 2020–2021 school year but there was some collected during the 2021–2022 school year. Table 1 illustrates the various resources used to collect data for analysis to inform this study.

Table 1

Data Collection and Analysis Tools for the NPFH Club at COHS During the 2020–2021 and 2021 School Years

Question	Method	Data collection	Data analysis 2020–2021 school year	Data analysis 2021–2022 school year
To what extent has the Anti-Defamation League’s No Place for Hate Program impacted school-based committee participants’ sense of belonging, sense of purpose and sense of connectedness?	Quantitative	Schoolwide survey data Fall 2020 and Spring 2021	Sense of belonging	n/a
	Qualitative	Focus groups	Participation in activities	Participation in activities
	Quantitative	Attendance at weekly meetings	Increase or decrease in members	Increase or decrease in members
What did the school-based committee perceive as the benefits and challenges of the Anti-Defamation League’s No Place for Hate Program?	Qualitative	Activity debriefs	Type of activity and perceived impact	Type of activity and perceived impact
	Qualitative	Focus groups	Fall 2021	Winter 2022
	Quantitative	Number of students who signed the pledge	Spring 2021	n/a

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Question	Method	Data collection	Data analysis 2020–2021 school year	Data analysis 2021–2022 school year
To what extent is the No Place for Hate program implemented in the school?	Qualitative	Pledge form comments	Understanding concepts around empathy and equity	n/a
	Quantitative	Attendance	Increase or decrease in participants	Increase or decrease in participants
	Quantitative /Qualitative	Pledge form	Number of students who participated and commented on pledge	n/a

Research Ethics

I was involved in the implementation of the program in the district in a variety of ways. As a parent, I volunteered with the NPFH program at my son’s school; therefore, I participated in district committee meetings, which put me in a position to be familiar with the study participants. As a member of the school community, I was part of the team that successfully submitted the grant application to provide additional funds for NPFH for the 2021–2022 school year. Finally, I served as a liaison between the different partners supporting the districtwide implementation of the program.

I did not monetarily gain, nor did I have any real or perceived power as part of the NPFH program. As a parent, I wanted to be part of improving the school climate at my sons’ current and future schools. I met regularly with school and district administrators around the larger implementation of the program. The original grant sought to bring training, curriculum, and support from the regional office of the ADL to the school district. Subsequently submitted grants, if approved, would supply stipends to school contacts.

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To protect the identities and ensure confidentiality of participants and information collected, several steps were taken. Once I received confirmation an individual was interested in taking part in the focus group, I shared the informed consent letter via email, and asked them to sign it electronically before sending it back to me. For students under 17 years of age, both individual and parent or guardian consent forms were obtained. Before the focus groups began, a verbal confirmation of all participating was also obtained, along with a reminder that their participation in the study could be ended by them at any time.

To ensure confidentiality, I used pseudonyms for all data collected. The signed consent forms were saved in a password-protected file and all email communications occurred on a university-provided account with password protection. I will save all materials related to the study in a protected online file, and after 2 years, all material in the protected file will be deleted.

Limitations

This study faced the ongoing challenges of any large-scale research project along with additional ones more specific to the school years when the study took place. The study did not occur during traditional school years or in a manner that could be considered a best practice for building community and discussion of difficult topics. The purpose, however, was not to solely demonstrate the effectiveness of this program as much as share the steps and pitfalls for implementing this type of school climate initiative in a high school with similar needs.

The survey conducted by the school supported the study, but the information presented must be interpreted with caution. The survey was not conducted with the rigors of a research study as it was meant to inform the school administration on their goal of student belonging. The school was encouraged to send out the survey to get additional feedback on the concept of belonging again at the beginning of the 2021–2022 school year but that step did not happen.

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Care was given to ensure the information included was not my opinions but that of the students, staff and parents who shared it. As with any qualitative study, there was room for interpretation and I worked hard to keep my own bias about the program out of the findings and the conclusions shared.

The study timeline spanned the entire 2020–2021 school year but only part of the 2021–2022 school year; therefore, it is difficult to compare the information from both years. Although the meetings and activities were still conducted in Zoom, there was the possibility for in person meetings during 2021–2022 school year because students were back on campus full time; yet, as of Winter 2022 that transition had not happened

Chapter Summary

This case study incorporated qualitative methods to examine the NPFH program at COHS. The school-based committee participants' sense of belonging, connectedness, and purpose was explored using information collected from individuals, the group, and the school as a whole. In the next chapter, the findings address the research questions.

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Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter presents the experiences of the committee members of the No Place for Hate (NPFH) program at Cooperating High School (COHS) during the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years. The information covers data collected through (a) a schoolwide survey, (b) focus group, (c) follow-up questionnaire, (d) activity debriefings, and (e) meeting planning notes. All sessions related to this study were conducted virtually during both school years due to COVID-19 global pandemic restrictions.

In Fall 2020, students and families were provided options to attend school fully online through the school year, or a hybrid approach. Those who elected to stay fully online were enrolled in an online program with different district teachers and administration. Although students remained part of the school district, they were not considered part of COHS. The students who began the school year in comprehensive distance learning transitioned to hybrid learning during the third trimester of the school year. Until January 2021, all instruction and activities were completed online. At the beginning of the second trimester of school during the 2020–2021 school year, some extracurricular sports and activities began in person with layers of protection, including masking, sanitization, and social distancing in place to participate.

COHS Survey

The findings from the schoolwide survey were used to inform this study. School administration developed the survey and distributed it to the student body at COHS. Staff and families were not asked similar questions; therefore, there was not data available from those stakeholders. From analyzing the data provided through the schoolwide survey, the following

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codes appeared most often in relation to student belonging, connectedness, and purpose: (a) representation, (b) relationships, and (c) opportunities.

At the beginning of the 2020–2021 school year, the administration at COHS established a series of goals related to school improvement. Several of the goals addressed school climate and the concepts of student belonging, connectedness, and purpose. A survey was conducted in Fall 2020 and then again in Spring 2021 to capture student perspectives.

Goal 1: By June 2021, 100% of COHS students will report a sense of belonging at COHS. Belonging was measured by reporting (via student survey) any of the following:

- Having at least one trusting, positive relationship with a staff member;
- seeing themselves represented in curriculum, hallway art, posters, etc.; and/or
- enjoyed being a part of an extracurricular activity (e.g., club or sport; S. E., personal communication, August 31, 2021).

The school officials solicited input from students around belonging, connectedness, and purpose through an online survey. Reminders from the administration to complete the survey were provided during daily announcements for the week the survey was available. The Google form was shared via student emails and time was given to complete it during the weekly Advisory Time.

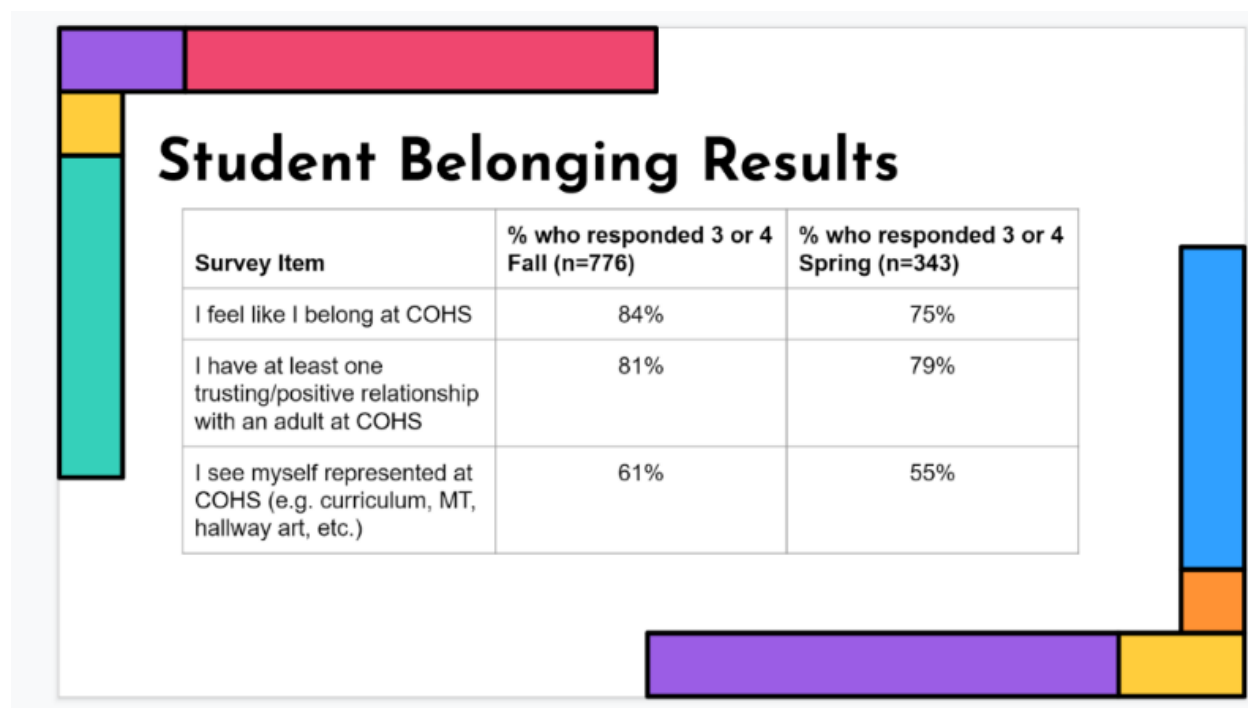
Advisory Time is an opportunity for students to meet weekly in a small group with an assigned school staff member to discuss information affecting the school and local community and practice social–emotional skills. Students are placed with their cohort when they enter school either as a freshman or later and stay with the same group and staff member throughout their time at COHS. This class mirrors the four practice areas of culturally responsive teaching recommended by Hammond (2015): “awareness, learning partnerships, information processing,

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and community building” (pp. 18–19). By providing this opportunity, students can establish a close relationship during their high school experience with at least one school staff member and small group of students. Figure 2 shows the COHS Student Belonging survey results from the 2020–2021 school year (S.E., personal communication, August 31, 2021).

Figure 2

Student Belonging Results



Note. Reprinted from S. E., personal communication, August 31, 2021.

Overwhelmingly, the student respondents endorsed the following statements on the Student Belonging survey, “I feel like I belong at COHS,” and “I have at least one trusting/positive relationship with an adult at COHS.” Interestingly, however, the number of students who responded in Spring 2021 was much lower than Fall 2020. Also, individuals who

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shared a Likert-scale score of 3 or 4 were viewed as in support of the statement without any additional information available to delineate between how many students scored these questions a 3 or 4.

The low percentage of students who responded positively to the statement, “I see myself represented at COHS,” deserves further investigation. Lansdon-Billings (1995) explained:

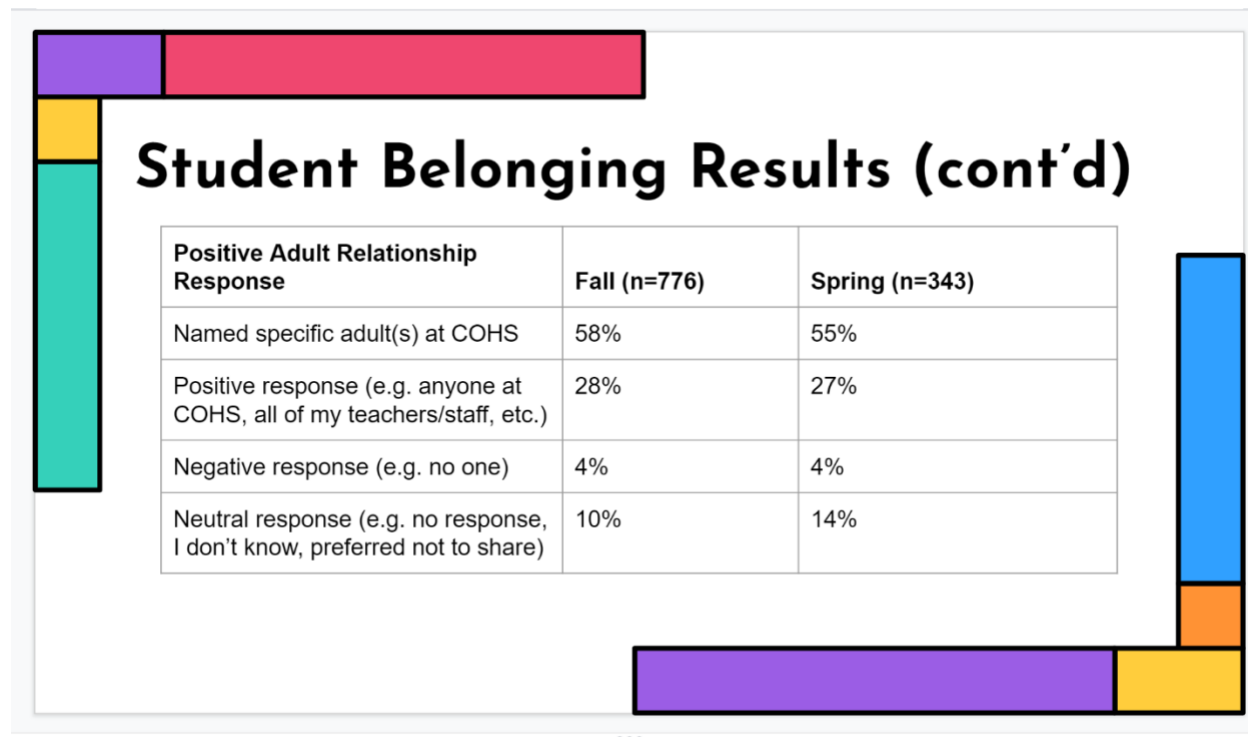
A next step for positing effective pedagogical practice is a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate. I term this pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy. (p. 469)

Students may not feel as though they belong or as connected to the school if they do not see themselves reflected in the various aspects of their learning environment. Representation does appear to be an ongoing issue for the school to address and more than cosmetic changes are needed to make a meaningful impact. Figure 3 illustrates the COHS student belonging survey results from the 2020-2021 school year with data around positive adult relationships at school (S.E., personal communication, August, 31, 2021).

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Figure 3

Student Connectedness



Note. Reprinted from S. E., personal communication, August 31, 2021.

Positive Adult Relationship

In Figure 3, approximately half of all students in both Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 (58% and 55%, respectfully) were able to name a specific adult with whom they had a specific result. Another quarter of the students surveyed (i.e., 28% and 27%, respectively) stated all teachers cared, whereas a small percentage provided a negative or neutral response.

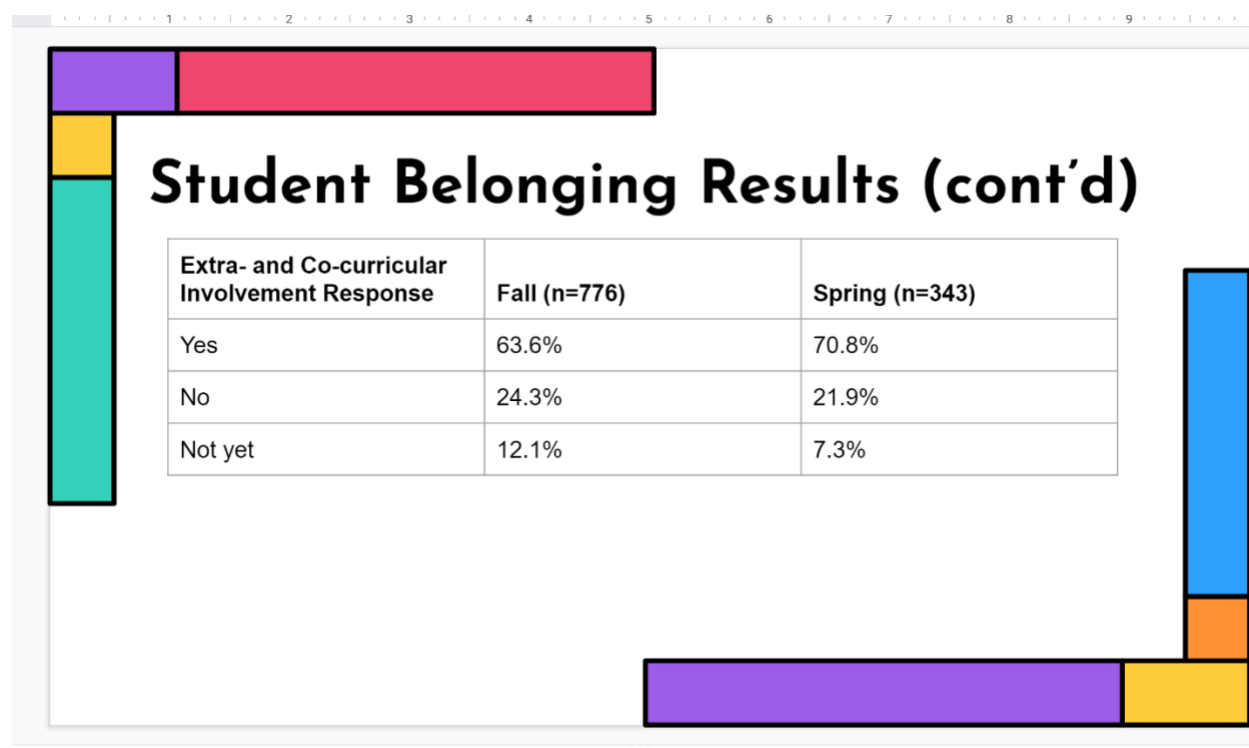
Further probing into why students identified certain adults as caring could provide information that would enhance the school climate. Gilligan (2014) explained the importance of discovering what makes caring individuals, but also what stops people from empathizing and

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understanding others' perspectives and needs. Students and families can provide valuable information by identifying the characteristics of those staff members who make them feel seen at school and when they feel excluded and unheard. Again, these are issues that need to be tackled on a schoolwide level. Figure 4 demonstrates the COHS Student Belonging survey results from the 2020–2021 school year in relation to extra- and cocurricular involvement (S.E., personal communication, August 31, 2021).

Figure 4

Sense of Purpose



Note. Reprinted from S. E., personal communication, August 31, 2021.

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There are many benefits to extracurricular activities. When a student feels connected to a group of individuals with similar interests, a greater sense of self can be developed (Karchner, 2003). Students who grow in awareness of their own abilities also develop a positive view of their future selves (Karchner, 2003).

For the 2020–2021 school year, the studied school administration set the goal of 100% student participation in extracurricular activities. Such participation could include any school sponsored activity. In Fall 2020, 63% of students identified as being part of an activity, 12% were undecided, and the remaining 24% had not yet found an activity. By Spring 2021, 70% of student respondents reported participation in extracurricular activities. With the drop in numbers of students who completed the Spring 2021 survey, it would be interesting to dig deeper into this information to see if students who completed the survey were also students who overall felt more of a sense of connectedness and purpose.

At the school, students can learn about clubs, sports, and activities through a variety of ways. A club fair is offered yearly, which did need to be shared virtually over the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years. Along with the fair, a list of all activities, meeting times, and contact information are available on the school website. Clubs also have an opportunity to share information about special events or opportunities during the daily announcements. During the 2021–2022 school year, there has been an attempt to connect students to various available opportunities in the community to provide more variety for extracurricular activities and reduce the workload of school staff who supported many of these activities without stipends or release time. One extracurricular activity offered during the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years at COHS was the NPFH club.

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Focus Groups

I conducted two online focus groups for members of the school-based committee. The consent forms and questions can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B. When beginning the focus group, participants affirmed they were willing to participate in the recording as part of the Zoom platform protocol. The video and audio recordings were also used to create the transcripts used for coding. I reminded participants they were free to stop at any point during the focus group and all information collected would be provided for their review.

The decision to use a focus group for this research stemmed from the need to provide the committee an opportunity to share their experiences. Following the recommendations of Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013), it was important to conduct focus groups in a similar setting and format to how the groups have functioned together in the past; therefore, they took place online on the same days and times as ongoing group meetings. Initially, 12 individuals expressed interest in sharing information about their experiences with the NPFH program in their school. During the first round of the focus groups for participants in the 2020–2021 school year, three individuals—Annie, a teacher; Tyler, a student; and Jane, a parent volunteer—took part in the focus groups and follow-up questionnaires. The second focus group took place as part of the only NPFH activity completed to date during the 2021-2022 school year.

The information collected from the focus groups and questionnaires was paired with archived notes from club meetings and activity feedback forms. The notes and feedback forms provided information on the thought process of the committee and these artifacts also demonstrated the various steps they pursued for each activity. The codes that appeared most often during the coding process were (a) dialogue, (b) student-led leadership, and (c) buy-in.

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Committee Formation

The NPFH program had been part of the district for several school years but really gained momentum during the 2020–2021 school year for several reasons. First, the district recognized a need to grow the program as a way for more stakeholders to be involved with addressing the school climate due to the virtual nature of the school year (K. L., personal communication, July 6, 2020). Second, a community group including COHS parents volunteered to serve on the committees at the schools. Third, students felt empowered to lead change at their own school. The NPFH program provided the vehicle for different groups to work together toward a common goal of improving school climate. According to Blankstein and Houston (2011), “It means finding ways of brining the school and community together to make a difference in the lives of children” (p. 200). This top-down approach paired with a bottom-up strategy gave the program the needed support in most schools in the district.

COHS students, staff, and community members came to the program through several ways. Annie, a teacher at COHS, stated she was part of an informal teacher’s group working on equity and participated in an online group working on similar issues in the larger school community. She noted, “I saw that folks were looking to bring the program to the high school and needed some adults to do that, so I reached out.” She then contacted existing student clubs, such as student council, affinity groups, and current equity-focused clubs to recruit members. She also let the people on an online forum and informal teacher’s group know she would be leading this initiative at COHS. Although the committee was advertised through the school club virtual fair, both Tyler and Jane reported they heard about the program through word of mouth. Tyler mentioned they heard about it from a friend. Jane shared information she “saw an

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invitation on Facebook.” The first meeting of the school year took place in December 2020 with a combination of students, staff, and community members present.

The attendance and activities at school committee meetings varied throughout the year. Table 2 includes the committee meetings topics and decisions for the NPFH program at COHS during the 2020–2021 school year.

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Table 2*Committee Timeline*

Date	Attendees	Topics discussed	Decisions
12/01/2021	Two staff members/one community member	COHS NPFH club	Start recruiting students to join newly forming NPFH club
12/14/2021	Four students/three staff/two community members	Student recruitment, pledge, future activities	More student involvement needed; student leaders volunteer to lead each meetings; Search for land acknowledgements.
1/11/2021	Five students/three staff/two community members	Pledge; sharing the pledge	Mini-survey for pledge rollout; create presentation for others, administration, and other groups; Identify classes for initial pledge rollout and ask teachers to present
1/25/2021	Seven students/two staff/two community members/one admin	Create video for student TV; work on pledge; share out of contacts with others	Black History Slides; Latinx Club asked for pledge to be translated; JRTOC willing to share with students; Students and Staff will attend Staff Equity Forum
2/01/2021	Five students/three staff/three admin	Outreach	Inviting others to join and sign pledge; Staff will attend Family Forum; ADL Training scheduled
2/08/2021	Five students/three staff/two community members	Pledge advertisement, teacher packages for pledge rollout, survey	Need to brace for negative feedback
2/22/2021	Three students/three staff/two admin/one community	Pledge rollout timeline Teacher packages for pledge Student ambassadors to middle schools Invites for Community events	Schedule presentation at staff meeting; Teacher slides to shared folder Reps selected for MS and upcoming county equity meeting
3/08/2021	Three students/two staff/one admin/one community member	Promote pledge, MP Day can be an activity, training, staff meeting, student council feedback, select class feedback	Schedule Multiple Perspectives (MP) Day; NPFH documentation; send out Doodle poll; student volunteers picked; add vocab “We do not tolerate hate speech”; respect pronouns; overall positive but limited entries
3/15/2021	Two staff/one community member	Pledge revisions	Teacher feedback
3/29/2021	Three students/three staff/one	Review teacher feedback How do we address outliers or those who	Revise land acknowledgment; add definition sheet

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Date	Attendees	Topics discussed	Decisions
4/05/2021	community member One student/one staff/one community member	don't want to participate? MP Day Pledge Student training	Include info on how to have difficult conversations Loop in district admin MP Day 4/28 Student training 5/4
4/12/2021	Two staff/one community	Pledge rollout date/ MP date Pledges	MP Day 4/28 Virtual signing Promo video
4/28/2021	Schoolwide activity	MP Day	Pledge signing
5/4/2021	Three students/two staff/one community member	Techer asks Parent info Virtual or live signing ADL evidence Pledge posters	Present at staff meeting; slide show Finish promo video QR codes for virtual signing; ABS funds
5/5, 5/12, 5/19, 2021	20 students/two staff members/one community/1 ADL facilitator	Committee training	Explore identity Interpret differences Challenge bias Champion justice
5/25/2021	Four students/three staff/two community members/	Complete feedback forms Next steps	Certified NPFH In person meeting

Pledge

After forming the committee, the group was tasked with the first step of becoming a certified NPFH School, which included creating a schoolwide pledge. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL, 2022) provides the Resolution of Respect that can be used by middle and high school students:

I will seek to gain understanding of those who are different from me. I will speak out against prejudice and discrimination. I will reach out to support those who are targets of hate. I will promote respect for people and help foster a prejudice-free school. I believe that one person can make a difference—no person can be an “innocent” bystander when

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it comes to opposing hate. I recognize that respecting individual dignity and promoting intergroup harmony are the responsibilities of all students. (p. 17)

Although the students appreciated the words of the ADL's pledge, they felt it was important to include some information and actions items specific for their school. The ADL's Resolution served as a starting point, but several other artifacts also served as an inspiration while creating the pledge. First, some of the students who participated in NPFH had been part of creating a unity pledge for the school. Second, the district administration had recently released a video pledging to create a safe and welcoming place for students and some of the wording from this video was used. Finally, locating an accurate land acknowledgement was something important to the group.

The individual significance of the pledge varied among those who participated in the compiling it. Jane mentioned the pledge had "clear and concise language along with purpose." Tyler added, "I have not felt very welcomed for who I am every day, but the pledge helped me feel acknowledged by the school." Annie included her thoughts around the concept of acknowledgment as it related to the pledge:

Some of the specific pieces included were known to be things that had faced pushback, like, the acknowledgement of Oregon's White history, also acknowledging that the land is not our land and that we're on Indigenous lands, acknowledging our privilege.

To get input from a diverse group of individuals, time was given to disseminate the pledge to various groups throughout the school. First, the pledge was shared with the building administration to ensure they supported it. School administrators began attending meetings after learning more about the club and its goals. Next, the pledge was shared with the student council to ensure they also were in favor of the ideas expressed in the document. Their feedback centered

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around including language that clearly stated no tolerance for hate speech and symbols and respecting pronouns. Then, the pledge was shown to the school staff at a staff meeting. Student representatives from the NPFH group presented virtually at the biweekly staff meeting and used a slideshow to structure the information shared. The student presenters also asked staff for feedback around the pledge. The staff requested having a solid rollout plan for the pledge, along with a definitions sheet or slides to help keep the information shared uniform and there was also interest in skill building around having difficult conversations. At the staff meeting, a small group of teachers volunteered to share the pledge with their classes. From the student notes around these initial class presentations, overall, student responses were positive, but the NPFH committee was also concerned those who did not agree simply did not fill out the feedback forms. Finally, the pledge and supporting materials was made available to all school staff. In the packet that went out to staff to share with students was a QR code to a google form to sign the pledge. This use of technology was new for the students and staff and something they looked upon favorably.

When asked to reflect on this process, those who participated in the focus groups and questionnaire recognized the importance of getting feedback from various stakeholders. Annie expressed an appreciation for the process of developing the pledge:

I have a tendency to be like, just go with it, and let's see what happens, which is probably my background, like, let's try this, let's try this, let's try this. Whereas some others in the group, other adults involved in the group last year, who had more of science and data backgrounds, pushed for focus groups to get other people's opinions. And then we wanted to make sure we had backing of the admin, because it was going to be so specific

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and awesome. And we wanted to run it by students, run it by teachers. The feedback loop was so slow because for the greater part of year we were online.

The committee completed a feedback form on the pledge signing at the end of the 2020–2021 school year. Table 3 shows committee feedback from the pledge signing activity that comprised part of the NPFH program at COHS during the 2020–2021 school year.

Table 3

Pledge Signing Feedback

Pros	Cons
Thorough feedback	Relying on staff to get information out
Lots of student engagements	Doing the project remotely
Sparked a good discussion	Need to repeat the activity annually
Teachers now have a lot of resources to continue discussions	Knowledge that not every teacher shared information
QR code helpful	

Note. Data came from Pledge Feedback Google form, May 25, 2021.

A community member, Jane, added the rollout was slow because, “This statement needed to reach a multitude of different parties, including student and staff.” A student, Tyler, shared, “I appreciate how inclusive the pledge is even though the response of half of the students at the school has been disappointing.” It was reported 12% of the student population signed the pledge by the end of the pledge signing campaign (Pledge Feedback Form, May 25, 2021).

Multiple Perspectives Day

Multiple Perspectives Day was hosted by the student council in conjunction with NPFH. The students planned, implemented, and debriefed the activity that was used as one of the qualifying activities for the NPFH program. Annie added, “This was totally student run. I know

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that they were trying to collect diverse voices and give people the opportunity to hear the stories of folks that they may not encounter on a regular basis.” The activity took place via Zoom and students and staff were invited to attend. Tyler shared:

A lot of kids who go to COHS literally only know people who are exactly like them and have negative opinion about anyone else, therefore treating people they don’t understand maliciously. Events like MP Day help share some perspectives and shine a light on groups of people who aren’t given a voice.

Speakers were selected who represented a variety of backgrounds and presented information on their own unique perspective, experience in the greater school community, or expertise in a field that could provide some type of support to students or staff. Attendees had an opportunity to select and attend two 20-minute sessions that included presentations with a question-and-answer session. At the end of the sessions, all were invited back to the main Zoom room to listen to information about the NPFH program including an opportunity to sign the NPFH pledge. Jane reflected, “Activities like this one are essential to get the message out, and we get more people actively engaged.” Table 4 shows information collected as part of the Multiple Perspective Day Debrief completed as an activity during the 2020–2021 school year by the NPFH club at COHS.

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Table 4

Multiple Perspective Day Debrief

Pros	Cons
Well organized; Zoom breakout rooms ran smoothly 50/50 students and staff Good input from staff and students during NPFH debrief Started conversations in the school between students and staff Students engaged with speakers and were respectful No Zoom raiders!	Speakers need to join the Zoom room earlier to make sure that materials are working Need to recruit more speakers to fill last minute gaps Signups continued to come in right up until the time that the program started.

The goal of the activity was to allow students and staff to gain new perspectives about different lives and experiences. These empathy-building exercise provided the insight necessary for individuals and organization to begin to note their own words and actions which in turn can lead to changes in behaviors on a small and large scale. This activity also provided the opportunity for individuals to ask questions in a safe space, which also leads to greater understanding of others. From the activity feedback form, someone noted, “Ultimately MP Day was very well received, and we couldn’t be more proud.” This activity demonstrated the meaningfulness of student-led activities that can address school climate issues.

Committee Training

Although the NPFH program was provided for free from the regional ADL, additional trainings and curriculum are available at a cost. The district personnel supporting the NPFH program applied for and received a \$10,000 competitive grant. This provided opportunities for committees across the district to take part in ADL facilitated training specifically tailored for the age and needs of the participants.

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The NPFH committee, including 20 students, received 6 hours of training spread over three different sessions using the grant money. COHS administration also used professional development funds to provide 6 hours of training to all school staff. The material presented in both training opportunities focused on the principles of the ADL's education program: Explore Identity, Interpret Differences, Challenge Bias, and Champion Justice (ADL, 2022). The training provided opportunities to explore one's own identity, identify bias, and learn how to interrupt bias and harassment when it is observed.

After the committee completed the training in Spring 2021, they completed a debrief form about the experience. The committee shared:

The training was a good opportunity for us to learn together. It provided other perspectives. The new information gave a lot of new ways to think about things and way that it is applied to us and our friends and families.

As far as triumphs and challenges, the form included the following statement:

It was a good chance to think about your own words and actions and how they affect others positively and negatively. We need ways to be able to share what we learned so that others can start to take accountability for themselves.

The feedback also included the need for a slower pace as the training provided a lot of information but not opportunities to discuss it and fully understand new ideas. One student shared, "It was draining to do three 2-hour sessions and shorter sessions more spread out may be easier in the future." Annie had the opportunity to participate in the student training along with similar staff training provided by the ADL. She added:

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We had like 20–25 students participating in student training. I had the same feedback for both groups that it was amazing to have a lot of the language to be the same in the adult and the student training.

Although the grant covered the cost for the committee training, COHS used their own funds to provide the complementary training to the entire school staff, including certified and noncertified individuals. Annie reflected on professional development (PD) during the 2020–2021 school year while the school participated in virtual learning:

We had so much time embedded in our schedule for PD and some energy to do it, because when we had Wednesdays for learning and for checking up on kids and office hours, and for meetings. We got so much PD in there!

Neither Tyler nor Jane, who participated in the focus group, were able to take part in the trainings. Scheduling conflicts and the commitment to the extended training session were barriers for both of them to participate.

End of 2020–2021 School Year

The school was certified a NPFH institution along with five other schools in the district. Each school received a banner of recognition in various publications throughout the district and ADL communications. Community donations also covered the costs to create a large, vinyl banner of the COHS NPFH pledge to hang next the ADL banner in the front hall of the school. Annie responded, “I think that as more schools in the district get certified, it will be a point of pride. This is who we are and these are the things that we value.” Jane added:

I would truly hope the momentum continues and a strong core of students has taken this task this year. I haven’t heard or seen an invitation this year-though my work schedule has increased and that may impact my ability to engage in this work.

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Tyler implored, “Getting certified is vital for showing our commitment to making this previously nonwelcoming school more warm for all kinds of students.”

2021–2022 School Year

During the 2021–2022 School year, the NPFH program was again offered at the high school. Some opportunities for recruitment of members happened early in the school year. During Summer 2021, I was invited to share information about NPFH at the Summer Bridge program for incoming freshman to COHS. I can report that several students I spoke to after the presentation mentioned they were already familiar with the program from having participated in middle school. I encouraged them to watch for meeting dates and times once the school year began. In October, the virtual club fair included a video from last year’s NPFH club with information of meeting dates and time. Table 5 shows NPFH School Committee attendance, discussions, and decisions for the 2021–2022 school year.

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Table 5

Committee Timeline for 2021–2022 School Year

Date	Attendees	Topics discussed	Decisions
10/25/2021	One staff member/one community member	COHS NPFH club	Start recruiting students from middle school participants and other affinity groups; add NPFH to school's club page
11/1/2021	Three students/one staff/one community member	Community training; school/community partners; using advisory periods	Contact ADL (community member); make paper flyers with tear off QR code with meeting info (students); reach out to middle school facilitators and club leaders to share info about NPFH (staff member)
11/8/2021	Five students/one staff/ one community member	Pledge signing; brainstorming activities	Community education around pledge signing
11/22/2021	Seven students/one staff/one community member	Timeline for year	December-Recruit; January-Pledge and community training; March-Bystander Training; April-MP Day
12/06/2021	One staff/one community member	Student leadership; community training	Next meeting 1/10/2022 Community training scheduled for 1/31/2022
1/10/2022	One staff/one student/two community members	2020–2021 focus group	Recorded session and provided questions for follow up to participants
1/24/2022	One staff/two students/one community member	Community training additional activities	Not a NPFH activity Connect with other high school clubs doing NPFH activities
1/31/2022	Eight staff/two parents/two students/one ADL facilitator	Community training; shared pledge	Understanding your bias and showing up as an ally debrief

School Community Training

During the 2021-2022 school year, a family and community member training component was added to the program. Family and community members were invited to take part in a 2-hour ADL-facilitated training session via Zoom. Registration material was sent out through the COHS

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newsletter to families and was also posted on social media to invite others to attend. The COHS administration asked new staff members to attend because they had missed the training provided in the previous year. The district grant covered the cost for this activity. There were 12 individuals who attended: two students, two parents, and eight COHS staff members, along with the ADL facilitator. The attendees, including myself, had an opportunity to explore our own biases and were provided tools for how to address cycles of discrimination and harassment in schools. During the discussion, one parent mentioned it seemed most of the responsibility was placed on the students to stand up for others. One of the student attendees mentioned, “It is tiring to have to do the work of adults.” The idea of a safe adult and how that signaling may work was decided as a next step for the NPFH club.

The COHS NPFH school pledge was presented at the end of the training. The group including the parents present were very supportive of the pledge and expressed interested in being part of the NPFH program in the future.

Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) and Equity Club

During the 2021–2022 school year, attendance at the weekly NPFH meetings consisted of one or two students, one parent, and a single staff member; however, the GSA took the lead with school-wide activities that would qualify as NPFH activities. They hung a Pride flag in the school cafeteria and provided pronoun buttons to students and staff. They also included information to discuss the flags and pronoun buttons in the weekly student advisory period. Although the NPFH has not experienced the same level of attendance in meetings or activity planning as they had in the previous school year, other student-led groups are holding activities that follow the NPFH format with opportunities for learning and discussion and building empathy for others.

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Future Activities

Although the NPFH club lost some momentum, individuals who were part of the club or joined the school community are still creating opportunities for empathy-building activities. The student council is planning to hold the Multiple Perspectives Assembly again during the 2021-2022 school year and this activity can be used as a NPFH activity. Affinity groups for students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color formed at COHS led by a new staff member and they have been contacted about sponsoring an activity. The plans is to present the pledge to the school community in Spring 2022 following the same timeline as the 2020-2021 school year. Based on the community training and school needs, bystander training is being considered for a school wide activity.

Although the information from the 2021–2022 school year was not as robust, the coding of data did support some emerging themes including the concept of commitment. During the 2021–2022 school year, the ideals behind the NPFH program, including student leadership and open dialogue, showed up in different ways in the school, attributing to an overall school–community buy-in around the need to work on school climate together by understanding the needs of others (i.e., empathy).

Chapter Summary

This chapter shared the data collection for the NPFH program at COHS during the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years. The information included a schoolwide survey, focus group, questionnaire, activity debriefings, and meeting planning notes. In the next chapter, the data is used to answer the research questions presented along with next possible research and practical steps for the information.

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Chapter 5

Conclusions

During the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years, the No Place For Hate (NPFH) program was implemented at cooperating high school (COHS). The program addressed issues related to school climate by providing opportunities for students to plan empathy–building activities that led to schoolwide discussions. This chapter explores the identified themes that arose from the schoolwide survey, committee artifacts, focus groups, and questionnaires. The themes are described in relation to each research question. I also provided recommendations for for future research and practical applications that could be conducted based on these initial findings. After analyzing the data collected, the following themes emerged: (a) need for representation, (b) open dialogue among stakeholders, (c) student-led change, and (d) commitment to the cause.

Research Question 1

1. To what extent has the Anti-Defamation League’s No Place for Hate Program impacted school committee participants’ sense of belonging, sense of connectedness and sense of purpose?

The need for representation was identified in several ways in terms of the school committee participants’ own sense of belonging, connectedness, and purpose. The school and district staff demographic information does not match the student population. For example, 92% of the educators self-reported as White, whereas only 77% of the student population identified themselves as White (Oregon Department of Education [ODE], 2021). The work of Hammond (2015) pointed to issues that arise when educators do not use culturally responsive teaching practices for students with backgrounds different than their own. From the focus group

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information, students had not felt seen at the COHS, but NPFH offered some hope that a shift toward more appreciation of diversity was happening.

The results of the student survey showed many students at COHS did not feel they were represented in the hallways, curriculum, nor by staff members. Some changes could be made relatively easily at the school level to begin to remedy this situation, such as (a) the type of posters hanging in classrooms and hallways, (b) books available to read in the library, (c) organization of affinity groups, and (d) cultural events offerings. However, changes to curriculum and creating new hiring practices would require long-term goals and more of a top-down approach from the district level.

The district committed to updating hiring strategies and successfully recruited and hired several diverse candidates for the 2021–2022 school year. At least one new member of the staff at COHS who identified as Black noted the need for an affinity group for students who identified as Black, Indigenous, or as a person of color. Starting an affinity group would show how important it is for individuals to make an immediate and pronounced commitment to change.

I would also be very curious to hear thoughts from student, staff, and families around what previous actions helped make them feel more welcomed in the school community. By having real-world examples of words and actions, other educators may begin to adopt these successful strategies. The thoughts shared by Ladson-Billings (1995) centered around the importance of finding out what worked—in her case, what worked in reaching African American students instead of simply restating or identifying obstacles or concerns about the Black students she supported.

The NPFH committee recognized the need to amplify historically marginalized voices to provide a platform to share their stories and develop activities such as the Multiple Perspective

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Assembly. By the students taking the lead in planning and delivering the activity, there was a greater opportunity to address blind spots that may be part of adult orchestrated events. The students worked with other committee members to schedule speakers and presenters, providing a rich experience for the students and staff who attended and took part in discussions.

Several students noted the importance of the pledge and activities in terms of feeling seen and supported at school. The pledge was something the committee took a great deal of time developing during the 2020-2021 school year. Despite positive feedback during development, only 12% of the school signed as a signal of the support for the NPFH principles. In response to this low response rate and the time it took to develop the pledge, the committee for the 2021–2022 school year decided to use the pledge provided by the ADL instead of creating a new one.

The student-led committee planned and implemented schoolwide empathy-building activities, such as the opportunity to listen and learn from others along with discussing what had been shared. Taylor et al. (2017) shared the extended positive impacts of social–emotional programs—not only on relationships, but on student attendance and academics as well. The NPFH program promoted authentic dialogue among students, staff, and community members, which had not have happened previously.

During the weekly meetings, Multiple Perspective Assembly, and committee training, the various stakeholders involved tackled tough topics together, which provided a sense of strength and support to the decisions for next steps. The participants in these discussions were treated as equals when different views were presented. The staff, students, and families are directly affected by school policies, procedures, and practices and therefore should included in the process rather than only considered when concerns arise (National School Climate Center, [NSCC], 2021).

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The students showed a commitment to the NPFH committee by attending meetings during the 2020–2021 school year. Lyons and Brasof (2020) provided evidence to support the fact that efforts should be made to increase inclusive and sustainable practices when engaging all stakeholders in a school toward common building-wide goals. During the 2021–2022 school year, there was a shift for students to work through already existing groups, such as the Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA). Overall, students who took part in the NPFH program demonstrated they have developed skills to promote change on a school wide level.

Research Question 2

2. What did the school-based committee perceive as the benefits and challenges of the Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate Program?

The NPFH group during the 2020–2021 school year did have students who represented marginalized backgrounds; however, those same students were very involved in many activities at COHS. The students involved recognized they needed to not only advocate for themselves but also others with the empathy-building activities.

One idea was for COHS and the district would be to have a process to select members of school committee for NPFH moving forward. By using a nomination and selection process, criteria for students and supportive adults could be established to accurately represent various aspects of the greater school community. Ice et al. (2015) shared the benefits for having representative and trained students gather information on needs from the greater school community. With such a small representation of the student population, knowing if the real concerns of the school are heard or only the issues of a few can be difficult.

During the final focus group with students, at least one student acknowledged they did not feel they were reflected in all parts of the decision-making process; however, they were

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asked to take on adult roles in confronting bias and harassment in the hallways and classrooms at school. Blankstein and Houston (2011) explained the importance of shared work among dedicated individuals to make schoolwide changes. There has been a shift at COHS with some students taking the lead in activities and adults serving in support roles due to the introduction of the NPFH, but with this power comes the student responsibility of planning and carrying out activating with inclusive practices in mind. Staff and administration also have to be willing to offer support while not making decision without fully informing and including students.

The NPFH program did offer opportunities for open dialogues; however, the activities were more manufactured than organic. Although different stakeholders were invited to attend the events and sign the pledge, the activity reflection information revealed a feeling among NPFH committee members that only those who supported the cause truly took part in these activities. The study results reflect personal growth for committee members rather than a total acceptance of the NPFH concept by the whole school, however, these findings should not diminish the fact that issues in a school can never be addressed if time and space are not provided to receive input and discuss them.

Acquiring new skills is the core of of empathy-building activities. An individual can begin growing their own capacity for empathy by trying to understand the experiences of others (Rivers et al., 2016). Although some of this skill-building took place in committee trainings as part of NPFH and the staff trainings, the same education was not afforded to all stakeholders, rendering discussions and compromise difficult. Additional opportunities to hone skills around discussion and compromise would be beneficial on a schoolwide level.

Overall, opportunities to work together toward a common goal of a more safe and welcoming school for all is a large undertaking. The process began at COHS during the 2020-

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2021 school year with a commitment to the cause made in the 2021–2022 school year. NPFH provides a structure that can be adapted to meet different needs as they arise. The overarching goal of the activities is to address school climate through building empathy for others and this objective can be accomplished in any number of ways.

Research Question 3

3. To what extent is the No Place for Hate Program implemented in the school?

Students who participated in NPFH during the 2 school years reported to have found new and existing groups and activities to use parts of the NPFH program, including student-led planning, schoolwide education, and discussion. For example, the GSA provided a schoolwide activity and discussion topic concerning pronouns and the importance of signaling a safe place at school.

Although the spirit of the NPFH program continued at COHS during the 2021–2022 school year, the club was not as successfully implemented. Attendance at weekly meetings was not consistent and a lack of action items showed the club may not be the best vehicle for continuing to be a NPFH-certified school.

The community training was an addition for the 2021–2022 school year. In response to some negative comments made by members of the larger school community around the intent of the NPFH program, the training provided an opportunity to allow more individuals to take part in empathy-building activities and engage in dialogue. Unfortunately, not very many individuals chose to participate and there was some concern about how the pledge and student-planned activities would be perceived during the 2021–2022 school year. Therefore, the decision was made by the committee to move forward with the ADL provided pledge and Multiple

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Perspectives Day for a key activity since neither had received any resistance from stakeholders previously.

There continues to be barriers to participation during the 2021–2022 school year. Although the students resumed in-person learning, the group met at 7:30 p.m. on Monday nights via Zoom. This day, time, and format was suggested by the core group of students who were part of the NPFH program during the 2020–2021 school year, but proved to not be accessible for other students and committee members. The NPFH group itself failed to have robust involvement during the 2021–2022 school year, however, meeting times continued to be offered. Those involved still wanted to ignite change at their school to address ongoing issues.

The student perspective at the COHS was crucial to include when considering any type of large-scale changes. The NPFH offered the opportunity for individual learning. When combined with a small group of like-minded individuals, there was real efforts to make long-lasting change in a school community. Far too often, issues are identified at administrator or school levels with little-to-no input from those most impacted: the students.

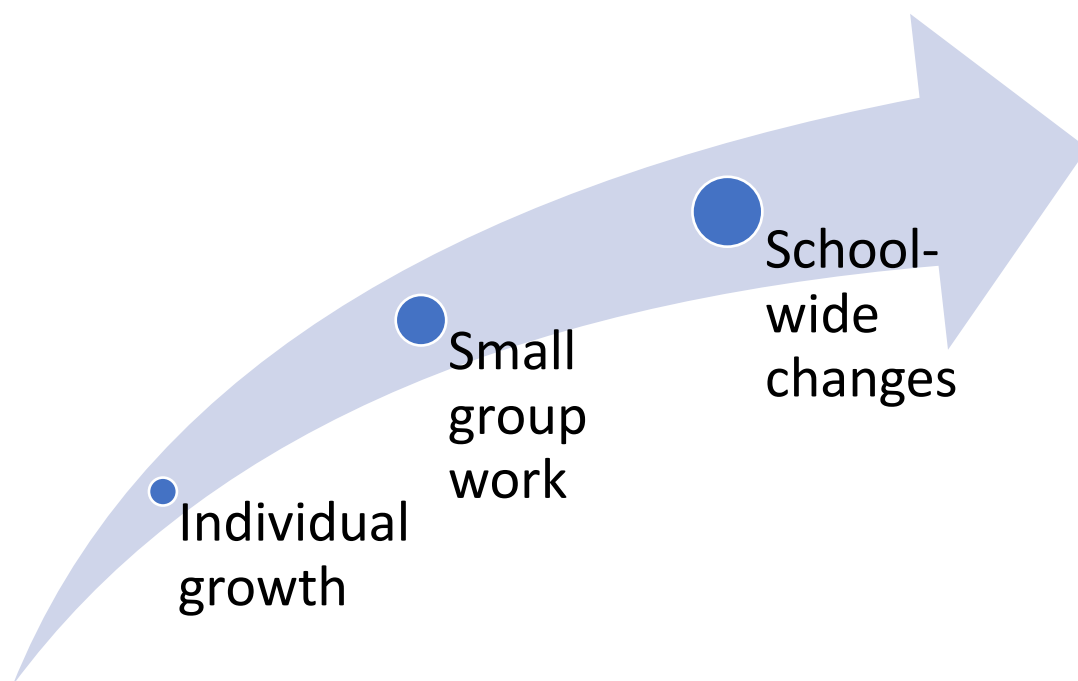
Implications

This study determined the effectiveness of using a school committee led by students to positively impact the school climate through empathy-building activities. There was a demonstration of changes and impacts on a microlevel from the information collected through the survey, focus groups, and other artifacts. By providing opportunities for individuals to learn and grow, the NPFH committee members found others who are like-minded and interested in addressing issues together and at a school level. Figure 5 illustrates the empathy-building framework I developed. The framework begins with individual work that, when done collectively in a small group, can progress to large-scale changes.

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Figure 5

Empathy Building Framework



Although schoolwide changes are important, these types of initiatives will continue to have limited success unless there is buy-in from a core group of individuals committed to personal growth and change. Therefore, the need to make a difference needs to come from individuals who, using a structure such as NPFH, can effect real change in creating safe and welcoming schools.

When I began my involvement in NPFH and work with COHS, I expected to find many who wanted to be part of making changes for the school; yet, that simply was not the case. However, due to the NPFH core elements, student-led change based on stakeholder engagement working toward a common cause has continued to build.

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The NPFH program was implemented in local schools due to a need to have a way to include stakeholders, empower youth, and provide opportunities for education. This study can help school personnel understand the importance of empathy-building activities in response to individual, group, and schoolwide needs.

Recommendations for Further Research

As I reflected on the information I collected as part of this study, I identified a few areas where additional research may be warranted. These areas include: (a) virtual implementation of empathy-building programming, (b) school climate during the COVID-19 global pandemic, (c) ways to truly measure levels of belonging for school stakeholders, (d) creating connections through relationships, and (e) authentic opportunities for engagement.

Empathy-building activities involve opportunities for individuals to listen and learn from each other. Due to COVID-19 global pandemic restrictions, these activities took place via Zoom, or other virtual formats and may not have been as effective as participating in person. Conducting a focus group of individuals after they took part in face-to-face empathy building and virtual activities to gauge the impacts of the activities based on each format would similarly yield interesting results.

The study took place during the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years. The individuals, schools, communities, and the United States were faced with several concerns related to health and well-being. Divisions were created instead of unity in many circumstances and the NPFH program certainly received its share of buy-in, apathy, and resistance. When the school returns to a more traditional format, continuing to monitor the impacts of the program will be critical.

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When collecting data on topics related to an individual, much of the information came from self-reporting. There is always the doubt in the researcher's mind around whether the information shared is a true reflection of the respondents' beliefs or simply answering in a socially acceptable manner. A way to support surveys through observations and engagement levels may provide a clearer picture of those who feel they belong at school and those who do not.

From the schoolwide survey data, students were able to name an adult who cared for them at the school; however, there was not additional information available about how this adult cultivated these feelings of connection. The characteristics or actions of an adult who creates a caring, learning environment seems like an area that could be explored more to provide opportunities for educators to learn best practices from those who have strategies that come naturally to them.

Although there were opportunities provided during the NPFH program for stakeholders to have dialogue, the interactions among stakeholders were carefully planned and implemented. It would be interesting to measure the effects of ongoing, candid conversations among stakeholders to really engage in problem solving. The impact of authentic opportunities would yield meaningful data.

Practical Applications

Classroom community-building activities involving empathy are applicable across all settings. Although I focused on high school students in this study, students at any age can and should be able to celebrate their own identities to understand how they are both the same and different from others in their classroom. The earlier in schools that interventions can be

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implemented to address assumptions, biases, and stereotypes, the less likely those are to evolve into violence or hate.

School climate tools, such as surveys and focus groups, are important to identify the feelings of those who are part of a school to create safe and welcoming learning environments. Multiple ways to assess the sense of belonging, connectedness, and purpose of all stakeholders will create a clearer picture of a school's strengths and weaknesses.

Although technology can be a barrier to successfully implementing empathy-building activities, tracking progress through new technologies may be beneficial for educators. Application such as Nearpod can document the learning process that individuals, groups and schools go through as they strive to address school climate issues.

Individual educators can also take steps to understand the needs of those in their care. By creating a questionnaire for students and families to complete earlier in the school year, school personnel can attain deeper understanding of the home lives of their students, which can ensure educators create ways to develop trusting relationships instead of obstacles.

Authentic, ongoing opportunities for stakeholder engagement can happen. Individuals have to feel safe enough to be vulnerable and share their true feelings during discussions. Moreover, others must be open to listening without defensiveness. Listening to learn instead of to respond is the heart of empathy and empathy-building activities.

Conclusions

I feel grateful I was granted the opportunity to work with NPFH program, the various school committees, and the district to support implementation of this program. With the various struggles individuals faced during the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years, working on this project was timely. Many of the issues the committee attempted to address are long term and will

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take time to change; however, with commitment by individuals and the committee, I feel hopeful systemic issues can be addressed as awareness around these issues are increasingly made known.

Even in this short period of time, there was progress. New connections and opportunities were made. Students took the lead and worked with staff and communities to begin making changes that demonstrated a more inclusive learning environment for all. The work of the NPFH committee was commendable and only time will tell if their efforts made a lasting impact.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Letter for Participants

The Effect of Empathy-Building Activities: Implementing the Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate Program

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this form is to provide you with information and obtain your consent to take part in this study.

RESEARCHERS

Heidi Blackwell, Principal Investigator, Doctoral Student, George Fox University

STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this case study is to explore the personal perspectives of committee members and extent of implementation of the No Place for Hate program.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The study will consist of a focus group of participants as well as access to information related to the No Place for Hate program. By taking part in the focus group, you consent to being recorded via Zoom and your responses may be used during presentations and published work.

RISKS

There are no known risks to taking part in this study. Being part of the No Place for Hate committee was voluntary during the previous school year and only those who participated in the previous year will be invited to the focus group. Due to the focus group format, it is difficult to guarantee complete confidentiality, but trusted relationships formed between participants last year. You will be able to review and remove information from the record before it is published.

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BENEFITS

The primary benefit of participating in this study is the opportunity to share your experience with the program during the previous school year. The information shared will inform other schools that are interested in implementing the No Place for Hate program or empathy-building activities.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Due to the nature of the focus group, it is impossible to guarantee confidentiality. It may be possible that others will share what you have reported. In the reporting of the information, no participants will be identified by name; instead, pseudonyms and codes will be used. Also, attempts will be made to share findings in a way that no individual, school or community identity will be identified.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

Participation is completely voluntary. Even if consent is obtained, you are free to withdraw it at any time. The decision to not participate in the study will not affect your relationship with the school, researcher, or George Fox University. When deciding to withdraw, I will discuss preferences on how data already collected will be shared.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS

There will be no payment provided for participating in the study.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

Any questions you have concerning the research study will be answered by Heidi Blackwell, (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

This form explains the background, benefits, and risks of participating in the project. By signing this form, you are voluntarily agreeing to take part in the study. You may choose to withdraw

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consent and discontinue participation at any time. A copy of this form will be available to you upon request.

Please sign below to consent to participation in the above study. By signing below, you are granting the researcher the right to use information gathered for presenting and publishing results.

Participant's Signature _____

Printed Name _____

Date_____

If Participant is under 18, parent signature is required

Parent Signature_____

Printed Name _____

Date_____

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Appendix B

Focus Group Questions

How did you hear about the No Place for Hate program and why did you decide to join the club?

A lot of time was spent developing the Pledge. Why was this statement important to you personally? What did you appreciate about the process of development and what could have been done differently?

The anti-bias/anti-bullying training was provided in the spring. If you participated, what was something new that you learned? How have you implemented the things that you learned in your words or actions at school?

Multiple Perspectives Day was one of the activities that was part of the No Place for Hate program last school year. How was the content and structure decided upon? Why do you feel it is important to listen to other perspectives? What was one thing you learned?

During the 2020–2021 school year, the school was certified as a No Place for Hate school. What does that mean to you and the school? Why or why not will you be involved with the program moving forward?