Quality Education For All:
Cultural Competency in K – 12 Education

A Community–Based Research Report from Whitman College
by Simerun Singh, Andrew Ryan and Catherine DeCramer

State of the State for Washington Latinos 2011 – 2012

"Growing up here, it's challenging, because in my house I have this culture, this Mexican culture, Hispanic culture and then I go to school and it's like a totally different environment where I have to learn what culture is here in America and sometimes I have to...mix the two so I can feel comfortable."
- Alejandro, Walla Walla High School graduate Class of 2011

Acknowledgements

This report is dedicated to the students of the Walla Walla Public Schools.

Table of Contents: Cultural Competency in K – 12 Education

INTRODUCTION

A group of 5th grade students are playing outside at recess.[1] One of the students shouts out "Who wants to play football?" and a group of about fifteen students, having agreed to play, gather around the field. It is a diverse group of Latino, Black, and White students – mostly male, a few girls. One student asks, "How will we choose teams?" One of the Black students jumps in excitedly, "I know, let's have the Negros versus the White kids!" The other Black students laugh along, but then another student asks "But what about the Mexicans?" "Well," the Black student responds, "we'll just have the Mexicans versus the Americans, the colored kids versus the White kids." The children respond with mixed reactions – some voice murmurs of opposition, some make snide remarks under-breath – but they all sort themselves according to race. The game begins. A few of the Black students call several of their opponents "White boy." Not long after, the White students begin responding with the "N" word. The game soon becomes extremely physical – many of the students aggressively challenge each other, and some look noticeably uncomfortable. After five minutes of play, a recess monitor walks over. She takes the football, chides the students briefly for playing too rough, and tells them to find something else to play.

This incident happened at an elementary school in Walla Walla, Washington, and incidents like this occur more frequently than we would wish in our communities. Why did these school students so effortlessly, and apparently unthinkingly, assume that racial difference was the best way to divide up their teams on the football field? Was this interaction more about race, or more about culture - or both? What do the students' actions say about how Latino, Black, and white identities are perceived and constructed by young people in everyday situations? How, if at all, might school-based efforts to increase students' knowledge of and respect for the varying cultural backgrounds of their peers make it less likely that such seemingly iron-clad, inflexible identities govern the lives of children and youth in our increasingly multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural society?

Schools are dynamic places of social interaction. They are places where in addition to learning arithmetic, writing skills, and history, students learn what it means to be members of society. They engage with their peers, teachers, and administrators and each experience forms their perception of their society and their place within it. Schools are places where students enter with distinct backgrounds and experiences. They are places certainly where all students deserve to enter without the fear of being called a racial slur, but moreover they are places where all students deserve to be valued and respected. This is the principle behind cultural competency: making the American educational system work well for all students.

To this end, American schools are failing. Staggering statistics continue to show that minority students drastically underperform compared to White students in America. Black and Hispanic students score an average of 20 test-score points lower than their White classmates – a difference of about two grade levels – on the NAEP math and reading assessments at 4th and 8th grades, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2009[2] and 2011[3].

---

[1] Observation by Andrew Ryan at Green Park Elementary School in Walla Walla, WA Nov. 24 2011.
[2] National Center Education Statistics Findings in Brief (2009). http://nationsreportcard.gov/hsts_2009/summary.asp

The NCES also found fewer than 10 percent of Black or Hispanic students participated in rigorous course loads in 2009[4]. In 2008, only 57.6 percent of Hispanic, 57 percent of Black, and 53.9 percent of Native American students graduated on time in comparison to 78.4 percent of white students[5]. Education and school funding policies can exacerbate these opportunity gaps. Analyses by The Education Trust, a Washington-based research and advocacy organization, and others have found that students in poverty and those who are members of racial minority groups are overwhelmingly concentrated in the lowest-achieving schools[6].

Conversations about the achievement gap have circulated state and national government circles for years, but the disturbing statistics about minority student performance in American schools continue to roll out. In 2001, No Child Left Behind passed with the purpose of ensuring "that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education," a goal hoped to be accomplished by "meeting the educational needs of low-achieving children in our nation's highest-poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children, and young children in need of reading assistance" and by "closing the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers.[7]"

In 2009, the Washington State Senate mandated the diffusion of *cultural competency* into instruction, curriculum, and professional development to address the K-12 achievement gap.[8] As defined by SB 5973, cultural competency "includes knowledge of student cultural histories and contexts, as well as family norms and values in different cultures; knowledge and skills in accessing community resources and community and parent outreach; and skills in adapting instruction to students' experiences and identifying cultural contexts for individual students."[9] The policy came in response to five studies conducted on Washington State schools that revealed disparities in educational experiences and academic performance according race.[10] The five reports recommended cultural competency as an effective and necessary means for bridging the achievement gap.

Our report examines three public schools – an elementary, middle, and high school – in Walla Walla, Washington. Our research question simply asks: *How culturally competent are these three schools?* This question comes at a time when the Walla Walla Public School District is 36 percent Latino for the 2011-2012 school year and 1 percent African American—racial minorities identified as performing lower and exposed to less educational opportunities according to the achievement gap studies.[11,12] Our partnership with Diana Erickson, the bilingual

[3] National Center Education Statistics Findings in Brief (2011).
http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2011/2012459.pdf
[4] National Center Education Statistics Findings in Brief (2009). http://nationsreportcard.gov/hsts_2009/summary.asp
[5] National Center Education Statistics "Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972–2008" http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011012.pdf
[6] Education Trust "Accessed Denied" (2010). Study can be found at:
http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/Access%20Denied.pdf
[7] No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, 20 U.S.C.A. § 6301 *et seq.* (West 2003)
[8] K-12 Education - Achievement Gap, SB 5973, 61st Legislature, State of Washington, Chapter 468, (2009).
[9] Ibid.
[10] Studies can be found at http://www.k12.wa.us/AchievementGap/Studies.aspx
[11] Walla Walla Public School District Website: About. http://www.wwps.org/aboutdistrict.htm

program coordinator, and Bill Erickson, the Latino Club advisor at Wa-Hi, gave us insight into the ways these influential leaders within the school district as well as advocates for Latino students in the school district felt that cultural competency needed to be addressed and assessed within the schools in Walla Walla. In addition to our partners' suggestion to assess cultural competency, previous State of the State for Washington Latinos reports on the Walla Walla Public School District reveal the marginalization of Latino students and parents within schools and the need for more culturally competent practices in order to increase student achievement and the quality of education.[13,14,15]

In order to answer our research question, we interviewed teachers, administrators, Latino students, and Latino parents in order to assess the perception of and barriers to cultural inclusivity within the respective schools from each perspective. We conducted a survey of the teachers and administrators to assess the broader perception of culture and race within the schools and to understand teacher and administrator's level of confidence with teaching in cultural sensitive and affirming ways.

We were able to gather personal narratives on issues ranging from racism, academic preparation and success, sense of social belonging, and discipline that helped inform our assessment of each school's level of cultural competency. In terms of school sense of social belonging, we found that students and parents tended to feel more included in a school that had easy access to translators and bilingual staff members. They also greatly appreciated the dual-language program. Latino parents and students valued staff diversity though we found low to very low levels of staff diversity at the three schools. At Garrison and Wa-Hi students noted racial segregation that promoted negative stereotypes because of the lack of interaction amongst student groups. Language barriers and time restrictions due to parent employment proved to be the strongest barriers to involving families at school. Teachers and administrators report higher levels of confidence in teaching and communicating with students of diverse backgrounds after having attended a training geared towards cultural sensitivity, however the district and the schools do not promote trainings that directly address cultural competency. Overall, there is a need to direct issues of cultural incompetency head on. This can be done by focusing on promoting school sense of social belonging, parent outreach tailored to different types of parental involvement, and providing consistent and professional development geared towards cultural competency as well as dealing with racial conflict.

---

[12] Studies can be found at http://www.k12.wa.us/AchievementGap/Studies.aspx

[13] "Improve teacher and school personnel relations with Latino parents; increase efforts to address family barriers by providing more institutional and personal support for Latino students." Schoenfelder, Caitlin. "The Larger Ecology of Latino Success in Secondary Education: Why Some Latino Students Are Beating The Odds." State of the State for Washington Latinos. 2006. walatinos.org

[14] "I recommend further professional development in multi-cultural education for teachers and staff ." Wilson, Lyndsey. "Towards Closing the Achievement Gap: Increasing Academic Preparedness and Ambition among Latino Students." State of the State for Washington Latinos. 2009. walatinos.org.

[15] "…directly and indirectly, parent and student marginalization hinders their access to sources of human, social and cultural capital necessary for a higher education." Ruiz, Ariel. "The Future of the Children of Immigrants: A Study of Latino Higher Education Aspirations and Abilities." State of the State for Washington Latinos. 2009. walatinos.org

The following is an excerpt from an interview with a Wa-Hi student:

> *Catherine DeCramer:* What are your hopes for our report?
> *Isabel:* I just really hope that it opens people's eyes to how hard it is to be here. I just want understanding. I just really want people to see that we are all equal, we are all human.
> *DeCramer:* Whose eyes do you think need to be opened the most?
> *Isabel:* The people who have put down someone because of their race, or stereotype people because of where they come from or think they are better because they have the money or the education.[16]

---

[16] Isabel, Wa-Hi personal interview by Catherine DeCramer at Starbucks Café on First and Main, Walla Walla, Washington, November 23, 2011.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on the achievement gap have consistently revealed a discrepancy between the academic achievement of students of color and their higher performing white peers. These studies reveal the need to identify variables that are prohibiting students of color from achieving at the same rate as their white peers. In order to bridge the achievement gap, scholars have located cultural competency as an effective means of creating a welcoming school environment with the primary intention of providing more opportunities for achievement for students of color. As there is no specific method to "achieve" cultural competency, we first trace the history and critiques of the strategy for cultural competency in order to come to a more refined, current, and effective conception of the term. From there, we explore aspects of the school that contribute to an environment that limits the achievement of students of color. These aspects include the lack of valuing all students' cultures, cultural and racial stereotyping, and low levels of parental involvement as well as exclusive definitions of parental involvement. From these themes, we identify components of a culturally competent school with an emphasis on the way in which the ongoing practice of the ideology works to create a successful mode of education.

The History and Trajectory of Cultural Competency

In one of the only articles clearly tracking the term "cultural competency," Burchum notes that cultural competency came about after the Civil Rights movement as various systems of care began to be integrated (Burchum 2005). Though the first conceptualization of cultural competency is relatively disputed, Gallegos, Tindall, and Gallegos mention that James Green was among the first to write on the concept of cultural competency within the context of social work (2005). Green's discussion of the term "cross-cultural awareness practice" refers to an approach focused on acquiring specific skills about the particularities of minority cultures in the US (1982). The author's anthropological outline of the specific characteristics of African-Americans, Latinos, Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, among other minority cultures displays cultural competency as knowledge of a set of cultural norms that service providers must learn within the social work field (Green 1982). Green defines culture as a people's history, tradition, values, and social organizations that individuals identify as important to their own identity (1982). Though Green has since developed upon his initial concept of cultural competence, this original work is frequently referenced and referred to as a catalyzing work in cultural competence theory (Gallegos, Tindall, and Gallegos 2005).

Cross, et al. provide a broader conceptualization of cultural competency that is widely referenced even in more recent scholarship on cultural competency. The authors developed their concept of cultural competency based on research done by a subcommittee of the Minority Initiative Resource Committee of the CASSP (Child and Adolescent Service System Program) Technical Assistance Center at Georgetown University Child Development Center on people of color and their experiences within the healthcare system (1989). The authors also use prior scholarship on the ways in which children of color who are emotionally disturbed, specifically, are commonly mistreated. For example, an adolescent Black child who is emotionally disturbed is more likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system rather than in the treatment setting to which his or her Caucasian peer would be referred (1989). A Hispanic child who is seriously emotionally disturbed will likely be assessed in a language not his or her own (1989). In order to address these cases of racial discrimination, the authors developed a definition, model of practice, and continuum outlining the trajectory of cultural competency (1989). They define cultural competency as the systems, agencies, and practitioners that develop the capacity to respond to the unique needs of populations whose cultures are different than that which might be called "dominant" or "mainstream." (1989).

Cross, et al. specify five essential elements for a system's, institution's, or agency's ability to become more culturally competent. These elements require that the system "value diversity, have the capacity for cultural self-assessment, be conscious of the dynamics inherent when cultures interact, have institutionalized cultural knowledge, and have developed adaptations to diversity." (1989). These elements must function simultaneously at every level of the system (1989). The authors constructed a widely-used cultural competency continuum (Fig. 1) or "Steps Toward Cultural Competency" (1989). Cultural competency, for Cross, et al., is intended to rectify mistreatment by emphasizing the need for health care providers to become more aware of the potential for racial and cultural discrimination and misunderstanding that prohibit certain populations from accessing appropriate health care services (1989).

Fig. 1: Cross, et al. "Steps Toward Cultural Competency." 1989
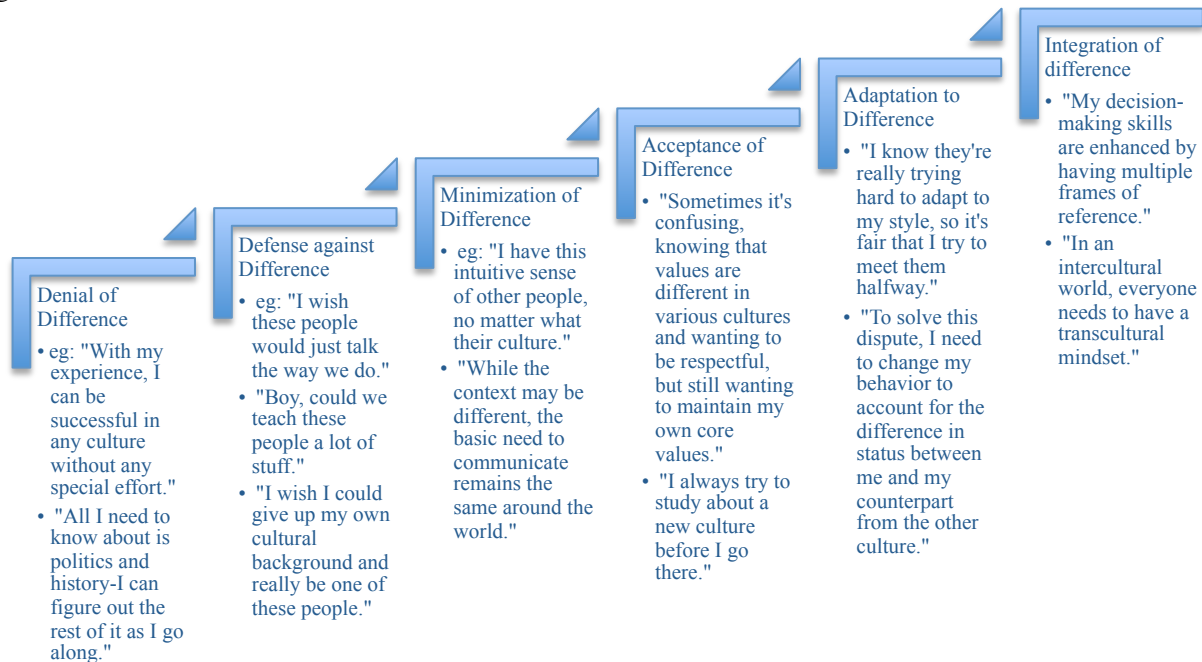

The stages refer to the holistic functioning of an entire organization though it can also refer to individuals within the organization. In order for an organization to move towards "cultural proficiency" or more realistically towards "cultural competence," the organization must plan, develop, and train individuals within the system to be more culturally competent (1989). Planning, developing, and training involves acquiring knowledge on ethnic-cultural behaviors like Green, but also includes individuals to reflect on themselves in an exercise of "cultural self-assessment" (1989). This would involve understanding the ways in which the culture or the operations of the organization may be structured to exclude or present exceptional difficulties for certain minorities (1989). Within this model, cultural competency acts as a practice that requires both the knowledge of cultural minorities in the community as well as an understanding of the way in which an organization operates as a whole in terms of outreach, accessing services, and administering medical service (1989).

The Bennett scale of intercultural competency strays from the characteristics of individuals cultures that Green discusses as well as the organization-focused continuum that Cross, et al. discuss. Rather, Bennett outlines the stages that educators of intercultural classrooms must go through to become culturally competent or be "interculturally sensitive." (Bennett 1993). The Bennett scale (Fig. 2) outlines six stages that an individual would go through starting with stages that reflect ethnocentrism—an individual's own culture is the center point for understanding cultures different than his or her own—and ending with stages that reflect the preferred perspective of ethnorelativism—the capacity to place one's own cultural experiences within the context of other cultures (1993). Bennett's scale takes a highly individual approach by placing emphasis on the behavioral displays that represent the type of thinking and experience of the varying levels of cultural sensitivity at each stage (1993). Straying from Cross, et al.'s approach, Bennett focuses on the educator and his or her outlook on issues of culture (1993). Bennett provides his own observations of actual responses and methods of identifying the stage in which an educator is in depending on his or her displayed beliefs and behaviors (1993). Bennett's model contends that through various methods of challenging and supporting an educator, an educator can move forward towards a perspective of integrating difference (1993). Methods in former stages include discussing different cultures in non-blaming, non-confrontational ways that allow for the educator to empathize with those who have different perspectives than his or her own (1993). The entire process encourages exercises in self-

reflection in order to dissolve assumptions about other cultures that prohibit intercultural sensitivity (Bennett 1993).

Fig. 2: Bennett, "A Developmental of Intercultural Sensitivity", 1998. Examples taken from original scale:

Integration of difference
• "My decision-making skills are enhanced by having multiple frames of reference."
• "In an intercultural world, everyone needs to have a transcultural mindset."

Adaptation to Difference
• "I know they're really trying hard to adapt to my style, so it's fair that I try to meet them halfway."
• "To solve this dispute, I need to change my behavior to account for the difference in status between me and my counterpart from the other culture."

Acceptance of Difference
• "Sometimes it's confusing, knowing that values are different in various cultures and wanting to be respectful, but still wanting to maintain my own core values."
• "I always try to study about a new culture before I go there."

Minimization of Difference
• eg: "I have this intuitive sense of other people, no matter what their culture."
• "While the context may be different, the basic need to communicate remains the same around the world."

Defense against Difference
• eg: "I wish these people would just talk the way we do."
• "Boy, could we teach these people a lot of stuff."
• "I wish I could give up my own cultural background and really be one of these people."

Denial of Difference
• eg: "With my experience, I can be successful in any culture without any special effort."
• "All I need to know about is politics and history-I can figure out the rest of it as I go along."

The Bennett scale is most commonly used within the education field, though it fails to contend with the structural issues of intercultural sensitivity as the Cross, et al. scale more effectively address. The Bennett scale places the onus on the educator to progress through these stages of cultural competency. Though that is much needed, a gap remains between the individual and the organization as a whole that could be supplemented by Cross, et al.'s discussion of the self-assessment as referring to developing an understanding of the way in which an organization as a whole operates.

Critiques of Cultural Competency: Emphasizing Race within Concepts of Culture

Though cultural competency has evolved significantly since Green, Cross, et al., and Bennett, critiques of cultural competency can be applied easily to these models that are still widely referenced. Pon locates the failures of cultural competency theory within social work in its establishing of "whiteness" as norm (2009). While cultural competency seeks to rectify problems that are inherently based on race, Pon argues that the use of culture and not race within cultural competency acts as a way to stereotype people of color based on pre-determined cultural characteristics (2009). People of color who are identified based on visible racial markers come to be identified as ethnic minorities who can be characterized by specific cultural traits, much like Green outlines. However, as opposed to identifying these characteristics as racial stereotypes, the characteristics become associated with cultural or ethnic differences rather than racial. Through veiling race with culture, cultural competency subsequently otherizes racial minorities (2009). Pon identifies the usage of culture in this way as "new racism," and argues that cultural competency and notions of culture as well as issues of nationality all stem from an assumed standard and perspective of whiteness (2009). This is because it "relegates 'others' as belonging

outside of the nation, different from what is ostensibly (white) 'Canadian [American] Culture'" (Pon 2009, 59). Cultural competency and its practice become an exercise of oppression through attempts to categorize and "otherize" the cultural minorities with static characteristics of particular cultural minorities (2009).

This particular interplay between culture and race that Pon identifies as problematic within cultural competency practice and thought is more generally discussed within Omi and Winant's discussion of the "ethnicity paradigm." Omi and Winant, sociologists and major proponents within the field of racial identity formation, frame "ethnicity" as the reduction of race to an insubstantial element (Omi and Winant 1994, 14-23). To Omi and Winant, race operates as a socially constructed trait which organizations within society uses as a means of characterizing people (1994). Values, common norms, and common circumstances come to characterize groups of people (1994). Omi and Winant present ethnicity as a problematic construction because, through discussions of assimilation, if a cultural minority group fails to "assimilate" in the white-dominant society, this is seen as a failure or deficiency of the culture of the minority community as opposed to understanding the way in which race may marginalize minority populations (1994, 18). The effects of nestling race within a broad scope of ethnicity or culture reflect the way in which cultural competency could neutralize or diminish issues that may be directly related to perceptions of race or the presence of racial discrimination.

Abrams and Moio utilize these critiques of culture, race, and cultural competency to refine both cultural competency thought and practice. Like Pon, Abrams and Moio argue that cultural competency models remain ineffective because of the tendency to "equalize oppression" within a framework of multiculturalism (Abrams and Moio 2008). From this tendency, the authors warn of the color-blind mentality that usually arises amongst social workers which obscures the harmful presence of institutionalized racism (2008). The authors reference studies that were conducted by Green, Kiernan-Stern, and Baskind in 2005 that studied the effects of cultural competency trainings on social workers' opinions about the presence of racism and oppression (2008). This specific case-study reveals how views toward privilege and race amongst social work students before and after a 'cultural competency' training produce the outlook that race does not matter and that, in general, everyone has equal opportunities and access to necessary resources—outlooks that are colorblind (Abrams and Moio 2008). The authors attribute ineffective diversity and cultural competency education for social workers to poor diversity curriculum and poor preparation and formatting on the cultural competency trainer's behalf (2008).

This critique specific to race poses a threat to Cross et al.'s emphasis on organizational self-assessments. While Cross, et al. stress the need for organizations to understand the ways in which the specific organization does not effectively serve minorities and in some cases prohibits minorities from even accessing its services, cultural competency trainings that do not address race jeopardize the ability for organizations to assess how race may be affecting access or quality of care (Abrams and Moio 2008, Cross, et al. 1989).

Abrams and Moio posit a solution to the imprecise distinction between culture and race within cultural competency, locating Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a means for clarifying this problematic conflation. CRT provides a way to place cultural competency models within a greater historical framework, shedding light on the way in which race has affected non-whites and their access to various resources and modes of care (Abrams and Moio 2008). According to

Abrams and Moio, providing this framework of CRT would address the critique that Pon poses of cultural competency's evasion of the historical implications of race as a factor in oppression (Abrams and Moio 2009). Abrams and Moio write "at the personal level, CRT demands an ongoing critical reflection, as well as vigilance for unearned privileges that flow to the self at the expense of others" (2009, 245). Cross, et al. describes these "unearned privileges" as rooted within experiences of race specifying that their particular research focused on people of color because "historically they [people of color] have had limited access to economic or political power and have been unable or not allowed to influence the structure that plan and administer children's mental health service systems" (Cross, et al. 1989, 17). Abrams and Moio suggest that cultural competency training and thought must encourage individuals to actively understand the way in which they are situated within greater social and racial hierarchies that carry historical implications related to power and influence (Abrams and Moio 2009). This includes the need for individuals to also understand the implications related to the perception and exercise of power not merely because of the perception of cultural differences but also because of perceptions and judgments based on race (Abrams and Moio 2009).

Schools as Public Space

Just as cultural competence requires clarification through complex terms such as "culture" and "race," so too does the term "public school." In order to better understand where and what sort of cultural barriers exist within public schools, the notion of "public" must be defined as well as a clarification of who the "public" is that the schools serves and the expectations of the level to which the public school is accessible to the "public" that it serves. According to Higgins and Abowitz, the ways in which school administrators conceptualize their school's 'publicness' affect student educational access and experiences. Through a negative definition of a 'public school' as a place that lacks sectarian preference as well as discrimination, essentially allows hegemony within the public to persist in school communities and further results in insufficient attention to minority needs (2011). Through a positive definition of a "public school", they write, the school becomes responsible for actively promoting public life, to build the public or publics that it serves rather than serve the public it encounters (2011). Public schools that approach the definition of "public" positively provide resources and services for minority members and groups in the school community based on a belief that the success of minority groups positively affects the larger public. Thus, schools that follow this model of public schooling perceive such efforts as universally beneficial rather than preferential (Higgins & Abowitz 2011).

Masschelein and Simons build on Higgins and Abowitz to show that a public school can be conceptualized as either a means for transitioning students into the larger public of society or as a public in and of itself. From the former point of view, access to education is crucial to a student's success in the public sphere because education itself is seen as a means of accessing resources that exist in society (Masschelein & Simons 2010). However, the authors discuss the dangers of perceiving certain pieces of cultural knowledge—frequently the English language—as essential to becoming part of the public. When schools identify students who lack these elements of "shared cultural knowledge" to be outside of the public, schooling becomes what the authors call a "pedagogic baptism" or a rite of passage for joining society (Masschelein and Simons 2010). Cross, et al. describe the dangers of valuing certain cultural characteristics over others

noting that "cultural traits, behaviors, and beliefs [of minority children] will likely be interpreted as dysfunctions to be overcome" as opposed to interpreting and using them as rich "funds of knowledge" (Cross, et al. 1989). Under this model, culturally diverse students that fail to succeed in school consequently fail to meet the criteria to be considered part of the national public. If, instead, public schools are considered publics themselves, the authors believe all students are seen as contributing members to the public. Students themselves therefore construct their public in an environment of "free space" and "free knowledge" (Masschelein and Simons 2010).

Belonging at School

Valenzuela locates specific instances of cultural exclusion as primary challenges that immigrant and U.S. born Mexican students face within the American educational system. Over a three-year period from 1992 to 1995, Valenzuela conducted participant observations and twenty-five open-ended group interviews with Latino students, involving 96 participants at a Californian urban high school known to have a large Mexican community. Valenzuela found that the extent to which immigrant and U.S. born Mexican students have social capital in American society greatly influences both peer group formations in school and student performance. The subtractive schooling she identifies at the high school in which non-English language speaker students are labeled deficiently as "limited English proficient" over "Spanish dominant" further contributes to the devaluing of student sub-cultures (Valenzuela 1999). Through labeling minority students as 'deficient,' schools assimilate Mexicans who are fluent in English. The "Spanish-dominant" immigrants maintain their cultural identities in a sub-group created by the tracking system that separates them and excludes them from most pathways to academic success (1999). However, Valenzuela found that many Latino students valued the bilingual and Latino teachers on staff as critical resources to increasing their comfort at school. Valenzuela ultimately argues that many of the cultural barriers to a student's success at school can be overcome by simply creating a welcoming environment through practices of compassion and care from teachers (1999).

Indeed, research by Espinoza and Juvonen indicates that Latino students are more sensitive to school social climate than White students, particularly in relation to school conduct. (Espinoza & Juvonen 2011). Surveying 520 students in grades 4 to 7, Espinoza and Juvonen find that Latino students who perceived their social climate negatively admitted to breaking rules at a much higher rate than white students with similar reactions to the social climate (Espinoza & Juvonen 2011). Espinoza and Juvonen's study compliments Valenzuela's interview-based research to indicate that the social dynamics of schools frequently present obstacles to Latino student education at both the high school and middle school level. In particular, racially segregated social groups at school play an immense role in determining both a Latino student's identity and school performance, according to Benjamin. Benjamin profiled two Latino middle school students at middle school identified as almost completely socially segregated with a high population of Latinos. Through interviews with the students, Benjamin traced the stages of their development as they came to associate and conform with the Latino sub-groups of their school leading to reported instances of negative "typecasting" by teachers. Both of the students profiled by Benjamin, who were dedicated students in elementary school, became mediocre students in middle school and frequently came in conflict with school authority figures (2011). Benjamin suggests school social segregation was largely the cause for each student's decline, a suggestion supported by the survey results of 935 students done by Schulte, Shanahan, Anderson, and Sides

that found a significant positive relationship between student perceptions of community at the middle and high school level and student attendance and academic achievement (2003). However, Brand, Feiner, Shim, Seitsinger, and Dumas conducted survey-based research on students at 188 middle schools and found that students who recognized high levels of cultural and social inclusion in their school were more involved in the school community (2003).

Martin, Fergus, and Noguera show the importance of social inclusion as a means for breaking down cultural barriers to education in their case study of a high-performing elementary school with a high portion of Latino immigrant children. By observing school activity during and after normal school hours over a period of 2 years and conducting interviews and focus groups with students, teachers, parents, and administrators, the authors assessed the effectiveness of the elementary school, which follows the community school model (2010). Under this model, the school provides services not only in the form of child education, but also in extended learning opportunities after school for both children and adults, and in partnerships with local community-based organizations that provide various services on school grounds. Martin et al write that the school's model builds a social support system on what the theorist Uri Bronfenbrenner calls the "mesolevel" layer of social relationships (Martin et al 2010). The system promotes an increased student sense of belonging for all students by engaging the community and creating a social network in which students and their families are made to feel welcome (2010). By involving families and community organizations as valued partners in student learning, schools work collaboratively to increase student achievement (2010).

Family Involvement and Student Success: A Positive and Convincing Relationship

Just as cultural inclusivity opens channels for minority students to engage in a productive and academically challenging education, parent involvement in students' educations respectively propels academic achievement and similarly opens up channels for more productive and positive educational opportunities. *A New Wave of Evidence,* a report published by the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), synthesizes 51 studies published between 1995 and 2002 and examines the impact of school, family and community connections on student achievement. The overarching conclusion from these studies found a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and students' improved academic achievement. This positive relationship holds across families of all economic, racial, ethnic, and educational backgrounds and for students of all ages (Henderson and Mapp, et al, 2003). The studies found academic benefits for students including higher grade point averages, increased test scores, enrollment in more challenging classes, more classes passed and credits earned, and better attendance. The synthesis concludes with recommendations for educators to recognize that all parents, regardless of income, education level, or cultural background, are involved in their children's learning and want their children to do well in school. From the research results, SEDL recommends that schools proceed with the assumption that all families can improve their children's performance in school.

The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute's study *Understanding Latino Parental Involvement in Education* takes a closer look at school and teacher expectations for Latino family involvement. The study found that most schools lack clear organizational goals and objectives on how to best

involve parents in schools. Scholar Maria Zarate juxtaposes those findings with the results from interviews and focus groups conducted with Latino families of middle and high school students in Los Angeles, Miami and New York, specifically regarding their perceptions of family involvement. The study groups parents' descriptions into two categories of involvement: academic involvement and life participation. "Academic involvement" includes parents attending parent-teacher conferences, asking questions about homework, and driving students to tutoring and school activities. "Life participation" includes the holistic integration of families in the lives of their children (Zarate 2007). When asked to define parent involvement, Latino parents mentioned "life participation" more often than "academic involvement" (Zarate 2007). Arents' examples of "life participation" included being aware of children's lives, peer groups, encouraging future planning, monitoring school attendance, establishing trust with child, encouraging siblings to look out for each other, and providing advice on life issues (Zarate 2007, 8). In the interviews and focus groups, parents described the challenges they perceived in their involvement in school. The most frequently cited reason was a lack of time due to demanding and inflexible work schedules (Zarate 2007). As children progressed through school, many parents expressed hesitation in assisting with homework, often due to language barriers and uncertainty concerning the subject matter of the homework (2007). In interviews with college-bound Latino students concerning their experiences with their parents' involvement in their education, students expressed that they felt that their parents' emotional and motivational support was more important than having parents participate in activities at the school, like volunteering. The report's main recommendation for schools and school districts highlighted the need for development and dissemination of clear and measurable goals for increasing Latino parent involvement (2007).

Gaitan's research on involving Latino families in schools corresponds with the findings of the SEDL synthesis and the Tomás Rivera report, showing that student achievement improves in schools with systematic and sustained parent involvement. She weaves findings from focus groups and interviews with students, parents, teachers, and administrators alongside the scholarly literature she reviews. In her inquiry, she finds two primary approaches to family involvement by educators—in the first, educators characteristically view communicating with culturally diverse families as difficult and problematic, which creates barriers to building trust between schools and families and prohibits the involvement of families in their children's education. Gaitan argues that a second, more successful approach for educators—which aligns with the recommendation the SEDL synthesis puts forth—emphasizes that families bring diverse strengths to a school's community, which educators can tap into to maximize student achievement, a required component of cultural competency that Cross, et al. describes as "valuing diversity" (Gaitan 2004; Cross, et al. 1989). Correspondingly, Gaitan argues that educators should focus on creating strong home-school partnerships. To inform educators on the existing variety of practices of parent involvement, she distinguishes between traditional and non-traditional forms of family involvement practiced by Latino families (2004). Gaitan's categories of involvement particularly relate to the Tomás Rivera report's distinction between "academic involvement" and "life participation". The category of "academic involvement" aligns with Gaitan's traditional form of involvement and includes attendance at parent-teacher conferences and fundraising (Gaitan 2004). Gaitan's category of non-traditional forms of involvement speaks to the Tomás Rivera report's description of "life participation"—parents' role in actively participating in the school

community and their student's education, especially at home through material and emotional support (2004).

Gaitan stresses that traditional forms of parent involvement are often easier for schools to facilitate because they have become institutionalized and routine. However, she points out that these traditional forms of parent involvement render parents passive and often create an assumption that schools do not need to accommodate parents who may have restrictive work schedules and do not speak English. The main reasons parents claimed they were not able to participate in schools include not having enough time, not feeling welcome, not understanding the school system, and not having access to childcare or transportation (2004). Gaitan makes the point that these are not cultural issues, rather they are structural ones. Therefore, with a strong commitment to involving families, schools can and must create avenues for families who encounter those challenges to become more involved (2004). Gaitan stresses that when schools engage in non-conventional forms of parent involvement, parents learn valuable knowledge about the schools and their student's education, leading to increased student success. Fundamentally, she stresses that forming home-school partnerships necessitates an authentic desire and commitment on the part of educators to build trust between families and schools to achieve a common goal: promoting student achievement (2004).

Moving Towards an Expanded Understanding Of Family Involvement

To illuminate a specific case study that speaks to the studies presented by the SEDL, Tomás Rivera report and Gaitan, scholar Guadalupe Valdés calls upon schools to expand their understanding of parent involvement. She does so through her secondary and primary research, in which she presents an ethnographic portrait of ten Mexican immigrant families' experiences with education as they navigate the US school system alongside their children (1996). She found that all ten families paid close attention to their children's behavior, closely supervised their activities at home and outside home, and actively displayed consistent role-model behavior—practices of family involvement that speak to life participation, rather than academic involvement. They emphasized the importance of education but did not see themselves as adjunct teachers of school curriculum and seldom interacted with teachers, often due to language barriers (1996). Valdés argues that these families were indeed very involved in supporting their children's education, but their form of involvement does not fit within the model of traditional family involvement. Along with Gaitan, Valdés calls upon schools to examine how they understand family involvement and correspondingly expand their practices for facilitating family involvement to encompass the diverse needs of students and their families.

Lopez affirms Valdés' and Gaitan's call for schools to expand their understanding of family involvement, illustrating this claim with a specific case study. Rather than suggest successful parent involvement practices, he highlights how one immigrant family, the Padillas, involve themselves deeply in their children's education, although not in the traditional understanding of "involvement". School personnel in the Río Grande valley in Texas identified the Padilla family as a migrant family in which all five children graduated in the top 10 percent of their class and consistently placed on the school's honor roll (2001). To gain a better understanding of how the Padillas practiced family involvement, Lopez conducted individual and family interviews and found that the Padillas taught their children to appreciate the value of their

education by modeling a strong work ethic at home and the fields where they worked. Their form of involvement consisted of transmitting this value of hard work to their children to use in their education and throughout their lives (2001). The Padilla parents did not attend parent-teacher conferences, volunteer, or attend meetings at school because they spoke only Spanish and their work schedules restricted the hours in which they could leave work to go to school. When Lopez asked Mr. Padilla how he was involved in his children's education, Mr. Padilla said, "I have shown them what work is and how hard it is" (2001). Lopez argues that parents may perceive the concept of involvement very differently from schools, so schools must recognize how families involve themselves in their students' education, and especially validate the ways in which families support their children's education at home. This argument builds upon Gaitan's and Valdés' proposal for schools to examine how they understand family involvement and shift their practices of family involvement to encompass the diverse ways in which parents promote their children's education.

Miano supplements Gaitan, Valdés and Lopez's call to expand the traditional understanding of family involvement through her scholarly and primary studies of literacy networks in a predominantly Latino community in California. She classifies three threads of analysis on parent involvement literature: the prescriptive thread, which instructs teachers how to work with parents; the quantitative strand, which seeks to predict certain variables that yield the most effective results in student achievement; and the interpretive strand, which consists of qualitative studies that bring to light parents' actual involvement practices. In her qualitative study, she selected seven Mexican immigrant mothers from a variety of educational and work backgrounds who were participating in basic Spanish literacy classes and literature circles. Her interviews sought to illuminate the mothers' experiences with parent involvement practices in Mexico and the US (Valdés and Lopez 2011). She found that all mothers involved their families in conversational and print-related literacy support practices. For example, children helped their mothers with homework in English, interpreting street signs and mail in English, while the mothers helped their children with Spanish homework and emphasized reading and telling stories in Spanish (2011). When Miano asked the mothers how they understood parent involvement, they included in their description not only their physical presence at the school and communication with the school, but they also emphasized the literacy, material and moral support they gave to their students to promote their learning. She contends that these literacy networks exemplify non-conventional and effective forms of parent involvement, which speak to the Rivera report's category of "life participation." In her study, Miano argues that schools must open spaces in which families can share their array of supportive practices with the schools to build partnerships to further enhance student learning.

Jasis and Ordóñez-Jasis continue this thread of affirming Latino parent involvement through their research on a Latino parent activist group that collaborated with a public middle school to improve student success. Parents succeeded in effectively communicating students' needs, forming a partnership with the school and collectively instituting positive change in the school system (Jasis et al 2004). La Familia Initiative began at a San Francisco Bay Area public middle school, spearheaded by a small group of parents and supported by a local non-profit, and quickly expanded to five schools on both sides of the Bay. La Familia's goal was to provide a new avenue for a growing number of low-income, mainly immigrant families to engage in their student's schools to improve student achievement. They began with an inclusive community

meeting—in which 112 families were represented—and then moved ahead to institutionalize the program into the life of the school. To this end, they worked with the school administration to emphasize multiple points for needed change, including creating a platform for on-going discussions regarding their student's academic placement, improving after-school tutoring by including parents as support personnel, and providing high quality translation for all printed and electronic school information, to name a few (2004).

From their hundreds of hours of interviews and two years of observation, Jasis and Ordóñez-Jasis locate certain aspects that led to La Familia's success, including their clear focus on improving student achievement, collaboration with school staff, and equity in rotating leadership positions. In the views of teachers, administrators and families two years after the group's initiation, La Familia catalyzed academic improvement among Latino students (2004). As evidence, they pointed to the middle school's first Latino honor roll students, more Latino students in advanced track classes at the local high school, and Latino students' increased sense of pride and desire to contribute to their school community. Through interviews with parents who participated in La Familia, Jasis and Ordóñez-Jasis discovered that parents felt an increased sense of agency in all aspects of their lives, not only in matters related to their children's education (2004). Jasis and Ordóñez-Jasis argue that the experience of La Familia Initiative offers a glimpse into what is possible for families and students when a school embraces the talents of Latino parents and their desire to create meaningful partnerships between schools and families to improve student achievement.

Common Characteristics of Successful Culturally Competent Schools

In their report *Building Trust with Schools and Diverse Families* as part of a series issued by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), Railsback and Brewster locate trust as the key component for building relationships between schools and families. They argue that schools must trust that families want to be involved in their children's education, harkening to the SEDL's primary recommendation, so families may trust that school personnel have students' best interests in mind (Railsback and Brewster 2003). Brewster and Railsback contend that the most successful programs for increasing family involvement focus on direct efforts to increase student achievement through building trust between families and schools. They present five case studies of Pacific Northwest public schools that incorporate programs that use this approach of building trust in their curriculum (2003).

In a later NWREL report focusing on culturally responsive practices, scholar Jennifer Klump builds upon Brewster and Railback's location of students' and families' "funds of knowledge" as resources for building culturally responsive educational practices.[17] She defines "culturally responsive practices" as practices that actively recognize, respect and use students and families' identities and backgrounds as meaningful sources for creating optimal learning environments (Klump 2005). Klump supplements this analysis with an extensive regional sampler that provides profiles of successful examples of culturally responsive practices that schools can draw upon for their own practices. These detailed case studies outline how public schools in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and Alaska have created culturally responsive practices based upon school's and family's specific needs and resources (2005). Klump's detailed compilation of practices in which schools identify needs and build upon schools' and

---

[17] Brewster and Railsback, *Building Trust with Schools and Diverse Families,* 2003.

families' resources serve as a road-map for enhancing cultural responsiveness in school practices.

A study conducted jointly by the Center for the Future of Arizona and the Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University compared the programs, policies, and staff of twelve elementary and middle schools in Arizona deemed outstanding in the area of educating Latino students. Through examination of school literature, faculty interviews, and school surveys, the study determined six common factors that lead to successful culturally competent schooling which build off those emphasized by the NWREL reports:

1. A clear bottom line goal,
2. Ongoing assessment of students.
3. A strong and steady principal.
4. Collaborative solutions.
5. Commitment to policies and programs.
6. Proactive student intervention system that responds to the needs of each student.

A similar assessment of outstanding schools for Latino students conducted by Gonzalez and Huerta-Macias focused in on the essential role of a determined and committed principal. The study profiles three exceptionally culturally competent principals and traces their common factors for success with diverse student bodies. The three principals were committed both to their respective schools and the culturally competent programs they instituted. They all made deliberate efforts to broadcast to the students the value of diversity. Moreover, they acted as active role models for other teachers, setting high expectations for the rest of the staff to emulate. Gonzalez and Huerta-Macias argue that a driven and sympathetic principal is essential to the succesful implementation of culturally competent practices at a school. In particular, Gonzalez and Huerta-Macias's study emphasized the important role of a principal in promoting outreach not only with Latino students, but also Latino families.

Conclusion

Understanding the trajectory of the term "cultural competency" illuminates the conceptual transformation it has undergone within the medical and educational fields. Overall, these attempts at redefinition have increased clarity of meaning among medical and education professionals regarding preferred models of cultural competency and have illuminated the ways in which race factors into the practice of cultural competency. Models of cultural competency as can be seen in Cross, et al. suggest the need for a holistic cultural competency assessment of an organization while cultural self-assessments as Bennett suggests are crucial in ensuring that educators are culturally competent. This means that schools as a whole must assess structural inequality while also focusing on the cultural competency of individuals working within the school. Fundamentally, for a school to become culturally competent it must have an inclusive rather than exclusive perception of the public it serves. The ways in which a school defines what it means to be public fundamentally establishes a school's intent and approach for providing and distributing services. Definitions of that public greatly influence how schools value cultural minorities in the school community, which in turn impacts culturally diverse students' sense of belonging at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Studies of successful culturally competent schools show that culturally accepting and integrated student bodies are a crucial component to achieving academic success for Latino students. Successful practices of cultural competency at the primary and secondary school level must begin with the assumption by educators that all families, regardless of socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and educational background, have strengths that schools can utilize in order to maximize student achievement. This mindset to broaden schools' understanding of family involvement must be accompanied by a commitment to clear and measurable goals by teachers and administrators in order to open structural avenues for a variety of family involvement practices. Successful schools for Latino students have led the way by developing programs that succeed in building trust between families and schools, ultimately leading to increased student achievement and stronger school communities. Culturally competent schools in the United States prove that initiatives taken from the top down – most influentially from school principals – can promote a culturally inclusive school environment conducive to Latino student academic success.

METHODS FOR PRIMARY RESEARCH

Interview and Focus Group Participant Recruitment

At the request of our community partner Diana Erickson, the Bilingual Coordinator for the Walla Walla Public Schools, we focused our research on Blue Ridge Elementary School, Garrison Middle School, and Walla Walla High School ("Wa-Hi") because these three schools have the highest percentage of Latino students of the schools in the Walla Walla school district. Over a period of approximately two months, we conducted interviews with a relatively even spread of faculty, students, parents, and recent alumni. After some initial outreach efforts about our project at school events and the Wa-Hi Latino Club meeting, we relied primarily on the 'snowball method' for gaining additional student, parent and recent alumni interview participants. Our interviews with students are primarily with Wa-Hi students because of the difficulties posed by communication with children at a young stage of cognitive development, and because we had more difficulty accessing students currently at Garrison; however, many of the students interviewed also attended Blue Ridge and Garrison. Because of difficulties in gaining parent interview participants through the 'snowball method' and scheduling difficulties due to time restrictions of our primary research, we conducted two parent focus groups with six of the eight parents interviewed. Our efforts to recruit parent interview participants from Garrison and Wa-Hi proved the least effective, and parent perspectives from those schools are relatively sparse. To maximize our ability to gain the trust of potentially undocumented individuals, we promised all parent and student interview participants anonymity (i.e., that we would keep confidential any and all information that could be used for identification purposes). In keeping with this promise, we use pseudonyms for all student and parent participants in this report.

Table 1: Interview Participants: Students

STUDENTS	Blue Ridge	Garrison	Wa-Hi
Daniela	X		
Jessica	(X)*	(X)	X
Luís		(X)	X
Carlos		(X)	X
Pedro			X
Isabel			X
Cynthia			X
Fernando	(X)	(X)	X
Alejandro	(X)	(X)	(X)
Olivia	(X)	(X)	(X)
Total:	5	6	9

*(X) used to indicate alumni, X indicates current student

Table 2: Interview Participants: Parents

PARENTS	Blue Ridge	Garrison	Wa-Hi
José	X		
Diana	X		
Carolina	X		
Maria	X	X	X
Carla		X	X
Miguel	X		
Estela	X		
Angel	X		
Total:	8	2	2

We recruited most of the faculty interview participants by directly contacting individuals listed on the school directories. We chose to contact individuals based on the relevance of their position to our project. We contacted administrators from each of the schools (though we were unable to acquire an interview with any of the higher-up administrators at Wa-Hi) as well as teachers – especially those with extracurricular involvement with Latino students – and counselors.

Table 3: Interview Participants: Administrators and Teachers

	Blue Ridge	Garrison	Wa-Hi	District
Administrators	· Principal Kim Doepker	· Principal Gina Yonts	· Sue Weber (Gear-Up coordinator)	· Diana Erickson (Bilingual Coordinator) · Dr. Linda Boggs (Assistant Superintendent)
Teachers		· Grace Ogoshi · Sarah Von Donge	· Curt Schafer · Refugio Reyes (Latino Club Advisor) · Kim Kelsay · Michelle Higgins	
Counselors	· Kendra Cox		· Cathy Rasley (Cheer Squad Coach)	

Interview Format

Interviews lasted between 35 and 90 minutes. All participants willingly allowed us to record each interview. We conducted interviews at various locations in Walla Walla, based on the participant preference and convenience, including student and parent homes, school grounds, local coffee shops, the Commitment to Community center, and the Walla Walla Public Schools district office. All student and parent interviews were conducted in person, one-on-one by one of the authors to this report. Many of the staff interviews (Principal Kim Doepker, Principal Gina Yonts, Dr. Linda Boggs, Grace Ogoshi, and Sarah Von Donge) were conducted by both one of the authors to this report and Emily Basham – a fellow Whitman student in the State of the State for Washington Latinos program researching ELL education in the Walla Walla Public Schools – for the sake of time and scheduling with the interview participants. We authored sets of questions for each of the groups interviewed: staff, students, and parents. In each of the staff interviews, we asked a teacher, counselor, or administrator to define what they think cultural competency is and how it is achieved through school policy and programs. We wanted to test for first, whether members of the school had heard of the term cultural competence, and second, which model for cultural competence practice each interviewee most closely aligned with. As such, we crafted both questions broad in nature and others specifically engaging in models for cultural competency such as Bennet's[18], Green's[19], with the most emphasized being the model presented by Cross, et al.[20] Additionally, we asked staff questions related to five essential elements for a system's, institution's, or agency's ability to become culturally competent.[21] We included questions testing how each teacher, counselor, or administrator perceived race among their students, how they distinguished race from culture, and to what degree he or she felt race plays a factor in student education as suggested by and Abrams and Moio.[22] We wanted to determine to what extent school staff members engaged in either the problematic "ethnicity paradigm" described by Omi and Winant[23] or the even less culturally competent attitude of "new racism" and color-blindness defined by both Pon[24] and Abrams and Moio, respectively. [25]

To better understand school culture at each of the three schools, all interview participants where asked questions about their perception of social trends in the school. In particular, we wanted to determine how well staff, students, and parents felt each school's student body was integrated or segregated as Valenzuela[26] and Martin et al.[27] argue the level of a school's cultural competence

[18] Bennett, M.J. Towards Ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In R.M. Paige (Ed.). Education for the Intercultural Experience. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press. 1993.

[19] Green, James. (1982). *Cultural awareness in the human services*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

[20] Cross, T., Bazron, B., Dennis, K., & Isaacs, M., (1989). *Towards A Culturally Competent System of Care, Volume I.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Child Development Center, CASSP Technical Assistance Center.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Abrams, Laura S., and Jene A. Moio. "Critical Race Theory and the Cultural Competence Dilemma In Social Work Education." *Journals of Social Work Education* 45, no. 2 (2009): 245-261.

[23] Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. 2nd ed. Routledge: New York. 1994

[24] Pon, Gordon. "Cultural Competency as New Racism: An Ontology of Forgetting." *Journal of Progressive Human Services* 20, no.1 (January 2009): 59-71. *Alternative Press Index*.

[25] Abrams, Laura S., and Jene A. Moio. "Critical Race Theory and the Cultural Competence Dilemma In Social Work Education." *Journals of Social Work Education* 45, no. 2 (2009): 245-261.

[26] Valenzuela, Angela. *Subtractive Schooling*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 1999.

[27] Martin, Margary, Edward Fergus, and Pedro Noguera. "Responding to the Needs of the Whole Child: A Case

is largely determined by the level of integration among diverse students. Further, we asked each interview participant to assess the reasons why social integration or lack thereof existed in each school. We further asked questions to both parents and students assessing their degree of comfort at school and their feeling of social belonging, based off of the studies conducted by Benjamin[28] and Brand et al.[29], which connect both factors to student performance. Based off the successful, culturally competent schools presented by Klump[30], the Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University and the Center for the Future of Arizona[31], and Gonzalez and Huerta-Macias[32], we asked students and parents whether they saw similar aspects in their schools. Because of the importance of family involvement in student performance shown by the studies in *A New Wave of Evidence*[33], we further asked students, parents, and staff about how involved parents were at school and for the students and how well they felt each school conducted parent outreach. Additionally, we included questions that asked for broad assessments of each school's efforts to be culturally inclusive and for any desired changes to each of the schools. These questions and themes also provided the foundation for the questions and themes of the survey we conducted which will be addressed in the next section.

We conducted all student and faculty interviews in English. Some parent interviews were conducted in Spanish in accordance with participant preference. Our prepared questions guided the interviews but, because our goal for the interviews was to acquire personal narratives rather than statistical data, consistency in the questions asked varied in favor of conversational strategies. Our research relied heavily on interviews because we – and our community partners – hoped to assess the level of cultural competency at each of the three schools specifically through personal perspectives. For students and parents, cultural competency involves the level of comfort at school, the severity of racial and cultural discrimination and segregation at school, the prevalence of stereotypes, student identities, cultural interaction, and feelings of inclusion or exclusion. None of these can be quantified by statistical data. In order to assess how culturally competent the school staffs were we fundamentally needed to know how they perceived their diverse students. Thus, we chose interviews as the primary source for our research.

Study of a High-Performing Elementary School for Immigrant Children." *Reading & Writing Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (January 1, 2010): 195-222.

[28] Benjamin, Rebecca. "Middle Schools for Latinos: A Framework for Success." in *Educating Latino Students: A Successful Guide to Practice.* Eds. Gonzalez, M. L., Huerta-Marcias, A., Tinajero, J. V (1998): 239-67.

[29] Brand, Stephen, Robert Felner, Minsuk Shim, Anne Seitsinger, and Thaddeus Dumas. "Middle school improvement and reform: Development and validation of a school-level assessment of climate, cultural pluralism, and school safety." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 95, no. 3 (September 2003): 570-588.

[30] Klump, Jennifer. *NWREL Culturally Responsive Practices For Student Success: A Regional Sampler.* Portland: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, June 2005.

[31] Morrison Institute for Public Policy & Center for the Future of Arizona. 2006. *Why Some Schools With Latino Children Beat the Odds…and Others Don't.*

[32] Gonzalez, M. L., and Ana Huerta-Macias. "Profile of Leadership at the Middle-/High School Levels: Successful Schools and Their Principals." in *Educating Latino Students: A Successful Guide to Practice.* Eds. Gonzalez, M. L., Huerta-Marcias, A., Tinajero, J. V (1998): 3-28.

[33] Henderson, Anne T. and Karen L. Mapp, et al. SEDL: *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement,* 2002.

Focus Group Format

Focus groups were conducted to increase the amount of parent perspectives in our research. To adjust to the specific circumstances of conducting focus groups with parents, we revised our interview questions to make them suitable for dialogue in small groups. To do this, we asked, for example, "How do parents support their children's education?" rather than asking, "How do you support your child's education?" This shift to the third person proved more conducive to group dialogue and provoked conversation in which parents engaged with each other, not just with the researchers. Also, as group conversation is often less predictable in terms of conversation themes than personal interviews are, we allowed parents to take more of a role in guiding the topics of conversation. Each of the focus groups lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and took place at Blue Ridge Elementary School.

Survey Conduct and Analysis

In addition to teacher and administrator interviews, we chose to administer a descriptive survey to teachers and administrators at Blue Ridge Elementary, Garrison Middle School, and Walla Walla High School in order to gain a broad perspective of the variables that affect staff views about cultural difference. We also wanted to gauge school professionals' frequency of encountering situations when cultural difference was a factor, and the confidence with which they felt they handled such situations in culturally sensitive ways, especially with Latino parents and students as well how their confidence was influenced by their experience with cultural competency trainings.

A survey was sent out electronically using the Survey Monkey online survey service to each school and the data was analyzed according to each school. The surveys were sent out three times with e-mails from Diana Erickson, Principal Kim Doepker of Blue Ridge Elementary, and Principal Gina Yonts of Garrison Middle School sending supplemental e-mails urging staff and faculty to complete the survey. Table 1.1 shows the response rates:

Table 1.1

School	Total # Teachers and Admin	# of Responses	Response Rate
Blue Ridge Elementary including HS/ECEAP Preschool program	110	29	26.4%
Garrison Middle School	77	29	37.7%
Walla Walla High School	192	59	30.7%

The response rates are adequate in quantitative terms; in addition, the demographics of respondents provided a good range of the types of teachers and administrators who work in these schools. For example, respondents greatly ranged in age, period of time working in the specific school, and position at the school.

The surveys were conducted over a period of two weeks and after they were all collected, they were analyzed using the IBM SPSS data collection program. Because the survey was descriptive, dummy variables were used to replace the demographic information in order to more efficiently analyze relationships between demographic information and responses to descriptive questions. Using dummy variables provided a simpler approach than regression analysis revealing correlations, and was suggested by the Whitman College head statistician. We identified questions and variables of interest and then analyzed them based on their respective units. Not all variables and potential relationships were analyzed because of limited time and because we were able to infer the variables that would be most helpful for our report. These variables most notably included the race of the teacher, Spanish proficiency, experience with training, whether the training was provided by the district which were identified as important given the focus on cultural competency and professional development, race, knowledge of Spanish.

In general, most of the analysis began with crosstabs to see the basic relationship between certain variables by analyzing chi-square values for analysis between the dummy variables (nominal variables) and ordinal variables (descriptive questions). In some cases, control variables were used, usually race or whether or not the respondent had been trained, in order to refine the results. The Pearson's R-value and Spearman's correlation coefficient were gathered through bivariate correlation analysis when analyzing relationships between two ordinal variables to analyze the associative strength of the connection between the two. We used the t-test and ANOVA to analyze the difference in responses between nominal variables. The t-test was used because it is not dependent on the population size or the response rate. We used the values gathered from these tests when the standard of error was between .000 and .150.

We also received about thirty-five comments regarding cultural competency at the respective schools, which provided detailed information on specific aspects of cultural competency that would be important to ask about in our interviews. For example respondents at Blue Ridge mentioned the Head Start/ECEAP preschool program three times in the comments as being a positive aspect of cultural competency at Blue Ridge. In light of these comments, we explored further the prior research on that program. The survey and interviews worked together to illuminate teacher's experiences with culture and race in the classroom, with the interviews often providing specific stories of difficulties with racial conflicts in the classroom and the survey illuminating the way in which a teacher's race affects his or her confidence in teaching culturally competent ways. The interviews also provided more details that helped with the interpretation of the survey results as well as the survey providing a broader scope to understand the specific experiences of staff at the three schools.

PRIMARY RESEARCH FINDINGS

I. CULTURAL COMPETENCY POLICIES

A. Washington State Legislation on Cultural Competency

In 2009, in response to five commissioned studies[34] on the state of the achievement gap within primary and secondary educational institutions in Washington State, the Washington State Senate passed the bill *Closing the Achievement Gap in K-12 Schools* (2009), Second Substitute SB 5973.[35] This bill asserts that educators must address variables related to culture that affect student achievement, teacher efficacy, parental involvement, and administrative support within schools. It reads:

> The legislature finds there is no better opportunity to make a strong commitment to closing the achievement gap and to affirm the state's constitutional obligation to provide opportunities to learn for all students without distinction or preference on account of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or gender... *A consistent and powerful theme throughout the achievement gap studies was the need for cultural competency in instruction, curriculum, assessment, and professional development.* Cultural competency forms a foundation for efforts to address the achievement gap, and more work is needed to embed it into the public school system.[36]

This is one of the more significant policies in Washington State Education legislature that explicitly addresses cultural factors—which include race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender—as important in focusing the efforts of educators to close the achievement gap. Prior to this bill, state education policy that addressed particular issues of "cultural awareness" and "cultural sensitivity" existed as reactions to very specific problems surrounding "ethnic" issues of concern. The 2007 "First peoples' [Native American] language, culture, and oral tribal traditions teacher certification act: Honoring our ancestors" legislates for the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) to incorporate a teacher certification program tailored toward the Washington State Native American language, culture, and oral tribal traditions with the intention of "fostering successful educational experiences and promoting cultural sensitivity for all students."[37]

Even before this example of promoting a specific iteration of "cultural sensitivity," "cultural awareness" legislation was used as a strategy to address youth gang involvement in Washington State schools and communities. In 1993, RCW 43.310.040 called for "Cultural Awareness Retreats" that would help at-risk youth or gang members and their parents to "develop respect for the community, and ethnic origin," with the intention of having the parents and gang members perform activities that enhance or increase their positive behavior and potential life

---

[34] The five studies include: Washington State Multi-Ethnic Think Tank. *METT Position Paper: Equitable and Culturally Competent Education*. Coordinated by The Community Outreach of the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington State. Oct. 2002. (4 other reports can be found here http://www.k12.wa.us/AchievementGap/Studies.aspx)

[35] Washington State Senate. 2009. *Second Substitute Senate Bill 5973: An Act Relating to closing the achievement gap in order to provide all students an excellent and equitable education.* 61st Leg., 2009 Regular Session. 2SSB 5973.PL.

[36] Ibid. Emphasis added

[37] 2007 c 319: "First peoples' language, culture, and oral tribal traditions teacher certification act: Honoring our ancestors."" [2007 c 319 § 4.]

successes.[38] In both the First Peoples' (Native American) language bill and the Youth Gang bill, "cultural awareness" and "cultural sensitivity" come about as strategies for addressing problems such as youth gang involvement by promoting a sense of awareness primarily amongst students of an ethnic-cultural minority background. From a legislative standpoint, "cultural competency" as defined in SB 5973 advances these conceptions of "cultural awareness" and "cultural sensitivity" by indicating the need for training and measures of accountability in the way of policies and strategies to educate about the crucial way in which a student's cultural background affects student achievement.[39]

B. Cultural Competency within the WA State OSPI

In order to address this need for measures of accountability, the SB 5973 bill created the Achievement Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (now called the Education and Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee or EOGOAC), which is currently active within the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).[40] The committee must recommend policies and strategies to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Professional Educator Standards Board and the State Board of Education in the following areas:

"EOGOAC Areas for Recommendation: Policies and Strategies:

- supporting and facilitating parent and community involvement and outreach
- enhancing the cultural competency of current and future educators and the cultural relevance of curriculum and instruction
- expanding pathways and strategies to prepare and recruit diverse teachers and administrators
- recommending current programs and resources that should be redirected to narrow the gap
- identifying data elements and systems needed to monitor progress in closing the gap
- making closing the achievement gap part of the school and school district improvement process
- and exploring innovative school models that have shown success in closing the achievement gap."[41]

Since its creation, EOGOAC recommended in its January 2009-2010 report for the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) to "align and infuse cultural competence standards across academic categories" and to "enhance monitoring and compliance efforts in the area of cultural competence and the achievement gap in order to show how they integrate across the teaching continuum." [42,43] From these recommendations, legislators have further incorporated "cultural

---

[38] RCW 43.310.040. "Cultural Awareness Retreats." Washington State Legislature. 1993

[39] Washington State Senate. 2009. *Second Substitute Senate Bill 5973: An Act Relating to closing the achievement gap in order to provide all students an excellent and equitable education.* 61st Leg., 2009 Regular Session. 2SSB 5973.PL.

[40] Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction website: Achievement Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee. <http://www.k12.wa.us/AchievementGap/>

[41] Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction website: Achievement Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee. <http://www.k12.wa.us/AchievementGap/>

[42] "Closing Opportunity Gaps in Washington's Public Education System: A Report by the Achievement Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee." The Achievement Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee of Washington State. January 2011.

[43] An example of the incorporation of cultural competency into the standards: Standard V.a.x.: Teacher expectation- "Informing, involving, and collaborating with families/neighborhoods, and communities in each student's

competency" into education policy by indicating that it must be incorporated into the PESB standards of education certification.[44]

A revised section of the bill states that effective January 2010, the Washington State PESB:

> ...shall be calibrated for each level of certification and along the entire career continuum. In developing the standards, the board shall, to the extent possible, *incorporate standards for cultural competency along the entire continuum*. For the purposes of this subsection, "cultural competency" includes:
> * knowledge of student cultural histories and contexts, as well as family norms and values in different cultures
> * knowledge and skills in accessing community resources and community and parent outreach
> * and skills in adapting instruction to students' experiences and identifying cultural contexts for individual students.[45]

From this legislation, the PESB adjusted all teacher certification standards to include standards specific to cultural competency and language acquisition.[46] Incorporating cultural competency standards into every level of certification would indicate the inclusion of these standards into residency education certification, second-tier professional certification, substitute certification, limited teaching certification, foreign trained certification, and student teaching certification.[47]

In addition to the EOGOAC, Washington state legislation passed a massive education reform bill in 2009 that established the Quality Education Commission (QEC), called ESHB 2261.[48] Comprised of eight legislators and representative of the Governor's Office, the State Board of Education, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Professional Educator Standards Board, and the Department of Early Learning of Washington State, the QEC was created to "recommend and inform the ongoing implementation of an evolving definition of Basic Education."[49] To this end, in the 2012 final report to the Legislature, the QEC recommends that in order to focus on closing the opportunity gap for disadvantaged students and students of color the Legislature must generate more data related to cultural competency and competency in language acquisition in order:

> "i. to identify strategies and incentives to recruit and retain diverse teachers.
>
> ii. to examine data from other states regarding certification options and requirements that support competency in language acquisition and cultural competency;

---

educational process, including using information about student cultural identity, achievement and performance."
Teacher Performance Assessment Question to test for Standard V.a.x: "How does the candidate use knowledge of his/her students to target support for students' development of conceptual understanding, computational/procedural fluency, and mathematical reasoning/problem solving skills?"
Standard V-TPA Alignment of the Teacher Performance Assessment with Washington Standard V for Teachers. Professional Educator Standards Board Assessment. http://assessment.pesb.wa.gov/assessments/pact/standard-5-tpa
[44] 2SSB 5973, RCW 28A.410.270.1(a))
[45] Ibid. emphasis added
[46] Ibid.
[47] http://www.k12.wa.us/certification/teacher/ProCert.aspx
[48] OSPI website. http://www.k12.wa.us/LegisGov/2012documents/QEC2012.pdf
[49] Washington State Congress Session ESHB 2261, 2009-10 Final Bill Report: Summary. Introduction. Quality Education Council. Passed May 19, 2009.

iii. to identify professional development requirements for continuing teachers regarding cultural competency and language acquisition; and

iv. to identify current policies that make it difficult to recruit and retain diverse teachers."[50]

At the state level, both the EOGOAC and the QEC have emphasized the importance for the effective implementation of cultural competency in order to raise the achievement of disadvantaged students and students of color.

C. Cultural Competency Policies of the Walla Walla Public School District

While the QEC, the First Person's bill, the Youth Gang bill, EOGOAC, and Senate bill SB 5973 all identify cultural competency as a priority for Washington State schools, the WWPSD lacks any explicit policies on "cultural competency." Nevertheless, the WWPSD's emphasis on valuing diversity and promoting under-represented groups within the district promisingly indicates efforts to promote an iteration of cultural competency. The WWPSD advertises within its School District Newsletter seven core values: quality, integrity, accountability, respect, courtesy, diversity, and innovation.[51] The WWPSD Strategic Plan Goals for 2011-2015 reflect this core value of diversity in its third goal: [to] "enhance trust amongst our students, staff, parents, and community" by using two strategies that include intentionally educating, soliciting responses and input from stakeholders and underrepresented groups, and encouraging, acknowledging, valuing and considering different points of view.[52] Culturally competent practices could exist within these strategies upon specification of the way in which the district chooses to implement them. The most notable effort to meet this goal using "Goal Three" of the Strategic Goal Plan includes the recent formation of the Diversity Steering Committee that is aimed at improving communications and involvement with Hispanic community members and parents, spearheaded by former academic Support Programs director, Sergio Hernandez.[53]

By creating channels of communication between the school district and administrators and those parents and students within the district who are "traditionally under-represented" the district is implementing one aspect of cultural competency: tailoring parent outreach efforts to be particular to those parents of diverse cultures who are not accessed by current modes of outreach. A strategy the district refers to as the effort to "intentionally educate and solicit responses and input from stakeholders and underrepresented groups" in order to enhance trust amongst parents and an element of cultural competency that the *Closing the Achievement Gap in K-12 Schools* bill refers to as utilizing "knowledge and skills in accessing community resources and community and parent outreach."[54,55]

In order to formally address and holistically implement culturally competent education practices and successfully address "Goal Three," WWPSD policies must also include specification of the particular ways in which they seek to enhance trust through their strategy of encouraging, acknowledging, valuing, and considering different points of view. From this specification of the

---

[50] "Quality Education Council Report." Released January 6, 2012. <K12.wa.us>
[51] "Focus on Education: Excellence in Every Classroom." Walla Walla Public School District Newsletter. Fall 2011. Vol 13, issue 1.
[52] "Strategic Plan Goals 2011-2015: Excellence in Every Classroom." <http://www.wwps.org/leadership/>
[53] "Focus on Education: Excellence in Every Classroom." Walla Walla Public School District Newsletter. Fall 2011. Vol 13, issue 1.
[54] Ibid.
[55] 2SSB 5973, RCW 28A.410.270.1(a)

Strategic Goal Plan, the district can begin to address "the need for cultural competency in instruction, curriculum, assessment, and professional development," as 2SSB 5973 outlines.[56]

D. Formal Commitment to Cultural Competency in the WWPS

Blue Ridge Elementary School

Specific policies or statements addressing cultural competency or policies that identify the diversity or students from all cultures do not explicitly exist at Blue Ridge. The elementary school does emphasize addressing the needs of the "whole student" and all students however does not refer to the importance of culture or race as crucial factors to consider when addressing the needs of the whole student.[57]

Garrison Middle School

Garrison does not have explicit policies regarding cultural competency or validating diverse cultures according to Principal Gina Yonts.[58] Garrison's School Safety Commitment, however, promotes a symbolic dedication to the concept of promoting cultural competency:

> School Safety Commitment:
> Garrison Middle School is committed to providing a quality safe school environment for students to learn and grow. **We take pride in our school and our collective commitment to peaceable solutions to challenges that may arise within and amongst our diverse population.** A commitment has been made through our "Trooper Time" advisory to build small learning communities where relationships, tolerance and problem solving skills are embraced. **We are proud of the diverse population of our school and are committed to growing the type of citizens that the Walla Walla Valley can be very proud of**. I encourage anyone not familiar with our school to come visit. We'd love to share our story with you![59]

This commitment substantiates a more general mission statement[60] by mentioning the need to address the challenges that exist when serving a diverse population. However the commitment also poses a problematic subtext through directly associating the presence of diversity with the potential for endangering the quality of school safety. The conflation of diversity and "bad behavior" was found to be significant within interviews with students and parents. These findings will be addressed in a later section.

---

[56] 2SSB 5973, RCW 28A.410.270.1(a)

[57] Walla Walla Public Schools, *Promising Practices*, Powerpoint data received from Blue Ridge Elementary Principal Kim Doepker, accessed 22 January, 2012. <http://www.blueridgeeagles.org/ >

[58] "…really probably not policies and procedures [for cultural competency] per se, but we are a school wide Title I program and so we really are focused on a wide range of students." Interview with Gina Yonts, Principal of Garrison Middle School. Personal interview by Simi Singh and Emily Basham, 18 Nov 2011.

[59] Garrison Middle School Website. "Safe School Commitment." <http://www.garrisonmiddleschool.org/> (emphasis added)

[60] Garrison Middle School Website. "Garrison Mission Statement": "Garrison Middle School staff will engage students in a positive and safe environment, providing support that allows all students to achieve academic excellence and reach their full potential." <http://www.garrisonmiddleschool.org/>

Walla Walla High School

Wa-Hi does not have explicit policies to directly acknowledge and address the needs of their diverse students. Its mission is: "We are a professional learning community. We work together to seek out best practices, test them in the classroom, and focus on results to ensure all students are college and career ready."[61] Of the schools we researched, Wa-Hi does have specific programs like AVID that provide cultural competency training and discussion, albeit somewhat tangentially, however there are no existing policies or programs that explicitly state their acknowledgement of the need for culturally competent practices in order that they effectively engage diverse students and their families.

Though these commitments and mission statements are not concrete policies, they reflect the priorities and educational philosophy of Blue Ridge, Garrison, and Wa-Hi. In order to begin to incorporate the feedback particularly of parents who are Latino as well as people who are minorities, the priorities of Blue Ridge, Garrison, and Wa-Hi must incorporate the acknowledgement that definitions of effective parental participation ad outreach efforts, appropriate curriculum, and student success may be faulty or inherently exclusionary if schools are not recognizing the existence of diverse experiences and circumstances within their schools. Mission statements provide a symbolic platform to exert this acknowledgement and commitment to diverse communities and community as a whole. It must also be noted that there are more formal programs that are present within these schools, as mentioned in the Wa-Hi section, that promote a culturally competent school environment and experience; however, because they are not intentionally present for the purpose of developing cultural competency, they will be addressed in a later section.

E. Practices that Promote Cultural Competency in the WWPS: Speakers and Trainings

OSPI provides information on the website regarding cultural competency definitions, practices, toolkits, and resources for educators to learn more about cultural competency.[62] While cultural competency has only been a priority of the EOGOAC and OSPI only since the 2009-2010 school year, through our interviews and surveys, there appears to be decent communication between Walla Walla school district and OSPI in terms of requesting trainings or lectures that help to develop cultural competency practices within the district. In the interviews and surveys of teachers and administrators, when asked about trainings that helped teachers learn more about teaching and communicating in more culturally competent ways, many mentioned specific speakers that the district has brought to speak to teachers and students. However, while staff interview participants found these lectures incredibly beneficially, there remains an inconsistency regarding experience with training amongst teachers and administrators. This may be because there are no explicit cultural competency initiatives, therefore interpretations of cultural competency trainings vary tremendously. Table 2 shows the percentages of people who have attended a training on communicating in culturally sensitive ways respective to each school:

---

[61] Walla Walla High School website. "About our School: School Mission"
<http://www.wahibluedevils.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=65>
[62] http://www.k12.wa.us/CISL/EliminatingtheGaps/CulturalCompetence/default.aspx

Table 5: Rates of Teachers and Administrators and Experience with Cultural Sensitivity Training

Have you ever attended a training about communicating in culturally sensitive ways with students and/or parents?	Yes	No
Blue Ridge Elementary School & Head Start/ ECEAP	**66%**	34%
Garrison Middle School	**57%**	43%
Wa-Hi	**53%**	47%

Table 6: Providers of Cultural Sensitivity Trainings

[If yes] Was the training provided by the Walla Walla Public School District or [the respective school]?	Yes	No
Blue Ridge Elementary School & Head Start/ ECEAP	**53%**	47%
Garrison Middle School	44%	**56%**
Wa-Hi	45%	**55%**

These tables show that between one half and two thirds of the teachers and administrators who took the survey have attended a training about communicating with parents and students in culturally sensitive ways. Roughly one half of these trainings were administered by the Walla Walla Public Schools. We recommend that the school district prioritize trainings regarding culturally sensitive communication for teachers and administrators, to better serve the needs of the district's culturally diverse students and parents.

Kim Kelsay, Bilingual Coordinator at Wa-Hi, mentioned Wa-Hi Assistant Principal Mindy Meyer's decision to bring Erin Jones, assistant superintendent of OSPI, to share her story as a woman of color navigating her way around discrimination and racism at school as she grew up[63]

> Kelsay: It was really a positive story and an eye-opening story for some of our kids. And, I think it really was positive for our kids that are students of color to hear someone—how prejudice has affected them and how they've dealt with it and you know trying to make things better in our world so that things are working more smoothly not just for a certain people."[64]

Not only was this event positive for the students, Kelsay mentioned that Jones provided a strategy for parent outreach that included sending out personalized invitations to parents for parent-teacher conferences, an idea which Kelsay and her colleagues used this fall.[65]

These sorts of trainings and speakers provide constructive strategies for parent outreach, student engagement, and more effective teaching for teachers and administrators. In an interview with

---

[63] Erin Jones' visit, May 2011: http://www.wwps.org/news/newsflash_RecordView.cfm?RecordID=1197; Kim Kelsay, bilingual coordinator for Wa-Hi. Personal interview by Simerun Singh, Walla Walla High School, Walla Walla, Washington, November 10, 2011.
[64] Kim Kelsay, bilingual coordinator for Wa-Hi. Personal interview by Simerun Singh, Walla Walla High School, Walla Walla, Washington, November 10, 2011.
[65] Ibid.

Wa-Hi history teacher, Michelle Higgins, Higgins mentioned the importance of a training she received ten years ago, which greatly informed her teaching practices:

> Higgins: Ten years ago, they had a speaker come to the Walla Walla Public Schools and her name was Ruby Paine. And she is absolutely phenomenal and her research is really phenomenal… And she says, you know if you live in a culture of poverty, these are things that you may be familiar with: You may be familiar with when a grocery store puts food out in a dumpster so you can access it. You may be familiar with when there are rummage sales or garage sales because that's how you get your items you know maybe instead of going to Macy's and buying clothes. And so I found her research really compelling and challenging because it makes you look at your class and go 'Wow, some of my students haven't heard classical music.' So, maybe to break down some of those barriers—maybe at the beginning of class, when we transition between different units, I'll play different music of that time period. At first, like in my world history, they are like "whoa, Mozart" you know 'This is so not 99.1' or whatever, the radio. But, now my students as we transition between units, they ask me who the composers are. And so I just really tried to implement some things that might be missing in students' lives to help bridge that.[66]

Paine had clearly revealed an aspect of certain students' lives of which Higgins had not necessarily been aware of previously. This crucial exposure to experiences specific to those who live in poverty spurred Higgins to incorporate classical music into her curriculum which demonstrates the importance of these district-provided trainings and speakers to provide teachers with information and strategies that help them address the needs of all incorporate curriculum or activities that may help bridge those differences in experiences in addition to providing teachers and administrators to alternative points of views and life experiences. Since Paine's visit, Dr. Donna Beegle, also a speaker on the culture of poverty, provided seminars on working with people who live in poverty in 2008 as well as in 2012.[67]

Teachers and administrators place great importance on additional opportunities to learn ways in which to accommodate for diverse cultures in the classroom. Sarah Von Donge, Garrison dual-language teacher, mentioned a presentation that she attended on the culture of poverty provided by the district when asked about trainings and appreciated it as a learning experience.[68] One survey comment received from Garrison said, "the best training we ever had was on the culture of *poverty*, not the Hispanic culture. That's the training I referenced in an earlier question. That helped a *lot* in my interactions with families of poverty."[69] These trainings that range from speakers to more intensive trainings, such as the GLAD training which Diana Erickson provides twice a year that last for seven days, clearly help in providing teachers with specific strategies for effectively teaching students who have experiences with which teachers may not be familiar. Blue Ridge Principal Kim Doepker also spoke about a book study program, *Teach Like a Champion* by Doug Lemov, which helps empower teachers by providing precise strategies for being a good teacher and creating effective and productive classrooms.[70]

---

[66] Higgins, Michelle. Wa-Hi History teacher. Personal interview by Simerun Singh. November 18, 2011, Walla Walla, Washington, at Walla Walla High School.
[67] "Breaking poverty barriers focus of 5th Children's Forum—The Valley's Children 2008." Walla Walla Public School District website. <http://www.wwps.org/news/>
[68] Interview with Sarah Van Donge. Interview SS and Emily Basham. 17 Nov 2011, Walla Walla, Washington, Garrison Middle School.
[69] Anonymous Survey Response from "Understanding Cultural Awareness at Garrison." Simi Singh. November 2011
[70] http://teachlikeachampion.wiley.com/

While professional development opportunities specifically geared towards cultural competency aren't consistently provided within Blue Ridge, Garrison, and WaHi, the GLAD trainings, as mentioned previously, are able to somewhat address issues of culture such as the culture of silence and the culture of power in the first two days.[71] However, while GLAD trainings were referenced as training opportunities in interviews with both Kelsay and Higgins of WaHi, there is also a desire for more opportunities for training. Kendra Cox, a counselor at Blue Ridge who has had a version of diversity training while getting her masters in social work, said, "I certainly don't think it would hurt to give some diversity training. I haven't seen a real glaring need for it, but I always think that it would always be beneficial."[72] One survey comment received from Garrison said, "I'd love something… training us about the Hispanic culture, and expectations of schools/teachers."[73] Survey comments from Wa-Hi include: "It would be so nice to see racial/ethnic difference issues addressed head-on, school-wide"[74] and a respondent who identified himself by name, Curt Schafer, and was later interviewed said "For many people, simply having increased exposure [to different cultures] is enough. For others, unfortunately, the increased exposure isn't enough. They need training to erase negative attitudes they have picked up along the way."[75]

The survey results indicate that trainings on culturally competent communication increase both confidence in teaching and communicating and increase the frequency with which teachers and administrators communicate with parents. From the survey results collected from Blue Ridge teachers and administrators, those who had gone through training about communicating in culturally sensitive ways with students and/or parents were more likely to respond that they more frequently communicated with Latino parents and guardians about the progress that their child is making at the 10% confidence level.[76] From the survey at Garrison, teacher or administrator's experience with training regarding communicating in culturally sensitive ways (both through and not through the district) is directly related with a teacher's confidence with teaching or communicating with a student in a way that takes the student's cultural experiences into account at the 5% confidence level.[77] At Wa-Hi, those who have been trained to communicate in culturally sensitive ways responded that they communicate via email, phone, or personal meeting with parents or guardians who do not speak English very well more frequently at the 10% confidence level.[78] Also at Wa-Hi, those who attended trainings that were *not* provided by Wa-HI or the district were more likely to respond that the training prepared them to work with Latino students in culturally sensitive ways to a greater degree of success at the 10% confidence level.[79]

These figures represent not only the importance of professional development opportunities but also the need for a more streamlined approach to cultural competency trainings. As can be seen through Abrams and Moio's discussion of the importance of clear and effective cultural

---

[71] Phone Interview with Diana Erickson. 6 December 2011.

[72] Kendra Cox, personal interview by Simerun Singh, November 3, 2011.

[73] Anonymous Survey Response from "Understanding Cultural Awareness at Garrison." Simi Singh. November 2011

[74] Anonymous Survey Response from "Understanding Cultural Awareness at Wa-Hi." Simi Singh. November 2011

[75] Schafer, Curt. Survey Response from "Understanding Cultural Awareness at Wa-Hi." Simi Singh. November 2011

[76] "Understanding Cultural Competency at Blue Ridge Survey." (t=2.341, R= .417 sig=.027, chi-square= 7.951, df=4, asymp sig= .093)

[77] "Understanding Cultural Competency at Garrison Survey" (chi-square=13.912, df=6, sig= .031, t=1.715, sig=.098)

[78] "Understanding Cultural Competency at Wa-Hi." (chi-square crit. val.= .088)

[79] ibid. (Pearson's R= -.359, sig=.051)

competency trainings for improving social workers' understanding both of culture and of race, poor training opportunities could have a negative effect on teachers' approach to cultural competency and to dealing with race in the classroom.[80] In order to address Wa-Hi's response that the district's cultural sensitive trainings are not as effective as perhaps trainings received in prior professional or academic settings, it is imperative that if the district intends on effectively addressing the needs of their culturally and racially diverse community, it must provide more effective trainings that are more consistent and effective than lectures on the culture of poverty. The district must create a streamlined initiative clearly geared towards cultural competency and provide opportunities for professional development from there.

[80] Abrams, Laura S., and Jene A. Moio. "Critical Race Theory and the Cultural Competence Dilemma In Social Work Education." *Journals of Social Work Education* 45, no. 2 (2009): 245-261.

II. THE ROLE OF SCHOOL STAFF IN CREATING A CULTURALLY COMPETENT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

School administrators, teachers, and staff play a crucial role in the progression towards culturally competent schools. This section covers the importance of Spanish-proficient staff members as role models for Latino students and valuable connectors for families, including and supporting culturally and racially diverse staff members who serve as invaluable role models for students, understanding the effects of discipline in a school environment, and the valuable position of the principal in leading the way towards cultural competency.

A. Valuing Spanish in School

Blue Ridge Elementary

Alejandro, a native Spanish speaker and graduate of Blue Ridge Elementary, recalled his early experiences at the school:

> Alejandro: All through kindergarten I didn't know English and that scared me too. I didn't know what to say, I didn't know how to say things…I remember one instance, where I came late and I didn't know any English so I had no way of communicating to the office that I was late so I stood there for 20 minutes before they understood that I was late to class. So that was really uncomfortable for me.[81]

The lack of bilingual staff in the office of the school at the time strongly impacted the student's sense of comfort at Blue Ridge. Now a recent graduate of Wa-Hi, this stressful and scary incident left a lasting impression on him. Because of the insufficient number of bilingual staff members in the office at Blue Ridge at the time, the student saw English as the proper and only language for communication: "I didn't know how to say things." Thus, the student came to devalue his Spanish language from his experience at school.

However, in recognition of the importance of conveying to Latino students the value of their culture and Spanish language, Blue Ridge has done much to greatly dissolve the language barrier in the school, with lasting positive effects for its students.

> Cox: I think we're [Blue Ridge is] doing a lot of things right…There are a lot of teachers that are Latino that work here, so I think that helps or there are Caucasian faculty or staff that do speak Spanish so that's huge.[82]

At Blue Ridge, Cox attributed Blue Ridge's culturally competent environment to the number of Spanish speaking and Latino faculty.[83] Having easily accessible Spanish speaking staff and faculty allows for Spanish-dominant parents to access to information, resources, and, more obviously, teachers and administrators in order to effectively involve themselves in their student's education. Cox also mentioned the easily accessible Spanish-speaking staff at Blue Ridge:

---

[81] Alejandro, Wa-Hi Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 15, 2011.
[82] Kendra Cox, interview by Simerun Singh, November 3, 2011.
[83] Ibid.

Cox: …When we have a question or there's a parent that's Spanish speaking—and I don't speak Spanish—I will go to the Intervention Specialist, or another staff and she'll call them and say, "Oh they speak English alright, I'll be there. I'll be in the meeting for support, but, you know, I think they'll be fine speaking in English or we'll ask the parent a preference do you want to speak in English or Spanish. And we do that with the kids too if we're interviewing a kid about an incident that came up, we'll ask them 'is it easier for you to speak in English or Spanish?' and give them the option and then go from there.[84]

There was an ease with which Cox spoke about accommodating for Spanish-dominant speakers. Cox was familiar with the protocol for communicating with Spanish-dominant parents. Cox also conveyed that the parents were equally familiar and comfortable with accessing translators or the correct person in order to communicate with the necessary people at the school. Principal Kim Doepker spoke about the importance of hiring bilingual staff in order to properly represent and serve the needs of the majority Spanish-speaking student body:

Doepker: Bottom line, I have to hire Spanish-speaking people…I just had a parent transfer to Prospect Point because they didn't want their child hearing any Spanish whatsoever—none. And I said 'Ok. Your child, we can fix your schedule so it's English-only.' [The parent said] 'But they are hearing Spanish.' You are absolutely right they are hearing Spanish because 68% are Spanish speaking. I try to be professional and that's where the conversation keeps coming up—we are choosing Spanish because that's the highest population here."[85]

In addition to hiring more bilingual staff members, the school's dual language immersion program, in which Blue Ridge students receive instruction in both English and Spanish for different subjects through out the school day provides an opportunity for cultural validation. Miguel, a parent with a child at Blue Ridge, was extremely grateful to send his child to a school that strives to ensure that a Latino child's Spanish language abilities will be valued in the school:

Miguel: When I was growing up, another language…wasn't really valued or encouraged, and so when you would hear Spanish you would think, "ESL, oh, you gotta go to this group that is behind." So my association was, if you're picking up another language somehow…you must be developmentally challenged, you can't keep up. To see it totally flipped around [in the dual program]…that's sort of why I was like, "Wow, this is a valued thing. It's a valued resource and a limited resource."[86]

Miguel recognizes the lasting and harmful effects of treating Spanish-dominant students "subtractively," in Valenzuela's terms.[87] The school-wide dual language immersion program at Blue Ridge not only places native Spanish speakers on the same level with English speakers, it also formally validates the Spanish language held by many of the students at Blue Ridge as a valuable and encouraged means of communication.

The opportunity to learn from and connect with bilingual teachers is a lasting positive impact of the dual immersion program, according to Jessica, a student at Wa-Hi and graduate of Blue

---

[84] Ibid.

[85] Principal Kim Doepker, personal interview by Andrew Ryan and Emily Basham, December 5, 2011.

[86] Miguel, Blue Ridge parent, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 30, 2011.

[87] Valenzuela, Angela. *Subtractive Schooling*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 1999.

Ridge and Garrison. Jessica grew up in a Spanish-speaking household and spoke about the positive influence of two Blue Ridge elementary teachers on her life. Of Ms. Garanzuay, who taught her second and third grade classes at Blue Ridge, Jessica said: "She helped me through so much. I could go to her and tell her anything that was going on with my family."[88] Jessica also appreciated the support she received from her bilingual kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Rivera, and said of her: "Mrs. Rivera knew English and Spanish and she helped me so much." [89] Mrs. Rivera's support in navigating the shift between learning Spanish at home and learning both English and Spanish in school was crucial in providing support for Jessica and validating her home culture and language.

Garrison Middle School and Walla Walla High School

At Wa-Hi, we found an instance in which a student was actually chastised for speaking Spanish. Isabel, a Latina student at Wa-Hi, was hurt when a teacher told her and her classmates to stop speaking Spanish in class because her speaking was disrupting the class. She reported:

> Isabel: We were in class and I was with my group of friends and we were speaking Spanish and the teacher was like, "Can you guys please speak English. You're in my class and we are here to learn and you guys are disrupting the class with your Spanish-talking so please speak English."
> CD: Did you talk with your friends about that?
> Isabel: Yes. We actually talked to the administration about it.
> CD: What was that like?
> Isabel: It was actually very hard because it was like, okay, was that worth it? Did she understand how that hurt us and affected us?
> CD: What did you feel the response from the administration was like?
> Isabel: … I felt it was good because right away that day, they talked to her. And after that day, she was more understanding of where we were coming from.[90]

Isabel's teacher devalued Isabel's cultural and linguistic background by insisting English was the only language of value in the classroom. Isabel and her friends exercised their agency in this situation by going to the administration and notifying them of the teacher's harmful comment. However, they were unsure if the administration understood how the teacher's comments had harmed them. When an administrator spoke to the teacher, the teacher became more understanding of the students' situation. The administrators were able to address the teacher's lack of cultural awareness and catalyze a change in the teacher's attitude, which students noticed and valued. Administrators' efforts to increase awareness of the value of cultural diversity can create real change for Latino students who may feel that their home culture and language are not valued in school.

Kim Kelsay, the Bilingual Coordinator at Wa-Hi, adamantly supports teaching Spanish in schools:

> Kelsay: Sometimes I think people look at being able to have a class in another

---

[88] Jessica, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 15, 2011.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Isabel, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 23, 2011.

language, and it kind of frustrates me because [they say], "Oh we have to teach 'em English. They can only have classes in English." And I think that's really a disservice to the kid because knowledge transfers. You can learn one concept in Science in Spanish and you go into the English classroom and [it's] the same process but…it's just labeled differently in a different language. So, it's not a disservice to the kids to provide them with classes and their native language. I think it's really healthy for them because it elevates their language to a higher status because I think sometimes if we only focus on English then they're thinking "Uh, well bilingual must be bad or my culture must be bad because I'm only supposed to speak English." … I don't want them to have that idea because it's not a healthy way to look at things and their language is just as important as the English language.[91]

Kelsay's assertion that "knowledge transfers" underlies the foundation for successful culturally responsive practices that build upon the funds of knowledge of students and families. For native Spanish speakers, providing classes in Spanish and hiring a noticeable number of bilingual staff members are critical methods for ensuring Latino student comfort in school environments. Conversely, neglecting to provide such resources sets native Spanish speakers at a competitive disadvantage until they can learn English. Alejandro, a graduate of Wa-Hi, reported: "The learning of a new language, I guess, is what broke most barriers going into Garrison."[92] The sense of division between the home and school setting conveyed by Alejandro in the following passage section will remain for the children of Latino families in schools that fail to provide adequate resources for native Spanish speakers:

Alejandro: Growing up here, it's challenging, because in my house I have this culture, this Mexican culture, Hispanic culture and then I go to school and it's like a totally different environment where I have to learn what culture is here in America and sometimes I have to...mix the two so I can feel comfortable.[93]

 A school structure that affirms the Spanish language can dramatically increase both a Latino student's level of comfort in the school setting and – importantly – that student's sense of self-worth.

B. Valuing Diversity: Faculty and Administrator Perception of Race in School, Providing Student Role Models through Staff Diversity

Teacher/Administrator to Parent and Student: Examples of Colorblindness and of Racial Awareness

Throughout all three schools, teachers and administrators who identify as Latino more frequently communicate with Latino parents specifically about issues regarding race, culture, and diversity and in general feel more confident with teaching or communicating in culturally appropriate ways. While this may seem obvious, the surveys and interviews reveal that at Garrison and Wa-Hi, race and racial conflict is not widely accepted as a variable that affects a student's educational experience. According to the Garrison survey, non-white teachers and administrators speak to Latino parents regarding issues regarding race, culture, and diversity more frequently

---

[91] Kim Kelsay, personal interview by Simerun Singh, November 10, 2011.

[92] Alejandro, Wa-Hi Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 15, 2011.

[93] Ibid.

than white respondents with a very strong association between the two variables.[94] While this statistic is a bit skewed because of the low number of teachers of color who work at Garrison, the statistic does reveal that issues regarding race, culture, and diversity are prevalent at Garrison.[95] In a memo shared with our research team written by a passionate Tier II Social Studies teacher, Grace Ogoshi shared her stories with seeing much racial and cultural conflict within her classroom at Garrison.

> Ogoshi: The first year I taught Tier-II students, it was a miserable situation as the infrastructural pieces were not in place, it was a first-run and there were many mistakes, as expected when starting something new. On the first day of class, my students came in, looked around the room and said, "Hey…we're all brown people in here except one…this is racist." I had a "machismo-block" for 2/3 of the school year without administrative support. As a teacher, it can be detrimental to entertain a "systems flaw" as administration may see this as a personal failure. This was occurring and there was a large monetary investment so Tier staff were supposed to make it work, as prescribed. The boys would come in and the girls would stand until they were signaled to sit. If I asked for them to get out a piece of paper, the boys waited until the girls handed it to them. They would visually cue each other to interrupt and disrupt class and my lessons so that I could not complete a sentence. I had talked to our Mexican-American counselor and our South American dean regarding the "machismo" attitude and how I could deal with this so that I could teach."[96]

Ogoshi was very open to share her experiences both with racism within the classroom, noting how difficult and alone she felt while trying to understand how to manage a classroom of students who felt they were being mistreated based on race.[97] Because there were no formal methods of addressing a clearly cultural and racial problem that was disempowering Ogoshi as a teacher, she had to improvise by contacting the dean who helped her understand strategies of working around these problems that she faced.

In an interview with Sarah Von Donge, a dual-language teacher at Garrison, when asked about how race affects her classroom, she quickly mentioned an instance that had occurred the very day of the interview where she did not know how handle a white student who was refusing to work with two young Latino girls. Von Donge perceived that the problem was racially charged and was also something that needed to be addressed without marginalizing the Latino girls. However, Von Donge also emphasized that she had no strategies or specific plans for addressing the issue despite her recognition that it needed to be addressed.[98]

These issues surrounding race and culture within the school seem to be unacknowledged by Garrison Principal, Gina Yonts, who spoke about race in a more positive light without noting the dangerous affects of racial segregation and the prevalence of cultural and racial conflict to arise that Ogoshi especially noted. Yonts notes that she doesn't "really ever feel that there is racial tension" when asked about students' interactions.[99] There seems to be either a lack of communication stemming possibly from the lack of protocol that exists within the school to

---

[94] Understanding Cultural Awareness at Garrison. t=1.593, sig (2-tailed)= .000, chi-square= 19.316, asymp. Sig= .000, Pearson's R= .716, approx. sig= .000.
[95] According to demographic information that we gathered on teacher and administrator populations, there are five teachers and administrators of color at Garrison and there were five teachers and administrators who identified as a race other than Caucasian on the Garrison survey.
[96] Grace Ogoshi. Memo sent to Simerun Singh. November 16, 2011.
[97] Grace Ogoshi. Personal interview by Simerun Singh and Emily Basham. November 2012.
[98] Sarah Von Donge. Personal interview by Simerun Singh. November 16, 2011
[99] Gina Yonts. Personal interview by Simerun Singh and Emily Basham. November 18, 2011

discuss issues within the classroom related to racial conflict. Yonts' views on race will be discussed in a later section on the importance of Principals and on Social Belonging, though it is important to note here that racial conflict happens not only between students as Von Donge noticed but also between teachers and students, as Ogoshi points out in her experiences. Both of these interactions require thorough training as well as open dialogue with the administration in order to ensure that teachers are prepared to handle all situations of racial conflict with the support of the administration.

Blue Ridge presented a more consistent perception of race between at all levels of the school. According to the survey conducted at Blue Ridge, there is a moderate to strong correlation between being Latino and feeling confident with teaching or communicating with a student in a way that takes the student's cultural experiences into account.[100] This is not the case for all non-white teachers and administrators at Blue Ridge, for which this relationship is weak to moderate.[101] The high level of Latino students may account for higher teaching confidence rates amongst Latino teachers as Latino teachers who are able to identify with their students may be more likely to experience higher confidence in teaching them in a way that takes their cultural experiences into account which may encompass a distinctly racial component.

At Blue Ridge, minimization of race or colorblindness is less apparent than at Garrison. In Cox's interview she was both aware of the possibility of racial conflict occurring amongst students. In response to the question, "Do you think you need more support or dialogue with the principal or other faculty members about creating a more culturally inclusive school?"

> Cox: But I think racism, I think too. Just to be more aware of maybe some of the bullying, maybe it is cultural or racial but we haven't been made aware of… Like there's certainly potential that there's some things that the kids haven't said [reported]. I know we had an incident recently where some kids were kind of being pressured to fight from the middle school who, and it was gang related. That wasn't really racial, but there was some gang related stuff that would be interesting to look at racial and cultural implications.[102]

Cox's awareness of the possibility for racial conflict and even the need for faculty and staff to be critical of the possibility that such interactions occur allows her to be open to suggestions for how to discuss and rectify such behavior.

Doepker was also very aware of the way in which race affected her students and her school at alarge. When asked if there were any racial conflicts at her school, she responded with "Absolutely."[103] This awareness of even the possibility of racial conflict enables cultural competency to be more easily addressed and diffused within the school and pushes past a sentiment of colorblindness that inhibits change.

Staff Diversity: The Lack of Bilingual and Racial Minority Staff

Many of our student interviewees expressed the importance having both bilingual members of their school's staff as well as Latino role models with whom students can identify and relate. As

---

[100] Chi-square= 7.104, df= 3, Asymp sig= .069, Pearson's R= .503, sig=.006
[101] White teachers/admin crosstabbed with confidence in teaching or communicating with students in a way that takes their cultural experiences into account at Blue Ridge. Chi-square=2.982, df=3, Aymp sig=.394, R= -.314, Sig=.094
[102] Kendra Cox. Personal interview by Simi Singh. Blue Ridge Elementary School. 3 November 2011.
[103] Kim Doepker. Personal interview By Andrew Ryan and Emily Basham. 5 December 2011.

far as developing connections with students, the ways in which staff members interacted with students played a larger role for most students than the staff member's race or culture. However, the race of a teacher often determines whether he or she can sympathize with students or actually *empathize* with minority children. As Olivia implored of the teachers at her former schools Blue Ridge, Garrison, and Wa-Hi:

> Olivia: Make [Latino students] feel welcome there everyday, because there are those students that are going through a tough situation…Like they might have a family member in Mexico that just got killed or one of their family members got killed here because of gang activity or their parents are drunks. I know some students, their parents are drunks and they have to live through that. And I know that, to go to school, and have a teacher not care at all, it makes it even worse. Going to an environment where you are going to feel welcome, you're going to feel at home, because if you don't, it's like, what do you expect from the student?[104]

While one parent and one student we interviewed mentioned that they felt racial and cultural diversity on staff made no impact on their level of comfort at school, the majority of the students we interviewed said racial and cultural diversity on school staff plays a critical role in developing how welcome students feel in the school environment. As this narrative shows, having Latinos on staff can form a bridge between a Latino student's home and school setting. Another Wa-Hi student, Luís, reported:

> Luís: If you had a problem you could go to the [Latino] staff because I think they'd understand because they'd probably dealt with something like that when they were younger too and give you advice.

For Luís, the staff person he felt most connected to was Melito Ramirez, an Intervention Specialist at Wa-Hi. Although Luís did not know Melito's official position at the school, he valued the personal relationship Melito had initiated with him.

> Luís: At the beginning of the year, Mr. Melito told me if I had any problems to just come down to him.
> CD: What did that feel like?
> Luís: Good. Better.[105]

Certainly, simply having racial minority members on staff does not ensure that students from diverse racial backgrounds will relate to them. Several of the Latino students interviewed connected deeply with non-Latino staff members who reached out to them, as Olivia reported about the GEAR-UP coordinator and AVID director at Wa-Hi, Sue Weber:

> Olivia: I met [Sue Weber] through AVID but I still keep in contact with her. She gave me advice academically, but she also…whenever I had a problem or something I would go to her and she would help me… she was there in AVID all the time, we were able to talk to her all the time if something was wrong… I can't really explain it, but there's an

---

[104] Olivia, Wa-Hi Class of 2011, Personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 16, 2011.

[105] Luís, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, October 28, 2011.

attachment there.[106]

Grace Ogoshi, a Garrison teacher who identified her bi-cultural background as important to her experience as a teacher, reflects on her ability to connect with the minority students in her class that helped fundraise money for a classmate's father's kidney transplant operation that she encouraged the students to lead:

> Ogoshi: The kids had no idea what they had accomplished … When talking to some of them as high schoolers, they did not feel or see that their contributions were significant. In the last seventeen days of school, 30 kids empowered three school collections, solicited donations from Coke and three area grocery stores, obtained drop box donations from a mail-packing business and raised $1400+ dollars. My interpretation of what I saw was that their mindset was that whatever they contributed to society would never be significant. I understand this from the perspective of being part of the "out-group" for long enough that you no longer trust your own judgments as you have been told in so many ways that you will never make a sound decision.[107]

Having someone older of the same race (or of another minority) to look up to is valuable for many of the Latino students we interviewed. Alejandro, Wa-Hi graduate, recounts the lasting impact seeing a Latino college student talk to his class at Garrison had on his academic pursuits:

> Alejandro: We had students, career students come and speak to us about college, briefly. It was during my Language Arts class – that's what it was called in middle school I guess – a student came from WSU and he shared with us what he was doing and he was studying electrical engineering. So I guess I just kind of related to him because he liked math and science, I liked math and science. You could just tell the way he described what engineers do, you know design... especially electrical engineers, like circuit boards and deal with sometimes simple as lights and electrical stuff, but also they can go as complex as satellites and cars and I guess that's what caught my attention, technology. Like whoa, I can do that. And ever since then I've dreamt of becoming an engineer, …going off the Latino student that came over from WSU, I was like, WSU, that's what I wanted WSU.[108]

Having a Latino role model to look up to instilled not only a strong desire for success for Alejandro, but also a sense of confidence that he could succeed. His account shows the real potential that mentoring relationships between Latino college students can have for Latino students still in middle or high school. It provides them with living evidence that educational success can happen for Latinos.

The Walla Walla Public Schools can also provide such role models for Latino students on a day-to-day basis by considering the diversity of the school staff in the hiring process. Diana Erickson, the Bilingual Coordinator for the Walla Walla Public Schools, reported the statistics on the diversity of the school staffs at Blue Ridge, Garrison, and Wa-Hi found in the following

---

[106] Olivia, Wa-Hi Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 16, 2011.

[107] "Cultural Values Comparison Study," written by Grace Ogoshi for this project. November 16, 2011.

[108] Alejandro, Wa-Hi Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 15, 2011.

tables[109]:

Table 7: Racial Demographics of Certificated Staff

Certificated positions include teachers, administrators, counselors, intervention specialists, etc.

	Certificated Staff	Latino Certified	African American Certified	Asian Certified	Caucasian Certified
Blue Ridge	28	**7** (25.0%)	0	0	21 (75.0%)
Garrison	43	**3** (7.0%)	0	2 (4.5%)	38 (88.4%)
Wa-Hi	112	**2** (1.8%)	1 (.9%)	0	109 (97.3%)

Table 8: Racial Demographics of Classified Staff Members

Classified positions do not require certification, such as secretaries, custodians, kitchen staff, interpreters, substitute teachers, security staff, etc.

	Classified Staff	Latino Classified	African American Classified	Asian Classified	Caucasian Classified
Blue Ridge	23	**10** (43.0%)	0	0	13 (57.0%)
Garrison	25	**5** (7.0%)	0	0	18 (72.0%)
Wa-Hi	69	**9** (13.0%)	1 (1.4%)	0	59 (85.5%)

The students we interviewed noticed the lack of racial diversity on the staff at both Garrison and Wa-Hi. Luís, Fernando, and Alejandro mentioned a lack of racial diversity on the permanent staff at both Garrison and Wa-Hi. With only three Latino teachers at Garrison and two at Wa-Hi, both schools have very few certificated staff members that can serve as role models for Latino students. Below we compared the demographics on staff to the demographics of the student body as reported on the Walla Walla Public School website for each school and found vast differences.

Table 9: Overall staff demographics for each school compared with the demographics of the student bodies

---

[109] As the Bilingual Coordinator for the WWPS, Mrs. Erickson has worked extensively at Blue Ridge, Garrison, and Wa-Hi. As such, she is extremely familiar with the staff at all three schools and helped to identify the race of teachers and administrators. We cross referenced her personal knowledge of the employees of the schools with the list of the names in each school's staff directory – looking for Latino last names – to determine these demographics. These findings do not necessarily represent individuals who identify with these races.

Blue Ridge Staff

- Caucasian 66.7%
- Latino 33.3%

(Total Staff: 51)

Blue Ridge Students

- Caucasian 27.6%
- Latino 70.2%
- African American 0.8%

(Total Students: 392)

Garrison Staff

- Caucasian 85.3%
- Latino 11.8%
- Asian 2.9%

(Total Staff: 68)

Garrison Students

- Caucasian 53.8%
- Latino 42.0%
- African American 1.3%

(Total Students: 595)

Wa-Hi Staff

- Caucasian 92.8%
- Latino 6.1%
- African American 1.1%

(Total Staff: 181)

Wa-Hi Students

- Caucasian 62.9%
- Latino 32.0%
- African American 1.1%
- American Indian 0.3%

(Total Students: 1,966)

The drastic difference between student and staff demographics are likely due in part to the rapid increase of the Latino population in Walla Walla County over the past twenty years. According to the U.S. Census, the Latino population in the county has increased from ten percent of the total population in 1990 to twenty percent in 2010.[110] Bringing the racial diversity of the school staff up to speed with the diversity of the student body requires intentionality on the part of those responsible for hiring staff members. We urge both Wa-Hi and Garrison to make increased

---

[110] 10.8% of the total population in 1990, to 15.7% in 2000, to 19.7% in 2010.
http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/53/53071.html

efforts to hire more Latino staff members, especially for certificated positions, to better support Latino students in school.

Notably, the AVID program at Wa-Hi is beginning to bring in Latino role models in the form of college tutors. Sue Weber, the head of Gear-Up at the school, responded to the question "Do you think [the Latino tutors have] become role models?":

> Weber: Absolutely, are you kidding me? I mean that is huge when you have students that have come back and speak to, especially when they struggled through the same things…That's why we hire college students and not people like me because they have that immediate connection with what those students can relate to and even more so if they've been an AVID student.[111]

However, the AVID program – which assisted all of the graduating AVID students this past year matriculate to either the Walla Walla Community College or another four-year institution – benefits only a portion of the over six hundred Latino students attending Wa-Hi.[112] A greater effort to add Latino teachers to the staff can contribute to creating a more accessible support system for Latino students and will further value cultural diversity at the schools for both students and staff.

C. Discipline

Schools must create safe and supportive environments for all students. However, disciplinary action alone does not address the root of actions that call for discipline, which often stem from culturally and racially charged stereotypes and attitudes. This section looks at the interplay between racial and cultural stereotypes and discipline. Blue Ridge, Garrison, and Wa-Hi all include statements in their student handbooks to show they will use disciplinary measures to punish any persons that demonstrate acts of discrimination in the schools.

"Wa-Hi Statement on Discipline

> Our School is committed to maintaining an educational environment that is free of discrimination. Accordingly, this policy forbids any discriminatory action or any unwelcome conduct that is based on an individual's race, color, religion, gender, national origin, disability, ancestry, citizenship status, sexual orientation, or any other protected status of an individual. The school will not tolerate any form of harassment of our students. Harassment consists of unwelcome conduct, whether verbal, physical, or visual, that is based on a protected group status.

> The school will not tolerate harassing conduct that:
> - Interferes unreasonably with an individual's educational performance
> - Creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive educational environment

> Such harassment may include, for example:

---

[111] Sue Weber, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 8, 2011.
[112] http://www.wwps.org/atoz/pdfs/ethnic_diversity_district_statistics.pdf

- Jokes about another person's protected status
- Kidding, teasing or practical jokes directed at a person based on his or her protected status" [113]

"Garrison Statement on Discipline

> The district will not tolerate harassment or discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender/sex, age, sexual orientation or disability. All acts of harassment, intimidation, bullying or discrimination -- including cyber-bullying -- should be reported immediately to a staff member or administrator. The procedures and forms for lodging an informal or formal complaint may be obtained upon request during business hours at the principal's office at each school building or by contacting the Personnel Department at the Walla Walla Public Schools Administration Building at 364 South Park Street." [114]

"Blue Ridge Statement on Discipline

> Blue Ridge is firmly committed to having a positive educational and work environment that encourages respect, dignity, and equality for students, patrons, parents/guardians, applicants, volunteers, contractors, and employees. We will not tolerate discrimination, harassment, intimidation, or bullying in Blue Ridge's education or working environment, regardless of whether the discrimination, harassment, intimidation, or bullying is based on conduct that is adult to student, student to adult, student to student, adult to adult, male to female, female to male, male to male, or female to female." [115]

While such measures are necessary, we caution against using disciplinary action as the sole approach to instances of discrimination in school. As the interview responses of Kelsay, bilingual coordinator at Wa-Hi, show, simply suppressing instances of discrimination visible to staff members does not sufficiently address the root of the issue. Kelsay responded to a question regarding the degree and intensity of instances of cultural insensitivity and racism:

> Kelsay: I think it happens more at lunch. Not necessarily in the classroom because I think teachers are pretty on top of that. But…I hear some of my students say "He called me so-and-so," or "This happened at lunch," or things like that and so I think that's more often after-school. Usually I haven't heard any complaints of anything going on in the classroom, they've never told me about anything like that… Mostly it's name-calling or derogatory remarks…racial names like "beaner." Sometimes they call each other that and I say, "Hey. Don't be using that. Don't be calling each other that. You know, have some respect for yourself." [116]

---

[113] Walla Walla High School Student Handbook 2011-2012. http://www.wahibluedevils.org/images/Web_Student_Handbook_2011-2012.pdf

[114] Garrison Middle School Student Handbook 2011-2012. http://www.garrisonmiddleschool.org/images/2011-12_Student_Handbook__English--Columns_Final.pdf

[115] Blue Ridge Discipline Procedures 2011-2012. http://www.blueridgeeagles.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=103:discipline-procedures&catid=41:about-our-school&Itemid=201

[116] Kim Kelsay, personal interview by Simerun Singh, November 10, 2011.

A purely reactionary method of dealing with discrimination in schools is insufficient because teachers are unable to monitor all areas of school space and, more importantly, simply suppressing acts of discrimination avoids addressing the source of discrimination: culturally and racially charged stereotypes and attitudes. School staff members must conceptualize the public space in their schools – in the terms of Masschelein and Simons' (2010) uses of the term public – as not merely spaces in which racial discrimination is forbidden, but as spaces where acceptance is *actively* promoted for all students, particularly racial and cultural minority students. Discrimination may become less visible on the school grounds with increased disciplinary action, but strongly enforced discipline measures only ensure that discrimination will occur elsewhere, further from the teacher's view. Culturally and racially charged stereotypes and attitudes are not themselves challenged by disciplinary methods.

On a second level, discipline – if used carelessly – can act as a tool for validating cultural and racial stereotypes in the school. As one Latino Wa-Hi student reported:

> Alejandro: I feel that there are instances where teachers look at a Latino student and the way they behave and even though other students are behaving the same way they treat them differently. I don't want to say that's discrimination…There have been times that I've been doing something, and you know someone else [is doing] totally the same thing and I've gotten in trouble for it and they haven't.[117]

Olivia echoed a feeling that Latino students were occasionally treated unfairly at Wa-Hi, while Luís reported an instance of unfair use of discipline from an administrator at Garrison. These reports from the students call into question the perception of the teachers and administrators at the schools. When responding to the question "How included do you think Latinas/Latinos feel in Wa-Hi?" Cathy Rasley, a former special-education teacher and counselor at Wa-Hi and a current cheerleading coach, associated Latinos with gangs at Wa-Hi:

> Rasley: I think they feel good. When you ask me that question, I think of the kids that are the big troublemakers. They're like the gang members that are Latino. Because there is a Latino gang here and that's the first thing I picture because those are the first things you go to. Because they are the ones that stand out because they want the attention.[118]

Kim Kelsay remarked upon her efforts to decrease student involvement in gangs at Wa-Hi:

> Kelsay: Oh yes, there's still a gang presence. …But we're really trying to make that not part of the culture here at school but there are groups of students that are in gangs and—like today one of my students who I don't know if he's completed because I don't really ask him because I don't think that's really my place to say, "Hey, are you in a gang?" [laughing] but I kind of have my suspicion that he is, but he came today and he was wearing a jacket that said "Los Cholos" on the back and there's some signs on his back. And I said, "You know, I really don't think that's appropriate to wear to school so let's go to the office and see what they think about it." And so I took him

---

[117] Alejandro, Wa-Hi Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 15, 2011.
[118] Cathy Rasley, personal interview by Andrew Ryan and Simerun Singh, November 7, 2011.

down there and he came back without the coat on. Gang signs change so much that it's hard to keep up with everything. So, usually what I'll do is if I have a question, I say let's just go to the office and they can decide if it is or not because they keep more current on what's happening and stuff.[119]

Kelsay's approach to dealing with gangs focuses on building relationships with her students, rather than using solely disciplinary actions with students deemed at risk of joining gangs.

Kelsay: I try to help my students see a future because I think a lot of times gangs …don't see a future. So I try to help them and say, "Ok, what are you going to do after high school? What are you going to do for a career? What are you going to do to support your family?" – asking those questions so that they can start thinking about that longer term instead of just high school.[120]

Proactive methods, such as forming relationships with students, can often prevent self-destructive and violent behavior. Administrators, along with teachers like Kelsay, have an incredible power to assist students along a constructive path of learning towards a successful future and away from one of violence. We caution all school officials to consider heavily the consequences of their choices to use disciplinary actions for students. Wa-Hi student Alejandro recalled:

Alejandro: One of my best friends that I met in 2nd grade – we were best friends through Blue Ridge through Garrison and our sophomore year in high school – you know, he wasn't the best student but we got along with each other. He had gotten in a couple of fights before and he told me - I remember the day, it was an assembly - he said I can't get in any more trouble or I'm gonna get kicked out of high school. And I was like, "Ok, well just do work, if you need help I'll help you with math, whatever you need." After the assembly I heard two kids got in a fight. The next day I realized it was my friend. He got kicked out. He went to Lincoln, and ever since then he's been in a gang.[121]

While school safety must be a priority for staff, relying first and foremost upon disciplinary methods creates an environment that is reactionary, rather than constructive. School staff, who deal with discipline matters on a daily basis, have the power to determine which route they will choose to create a safe and respectful school culture.

D. The Role of the Principal

Gonzalez (1998), Gonzalez & Huerta-Macias (1998), and Morrison Institute for Public Policy & Center for the Future of Arizona (2006) report that the most pivotal person to achieving cultural competence in any school is the principal. Gonzalez writes, "In schools serving Latinos, the principal sets the tone of respect that results in high expectations. It is the principal who must exhibit a combination of skills and knowledge to effectively lead a school in providing the quality education legally guaranteed to Latinos, in order for them to become successful,

---

[119] Kim Kelsay, personal interview by Simerun Singh, November 10, 2011.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Alejandro, Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 15, 2011.

productive citizens in the twenty-first century" (1998).[122] We encourage principals to embrace the significance of their position in this regard, as leaders that set an example for interacting with students with equity. Olivia encouraged the principals at both Garrison and Wa-Hi to make themselves visible for both students and teachers:

> Olivia: At Garrison, definitely try to be out there for the students…. Definitely be there for them. It's definitely like a teacher; make them feel welcome. Get involved with students. Go out to the lunchroom; get to know them…. I know Wa-Hi, Mr. Peterson, he is definitely, I see him. He's out in the hallways, going to the lunchroom, talking to some of them, but definitely getting involved with them so they can feel welcome. Like I said earlier about teachers, make them feel important, that they matter even though there's so many students.[123]

Part of the reason so many Latino parents and former students felt comfortable at Blue Ridge is due to the school's history of highly dedicated and engaging principals. Several students including Alejandro and Olivia raved about their experiences with Linda Boggs while she was principal at the school. The current principal, Kim Doepker, has continued with the school's tradition of strong principal involvement. She reported:

> Doepker: My goal is to get out to the classrooms, set my calendars so that I am out interacting with kids. I've been very upfront with staff that when I walk into a classroom - get out of my way, I want to talk to the kids. I want to see what they're learning, and me interacting with them.[124]

Principals have not only the power to set the standard for all other staff members, but they can also make the structural and policy changes essential to ensuring a school's dedication to cultural competence. Cathy Rasley recalled the positive effects of a new principal at Wa-Hi in terms of lessening gang presence on school grounds:

> Rasley: We got a different principal and they changed all the rules so that you couldn't wear things [that associated you with a gang]. Let's just say you were a gang member and now you're dressed like that and you don't have your little colors so people – so that they kind of got out of that mode where they start thinking not all Hispanics are gang members…. I think as more and more Latinos came into our community, besides our high school, I think people got a better understanding.[125]

At Blue Ridge, parents praised the dual language program. One parent actually moved back to Walla Walla – after hearing about the bilingual program at the school – so that his child could benefit from the unique set up of instruction in English and Spanish for all students:

> Miguel: Hopefully these kinds of resources will be valued. I'm impressed with what they've done so far. This is way past what I saw when I was a kid, so I feel really

[122] Gonzalez, M. L. 1998. "Successfully Educating Latinos: The Pivotal Role of the Principal." in *Educating Latino Students: A Successful Guide to Practice.* Eds. Gonzalez, M. L., Huerta-Marcias, A., Tinajero, J. V. p.3-28
[123] Olivia, Wa-Hi grad class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 16, 2011.
[124] Principal Kim Doepker, personal interview by Andrew Ryan and Emily Basham, December 5, 2011.
[125] Miguel, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 30, 2011.

blessed that we have access to something like this. Because in other communities, it's a competition…. In the other communities, where you had to be a person of means and influence to be able to have a spot in something like that."[126]

Principals have the power to play an essential role in creating a welcoming school environment by both being highly visible and creating structural changes aimed at discouraging formation of stereotypes and promoting positive, safe interaction between culturally and racially diverse students.

---

[126] Miguel, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 30, 2011.

III. PEER INTERACTIONS

The following are voices of Latino students in the Walla Walla Public Schools:

> Jessica: "I've had people tell me [in school], 'You [Latinos] are no good, but you can jump fences.'"[127]

> Luís: "[…] one time in sixth grade, one of my friends was in class and then some girl called him a stupid beaner Mexican." [128]

> Isabel: "It's just like what everybody says - people are putting you down. Like, 'Go back to where you came from,' and maybe because we speak more Spanish than we do English in school, they're like, 'Speak English. You're in America.'"[129]

A. Social Belonging

By far the most frequently mentioned factor for a student's level of comfort at school was their sense of social belonging. One recent graduate of Walla Walla High School, also a Garrison and Blue Ridge aluma, responded to the question which of three schools she felt most comfortable at:

> Olivia: Of the three, elementary, definitely. It's just the people you grow up with and you're stuck with them for like five years practically, and some of them move away but …it's like those friendships that you carry on with you for the rest of your life…I definitely loved it and the teachers. They made a huge impact on me.[130]

Fernando reported, "When I feel really comfortable is when I have a class with all my friends … I can be myself."[131] Every student that we interviewed discussed the social atmosphere of the schools. Most notably, students frequently reported a sense of racial segregation among social groups, especially at Wa-Hi:

> Olivia: The Mexican girls would hang out with their Mexican girls group. I was more - I remember my junior year, I always hung out with my cousins but I would hang out with more Mexican girls…you know there might be one white dude who plays soccer too; he hangs out with them. And I do know that he would hang out with all the Mexicans but he would hang out with his friends also. There's just, you don't really see it a lot, I don't know why, it's kind of weird.[132]

The students that remarked upon this social segregation based on race perceived the student body as a whole to be culturally and racially accepting, despite the lack of social interaction between white and Latino students.

---

[127] Jessica, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 15, 2011.
[128] Luís, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, October 28, 2011.
[129] Isabel, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 23, 2011.
[130] Olivia, Wa-Hi grad class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 16, 2011.
[131] Fernando, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, October 28, 2011.
[132] Olivia, Wa-Hi grad class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 16, 2011.

AR: So do you feel that most people are really accepting of different races, different cultures?

Fernando: Well yeah, we all get along. I don't ever see people fighting over that…. It's just, we [whites and Latinos] don't really talk to each other.

AR: Why do you think that is?

Fernando: I don't know, cause they don't talk to each other, they're not friends. So like we hang out during lunch, it's just us and we see a table full of white people and then it's just like whites and Mexican immigrants at different tables.[133]

Garrison Middle School Principal Gina Yonts held a similar impression about her school's social atmosphere, as well as Wa-Hi's. However, rather than attributing the social segregation of students to racial tensions among the students, she speculates that the social trend of segregation is the natural result of students being drawn to each other's similarities:

Yonts: I don't really ever feel that there is racial tension. There is racial comfortableness. Does that make sense? … I have kids that are up at the high school and the whites very much stay to themselves and the Hispanics very much stay to themselves at Wa-Hi.… I have Hispanic friends that I hang out with outside of school and work and our families get together and—so you know, I think I might be— I think I might be the exception, not the norm. Does that make sense? I think I don't have a problem just seeing people. But I'm not necessarily sure if that is inclusive of the rest of the staff and the rest of our school population. I think it's different in the dual-language programs. And I think that there is probably some tension on the dual kids when they get up here. And the kids that are Hispanic still are drawn to other Hispanics. The division between pulling aside and identifying with kids of their own race and ethnicity and pulling away from their Caucasian counterparts that they've been with since kindergarten. There is sometimes some tension that way but they could all be purple and they'd all be fighting over making new friends. You know, it's like, "He was my best friend since third grade and now you're here and you're taking her away from me." It doesn't really have much to do with skin color.[134]

Yonts accepts the possibility for racial conflict within her school however seems to view it as a fleeting or temporary problem that occurs when elementary school students graduate into Garrison. Even so, racial segregation becomes a non-issue to Yonts under the larger umbrella of making new friends and general social conflict. Her opinion draws into discussion the larger question: what role does a school serve regarding socialization? Is school, as Higgins & Abowitz (2011) write, a resource that shapes students into individuals capable of succeeding in society, a process that caters to and in effect legitimizes existing societal inequities within the education system? Or should it strive, as Masschelein & Simons (2010) write, to create its own more leveled public at school and challenge inequity in the larger society for the sake of the students and future generations? For schools to step closer to that ideal of becoming a social equalizer, schools must challenge societal inequity and actively promote a culture of acceptance at school.

---

[133] Fernando, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, October 28, 2011.
[134] Principal Gina Yonts, personal interview by Simerun Singh, November 18, 2011.

Yonts further notices the trend for Latinos to tend towards other Latino children but feels that race is far less of a factor in the determination of friend groups than early teenage insecurity in a new middle school environment. But as McKown & Weinstein (2003) show, a child at the middle school age is likely highly aware of racial stereotypes and their level of awareness increases at an accelerated pace between the ages of 6 and 10. The high level of racial segregation among friend groups that occurs at Wa-Hi begins long before high school. The trend for Garrison students to segregate socially based on race observed by Yonts is a serious issue. While the point that students are naturally drawn to each others similarities – which include culture and race – when creating friend groups is valid, the school must examine both the ways in which it can promote positive social interaction between social groups to combat the acceptance of racial stereotypes and work to acknowledge and change trends of social segregation by classroom.

One example of a program working to counter this negative segregation is at Blue Ridge Elementary. The dual immersion program at Blue Ridge Elementary has created a learning environment in which students become skilled at helping others shift between languages and streamlining cultural integration in the classroom. Carolina, a mother of two Blue Ridge students, spoke of a culturally responsive teaching practice, a component of the dual language immersion program, in which teachers pair students with others who speak a different language at home.

> Carolina: Like right now, the teacher Morenos is in that class [points], a Spanish class. She puts a Spanish-speaking child with an English-speaking child so they have buddies. So the Mexican says to the American what the teacher is saying in English, so they translate and when they are in English class, they have the same buddy, and in English class, the American says to the Mexican what she is saying. I like that. My girl knows both languages and she likes to help to translate what the teacher is saying in Spanish. And a great thing - it's like what the teacher Morenos says - if we begin to plant the seeds of helping others, when they are older, they will want to do the same thing. They will want to help those that don't know.

Carolina appreciates the Dual Language Immersion Program because she sees how it helps her students, like her daughter, "plant the seeds of helping others." This profound learning environment helps foster student learning and teaching relationships, as well as friendships, across cultural barriers. To use language as a bridge to cross cultural barriers is an engaging exercise in utilizing the "funds of knowledge"[135] that all students and families bring to a school.

B. Classroom Diversity

The social segregation that occurs at Garrison and Wa-Hi is likely due in part to the lack of classroom diversity reported by many of the students. Alejandro, Fernando, Olivia, and Isabel noticed that the advanced classes at Wa-Hi consisted of mostly white students and very few Latinos. Isabel spoke about her experience as the only Latina in her AP English class:

---

[135] Cross, T., Bazron, B., Dennis, K., & Isaacs, M., (1989). *Towards A Culturally Competent System of Care, Volume I.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Child Development Center, CASSP Technical Assistance Center.

Isabel: And right now, I'm the only Latina in my AP English class. I'm the only one. So it's really different.

CD: What do you think about that?

Isabel: Last year, there were more Latinos in my English class than Americans. I was more comfortable. And then in this one, it's just like, do I belong here? Maybe they are smarter than me. Do I sound dumb when I give my opinion? Those kind of things.

CD: Have you encountered anything [like that] from your classmates?

Isabel: Actually, the first day of school when I entered that class, one of my classmates went up to me and said, "*You're* in this class?" And I was like, "Yeah…" It's just the way that classmate put it, I was like, "Okay..." [makes face]. I mean, they think that [Latino] people can't do it.[136]

More than simply affecting Isabel's social comfort, the lack of diversity in the classroom caused her to question her academic ability and her deservingness to be in an advanced class. The comment she received from her classmate - of surprise and some degree of disgust - that she was in the AP class shows how the trend of Latinos enrolling in lower-level classes at Wa-Hi contributed to the stereotype that Latino students are less intelligent and less capable than white students. Of course, advanced classes are intended for high-performing students; they are not proper fits for all students. However, Wa-Hi must critically examine both the factors that contribute to the trend that creates class enrollment of "only two of us [Latinos] in there"[137] for Alejandro's AP Biology class and "only three Mexican students"[138] in Olivia's AP Calculus class and the consequences of that trend. Explaining the trend with a claim that the white students at Wa-Hi simply happen to be higher-performing students is not an acceptable explanation – nor is it adequate to defer the factors contributing to the trend as outside the control or proper role of the school. Why? Because the trend threatens to validate a stereotype held by both white and Latino students that Latino students are less intelligent and hard-working than other students. Isabel's question to herself, "Do I belong here?" is an example of how a Latina student internalized stereotypes and began to accept an assumed inferiority. Like Grace Ogoshi, Isabel began to "no longer trust [her] own judgments" after confronting both a racial trend and actual judgment for breaking that trend that made her feel out of place as a Latina succeeding academically at Wa-Hi.

Notably, while the advanced classes still have a shockingly few number of Latino students enrolled in them, the AVID program, which begins during 7th grade at both middle schools in the district, is beginning to improve Latino representation in those classes. AVID is a selective program – originating from a partnership with Washington State University – designed to increase college readiness and enrollment for students who express a desire to achieve. As Olivia reported:

Olivia: "There's been a huge advancement in students trying harder now. Especially in the AVID classes they're really helping them a lot. And they're trying to persuade them to try and take harder classes. I've seen a big difference now. Back then it was just one or

---

[136] Isabel, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 23, 2011.

[137] Alejandro, Wa-Hi Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 15, 2011.

[138] Olivia, Wa-Hi Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 16, 2011.

two students [in advanced classes]."[139]

But, again, while AVID is a step in the right direction, it benefits only a portion of students at Wa-Hi and, moreover, the program's model does not address the specific racial and cultural barriers affecting Latino students even if in effect it allows some Latino students to overcome them. The stereotypes held against Latino students at Wa-Hi remain unchallenged for students not enrolled in AVID, like Luís, who reported:

> Luís: Like most people think that white people are smarter… And it's just harder for Mexicans to get in the same class as a white person might. Because I think if a Mexican and a white person were to go for the same class and there was only one spot they'd probably pick the white person, because white people are "smarter" I guess. That's what people think. It's a stereotype.[140]

While class enrollment is determined by a number of factors, including student's previous educational experience at middle and elementary schools, Luís ascribes power in the hands of teachers and administrators to sustain or change the stereotype of white students as "smarter" than Latino students. He perceives that teachers and administrators determine who is qualified for each class. Students may work hard, but ultimately teachers and administrators place students in classes.

C: Stereotypes and Discrimination

The students interviewed conveyed awareness and disapproval of several stereotypes held against Latinos in the public schools. In addition to the stereotypes about intelligence, students reported stereotypes that associated Latinos with drugs, poverty, illegal immigration, and gangs. The barriers associated with stereotypes in schools are difficult to fully address as they often permeate from the larger society. Luís recounted an experience in which he encountered discrimination on the street in Walla Walla:

> Luís: I was walking to my house 'cuz I was coming home from the Y, from playing basketball, it was me and my friend and we were walking home and then as we were walking we see a red car pass by and we just look at it. They threw a bottle at us and said, "Stupid Mexicans, go back to Mexico."
> CD: Did you and [your friend] talk about it?
> Luís: Yeah, I dunno. We just thought it was kind of funny. It didn't really matter.
> CD: Why didn't it matter?
> Luís: I dunno. I was used to it because before that I'd gotten called multiple times like "Mexican" or "beaner."[141]

While this instance of discrimination occurred outside of school property, in sixth grade, Luís' friend was called "beaner" by his white classmate. Schools can and must combat such

---

[139] Olivia, Wa-Hi Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 16, 2011.

[140] Luís, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, October 28, 2011.

[141] Luís, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, October 28, 2011.

stereotypes by not only responding to instances of discrimination, but actively encouraging respect of different cultures and races in school.

Many Latino students we spoke with have confronted these stereotypes so often they have adopted a sense of apathy to cope with them. It is this apathy that is most disturbing. It is disturbing to hear Alejandro say "There's always going to be discrimination, there's always going to be racist comments that can be made. But I've learned to not really pay attention."[142] It is disturbing to hear Luís recall how one of his friends in sixth grade "was in class and then some girl called him a stupid beaner Mexican," and he believes, "Nobody really cares though."[143] It is disturbing to hear that after Jessica was told by her classmate, "You [Latinos] are no good but you can jump fences," she responded: "I was mad and at the time I just wanted to hit someone but then I was like, I'm going to show them how respectful Mexicans can be about it. [I said,] "It's all good. You guys can say what you guys want. I could care less, I mean, we're good at something, right?"[144] Her response shows an alarming internalization of the discriminating remark. Clearly, Jessica did care about the instance because two years later, she spoke with us about it:

> Jessica: [The teacher] took us down to the office and [the other student and I] talked about it, but I was like, "Why am I going to talk to someone who just discriminated against me and told me what I'm good at because I'm from a different culture?" But I didn't really pay attention to that person no more. I mean, they're probably going to tell me something else [hateful]…that student apologized to me actually. But I don't see the person the same. It's like, I'm gonna respect you but you're not going to get all of my respect because of what you've told me.[145]

When students encounter discrimination from their classmates in school, not only does it harm the school community, it may have lasting mental consequences for them as well. MD and scholar Dr. Lee M. Pachter and his colleagues at Drexel University College of Medicine surveyed 277 minority children to determine the relationship between discrimination, depression and self-esteem. He writes:

> Dr. Pachter: Not only do most minority children experience discrimination, but they experience it in multiple contexts: in schools, in the community, with adults and with peers…. It's kind of like the elephant in the corner of the room. It's there, but nobody really talks about it. And it may have significant mental and physical health consequences in these children's lives.[146]

Discrimination in school has lasting negative effects upon children, rather than enduring positive effects. Therefore schools must sustain their efforts to address discrimination in school and actively work to develop a positive school culture to promote respectful relationships and enhance student learning. One step the Walla Walla Public Schools have taken in this direction is

---

[142] Alejandro, Wa-Hi Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 15, 2011.
[143] Luís, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, October 28, 2011.
[144] Jessica, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 15, 2011.
[145] Jessica, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 15, 2011.
[146] Dr. Lee M. Pachter, *ScienceDaily,* May 2, 2010.

that they invited Stu Cabe, relationship expert and founder of the Ovation Company – *Standing Up for What is Good*, to work with Garrison, Pioneer and Wa-Hi so that he may deliver a message of building respectful relationships to students and staff. He visited all three schools December 6th and 7th, 2011 where he led all-school assemblies and met with student leaders.[147] We commend this effort on the part of the district to engage in the work of creating a more positive school climate. We endorse in-depth follow-up dialogue among students and staff about respect in school to continue building a school a respectful school climate throughout the year to ensure that yearly or one-time events, such as Cabe's, have a lasting effect upon students and staff. Additionally, we support a "Be Nice" campaign, such as Cabe's, that specifically addresses the roots of disrespect: specifically, racially and culturally charged stereotypes and attitudes.

Alejandro explained his perception of the current status of stereotypes at Garrison and Wa-Hi in his response to the question "Is there categorizing among students?"

> Alejandro: Students on students? I would say yes. Maybe more in middle school than high school. I would say…in high school I feel that most people were a little bit more mature, but then again when people did discriminate, it wasn't as much, it wasn't as often, but it was harsh and more tough and just stronger comments being made. So that in middle school it was more often, but it's just like maybe they were just joking around, or maybe they're not really understanding. In high school, they do really understand that this hurts and they do it on purpose.[148]

Alejandro noticed an intentional quality to the hateful comments students make towards each other in high school. For Latino students and their academic success, stereotypes and the discrimination that stems from them have lasting repercussions in terms of the opportunities they encounter. Isabel reported on her experiences at Wa-Hi:

> Isabel: We [Latinos] have to try harder to get where someone else doesn't have to try as hard to be there. It's just like what everybody says – people are putting you down. Like, "Go back to where you came from" and maybe because we speak more Spanish than we do English in school, they're like, "Speak English. You're in America."[149]

Fernando felt that white students at Wa-Hi make racially based judgments against Latino students:

> Fernando: Before you make friends with [white students], they actually think you use drugs and all that. So if I started talking to a kid, they'll ask me if I do drugs and they won't believe me.[150]

Fernando's account shows that the stereotypes he encountered of Latino students as drug-users – even as he did not use drugs - inhibited how he formed friendships with white students. Sadly, it became Fernando's position to defend himself against these stereotypes. This is a real

---

[147] http://www.wwps.org/news/newsflash_RecordView.cfm?RecordID=1328
[148] Alejandro, Wa-Hi Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 15, 2011
[149] Isabel, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 23, 2011.
[150] Fernando, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, October 28, 2011.

consequence of stereotypes about Latino students that can lead to social segregation in school. Additionally, it was particularly unsettling to see how some of the Latino students we interviewed accepted stereotypes about themselves and their peers in order to combat them. When Jessica's classmate at Garrison told her, "You [Latinos] are no good but you can jump fences," she first responded with hate. "I was mad and at the time I just wanted to hit someone." Then she adopted a different mindset: "It's all good. You guys can say what you guys want. I could care less, I mean, we're good at something, right?"[151] The most disturbing consequence of this encounter is that Jessica internalized the hateful comment and turned it around by implying that in fact, she was not good at anything - but at least she could jump fences.

Discrimination can also take the form of Latino students not being heard when they speak. Isabel answered the question: "Have there been instances in school where you've felt like you've been treated unfairly by peers or others?" by recounting an experience in class at Wa-Hi in which some of her classmates did not follow guidelines set forth by the class. Isabel addressed the issue in class and proposed that students make more of an effort to follow those guidelines and model respectful behavior for other students. She reported:

> Isabel: So I said my opinion, "…We are supposed to be showing the examples for the other students." And everybody was like [speaks quietly and doesn't look up] "Sure, whatever, okay." And when somebody else said exactly what I said and she was American, everybody was like [enthusiastically] "Oh yeah! She is right! She's right."[152]

Isabel attributed the fact that her classmates did not listen to her or hear her comment to her race. On the other hand, when her white classmate said the same thing, her peers listened and actively agreed with the classmate. Schools must do their part to create an atmosphere in which Latino students are listened to and valued by their classmates. For this to occur, schools must address the fact that students like Isabel who are Latino or of other minority races are often not heard when they speak.

D: Gangs and Peer-Pressure

The issue with gangs in the Walla Walla Public Schools is a very complicated one, and while this report can certainly begin to address the issue and how it relates to cultural competency, our research only skims the surface. We did not interview any gang members at any of the schools. The only insight we can provide as to how some students get pulled into gang involvement is from an interview with Kendra Cox, a counselor at Blue Ridge Elementary and Child Development Center, who reported:

> Cox: I know we had an incident recently [at Blue Ridge] where some kids were kind of being pressured to fight from the middle school and it was gang related. That wasn't really racial, but there was some gang related stuff that would be interesting to look at with racial and cultural implications.[153]

---

[151] Jessica, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 15, 2011

[152] Isabel, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 23, 2011.

[153] Kendra Cox, personal interview by Simerun Singh, November 3, 2011.

Though gangs certainly are a serious issue at Wa-Hi, the roots of gang activity and gang recruitment permeate even into district elementary schools. Currently, there is a movement among the parents of Blue Ridge for the school to adopt a dress code policy of uniforms, mainly because of reports by parents of students bullying poorer students based on their attire, but also in part because of a fear that students are wearing gang-related apparel. One parent of a Blue Ridge student reported that she would not consider sending her child to Garrison Middle School because "that's where the gangs are."[154] Gangs were perceived as an issue for all three of the schools, and the topic came up surprisingly frequently in our interviews.

What we can say about gangs is that every student we interviewed was affected by perceptions about gang activity in the schools despite their avoidance of gangs. Thus, the issue with gangs is both an issue in its own right and an issue plaguing effective cultural competence practices in the schools. Dealing with gangs pose a great struggle to the Walla Walla Public Schools because efforts to suppress gangs can very easily create a threatening environment for all Latino students. However, many of the Latino students we interviewed called for more action to root out student involvement in gangs. When asked, "if you could sit down with the principal at Wa-Hi and tell him one thing, what would you tell him?" Alejandro responded that school administrators should do more to dispel gangs at the school:

> Alejandro: I mean there's still gangs and there's still people that believe that they're in gangs that are still in high school. And they just have bad habits that they bring into the school and that they shouldn't. I mean people fight in school and you know that's not a safe place for anyone to be in. You never know, maybe they bring a weapon to school and they shouldn't do that. Just, to be more careful and provide control for gang-related behavior, especially with clothes.[155]

Gangs certainly create threatening environments for the schools and must be a constant concern of school officials, but the silent victims of so much attention and focus on gang activity are the vast majority of Latino students in the district that are not involved with gangs. Fernando recalled how gangs have affected him at Wa-Hi:

> AR: Gangs are a big part of Wa-Hi, you feel like?
> Fernando: Well, not part of Wa-Hi but part of the kids.
> AR: Is it mostly around Latino gangs?
> Fernando: Uh huh.
> AR: Is there a lot of tension among Latinos about that?
> Fernando: I haven't seen that much right now. But there are gangs that are there. They usually fight.
> AR: How do you feel about that?
> Fernando: I don't care, when they're not fighting, I don't see them that much.
> AR: You don't involve yourself with them at all? Do you have friends that are involved with them?
> Fernando: No
> AR: So you steer clear?

---

[154] Estela, Blue Ridge Parent, interview by Andrew, December 1, 2011.
[155] Alejandro, Wa-Hi Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 15, 2011.

Fernando: Yeah

AR: Is it pretty well known who's involved with gangs?

Fernando: Yeah

AR: How does that affect how you feel comfortable at school? Does it make you feel less comfortable?

Fernando: Since I don't know many of the gangsters, it doesn't bother me.

AR: So there's never been an issue where another Latino student has talked to you about being in a gang?

Fernando: No[156]

Every student we interviewed made efforts to avoid association with those they knew to be involved in gangs. Alejandro reported:

Alejandro: I was never influenced by gangs, even though even up to my junior year, there were still some people that I knew that were in gangs but I would never - I would hang out with them in school I would eat lunch with them - but I would never hang out with them after school. I would never get involved with their life outside of school. If they would say, "Come to my house," I would say, "No, I've got homework to do," because I knew that they were going to do bad things, simple as that. And I don't want to see them do anything bad, and I didn't want to do bad things myself.[157]

Like Alejandro, all of the Latino students we interviewed expressed a desire to succeed academically and in society at large. If we can convey only one thing with this project, it is that these students have much to contribute to schools, which can and must provide opportunities for students to engage in positive community-building activities that bridge racial and cultural barriers.

E: Extracurricular Activities and Latino Club

Through their involvement in extracurricular activities, many Latino students experienced positive social interactions with non-Latino students. Fernando reported:

Fernando: I have a couple [of white friends]. I have them cause I used to play football and I became friends with some of them and some of them are just fun, they're just fun to hang out with, they tell jokes and all that.[158]

School sports helped to break down the social segregation by race at the schools, according to Alejandro:

Alejandro: Through Garrison I've had friends of all races. I think soccer really connected most of us, especially with athletes. Even if they didn't play soccer, some people played

[156] Fernando, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, October 28, 2011.

[157] Alejandro, Wa-Hi Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 15, 2011.

[158] Fernando, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, October 28, 2011.

basketball. I mean, I like to play any sport, and we just got together and we were friends.[159]

Alejandro's narrative shows how sports can unify students of different races. Jessica, another student at Wa-Hi, told us "sports are my everything." However, she reported feeling different than her white peers on the Wa-Hi basketball team:

> CD: Have you ever felt different or not welcome at school?
> Jessica: I feel different being surrounded by the basketball team because it's a bunch of American girls. And so I'm like..."I'm over here, I'm Latina!" It's a big difference. I mean, they don't see things the way I see it. I can't do things that they can do. And it's different. That's the only thing, I see being with Americans. It's just different.

Jessica described feeling surrounded and overlooked by her white teammates on her basketball team. What is striking about Jessica's analysis of her involvement in sports is how she exercised her agency by announcing her identity and presence to her white teammates. She described how she felt "different" and described being with her white peers (as opposed to her Latino peers) as "just different." However, she saw this difference manifested in that her white teammates have more opportunities and abilities than she. She approached this issue by talking to her teammates about feeling like an outsider.

> Jessica: I've always talked to them, you know, and I tell them, "I don't feel like I fit in," but they comfort me and make me feel better.[160]

The framework for relationships that exist within the structure of a sports team, or within other social and activity-based extra-curriculars, provided a means for Jessica and Alejandro to engage with peers by whom they may otherwise feel isolated or overlooked. These opportunities to bridge racially segregated peer groups was valuable for both students and their teams. For Fernando, involvement in sports helped him stay focused on succeeding in school:

> Fernando: Playing basketball keeps me off [drugs]. Having a goal for high school, to try and graduate from my high school and get into college.[161]

For some students, involvement in sports provides a valuable opportunity to dedicate themselves to their goal of future success. However, maintaining support for extra-curricular sports is not enough. Isabel, a student at Wa-Hi, reports:

> Isabel: We have so many cultures at Wa-Hi and not all of it is represented. I just want that. You know, have events where cultures are happening and everyone comes and celebrate those, not just focus it on our main population at Wa-Hi. I think that's what keeps students at Wa-Hi down and closed and not trying hard because they know that their effort is not going to be recognized.[162]

---

[159] Alejandro, Wa-Hi Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 15, 2011.

[160] Jessica, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 15, 2011.

[161] Fernando, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, October 28, 2011.

[162] Isabel, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 23, 2011.

The alternative to embracing a diversity of cultures is dim – for the school, community and the future success of students. One successful endeavor that is moving towards achieving Isabel's dream of a school community that embraces all of its students' cultures is Latino Club, whose specific focus upon community service, academic success and celebrating cultural identity has flourished at Wa-Hi due to strong student interest and the dedication of Refugio Reyes, and Mr. and Mrs. Erickson. We strongly encourage the school district to continue and expand support of Latino Club, which has made considerable strides in giving voice and presence to the Latino students at the high school and in the community, and equally as important, improving school cultural acceptance of Latinos. Reyes, a Spanish teacher at Wa-Hi and the faculty advisor for the club, spoke to this issue when he responded to the question, "Do you think Wa-Hi is culturally inclusive?":

> Reyes: I want to say yes. It's not perfect - we have to improve. We [Latino Club] have played a big role. Before I came, there were a lot of tensions between Anglo and Latino students and a lot of fights between the two. Now you don't see it that much and I think it's because we allow students to celebrate who they are and be proud of who they are.[163]

Reyes attributes the work of Latino Club students and its presence in the school and larger community to decreased tension between white and Latino students. He notes that much of this is the chance for students to collectively celebrate who they are. Similarly, Cathy Rasley, Cheerleading Coach at Wa-Hi, reported:

> Rasley: Now they have Latino Club here and I think that makes a huge difference because they do a lot more, there's more of an outreach, and people understand it more. [But] back in the day, everyone thought when they saw a Latino or Hispanic - they thought of a gang member because around this area, that's what people perceived the gangs were … So when they would see Latinos and Hispanics they thought, "Oh, they must be in a gang.[164]

According to both Reyes and Rasley, the founding of Latino Club provided an opportunity for Latino students to celebrate their Latino culture collectively, which ultimately challenged and changed harmful cultural and racial stereotypes ascribed to Latino students. What is significant here is not just the concrete benefits students gain from performing volunteer service in the community and the benefits the community receives from their service, but the club's success in replacing a stereotype of "all young Latinos as gang members" with a more accurate perception: of many young Latinos as hard-working students proud of their cultural heritage and with a strong desire to engage with their community. To be successful, the club required the dedication of staff members, like Reyes and Mr. and Mrs. Erickson, engaged and determined students, and a school community willing to question the validity of a false stereotype. Latino Club has proved itself as a successful approach to dissolving cultural and racial stereotypes, as well as a valuable opportunity for community service by which both the Latino students and community benefits. Like the actions of Latino Club, the work of changing stereotypes of Latinos is irrefutably collaborative. We call upon the district to increase dialogue with the club's leaders, the students,

---

[163] Refugio Reyes, personal interview by Simerun Singh and Catherine DeCramer, November 14, 2011.
[164] Cathy Rasley, personal interview by Andrew Ryan and Simerun Singh, November 7, 2011.

the staff sponsors in order to sustain and promote their invaluable school and community work. This is one important step in achieving Isabel's dream of a school community that values the efforts and cultural backgrounds of its students as a means to improve student success.

IV. FAMILY INVOLVEMENT: PARENT AND STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

Cultural competency means nothing less than moving towards an inclusive school environment that affirms the cultural backgrounds of all students and their families. Research shows that when families becomes involved in their children's education, regardless of their cultural background, students achieve at higher levels[165]. Schools that welcome parents of all cultural backgrounds opens the door for increased student success across the board. However, many parents currently face barriers to supporting their children at school. Cultural competency entails identifying the barriers that parents face and making sure to address these barriers in an understanding way. The Latino parents we interviewed were highly supportive of their children and wanted to be very involved in their education. However, many did not speak English, some worked long and arduous shifts, including some night shifts, and some lacked transportation to go to their children's school. During the two parent focus groups we led, we discovered that when parents discussed the challenges and successes they have experienced in supporting their children's education, they learned from and leaned on one another as parents and as community members. This surprised us as researchers because we viewed the focus groups as an opportunity for dialogue and gathering information—not anticipating that real lasting effects would come to fruition just from our hourlong conversations. In light of this finding and the parent desire present for more meetings like this, we support providing forums for parents to discuss issues such as their student's class placement, learning opportunities, etc. to build upon parents' desire to support their children as they move towards their goal of attaining an education that prepares them for leading a good life. This section on family involvement brings forward the voices of parents, highlighting their successes and struggles, in the hopes that schools will work to welcome Latino families so they can work collaboratively with schools to build towards a better future for their students.

A. Parents Supporting their Children's Learning: Findings

Our student and parent interview findings boldly show that Latino parents emphasize the importance of education to their children and as a result, students strive to succeed in school. The following voices are of Walla Walla High School students we interviewed. Jessica said, "My mom has encouraged me so much to go to school. I really want to go to a college … to make her proud."[166] Alejandro spoke of his mother as his inspiration to succeed in school: "Even though my mom doesn't have really that much education to talk about, she only went to what is the equivalent of middle school here in Mexico…my whole family just always told me to just keep on going, to push my way through it, to succeed and that one day I will have a better life than them, than they ever imagined. And so that's my inspiration."[167] Isabel said: "I knew [going to college] is something my parents always wanted me to do and I knew it was something I have always wanted to do."[168] These student voices show how students have internalized the support and dreams of their parents to further their own educational aspirations.

[165] Zarate, Maria Estela. *Understanding Latino Parental Involvement in Education*. Tomás Rivera Policy Institute: September 2007.

[166] Jessica, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 15, 2011.

[167] Alejandro, WWHS Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 15, 2011.

[168] Isabel, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 23, 2011.

The students and parents we interviewed emphasized the importance of academic success within their family. Olivia's father said to her, "I want you to get a good education so you can love your job."[169] Sofia's mom says to her and her siblings, "Education, my children – study study study!"[170] Luís' mother, Carla, said she hopes her children "will be successful and when I say successful what I mean is that they go to school, go to college, and they be happy with what they do."[171]

Scholarly literature addressing family involvement stresses that all parents–-regardless of socioeconomic status, education level, and cultural background—can have a positive effect on their children's academic success. Our interview findings show that parents involve themselves in their children's education with positive results for students. However, families often define parental involvement differently from teachers and administrators, according to the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute Report on Latino Family Involvement. The report distinguishes between ***traditional academic involvement***, in which parents regularly attend parent-teacher conferences, volunteer in the classroom or on field-trips, and assist their children with homework, and ***life participation***, which they define as "the holistic integration of families in the lives of their children"[172]. Their findings show that parents mentioned life participation more often than traditional academic involvement. The students and parents we interviewed provided examples of life participation, including emphasizing the importance of education for a better future, talking to their child about life issues, supporting them materially and emotionally, and establishing a trusting relationship with their child. Parents also mentioned volunteering at school, attending school events, communicating with teachers, and assisting children with homework. However, students and parents discussed the barriers that they and other Latino families have encountered in becoming involved beyond the life participation that parents emphasized.

B. Barriers to Family Involvement

Our interview findings show that the three most common prohibiting factors parents encountered in traditional academic involvement was due to language barriers, their educational background and demanding and inflexible work schedules. Schools must acknowledge and address these barriers to promote the equitable access of school resources for all families.

Parents' Language Abilities

The parents and students we interviewed discussed how language barriers prohibit their ability to assist with traditional academic activities, like assisting their children with schoolwork. Fernando, a student at Wa-Hi, said: "Since [my parents] can't speak English, they really can't help me with my schoolwork." [173] Maria, a Spanish-speaking mother of three students, shared

---

[169] Olivia, WWHS Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 16, 2011.
[170] Maria, group interview by Catherine DeCramer, October 14, 2011.
[171] Luís' mother, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 9, 2011.
[172] Zarate, Maria Estela. *Understanding Latino Parental Involvement in Education*. Tomás Rivera Policy Institute: September 2007.
[173] Fernando, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, October 28, 2011.

Fernando's perspective. She spoke about her desire to get involved with her children's education and the fact that her children's school was in English prohibited that involvement.

> Maria: I like to involve myself in their education but sometimes it's impossible to help them because, well, it's in English. Sometimes I stay up until 11 or 12 at night with [my children] while they do their homework, and I say "Education, my children - study study study!"[174]

Even though Maria is unable to assist her children with coursework in English, she supports her children by sitting with them while they study, emphasizing the importance of education. When she encountered a barrier to traditional involvement, she involved herself in their lives by taking the time to sit with them regardless of her ability to help with the content, and stressing to her children the importance of education. When we asked Maria what the most important thing was to her family, she replied with one word: "*Escuela*." She turned to her children, two of whom were sitting at the table with us. She said, "Ask them if you want to know!" They both nodded their heads and said, "*Sí, la escuela.*[175]" This form of life participation has inspired a desire in her children to attain higher education so they can access the jobs they desire. Her youngest daughter Daniela wants to become a veterinarian "because she loves animals" and her eldest daughter Sofia wants to go to college to become a lawyer. The barrier Maria faced, and her tenacity to in supporting her children through other means, highlights the various forms of support Latino parents provided for their children.

Parents' Educational Backgrounds

In addition to language barriers, many first-generation Latino parents often have less knowledge of the content of their children's homework because they received schooling in the Mexican education system. Alejandro's mother received a middle school education in Mexico and her work schedule prevented her from being able to assist her son with homework, yet as Alejandro progressed in school, she served as his "inspiration.[176]" Today, he wants to become an engineer. Olivia, a WWHS Class of 2011 graduate, also addressed how the level of schooling Latino parents have received often serves as an obstacle to their ability to assist with their children's homework. Maria, mother of three Walla Walla Public School children, echoed this sentiment. When Maria's daughter brought home schoolwork in Spanish, Maria was excited to help teach her daughter.

> Maria: I said, "My daughter, the letters look better like this. Put a period here, put a comma there, separate the words." And well I like to do this with her, telling her how they look better and seeing her learn.[177]

Maria valued this opportunity to involve herself in the academic activity of her daughter. Because the schoolwork was in Spanish and Maria had attained higher education in Mexico, this enabled to take the role of a teacher at home and exercise her agency as a parent.

---

[174] Maria, group interview by Catherine DeCramer, October 14, 2011.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Alejandro, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 15, 2011.
[177] Ibid.

Parents' Demanding and Inflexible Work Schedules

A third barrier parents encountered was their demanding and inflexible work schedules. José, a father of two Blue Ridge students, explained his feelings about being unable to attend Blue Ridge's family carnival event due to his night job.

> José: I didn't come [to the carnival] because I work at night – from 5 pm on – and because of that I don't have the time to come, but my kids say, "Let's go! Let's go!" And I would love to go but I can't.[178]

José's work schedule did not allow him to attend the event at Blue Ridge, despite his clear desire to attend with his children and their urging him to attend. But this dedication to hard work that parents like José exhibit can also serve as a valuable form of inspiration for their children, who learn the value of hard work from seeing their parents. Alejandro spoke of how his mother's hard work served as an inspiration for him.

> Alejandro: I saw her as someone that can do pretty much anything. I remember her working two jobs at a time and I only saw her when she was sleeping. Sometimes when I would come home from school she would be sleeping…in order for her to go to night work. So it was really tough – my first years at Blue Ridge. She would wake up in the morning and go to work, I would wake up in the morning and she was already gone. I would walk to school, come back, she would be sleeping. Do my homework, and then she would leave, and I was sleeping before she came back…[179]

Like López's scholarly study of the Padillas, an immigrant family, who involved themselves in their children's education through modeling hard work[180], Alejandro's mother inspired him to work hard. Despite Alejandro's mother's inability to assist with his schoolwork because she needed to work two jobs to support her family, modeling hard work was a valuable form of parent involvement for Alejandro. He saw his mother "as someone who [could] do pretty much anything."[181] While this work prevented her from being physically present with her son, he admired her strength and dedication, and used his mother as his inspiration for success in his school work.

D. Life Participation

While these barriers prevent many parents from becoming involved in the "traditional" sense of parent involvement, students spoke of valuing other forms of support they received from their families. The inspiration students receive from watching their parents model hard work is a valuable form of life participation, as mentioned above. Additionally, two students spoke specifically of their appreciation for the material support they receive from their families. In an

---

[178] José, Blue Ridge father, group interview by Catherine DeCramer, December 2, 2011.

[179] Alejandro, WWHS Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 15, 2011.

[180] López, Gerardo. "The Value of Hard Work: Lessons on Parent Involvement from an (Im)migrant Household." *Harvard Educational Review* 71 (3), 2001.

[181] Alejandro, WWHS Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 15, 2011.

interview with Carlos, a student athlete at Wa-Hi, he expressed appreciation for his parents' support of his participation in athletics. Carlos' dream is to play basketball in college and he values that his parents buy him "stuff [he] need[s] like shoes and pads and ankle braces – like this [he points to his ankle]."[182] He said they encourage him to keep playing to "see where [he] get[s] with that sport." Isabel also spoke about her parents' material support of her education.

> CD: How does your family support you?
> Isabel: Even though we're not the wealthiest family in the world, I know when I need them - in like money terms - they pull through. [183]

Isabel's mother lives about two hours away from Walla Walla. When Isabel told her mother that she was to be receiving an award at an AVID event, her mother regretfully told her she would not be able to make it. Additionally, Isabel's mother does not speak English. But on the day of the event, Isabel was surprised. She said, "But my mother ended up going and so that really showed a lot for me. It meant a lot."[184] As she recounted this event, Isabel's face showed the deep appreciation she felt for her mother attending the AVID awards ceremony. Isabel's mother showed a valuable form of life participation by supporting her daughter at the event. Another form of valuable life participation includes parents simply spending time with their children. Carolina, a mother of two students at Blue Ridge Elementary, spoke about how her family connects by limiting electronic distractions and sitting together, reading aloud:

> Carolina: Before, my little girl didn't know how to read Spanish. Now what we do, we sit down together on the sofa, we turn off the TV, we turn off all of the sound, and we begin to read [in Spanish] together. It's something that brings parents closer to their children too. It's time together.[185]

To limit an understanding of parent involvement to simply signify parents as members of Parent Teacher Associations is a narrow perspective. The Latino students and parents we interviewed exhibited a number of different forms of parent involvement, all valuable. Additionally, we learned that it was not only parents that involved themselves in the education of their students.

E. Family Involvement: Not Just Parents Supporting Students

Our interview results showed that family involvement was not limited to the participation of parents in their students' lives and education. Other family members—such as siblings and extended family members—also greatly supported students as they navigated school and life.

Sibling to Sibling Support

Carlos, a student at WWHS, spoke of his older sister's guidance and support in navigating high school:

---

[182] Carlos, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 22, 2011.

[183] Isabel, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 23, 2011.

[184] Ibid.

[185] Carolina, Blue Ridge mother, group interview by Catherine DeCramer, December 2, 2011.

CD: What is it like to have her there?

Carlos: Pretty great because she helps me with stuff, homework and studying and stuff, so if I need help with something, she has more experience with it than I do because she's older and has gone through it.[186]

Our interview findings showed that students also receive support from older siblings in managing the college application process.

Alejandro: I feel that students that have older siblings that have gone through the process…that they are gonna have an easier time. I'm not gonna say it's going to be easy, but it's gonna have just a little bit easier time. Unlike students like me that did not have any older siblings, that didn't have parents that went to college, it's very difficult… especially to understand…the application itself, you know you're just doing it and you think "Ok, I'm done," but you're not done, it's a lot more than that … little stuff you don't know that can really hurt you.[187]

Older siblings offer invaluable support for their younger siblings as they find their way through high school and the college application process. In the case of Alejandro's family, his extended family—specifically his uncles—played a pivotal role in supporting his mother and his family.

Alejandro: As far as family, we have three uncles here, that are related to her, that her brothers. She's the only sister in her family. And…they're all very close to me, especially with soccer, they all used to play soccer and they all pushed me in both school and soccer and…they help my mom out if she needs income, money or things that she can't afford. And…truly, it's really incredible…how sometimes siblings can be mad at each other or have a grudge against each other, but when someone's in need they will help.[188]

Sofia, a student at Walla Walla High School, also spoke of support she received from her sibling—but surprisingly, her younger sibling. Although she speaks Spanish at home with her mother, Sofia is learning Spanish in school for the first time. Her younger sister was able to learn Spanish in school before Sofia, thanks to Blue Ridge's Dual Immersion Program. Sofia grew up in Arizona attending the Arizona public schools, where she did not have the opportunity to study Spanish in school. Here, Sofia speaks of her younger sister's support:

Sofia: I was kind of jealous [of my younger sister] because I went to Arizona my whole life and I went to school there but we didn't have any Spanish or Spanish class. But when my sister came to Blue Ridge here, they had a whole bunch of Spanish classes and I was kind of jealous because she actually got Spanish when she was young and I didn't get Spanish until this year. And I'm still struggling with Spanish, with the reading and the writing and its kind of hard for me, but she's kind of like my tutor sometimes. She helps me with that.[189]

---

[186] Carlos, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 22, 2011.

[187] Alejandro, WWHS Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 15, 2011.

[188] Ibid.

[189] Sofia, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, October 14, 2011.

Because Sofia's younger sister was able to study Spanish in elementary school, Sofia has a better understanding of the grammar and technical aspects of the language. Sofia is jealous of her sister's level of schooling in Spanish. We recommend that in addition to supporting the dual language immersion program at Blue Ridge, that Garrison Middle School provides a Spanish elective class open to the entire school body. Currently both Blue Ridge and Wa-Hi have Spanish classes available to all or most students, but Garrison lacks this learning opportunity for its students. Creating an elective class in which students can learn Spanish would promote culturally responsive learning and enable families to support students' linguistic and cultural background as well.

Student to Parent Support

Another form of family involvement is just as valuable, and perhaps more surprising: students using skills they learn in school to help their parents. Blue Ridge mother Carolina saw the fruits of "the seeds" that the Dual Language Immersion teachers planted in her daughter's learning while her daughter and her father, who does not speak English, were shopping at Home Depot.

> Carolina: And it's true [that the Dual Language Immersion Program works] because sometimes my daughter goes with her dad to the store. Her dad knows some English but he doesn't like to talk that much. Sometimes they go to Home Depot, and the girl translates at Home Depot. Like the other day, they were looking for a screwdriver. And my boyfriend says, "I'm looking for screwdrivers." "How many do you want?" she says. "A box, I want a box." "Okay, daddy. Let me find somebody." So she finds the guy who works there and says, "My dad is looking for screwdrivers." And the man says, "And why are *you* talking? Your dad is supposed to be talking." And she goes, with an attitude, because my daughter has an attitude sometimes, "Okay, you don't have to say that. Daddy doesn't know English, so I'm going to help him, okay?" And the guy goes, "Well, I'm sorry!" And my boyfriend was laughing […] And I told my boyfriend, you let her do that? And he goes, "Yeah, she's defending me! Because I don't know English!" And I go, that's good! We should let her do that kind of stuff because what happens if you go with someone to translate for someone and they say the same thing [as the Home Depot employee]? They want to leave behind the people who don't know [English]. Like what Mrs. Morenos is doing and what the other teachers are doing, I think it's the best for our children.[190]

Carolina, mother of two students at Blue Ridge, fully supports the Dual Language Immersion Program because it has provided her daughter with the tools to support her family by engaging with two languages. We support the expansion of this program as it provides students with the tools they need to connect with their home culture and engage with a mainly English-speaking population.

Parent to Parent Support

Cultural competent schools affirm the cultural backgrounds of all students and their families. To progress towards fully culturally competent schools, administrators and teachers must strive to

---

[190] Carolina, Blue Ridge mother, group interview by Catherine DeCramer, December 2, 2011.

understand the lives of the students and families their schools serve. To gather the thoughts of parents regarding cultural competency in the schools for our research, we formed two parent focus groups. Each group was composed of three Spanish-speaking parents and each met for 1 – 1.5 hours. The parents' students attended Blue Ridge, Garrison and WWHS. The parent focus groups were valuable not only as a method for us to gather information for our research, but also because parents used the opportunity to engage in critical conversation with other parents as a means to learn from each other and support one another, as both parents and community members. This was a highly surprising finding and we were inspired by the demonstration of support the parents offered each other. One parent was curious about the selection program for AVID at Garrison Middle School, which another parent was more familiar with and explained to the group. Another parent spoke of her difficulty in communicating her needs at the WIC office in Walla Walla, and the fellow participants offered emotional support and understanding. José, a father at Blue Ridge, spoke of the shame he feels when he needs to ask for an English interpreter.

> José: Sometimes someone who asks for an interpreter feels bad because they think they're taking away that person's time, that they were probably going to do something else […]. I have been living here for ten years and I still don't know how to write in English. I have gone to [Garrison] Night School for periods of time - like a month - but I have to leave because I have to work. I want to go to school and learn English and I also want to be a citizen. Sometimes it's difficult because you have to ask others to help you. You feel a little bit of shame.
> Carolina: Yes, but for that you don't need to feel shame. […] [191]

Carolina then recounted an experience in which a lawyer exploited her neighbor's unfamiliarity with English while her neighbor was buying a home. The lawyer continually asked her neighbor to sign papers for the house, and each time demanded a down payment. Her neighbor did not ask for Carolina's assistance as a translator because she did not want to impose on Carolina's time. Carolina related this story to the group to validate José's feelings, as well as to encourage him to reach out to others who speak English when he needed help translating. José's narrative speaks to the experiences of many adult language learners who have been in the United States for extended periods of time and are unable to devote time to learning English because they have employment and family commitments. José also felt comfortable sharing his citizenship status with the group, a sign that he trusted the other members. As researchers, we had designed a semi-structured conversation about their experiences regarding their students' experiences with English-language learning and culture in the schools. But when the parents met and began speaking, they used the opportunity to support one another about challenges they face as Latino families, many of whom are immigrants, simultaneously creating support networks to share experiences of struggle and success in navigating the schools as parents and living in the United States.

We also learned that at Blue Ridge, parents are advocating for concrete changes to improve their student's learning and overall experience at school. They have communicated with the WWPS District to move towards their goal of implementing school uniforms for Blue Ridge students. This suggestion came up at a kindergarten meeting this year, and during the focus group we held, some Blue Ridge parents spoke about their children coming home crying after school because

---

[191] José and Carolina, Blue Ridge parents, group interview by Catherine DeCramer, December 2, 2011.

other students had made fun of their clothing. The student population at Blue Ridge Elementary is 87% Free or Reduced Lunch[192] and many parents can't afford to buy lunch or new clothing for their students. As stated in a letter they drafted to give to Blue Ridge parents, the parents' goals in implementing uniforms are the following:

1) "Students form groups of friends according to the way they dress and some families can't afford expensive clothes and the students get outcasted.
2) Gangs: our children see that their friends are wearing loose clothing, shirts with wrong messages or gang colors.
3) Additionally, we believe that it would actually be cheaper to purchase school uniforms over back to school shopping."

They concluded the letter by saying: "This will be a way to help our children not to lead to intimidation and have a spirit of equality."[193] During our focus group discussion on December 2, one Blue Ridge parent said of implementing school uniforms: "No one would be less because of their clothing."[194] Latino parents are advocating for change at Blue Ridge to better the lives and education of their students. They expressed this desire to organize in our focus groups.

During the focus groups we conducted, we witnessed Latino parents engaging in critical conversation about issues that affect their students in school, like bullying, and challenges they face as parents navigating a school system. We asked the parents if they thought there would be interest among parents in continuing conversations of this kind.

> CD: Do you believe that other parents would want to have conversations like what we did today? About their kids and what is happening in their lives regarding school?
> Carolina: I think so.
> José: I also think so. Many parents can help to bring more help to school. They could come to ask questions. Is this the first time?
> Carolina: Yes, this is the first time.
> José: It's the first time.[195]

Carolina and José said that other parents would value being able to participate in conversations like the focus group discussions we held at Blue Ridge. José spoke about how a group of parents could bring more help to the school and create an on-going platform to ask questions. The parents who participated in our focus group saw the productivity of the discussion as more than a conversation that furthered a research project, indeed, because they gained from the experience. They saw the discussion group as a platform for open, supportive and engaging dialogue among parents to support one another and critically reflect on their own experiences and their students in the WWPS. We encourage the district to consider continuing small group discussions with parents. Parents offer a critical "fund of knowledge" [citation] for the district to tap into and parents' involvement in their students' education leads to improved student achievement and

---

[192] Walla Walla Public Schools, *Promising Practices*, Powerpoint data received from Blue Ridge Elementary Principal Kim Doepker, accessed 22 January, 2012.
[193] Letter drafted by parents following a kindergarten parent meeting. Received December 2, 2011.
[194] Blue Ridge parent, group interview by Catherine DeCramer, December 2, 2011.
[195] Ibid.

better schools.

Parents and schools share the responsibility of supporting students' educations, but schools must provide the driving force in this shared endeavor. Our interview results showed that Latino parents involve themselves in their children's education in a variety of valuable ways, to the increased success of the student. Carla, Luís' mother, spoke about how many Latino parents do not know how to navigate the WWPS because they did not experience schooling in this country.

> Carla: Because a lot of parents - maybe they don't know their rights and you know, if they don't agree with something, know that they can speak up. Or maybe they have spoken up and they are not heard.[196]

It may not be something schools and parents currently discuss, but parents engage with schools on behalf of their children according to an unwritten culturally-dictated code of rights. Parents can hold the school accountable to improving the academic success of their students, but only if the school is willing and committed to providing avenues to engage with parents on the parents' own terms. Making a commitment to becoming more culturally competent means understanding that this code of rights is culturally-based, and in order to provide equal access to resources and opportunities for all students to succeed, including the children of immigrants, schools must acknowledge which voices they are hearing and acting upon.

---

[196] Luís' mother, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 9, 2011.

V. ADMINISTRATOR AND TEACHER OUTREACH TO FAMILIES: BUILDING TRUST

Scholars agree that if schools are to be successful in engaging culturally diverse families, they need to include the families themselves in discussions about how they would most like to be involved[197]. To best facilitate this dialogue, researchers content that a framework of trust must be established. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran offer the following definition of trust:

> Trust: "an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest and open."[198]

To build trusting relationships, schools must address barriers that prevent the formation of trusting relationships. These barriers include past and present acts of discrimination at the school, one-way communication from schools to families, and differing expectations of parent-teacher roles for teachers and parents. To build foundations of trust at a school, scholars offer the following guidelines for teachers and administrators:

- Actively welcome students and families
- Open up ways for families to communicate with schools, then listen and respond seriously to their questions and concerns
- Show respect and care for all students and families
- Remember that all families offer a "fund of knowledge" that can positively contribute to the school and their student's achievement[199]

Trusting relationships are the foundation of successful home-school partnerships. This trust cannot be present if teachers and administrators do not initiate forming relationships with students and families. Cultural competent schools build upon "funds of knowledge"[200] to create lasting, trusting relationships with families.

A. Establishing Trust Between Families and Schools

The Latino parents we interviewed appreciated thoughtful communication from teachers and desired personal contact with their students' teachers. José, a father of two Blue Ridge students, expressed gratitude for his child's second grade teacher whom he met with "twice every two or three months" while his child was in second grade at Blue Ridge. He valued this relationship and said, "Before when we came to the school the teacher said, "Oh, your child is doing well!" That also motivates the parents to tell your student, "You're doing well!""[201] José found his discussions with his child's teacher invaluable because he received support in how to best

---

[197] Mapp, 2002, Trumball et al, 2001, Voltz, 1994. In *Building Trust with Schools and Diverse Families*, 2003.

[198] In *Building Trust with Schools and Diverse Families*. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran 2003.

[199] Brewster and Railsback, *Building Trust with Schools and Diverse Families,* 2003.

[200] Cross, T., Bazron, B., Dennis, K., & Isaacs, M., (1989). *Towards A Culturally Competent System of Care, Volume I.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Child Development Center, CASSP Technical Assistance Center.

[201] José, Blue Ridge father, group interview by Catherine DeCramer, December 2, 2011.

encourage his child's studies.

When teachers do not initiate personal contact with parents, parents became concerned. José was distressed that he had not met his child's third grade teacher at a school event or a parent-teacher meeting even though half of the school year had passed. He knew that at Blue Ridge, impromptu parent visits to the school are welcomed, as long as parents check in at the front desk. José chose to visit the school in this manner on one occasion, but felt uncomfortable because he felt he was disrupting his son's class when his son's classmates loudly and enthusiastically pointed out his presence. According to José, they said: "Hey look! Mateo's[202] dad is here!" Reflecting the unproductive and disruptive nature of this visit, José expressed a desire for a standard school-wide practice regarding parent-teacher meetings, saying, "I think it would be good that parents came in once every two months to meet with the teachers."[203]

Personal relationships with administrators built upon trust can also leave a lasting impression upon students and families. Daniela and her mother recounted a specific example in which former Blue Ridge principal, Ms. Taylor-Randall, made an effort to build a trusting relationship with Daniela, a student at Blue Ridge. The experience left a very positive impression on both Daniela and her mother and contributed to their high regard for the school.

> Daniela: I went to try out for a play and I didn't get the part so I was crying and I was in 2nd grade and she took me to McDonald's but it was closed. So she took me to three more places but they were all closed so…she took me to KFC! [laughs][204]

After Daniela recounted the experience, Daniela's mother spoke of her great appreciation for the lengths the administrator took to comfort Daniela and related the administrator's actions to her positive regard for the school staff in general.

> Daniela's mother: [laughs] That's why I like Blue Ridge so much. So so much. And my husband likes it too. They have treated us well. The teachers are such good people. They tell me if it's going well, if it's going poorly, and I say, "Tell me the truth!" because here at home they are other kids and at school they are *other* kids. They're not perfect. And well I love that school. It makes me very happy.[205]

Daniela's mother clearly demonstrated great trust in the administrator to provide emotional support for her daughter when she was upset. She described this personal relationship of her daughter with the school principal as an example of the kindness and strength of the Blue Ridge staff as a whole. Daniela's mother trusted the principal to take her daughter off school grounds and provide appropriate emotional support for her daughter. Additionally, Daniela's mother values her relationships with the school staff in general at Blue Ridge.

Daniela's mother also appreciates the honesty of the teachers in assessing her student's performance and behavior in school. She values the input of teachers and described how the only

---

[202] Name changed to maintain confidentiality.

[203] José, father of two Blue Ridge students, group interview by Catherine DeCramer, December 2, 2011.

[204] Daniela, Blue Ridge student, group interview by Catherine DeCramer, October 14, 2011.

[205] Maria, group interview by Catherine DeCramer, October 14, 2011.

way she has to learn about children's behavior at school is through school personnel, who she encourages and trusts to provide her with honest feedback. José expressed why parents ultimately seek to engage with their student's education and school community. He said, "Parents also worry because they also need to help their kids reach that level."[206] When both teachers and families have students' best interests in mind and are able to convey that to the other, they can focus on collaborating to increase student achievement, the ultimate objective of family involvement.

Ms. Doepker, the Principal of Blue Ridge Elementary, invites parents to breakfast with her at the school. This active invitation to parents welcomes them to the school building and provides an avenue for engagement with parents who may have questions or concerns about their students at school. This is an example of a leader taking initiative to engage with parents and create the foundations of trusting relationships.

Luís, a student at Walla Walla High School, also spoke about a trusting relationship he formed with an administrator. When asked about the staff person he connected with most, Luís spoke very positively about Intervention Specialist, Melito Ramirez. At Garrison Middle School, Luís felt targeted by an administrator because of his race. But when he transitioned to the high school, he felt supported and listened to. Luís is a soft-spoken and intense young man, who spoke briefly and to-the-point.

> CD: Who is the staff person you connect with most at Wa-Hi?
> Luís: I connect with most? Probably Mr. Melito.
> CD: What does he do at Wa-Hi?
> Luís: I don't know what he does.
> CD: Do you talk to him at school?
> Luís: Yeah, at the beginning of the year, he told me if I had any problems to just come down to him.
> CD: What did that feel like?
> Luís: Good. Better.[207]

Mr. Ramirez initiated positive contact with Luís at the beginning of the school year, which Luís remembered and valued. Mr. Ramirez's position at the school did not matter to Luís—what mattered was that he reached out to Luís and showed he cared. This was enough to establish a trusting relationship that made Luís feel more comfortable and safe at the school. Culturally competent schools actively seek to build trusting relationships with culturally diverse students and their families.

B. School Staff with Spanish Language Proficiency: Support for Families

Just as teachers with Spanish language proficiency provide a critical source of support for Latino students, they also create avenues for Spanish-speaking Latino families to share their assets with the school. Maria, a Spanish-speaking mother, has a daughter studying at Wa-Hi. Last year, her daughter's iPod was stolen at school and she described going to the school to advocate for her

---

[206] José, father of two Blue Ridge students, group interview by Catherine DeCramer, December 2, 2011.
[207] Luís, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, October 28, 2011.

daughter in addressing how to recover the stolen item.

> Maria: One could feel sad or upset because an iPod isn't just anything. The secretary helped us a lot and the sheriff that was there helped us too. I felt good that they could help. When you don't speak Spanish and arrive there and the secretary spoke Spanish and English and I said, "This happened and we don't know who took it". My daughter is a good girl and the secretaries said so too…it's a different language but there are people who help us and we are like "Wow!" [208]

As a Spanish-speaking mother, Maria greatly appreciated that the secretaries at Wa-Hi were able to communicate with her in Spanish. She was able to advocate for her daughter and personally explain the situation to the school staff. The support of bilingual secretaries enabled Maria to exercise her agency as a parent in advocating for her daughter. Additionally, the secretaries and the sheriff knew and trusted her daughter, which she valued greatly. The presence of bilingual secretaries at Wa-Hi provide an example of a culturally competent practice that enables parents to communicate and advocate for their students, regardless of the parents' language background.

Pedro's mother, who is Spanish-proficient, does not have access to transportation to easily visit her son's school. The intervention specialists at Walla Walla High School, Mireya Vargas and Melito Ramirez, play a critical role in communicating with her and other Spanish-proficient parents. Pedro, a recent immigrant to the US, spoke about the intervention specialists' relationship with his mother:

> Pedro: Mireya talks to my mom or Melito talks with my mom. Between the two of them, they tell my mom how I'm doing and what the teachers are up to.[209]

Both Mireya and Melito work together to communicate with Pedro's mother. They provide invaluable assets to the Wa-Hi school staff. They engage families - who otherwise may be isolated from their student's schooling due to language or other structural barriers – through their Spanish proficiency and consistent communication with parents.

C. Administrators and Teachers with Cultural Experience

Our interview results show that families value a school staff that has experience working with children of diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. In separate personal interviews, Luís and his mother Carla recounted their perspectives on an experience in which Luís felt that an administrator at Garrison Middle School unfairly discriminated him because of his race.

> CD: What was your middle school like?
> Luís: It was good. I don't think [a certain administrator] liked me that much but I thought he was racist.
> CD: Really? Can you tell me more about that?
> Luís: When I'd go through the halls, he'd give me bad looks. Say if me and another kid were in the halls, say I was late to class, I would get in more trouble than any white kid.

---

[208] Maria, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, October 14, 2011
[209] Pedro, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 9, 2011.

Luís felt that the administrator targeted him unfairly because he was Latino. Luís' mother, Carla, came to school to participate in a meeting with both the administrator and her son. Luís was frustrated about feeling powerless in his encounters with the administrator and spoke about how his mother's presence at the meeting helped him feel like he could exercise his agency.

> CD: So when your mom came to the meeting with the administrator at school - what was it like to have her there?
> Luís: Better. I had more power. Because when we would just have me it was like one on one, he was more rude to me and when my mom was there he acted all nice.[210]

Luís felt that his mother's presence at the meeting changed the administrator's behavior and empowered Luís. Luís' mother, Carla, a calm and thoughtful woman, described her thoughts about the administrator:

> Carla: Sometimes you'll get teachers or administrators that are - maybe they haven't had much experience with kids of different cultures and races so maybe it's intimidating for them and so the kids all say, "He is racist, he is racist," and it could be that he's not. It could be he just doesn't know. He doesn't have the experience. I kind of felt more like he just didn't have the experience… [211]

Luís' mother compared this encounter - in which she perceived that the administrator lacked experience in interacting with students of different races and cultures - with her perception of a teacher at Walla Walla High School, who she felt intentionally harmed Latino students and families who did not speak English.

> Carla: Sometimes you'll get one teacher that will take their job a little too far and they are not sensitive to the kids who don't speak English or their parents who don't speak English. I don't know why an educator would do that. I do see the difference. I see the difference in how they treat them. And it's not all the teachers, I've seen one maybe do that.[212]

Luís' mother became assertive and protective of her son when she thought about how she would respond to a teacher disrespecting her son in that manner:

> CD: What would you say to that teacher?
> Carla: I probably wouldn't even talk to them because that sickens me. I don't like to see it. When I see them, I try to keep my kids away from them, and I tell my kids, "Don't take that class from that person." Because I've seen it in the past, and after you've seen something, I'm like, okay, I don't want my kids around this person. [213]

Luís' mother noticed a clear difference between the Garrison administrator, who she felt solely

---

[210] Luís, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, October 28, 2011.

[211] Carla, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 9, 2011.

[212] Ibid.

[213] Carla, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 9, 2011.

lacked experience working with children of diverse cultural and racial backgrounds, and the teacher who purposefully sought to harm children who did not speak English. As a mother, she dismissed the Garrison administrator's actions toward her son as a lack of experience. However, the high school teacher's malicious intentions disgusted her, and she warned her children to stay away from that teacher. She exercised her power as a mother because she did not want her children to be harmed by someone who might damage them.

While it is encouraging that Luís' mother had experienced only one interaction with a hateful teacher in the WWPS, it is one too many. The WWPS need to encourage dialogue among all teachers about the importance of cultural understanding to create an environment in which teachers and administrators can hold each other accountable to create a welcoming school environment, rather than an environment that creates fear for families.

D. School Events as Family Outreach

A culturally competent school actively welcomes students and families of diverse cultural backgrounds. A critical method for schools to reach out to and welcome families is by hosting events at the school. When successful, school events serve to create a welcoming atmosphere and foster a sense of belonging for families. Families can meet and ask questions of their student's teachers, gain familiarity with their students' lives at school, become more comfortable in the physical space at school, and build a sense of trust with the people who teach and work with their children. School events serve different purposes, often based upon the goals of whoever is leading them and the age of the students involved. At Blue Ridge Elementary, the events often offer an occasion for families to meet one another at the school to enjoy themselves and learn more about what their children are learning.

Blue Ridge Family Events: Community Building

Our interview results show that families enjoy and appreciate the family events at Blue Ridge. We interviewed Miguel, a Blue Ridge parent, at the Blue Ridge Carnival he attended with his family in December. He spoke of the high attendance levels he has witnessed at the school events.

> Miguel: I mean the events I've seen [at Blue Ridge], they get some pretty good numbers, and I'm just like "Wow!" And I even ask [the school]: "What kind of advertising do you guys do?" And they're like, "Well, we just send notes to parents." And I thought to myself well hopefully they read them, but as you can see, there's a pretty good showing of people…It does look like a lot of the parents are paying attention, that they're involved otherwise you wouldn't have…the amount of people showing up as they do.[214]

The number of families who attend Blue Ridge family events impressed Miguel. He concluded that parents's high levels of attendance at these events suggests that parents are highly involved in their children's education. Maria, a mother of a Blue Ridge student, compared the events at Blue Ridge to the schools her students attended when they lived in Arizona, praising Blue Ridge events.

---

[214] Miguel, Blue Ridge parent, personal interview by Andrew Ryan, November 30, 2011.

Maria: [At Blue Ridge] in December they do an event, and then for the Day of the Father they do another event, for Mother's Day they do an event. This is good because a parent can become involved. In Arizona, there was nothing like this and well really, I didn't know what was going on in school. But here you can get so involved with your children at the school.[215]

Maria valued events at Blue Ridge because they helped her learn "about what was going on in the school." José, another Blue Ridge parent, echoed this sentiment and described how events like the Family Goal Planning Dinner at Blue Ridge in September helped families connect with teachers, as well as parents of other cultural backgrounds.

CD: In September there was a dinner with *pozole* and they have other events like that for families. What do you think about the events? What do you think other parents think about them?
José: I think they are great because you socialize more with the Americans. They don't know our culture. Then you can show your pride to be Mexican and share your culture with everyone. It's very good because we will like to coexist with one culture and then another. And well, we all live here! We should expand what we know about others and expand our knowledge.[216]

José valued the Family Goal Planning Event in which teachers and staff served *pozole* because it simultaneously celebrated Mexican culture and provided a means for building community across cultures. José identified as Mexican and was proud to celebrate at school with other families while sharing a Mexican traditional dish. He saw the school's choice to serve *pozole* as a positive affirmation of his family and cultural group's identity. He also spoke about the social aspect of the event as an opportunity to socialize more with Americans. Interestingly, José understood the event as a way to bridge distance between social groups by increasing communication and build trust across social groups. Public schools have the unique opportunity to unite communities behind a common goal: the success of a their children. We commend Principal Kim Doepker and the staff at Blue Ridge for their efforts in supporting culturally validating school events. The staff brought together neighbors—families whose children attend school together—viewing the family event as an opportunity for sharing cultural knowledge. Miguel made the case that this proximity opens avenues to share cultural knowledge to build community and bridge divisions between groups. The Blue Ridge staff and parent José displayed a deep understanding of Brewster and Railsback's location of families' "funds of knowledge"[217] as valuable assets that schools can tap into to build collaborative learning communities. We recommend that the other schools in the district look to Blue Ridge's family events as models for engaging families with the school and one another in culturally affirming ways.

[215] Maria, group interview by Catherine DeCramer, October 14, 2011.
[216] José, group interview by Catherine DeCramer, December 2, 2011.
[217] Brewster and Railsback, *Building Trust with Schools and Diverse Families,* 2003.

Garrison and Wa-Hi Events: Paths to Higher Education

As students progress in their education along the middle and high school levels, the purpose of school events often becomes more specialized. However, personal outreach by teachers and administrators still builds the framework for trusting relationships that foster student success. Mr. Reyes, a Spanish teacher at Wa-Hi, spoke of his successful methods of family outreach.

> SS: In terms of getting parents more involved, how do you see yourself reaching out to parents, in general for the school or in classes?
>
> Reyes: We have a system - we send emails for grades. It's easy, but with Latino parents they don't have email a lot of the time. So the way I meet their parents is I am involved with other events. I teach at Garrison Night School, for example, and a lot of the students are the parents to the kids in my classroom so a lot of information I give them - like events that I have. Parents come and I get to meet them at the events. Most of the Spanish-speaking class is in the Latino Club. We used to have a *posada* in the winter and we used to meet [parents] that way. It's important to have more events on campus to make them feel more comfortable. The administration could use that as an example.[218]

Mr. Reyes recognizes that many Latino families do not have access to the Internet, so communicating with Latino families through email is ineffective. Instead, Mr. Reyes meets his student's parents by intentionally becoming involved in the community and reaching out to his students' parents face-to-face at a variety of events. This requires an openness to connection and a commitment to understanding the desire shared across cultures to support children in school. Mr. Reyes also stressed the importance of holding family events on school grounds to make Latino parents – who may face structural barriers such as language – more comfortable in the school space.

Michelle Higgins, a history teacher at Wa-Hi, also reaches out to families using traditional methods, like phone calls, emails and parent-teacher conferences. Additionally, like Mr. Reyes, she also makes an effort to reach out to families at community events.

> SS: How do you reach out to your students' parents?
> Higgins: … I try to be visible in the community. And attend Habitat for Humanity events, or parades, or different speaker presentations. For instance… I went to the Three Amigos presentation this fall [at Whitman], and saw people from the community and so I just try to reach out at sporting events or drama productions.
> SS: So you feel like maybe Spanish dominant students' parents are --that helps them engage in their students' education more? Like, it makes them less hesitant to come to school maybe because they don't know how to speak English?
> Higgins: Research shows that parental involvement is key to a child's academic success. And…again, I don't necessarily have the numbers as far as how many parents attended who were Spanish-speaking at certain events but I would hope that people feel welcome and encouraged. I know that materials are translated into Spanish. And you know try to reach out with phones calls in Spanish so hopefully that's kind of a step in the right

---

[218] Refugio Reyes, personal interview by Simerun Singh and Catherine DeCramer, November 14, 2011.

direction. We have access to translators here at school so if we need to conference with a parent they will call them in Spanish and reach out to them in…their first language spoken in their home. They also have translators who will come to the conference and translate for us. So that's encouraging as well.[219]

Higgins referred to the research showing a positive correlation between student success and parent involvement, and was heartened by district's efforts to provide translators at the high school to support Spanish-speaking parents. However, Isabel, a student at the high school, spoke about the fact that even with the presence of translators, her Spanish-dominant parents do not feel comfortable asking questions at school events.

> CD: What would you say are the biggest factors that affect your family's involvement at school?
> Isabel: One is not knowing English. Sometimes they feel like they don't know what's going on at school. I know that even though they have interpreters at events, [my family] really doesn't feel like it's where they belong because you have all these other people that know what they are doing and have the experience or the knowledge of it, so for them, it's like, "I don't know what I'm doing here."[220]

Isabel's family did not feel like they belonged at school events. Interestingly, the presence of translators had little effect upon their level of comfort at the school. In fact, it was the presence of other parents who her family perceived as "know[ing] what they are doing" that made them feel uncomfortable. Isabel suggested holding separate events—one in English and one in Spanish—to ensure that parents who speak either language feel comfortable.

---

[219] Michelle Higgins, WWHS teacher, personal interview by Simerun Singh, November 18, 2011.
[220] Isabel, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer, November 23, 2011.

CONCLUSION

To briefly revisit our research question, we asked: how culturally competent are Blue Ridge Elementary, Garrison Middle School, and Walla Walla High School? Through our secondary research, we identified **three elements** of creating a culturally competent school: **the school must promote school sense of social belonging, increase parental involvement of all types, and provide race-conscious cultural competency trainings.** In terms of school sense of social belonging, we found that students and parents tended to feel more included in a school that had easy access to translators and bilingual staff members, as well the presence of a dual-language program. Latino parents and students also valued staff diversity. At Garrison and Wa-Hi, however, students noted racial segregation that promoted negative stereotypes because of the lack of interaction amongst student groups. Language barriers and time restrictions due to parent employment proved to be the strongest barriers to involving families at school.

At all three schools, while over half of the staff members responded to being trained in communicating in culturally sensitive ways, in most cases, these trainings in terms of type and topic were not consistent nor related to specific issues of race and culture. Progressing towards culturally competent schools requires that administrators and teachers work to improve upon all three of these components with an overarching goal of creating and maintaining a school environment that fosters learning for all students and engagement for all parents. The lack of formal commitment to cultural competency was consistent amongst the three schools.

Our community-based research of cultural competency in K-12 education, using three of the Walla Walla Public Schools as our area of focus, is the first comprehensive assessment of cultural competency in the district. With this collaborative report, we are presenting the voices and experiences of Latino parents and students, in combination with the perspectives of teachers, administrators and school staff, towards piecing together a clearer picture of the needs and successes of the Walla Walla Public Schools, specifically regarding issues of race and culture. Below, we have provided a list of our most significant research findings.

I. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

POLICY

- Washington State Legislature located cultural competency as a means to reduce the state achievement gap in 2009.
- **Currently, the WWPS do not have explicit policies regarding cultural competency.**
- The recent formation of the Diversity Steering Committee, aimed at improving communication and involvement with Latino parents and community members, is a promising opportunity to engage in dialogue at a district level regarding implementing more culturally competent policies and practices.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

"For many people, simply having increased exposure [to different cultures] is enough. For others, unfortunately, the increased exposure isn't enough. They need training to erase negative attitudes they have picked up along the way." – Spanish teacher at Wa-Hi, Curt Schafer

- **Teachers and administrators expressed a desire for gaining strategies for effectively handling issues of culture and race in the classroom.**
- Trainings on culturally competent communication increase both confidence in teaching and communicating and increase the frequency with which teachers and administrators communicate with parents.

SCHOOL STAFF

- **The person with the most power to implement culturally competent practices is the principal.**
- There are instances of the minimization of racial conflict by school staff within the schools we researched.
- Students and parents we interviewed said racial and cultural diversity on school staff plays a critical role in developing how welcome they feel in school.
- Latino teachers are currently under-represented at Wa-Hi, Garrison, and to a lesser degree, Blue Ridge Elementary.[221]

DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM

- **All of the Latino students we interviewed expressed a desire to succeed academically and in society at large.**
- Students reported that advanced classes at Wa-Hi consisted of mostly white students and very few Latinos, which led some to question their deservingness to participate in advanced classes.
- The AVID program at the high school is beginning to improve Latino representation in advanced classes.

DISCRIMINATION

- **Many Latino students we spoke with have confronted negative racial and cultural stereotypes in school and the community at large so often that they have adopted a sense of apathy to cope with them.**
- The visible and active Latino Club has challenged and changed harmful cultural and racial stereotypes ascribed to Latino students at Walla Walla High School and in the community.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

- Scholars agree that if schools are to be successful in engaging culturally diverse families, **schools must include the families themselves in discussions about how they would most like to be involved.** They also conclude that all parents–regardless of

---

[221] Currently, 6% of teachers at Wa-Hi are Latino, while one third of the student body is Latino. At Garrison, 12% of the staff members are Latino, while 42% of the student body is Latino. At Blue Ridge, one third of the staff members are Latino while roughly 70% of the student body is Latino.

socioeconomic status, education level, and cultural background—can have a positive effect on their children's academic success.
- Every Latino parent we interviewed emphasized the importance of education to his or her children.
- The Latino parents we interviewed appreciated thoughtful communication from teachers and desired more face-to-face personal contact with their students' teachers and administrators.
- Families valued a school staff that had experience working with children of diverse cultural and racial backgrounds, as well as Spanish-proficient staff.
- Surprisingly, parents used the focus groups we led to engage in critical conversation with other parents to learn from and support one another, as both parents and neighbors.

From our findings listed above and a more detailed analysis provided in our Primary Research Findings section, we recommend the following actions:

III. ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

Questions For Further Research
- How culturally competent are the remaining seven Walla Walla Public Schools?
- How many Latino students are currently not enrolled or not attending the Walla Walla Public Schools?
- If opportunities for cultural competency trainings are administered in the district, how effective are such trainings?
- How does Garrison Night School affect Garrison parent and student sense of social belonging and familiarity within the district?

The Washington State Legislature
- Hold public schools in the state accountable by providing specific funds for first assessing and then implementing standards of cultural competency within policy and programs.
- Reintroduce scholarship funds for minority applicants towards teacher certification programs.

The Washington State OSPI
- Provide recommendations for more specific cultural competency trainings available to schools.

The Walla Walla Public School District

Why they are a model
- Recently formed the Diversity Steering Committee.

How they can move forward
- Use the Diversity Steering Committee as a platform to engage parents in discussions on how they would most like to be involved at school.

- Emphasize a streamlined approach to professional development for teachers and administrators for communicating in culturally sensitive ways.
- Promote the diffusion of Dual Language Immersion Program.

Walla Walla High School

Why they are a model
- GEAR UP, especially with the AVID program, is providing concrete educational opportunities for minority students.
- Latino Club is reducing racial tensions and providing valuable opportunities for community service.
- Strong bilingual coordinator serving at the high school.

How they can move forward
- Prioritize making school events welcoming for parents who do not speak English, which also means improving translation services provided at such events.
- Increase staff diversity for both certified and classified positions.
- Listen to all students' requests for school improvement, such as requests for cultural events and concrete changes within school life.
- Deepen administration support for Latino Club by accommodating their requests to hold events on school grounds.
- Make the online grading system available in Spanish.
- Formalize a protocol that ensures that every document sent to families is in both Spanish and English.
- Reduce dependency upon the Internet for parent outreach.
- Instead, strive for more face-to-face outreach and personal contact with families.

Garrison Middle School

Why they are a model
- Currently prioritizing hiring more bilingual office staff, and currently employ bilingual office staff.
- Host Garrison Night School.
- Currently have a limited Dual Language Immersion Program.

How they can move forward
- Increase staff diversity.
- Offer a Spanish language class available to students.
- Create more Principal-led efforts in discussion on the potential for issues related to diversity, race, culture, such as through a school-wide book study.
- Engage in more collaborative activities between Garrison Night School and the Garrison school community, to capitalize upon the resource of having hundreds of Latino parents come to your school daily for five months.

Blue Ridge

Why they are a model:
- Staff prioritize creating a strong supportive community for families and students.
- Currently phasing in the Dual Language Immersion Model in all grades of instruction.
- Principal Kim Doepker prioritizes being fully aware of the racial and cultural issues that may occur within her school and is recently being considered for the Washington State Distinguished Principal Award.
- In 2011, Blue Ridge was recently taken off the list of lowest achieving schools, as determined by OSPI.

How they can move forward:
- Create avenue for parents to discuss issues they deem important with school staff, such as discussion groups with administrators and teachers present to answer questions.
- Fuller awareness of the degree to which Spanish or English-dominant parents can assist children with homework.

APPENDIX

Teacher and Administrator Interview Questions
1. Could you tell me a little bit about your professional background? Where you went to school, how long you've worked at this school, what you like most about your job?
2. For my research, I'm trying to understand how cultural experiences affect relationships between teachers, students, and parents. Can you think of a time when you were interacting with a student or parent and you noticed a cultural difference perhaps in the way you communicated with this student or maybe in some sort of difficulty you had explaining something to that student?
3. Do you feel you have developed a way to understand when culture is a variable when interacting with students and parents?
4. Can you think of a specific situation where you were working with a student or a group of students and you noticed that a student's comment or an aspect of the curriculum or something else may have excluded a minority group of students?
5. When you hear the term "cultural competence", what comes to mind?
6. What sort of opportunities or information are available for you as a [teacher, counselor, learning specialist, principle] to help you incorporate cultural competency into your daily professional conduct?
7. What are the cultural competence policies at [Blue Ridge, Garrison, Wa-Hi] and how do you practice them?
8. What three major problems do you think cultural competence policies address at [Blue Ridge, Garrison, Wa-Hi] and how so?
 7. Are there aspects of the way in which cultural competence policies were communicated to you or aspects of the general culture of the school that you see as barriers to creating a more culturally competent environment?
 8. Are there particular aspects of your school that you think made implementing policies easier?
9. What do you need to make your school a more welcoming and culturally inclusive environment? In terms of resources, training, or general support?
10. If you could tell the principal one thing that you think the school needs to work on or one thing that you think the school as a whole is doing well, what would that be?

Survey Administered To Blue Ridge, Garrison Middle School, and Walla Walla High School Teachers and Administrators

The e-mail that prefaced the electronic survey:

Dear [Blue Ridge, Garrison, or Wa-Hi] Teachers and Staff,

I am a student at Whitman College working with Linda Boggs and Diana Erickson researching practices promoting cultural awareness of three schools in the Walla Walla Public School District—Blue Ridge Elementary, Garrison Middle School, and Wa-Hi.

I am conducting my research with two other students who are interviewing students and parents of the three schools. From the findings that we gather, we will write a report for the school district that identifies the successes of each school in creating environments of cultural inclusivity. We will also identify, based on our research, specific ways the district can improve the quality of education in Walla Walla schools.

I have created an anonymous, ten-minute survey that Dr. Boggs and Mrs. Erickson have approved for teachers and staff to complete. Your participation with this survey will not only refine my research findings, it will also provide an opportunity for you to personally voice your opinion regarding what you think is working at Wa-Hi and your suggestions for improvement.

The survey can be accessed by clicking the link below:
[Link to respective survey]

If you have any questions or are interested in being interviewed for my research, please feel free to respond to this e-mail or call me at (785) 218-5820.
I am very grateful to be able to work with [Blue Ridge, Garrison, Wa-Hi] and I look forward to sharing my findings with you all.

Thanks so much for your time,
Simerun Singh

Understanding Cultural Competency at Blue Ridge

Because Latino students are the largest minority in the Walla Walla Public School District, the following survey includes some questions specific to the experiences of Latino students and parents. It was brought to my attention that the e-mail describing my research was too vague, and so I hope this clarifies your expectations. Thanks and I appreciate your input. -Simerun Singh

1. Sex:

○ Male

○ Female

○ Prefer not to answer

2. Which category below includes your age?

○ 21-29 years

○ 30-39

○ 40-49

○ 50-59

○ 60 or older

3. What's your position at Blue Ridge Elementary School?

○ Principal

○ Office Staff

○ Classroom Teacher

○ Bilingual Para-Educator

○ Special Education Para-Educator

○ Intervention Specialist

○ Counselor

○ Prefer not to answer

○ Other

Page 1

Understanding Cultural Competency at Blue Ridge

4. What grade(s) do you work with most frequently? Please mark all that apply.

- ☐ Kindergarten
- ☐ 1st
- ☐ 2nd
- ☐ 3rd
- ☐ 4th
- ☐ 5th

5. How many school years have you worked at Blue Ridge?

- ○ Less than 1 year
- ○ 1-3 years
- ○ 3-6 years
- ○ 6-9 years
- ○ More than 10 years

6. Of the following, which do you most strongly identify as?

- ○ African American/Black
- ○ Asian/South Asian
- ○ Caucasian/White
- ○ Latino
- ○ Native American
- ○ None of the above
- ○ Prefer not to answer

7. Spanish Proficiency:

	I cannot speak Spanish	I can speak some Spanish	I speak Spanish conversationally	I speak Spanish fluently	Spanish is my first language
What is your familiarity with speaking Spanish?	○	○	○	○	○

Understanding Cultural Competency at Blue Ridge

4. What grade(s) do you work with most frequently? Please mark all that apply.

- ☐ Kindergarten
- ☐ 1st
- ☐ 2nd
- ☐ 3rd
- ☐ 4th
- ☐ 5th

5. How many school years have you worked at Blue Ridge?

- ○ Less than 1 year
- ○ 1-3 years
- ○ 3-6 years
- ○ 6-9 years
- ○ More than 10 years

6. Of the following, which do you most strongly identify as?

- ○ African American/Black
- ○ Asian/South Asian
- ○ Caucasian/White
- ○ Latino
- ○ Native American
- ○ None of the above
- ○ Prefer not to answer

7. Spanish Proficiency:

	I cannot speak Spanish	I can speak some Spanish	I speak Spanish conversationally	I speak Spanish fluently	Spanish is my first language
What is your familiarity with speaking Spanish?	○	○	○	○	○

Understanding Cultural Competency at Blue Ridge

11. In terms of your instructional/professional practice, how confident are you...

	Not confident at all	Somewhat confident	Confident	Very Confident	Completely confident
...with teaching or communicating with a student in a way that takes the student's cultural experiences into account?	○	○	○	○	○
...with encouraging students to work with other students who are culturally different than them?	○	○	○	○	○
...with addressing students' questions about diversity and culture?	○	○	○	○	○
...with understanding what success looks like for Latino students?	○	○	○	○	○
...that the curriculum you teach is culturally appropriate for Latino students, specifically?	○	○	○	○	○

12. How often do you...

	Rarely or never	Once or twice a quarter	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Almost everyday
...communicate via email, phone, or personal meeting with parents/guardians who do not speak English very well?	○	○	○	○	○
...communicate with Latino parents/guardians who seem hesitant to get more involved in his or her student's education?	○	○	○	○	○
...communicate with Latino parents/guardians about the progress that their child is making?	○	○	○	○	○
...communicate with Latino parents/guardians about issues surrounding culture, race, and/or diversity?	○	○	○	○	○

13. How comfortable are you with...

	Not comfortable at all	Somewhat comfortable	Comfortable	Very Comfortable	Extremely Comfortable
...discussing issues of diversity and cultural differences with faculty?	○	○	○	○	○

Page 4

96

Understanding Cultural Competency at Blue Ridge

14. How familiar are you with...

	Not familiar at all	Somewhat familiar	Familiar	Very Familiar	Completely familiar
....your school's policies addressing culture and diversity?	○	○	○	○	○

15. Have you ever attended a training about communicating in culturally sensitive ways with students and/or parents?

○ Yes

○ No

16. Was the training provided by the Walla Walla Public School District/Blue Ridge?

○ Yes

○ No

17. How well...

	Not well at all	Not very well	Moderately well	Very well	Extremely well
...do you feel this training prepared you to work with Latino students in culturally sensitive ways?	○	○	○	○	○

18. Why haven't you attended one of these trainings?

☐ I do not think these trainings are offered at my school.

☐ The trainings sessions conflict with my schedule.

☐ This sort of training is not pertinent to my line of work.

☐ I do not like discussing culture, race, or diversity.

☐ Cultural competency is not that important.

☐ I do not need to be trained to be "culturally competent".

19. Please use this space to provide any comments on issues of culture and diversity at Blue Ridge.

Understanding Cultural Competency at Garrison

Because Latino students are the largest minority in the Walla Walla Public School District, the following survey includes some questions specific to the experiences of Latino students and parents. It was brought to my attention that the e-mail describing my research was too vague, and so I hope this clarifies your expectations. Thanks and I appreciate your input. -Simerun Singh

1. Sex:

○ Male

○ Female

○ Prefer not to answer

2. Which category below includes your age?

○ 21-29 years

○ 30-39

○ 40-49

○ 50-59

○ 60 or older

3. Of the following, which do you most strongly identify as?

○ African American/Black

○ Asian/South Asian

○ Caucasian/White

○ Latino

○ Native American

○ None of the above

○ Prefer not to answer

Understanding Cultural Competency at Garrison

4. What's your position at Garrison Middle School?

- ○ Principal/Assistant Principal
- ○ Office Staff
- ○ Classroom Teacher
- ○ Bilingual Para-Educator
- ○ Special Education Para-Educator
- ○ Intervention Specialist
- ○ Counselor
- ○ Prefer not to answer
- ○ Other

5. If you are a classroom teacher, in what department do you teach? Please mark all that apply.

- ☐ Reading and Language Arts
- ☐ Math
- ☐ Social Studies
- ☐ Science
- ☐ Music
- ☐ Physical Education
- ☐ Exploratories

6. What grade(s) do you work with most frequently? Please mark all that apply.

- ☐ 6th
- ☐ 7th
- ☐ 8th

7. How many school years have you worked at Garrison?

- ○ Less than 1 year
- ○ 1-3 years
- ○ 3-6 years
- ○ 6-9 years
- ○ More than 10 years

Understanding Cultural Competency at Garrison

8. Spanish Proficiency:

	I cannot speak Spanish	I can speak some Spanish	I speak Spanish conversationally	I speak Spanish fluently	Spanish is my first language
What is your familiarity with speaking Spanish?	○	○	○	○	○

9. To what extent do you think...

	Not at all	Small extent	Moderate extent	Great extent	More than anything else
...a student's academic achievement depends on his or her ethnic-cultural background?	○	○	○	○	○
...a student's academic achievement depends on his or her racial background?	○	○	○	○	○
...a student's extracurricular involvement depends on his or her ethnic-cultural background?	○	○	○	○	○
...a student's extracurricular involvement depends on his or her racial background?	○	○	○	○	○

10. How often do you encounter difficulty in teaching or communicating with a student because of a perceived cultural barrier or cultural misunderstanding between you and the student?

- ○ Nearly every day
- ○ Once a week
- ○ Once every few weeks
- ○ Once or twice a quarter
- ○ Rarely to never
- ○ I don't know or haven't noticed

Understanding Cultural Competency at Garrison

11. How often do you encounter difficulty in communicating with a parent because of a perceived cultural barrier or cultural misunderstanding between you and the parent?

- ○ Nearly every day
- ○ Once a week
- ○ Once every few weeks
- ○ Once or twice a quarter
- ○ Rarely to never
- ○ I don't know or haven't noticed

12. In terms of your instructional/professional practice, how confident are you…

	Not confident at all	Somewhat confident	Confident	Very Confident	Completely confident
…with teaching or communicating with a student in a way that takes the student's cultural experiences into account?	○	○	○	○	○
…with encouraging students to work with other students who are culturally different than them?	○	○	○	○	○
…with addressing students' questions about diversity and culture?	○	○	○	○	○
…with understanding what success looks like for Latino students?	○	○	○	○	○
…that the curriculum you teach is culturally appropriate for Latino students, specifically?	○	○	○	○	○

Understanding Cultural Competency at Garrison

13. How often do you...

	Rarely or never	Once or twice a quarter	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Almost everyday
...communicate via email, phone, or personal meeting with parents/guardians who do not speak English very well?	○	○	○	○	○
...communicate with Latino parents/guardians who seem hesitant to get more involved in his or her student's education?	○	○	○	○	○
...communicate with Latino parents/guardians about the progress that their child is making?	○	○	○	○	○
...communicate with Latino parents/guardians about issues surrounding culture, race, and/or diversity?	○	○	○	○	○

14. How comfortable are you with...

	Not comfortable at all	Somewhat comfortable	Comfortable	Very Comfortable	Extremely Comfortable
...discussing issues of diversity and cultural differences with faculty?	○	○	○	○	○

15. How familiar are you with...

	Not familiar at all	Somewhat familiar	Familiar	Very Familiar	Completely familiar
....your school's policies addressing culture and diversity?	○	○	○	○	○

16. Have you ever attended a training about communicating in culturally sensitive ways with students and/or parents?

○ Yes

○ No

17. Was the training provided by the Walla Walla Public School District/Garrison?

○ Yes

○ No

103

Understanding Cultural Competency at Garrison

18. How well...

	Not well at all	Not very well	Moderately well	Very well	Extremely well
...do you feel this training prepared you to work with Latino students in culturally sensitive ways?	○	○	○	○	○

19. Why haven't you attended one of these trainings?

- ☐ I do not think these trainings are offered at my school.
- ☐ The trainings sessions conflict with my schedule.
- ☐ This sort of training is not pertinent to my line of work.
- ☐ I do not like discussing culture, race, or diversity.
- ☐ Cultural competency is not that important.
- ☐ I do not need to be trained to be "culturally competent".

20. Please use this space to provide any comments on issues of culture and diversity at Garrison.

[text box]

Understanding Cultural Competency at Wa-Hi

Because Latino students are the largest minority in the Walla Walla Public School District, the following survey includes some questions specific to the experiences of Latino students and parents. It was brought to my attention that the e-mail describing my research was too vague, and so I hope this clarifies your expectations. Thanks and I appreciate your input. -Simerun Singh

1. Sex:

○ Male

○ Female

○ Prefer not to answer

2. Which category below includes your age?

○ 21-29 years

○ 30-39

○ 40-49

○ 50-59

○ 60 or older

3. Of the following, which do you most strongly identify as?

○ African American/Black

○ Asian/South Asian

○ Caucasian/White

○ Latino

○ Native American

○ None of the above

○ Prefer not to answer

Understanding Cultural Competency at Wa-Hi

4. What's your position at Wa-Hi?

○ Principal/Assistant Principal

○ Office Staff

○ Classroom Teacher

○ Bilingual Para-Educator

○ Special Education Para-Educator

○ Intervention Specialist

○ Counselor

○ Prefer not to answer

○ Other

5. If you are a classroom teacher, in what department do you teach? Please mark all that apply.

☐ Art

☐ Career and Technical Education

☐ English

☐ ESL

☐ Foreign Language

☐ Math

☐ Music

☐ Physical Education

☐ Science

☐ Social Studies

6. What grade(s) do you work with most frequently? Please mark all that apply.

☐ 9th

☐ 10th

☐ 11th

☐ 12th

Understanding Cultural Competency at Wa-Hi

7. How many school years have you worked at Wa-Hi?

- ○ Less than 1 year
- ○ 1-3 years
- ○ 3-6 years
- ○ 6-9 years
- ○ More than 10 years

8. Spanish Proficiency:

	I cannot speak Spanish	I can speak some Spanish	I speak Spanish conversationally	I speak Spanish fluently	Spanish is my first language
What is your familiarity with speaking Spanish?	○	○	○	○	○

9. To what extent do you think...

	Not at all	Small extent	Moderate extent	Great extent	More than anything else
...a student's academic achievement depends on his or her ethnic-cultural background?	○	○	○	○	○
...a student's academic achievement depends on his or her racial background?	○	○	○	○	○
...a student's extracurricular involvement depends on his or her ethnic-cultural background?	○	○	○	○	○
...a student's extracurricular involvement depends on his or her racial background?	○	○	○	○	○

10. How often do you encounter difficulty in teaching or communicating with a student because of a perceived cultural barrier or cultural misunderstanding between you and the student?

- ○ Nearly every day
- ○ Once a week
- ○ Once every few weeks
- ○ Once or twice a quarter
- ○ Rarely to never
- ○ I don't know or haven't noticed

Understanding Cultural Competency at Wa-Hi

11. How often do you encounter difficulty in communicating with a parent because of a perceived cultural barrier or cultural misunderstanding between you and the parent?

○ Nearly every day

○ Once a week

○ Once every few weeks

○ Once or twice a quarter

○ Rarely to never

○ I don't know or haven't noticed

12. In terms of your instructional/professional practice, how confident are you...

	Not confident at all	Somewhat confident	Confident	Very Confident	Completely confident
...with teaching or communicating with a student in a way that takes the student's cultural experiences into account?	○	○	○	○	○
...with encouraging students to work with other students who are culturally different than them?	○	○	○	○	○
...with addressing students' questions about diversity and culture?	○	○	○	○	○
...with understanding what success looks like for Latino students?	○	○	○	○	○
...that the curriculum you teach is culturally appropriate for Latino students, specifically?	○	○	○	○	○

Understanding Cultural Competency at Wa-Hi

13. How often do you...

	Rarely or never	Once or twice a quarter	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Almost everyday
...communicate via email, phone, or personal meeting with parents/guardians who do not speak English very well?	○	○	○	○	○
...communicate with Latino parents/guardians who seem hesitant to get more involved in his or her student's education?	○	○	○	○	○
...communicate with Latino parents/guardians about the progress that their child is making?	○	○	○	○	○
...communicate with Latino parents/guardians about issues surrounding culture, race, and/or diversity?	○	○	○	○	○

14. How comfortable are you with...

	Not comfortable at all	Somewhat comfortable	Comfortable	Very Comfortable	Extremely Comfortable
...discussing issues of diversity and cultural differences with faculty?	○	○	○	○	○

15. How familiar are you with...

	Not familiar at all	Somewhat familiar	Familiar	Very Familiar	Completely familiar
....your school's policies addressing culture and diversity?	○	○	○	○	○

16. Have you ever attended a training about communicating in culturally sensitive ways with students and/or parents?

○ Yes

○ No

17. Was the training provided by the Walla Walla Public School District/Wa-Hi?

○ Yes

○ No

Understanding Cultural Competency at Wa-Hi

18. How well...

	Not well at all	Not very well	Moderately well	Very well	Extremely well
...do you feel this training prepared you to work with Latino students in culturally sensitive ways?	○	○	○	○	○

19. Why haven't you attended one of these trainings?

☐ I do not think these trainings are offered at my school.

☐ The trainings sessions conflict with my schedule.

☐ This sort of training is not pertinent to my line of work.

☐ I do not like discussing culture, race, or diversity.

☐ Cultural competency is not that important.

☐ I do not need to be trained to be "culturally competent".

20. Please use this space to provide any comments on issues of culture and diversity at Wa-Hi.

Student and Parent Permission Forms and Interview Questions:

October 28, 2011
Parent Letter and Permission Form

Dear Parents:

We are Katie DeCramer and Andrew Ryan, seniors at Whitman College. This year as part of Whitman's ongoing research project "*The State of the State for Washington Latinos*" (www.walatinos.org), we are working in partnership with the Walla Walla Public Schools to research how culture and race affect Latino students' and parents' experiences with education in the district. This research is critical in determining the needs of Latino students and parents and communicating those needs to the district and community, as well as Washington state legislators.

Our research focuses on the cultural experiences of Latino students and families at Blue Ridge Elementary, Garrison Middle School, and Walla Walla High School. My project is one of four being conducted this fall by Whitman students partnered with Diana Erickson, Bilingual Coordinator of the Walla Walla Public Schools, and Bill Erickson, Advisor to Wa-Hi's Club Latino.

Our study will consist of conducting separate interviews with Latino parents and students. During the student interviews, students will be asked to share their experiences and observations regarding their own cultural experiences. These interviews will be approximately forty-five minutes long and conducted within the vicinity of a school faculty member. For the parent component, Latino parents will be asked to talk about their cultural experiences as they relate to their student's education. These interviews will be conducted outside of school grounds in a setting selected by the participant.

There is no foreseeable risk if you, your son or daughter participates in these interviews, nor should they experience any discomfort. Your identity, and your child's identity, in this study will remain confidential. You and your child's participation in these interviews is voluntary in that you and your child may choose to answer or not answer a question you are asked, and that you and your child may end the conversation at any time. Whitman College's Internal Review Board has approved this research project, certifying that it will not cause any harm to any participant. I encourage you to have a discussion with your child concerning this study. If you or your child agrees to be part of the interviews, participation will help us meet the needs of Latino students.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study or the interviews, please feel free to contact us at (612) 816-2141 or at decramcb@whitman.edu. You may also contact Paul Apostolidis, a politics professor at Whitman College who oversees this project at (509) 522-4426 or at apostopc@whitman.edu.

I thank you for your time and hope that you and your child participate in this critical project.

Katie B. DeCramer and Andrew J. Ryan

Note: It is not necessary that both parents and students participate, but it is suggested.

*If you are willing to participate and/or willing to allow your child to participate in this project,

please sign the permission slip below and give it to your son or daughter. After we receive this completed permission slip, we will then speak to your child about the dates for student interviews. If you, the parent, decides to participate, we will then contact you to set up interview appointments at the place of your choosing.

Consent Form for Participation in
"State of the State for Washington Latinos" Study

Note: It is not required for both the parent and the student to participate, but it is encouraged.

Student Participation

I _____ give permission to _____, my son or daughter

to participate in the research described above, focused on the cultural experiences of Latino

students at Blue Ridge Elementary, Garrison Middle School, and Walla Walla High School.

Parent's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent Participation

I _____ (Printed Name) _____ (X) agree to participate

or _____ choose not to participate

in the research described above, focused on the cultural experiences of Latino students and

families at Blue Ridge Elementary, Garrison Middle School, and Walla Walla High School.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent Phone Number: _____

Student's Name Printed: _____

28 de octubre, 2011, Permiso para participación:

Estimados padres de estudiantes:

Mi nombre es Katie DeCramer y soy un estudiante de cuatro año en *Whitman College*. Este año, como parte del proyecto de investigación de esta universidad, conocido como "La Situación Actual de los Latinos en el estado de Washington" (www.walatinos.org), estoy trabajando con Diana y Bill Erickson, así como con el sistema escolar público de Walla Walla. Estámos realizando un estudio enfocado en como la cultura y la raza se influyen la educación de estudiantes Latinos y sus padres en las escuelas de *Walla Walla High School, Garrison Middle School y Blue Ridge Elementary*. Este estudio es crítico para determinar las necesidades de los estudiantes y familias Latinos en las escuelas, y también para comunicar esas necesidades con las escuelas de Walla Walla y los legisladores de Washington.

Mi investigación está enfocada en como la cultura del estudiante Latino y la familia se influye las experiencias educacionales del estudiante y la familia. Es importante que comprendamos que hay ambos dificultades y oportunidades dentro el sistema de educación para estudiantes Latinos. Por esta razón, el objetivo de esta investigación es analizar y sugerir maneras de cómo mejorar el sistema para los estudiantes Latinos y sus familias. Este estudio es uno de cuatro en progreso este año por estudiantes de *Whitman College*. Somos asocios con Diana Erickson, Coordinador Bilingüe para las escuelas públicas de Walla Walla, y Bill Erickson, Asesor a Club Latino de *Walla Walla High School.*

Este estudio consistirá de entrevistas separadas con padres y estudiantes. Durante las entrevistas con los estudiantes, se les harán preguntas sobre sus experiencias con la cultura y la raza en las escuelas. Las entrevistas durarán aproximadamente cuarenta y cinco minutos y serán conducidas en la proximidad de un miembro de la facultad de la escuela. En las entrevistas con los padres se les preguntaré que describen como su cultura, lenguaje y raza se influyen su relación con la escuela. Las entrevistas con los padres serán hechas afuera del territorio escolar donde el participante elija.

No hay ningún riesgo previsible si usted, su hijo o hija participan en estas entrevistas, ni tampoco le creará ninguna incomodidad. Las identidades de todos los participantes permanecerán anónimas al menos que el participante otorgue permiso para citarlos por su nombre. Participación en las entrevistas es voluntaria y el participante no necesita contestar ninguna pregunta y puede concluir la entrevista en cualquier momento. También debe saber que el Consejo Interno de Revisión (IRB) de la universidad *Whitman College*, ha aprobado este proyecto de investigación, certificando que no le causará ningún perjuicio a ninguno de los participantes. Le animo que hable con su hijo o hija sobre este estudio. Si usted o su hijo(a) está de acuerdo en participar en las entrevistas, nos ayudará estudiar y apoyar a los estudiantes y familias Latinos en las escuelas de Walla Walla.

Si está dispuesto a participar o a permitir que su hijo o hija participe, por favor firme el permiso que está a continuación y déselo a su hijo(a) para que se lo entreguen a _____. Después de recibir el permiso, hablaré con su hijo(a) sobre fechas para las entrevistas. Si usted también decide participar, le contactaré para hacer una cita para la entrevista.

Si ustedes tienen alguna pregunta o preocupación sobre este estudio o las entrevistas, por favor comuníquense conmigo llamándome al teléfono (612) 816-2141 o pueden enviarme un mensaje electrónico a decramcb@whitman.edu . También pueden comunicarse con el profesor Paul Apostolidis quien supervisa estos proyectos. Su número es (509) 522-4426 y su dirección electrónica apostopc@whitman.edu . Les agradezco por su tiempo y espero que usted y su hijo o hija participen en este proyecto crítico.

Katie B. DeCramer

Nota: no es necesario que ambos padres y estudiantes participen pero si sugerido.

Permiso para Participación en
"La Situación Actual de los Latinos en el estado de Washington"

*Por favor firme abajo y devuelva este papel con su hijo(a), si usted va a participar y está dispuesto a que su hijo(a) participe en este proyecto. Después de recibir este papel firmado, hablaré a su hijo(a) para determinar las fechas para la entrevista. Si usted, el padre o la madre, quiere participar, luego le contactaré para coordinar una entrevista en la hora y lugar de su elección.

Parte 1 – Participación Estudiantil

Yo _____ doy permiso para que _____,

      (Nombre del padre)   (Nombre del estudiante)

participe en la investigación descrita anteriormente que está enfocada en las experiencias del

estudiante con respecto a la cultura y la raza en *Walla Walla High School*, *Garrison Middle*

School o *Blue Ridge Elementary*.

      Firma del Padre: _____

      Fecha: _____

Parte 2 – Participación de Padre

Yo _____   _____ (X) estoy de acuerdo en participar

      (Nombre del Padre/Madre)

                        o _____ (X) no estoy de acuerdo en participar

en la investigación descrita anteriormente que está enfocada en las experiencias del estudiante y

la familia con respecto a la cultura y la raza en *Walla Walla High School*, *Garrison Middle*

School y *Blue Ridge Elementary*.

      Firma del Padre: _____

      Número de Teléfono: _____ Fecha: _____

Student Interview Questions - English

1) Please tell me about your childhood and your family.

2) How important do your parents think it is for you to go to school?

3) What are valuable ways your family supports your education at home and at school?

4) How do you identify yourself racially and culturally?

5) Are there obstacles that Latino students face when they want to succeed in school?

6) Have you ever felt different or not welcome at your school? Tell me about that experience.

7) How do Latino students perform as compared to white/other students in your school?

8) How can schools better support and involve your family?

9) If you were sitting with the school principal and could tell him/her one thing, what would you say?

Las Preguntas para los Estudiantes – Español

1) Por favor, cuéntame algo de su niñez y su familia.

2) Y para su familia, que tan importante es la escuela?

3) De que maneras su familia apoya a su educación en la casa y en la escuela?

4) Como te identificas con respecto a su cultura y su raza?

5) Hay obstáculos que encuentran estudiantes Latinos cuando quieren tener éxito en las escuelas?

6) Has sentido diferente en su escuela? Por favor, dime un poco sobre la experiencia.

7) Como realizan los estudiantes Latinos en comparación con estudiantes blancos o otros?

8) Como puede la escuela mejorar las maneras de que tu familia puede involucrarse?

9) Si tu pudiera sentarse con el director de la escuela de Wa-Hi, y pudiera decirle una cosa, que le diria?

Parent Interview Questions – English

1) Please tell me where you were born, where you lived as a child, something of your childhood and education, which schools your children attend, and your family now.

2) When you think about what is important to your family, what do you think about?

3) How important to you is it that your children attend and succeed in school?

4) How does the school communicate with you?

5) Who do you go to at school when you have a problem or question?

6) Can you tell me about a time when you felt that your culture was affirmed at school?

7) What gifts do you have to offer the schools?

8) How can schools better support your family?

9) What are obstacles that Latino students encounter when they want to succeed in school?

10) If you were sitting with the principal of the school and tell him/her one thing, what would you say?

Las Preguntas para los Padres – Español

1) Por favor, cuéntame donde nació y donde vivía cuando era niña, algo de su juventud, sus hijos, y a cuales escuelas ellos asisten, y su familia ahora.

2) Cuando piensa de lo que es importante para su familia, de que piensa?

3) Para usted, que tan importante es que sus hijos asisten a la escuela? Tener éxito? Graduarse?

4) De que manera la escuela le proporciona información importante para la educación de su hijo?

5) Con quien hablas en la escuela cuando tienes una pregunta o un problema?

6) Siente que su cultura y valores son respetados y reconocidos en la escuela de su hijo? Por favor, cuéntame sobre una experiencia cuando sentía que su cultura fue respetada y reconocida o no respetada y reconocida. Por que pasó?

7) Cuales habilidades tienes para ofrecer a la escuela?

8) Como pueden las escuelas establecer una asociación de apoyo mejor con las familias?

9) Cuales obstáculos encuentran estudiantes Latinos cuando quieren tener éxito en las escuelas?

10) Si usted pudiera sentarse con el director de la escuela y pudiera decirle una cosa, ¿qué le diría?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrams, Laura S., and Jene A. Moio. "Critical Race Theory and the Cultural Competence Dilemma In Social Work Education." *Journals of Social Work Education* 45, no. 2: 245-261. 2009.

Brand, Stephen, Robert Felner, Minsuk Shim, Anne Seitsinger, and Thaddeus Dumas. "Middle school improvement and reform: Development and validation of a school-level assessment of climate, cultural pluralism, and school safety." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 95, no. 3: 570-588. September 2003.

Benjamin, Rebecca. "Middle Schools for Latinos: A Framework for Success." in *Educating Latino Students: A Successful Guide to Practice.* Eds. Gonzalez, M. L., Huerta-Marcias, A., Tinajero, J. V: 239-67. 1998.

Bennett, M.J. Towards Ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In R.M. Paige (Ed.). Education for the Intercultural Experience. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press. 1993.

Brewster, Cori and Jennifer Railsback. *NWREL Building Trust with Schools and Diverse Families*. Portland: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. December 2003.

Burchum, Jacqueline L. Rosenjack. "Cultural Competence: An Evolutionary Perspective." *Nursing Forum* 37, no. 4: 5. October 2002.

Cross, T., Bazron, B., Dennis, K., & Isaacs, M., *Towards A Culturally Competent System of Care, Volume I.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Child Development Center, CASSP Technical Assistance Center. 1989.

Espinoza, Guadalupe, and Jaana Juvonen. "Perceptions of the school social context across the transition to middle school: Heightened sensitivity among Latino students?" *Journal Of Educational Psychology* 103, no. 3: 749-758. August 2011.

Gaitan, Concha Delgado. *Involving Latino Families in Schools.* Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press, 2004.

Gonzalez, M. L., and Ana Huerta-Macias. "Profile of Leadership at the Middle-/High School Levels: Successful Schools and Their Principals." in *Educating Latino Students: A Successful Guide to Practice.* Eds. Gonzalez, M. L., Huerta-Marcias, A., Tinajero, J. V: 3-28. 1998.

Green, James. *Cultural awareness in the human services*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1982.

Higgins, Chris, and Kathleen Knight Abowitz. "What Makes a Public School Public? A Framework for Evaluating the Civic Substance of Schooling." *Educational Theory* 61, no. 4: 365-380. August 2011.

Henderson, Anne T. and Karen L. Mapp, et al. SEDL: *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement,* 2002.

Jasis, Pablo and Rosario Ordóñez-Jasis. "Convivencia to Empowerment: Latino Parent Organizing at La Familia." University of North Carolina Press: 2004.

Klump, Jennifer. *NWREL Culturally Responsive Practices For Student Success: A Regional Sampler.* Portland: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, June 2005.

Lopez, Gerardo. "The Value of Hard Work: Lessons on Parent Involvement from an (Im)migrant Household." *Harvard Educational Review* 71 no. 3 (2001): 416-437.

Martin, Margary, Edward Fergus, and Pedro Noguera. "Responding to the Needs of the Whole Child: A Case Study of a High-Performing Elementary School for Immigrant Children." *Reading & Writing Quarterly* 26, no. 3: 195-222. January 1, 2010.

Masschelein, Jan, and Maarten Simons. "Schools as Architecture for Newcomers and Strangers: The Perfect School as Public School?" *Teachers College Record* 112, no. 2: 533-555. January 1, 2010.

Miano, Alice A. "Schools Reading Parents' Worlds: Mexican Immigrant Mothers Building Family Literacy Networks." *Multicultural Education*, Vol. 18, No. 2.: 30-38. Winter 2011.

Morrison Institute for Public Policy & Center for the Future of Arizona. *Why Some Schools With Latino Children Beat the Odds…and Others Don't.* 2006.

Pon, Gordon. "Cultural Competency as New Racism: An Ontology of Forgetting." *Journal of Progressive Human Services* 20, no.1: 59-71. *Alternative Press Index*. January 2009.

Schulte, L. E., Shanahan, S., Anderson, T. D., & Sides, J. Student and teacher percep-tions of their middle and high schools' sense of community. *The School Community Journal, 13*(1), 7-33. 2003.

Valdés, Guadalupe, *Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools.* New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1996.

Valenzuela, Angela. *Subtractive Schooling*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 1999.

Washington State Senate. *Second Substitute Senate Bill 5973: An Act Relating to closing the achievement gap in order to provide all students an excellent and equitable education.* 61st Leg., 2009 Regular Session. 2SSB 5973.PL. 2009.

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s.* 2nd ed. Routledge: New York. 1994.

Zarate, Maria Estela. *Understanding Latino Parental Involvement in Education*. Tomás Rivera Policy Institute: September 2007.

Student and Parent Interview Participants

Language note: All interviews were conducted in English, unless otherwise noted.

Alejandro, Wa-Hi Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan conducted on the
    Whitman College campus, Walla Walla, Washington, November 15, 2011.
Angel, Blue Ridge parent, group interview by Andrew Ryan conducted at Blue Ridge
    Elementary, Walla Walla, Washington, December 1, 2011.
Carlos, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer conducted at Starbucks Café
    on First and Main, Walla Walla, Washington, November 22, 2011.
Carla, Garrison and Wa-Hi parent, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer conducted at
    Starbucks Café on First and Main, Walla Walla, Washington, November 9, 2011.
Carolina, Blue Ridge parent, group interview by Catherine DeCramer conducted at Blue Ridge
    Elementary in Spanish, Walla Walla, Washington, December 2, 2011.
Daniela, Sofia, and Maria – Blue Ridge student, Wa-Hi student, and their mother (respectively),
    group interview by Catherine DeCramer conducted at their home in Spanish, Walla Walla,
    Washington, October 14, 2011.
Diana, Blue Ridge parent, group interview by Catherine DeCramer conducted at Blue Ridge
    Elementary in Spanish, Walla Walla, Washington, December 2, 2011.
Estela, Blue Ridge parent, group interview by Andrew Ryan conducted at Blue Ridge
    Elementary, Walla Walla, Washington, December 1, 2011.
Fernando, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Andrew Ryan conducted at CCY, Walla Walla,
    Washington, October 28, 2011.
Isabel, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer conducted at Starbucks Café
    on First and Main, Walla Walla, Washington, November 23, 2011.
Jessica, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer conducted at Wa-Hi, Walla
    Walla, Washington, November 15, 2011.
José, Blue Ridge parent, group interview by Catherine DeCramer conducted at Blue Ridge
    Elementary in Spanish, Walla Walla, Washington, December 2, 2011.
Luís, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer conducted at CCY, Walla
    Walla, Washington, October 28, 2011.
Miguel, Blue Ridge parent, personal interview by Andrew Ryan conducted at Blue Ridge
    Elementary, Walla Walla, Washington, November 30, 2011.
Olivia, Wa-Hi Class of 2011, personal interview by Andrew Ryan conducted at Starbucks Café
    on First and Main, Walla Walla, Washington, November 16, 2011.
Pedro, Wa-Hi student, personal interview by Catherine DeCramer conducted in Spanish at Wa-
    Hi, Walla Walla, Washington, November 9, 2011.

School Staff Interview Participants

Language note: All interviews were conducted in English.

Dr. Boggs, Linda. Assistant Superintendent to the WWPS, personal interview conducted by Simerun Singh and Emily Basham, Walla Walla, Washington, December 14, 2011.

Cox, Kendra. Blue Ridge Counselor, personal interview conducted by Simerun Singh at Blue Ridge, Walla Walla, Washington, November 3, 2011.

Doepker, Kim. Principal of Blue Ridge Elementary, personal interview conducted by Andrew Ryan and Emily Basham at Blue Ridge Elementary, Walla Walla, Washington, December 5, 2011.

Erickson, Diana. District Bilingual Coordinator, personal interview conducted by Simerun Singh by telephone, Walla Walla, Washington, December 6, 2011.

Higgins, Michelle. History teacher at Wa-Hi, personal interview conducted by Simerun Singh at Wa-Hi, Walla Walla, Washington, November 18, 2011.

Kelsay, Kim. Bilingual Coordinator at Wa-Hi, personal interview conducted by Simerun Singh at Wa-Hi, Walla Walla, Washington, November 10, 2011.

Ogoshi, Grace. Social Studies teacher at Garrison, personal interview conducted by Simerun Singh and Emily Basham at Garrison Middle School, Walla Walla, Washington, November 17, 2011.

Schafer, Curt. Spanish teacher at Wa-Hi, personal interview conducted by Simerun Singh at Wa-Hi, Walla Walla, Washington, November 15, 2011.

Rasley, Cathy. Cheer Coach at Wa-Hi and former Special Ed teacher at Wa-Hi, personal interview conducted by Simerun Singh and Andrew Ryan at Wa-Hi, November 7, 2011.

Reyes, Refugio. Spanish teacher at Wa-Hi and advisor to Latino Club, personal interview conducted by Simerun Singh and Catherine DeCramer at Wa-Hi, Walla Walla, Washington, November 14, 2011.

Weber, Sue. GEAR-UP Coordinator at Wa-Hi, personal interview conducted by Andrew Ryan at Whitman College, Walla Walla, Washington, November 8, 2011.

Van Donge, Sarah. Dual Language teacher at Garrison, personal interview conducted by Simerun Singh at Garrison Middle School, Walla Walla, Washington, November 17, 2011.

Yonts, Gina. Principal of Garrison Middle School, personal interview conducted by Simerun Singh and Emily Basham at Garrison, Walla Walla, Washington, November 18, 2011.

Primary Documents

Blue Ridge Discipline Procedures 2011-
   2012. http://www.blueridgeeagles.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10
   3:discipline-procedures&catid=41:about-our-school&Itemid=201
 "Cultural Values Comparison Study," written by Grace Ogoshi for this project. November 16,
   2011.
Education Trust "Accessed Denied" (2010).
   http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/Access%20Denied.pdf
"Focus on Education: Excellence in Every Classroom." Walla Walla Public School District
   Newsletter. Fall 2011. Vol 13, issue 1.
Garrison Middle School Student Handbook 2011
   2012. http://www.garrisonmiddleschool.org/images/2011-12_Student_Handbook__English--
   Columns_Final.pdf
Letter drafted by parents following a kindergarten parent meeting. Received by Catherine
   DeCramer. December 2, 2011.
National Center Education Statistics Findings in Brief (2009).
   http://nationsreportcard.gov/hsts_2009/summary.asp
National Center Education Statistics Findings in Brief (2011).
   http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2011/2012459.pdf
National Center Education Statistics "Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in
   the United States: 1972–2008" http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011012.pdf
No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, 20 U.S.C.A. § 6301 *et seq.* (West 2003)
"Student Achievement Gap." 2SSB 5973, RCW 28A.410.270.1(a). signed July, 26. 2009.
Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College
   Homepage. http://teachlikeachampion.wiley.com/
Walla Walla High School Student Handbook 2011-2012.
   http://www.wahibluedevils.org/images/Web_Student_Handbook_2011-2012.pdf
Walla Walla Public School Website: Leadership. "Strategic Plan Goals 2011-2015: Excellence in
   Every Classroom." <http://www.wwps.org/leadership>
Walla Walla Public Schools Website: News and Events. "Relationship expert Stu Cabe
   Continues Work with District to Help Develop Positive School Climate." December
   2011. http://www.wwps.org/news
Walla Walla Public Schools Website: News and Events. "State Assistant Superintendent for
   School Improvement Praises Walla Walla High School During Visit." May
   2011. http://www.wwps.org/news/
Walla Walla Public Schools, *Promising Practices*, Powerpoint data received from Blue Ridge
   Elementary Principal Kim Doepker, accessed 22 January, 2012.
Washington State Congress. ESHB 2261, 2009-10 Final Bill Report: Summary: Introduction:
   "Quality Education Council." Passed May 19, 2009.
Washington State Senate. 2009. *Second Substitute Senate Bill 5973: An Act Relating to closing
   the achievement gap in order to provide all students an excellent and equitable
   education.* 61st Leg., 2009 Regular Session. 2SSB 5973.PL.
"Youth Gangs." RCW 43.310.040. "Cultural Awareness Retreats." Washington State
   Legislature. 1993. http://www.leg.wa.gov/pages/home.aspx