LEARNING FROM TESTIMONIOS ABOUT EQUITY IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: EXPERIENCES OF LATINX PUBLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS IN NORTH CAROLINA

by

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ABSTRACT

CASSIE BRYSON-EVANS. Learning from Testimonios about Equity in Educational Leadership: Experiences of Latinx Public School Administrators in North Carolina. (Under the direction of DR. WALTER HART).

The significance of this study was its ability to further inform district and state level leaders and policy makers on the supports of the advancement and service of North Carolina's Latinx educators in school leadership roles. More specifically, this study shed light on the barriers and supports faced by Latinx public school administrators in North Carolina during their professional advancement into school leadership and within their current leadership roles. The purpose of this qualitative study was to use an equity lens to explore the experiences/testimonios of Latinx administrators: their perceptions and experiences as public-school administrators in North Carolina. This study explored the lived experiences of Latinx school administrators in North Carolina in order to foster understanding about the importance of racial and ethnic representation among teachers and school administrators for all students. A basic interpretative qualitative study, the researcher's data sources for this study involved semi-structure, open-ended, one-on-one interviews with six Latinx North Carolina PK-12 public school administrators. Results of the study indicate that participants were supported by colleagues, partnership programs, mentoring, and networking as aspiring and practicing administrators. Results also indicated that participants faced a variety of biases, systemic racism, and lack of mentoring and networking opportunities both as aspiring and practicing administrators. Implications included the need for additional administrative supports, changes within hiring practices and school/district cultures, an increase in Latinx recruitment programs, and increased partnerships with higher education programs for Latinx educators.

DEDICATION

To Thaddeus and Atticus – Thank you for making me a better person. You inspire me, motivate me, and show me ways to help others, ourselves, and to make a better future. This is for you two, for me – for us. May we always remember to learn from the past, cherish the present, and rise like the wings of an eagle into the future (Isaiah 40:31).

To my family, friends, heart-family, and colleagues (near and far, old and new), I am so thankful for your support, your safe space, your integrity, and your challenging mindsets. Thank you for your inspiration, love, and light – especially in the darkest of times. May we always strive to better ourselves, one another, and the world.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

As of 2020, the Latinx[1] population is the largest minority group within the United States, surpassing the African American population (Jones et al., 2021). As the Latinx population is increasing across the United States, many traditionally White communities are seeing an increase in school-age Latinx students within the school setting (Murakami, et al., 2016). Yet, the presence of Latinx teachers and school administrators does not reflect the diversity of students, particularly in suburban school districts (Fernandez, et al., 2015; Murakami, et al., 2016).

Research suggests that "student engagement and academic performance might be influenced by the presence or absence of adult role models, both teachers and principals, who students identify with ethnically or racially" (Fernandez et al., 2015, p.61). Despite this important relationship, and despite the increasing number of Latinx children in schools, research examining the career paths, barriers, and professional mobility of Latinx school leaders has been fairly limited in recent years (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Niño, et al., 2017; Sánchez, et al., 2020; Martinez, et al., 2020). In fact, most of the research pertaining to Latinx school leadership consists of unpublished dissertations focused within the geographic area of the Southwest United States (Niño et al., 2017; Sánchez et al., 2020). This lack of published research about Latinx school administrators, which has been accompanied by an increase in the Latinx school population within the United States, highlights the need for additional research studies within this area. As Murakami et al. (2016) noted, learning about Latinx school leadership can bring

[1] Latinx or Latina/o/x tends to be the academic terminology for the Latina/o and Hispanic population. With respect to individual identities and the right to self-identify, for the purposes of this academic study, the term Latinx will be used in place of Latina/o or Hispanic unless specified in direct quotes, statistics or participants interviews (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020).

cultural relevance to education, specifically to school administration by examining engagement, role modeling, and learning about various pedagogies focusing on underrepresented students.

Several factors combined to support the need for this study. First, the number of Latinx children is rapidly growing in schools nationwide. Next, research demonstrates the positive impact on children when they have role models they identify with ethnically or racially. Despite these realities, the number of Latinx school administrators is disproportionately low. Therefore, it is important to explore the salient factors that support increasing the number of Latinx school administrators (Niño et al., 2017; Sánchez et al., 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and LatCrit formed the theoretical framework of this study. CRT centers race as the forefront issue in society, while LatCrit specifically focuses on the experiences of Latinx individuals in the United States (Osorio, 2018). Both CRT and LatCrit served as the lens for the educational research of this study, adapting and borrowing from both theories.

Critical Race Theory is utilized by scholars in an effort to provide voice to marginalized groups in society by presenting research that focuses on the experiences and knowledge of these individuals and groups (Alemán, 2009). Solórzano (1998), as cited in Osorio (2018), outlined five elements defining CRT within education as: "(1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; (2) the challenger to dominant ideology; (3) the commitment to social justice; (4) the emphasis of experiential knowledge; and (5) the importance of interdisciplinary perspectives" (p.94). For the purposes of this study, these tenets underlay the framework in which the research was analyzed. However, the researcher focused on the following tenets:

- Emphasis of experiential knowledge: CRT recognizes that the knowledge of people of color is critical to learning about, understanding, and teaching about race and racism in education. This knowledge is viewed as a strength and draws explicitly from the lived experiences of people of color using methods such as storytelling, biographies, narratives, and family history (Osorio, 2018). This emphasis of experiential knowledge provides the opportunity and space for marginalized individuals and groups to be heard that is needed for social transformation (Alemán, 2009).
- Commitment to social justice: CRT seeks to challenge individuals to eliminate racism and additional forms of subordination and marginalization while empowering people of color and marginalized groups, thereby advancing the social justice agenda (Osorio, 2018; Alemán, 2009).

While CRT focuses on all people of color, LatCrit Theory specifically focuses research on the Latinx community as a marginalized group (Alemán, 2009). LatCrit incorporates four functions according to Osorio (2018):

- research based within learning from marginalized voices that have not had the opportunity to be shared or their stories have been silenced in the past,
- the advancement of societal transformation by learning through these stories and pushing against dominant ideologies,
- the continuation of research based on the learning about the struggles and possible connects based on knowledge gathered that may have been previously ignored, and
- the sharing of the research for the cultivation of community bringing individuals together and to push against majoritarian discourses/dominant ideologies.

Educational scholars have begun to tell stories of the lived experiences of Latinx within public education and higher education by integrating LatCrit scholarship and theory in their research while seeking to impact and promote social change (Alemán, 2009).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to use an equity lens to explore the experiences and counterstories[2] of Latinx administrators: their perceptions and experiences as public school administrators within suburban and urban school districts located in the Southeastern United States. There is a need to explore the lived experiences of Latinx school administrators located in the Southeastern United States due to increased understanding about the importance of racial and ethnic representation among teachers and school administrators for students. Research suggests that adult role models who reflect students' ethnic or racial similarities can positively affect student engagement and academic performance (Fernandez et al., 2015). Additionally, the volume of research on Latinx leadership in schools is limited, and the research that does exist tends to be limited to the Southwestern region of the United States. Therefore, researching the lived experiences of Latinx public school administrators in the Southeastern United States is a salient endeavor and served two useful purposes. First, this study helps to fill a gap in existing literature. Next, this study can inform policy makers and others who seek to improve educational experiences for the Latinx community.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are based on the work of Fernandez et al. (2015). This study sought to answer the following questions:

[2] The term "counterstories" is "both a technique of telling the story of those experiences that are not often told (especially by those on the margins of society)" (Osorio, 2018, p.95).

1. What do Latinx public school administrators perceive to be the factors that supported their professional advancement into school leadership?
2. What do Latinx public school administrators perceive to be the factors that inhibited their professional advancement into school leadership?
3. How do Latinx public school administrators characterize the support they experience in their current professional role?
4. How do Latinx public school administrators characterize the challenges they experience in their current professional role?

Delimitations

There are several delimitations associated with this study. First, the participants for the proposed study are located in the Southeastern region of the United States. Specifically, this research focused on public school Latinx administrators located in North Carolina. Second, as the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) reported almost no public school Latinx administrators in the state, the sample was not limited to one classification of administrators (Cash, 2021). The sample included principals, assistant principals, and deans of students, with a total of six participants. The small number of potential participants also meant that there was no attempt to limit participation based on other personal or professional characteristics for participants such as gender or years of experience. Third, the research was conducted in the fall of 2022.

Assumptions

There are several assumptions within this study. The first assumption is that all participants identified as Latinx, Latino/a and/or Hispanic. No attempt was made to formally verify participants' racial and ethnic identities; rather, the researcher relied on self-reports from

the participants via the initial demographic survey. The second assumption of the study is that all Latinx, Latino/a, and/or Hispanic participants were currently employed as public school administrators or have served in this role within the past two years. The third assumption of the study is that the sample size of six participants yielded sufficient and suitably rich data and information. It is also assumed that the participants in this study fully, openly, and honestly answered all of the interview questions and provided the most accurate and timely data possible. To encourage participants to be forthright in their responses, they were informed that their participation is voluntary and that all data gathered was de-identified to maintain confidentiality. Finally, it is also assumed that the interview protocol elicited the desired perspectives from participants.

Definition of Relevant Terms

The following terms are used throughout this study:

Race: Any one of the groups that humans are often divided into based on physical traits regarded as common among people of shared ancestry (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

Ethnic Group: Of or relating to large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

Latinx: Latinx is the chosen term utilizing a non-binary label within academic research and representation for the Latina/o and Hispanic population. With respect to individual identities and the right to self-identify, for the purposes of this academic study, the term Latinx was used in place of Latina/o or Hispanic unless specified in direct quotes, statistics, or participants interviews. For self-identification, individuals who identify themselves as Latino/a or Hispanic may include individuals who identify themselves as

being from or descents of Mexico, Puerto Rico, Central and South America and/or other Spanish-speaking countries (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020).

Counterstories: Counterstorying is a Critical Race methodology and is a technique researchers use to tell narratives of lived experiences that are not often told, with a focus on marginalized individuals (Osorio, 2018). Within the context of this study, counterstories are called "Testimonios."

Marginalize: Additional forms of this term may include marginalization, margins and marginalized in the study. This term is used to describe individuals and groups of people that society and research tend not to focus on or there is limited research or representation within the discussed aspect of society (Oxford University Press, 2021).

Testimonios: Testimonios is a Spanish term for first-hand accounts or oral histories for a narrative research methodology within Latin American History (Mora, 2015).

Summary and Organization of the Study

The growing number of Latinx children in schools is accompanied by a noticeable absence of Latinx school administrators. Given the need for school leaders to represent the communities they serve and given the positive impact on children of having adult role models with similar cultural and racial backgrounds, understanding the factors that will support and encourage Latinx school administrators is salient. As much of the literature that explores the experiences of Latinx administrators is dated, this research intended to fill a gap in scholarly knowledge and offer recommendations for professional practice that will support Latinx administrators.

This chapter described the purpose of the study along with the applicable research questions. Additionally, the theoretical framework was introduced along with an overview of the

research methodology, design, and rationale. Finally, the study's potential significance was stated, delimitations and assumptions were noted, and key terms were defined.

The remainder of the study is organized into four chapters. Chapter 2 provides a review of scholarly literature regarding Latinx administrators in schools and the contextual theories used to interpret the findings of this study. Chapter 3 describes all aspects of the research design and methodology along with strategies to ensure trustworthiness. The major findings from the analysis of data and the themes that arise from these findings are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of outcomes and the relationship of findings to other research, implications for professional practice, and recommendations for further studies. The study culminates with a bibliography of referenced literature and appendices.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Latinx is the largest minority group in the United States (Jones et al., 2021). For the purposes of this study, the term Latinx[3][4] refers to all Latina/o and Hispanic[5] individuals with an ethnic relationship to Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Central/South America (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016, Noe-Bustamante et al, 2020). The Latinx population continues to increase within traditional locations in the United States such as the Southwest, but it has also started to expand in nontraditional locations such as the state of Georgia (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Murakami et al., 2016; Rodela & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2020). With the expansion of the Latinx population within the United States, including the school setting, there is an essential need for school leaders to be diverse (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016).

Currently, the percentage of Latinx school leaders does not reflect the number of Latinx students, especially in rural and suburban areas (Fernandez et al., 2015; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Sánchez et al., 2020). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), the number of Hispanic principals within North Carolina and South Carolina in the 2012-2013 school year rounded to zero. By the 2017-18 school year, only 8.9% of all principals across the United States were labeled Hispanic (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). The percentage of public-school principals of color, specifically African American and Latinx, barely increased from the 1987-1988 school year to the 2011-2012 school year (Anderson, 2016; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2017). Despite changing student demographics, more recent data from

[3] Latinx or Latina/o/x tends to be the academic terminology for the Latina/o and Hispanic population. With respect to individual identities and the right to self-identify, for the purposes of this academic study, the term Latinx will be used in place of Latina/o or Hispanic unless specified in direct quotes, statistics or participants interviews.

[4] For more information, please read: Noe-Bustamante, L., Mora, L. & Lopez, M. (2020). About One-in-Four U.S. Hispanics Have Heard of Latinx, but Just 3% Use It. Pew Research Center.

[5] "The term *Latina/o*, unlike the term *Hispanic*, connotes common values but leaves room for individual differences and does not strip people of their historical identity" (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016, p.21).

NCDPI indicated that only one percent of the state's principals were Latinx in 2021; there were only 30 Latinx principals out of 2,465 principals in North Carolina (Cash, 2021). In describing the relationship between these changing demographics and Latinx leadership, Niño et al., (2017) noted: "As the demographics change and the Latino student population continues to grow, we must look carefully at approaches to leadership that mirror these changing demographics" (p.10).

Research suggests that academic performance and student engagement may be affected by adult role models, both teachers and school leaders, who can identify with students ethnically and/or racially (Fernandez et al., 2015). In addition, research suggests that Latinx school leaders are able to understand the cultural and linguistic challenges often presented to Latinx students (Murakami et al., 2016). As Hernandez and Murakami (2016) noted:

> In order to change the odds and improve the educational landscape for Latina/o students, we focused on the Latina/o imperative: valuing the educational leaders who can guide a further understanding of the experiences of these students and families. Those who lead schools and understand these complexities can support Latina/o students in succeeding socially and academically in schools (p.12).

Underrepresented and marginalized students may have more engagement and increased academic possibilities with the promotion of role modeling and culturally related pedagogies when learning about Latinx leadership and cultural relevance within school administration (Murakami et al., 2016, Hernandez & Murakami, 2016).

The review of literature revealed several themes that will be described in this chapter. The literature related to each of these themes and this study's theoretical framework is summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Literature Table

Current Latinx Trends and History of Latinx in United States

Context and Explanations (Jones et al., 2021; Fernandez et al., 2015; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Martinez et al., 2020; Murakami et al., 2016; Niño et al., 2017; Sánchez et al., 2020)

Theoretical Framework (Alemán, 2009; Osorio, 2018)

Definition of Relevant Terms (Merriam-Webster, 2021; Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020; Osorio, 2018; Oxford University Press, 2021)

Introduction to Latinx Population in United States and Public Education (Anderson, 2016; Cash, 2021; Fernandez et al., 2015; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2017; Jones et al., 2021; Murakami et al., 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, 2021; Niño et al., 2017; Noe-Bustamante, Mora, & Lopez, 2020; Rodela & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2020; Sánchez et al., 2020)

Current Latinx Population Trends in the United States (Krogstad, 2020; Noe-Bustamante & Flores, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2021; Tamir, 2021; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021)

History of Latinx Population in the United States (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Krogstad, 2020; Krogstad & Noe-Bustamante, 2021; Pew Hispanic Center, 2021)

Latinx within United States Educational Systems

Litigation for Latinx Educational Advancement (Acosta, 2020; Alexander & Alexander, 2019; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Lopez & Lopez, 2010; Library of Congress, 2021; Orozco, 2020)

PK-12 School Setting for Latinx Students & Teachers (Bergey et al., 2019; Hernandez &

Murakami, 2016; Martinez et al., 2020; Noe-Bustamante & Flores, 2019; Núñez and Meráz García, 2017; Stein et al., 2018)

Higher Education Setting for Latinx Students including Preservice Teachers (Bergey et al., 2019; Garza, 2019; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Noe-Bustamante & Flores, 2019)

Latinx School Leadership in the United States (Cash, 2021; Fernandez et al., 2015; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Hernandez et al., 2014; Martinez, Rivera, & Marquez, 2020; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Niño et al., 2017; Rodela et al., 2019; Sánchez et al., 2020)

Current Latinx Population Trends in the United States

As of the 2020 United States Census, the Latinx population became the largest minority group within the United States. As of 2019, the Latinx population made up 18% of the U.S. population, reaching a record of 60.6 million (Krogstad, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2021). The Latinx population accounted for 52% of the total U.S. growth between 2010 and 2019 (Krogstad, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2021). Respectively, the Asian population had a 22% growth rate increase, and the Black population had a 17% growth rate increase during the same time period (Krogstad, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2021).

The nation's largest Latinx populations were found in the four border states of California, Texas, Arizona and New Mexico. Together, as of 2019, these states represented 50% of the U.S. Latinx population (Krogstad, 2020; Pew Hispanic Center, 2021). Furthermore, 45% of the U.S. Latinx population is found in California (15.6 million Latinx individuals) and Texas (11.5 million Latinx individuals) (Krogstad, 2020; Pew Hispanic Center, 2021). Whereas, the Dakotas

may have had the most rapid increases in the U.S. Latinx population among the 50 states since 2010, the Southeastern United States is the fastest growing region for the Latinx population. (Krogstad, 2020; Pew Hispanic Center, 2021). As Krogstad (2020) noted:

> The South saw the fastest growth in Latino population, increasing by 26% from 2010 to 2019, followed by the Northeast (18%), Midwest (18%) and West (14%). The South has accounted for nearly half (48%) of Latino population growth since 2010 (p.1).

Data from North Carolina indicate that growth in the state's Latinx population has mimicked national and Southeastern trends. According to Tippett (2019), Latinx individuals comprised 8.4% of North Carolina's population in 2010. By 2019, that number grew to 9.6%, with the largest concentration in Mecklenburg and Wake Counties. Notable concentrations were found in rural counties and smaller towns across the state.

As future population growth is affected by the current ages of individuals, it is important to describe the ages of the Latinx community. According to Pew Research Center (2021), the median age for the Latinx population is 30 (Krogstad, 2020). Two states in the South account for two of the lowest median ages for Latinx individuals: North Carolina (25 years) and Georgia (27 years) (Krogstad, 2020). As of 2017, individuals between the ages of five and 17 represented the largest age group within the Latinx population (23%). These ages are significantly lower than other racial groups. For example, the median age of the U.S. Latinx population is 30, the median age of White individuals is 43, the median age of African American individuals is 35, and the median age of Asian American individuals is 38 (Krogstad, 2020; Tamir, 2021). The Latinx population is relatively young, suggesting continued growth in the population of Latinx individuals in coming years.

Growth in the Latinx population has been accompanied by the challenges of poverty as a significant percentage of the Latinx community is impacted by poverty (Noe-Bustamante & Flores, 2019). As of 2017, 19% of the total U.S. Latinx population lived in poverty and the median annual household income of the Latinx population was $49,010 (Noe-Bustamante & Flores, 2019). Twenty-seven percent of those living in poverty were children between the ages of five and 17. Within the past five years, the average Latinx median income has increased to $55,321 whereas the median household income for African Americans was $45,870. By contrast, the average median income for White (non-Hispanic) individuals during this same time period was $74,912 and Asian America's median income was $94,903 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

Historical Struggles of Latinx Population in the United States

The Latinx population in the United States is diverse. While 62% of the Latinx population was born in the United States, there are several backgrounds and nationalities that compose the Latinx population (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). Mexican origin represents the largest Latinx population origin (61.9%) in the United States (Krogstad & Noe-Bustamante, 2021). Puerto Ricans make up the second largest group with 9.7% and the Cuban population comes in third with 4%. Additionally, the other 24.4% consist of 20 other Hispanic origin groups including, but not limited to, Salvadorian (3.9%), Dominican (3.5%), Guatemalan (2.5%), Columbian (2.1%), Honduran (1.6%), Spaniard (1.4%), Ecuadorian (1.2%), and Peruvian (1.1%). Other groups that comprised less than 1% of the Latinx population included: Venezuelan, Nicaraguan, Argentine, Panamanian, Chilean, Costa Rican, Bolivian, Uruguayan and Paraguayan (Krogstad & Noe-Bustamante, 2021).

The complexity and diversity of the Latinx population in the United States derive from several sources, including diasporic movement in the Americas, indigenous history, and conquests of land (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). As previously discussed, the nation's largest Latinx populations reside in one of four border states: California, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico. As of 2019, these four states represented 50% of the U.S. Latinx population (Krogstad, 2020; Pew Hispanic Center, 2021). This dynamic occurs largely because of the proximity with Mexico and the fact that in 1848, half of Mexico's territory forcibly became part of the United States following the Mexican-American War. This annexation included the areas where New Mexico, California, Texas, Arizona, Colorado, and Utah are located today. While the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty in 1848 provided U.S. citizenship to those individuals residing in these conquered areas, the voting rights of these individuals were limited, and they were further victimized by racial segregation (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). In addition to the conquest of Mexican territory in 1848, the 1898 invasion of Puerto Rico by the United States incorporated even more Latinx population into the United States (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016).

The historical labeling of individuals residing in these conquered territories has also been complex. As Hernandez and Murakami (2016) explain:

> In 1897, Texas courts ruled Mexican Americans as being non-White, while in California, Mexican Americans were considered White until 1930 when they were categorized as Indians. Even when considered indigenous, Mexican Americans were still segregated. At the time, California school district codes produced provisions to discern between Indians and descendants of the "original" American Indians of the United States' this was done to enforce segregated schools (pp.7-8).

Much of the presence of the Latinx population residing within the United States can be accounted for from three sources: colonization as noted above, diasporic movement of refugees due to political or economic oppression or voluntary migration, and immigration - not including adoptions or hybrid/mixed-heritage Latinx individuals (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). Since 2007, the number of Latinx immigrants has increased from 18 million to 19.8 million. However, the immigrant population made up a declining percentage of the Latinx population within the United States, decreasing from 40% to 33% (Krogstad & Noe-Bustamante, 2021).

Litigation for Latinx Educational Advancement

The pursuit for educational rights for the Latinx population within the United States has primarily been advocated for from the Mexican American community (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). Many of the educational rights that are established today for the Latinx population have been achieved through lawsuits, similar to the historical struggles and patterns seen for the American Indian population (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). Like the American Indians, language has been one pathway for educational assimilation or exclusion for the Latinx population, including the pressure to only speak English in public schools to later having to enroll in secondary language classes at the higher education level (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). The primarily historical struggle for the Latinx population in the United States in terms of schooling has been related to immigration laws that cause schooling issues such as school enrollment, immunizations, higher education accessibility with these children caught in the middle (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). Based on litigation and the history of marginalization of the Latinx population in the United States, Latinx individuals report that schools are one of the first places that they experience discrimination (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). Several lawsuits have impacted educational opportunities for Latinx students and have highlighted the history of

discrimination of Latinx individuals within the United States. These lawsuits are described in the sections that follow.

***Del Rio Independent School District v. Salvatierra* (1931)**

This case, which occurred in Texas, was the first in which plaintiffs alleged that maintaining segregated schools for Mexican children violated the Fourteenth Amendment. The Texas state courts ruled to allow the segregation of Mexican children until the third grade, thus allowing Texas to have a tripartite system of segregation in which White, Mexican, and African American children attended school separately. It was not until *Delgado v. Bastrop Independent School District* (1948) that the Texas courts ruled that maintaining segregated, separate schools for children of Mexican descent was a violation of the United States Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment (Orozco, 2020).

***Alvarez v. the Board of Trustees of the Lemon Grove School District* (1931)**

Texas was not alone in its segregation of Mexican children in its schools. Some of the earliest cases focusing on school segregation started in the 1930s and occurred in the Southwest United States and California. This case was set in California. This school segregation case was the first case in United States' history where the courts ruled against segregation. The state courts in California ruled that schools could not implement segregated schools based on limited English language or other arguments for children of Mexican origin (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016).

***Mendez v. Westminster* (1946)**

This case set the stage for the renowned *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case. Represented by Thurgood Marshall, parents won a federal lawsuit against the state of California in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals because it had segregated Mexican American children in the public school setting. The courts ruled that this segregation was unconstitutional. This is the

first case that introduced evidence that school segregation was harmful to children of categorized minority ethnicities and racial identification (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016).

***Rodriguez v. San Antonio Independent School District* (1971)**

This landmark case dealt with a class action lawsuit in which a federal district court stated Texas' school-finance system was unconstitutional under the 14th amendment (Orozo, 2020). This school-finance lawsuit illustrated the funding inequalities between predominantly White populated schools and Mexican American populated schools (Alexander & Alexander, 2019; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). However, two years later in 1973, the Supreme Court ruled five to four against Rodriguez. The Supreme Court ruled that Texas did not have an unconstitutional violation of the 14th Amendment and rejected the argument that education is a fundamental right (Library of Congress, 2021). This case would later be the premise of *Edgewood Independent School District v. Kirby* (1989).

***Plyler v. Doe* (1982)**

This case focused on the litigation surrounding undocumented students in Texas. The court ordered the entitlement of state-funded, free public education at the elementary and secondary levels to undocumented children (Alexander & Alexander, 2019; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). In 1982, the Supreme Court ruled a section of the Texas Education Code unconstitutional. In addition, the Supreme Court ruling held schools responsible for extending and including undocumented children under protection of the Equal Protection Clause in the 14th Amendment (Library of Congress, 2021).

***Edgewood Independent School District v. Kirby* (1989)**

This case occurred in Texas with the premise based on *Rodriguez v. San Antonio Independent School District,* which had previously asked the courts to address the funding

disparities between predominantly White populated schools and Mexican American populated schools. *Edgewood Independent School District v. Kirby* (1989) was a landmark public school finance case which continued the discussion of funding inequalities between White and Mexican American populated schools. Plaintiffs proposed to remediate Latinx populated schools based on unequal services and desired to provide ways to recognize and address funding disparities between the two populated school demographics (Acosta, 2020; Alexander & Alexander, 2019; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). In 1992, the Supreme Court ruled that the Texas school finance methods were unconstitutional and ordered Texas to implement an equitable education system (Acosta, 2020, Library of Congress, 2021).

PK-12 School Setting for Latinx Students and Teachers

Historically, Latinx individuals have been marginalized within education (Martinez et al., 2020). There are disparate educational outcomes between the Latinx population and the population at large, with a smaller percentage of Latinx individuals achieving post-secondary degrees. As of 2017, 39% of all Americans who were 25 years old or older had a high school degree or less educational attainment, 29% had a two-year degree or some college, and 32% had a bachelor's degree or higher (Noe-Bustamante & Flores, 2019). By contrast, 59% of the Latinx population ages 25 and older had a high school or less educational attainment; 25% had a two-year degree/some college and only 16% had a bachelor's degree or higher educational attainment. These data reveal that Latinx individuals are attaining post-secondary education at a significantly lower rate than the overall population. As Bergey, et al. (2019) noted, "These poor educational outcomes reflect widespread systemic inequalities in educational opportunities that underscore the racial nature of educational opportunity gaps in the United States" (p.2). Stein et al. (2018) utilized survey and interview data to report that Latinx students had fewer positive

experiences compared to other racial and ethnic groups at a Texas high school. Further analysis of the data revealed racial injustices within enrollment, student-teacher relationships, school policies, and Latinx student experiences with stereotypes and prejudice (Stein et al., 2018).

The majority of schools that Latinx students attend are racially segregated, under-resourced, over-crowded, and have high teacher attrition (Bergey et al., 2019). In addition, Latinx students, especially Latinx students, are less likely than White students to be in gifted and talented programs, less likely to be offered the necessary high school courses commonly required for college admissions, and more likely to be receiving special education services (Bergey et al., 2019). These macro-level systems of inequity patterns illustrate the disparities that Latinx students face in educational systems across the United States. These barriers hinder the development and achievement of Latinx children within PK-12 educational settings, limit their preparation for college admissions, and help to negatively frame their perceptions of opportunities and areas for success (Bergey et al., 2019; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016).

Núñez and Meráz García (2017) studied the perceptions of Latinx elementary schools pertaining to ethnic identity and the perceptions of college. The researchers interviewed randomly selected second through fifth grade Latinx students using a version of the Kenneth B. Clark and Mamie Phipps Clark doll experiment (Núñez & Meráz García, 2017). The researchers found that the Latinx children held their race/ethnicity in lower regard as compared to White students. In addition, the study found that Latino students had less favorable perceptions of themselves compared to the Latina students. These views regarding identity may negatively affect Latinx students' self-esteem as well as their perceptions of college as an attainable goal (Núñez & Meráz García, 2017).

Núñez and Meráz García (2017) made recommendations based on their findings. They recommended the Kinder to College Program utilized by some school districts. This program encourages kindergarten students to visit college campuses with their parents/guardians (Núñez & Meráz García, 2017). Additional recommendations included having PK-12 schools to invite colleges and universities into the school setting and creating support systems to help Latinx students in the application and financial aid process for college entrance (Núñez & Meráz García, 2017).

Higher Education Setting for Latinx Students

Given the disparities that have already been described, it is not surprising to find educational inequities in higher education for Latinx students. According to Pew Research Center (2021), Latinx individuals have less educational attainment than the total population. For example, 25% of Latinx individuals over the age of 25 hold a two-year degree/some college and only 16% have a bachelor's degree or higher (Noe-Bustamante & Flores, 2019). Overall, high school graduation rates, college readiness, and college enrollment for Latinx students are well below White students. These concerning trends are even worse for Latino students than Latina students (Bergey et al., 2019, Noe-Bustamante & Flores, 2019).

This systemic inequity is further illustrated in the barrier of language in the PK-12 and higher education settings. According to Pew Research Center, roughly 70% of the Hispanic population in the United States speaks Spanish at home, making it the second most widely spoken language in the country (Krogstad & Noe-Bustamante, 2021). However, the use of the Spanish language is discouraged in many schools (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). Yet, many of these same students are required to learn a foreign language in college. Thus, these Latinx

students then may have to pay tuition to relearn the same language that they were discouraged to use in the PK-12 setting (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016).

Similar to the inequalities of educational opportunities for Latinx students overall, Latinx preservice teachers are more likely to encounter racial and ethnic barriers in teacher training programs than their White counterparts (Bergey et al., 2019). Racism in college programs and teaching programs for preservice teachers, including racially insensitive comments, stereotypes, and social marginalization in their interactions with higher education professors and students, may go unchallenged. These discriminatory behaviors may result in psychological and social pressures for preservice Latinx teachers (Bergey et al., 2019).

The limited number of Latinx educators overall contributes to the noticeable absence of Latinx administrators. Simply stated, there are not enough Latinx teachers because there are not enough Latinx students that are graduating high school, enrolling in college, and entering teacher education programs (Garza, 2019). The finding is exacerbated by data that reveal that Latinx preservice teachers pass their certification exams with a lower rate than White preservice teachers (Bergey, et al., 2019). As principals commonly come from within the teaching ranks, the limited number of Latinx teachers means that there will be a limited number of Latinx principals.

This noticeable absence of Latinx school administrators was recognized by one institution of higher education in North Carolina. According to Shore et al. (2021), concerns over the absences of Latinx school leaders even as the population of Latinx students dramatically increased caused officials in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina Charlotte to implement a proactive recruitment, scholarship, and mentoring

program known as the Latinx Leadership Initiative. This initiative seeks to increase the number of Latinx teachers in master's programs that lead to licensure as a school administrator.

According to Shore et. al. (2021), the initial results of the Latinx Leadership Initiative have been positive. While still a relatively young initiative, the program has seen the number of Latinx administrators slowly increase in the Charlotte Mecklenburg schools. Specifically, as of 2021, there were at least three Latinx deans of students and three Latinx assistant principals who came from this program. Additionally, seventeen new Latinx students joined the Latinx Leadership Initiative. One graduate of the program now participates in the doctoral program in educational leadership at the University of North Carolina Charlotte. The initial success of the Latinx Leadership Initiative has prompted officials in the teacher education program at the University of North Carolina Charlotte to become more proactive in their recruitment of Latinx students into teacher education majors (Shore et al, 2021).

Latinx School Leadership in the United States

Research surrounding Latinx school leadership reached a peak in the 1990s revolving around the topics of career mobility as well as barriers and career pathways for Latinx school principals (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). More recently, there has been very little research about Latinx school leaders. The majority of the research that does exist largely consists of unpublished dissertations focusing on the Southwestern United States region (Niño et al., 2017; Fernandez et al., 2015; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). Perhaps this limited research is due to the relatively small number of Latinx school administrators. Recently, there were only 30 Latinx principals out of 2,465 principals within North Carolina (Cash, 2021).

Research suggests a variety of personal barriers exist for Latinx educational leaders. Common personal barriers for Latinx educational leaders, especially Latinas, include family,

religion, and community and career balance between personal and professional lives (Niño et al., 2017; Hernandez et al., 2014; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Sánchez et al., 2020). Additional discriminatory experiences affecting Latina school leadership have included "comments made about their appearance, age or stature, push back on their use of Spanish in reaching Latinx families, and sexual harassment from other administrators" (Rodela et al., 2019, p.4).

Professional barriers for Latinx educational leaders include racial discrimination, the lack of formal mentorship, and a lack of networking opportunities (Rodela et al., 2019). Research indicates this lack of formal, professional mentorship is a frequent barrier for Latinx school leaders, especially Latina school leaders (Rodela et al., 2019). This dynamic is problematic because networking provides access to develop relationships and potential job opportunities. Also, the lack of formal mentoring limits networking opportunities that help to develop an understanding of the social norms within the networking system. For example, "Latinx leaders reported that a lack of knowledge about the unspoken rules of leadership put them at a disadvantage, and often led to feelings of isolation" (Rodela et al., 2019, p.4). These feelings of isolation and discrimination may be even more exacerbated in states with less Latinx school leaders (Rodela et al., 2019). As Hernandez and Murakami (2016) highlighted, "The importance of mentoring and of role models for Latina/o leaders is of important consideration, especially when there is an absence of mentors familiar with the same cultural experience" (p.37).

In addition to these common barriers, Latinx school leaders are often placed in high poverty and/or highly diverse school settings that can be challenging to lead. These placements are often based on the notion that Latinx leaders working in these situations might build strong ties with the local community. These ties, in turn, might support their leadership trajectories. (Martinez et al., 2020; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). In reality, these placements often land

Latinx leaders in difficult leadership situations while still lacking the formal, professional mentorship that would positively affect their success. (Rodela et al., 2019).

Conclusion

This chapter provided a review of scholarly literature regarding Latinx administrators in schools and the contextual theories used to interpret the findings of this study. This review included an in-depth analysis of the Latinx population trends in the United States, and the historical struggles of the Latinx population in the United States. Also, litigation supporting Latinx educational advancement was described along with an overview of the experiences of Latinx educators, preservice teachers, and students.

Several themes recur in the literature. First, the Latinx population in the United States has been greatly impacted by historical marginalization, with the basic rights of citizenship being earned only through periods of strife and litigation. Next, changing demographics have generated significant increases in the Latinx population in the United States, with this trend likely to continue. As such, schools that have traditionally had limited interactions with Latinx communities have been impacted and will continue to face more pronounced demands to meet the needs of Latinx students. These changes illuminate the noticeable absence of Latinx school administrators and the potentially positive impact of proactively identifying ways to encourage and support Latinx administrators.

Chapter 3 describes the research design and methods utilized in the study, role and positionality of the researcher, research site and participants, protection of human subjects, approaches to sampling and data collection, data analysis and interpretation techniques, and strategies for quality applied in the research. The major findings from the analysis of data and the themes that arise from these findings are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides a summary,

discussion of outcomes and the relationship of findings to other research. Chapter 5 also includes implications for professional practice and recommendations for further studies. The study culminates with a bibliography of referenced literature and appendices.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter 1 described the purpose of the study with the applicable research questions. Additionally, the theoretical framework was discussed and an overview of the research methodology, design, and rationale. The study's potential significance was stated, delimitations and assumptions were noted, and key terms were defined. Chapter 2 provided a review of scholarly literature regarding Latinx administrators in schools and the contextual theories used to interpret the findings of this study. Chapter 3 describes the research design and methods utilized in the study, role and positionality of the researcher, research site and participants, protection of human subjects, approaches to sampling and data collection, data analysis and interpretation techniques, and strategies for quality applied in the research.

Introduction with Research Questions

In 2020, the Latinx[6] population became the largest minority group in the United States, surpassing the African American population (Jones et al., 2021). While the Latinx population is increasing across the United States, many traditionally White communities are also seeing an increase in school-age Latinx children within the school setting (Murakami et al., 2016). Yet, the percentage of Latinx teachers and school administrators does not reflect the diversity of students, specifically in suburban school districts (Fernandez et al., 2015; Murakami et al., 2016).

Research suggests that "student engagement and academic performance might be influenced by the presence or absence of adult role models, both teachers and principals, who students identify with ethnically or racially" (Fernandez et al., 2015, p.61). However, research involving Latinx school leaders has been limited. This research increased in the 1980s but has

[6] Latinx or Latina/o/x tends to be the academic terminology for the Latina/o and Hispanic population. With respect to individual identities and the right to self-identify, for the purposes of this academic study, the term Latinx will be used in place of Latina/o or Hispanic unless specified in direct quotes, statistics or participants interviews.

slowed since then. (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Niño et al., 2017; Sánchez et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2020). Most of the research pertaining to Latinx school leadership is in the form of unpublished dissertations focusing within the area of the Southwest United States (Niño et al., 2017; Sánchez et al., 2020). The lack of published research about Latinx school administrators and the increase of the Latinx population, specifically in public schools, within the United States highlights the need for additional research studies within this area. As Murakami et al. (2016) noted: "Learning about Latina/o leadership brings cultural relevance to the field of school administration. This can be witnessed by emulating possibilities for underrepresented students to better engage in schools, promoting role modeling and cultural-relational pedagogies" (p.282).

As the U.S. Latinx population increases overall and in schools specifically, it is important to examine the experiences of Latinx school leaders (Niño et al., 2017; Sánchez et al., 2020). To accomplish this purpose, this study sough to answer research questions which are based on the work of Fernandez et al. (2015). The research questions for this study included:

1. What do Latinx public school administrators perceive to be the factors that supported their professional advancement into school leadership?
2. What do Latinx public school administrators perceive to be the factors that inhibited their professional advancement into school leadership?
3. How do Latinx public school administrators characterize the support they experience in their current professional role?
4. How do Latinx public school administrators characterize the challenges they face in their current professional role?

Research Design

A qualitative, phenomenological methodology was chosen for this study in order to develop an understanding of the lived experiences that Latinx school administrators encountered in their pursuit to become leaders and the lived experiences related to their current professional roles. This approach allowed for a more personal approach to the research as participants shared their lived experiences, their perceptions of their current school leadership roles, and their pathways to leadership. The following section provides the justification for the selection and usage of a phenomenological methodology and how the research method aligns with the research questions.

A phenomenological approach to research seeks to capture the meaning and common features of an experience or event through an examination of individuals, their experiences, and perspectives (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). It is based on the paradigm of an individual's knowledge and subjectivity (Hovis, 2021). Utilizing a phenomenological approach within a qualitative research design contextualizes and reflects on the meaning of an individual's personal experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

The methodology of this study was based on the quest to understand the participants' perceptions of their lived experiences while they were becoming school leaders. It also sought to understand their lived experiences while serving in their current role as school leader. Due to the limited research and marginalization of the Latinx population within school leadership research, these experiences will be considered counterstories and called "testimonios" within the study. Osorio (2018), described counterstories:

> Counterstorying is both a technique of telling the story of those experiences that are not often told (especially by those on the margins of society) and a tool for analyzing and

challenging the stories of those in power whose stories are presented in the dominant discourse as 'natural' (p.95).

Phenomenological qualitative research seeks to identify, understand, and illuminate the specifics of a phenomenon through the lens of participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). For this phenomenological study, the researcher first looked through the lens of Latinx public school administrators as they described their lived experiences as they matriculated through the professional ranks to become school administrators. Using the same lens, the researcher also sought to understand their perceptions about their current roles as school administrators.

Positionality Statement

Qualitative researchers must embrace the understanding that they are the primary instrument within qualitative research. The impact the researcher can have on the questions asked, the methods, data collection, and data analysis is extremely important to understand and acknowledge. "Recognizing that you are not simply collecting data in a unilateral way is important to conducting ethical and complex qualitative research" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p.106).

Positionality is related to a researcher's positioning in relation to the context of the study. A positionality statement describes this relationship. It is a much more introspective analysis - one that looks at yourself, your dimensions of understanding, and the foundations of that knowledge. As Merriweather (2015) noted, developing a positionality statement requires the researcher to be introspective and to carefully, continually examine oneself within their research. The importance of a positionality statement is that it essentially holds the researcher accountable as the primary data collection instrument. It challenges the researcher to seek out their own positionality, both active and passive, throughout the research process. (Peshkin, 1988; Merriweather, 2015).

Recently within education, many states and districts have discussed the concept of equity versus equality. As the researcher, I sought to research solutions to create an equitable, sustainable education system addressing the needs of marginalized groups. Specifically, this focus led me to research the representation of diversity within public school administration within North Carolina. I focused on the Latinx representation within public school administration as this percentage currently rounds down to one percent within North Carolina (Cash, 2021).

In full transparency, I am a White female who worked in education within the United States for over 12 years. I taught in PK-12 schools in the Carolinas, Colorado, and Hawaii, working with high poverty, high minority students. From 2018 - 2022, I served as a North Carolina public school administrator in high poverty schools. I sought to create understanding and build bridges to help acknowledge the diversity issues surrounding equitable representation in public school administration. I also sought to have crucial conversations with people in my personal life about these disconnections and the spectrum of systematic racism. I recently left public education to become a trainer and educational specialist in the corporate sector. I understand my perspective is my own, however, I have the opportunity to listen to others and learn from them. I must be cognitive of my own biases and subjectivity with the understanding I was impacted by my own research journey.

Protection of Human Subjects

The protection of human subjects occurred throughout all aspects of this research study. For the protection of the human subjects, each participant received an Interview Consent Form (Appendix A). The purpose of the study, data collection process, the voluntary nature of participation, and ability to withdraw at any time was stated in the Interview Consent Form. All participants and their specific data gathered from their interviews was confidential to all but the

researcher. Each participant was given a numeric identification code and/or the use of a pseudonym to further ensure confidentiality of their responses throughout this research study. All participant responses were confidential. In addition, each participant had the opportunity to ask questions about the study, receive transcript notes from the interview, and receive the study's findings after the study was concluded.

This study was in full compliance with the ethical and professional guidelines of the sponsoring university and its Institutional Review Board review process. This study presented minimal risk to participants as it does not contain exposure to physical or psychological harm or any experimental treatment. The researcher provided both verbal and written notification within this study to ensure that every participant understands that participation in this study was completely voluntary. Furthermore, there were no penalties if participants of this study initially declined to participate, declined to continue once the interview session began, declined to answer specific interview questions, and/or voluntarily withdrew from the study. In a continued effort to protect participant confidentiality and/or any potential conflicts of interest, the researcher provided no identifiable information that was provided by the participants to the participants' schools, school districts, or the North Carolina Department of Instruction (NCDPI). All of the above conditions were communicated to every participant at the beginning of their involvement in this study.

Participant Selection

It is suggested that a sampling size range from 5 to 25 for a phenomenological, qualitative research study (Creswell, 1998). Given the very low number of Latinx school administrators in North Carolina, the researcher hoped to identify and interview 5-7 participants.

There was a total of 6 participants for this study. The individuals selected for this study were chosen through a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling occurs when the participants of a study are chosen purposefully because of their experiences and identification that will help the researcher answer the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Snowball sampling is used to create a larger study sample by asking already identified participants to help identify other potential participants. The researcher also used her professional contacts and North Carolina organizations such as LatinxEd to identify potential participants.

The individuals selected for this study had to identify as Latina/o/x and or Hispanic. They also had to serve in a role that is defined by their public school district in North Carolina as a formal, administrative role (e.g., deans of students, assistant principals, principals) within the past two academic years. Given that there are roughly 30 principals across North Carolina that identify as Latinx and/or Hispanic, no attempts were made to limit participation by gender or other personal or professional characteristics. All participation was voluntary as participants provided written consent to participate in this study and completed a one-hour, semi-structured interview (Appendix A).

Data Selection

Instrumentation

According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), interviewing is a craft, a social practice, or form of human interaction situated in historical, cultural, and material contexts, with an emphasis on the ethical aspects of the interview. By choosing a semi-structured interview method for this study, the researcher was able to guide the interviews and integrate specific questions to explore deeply into the participants' experiences as they matriculated into school leadership and as they

currently serve as school leaders (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The instrument for this study was also designed to elicit responses from the participants through the lens of identifying as Latinx and being located in North Carolina. Two data gathering instruments were used in this study. The first was a brief survey that was used to verify participants' eligibility for participation (i.e., their professional role and identification as Latina/o/x) and to gain demographic information. This survey was administered to potential participants using Google Forms software following an initial email with participants. Please see Appendix B for the Demographic Survey questions.

The second data gathering instrument was a series of questions for a semi-structured interview (Appendix C). The beginning questions were framed to gather racial/ethnic background information to allow for opportunity to expand upon their answers within the Demographic Survey (Appendix B). Then, the questions transitioned to learning about the participant's professional background and personal school experiences to set the platform of how they viewed their own schooling experiences as students as well as their professional experiences in education. Then, the researcher asked specific questions focused on their role within educational leadership in the semi-structured, open-ended interview. The questions addressed the professional supports and barriers of advancement into formal educational leadership roles. After learning about the participant's professional experiences going into educational leadership, the researcher transitioned to questions about the professional supports and barriers within their current leadership role including challenges, successes, and the intersectionality of race/ethnicity.

Data Collection

Due to COVID-19 health concerns and the decentralized locations of participants, all interviews were conducted virtually. Each participant was provided a consent form prior to the interview. An initial communication via email occurred prior to setting the date and time of the

interview. Within this initial meeting, the purpose of the study (including the consent form) was shared and any questions about the study were answered. The researcher also shared the research questions of the study and explained the protocol that would be used to ensure that participants and their responses would be de-identified.

Data for this study were collected through a semi-structured, one-on-one interview with each participant. Each of these interviews were video recorded using the record feature within the Zoom platform. These interviews were held during the fall of 2022. Follow-up questions and prompts were used to provide clarification and to encourage participants to fully address the interview questions. Interviews were approximately 60 to 90 minutes in length. This method of data collection allowed the participants to provide information without a limited contextualization and provided the ability for the participants to expand on answers. Interviews allowed the researcher to focus and dig deeper into areas of study. All interviewees were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identities and to ensure confidentiality and validity of the interview process.

The researcher also gathered data based on how the participants behaved during the interview. In addition to their verbal responses, participants' non-verbal actions provided clues that embodied meaning (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). As such, participants' behaviors were noted in the interview notes completed by the researcher. However, the participants' verbal responses served as the primary data for this study.

Data Analysis

The data analysis and coding processes suggested by Saldaña (2013) were used for this study. These processes are outlined in this section. These included the development and analysis of field notes and analytic memos, precoding, and two rounds of formal coding. Analytic memos

were used as part of the data analysis. Saldaña (2013) compares analytic memos to informal researcher journal entries or blogs. They are a place for the researcher to record any thoughts they have about the participants, the phenomenon, or process under investigation by thinking and writing and thinking and writing some more. The researcher wrote an analytic memo following each participant interview to capture the highlights of the conversation. These memos were retrieved for more in-depth analysis.

The researcher transcribed each interview word for word. This process was completed manually by the researcher. She listened carefully to each audio recording, and she typed the exact words used during the interview. The researcher then conducted an uninterrupted reading of each transcript. The researcher did not make any notes or identify any codes during this initial reading. Following this initial reading, the researcher engaged in a process that Saldaña (2013) called preliminary jotting. This step involved jotting down any preliminary words or phrases from the analytic memos or transcripts. This jotting further helped the researcher to get her thoughts documented. The researcher then focused on highlighting anything from the interviews that was particularly intriguing, surprising, or disturbing.

Next, the researcher broke the data into manageable chunks. The first step in this process was to logically separate sections of participants' responses. This was accomplished through a combination of highlighting separate sections or using additional spacing between sections. The researcher then assigned codes to each line of the transcripts in order to further break the data into coded segments. This initial coding involved assigning either a descriptive code or an in vivo code to each line. This inductive process naturally allowed for the codes to emerge from the words of the participants rather than testing pre-determined codes from the researcher. Theoretical axial coding was used for a second round of coding. This process involved deductive

reasoning to compare, reorganize, and group the codes into categories. These categories were further analyzed in order to identify relationships between them and to synthesize them into central concepts. These iterative processes led to the identification of larger thematic assertions.

As a novice researcher, manual processes were used to code the data. The researcher identified pertinent quotations from participants, and she used the right margin of the transcripts in order to write in vivo and descriptive codes. The researcher developed a Microsoft Word database to manage the codes, their definitions, and participants' direct quotations that illustrated emerging categories and themes.

Trustworthiness

The validity (both internal and external), reliability, and objectivity of the qualitative research must be ensured by the trustworthiness of the researcher and study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The standards that must be met to ensure trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In short, trustworthiness means establishing confidence in the truthfulness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Several approaches based on the suggestions of Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used to enhance the trustworthiness of this study. First, the researcher conducted multiple readings of the data that were analyzed along with multiple rounds of coding. These processes were complimented through a peer checking process. Specifically, as a novice researcher, consultation with the dissertation advisor occurred in an ongoing manner. Next, the researcher also provided detailed descriptions of processes used to gather and analyze data. Also, thorough descriptions of participants and settings were included in Chapter 4 of this study. In addition, direct quotations from participants were used to support assertions made in the study. Finally, a form of member checking occurred. Participants were asked to review the transcripts from their interviews,

specifically their participant description and direct quotations, so that they could provide additional clarification.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study was the limited number of participants. The low number of Latinx school administrators in North Carolina meant that there the pool of potential participants was small. To address this issue, Latinx school administrators were defined to include principals, assistant principals, and deans of students that identify within the Latinx population located in North Carolina. Due to COVID-19 and the limited accessibility of Latinx school administrators, all interviews were conducted via the Zoom virtual platform. Additional follow-up contact or debriefings about data analysis were conducted via email or phone.

Summary

This chapter described the research design and methods utilized in the study, including the procedures used for sampling, data collection, and data analysis. The role and positionality of the researcher, protection of human subjects, and strategies used to enhance trustworthiness are delineated. The remainder of the study is organized into two chapters. The major findings from the analysis of data and the themes that arise from these findings are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides a summary, discussion of outcomes and the relationship of findings to other research. Chapter 5 also includes implications for professional practice and recommendations for further studies. The study culminates with bibliography of referenced literature and appendices.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to use an equity lens to explore the experiences/testimonios of Latinx administrators: their perceptions and experiences as public-school administrators within suburban and urban school districts located in the Southeastern United States. To accomplish this purpose, this study sought to answer research questions which are based on the work of Fernandez et al. (2015). The research questions for this study included:

1. What do Latinx public school administrators perceive to be the factors that supported their professional advancement into school leadership?
2. What do Latinx public school administrators perceive to be the factors that inhibited their professional advancement into school leadership?
3. How do Latinx public school administrators characterize the support they experience in their current professional role?
4. How do Latinx public school administrators characterize the challenges they experience in their current professional role?

A qualitative, phenomenological methodology was chosen for this study to develop an understanding of the lived experiences/testimonios that Latinx school administrators encountered in their pursuit to become leaders and the lived experiences related to their current professional roles. For this phenomenological study, the researcher looked through the lens of Latinx public school administrators as they describe their lived experiences, their testimonios, as they matriculated through the professional ranks to become school administrators. Using the same lens, the researcher also sought to understand their perceptions about their current roles as school administrators. Data from this sample were gathered and analyzed through two methods. First, a demographic survey was administered via Google Forms and sent to each participant's email

address. Next, participant interviews were conducted. These interviews were transcribed and coded to provide themes and insights to each research question.

This chapter provides a summary of the findings per research question. Within each research question, themes and subthemes are discussed based on the support factors or inhibitors that participants faced when advancing into school leadership or that they face in their current roles. Table 1 provides a summary of the themes and subthemes that arose for each research question.

Table 1

Summary of Findings

Research Question	Theme	Subthemes
1: Perceived factors of support in the professional advancement into school leadership	School District Supports	• School-Based Personnel in PK-12 Schooling Experience • District Personnel in Professional Advancement into School Leadership
	Initiatives & Recruitment	
	Mentorship & Networking	• Mentorship • Networking
	Motivation	• Latinx Representation in Education and the Community
2: Perceived factors of barriers in the professional advancement into school leadership	Personal Experiences	
	Latinx Cultural Expectations About Education	
	Systematic Racism	• School & District Culture • District Hiring Processes
	Lack of Administrative Supports	

Research Question	Theme	Subthemes
3: Perceived factors of support in current leadership role	School District Supports	• School-Based & District Personnel
	Initiatives	• School-Based Initiatives & District-Wide Initiatives • State-Level Initiatives, Associations & Higher Education Programs.
	Educational Mentorship & Networking	• Mentorships • Networking
	Motivation	• Latinx Representation in Education and the Community
4: Perceived factors of barriers in their current leadership role	Personal Experiences	• Internal Struggles • External Struggles
	Latinx Cultural Expectations About Education & Job Reciprocity	
	Systematic Racism	• District Hiring Processes • School District Culture
	Lack of Administrative Supports	

Participant Summary

The population studied for this research was comprised of individuals that identify as Hispanic, Latino, Latina, and/or Latinx and are either currently serving or recently served as public school administrators in North Carolina. This population was relevant from an investigative standpoint because it is significantly connected to the research questions and problem statement of this study. Specifically, all participants have served as a principal, assistant principal, or dean of students in North Carolina public schools within the past two years. One of the six participants previously served as a superintendent outside of North Carolina. Another of the six participants transferred from a principalship in North Carolina into a district-level

leadership position in the state within the last year. These participants were identified for this study via purposive sampling. Snowball sampling was also used due to the limited number of North Carolina public school administrators that identify as Hispanic, Latino, Latina, and/or Latinx.

Table 2 illustrates cumulative, descriptive data for the participants based on the initial demographic survey that participants voluntarily completed via Google Forms. As illustrated in Table 2, there was a wide range of years that each participant had served as a North Carolina public school administrator, with 33% having served 0-4 years, 16.7% having served 5-9 years, 16.7 % serving 10-14 years, 16.7% serving 15-19 years, and 16.7% serving 20+ years. However, data about years of experience do not reflect the number of participants that served as PK-12 public school administrators outside of North Carolina. This question was not part of the demographic survey as this study focuses on North Carolina PK-12 public school administrators. Nonetheless, interviews revealed that three of the six participants served as educators outside of North Carolina, and one served in an administrative role outside of North Carolina.

Table 2 also delineates ages, race, gender, and educational attainment of participants and their parents. First, participants spanned across four different age brackets. Two of the participants selected the 40-44 years age bracket (33.3%). The remaining participants (66.7%) fell within the four other age brackets: ages 30-34 years (16.7%), 35-39 years (16.7%), 50-54 years (16.7%) and 55-59 years (16.7%). Second, all participants identify as Hispanic, Latino, Latina, and/or Latinx (100%). Two of the six participants identified specifically as Mexican origin (33.3%). Third, four of the six participants identified as female (66.7%) and two identified as male (33.7%). Fourth, five of the six participants hold a master's degree, and one has a doctorate degree. Next, three of six reported that their mothers had a high school diploma while

four reported that their fathers did not finish high school. Finally, all participants reported that they are married.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Survey Cumulative Data

	Frequency	Percentage
Experience as Administrator in NC (years)		
0-4	2	33.3
5-9	1	16.7
10-14	1	16.7
15-19	1	16.7
20+	1	16.7
Age (years)		
30 – 34	1	16.7
35 – 39	1	16.7
40 – 44	2	33.3
45 – 49	0	0
50 – 54	1	16.7
55 – 59	1	16.7
Race		
Hispanic and/or Latinx	6	100
Not Hispanic and/or Latinx	0	0
Latinx Origin Identification		
Mexican	2	33.3
Puerto Rican	0	0
Cuban	1	16.7
Other	3	50
Gender		
Female	4	66.7
Male	2	33.3
Highest Educational Level Achieved		
Master's Degree	5	83.3
Doctorate Degree	1	16.7
Mother's Highest Educational Level Achieved		
Did not graduate high school (HS)	3	50
HS Diploma	3	50
Father's Highest Educational Level Achieved		
Did not graduate high school (HS)	4	66.7
HS Diploma	1	16.7
Bachelor's Degree	1	16.7
Legal Guardian's Highest Educational Level Achieved		
Did not graduate high school (HS)	3	50

	Frequency	Percentage
Legal Guardian's Highest Educational Level Achieved		
HS Diploma	0	0
Bachelor's Degree	0	0
Not Applicable	3	50
Marital Status		
Single	0	0
Married	6	100

Note. Three of six participants stated that while they knew both their biological parents, they were raised at one point within their childhood by legal guardian(s) or the foster system.

In addition to the cumulative data about the participants, individual descriptions of each participant are provided with pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants. These descriptions encompass greater detail about each participant's PK-12 schooling, childhood, and adult experiences. These details provide additional context and nuances around the cumulative data extracted from the participant's responses within this study. Table 3 provides data about age, race, and gender for each individual participant. Table 4 provides data about experience as a school administrator and educational level achieved for each participant. Table 5 provides data about the educational level achieved by each participant's parents/guardians along with the marital status of each participant.

Participant 1 (Maria) was between 40 – 44 years old and identified as a married, White Hispanic female. She earned her master's degree, has served 5 – 9 years as a North Carolina public school administrator, and she has over 23 years of experience as an educator. Maria, who began living alone at the age of 16, was raised within the foster care system. She came to North Carolina because her last foster home was in the state. During her PK-12 schooling experiences, she attended 13 different schools. During her elementary experience, Maria was labeled an English as a Second Language (ESL) learner, and she was later identified as Academically and

Intelligently Gifted in middle school. Though raised within the foster system, Maria did know her biological parents. Neither her biological parents nor her legal guardians graduated from high school.

Participant 2 (Alberto) was between 35 – 39 years old and identified as a married, Columbian male. Alberto was a first generation American. He earned his master's degree and has served as a North Carolina school administrator for four years and within education for 10 – 14 years. Within his PK-5 public school elementary experience, Alberto was labeled ESL. He later attended a private, Catholic, all boys high school. Alberto indicated that both parents earned high school diplomas. He also noted that he began his educational career as a family and parent advocate within a predominantly Latinx community in North Carolina. He later became a teacher in the state and eventually transitioned into an assistant principal role at the high school level.

Participant 3 (Ricardo) was between 50 – 59 years old and identified as a married, Chicano Mexican American male. He earned a doctorate degree and has served within education for over 20 years. Ricardo indicated that out of seven children, he was the first child that did not have to work as a farmer in the fields. He noted that his mother stopped school in the fourth grade and his father never attended school. Ricardo's experiences have ranged from working as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal. He also worked as a superintendent in the Midwest. After moving to North Carolina, Ricardo worked as a Dual Immersion Curriculum Developer and high school administrator. After the 2021-2022 school year, Ricardo transitioned to an adjunct faculty member at a university in North Carolina.

Participant 4 (Sofia) was aged 40 – 44 years and identified as a married, Columbian American female. She earned her master's degree and has served as a North Carolina school

administrator for 10 years and within education for 15 – 19 years. Sofia noted that her mother earned a high school diploma, and her father earned a bachelor's degree. She moved to the United States from Colombia when she was 4 years old. She indicated that she later moved back to Colombia for one year to attend school for Spanish language development. Within her PK-5 public school elementary experience in the United States, Sofia was labeled ESL. Sofia's educational experiences included working as a teacher assistant, substitute teacher, and special education teacher. She then transitioned directly from classroom teacher to principal, serving as an elementary and middle school principal.

Participant 5 (Isabella) was aged 30 – 34 years and identified as a married, White Mexican female. She noted that her mother is White and her father is Mexican, so she considers herself to be White Mexican. She earned her master's degree, and the 2022-2023 school year is her first year as a dean of students at the high school level. Prior to becoming a dean of students, she was a teacher for 11 years. Isabella noted that her mother, father, and legal guardian(s) did not graduate from high school.

Participant 6 (Gabriela) was aged 50 – 54 years and identified as a married, Cuban Mexican American female. She earned her master's degree and has served as a North Carolina school administrator for 10 – 14 years with over 24 years of experience within education. Prior to becoming a North Carolina school administrator, Gabriela worked as a teacher outside of the state. After moving to North Carolina, she became an academic facilitator. She then transitioned into administration, serving as an assistant principal and principal. In the 2021-2022 school year, Gabriela moved into district leadership and serves as an area superintendent. She noted that her mother earned her high school diploma, and her father did not graduate from high school.

Table 3

Participant Demographic Survey Individual Data: Age, Racial/Racial Origin, and Gender

Participant	Age (years)	Race	Racial Origin	Gender
1 (Maria)	40 - 44	Hispanic/Latinx	Other	Female
2 (Alberto)	35 – 39	Hispanic/Latinx	Other	Male
3 (Ricardo)	55 – 59	Hispanic/Latinx	Mexican	Male
4 (Sofia)	40 – 44	Hispanic/Latinx	Other	Female
5 (Isabella)	30 – 34	Hispanic/Latinx	Mexican	Female
6 (Gabriela)	50 – 54	Hispanic/Latinx	Cuban	Female

Table 4

Participant Demographic Survey Individual Data: Experience as School Administrator (years) and Educational Level Achieved

Participant	Experience as Administrator (years)	Educational Level Achieved
1 (Maria)	5 – 9	Master's Degree
2 (Alberto)	0 – 4	Master's Degree
3 (Ricardo)	20+	Doctorate Degree
4 (Sofia)	15 – 19	Master's Degree
5 (Isabella)	0 – 4	Master's Degree
6 (Gabriela)	10 – 14	Master's Degree

Table 5

Participant Demographic Survey Individual Data: Parental Education Levels and Participants' Marital Status

Participant	Mother's Education Level	Father's Education Level	Legal Guardian(s) Education Level	Marital Status
1 (Maria)	Did not graduate HS	Did not graduate HS	Did not graduate HS	Married

Participant	Mother's Education Level	Father's Education Level	Legal Guardian(s) Education Level	Marital Status
2 (Alberto)	HS Diploma	HS Diploma	Non-Applicable	Married
3 (Ricardo)	Did not graduate HS	Did not graduate HS	Did not graduate HS	Married
4 (Sofia)	HS Diploma	Bachelor's Degree	Non-Applicable	Married
5 (Isabella)	Did not graduate HS	Did not graduate HS	Did not graduate HS	Married
6 (Gabriela)	HS Diploma	Did not graduate HS	Non-Applicable	Married

Note. High School is abbreviated as HS in Table 5.

Themes/Findings by Research Question

The participants provided a variety of answers and complexity within those answers during the interviews. Their responses flowed from perceived supports, barriers, and/or challenges affecting their professional advancement into school leadership to responses about the supports, barriers, and/or challenges they face within their current leadership roles. Within the data analysis, there were several themes and subthemes related to each research question. These themes and their connectedness to the research questions are described within the four sections that follow.

Research Question 1: What do Latinx public school administrators perceive to be the factors that supported their professional advancement into school leadership?

The first research question sought to examine the factors that participants thought supported their professional advancement into school leadership. Data analysis was conducted to assess the perceived factors of support during their professional advancement into school leadership. Supports included school district personnel, initiatives and recruitment, mentoring and networking. Participants' motivation also emerged as a theme. Specifically, participants talked about how their presence increased the representation of the Latinx community in educational leadership roles.

Support From School District Personnel

Support from school district personnel emerged as a primary theme regarding factors that supported participants during their ascension into leadership roles. All participants mentioned that school district personnel either during their PK-12 academic experiences or their professional careers motivated their professional advancement into school leadership. All participants stated that school district personnel such as colleagues, school-based administrators, district leaders, and board of education members positively supported their professional advancement into school leadership. Four of six participants (67%) discussed the impact of school-based personnel they encountered during their own PK-12 school experiences; five of six participants (83%) discussed school-based and district personnel they encountered as adults that contributed to their professional advancement into school leadership. Sofia said:

> [After earning her administration degree] I stayed in the classroom, started looking and then the superintendent actually came to do a visit to my school and he was like, 'Hey [Name], let's meet. Let's see what opportunities there are out there.'

School Personnel During PK-12 Schooling. Four of the six participants (67%) discussed how their own schooling experiences motivated them to go into education and seek professional advancement into school leadership. The participants discussed how their PK-12 teachers and support staff impacted their motivation. Two of the four only discussed positive experiences. One of these four only discussed negative experiences that were motivating, nonetheless. One of the four discussed a negative experience in elementary school followed by a positive experience in high school. All four of these participants described their own schooling experiences, whether positive or negative, as motivating factors.

Participants spoke of how their teachers, specifically high school teachers, helped guide them in their high school academics, applying to college, and/or teaching them about the Latinx history within the United States. Ricardo described the impact of his high school teacher changing his trajectory to go to college by encouraging him to take a college preparatory class:

> So, in the hallway of the high school, he asked me to come on over and said, 'Hey [Name], I want you to take my class.' And I said, 'Class?' And he goes, 'Yeah, I'm gonna be teaching a Mexican American studies' elective next year. I want you in my class.' And I said, 'Mexican American? What's that?' He goes, 'Just take it.' So, I did. And at that point I was not college bound. I was gonna be electrician or I was gonna join the military. I didn't even take college, I didn't need to take college prep classes. College is not in our - my - pathway.

This guidance from school district personnel was particularly helpful as all participants had childhood experiences of moving to other locations within and outside of the United States and/or being in ESL programs during their PK-12 schooling experience. Maria and Isabella specifically noted how their high school teachers supported them during their professional advancement into school leadership and within their current role in school leadership. Maria discussed how her high school English teacher impacted her and has continued to support her:

> I moved to North Carolina and my junior English teacher, I had to work because by the time I was 16, I was living on my own and I was going to the high school, and I had to work to stay where I was staying. And so, I had to pay rent. So, I was 15, I was working as a part-time camp counselor…I was just trying to do what I could to survive… So, I slept in class and my teacher actually yelled at me. She was an older White lady and she yelled at me about being so disrespectful. You know, 'Don't sleep in class, you're not

> paying attention' that type of thing. And I got so angry, and I was like, 'You don't know anything about me.' And I yelled at her in class and so she asked me to stay after and I did. And we started talking and she's like, my mom… she's my angel, she's my adopted mom…She helped me fill out applications for colleges and scholarships. And when I graduated, I was one of the top students with more scholarships. I ended up with the North Carolina Teaching Fellow Scholarship. And I, I was very blessed, very blessed to have her because I know I wouldn't be where I am without her. And she's still my biggest cheerleader.

The participants' PK-12 schooling also included negative experiences. However, the participants stated that these negative experiences motivated them to become school leaders. For example, all participants speak Spanish as their primary or secondary language. Participants discussed the negative feelings associated with not being allowed to speak Spanish within their PK-12 school setting. Ricardo illustrated this when describing the terror that he felt when receiving corporal punishment for speaking Spanish and how this negative experience later impacted his decision to go into education:

> We were not allowed to speak in Spanish. [Student name] and I were not allowed to speak. I learned that lesson cause when you're little, you don't know the systems of a school. And so, I was spoken Spanish, and I remember this to this day, and it kind of motivated me, actually. It did motivate me to become an educator but not in a positive way. I was asked to put my hands out like this in front of my desk. I was a first grader and she Miss [Teacher's name], she had blue hair. I remember this. She had blue hair and was probably 195 years old. I've never seen anyone so, in my life, that old, she just scared me. But she terrified [Student name] and I because she would hit us any time we spoke

> Spanish with a ruler, you know, the pencil type pointers, she would hit us. And so, we were terrified.

While a negative experience, Ricardo later explained that this experience was followed by a much more positive experience in high school when a teacher motivated him to go into education and to continue his professional advancement into school leadership. Doing so would enable him to help other students who may have experienced similar situations.

Gabriela also discussed how her negative experience provided motivation to continue her professional advancement into school leadership:

> I would say, and then the, the biggest turning point for me, and this is getting really personal, but it's my story and I'm proud of it. I was in high school and my grades dropped, drastically, right? Because in my, I think it was sophomore to junior year, my mother attempted suicide. And so, there was a lot of commotion at home and then I had a counselor, an Anglo, male counselor that called me into the office. I think that maybe it was my junior year to my senior, but he called me into the office very nonchalantly, popping peanuts, and said, 'Hey, are you planning on graduating?' You know, like if it was like, he never asked me what happened to this decline, you know? And so, when, when I talk about who inspired me to become an educator, that's the story that I tell because his lack of empathy, his lack of wanting to dig into why a, a straight A student had fallen so far behind. You know, I felt like telling him, 'No dummy, I'm not only planning on graduating, I'm gonna go to college and I'm gonna have more degrees than you do eventually.' Right? So, that was like my experience that really turned me into an educator. I, I didn't, I didn't have access to like - my parents weren't like interested or

> didn't know pretty much about how to get me access to college or whatever. And so, all of those things were lacking.

The participants that discussed their negative experiences also described how these negative experiences increased their desire to go into school leadership.

Two of the participants also described how the support of school personnel continues today. They noted that those individuals are still considered part of their support system. As Isabella noted about her former high school teacher that became her colleague and now is a teacher at the school where Isabella is principal: “[I] Love her. She's still here. I just love her so much. I just feel like she believes like in me more than I believed in myself.”

School Personnel During Professional Advancement into School Leadership. Participants consistently described the positive impact of school personnel as they ascended into leadership roles. Specifically, five of six participants (83%) discussed how school personnel provided support during their professional advancement into school leadership. Two of the six participants work within the school district where they graduated from high school. One participant works at the high school she attended and sees her former high school teacher daily. Isabella noted: [HS teacher turned colleague turned staff] “She's still here. I just love her so much. I just feel like she believes like in me more than I believed in myself.”

Maria discussed unofficial mentorship and a strong beginning teacher program as support factors when going into school leadership:

> As a teacher when I first started, I was in a beginning teacher program and I had a mentor, but I also had a group. The school I worked at had veteran teachers and there was a group of five veteran teachers. And they were not my mentors, my mentor, but they were just so welcoming and opening open… I had a strong BT program. I always took on

> a lot of leadership roles outside of the school system or…outside of the school, a lot of district level roles. And I just built a strong network of supporters. I've always had close relationships with my assistant superintendent and my superintendent and I, I've been blessed to have a great support system.

One participant noted that she felt support from her former teachers, school-based administration, and her district school board to go into school leadership. Isabella said:

> I'm first person to go to college and graduate…so literally my teachers, like literally everyone in the district has been super supportive. Like I've even had school board members come up to me and say like, 'I'm so proud of you.' Which is so crazy because just like, how do you even know who I am? Like I'm just like a regular [City name] kid. Like I feel like I'm literally all of our kids…Everyone doesn't have like the same story as me but I don't know, I just love our kids and I feel like I'm like we are the same people and I wanna be like the Miss [HS teacher's name] to all of our kids that she was to me because I know like it literally doesn't matter what you have at home. You can definitely make it as long as the people here believe in you…. I have felt like the school board, the superintendent, my administrators, everyone wants me to succeed.

Initiatives and Recruitment

Another theme suggested by participants' responses to inquiries about supports they experienced while ascending to leadership roles was that structured educational recruitment programs and initiatives were important to their advancement. Four of six participants (67%) discussed recruitment initiatives and programs offered through their districts, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, and regional universities (including school district partnerships with regional universities) as part of the supports that contributed to their professional

advancement into school leadership. For example, one participant completed the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program which provides scholarship support for aspiring teachers. Alberto completed the North Carolina Principal Fellows program, designed to provide scholarship support for aspiring administrators, through a regional university. Two of the participants completed a master's degree at a regional university that specifically recruited Latinx participants. As Alberto explained, "[I] Met Dr. [Professor at regional university]. They had a Hispanic teacher meeting, right? Leadership meeting. So, this was a little bit of push that [District] did for a little while, trying to get more Hispanics into leadership." Maria discussed the partnership between the regional university and her district:

> On our strategic plan for our district, we looked at within the next seven years, we need to increase hiring Hispanic staff members by 12% with a priority of teachers. And we were looking at schools that graduate the most Latinx students and [Regional university] is top.

In addition to these programs, three of the participants (50%) discussed the importance of local school district recruitment programs and initiatives designed to increase the number of Latinx school educators and administrators.

District recognition programs were also referenced as sources of motivation. For example, two participants described their district's Teacher of the Year, Assistant Principal of the Year, and Principal of the Year awards as factors of support in their professional advancement into school leadership. As Alberto noted:

> I was a North Carolina principal fellow and that's, that in and of itself is a, for me, really prestigious. And I don't know how many of you all apply, but it's such a strict kind of interview process and everything. And everybody tells me it's prestigious, so I'll take

> it…and then I just got assistant principal of the year. So, people tell me, I have about 12 months to find a principalship because you can only stand your resume for so long…Those are really big successes for me on the forward-facing piece.

Mentorship and Networking

Another theme that emerged about support factors was that mentoring and networking were important to the professional advancement of participants.

Mentoring. All participants discussed the key role that mentoring played in their professional advancement into school leadership. The subthemes within mentorship were school district mentorship, personal life mentorship, and the need for Latinx community mentorship and representation. Four participants (67%) discussed support factors from district and state programs including their beginning teacher programs and higher education administrative recruitment programs. The participants noted that these programs led to unofficial mentors and networking that provided support in their professional advancement into school leadership. Four of the six participants (67%) noted that both official and unofficial mentors came from district and state initiatives and recruitment programs, including their beginning teacher programs. As Maria noted:

> As a teacher when I first started, I was in a beginning teacher program and I had a mentor, but I also had a group, the school I worked at had veteran teachers and there was a group of five veteran teachers. And they were not my mentors, my mentor, but they were just so welcoming and opening.

Mentors were also found among university professors; Alberto explained:

> So, for lack of a better term, I attach myself to successful people. So, I think I pick the right mentors. [Former principal] really taught me a lot. And then Dr. [Regional university professor] has been an integral part of my career and process.

Additionally, four of six participants discussed personal life mentorships including family members, former PK-12 teachers, and a network of colleagues and educators within and outside of their school districts. On a personal level, one participant talked about grandma and the women who mentored him. Ricardo explained:

> My grandma was kind of my mentor before she passed away and she had to deal with all kinds of racism. And she said, [Participant's name], you can be mad all your life or you could do something about it. So, I said, 'Okay.' So, I decided to go. At that point, it changed my trajectory. I decided to take college-level classes or classes that would qualify me to enter a university. So, I did. And I decided to become an educator and I became an elementary teacher…And after my first year, I knew that to affect change in a positive way and to be a role model was to pursue an administration. [He goes on later to say] What helped was having mentors. I wouldn't have been successful unless I had mentor. My most powerful ones were women mentors who actively pulled me aside and said, 'Look, I'm gonna help you.' And I remember one, her name was [Name]…She was a school board member. I don't know why she approached me, but she did. And now I know why. Cause there are only a handful Latino administrators. She was a school board member. She's also on a college board…So she was way up there. So, she got together and asked me to pull us some other young, younger Latinos and other Latinas to form a group…And that's where I found my community. And from that point on anywhere I reached out to establish like-minded communities.

All six participants discussed the need for Latinx representation in leadership roles within education and their surrounding communities. The participants discussed the need for mentorship as they believe this would increase the number of Latinx educators. Participants also discussed the need for Latinx educational organizations to provide networking and community support for Latinx educators. All the participants discussed how being a Latinx role model and providing mentorship for their students impacted their motivation to advance into school leadership. Ricardo noted:

> I'm most proud of in my work at the school first with students and that they were able to see someone like them in the role. And even with the parents, a lot of parents like, 'Oh my god, oh my god, I can't believe that you're everyone's boss here.' Right? And then building community relationships.

Another participant described how more Latinx mentorship is needed to help more Latinx to advance into school leadership. Alberto noted that this need motivated him in his professional advancement into school leadership. Alberto said:

> It's a mentorship. It's a paving the way to create the wave the next wave of Hispanic leaders in education, empowering those. So, it's not a tomorrow solution. Yeah, it's a generational solution. And that's really hard sometimes for people because you can't, I'll never see a difference. No matter how hard I work, how hard you work with this research, how many conversations we have. We will never see this difference. Hopefully our kids will, and their kids will. And that's what I really focused on.

Networking. Three of six participants (50%) discussed networking as a perceived factor of support in their professional advancement into school leadership, including former and current colleagues and educators within education. Alberto noted:

> I attach myself to the right people throughout my journey, I think. And so just people that really, really, really loved and cared for me and wanted us to be successful and pushed me to be the best me. And I think that's what it is. We need people around us that push us to be the best versions of us that we can be. My parents did that for me. [Name] did that for me. [Name] did that for me. [Name] did that for me. All these people did that for me and really pushed me to be the best version of me. And never told me no. They never said, 'No, I don't think you can do that.' They helped me figure out how I can do it. And I already had the tools for the most part.

Three of six participants discussed the impact of networking and community as a support factor in their professional advancement into school leadership. This support provided motivation to go into school leadership and provide support to other Latinx educators. Ricardo noted:

> What I realized to add to build ranks of future leaders, there has to be an organization where they can go to and feel supported and just vent and let it out…I found my community with that. And from that point on anywhere I reached out to establish like-minded communities. In fact, when I was in [State], well in [State] there were a couple of Latino educator associations. When I got to [State], there was zero. So, I met with my professors when I started my doctorate and I started asking to make a long story short, he connected me with a lot of leaders. At that time, I was just a principal. He connected me with a lot of leaders throughout the state. And so, we formed an organization which is now the [State] Association of Latino School Administrators and Superintendents. We later affiliated with alas, the association, Latino Administrators and Superintendents. And that organization now is statewide. It's huge. And our goal was very simple, just to add a

place where we could have like-minded folks meet, but also work on our legislative agenda and to write white papers to inform legislative bodies.

Motivation

Another theme that arose was that participants described their own motivation and drive to achieve as support factors in their professional ascension. This internal motivation was heightened by an awareness that Latinx individuals are underrepresented in leadership roles. All participants discussed motivation, both internal and external, as a perceived factor of support in their professional advancement into school leadership. All the participants discussed the need to increase Latinx representation in systemic structures in education and throughout the community. This need contributed to their motivation to go into school leadership.

Latinx Representation in Education and the Community. Four of six participants discussed internal motivation to go into school leadership. The internal motivators included being the first person in their family to graduate from high school, being the first generation in their family to graduate from college (83%), passion for education (50%), and desire for generational improvement (100%) both in their personal families and the Latinx community. One participant discussed how his motivation to increase Latinx representation within education and the community contributed to his need to go into school leadership and his determination to not to burn out. Alberto said: “For me, I can't burn out because if I burn out, then I stop doing the work. I have to keep on getting better and growing, but I can't stop doing the work, so I can't burn out.”

Additionally, all participants discussed how the lack of Latinx representation in leadership roles served as motivation for going into school leadership. Participants also discussed how the notable lack of Latinx representation within school districts’ curriculum and personnel,

coupled with the lack of Latinx mentoring and networking, heightened their drive to become administrators. Ricardo illustrated this point:

> I decided to become an educator and I became an elementary teacher. And I decided to work in the toughest schools that were at that time a minority-majority. And so, I did that in [City] and I realized the structural racism that existed with, just, education - the inequities, and funding equities and resources, equities and expectations are really low expectations. And after my first year, I knew that to affect change in a positive way and to be a role model was to pursue an administration.

Ricardo also described how learning about the lack of Latinx history being taught during his high school experience supported his internal motivation to advance into school leadership. Ricardo noted:

> Fast forward to high school, we were kept in the dark as far as our culture, our contributions…[Discussing his high school teacher's Latinx history class] So, I took his class, and I was so blown away about the culture…And he basically told us that all the lands that you have on now, the farmers, that your parents and families work on; they're owned by Mexicans. And that land was taken from them. So, I immersed myself. It's the first time that I was motivated to learn for learning's sake, and I became angry. Right, it's the first time in my life that I became angry in this deep, deep sense of frustration, feeling helpless and understanding why I was treated the way I was treated.

Research Question 2: What do Latinx public school administrators perceive to be the factors that inhibited their professional advancement into school leadership?

The second research question sought to examine the factors that inhibited participants' professional advancement into school leadership. Data analysis revealed that these inhibiting

factors can be divided into three themes: personal experience (50%), Latinx cultural expectations (50%), and racism in their school districts (83%). While five participants described factors that inhibited their advancement, there was one exception. Alberto was a lone exception in that he did not feel he experienced any barriers to his advancement. When asked about barriers he stated, "No, I would say not particularly [any barriers] for me. So, for lack of a better term, I attach myself to successful people. So, I think I pick the right mentors." Alberto also said that others often believe that he is White, which may contribute to this dynamic. However, Alberto did mention later in the interview that he thought he might have been invited to an interview because he is Latinx.

Personal Experiences

A theme that emerged about factors that inhibited participants' professional advancement was that personal experiences are oftentimes limiting factors. For example, three participants discussed personal experiences that they perceived to be inhibiting factors. These included motherhood, work/life balance, and health issues due to stress. Two participants discussed how becoming a mother at an early age (teenager and young adult) inhibited their advancement into school leadership because of the work/life balance needs of their personal situations. As Isabella said about her delayed advancement into school leadership, "I feel like it's more of a balance of what's expected at work, what's expected at school, what's expected at home. More of like balancing everything has been a barrier."

Latinx Cultural Expectations About Education

Another theme that emerged about inhibiting factors was that Latinx cultural expectations about education can interfere with professional advancement. Three of the six participants described a negative Latinx cultural view of education as a factor that inhibited their professional

advancement into school leadership. For example, 50% of the participants' biological mothers and 67% of the participants' biological fathers did not graduate from high school. During their interviews, the participants discussed how much of their surrounding Latinx culture derived from generations that did not attend school because they felt pressure to work rather than seeking educational advancement. Isabella illustrated this notion:

> It's like frowned upon [In Hispanic community] like 'Why are you going to school?' Or 'Oh my gosh, you're still in school.' Like from a community perspective, not necessarily from like the school district or even your spouse, but from the community, like 'How are you going to college' or 'How are you finishing high school?' Like 'Why don't you have a job?' Like 'You should have a job.'

Systemic Racism

Another theme that emerged about inhibiting factors was that systemic racism negatively impacted participants' professional advancement. Four of the six participants (67%) discussed systemic racism they have experienced outside of education, while five out of six participants (83%) discussed how systematic racism they experienced inside of education inhibited their professional advancement into school leadership. Five out of six participants (83%) moved into school leadership in North Carolina after having lived in other states. All of these individuals described the racial climate in North Carolina more negatively than their experiences in other states. Participants offered accounts of racism in North Carolina that made their professional journeys difficult. Maria said: "I will tell you that living in this little, small town of North Carolina is the hardest place I've ever lived." Gabriela added:

> When I moved here with my husband, it was culture shock because first of all, everybody thinks you're Mexican. I happen to be half Mexican; I have no problem with that. But if

> you're, you know, Hispanic, everybody thinks you're Mexican and everybody thinks you're uneducated. Like those are the two assumptions.

She goes on to say, “When we moved here is the first time, we kind of hit this roadblock of racism and like, you know discrimination and I was like kind of shocked about it.” Sofia also stated, “When we moved to North Carolina, I moved to [Name] County. That was a culture shock for me. I had never in my life seen anything like that.” Sofia goes on to say:

> But it was just the more of, it was sad to see, that it was so Black and White, right? Like nothing else existed. Like you're either Black or you're White. And I'm like, ‘But I'm not Black or White. I'm Spanish.’ Yeah. It was like, ‘No, you gotta choose.’ ‘No, we're not choosing.’ Like that's what it is. This isn't that either or. This is who I am.

Ricardo said, “I just can't believe how much growth we have to make here in this state when it comes to servicing Latino families and communities.”

Participants reflected on other topics involving racism. They noted the lack of cultural diversity in many North Carolina districts, the need for a societal mind shift about the importance of multilingualism, and how widespread stereotypes about the Hispanic community impacted their professional experiences with colleagues. Sofia said, “How do I prove to the world that multilingualism is actually a great thing to have?” Ricardo stated, “The barriers were your colleagues that would look at you not as an educator professional but look at you as whatever ethnic group you come from and then tying in their experiences.”

School and District Culture. Three of the six participants (50%) stated that school and district culture inhibited their professional advancement into school leadership. Categories that emerged included racism from colleagues, lack of empathy/lens of whiteness from colleagues, and a lack of academic expectations from the Latinx student demographic. Ricardo said:

> I had a colleague; I remember this clear as day. She says, '[Name], we don't need this diversity crap. You know, you just work hard, just bust your butt, you work hard. You can be a principal, you can be all this, whatever you wanna be.' And I said, 'Oh really?... Oh, okay. Well, growing up…let's…change the dynamic here and as far as being motivated, what you do and who that inspires you, what if you grew up where everyone was either everyone who was a doctor, a lawyer, a businessman, a teacher was either black or Mexican? Think about that...They don't know anything about what it means to be your experience as a young American. How would that feel?' And she goes, 'Well that, that's stupid.' And I said, 'No, it's not stupid that that's how we grow up. That's how I grew up.' I didn't have my first Latino my teacher until I was in ninth grade. That was a Spanish teacher. And he wasn't even Mexican, he was from Spain. So, he really didn't connect with the local culture. So, I got her to think about that different perspective…but that's just one little example barriers and hurdles. It's a personal journey that's lonely at times that you know, feel that you can't do it because the expectations and then whatever baggage you have that kind of linger up, that make you feel like, 'Oh gosh, maybe I'm not as smart as, I'm not as skilled as,' And those little things come up. But what helped was having mentors. I wouldn't have been successful unless I had a mentor.

Sofia noted:

> I get to that school and people are looking at me like, 'What are you?' I'm like, 'I'm a teacher, a special ed teacher.' And then it was like, 'You're Mexican.' And I'm like, 'What is that?' And it was so bad. Like the teachers that were teaching with me would be like, 'So do you speak Mexican?' So, it got to the point that I'm like, 'How are you guys so illiterate and on culture, like there is no Mexican language and you're a teacher?' So, I

> remember being like, ‘You didn't, you didn't have geography class? Like you didn't, nobody ever taught you about different languages and continents’…So I was known as the Mexican. So, our culture is different…. Such a culture shock. They were so racist. And so, punitive, and belittled. And I was like, ‘Oh, I'm like I can't do this.’ And then some people I guess were confused. So, some would just call me Mexican. Some were like, ‘Well you look Mexican, but you don't, um, did you just marry Spanish guys? Is that where the [Name] came from?’ I'm like, ‘No, I'm Latina. Like I'm Spanish.’ Anyways, I ended up going to [City] because I'm like, I'm going somewhere else.

Two of the participants (33%) stated that their former and/or current school district lacked high expectations of their Latinx students. Ricardo explained:

> When you work throughout my career of 33 years in this there, what I see with Latino expectation from staff members, even Latino staff members, is that our kids can't learn because well, they're brown, they can't learn at that level. So, it's an expectation issue. So, when you have low expectations, you have what I call the expectation gap leads into the opportunity gap. So, when you talk about the gaps, what you have first is the opportunity gap where because expectations are low, the teachers won't cover the curriculum.

Ricardo described how low expectations lead to opportunity gaps for the Latinx students in North Carolina:

> Then the kids take test, they're not gonna do well on any type of exam because they did not have access to the written, to the assessed curriculum. There's written taught in assess curriculum. Right? So that's something that I have been working throughout my career to get it. So, you have equitable shot of doing well. So, in my opinion, everything that I've seen throughout [state], [state], [state], and here, especially here, especially here in North

> Carolina, is the low expectation led to opportunity gap that equals to the achievement gap. Plain as day, plain as day.

District Hiring Processes. Three out of six participants (50%) perceived racism in hiring practices at the local school district level inhibited their professional advancement into school leadership. Maria said:

> I had to fill out the equal opportunity employment form because I was the only minority teacher at those schools. But nothing. And that's when I was like, oh my gosh, I am looked at differently because I'm the only one that spelled this stupid form every single year. Not stupid, but, and it asks how are you treated and things like that. But I hope, I don't know if people looked at my race to move to as I moved on. I really hope that it was my work ethic. I dropped my name [Last name] when I got married because I was of the way, I was treated from being Hispanic…because I did have a principal that told me, if you don't change your name, nobody's gonna look at your resume. So, they're not gonna pick you… But it's sad because tons of people that are applying for leadership don't get jobs. Yeah. Because of their last name.

Alberto felt he was invited to an initial meeting to become a potential school leader due to being Latinx, saying:

> I think that I got invited to the initial meeting because I was Hispanic. And I think that's about it. I struggle, where I struggle with my identity, and I've talked about this too in a couple different spaces, is I represent white if I'm in a space with people if I'm in a room with people and I'm the only Hispanic person, no, nobody thinks that there's a Hispanic person in that room. So, I don't have the same barriers necessarily that some other people do because I present very white and it's my story to tell.

Administrative Lack of Supports

Another theme that emerged about inhibiting factors was that participants perceived a lack of administrative support negatively affected their advancement. Three of the six participants discussed the lack of administrative support that they perceived was an inhibitor in their professional advancement into school leadership. Two participants (33%) were not assistant principals prior to becoming school principals within the state of North Carolina. One participant believed he became a school administrator, specifically a principal, too fast. Ricardo explained:

> That [Having the biggest impact within education] motivated me to my career to work in Title 1 schools and to do what I can. And I learned after time to be, before the term even was out there, turnaround principal, I became a principal within my first five years. I had my first school when I was 29. Probably shouldn't, I didn't really know what I was doing, but I had a fire in my belly to show that people who look like me, people who look [Like me] can lead and can be successful. So, I started my first principalship in [City] and I did start off as high school from elementary to high school. And then because I got recognized for my work, I became a principal too fast actually. And over time I was gravitated. I gravitated towards schools that were failing.

One participant discussed that her quiet nature resulted in her not receiving as much support as she felt her colleagues received. Gabriela said:

> I am an introvert. I still am an introvert for my job. I have to be an extrovert. But in the core, I'm an introvert. And I was, back then I was very meek. I didn't, you know, I didn't have confidence in myself when I started as a teacher. And people along the way, like the first person was an assistant principal in, in that [City] school that I was at told me you would be great at administration…Like I had people in my path that recognized an

> introverted, quiet leader. People don't often recognize, and I still struggle with that. I'll tell you, that's my struggle in [School district location].

Another participant discussed how pressure from both district and states educational entities concerning standardized tests and expectations of school administrators inhibited his advancement. Ricardo noted, “I got burnt out though when I was in [state] because it was all about the test, all about the test. So, I got burned out and I thought…maybe I need to do something else.”

Research Question 3: How do Latinx public school administrators characterize the support they experience in their current professional role?

The third research question sought to examine the supports that participants receive while in their current role. Three support factors emerged: (a) School District Supports, specifically related to School-Based and District Personnel; (b) Educational Initiatives; and (c) Educational Mentorships and Networking. Other support factors that emerged from the data analysis included personal motivation and the desire to positively impact the Latinx community.

School District Supports: School-Based and District Personnel

The primary theme about factors that support the participants in their current leadership role was that school district personnel often serve as a support system. All participants stated that school district personnel, including colleagues, school-based administrators, and district leaders serve as a support network within their current leadership role. Three of the participants (50%) said that their school-based administrators, including both their supervisors and subordinates, provided support. Gabriela said:

> [When asked about her successes in her current role] So, I think the relationships that I bring, and I think my experience as an educator, like I'm an instructional leader. I hope

> even as, you know, a coach and mentor for six years that I did as a sitting-principal, I would hope that people are learning from my mistakes. I'm very open about like, 'Here's what I did wrong. Don't do that.' Right? So, I think that's, that's my biggest success. I really have a good relationship with my principals. I'm working hard with them you know to share the knowledge base that I have and to learn alongside them.

In addition to school-based school administrators, participants noted that they received support from other district personnel including individuals they served with on various school district committees (16.7%), district-level colleagues (50%) who hold the same leadership role, and the superintendent (33%). Gabriela noted, "They [District-level colleagues within the same leadership role] have really mentored me in how, you know, in this position navigating that micro-political and just learning, you know more about coaching principals." Two participants discussed receiving support from the superintendent in the form of additional funds to increase professional development activities. Ricardo noted:

> [Speaking to his staff] I tell you what, I'm going to submit a proposal to the superintendent because he said that he will do whatever it takes and when he told me that, I said, 'Will you gimme a blank check?' And he said, 'Yes'…So the superintendent allowed us; my entire staff did three trips to visit high performance schools in [State].

Initiatives

Another theme that emerged as a support factor for the participants within their current leadership role was a variety of district, state, and university initiatives. Five of six participants (83%) discussed school district, NCDPI, and university initiatives as support factors within their current leadership role. District initiatives that emerged from the data analysis included both

mandatory and voluntary initiatives that occur at both the individual school and district-wide levels.

School-Based Initiatives and District-Wide Initiatives. Participants described school-based initiates that are designed to promote racial equity as supports. These initiatives included efforts to reduce disproportionate suspensions and negative stereotypes of Latinx individuals. Specific examples included racial equity training for teachers, a heightened focus on developing positive relationships with students of color, adopting more culturally sensitive curriculum, and changes within school discipline policies. For example, Maria discussed how her school's administrative team utilized their racially diverse team to promote teachable moments about race which have helped build positive relationships with students:

> So, my admin team, again, we're very diverse and we've said we're, anytime a kid says something, instead of giving a disciplinary action, we have to turn it into a teaching. It's got to be teaching first. We've got to explain to them because they're gonna go home and have the same views at home. It won't change. But making sure that we kind of use our race to help our kids, but we wanna make sure, I don't want all my Hispanic kids coming to me for issues. They need to build a relationship with everyone.

Alberto discussed how his administrative team has lowered suspensions by changing their discipline policies, which has also helped him in his current role:

> I mean we're trying to pull a lot of things in place to not be punitive and be more restorative. So even drug suspensions. So, if you get suspended for 10 days for drugs, but if you go to drug counseling, and we partnered with a program, it can get reduced to five days and they work sliding scale.

District-wide initiatives that emerged from the data analysis of perceived factors of support for participants within their current leadership role included district-mandated, district-wide Racial Equity Training.

State-Level Initiatives, Associations, and Higher Education Programs. Participants reported that they found support from participation in state initiatives, professional organizations, and higher educational programs. For example, three of the six participants (50%) were part of the NCDPI programs such as the North Carolina Principal's Fellow Program and the North Carolina Portrait of a Graduate committee. These were viewed as highly motivating personal successes. Participants also discussed the support they receive from other organizations and committees in North Carolina including the North Carolina Principal's and Assistant Principals Association and the North Carolina Governor's DRIVE Task Force on diversity. Ricardo said:

> The governor appointed people throughout the state - college presidents, superintendents, educators to put together a list of recommendations to provide diversity in all educational ranks and leadership, including at the university level. So, they met right before Covid and they came out, they ended up - I have it right here. They [DRIVE Task Force] ended up developing a representative and inclusive vision for education. And they came out with some recommendations. So, I'm on that task force and right now, so I still have my foot right at my door and foot in the door here. I'm tasked with getting all of the committee's recommendations and providing the organizational design to make it happen. I love our governor and he's taking that's something that is pretty powerful to drive the task force. So, I still have a little fire in my belly to make changes, especially in the state. But we're gonna look at doing it from a statutory [Approach].

Ricardo goes on to discuss the importance of the Governor's DRIVE Task Force in addressing minority representation within leadership roles throughout the state of North Carolina, saying:

> So, number one is keep the conversation at the table… We represent, our job is to represent everyone and to advocate the needs for everyone and those that need it the most especially. So, that's the first thing to keep the conversation at the table. The second thing is what drive, the DRIVE task force, is doing - codifying a lot of the expectations so it gets done for those communities that will only do it, only provide that type of training or whatever because they have to…I think the governor, this governor, is open about that in making change. I just worry about what's gonna happen if we get a leadership that'll try to further enclose our free thinking on how to help all kids.

Other programs and initiatives that were discussed by two participants as supports were higher education programs, including doctoral programs and/or mentorship from higher education university faculty members. Maria explained how being part of her doctoral program has increased her personal motivation to represent her Hispanic heritage:

> I dropped my name [Name] when I got married because I was of the way, I was treated from being Hispanic. I married a White male, and I didn't want my last name [Name] on anything. And so, I've kept it that way. And it's interesting because I told him recently, I want to add my name back on because I'm working on my doctorate as well and I am proud, very proud of who I am.

Sofia discussed how an unofficial mentor from a regional university has supported her within her current leadership role:

> I do have one that is like a mentor. I mean it's not even official, it's actually from [Regional university]. His name is [Name]. He was a superintendent for [School district]

> who actually put me at this school because this school was an initiative for [School district] to desegregate the population.

Educational Mentorship and Networking

Another theme that emerged from the data analysis was that educational mentoring and networking are important support factors. Participants acknowledged the importance of current mentors and also expressed concern about the lack of mentoring and networking for Latinx administrators across North Carolina. Participants noted that this lack of Latinx mentors motivated them to serve as mentors to others and increase networking opportunities for Latinx educators.

Mentorship. Three of six participants (50%) discussed mentorship as a support factor in their current professional roles. Gabriela explained:

> They [Her colleagues] have really mentored me in how, you know, in this position navigating that micro political and just learning, you know more about coaching principles. So, the support that I get is not coming from my deputy superintendent, which is supposed to be, it's coming from those two colleagues that I have.

All six of the participants (100%) discussed personal life mentorships including family members, former PK-12 teachers and the network of colleagues and educators within and outside of their school districts that were support factors in their current leadership role. Additionally, four of six participants (67%) noted that the need to increase the amount of Latinx role models and mentors motivated them in their current leadership role. Alberto said:

> It's a mentorship. It's a paving the way to create the wave, the next wave, of Hispanic leaders in education - empowering those. So, it's not a tomorrow solution. Yeah, it's a generational solution. And that's really hard sometimes for people because you can't

> never see a difference. No matter how hard I work, how hard you work with this research, how many conversations we have, we will never see this difference… Hopefully, our kids will and their kids will. And that's what really focused on. So, for me, I can't burn out because if I burn out, then I stop doing the work. I have to keep on getting better and growing, but I can't stop doing the work, so I can't burn out. And I think that's where it is, is that we tried not to use the word pipeline yesterday, but I mean, if you wanna own it, you own it. We need that pipeline. Really just creating a space where people can grow, students can grow.

Alberto goes on to discuss how he shares his personal story with students when mentoring them:

> I 100% tell my story because my story isn't traditional. I went to college, I went to high school and did well, went to college, graduated from college with my bachelor's in four years, went and got my master's in two. My journey, my particular journey, and I include my parents' journey in that I think is important because I want to show my students that everybody's different. That's like my mantra in education is everybody's different.

Networking. Four of six participants (67%) discussed the need for more Latinx networking and how this need motivated them in their jobs. One participant discussed his frustration with current Latinx leaders not utilizing their leadership roles to increase Latinx representation within educational leadership. Additionally, participants also spoke about specific Latinx community organizations that are support factors within their current leadership roles. One Latinx organization that was mentioned was LatinxEd, a North Carolina based organization whose mission to is "to invest in Latinx leadership and expand educational equity and opportunity in North Carolina" (LatinxEd, 2022). One participant discussed the need for Latinx networking within education, Ricardo said:

> What I would like to see for a Latino community is that they get together and they form and belong to an organization that supports their needs. Just as you have in Texas, California, all of really, the western states have organizations that support Latino leadership development, professional development. So that's what I would like to see. And of course, there are a lot of other things too that's just from the educator, the public-school educator perspective and I don't know many what the task force is working on this but driving and growing future leaders and I'm starting to see more academies where they're starting to grow their own. Texas did that successfully. California did too. So, they have their own pipeline now. They solved the issue with getting people of color because they took action years ago to build their own farm system. Here we don't have that. So, I'd like to see that.

Ricardo goes on to discuss the impact of a Latinx educational association he helped create in another stated. Ricardo said:

> So, that piece is something that we're really proud of what we did. [Creating a Latino Educator Association in another state.] So, when I came out here, I started doing the same thing. And then I was astounded when I looked at the data through NCDPI with a matter of Latino educators. I saw some data and then you shared what there are 30 in the state. You know what drives me crazy is that there are a couple Latinos and Latinas in positions where they can affect that…I thought, okay, I'm gonna reach out to this [Person in leadership], start making the connections. Maybe we could build what we did in [State]. And so, when I met with [Person in leadership] …I looked at her leadership cabinet, not one Latino…I looked at the support staff right under cause that cause it's huge. Not one Latina except when, who does the community engagement for Latinos by someone who

> speaks Spanish. So, I thought, okay this is gonna be hard to start organizing and to start. And then I met another, then I looked deeper and it's like there aren't any really, there aren't any others, right? There aren't any others and there you have to advocate. What I realized to add to build ranks of future leaders, there has to be an organization where they can go to and feel supported and just vent and let it out. And then have that organization grow their leadership because it's not going to happen in this date because that old, they have that ridiculous notion that, well if you work hard, you'll become a leader. They dismiss the target by a lot. When I have conversations with folks about, they've always had to work hard. And I said, alright, I said, think about someone who is high up there in the leadership change in your district. How many people of color you know that could do a better job. It's like, okay, so do you think when they all applied that they had a shot to get that job? Or is it that a guy or a gal that was mentored by someone to grow up to grow in that position? And so, you, that - it has to be deliberate. Anytime that I meet Latinx folks and through that organization when I introduce myself, I introduce myself as someone who has a chip on the shoulder. It comes to leadership development. Especially in this state. Especially in this state.

Motivation

The theme of motivation emerged as a support factor within participants' current leadership roles. Five of six participants (83%) participants discussed motivation including personal successes (67%) and personal motivation. All participants discussed how the need to increase Latinx representation in both the community and educational structures contributed to their motivation. Also, job successes such as winning district awards, having their schools do

well on standardized testing, and participating in state educational programs such as the North Carolina Principal Fellows program were described. Alberto said:

> I was a North Carolina Principal Fellow and that's, that in and of itself is, for me, really prestigious…And everybody tells me it's prestigious, so I'll take it. Thank you. Thank you. And then I just got [current leadership role] of the year.

Other job successes that participants (50%) discussed included getting their schools off of the state's low performing lists and/or exceeding growth on state testing programs. Two participants discussed personal motivation. Maria said:

> So, I take, there's things that I just push, and I don't know if it's because I say no, I don't think I can't do it. I push myself to do it. So, my internal push is big, my work ethic, I think. But again, I've made sure that I've put myself in positions to where I'm a part of things in the district. So, I'm able to network. People know me because I will join every committee. And I've always, in my 23 years, I've always had close relationships with my superintendents the superintendent team, the cabinet just because like I said, I like to be a part of things and know that I'm making some type of decision that's going to have a positive effect on someone.

Alberto said, "The hard work and dedication is what really gets you somewhere and doing what you love and just being happy. And if you're not happy then don't do it." Four of six participants (67%) discussed their passion for education as a motivator. For example, three of the participants (50%) specifically discussed the importance of being a role model for their students.

The support of others was also discussed when talking about motivational factors. Two of the six participants discussed how family, friends, and former colleagues serve as support factors within their current leadership role. Alberto said:

> I would say support system for me in particular is my team. So, my team and the people around me, my wife, we don't talk a whole lot about work, but she can kind of sense when we, I've had a stressful day and whatever. And we'll have that, a little bit of a conversation around that. And I'll tell her, I mean I don't have anything from her really, but some stuff is just, if I tell her, she's like, oh my god, how is that even possible? But I think the people around me, I have an amazing team around me.

Latinx Representation in Education and the Community. Four of six participants (67%) described the lack of Latinx representation within education and the community as a support factor because it increased their motivation in their current leadership roles. Additionally, one participant described being motivated to improve the community and believed that increasing the accessibility of educational communication would help in this endeavor. Alberto noted the example of creating Spanish weekly messages, both audio and email, to send to parents to increase parent communication. Alberto said:

> She'll probably send me an email here in a little bit with Sunday message and I'll go in and I'll translate it and she makes it, so I don't have to create [It]. It's great and I translate it and then I record it. And so, parents have the opportunity to have a name to call, a voice to hear that's supporting. So that's a huge success for me. And not necessarily personally, but professionally, I think.

Research Question 4: How do Latinx public school administrators characterize the challenges they experience in their current professional role?

The fourth question sought to examine the barriers and challenges that participants believe inhibited them in their current leadership roles. Data analysis was conducted to assess the perceived factors that inhibit the participants within their current leadership role. Factors can be

divided into three groups: personal experience (100%), Latinx culture (33%) and factors related to their former and/or current school districts (100%) including systematic racism, racism from colleagues, hiring processes, and lack of administrative supports.

Personal Experience

A primary theme that emerged about challenges that Latinx school administrators face was the personal experiences they currently face within their current leadership role. All six participants (100%) discussed personal experiences that they perceived to be barriers and/or challenges within their current leadership role. Two subthemes emerged from data analysis within personal experiences to include internal and external personal experiences.

Internal Struggles. Three of six participants (50%) discussed internal personal experiences as inhibitors within their current leadership role. Three of the six participants discussed their internal struggle with perfectionism based on the external expectations to be a Latinx representative and what being a Latinx representative means to them. Maria explained that she was the first Latinx principal within her school district, and she feels that this contributes to internal pressure for her to represent the greater Latinx community. Gabriela noted:

> The internal expectation for me comes from my high expectations for myself. Cuz I wanna be the best at what I do regardless. Right. Yeah. I think, I think I've realized that being a Latina woman that I have to be even and an introvert to top it off, right? Like my leadership style, I have to like, try even more. Right? So, it's a pressure from inside and for outside…It's a pressure from inside and from outside, I think.

Similarly, three of the six participants discussed the pressure to represent the Latinx community in their professional role. While no one has explicitly stated such an expectation,

participants described feeling that it was their responsibility to always perform in ways that would positively reflect upon the entire Latinx community. Sofia said:

> I do believe that people that are brown have to prove themselves double…I do feel like I have to maintain a high, high level of excellence in order to show the world that we are valued or that we are smart. That our kids are brilliant. It's more about the kids, too. Like we have to work harder to show them.

Two of the participants discussed how the expectations to be a Latinx representative translates to conversations with students and/or school district personnel who identify as Latinx. Maria described conversations she has with Latinx students during discipline situations, saying:

> I would say, you know you are the only Hispanic kid at this school, what do you think they're gonna say? How are they gonna look at you? And so, I guess as when my Hispanic kids get in trouble at school, I do find myself saying, you know what? You're already in a place where people are looking at you differently. Why? What can we show them to that we are different? What can we put out there which may be contributing to my drive of why I want to make sure that I do well in everything that I do look at.

Gabriela discussed the expectations she puts on herself and her Latinx community of educators, specifically Latinas:

> I have super high expectations for myself and for the people around me…I'm the biggest critic of Hispanics… like when I see a Latina educator, I'm very critical. Like, because you're representing us, like I wanna see your grammar in your emails. Correct. I wanna see, you know, like the way that you handle yourself. Correct. Like, I don't, I don't like to for us to be represented badly. So, I'm not just for like more Latinas. I want quality.

Additionally, the participants discussed the internal dialogue of wondering if they are being included within committees and leadership roles based on their achievements or because they are Latinx. Maria said:

> I think that I'm definitely put in, I think I am put on some committees because of, like interview committees, because of my being the only Hispanic. And so, when they need a diverse interview committee, it's for the district. I'm always on it, I think. But again, I'm hoping that my reputation has allowed that too.

Like Maria, Gabriela felt a perceived factor that inhibits her within her current leadership role is imposter syndrome; however, this imposter syndrome also motivates her to be a role model for her Latinx students, saying:

> Yeah. I mean, as a child, like, you know, like you said, we grew up in poverty amongst drug addiction, you know, domestic violence, whatever it is. This - seeing somebody that could accomplish, like I think about where I am now as to how I grew up and I, I'm you all, you get imposter syndrome, right? Like I see myself sometimes, and it's not because I'm Latina, it's just because of where I grew up from. Sometimes I'm sitting in cabinet meetings thinking like, 'How am I here?' Right? Like, 'How do I make this amount of money' and 'How am I here in this position?' I was, you know, counting pennies and living in places where like, you know, rats were more at home than I was. You know what I mean?' Like I, that's, that's a huge thing. So, to me, yeah. I mean, I want to be the inspiration to all those kids that are sitting in, you know, in the corner reading while their parents are high.

External Struggles. Four of six participants (67%) discussed external struggles within their personal experiences that they perceived to be barriers and/or challenges within their

current leadership role. The four participants discussed stress in their current leadership role as a perceived inhibitor including educator burn out, work/life balance, and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic within their personal and professional lives. Maria discussed the perceived stress of being in her current leadership role, saying:

> I feel like the more successful you are, the more roles you kind of inherit. And I have effort as middle, there's six, seven middle school principals, and it seems like I am the one that is chairing everything under the sun. But I can't say no either. So that's on me.

Two participants discussed the work/life balance that is a perceived factor that inhibits the participants within their current leadership role. Isabella discussed the work/life balance inhibitor that she feels is due to being Latina:

> Like our role in family is different than maybe like the American role in family. So, I feel like there like that could be a huge barrier as well. Like culturally not understanding like family responsibilities. It's more like traditional. And my husband is super supportive. Right. And if I say I need to work this game, like he has it, but I feel like for other people, like I don't know who they're married to, right. Or like, they may be expected to be at home with their family every afternoon and not be at a football game until 10 or 11 o'clock or until you clear the same. So, I feel like that could be a hindrance to specifically Hispanic women from moving up in leadership because of what like the family dynamic is.

Latinx Cultural Expectations About Education and Latinx Job Reciprocity

Two of six participants discussed the Latinx community and culture as perceived inhibitors within their current leadership role. Specifically, one of the frustrations that school-based participants discussed was the discipline of Latinx students. Two of the participants

discussed conversations they have had with parents based on the student being Latinx and addressing school-based discipline policies. Alberto discussed the internal struggle he has with the Latinx student population within his current leadership role. Alberto noted:

> I think one of the things I really struggle with, and I talked a lot of this, a lot about this with my fellows and trying to figure out and navigate and I don't know if it's a lack of parent education, but it's a lack of drive for my Hispanic students really just absolutely kills me.

Two participants discussed the need for dialogue within the Latinx community about education and their personal stories of immigration and migration to and within the United States. The two participants discussed their personal stories as well. They explained that the need for Latinx dialogue about personal situations is an inhibitor because they feel the lack of this dialogue causes increased Latinx student discipline issues. Alberto explained the lack of Latinx dialogue and how it translates into Latinx student discipline, saying:

> We don't talk about that [their parents' stories]. And for me, my parents' story is so much of my life. It was the ultimate sacrifice for them to leave their whole family behind and come over here with one suitcase and $500. And my one-year-old brother at the time, ultimate sacrifice without knowing, without anything. There's no job. They knew where they were gonna put their head that night. That's about it. To give me the opportunity to be where I am now, to graduate high school, honors college, get my master's. My brother also got his bachelor's. He never got his master's, but he's a chemist. And just my dad worked two and three jobs sometimes. And so that ultimate sacrifice from them to give me the opportunity to be where I am now. And so, I struggle with that. I struggle with the kids that don't care.

Alberto goes on to say:

> I have to share my story because it's so important that they understand theirs and know that they can overcome these things, that they have the opportunity of a lifetime to be able to go to college because they were born here and do better than what their parents had.

One participant discussed the issue of reciprocity of jobs within the Latinx community when migrating to the United States or from one state to another including the lack of knowledge for Latinxs to gain employment and similar careers that they had outside of the United States. Sofia explained:

> We will come here, try to work this out, figure this out and then move on. My parents were highly educated in my country, so we're not here because my dad is a college graduate. Like my mom was a homemaker cuz she did not wanna do nothing but stay at home. That was her thing and raise us. She did a great job and cook and do all that for us. So, trying to change that too. Like not every Hispanic is uneducated. You have tons of people that come from other countries that have doctorates, they were lawyers, but they come here and once you come here lose that status. Yes. So, they have nothing else to do, but end up having to clean because of your degree, there's no reciprocity.

Systemic Racism

Five of six participants (83%) discussed racism as a factor that inhibits them within their current leadership role. Two subthemes within systemic racism include community racism that translates into systematic racism within the education system. The perceived factor of systematic racism will be discussed under the theme of school districts. Three of six participants discussed racism toward the Latinx community as a factor that inhibited the participants within their

current leadership role. Direct quotations from participants about their experiences with racism in North Carolina are provided below in order to ensure their voices, their testimonios, are told completely and authentically. Maria said:

> We've just all used it [Racists comments to her school administrators from students and parents] as teachable moments, but as administrators within the state I think, because North Carolina still has some big, some heavy racist views. And I hate to say that, but it's the truth, know that they deal with that.

Sofia discussed her belief that the lack of representation of Latinx educators is due to the systemic racism within the South. Sofia said:

> I think the lack of representation is due to the lack of interest that the education field has. And I think it's the lack of interest comes from a deep-rooted mindset that Spanish individuals are not there yet. Even with brown people, I have to say even with black people, a lot of times they're like, 'Okay, so now we're brown.' So, we talk about brown people, but within the brown people, some black people are really racist too with their racist comments…Their comments, too, are very demeaning as well.

Gabriela discussed the different forms of racism she has experienced as an inhibitor within her current leadership role. Gabriela said:

> When I became a principal, I, I went to a school where again I started feeling like pushback. I was called a 'racist,' you know, by African American people. It's been, I think, I think White people are more 'bless your heart' about it, and African American people are more like in your face about it.

District Hiring Process. Two of six participants (33%) discussed district hiring processes as a factor that inhibited the participants within their current leadership role. All six

participants have worked at or currently work at Title 1 or low-income, high minority North Carolina PK-12 public schools. Two participants discussed the lack of Latinx leadership within their school districts as a perceived factor that inhibits them within the current leadership role and the need for more Latinx representation within the district's hiring processes. Sofia said:

> So, I'm like, so what is it? Is it now because I'm brown? [Participant feels she is always placed in low-income, high-minority schools]. So, it's a Black and Spanish kids. But it has been hard. That's why my two colleagues left. Um, because you apply for jobs. That's why I'm like, I'm not gonna apply unless they come and tap me because you won't get it. You apply for jobs, you're highly qualified.

Gabriela described being the only Latinx within her district's leadership and the mindset within the district's hiring processes as a perceived inhibitor within her current leadership role, stating:

> I'm having a hard time in this position. I love the work, love the work. My principals are fantastic. I love the work that I'm doing with them. But at the district level, it's very bad. They don't like outsiders. I'm the only Hispanic on cabinet obviously. I, and I wonder, I wonder so much across North Carolina how many Hispanics are in cabinet, right? How many, I, I wonder because as it as it is like the amount of you know, we have one Hispanic principal in those 80 schools.

School District Culture. Four of six participants (67%) discussed the lack of Latinx individuals within administration, both at the school and district levels as perceived factors that inhibit them within their current leadership roles, including their perception of how their race intersects with their current leadership role. Gabriela discussed the racial barriers within her current professional role: "They see you as a Hispanic first. And, and I worked through the years on building relationships, so they saw me as an educator, a person, and I happened to be Latina."

Sofia discussed her frustration with administrative expectations in Title 1 and low-income, high-minority schools as a Latina:

> I think if you're White and you're a female, you get a way easier, right? Um, we've seen White females that have been principals in low performing schools for years. Yeah. Been there nine years. The school's still enough. She's White, she's a female, she's there. Um, it doesn't matter. But we also have seen Black principals that are in low performing schools and after three years they get removed. Can't speak a lot about Spanish people cuz it's only me. Right. So, but I think they are tougher on the brown people. And as a brown woman, they expect a lot more from me than they expect from my White counterparts. Like, I'm supposed to work hard because I'm brown.

Four of six participants (67%) discussed their racial identity within their school district as a perceived factor that inhibits the participants within their current leadership roles. The participants noted that they have internal struggles within their current leadership role with being on district committees and panels and being deemed the Latinx representative. Sofia explained, "So they want you for panels, they want you to be, you know, open to things but not to opportunities."

Administrative Lack of Supports

Another theme that emerged from data analysis was the lack of administrative support within school districts as a factor the participants perceived inhibited them within their current leadership role. All six participants (100%) discussed school districts as a perceived factor that inhibits the participants within their current leadership role. Subthemes within school districts that emerged from data analysis include administrative lack of supports (67%) and school and district culture (100%).

Four of six participants (67%) discussed district-based lack of administrative support as a perceived factor that inhibited the participants within their current leadership roles. These included lack of administrative mentorship (16.7%), lack of administrative resources (16.7%), lack of emotional support (50%), and administrative expectations from district and state policies and legislation (16.7%). Maria discussed the lack of administrative resources, such as an administrative handbook, as a perceived factor that inhibited her:

> I remember meeting with my associate superintendent and one of my issues, we don't have a book and we don't have any, there's nothing to find other than the policies. If I need this, what do I do if this happens, what do I do if this happens? Everything's kind of just thrown out by different departments. And so, I remember asking, 'Is there something that we can look at a handbook for principals?' And I was told, 'No'…and I said, 'How do we learn? How do we know?' And I was told, you just kind of figure out.

Two of six participants (33%) discussed school-based culture as a perceived factor that inhibits the participants within their current leadership role. One participant discussed lack of administrative support as a perceived factor that inhibits the participant within their current leadership role, specifically discussing inconsistencies within school-based processes (i.e., school discipline). Isabella explained:

> The biggest thing is like consistency because if we're all consistent then I don't have to spend four hours on dress code…So, like if we're all consistent, like the lack of consistency, has been really difficult for me in terms of like dress code. But, and this is not like a large population, like the next comment I'm about to make, it's not a large group of students, but it is a group of students who exist. Right. Like the entitlement, I feel like it's been challenging to deal with like entitled students.

Three of six participants noted the lack of emotional support from the school district was a perceived factor that inhibited the participants in their current leadership roles and the need for improved and increased mentorship resources specifically for school-based administrators. One participant explained that although she receives support from district-based personnel, the lack of Latinx specific support exists due to the lack of Latinx demographic within school and district-based leadership within her school district. Sofia explained:

> No, there's really nobody. It's really hard…I had two great superintendents, but they don't know how to help me navigate this. And I said to a lot of 'em, there's probably tons of Spanish people out there. The problem is they don't know how to navigate the system or how to get in.

Maria explained:

> [The] lack of support as a principal, I was never given a mentor and it was just figure out basically as you go. And actually, I count myself as a Covid principal because that's when I really got my own real principalship. And again, we had so many changes within the district. I've stayed in the same district for 23 years, 22, 23 years. But there there's really no support system in place and you kind of have to go out and create your own network or you're floundering, it's you. As new principals are hired, I make it my goal to reach out to them and we remind them this is what we're doing, hey guys, just kind of mentor them because nothing is in place for us.

Maria continued to explain how the lack of administrative mentoring in her school district has provided motivation for her to expand her mentorship relationships with other school-based administrators in her school district. Maria explained:

> And so, I need to spend time to talk to them about budget because the school system won't do that. When I was hired, no one met with me about anything except for budget. And that was [Name] and she came out to the school, and she walked me through that. But no one else works with you for through anything. So, it, it's scary because you're manning a ship on your own.

Ricardo explained, as a former superintendent and school-based administrator, that administrative expectations at both the district and state levels were a factor that inhibited him within his current leadership role. These academic expectations include pressure from leadership concerning standardized test scores. Ricardo also discussed the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic as a factor that inhibited him in his last principalship (2021-2022 academic school year) and one reason the participant moved outside of the North Carolina public school system, saying:

> It [Pressure on administrators] weighs on you as a leader because you know, have the regular weight of accountability and keeping everyone happy and safe. Then you have this unknown with Covid and then the emotional, social, emotional impact I had on kids when they came back.

Two participants discussed how frustrations with educational priorities across the United States inhibited them within their current leadership role. One participant discussed the education system culture across the United States, describing the system as being "broken" and not knowing "how to actually support students." Alberto noted:

> Education's completely broken… I do honestly think the fact of the system is broken. And I keep on telling people, I guess full transparency for me too. And I thought, I don't know if I wanna be in the system when the system breaks. Cuz that's gonna be ugly. It's gonna be terrible.

Alberto goes on to say:

> It's [Education system] just honestly that the system is broken. The system doesn't know how to actually support students in the way need to be supported. The system focuses on test scores that don't actually mean anything.

Summary

This chapter detailed through data analysis, coding, and thematic grouping how the participants responded to the study's four research questions. The questions focused on the participants' professional advancement into school leadership and their current leadership roles. The questions examined participants' perceptions of factors that supported and inhibited them in their professional advancement into school leadership and in their current leadership roles. The research questions were specifically focused on North Carolina PK-12 public school administrators that identify as Hispanic and/or Latinx. The goal of the study was to assess these research questions within the lens of a Hispanic/Latinx North Carolina PK-12 public school administrator's point of view. The goal of the study was to assess these research questions through the lens of Latinx identity.

This chapter included an analysis of the responses of the six participants. Data analysis was conducted within the demographic survey completed by each participant via Google Forms and the semi-structured, open interview questions associated with the four research questions. Results were analyzed, evaluated, and interpreted with consideration given to Saldaña's data analysis and within the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory, specifically LatCrit (Alemán, 2009; Osorio, 2018; Solórzano, 1998). As discussed in Chapter 1, this study included an emphasis on experiential knowledge and a commitment to social justice. Implications

associated with the findings of this study, along with recommendations for school districts and future studies are discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Summary of the Study

This chapter contains a summary of the problem, purpose, methods, and ethical components of this research study. Discussions regarding the findings and their connections to existing literature are presented along with recommendations for future practices and additional research. These discussions are aligned to each of the four research questions. The chapter concludes with a summary of the significant elements of this study.

As of 2023, the Latinx population is the largest minority racial/ethnic group within the United States, surpassing the African American population (Jones et al., 2021). As the Latinx population increases across the United States, many traditionally White communities are seeing an increase in school-age Latinx students (Murakami et al., 2016). Yet, the presence of Latinx teachers and school administrators does not reflect the diversity of students, particularly in suburban school districts (Fernandez et al., 2015; Murakami et al., 2016)

The purpose of this study was to use an equity lens to explore the experiences/testimonios of Latinx administrators: their perceptions and experiences as public-school administrators within public school districts located in the Southeastern United States. There is a need to explore the lived experiences of Latinx school administrators located in the Southeastern United States in order to increase understanding about the importance of racial and ethnic representation among teachers and school administrators for students. This is important as research suggests that adult role models who reflect students' ethnic or racial similarities can positively affect student engagement and academic performance (Fernandez et al., 2015). Despite this important relationship, and despite the increasing number of Latinx children in schools, research examining the career paths, barriers, and professional mobility of Latinx school leaders has been fairly

limited in recent years (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Niño et al., 2017; Sánchez et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2020) As Murakami et al. (2016) noted, learning about Latinx school leadership can bring cultural relevance to education.

As the U.S. Latinx population increases overall and in schools specifically, it is important to examine the experiences of Latinx school leaders (Niño et al., 2017; Sánchez et al., 2020). To accomplish this purpose, this study sought to answer research questions which are based on the work of Fernandez et al. (2015). The research questions for this study included:

1. What do Latinx public school administrators perceive to be the factors that supported their professional advancement into school leadership?
2. What do Latinx public school administrators perceive to be the factors that inhibited their professional advancement into school leadership?
3. How do Latinx public school administrators characterize the support they experience in their current professional role?
4. How do Latinx public school administrators characterize the challenges they experience in their current professional role?

A qualitative methodology was chosen for this study to develop an understanding of the lived experiences/testimonios that Latinx school administrators encountered in their pursuit to become leaders and the ones they face in their current professional roles. This method allowed for a more personal approach to the research as participants shared their lived experiences, their perceptions of their current school leadership roles, and their pathways to leadership (Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Additionally, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and LatCrit formed the theoretical framework of this study and served as the lens for data gathering and analysis. Critical Race Theory is utilized by scholars to provide voice to

marginalized groups in society by presenting research that focuses on the experiences and knowledge of these individuals and groups (Alemán, 2009).

There were six participants in this research study. The population studied for this research was comprised of individuals that identify as Hispanic, Latino, Latina, and/or Latinx and are currently serving or recently served as public school administrators in North Carolina. Specifically, all participants have served as principal, assistant principal, or dean of students in North Carolina within the past two years. One participant had previous experience as a superintendent outside of North Carolina, and one participant worked as an area superintendent in North Carolina. Two participants have served as either a superintendent (outside North Carolina) or area superintendent (within North Carolina). Participants were identified for this study via purposive sampling that also included snowball sampling due to the limited amount of North Carolina public school administrators that identify as Hispanic, Latino, Latina and/or Latinx (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). At the time of this study, four of the six (67%) participants were in school-based leadership roles such as principal, assistant principal, or dean of students; one participant was in a district-based leadership position, and one participant had just transitioned out of a principalship in North Carolina at the end of the 2021-2022 school year and is presently an adjunct professor in the state. All participation was voluntary; participants provided written consent to participate in this study and to complete a one-hour, semi-structured interview.

Data from this sample were gathered and analyzed through two methods: a demographic survey was administered, and semi-structured interviews were transcribed and coded to provide themes and insights to each research question. The data collection instruments for this study were designed to elicit responses from the participants through the lens of identifying as Latinx and being in North Carolina. Due to COVID-19 health concerns and the decentralized locations

of participants, all interviews were conducted virtually. The data analysis and coding processes suggested by Saldaña (2013) were used for this study including the development and analysis of field notes and analytic memos, precoding, and two rounds of formal coding.

Findings in the Context of Empirical Literature

There were consistent topics that the participants discussed within the four research questions. All participants discussed factors that they felt supported their pathway to educational leadership. Most participants emphasized the importance of support they received from school district personnel. They also described wanting to become school administrators in order to increase Hispanic/Latinx leadership in schools and the community. Additionally, all participants discussed factors that they felt support them within their current leadership position. These current supports are similar to the ones they experienced when ascending to their current positions. Support from others and the ongoing desire to represent the Latinx community arose as significant support and motivational factors in their present roles. Additionally, five of the six participants (83%) discussed factors that they felt were barriers and/or challenges in their pathway to educational leadership, with one lone participant stating that he had not experienced any barriers in his professional advancement. Finally, all participants discussed factors that they felt were challenges within their current leadership roles.

Utilizing the lens of LatCrit Theory and Critical Race Theory, themes emerged that summarized the entirety of the research questions. However, themes that arose in response to questions about support that participants experienced while ascending to leadership were similar to the support that they currently experience while serving in leadership roles. Similarly, themes that arose in response to questions about barriers that participants experienced while ascending to leadership were similar to barriers they currently experience. For example, school personnel,

school and district initiatives, mentoring/networking, and personal motivation consistently arose as important support factors as they ascended into leadership and as participants serve in leadership positions. These same types of similarities existed for the barriers they experienced while advancing professionally and while serving as educational leaders. Personal experiences, Latinx cultural expectations about education, systemic racism, and a lack of administrative support were themes that consistently arose about barriers to becoming administrators and as barriers while serving as administrators.

The sections that follow will capture the essence of the themes that arose pertaining to each research question. Additionally, the relationship to previous research and the importance of these findings will be described.

Research Question 1: What do Latinx public school administrators perceive to be the factors that supported their professional advancement into school leadership?

This research demonstrated that school districts impact the support and barriers facing Latinx PK-12 school administrators in North Carolina. Throughout this study, subthemes from within school districts were discussed with regards to both supports and barriers as a perceived factor in their professional advancement into school leadership. The biggest factor of support was school district personnel, whether the relationship was current or had taken place sometime in the past. Participants consistently described individuals who supported them in their professional advancement into school leadership through positive administrative relationships, mentoring, and encouragement.

Participants also discussed the impact of school personnel they interacted with during their own PK-12 schooling experiences, with some sharing positive memories and others sharing alarming experiences. In some cases, pleasant interactions with teachers were very motivating

and remembered fondly years later. However, some participants discussed racist comments from adults, and one participant became emotional when describing an elementary teacher administering corporal punishment because he spoke Spanish at school. In an ironic twist, participants described both the positive interactions and negative interactions as motivating, albeit for different reasons. It is not surprising that the positive, nurturing exchanges they experienced as children were well received. However, the negative childhood interactions motivated participants to rise above the adversity, creating the will to prove the adversarial adult wrong and making them want to become better educators than what they experienced.

These findings relate to previous research related to the history of marginalization of the Latinx population in the U.S. For example, Hernandez and Murakami (2016) reported that schools are one of the first places that Latinx individuals report experiencing discrimination. That was true of participants in this study. For example, despite Spanish being the second most widely spoken language in the country and being spoken by 70% of the Hispanic population in the U.S., (Krogstad & Noe-Bustamante, 2021), its use is commonly discouraged in schools (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). One participant in this study was struck by a teacher for speaking the language he knew best.

Other topics that were discussed about participants own PK-12 schooling experiences included a lack of Latinx representation as educators, the absence of Latinx topics in the curriculum, and little support from school officials regarding college preparation and pathways to college. One participant discussed the lack of Latinx students in her high school honors classes at school and how this lack of representation discouraged her from taking honors classes within her PK-12 school experience. Isabella said:

> Because when I was a student here, I took one honors class and I was like, "I'm not." It was funny because it's civics like the class I teach or so, I took one honors class and I was just like, yeah, I'm not, and I know like I'm white passing, but I was like I'm not gonna be the only Mexican person in here. Like I cannot be in here. And then my friend [Name], who's also Mexican, she's like "[Participant's name], no because if you leave me, I'm really gonna be the only Mexican person in here. You cannot leave me." So, I did not leave but I did not take another honors class after that.

These findings about the positive and negative impact of educators on Latinx students and educators are important because they illustrate the importance of the voices of educators: what educators say matters. It was clear that school district personnel had a tremendous and lasting impact on the participants as PK-12 students, as teachers, and as leaders. As Hernandez and Murakami (2016) noted, "It is also important to recognize the need to foster the preparation of teachers, not only for content knowledge but in being prepared to break away from deficit thinking towards children of color" (p.12).

Other areas of support from school districts included beginning teacher programs, official recognition programs, and recruitment strategies that commonly involved partnerships with universities. For example, participants discussed recruitment initiatives and programs offered through their districts, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, and regional universities as part of the supports that contributed to their professional advancement. State programs such as the North Carolina Teaching Fellows and Principal Fellows programs were important supports for participants as well. District recognition programs such as Teacher of the Year, Assistant Principal of the Year, and Principal of the Year also served as motivation for advancing into school leadership. These findings relate to a research study conducted by

Hernandez et al (2016) which noted that the majority of Latinx school leaders within their study participated in district-based programs for their professional advancement into school leadership. These findings are important because they highlight the impact of district-based programs such as partnerships with area universities that focus on increasing the presence of Latinx educators and leaders (Shore et al., 2021).

Another theme that emerged about support factors was that mentoring and networking were important to the professional advancement of participants. All participants discussed the key role that mentoring played in their professional advancement into school leadership. The subthemes within mentorship were school district mentorship, personal life mentorship, and the need for Latinx school and community mentorship programs. All participants discussed the need for Latinx representation in leadership roles within education and their surrounding communities. The participants discussed the need for mentorship as they believe this would enhance the recruitment and retention of Latinx educators. All the participants discussed how being a Latinx role model and providing mentorship for their students impacted their motivation to advance into school leadership. Like Hernandez and Murakami (2016), this research demonstrated the importance of mentoring and role models for Latinx school leaders, especially due to the lack of mentors with similar cultural experiences.

Another theme that arose was that participants described their own motivation and drive to achieve as support factors in their ascension to leadership roles. While there was no research that pertained to motivation of Latinx school administrators in the context of this study, all participants discussed how the absence of Latinx topics in the curriculum and the notable absence of Latinx leaders motivated them. These findings are important because they illustrate

the need to proactively address the notable absence of Latinx topics in schools' curriculum and Latinx individuals among schools' leaders.

Research Question 2: What do Latinx public school administrators perceive to be the factors that inhibited their professional advancement into school leadership?

This research demonstrated a variety of factors that inhibited the advancement of participants into educational leadership positions. The first category appeared within the participants' own PK-12 schooling experiences. Inhibiting factors included language barriers, a lack of Latinx role models, a lack of Latinx representation in the gifted and talented programs, and the lack of college knowledge and accessibility. Participants faced these inhibitors against a cultural backdrop in which expectations for educational achievement were limited. Additionally, participants faced racism in a variety of forms, including negative experiences with colleagues, discrimination in hiring practices, and an unwelcoming culture and climate in schools. Finally, participants discussed the overall lack of administrative supports that inhibited their professional advancement into school leadership including the lack of mentorships, lack of resources, lack of emotional support (especially during Covid), and the overall stress due to pressures and expectations of school administrators in North Carolina.

Participants in this study also reflected on racism and the lack of cultural diversity in many North Carolina districts, the need for a societal mind shift about the importance and imagery of multilingualism, and how widespread racial views translated to negative interactions with colleagues. Participants stated school and district culture was a factor that inhibited their professional advancement into school leadership including hiring processes, racism from colleagues, lack of empathy/lens of whiteness from colleagues, and lower academic expectations for Latinx students.

Connections between this study and existing literature existed. For example, research suggests that Latinx students are less likely than White students to be in gifted and talented programs, less likely to be offered the necessary high school courses commonly required for college admissions, and more likely to be receiving special education services (Bergey et al., 2019). All participants in this study were either first generation high school graduates or college graduates except for one participant whose father had obtained a bachelor's degree. Based on the negative PK-12 schooling experiences of participants, these findings also relate to existing literature which suggests the Latinx children hold their race/ethnicity in lower regard as compared to White students. These views regarding identity may negatively affect Latinx students' self-esteem as well as their perceptions of college as an attainable goal (Núñez & Meráz García, 2017). In addition, research suggests that these types of barriers hinder the development and achievement of Latinx children within PK-12 educational settings, limit their preparation for college admissions, and help to negatively frame their perceptions of opportunities and areas for success (Bergey et al., 2019; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). As Stein et al. (2018) noted, "These poor educational outcomes reflect widespread systemic inequalities in educational opportunities that underscore the racial nature of educational opportunity gaps in the United States" (p.2). Stein et al. (2018) also reported that Latinx students had fewer positive experiences compared to other racial and ethnic groups based on racial injustices, student-teacher relationships, school policies, and Latinx student experiences with stereotypes and prejudice (Stein et al., 2018).

These findings are important because they depict the need for racial equity training and an overhaul of supports for students and staff within school districts in North Carolina. With additional trainings to address systemic racism, school districts can then truthfully analyze and

address cultural problems in order to decrease the racial discrimination faced by both Latinx students and school employees. As Hernandez et al. (2016) explained:

> Constrained by racial dynamics, the education of Latinos in public school systems has historically been plagued by limited resources and facilities, low expectations for Latino students, limited inclusion of Latino educational professionals, and an ideology of assimilation that demands that students from cultural backgrounds different from American mainstream change themselves culturally to fit the organizational culture of the schools and the dominant society (p.119).

Furthermore, the findings suggest that these issues not only affect Latinx students, but also Latinx educators. Like the inequalities of educational opportunities for Latinx students overall, Latinx preservice teachers are more likely to encounter racial and ethnic barriers in teacher training programs than their White counterparts (Bergey et al., 2019). Racism in college programs and teaching programs for preservice teachers, including racially insensitive comments, stereotypes, and social marginalization in their interactions with higher education professors and students, may go unchallenged. These discriminatory behaviors may result in psychological and social pressures for preservice Latinx teachers (Bergey et al., 2019). All these various aspects indicate the need to address racism experienced by Latinx students, educators, and administrators. However, this racial discrimination within the school context may also contribute to the Latinx cultural expectations about education. Regardless, decreasing the systematic racism with school districts can also potentially decrease the systemic racism within the surrounding community. In addition, incorporating more community outreach for the Latinx communities may help alleviate the negative Latinx cultural expectations about education.

Research Question 3: How do Latinx public school administrators characterize the support they experience in their current professional role?

The findings related to question three were similar to the findings for the first research question. Three factors emerged as supports within participants' current roles: School District Supports, specifically related to School-Based and District Personnel; Educational Initiatives; and Educational Mentorships and Networking. Specifically, all participants stated that school district personnel, including colleagues, school-based administrators, and district leaders serve as a support network within their current leadership roles. These personnel serve as official and unofficial mentors. Additional areas of support within the participants' current leadership roles included initiatives within school districts, the North Carolina Department of Instruction (NCDPI), and universities that are designed to recruit more Latinx educators and leaders. Other factors that participants described as supports included the motivation to positively represent the Latinx community, provide mentoring for other Latinx educators and students, and to advocate for Latinx presence in the curriculum. Finally, other factors that supported the participants within their current leadership roles were the implementation of school-based and district-wide professional development, specifically racial equity training. Other categories that participants described as supports included changes within school policies and curriculum designed to promote equitable treatment of all students.

These findings are important because they indicate that recruitment initiatives at the school, district, and state levels are impactful in supporting Latinx individuals becoming educational leaders. This implies that these types of initiatives should be increased as North Carolina's Latinx population continues to grow. These findings also illustrate how addressing

racial discrimination for Latinx students has the added benefit of improving the pathways and roles of Latinx educators, specifically Latinx school administrators.

Though the lack of Latinx mentorships and networking was a concern expressed by participants, it was motivating, nonetheless. All participants discussed how being a Latinx role model and providing mentorship for their students impacted their internal motivation to seek professional advancement into school leadership and within their current leadership role. These findings relate to existing literature that suggests that Latinx school leaders understand their impact in representing Latinx communities and inspiring the educational and professional advancement of Latinx students (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). These findings highlight the need to foster mentoring and networking for aspiring and practicing Latinx administrators.

Research Question 4: How do Latinx public school administrators characterize the challenges they experience in their current professional role?

Findings related to Research Question 4 were similar to those for Research Question 2. This research demonstrated that the culture, policies, and practices of school districts inhibited the participants within their current leadership roles. The factors specifically cited included hiring processes, racism, inequitable policies, and the limited presence of the Latinx community in curriculum, mentorship, and administrators. Additionally, participants discussed the overall lack of administrative support including a lack of mentorships, limited resources, a lack of emotional support, and feeling "burnt out" due to the pressures and expectations placed on school administrators.

Participants, specifically the Latina participants, also discussed the Latinx cultural expectations and the struggle of their work/life balance. This included their internal struggle with perfectionism including pressure to be the best Latinx representative possible for their schools

and surrounding community. Within these struggles, the discussion of what being a Latinx representative means to them was discussed. The participants discussed that they question if they are being included within committees and leadership roles based on their achievements or merely because they are Latinx which was referred to as imposter syndrome.

One finding within the inhibitors of the participants within their current leadership role was the schools the participants worked at. At the time of this study, all six participants have worked at or currently work at Title 1 or low-income, high minority North Carolina PK-12 public schools. All six participants discussed the barriers and challenges of working in low-income, high minority, and/or Title 1 North Carolina PK-12 public schools. Participants discussed the additional stress of being expected to heroically improve student achievement and reduce incidents of student discipline in challenging schools. Participants also discussed that they felt they were moved to other low-income, high minority schools more than their White counterparts.

These findings relate to existing literature which suggests that Latinx school leaders are often placed in high poverty and/or highly diverse school settings that can be challenging to lead. These placements are often based on the notion that Latinx leaders working in these situations might build strong ties with the local community. These ties, in turn, might support their leadership trajectories. (Martinez et al., 2020; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). In reality, these placements often land Latinx leaders in difficult leadership situations while still lacking the formal, professional mentorship that would positively affect their success. (Rodela et al., 2019). As Hernandez and Murakami (2016) noted:

> It is important to recognize that placement of Latina/o school leaders primarily in schools with high concentration of risk factors can be problematic for several reasons. First, the

> potential to 'ghettoize' Latina/o school leaders in particular work settings can result in the assumption that they are only sufficiently qualified to work with and lead other minorities…Second, overall, the Latina/o participants worked in particular types of settings, namely, some of the most challenging schools with some of the neediest students and schools exhibiting substantive gaps in achievement among students. Given current accountability mandates, these principals may find themselves facing public scrutiny, removal, and limited options (p.113).

These findings are important because it shows the impact of school placement and the need for districts to analyze their administrative placements across the district.

Another barrier included the lack of administrative support. Participants discussed the need for more emotional support from superiors, Latinx mentorships, and networking as recommendations to overcome the barriers that inhibited them during their professional advancement and/or within their current leadership role. These findings are important because research suggests that professional barriers for Latinx educational leaders include racial discrimination, the lack of formal mentorship, and a lack of networking opportunities (Rodela et al., 2019). Research indicates this lack of formal, professional mentorship is a frequent barrier for Latinx school leaders, especially Latina school leaders (Rodela et al., 2019). This dynamic is problematic because networking provides access to develop relationships and potential job opportunities. Also, the lack of formal mentoring limits networking opportunities that help to develop an understanding of the social norms within the networking system. For example, "Latinx leaders reported that a lack of knowledge about the unspoken rules of leadership put them at a disadvantage, and often led to feelings of isolation" (Rodela et al., 2019, p.4). These feelings of isolation and discrimination may be even more exacerbated in states with less Latinx

school leaders (Rodela et al., 2019). As Hernandez and Murakami (2016) highlighted, "The importance of mentoring and of role models for Latina/o leaders is of important consideration, especially when there is an absence of mentors familiar with the same cultural experience" (p.37). Within this study, the findings suggest that increased Latinx representation, specifically including mentorship and networking opportunities within PK-12 Administrative and Educator district-mandated, both school-based and district-wide, is an area of improvement within North Carolina.

The Latina participants also noted the struggle to maintain a work/life balance. These findings relate to existing literature because research suggests a variety of personal barriers exist for Latinx educational leaders, specifically Latinas. Common personal barriers for Latinx educational leaders, especially Latinas, include family, religion, and community and career balance between personal and professional lives (Niño et al., 2017; Hernandez et al., 2014; Méndez-Morse et al., 2015; Sánchez et al., 2020). Additional discriminatory experiences affecting Latina school leadership have included "comments made about their appearance, age or stature, push back on their use of Spanish in reaching Latinx families, and sexual harassment from other administrators" (Rodela et al., 2019, p.4).

Implications

Recommendations arising from this study are intended to increase Latinx representation within education, address racism associated with school and district cultures, and improve the North Carolina education system for the betterment of all students. The results from Research Question 2 about inhibiting factors illuminate the need to provide more support for the Latinx community that will promote foundational knowledge and accessibility to education, specifically higher education. Strategies to increase the number of Latinx teachers and administrators begin

at early childhood. For example, Núñez and Meráz García (2017) recommended the Kinder to College Program utilized by some school districts. This program encourages kindergarten students to visit college campuses with their parents/guardians (Núñez & Meráz García, 2017). Additional aspects of this program include having PK-12 schools to invite colleges and universities into the school setting and creating support systems to help Latinx students in the application and financial aid process for college entrance. In addition to creating PK-12 college access programming, school districts must ensure effective communication with Latinx parents, including setting long-term educational goals and providing sufficient Spanish translations with all school communications.

Research Question 2 also revealed the need for culturally responsive curriculum. For example, the history and culture of the Latinx community should be integrated into existing curriculum along with elective classes in middle and high schools that give students the opportunity to learn about the Latinx heritage. This sort of initiative is illustrated in Dillard's (2022) description of a local curriculum in the Tulsa, Oklahoma schools that addresses the historical marginalization and discrimination of minority groups through the lens of learning about history to help the future. Learning about historical events that depict information about all racial groups, not just dominate voices, may help marginalized groups feel impowered and represented within their schools and communities while addressing systemic and systematic racism.

Research Question 1 and Research Question 3 revealed the positive impact of programming designed to attract and nurture Latinx educators. Therefore, it is recommended to expand recruitment and incentive efforts such as the North Carolina Teaching Fellows and Principal Fellows programs. Also, it is suggested to create (or expand) district partnerships with

local colleges and universities to provide pathways for Latinx teachers into school leadership. Given that participants frequently discussed the importance of mentoring relationships, districts should also ensure that they have robust mentoring programs for Latinx educators.

Throughout this study, racism was discussed by Latinx educational leaders in relation to school and district culture, hiring processes, and interactions with school district personnel and the surrounding community. This sad phenomenon negatively impacts the progress of the Latinx community and education overall, and it defies the moral purpose of schooling. Helping to ensure positive, welcoming, and appropriate educational experiences for Latinx leaders, teachers, families, and students is not only the morally correct thing to do, it is a pragmatic imperative. As Hernandez and Murakami (2016) explained:

> Social progress in this country requires the recognition that the nation's future is bound up with the educational achievement of Latinos. Despite the refusal of many Americans to incorporate Latinos into the nation's major institutions, the Latino population will continue to increase at rapid rates while the dominant population will experience slow growth and eventually population decreases (p.122).

Therefore, proactive efforts must be made to combat racism. These efforts can begin by ensuring equitable practices within schools and by establishing clear norms that all children and adults are to be treated with dignity and respect. Training is integral to this notion, and it is recommended that districts require ongoing racial equity training to ensure that values of equity and fairness are operationalized by all who work in schools. As related to Latinx school administrators, equitable hiring practices, mentoring, and the promotion of mental health and well-being must be promoted.

Recommendations for Further Research

The limitations of this study included a small number of participants and challenging accessibility to participants because of COVID-19 restrictions. The limited number of Latinx school administrators in North Carolina meant that there were few potential participants. This issue was addressed by including Latinx administrators from a wide array of potential positions (e.g., principals, assistant principals, and deans of students). Additionally, like other qualitative research, this study is not intended to generalize results but to enhance understanding of the experiences of often marginalized Latinx school leaders by giving voice to their testimonios.

The volume of research on Latinx leadership in schools is limited, and the research that does exist tends to be limited to the Southwestern region of the United States (Niño et al., 2017; Sánchez et al., 2020). This lack of published research about Latinx school administrators, which has been accompanied by an increase in the Latinx school population within the United States, highlights the need for additional research studies within this area. Additional qualitative studies are needed to continue to more fully understand the supports and barriers faced by Latinx school administrators in the Southeastern United States. These studies could include in-depth field work, ethnographies, and observations. It is the recommendation that additional studies include the specific targets within gender of Latinx population. In addition, due to the limited number of potential participants, it is recommended to expand the geographic locations within future studies to include additional states within the Southeastern United States. The researcher hopes that the testimonios illuminated by this study can fill a gap in existing literature and inform policy makers and school districts who seek to improve educational experiences for the Latinx community, particularly Latinx public school administrators in North Carolina.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that there is a need for increased Latinx representation among North Carolina's PK-12 public school educators, specifically within school-based and district level leadership. Furthermore, the findings suggest that factors to increase the presence of Latinx educational leaders include increasing school district supports, community and state-level supports, addressing systemic racism, and providing opportunities for Latinx testimonios to be heard, their languages used, and their lives to be represented in the educational systems across North Carolina. The findings of this study are important because research indicates the positive impact of Latinx school administrators on schools and the communities they serve (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). It is the researcher's hope that the recommendations from this study will be utilized by district and state-level policy makers and practitioners to increase the supports for Latinx school administrators within their professional advancement into school leadership and within their current leadership roles.

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APPENDIX A: PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS - INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Each participant will receive a copy and be required to sign the Interview Consent Form.

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of the Research Study:

Learning from Testimonios about Equity Leadership: Experiences of Latinx Public School Administrators in North Carolina

Principal Investigator/Researcher: Cassie Bryson-Evans
Faculty Member: Dr. Walter Hart, UNC Charlotte

You are invited to participate in a research study via an interview. Participation in this research study is voluntary. The information provided is to give you key information to help you decide whether or not to participate.

Important Information You Need to Know

- The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of Latina/o/x school leaders in public schools in North Carolina.
- You must be age 18 or older to participate in this study.
- The questions are not sensitive or overly personal.
- There is a demographic survey emailed via Google Forms prior to the interview (approximately 5 minutes long).
- We anticipate that the interview will take about 60 - 90 minutes to complete.

Why are we doing this study?

The purpose of this study is to explore within the focus on equity leadership the experiences and stories of Latinx administrators: their perceptions and experiences as public school administrators within suburban and urban school districts located in North Carolina.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you identify as a Latina/o/x public school leader in North Carolina.

What will happen if I take part in this study?

If you choose to participate you will complete a demographic survey emailed prior to the interview and a one hour interview with the researcher via digital platform. The demographic survey information will be used to provide statistical data of participant interview pool as well as provide the researcher with participant information prior to the interview. There will be follow-up communication after the interview via email and the opportunity to access any data, transcripts and recordings of your interview.

What benefits might I experience?

You will not benefit personally by participating in this study. You will not receive a financial incentive for taking part in this study.

What risks might I experience?

We do not believe that you will experience any risk from participating in this study. We do not expect this risk to be common and you may choose to skip questions you do not want to answer.

How will my information be protected?

You are asked to provide your email address as part of this study. I will use your email address to send you the Consent to Participate Form as well as send you the Google Form link of the demographic survey to be completed prior to the interview. Additionally, I will use your email to send you the interview transcript once I have completed the transcribing process. Your privacy will be protected and confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible. Your responses will be treated as confidential. To protect your privacy, your identity including potential school/district locations, I'll assign a study ID code to your questionnaire responses. I will digitally record our interviews. Immediately after each interview, I will transfer the recording to the university (UNCC) password-protected cloud data storage. While the study is active, all data will be stored within the password-protected cloud storage accessible by only the primary researcher. Only I, Cassie Bryson-Evans, the primary researcher will have routine access to the study data. However, other people, with the approval of the investigator, may need to see the information I collect about you including UNCC staff and other agencies as required by law or allowed by federal regulations. However, that information will be coded for anonymity. After the study is complete, all interview recordings will be deleted after the research project is completed. We might use

the data for future research studies and we might share the non-identifiable interview data with other researchers for future research studies without additional consent from you.

How will my information be used after the study is over?

After this study is complete, data may be shared with other researchers for use in other studies without asking for your consent again or as may be needed as part of publishing our results. The data we share will NOT include information that could identify you.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

It is up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

Who can answer my questions about this study and my rights as a participant?

If you have questions concerning the study, contact the principal investigator and/or faculty advisor:
Principal Investigator: Cassie Bryson-Evans (cbryson4@uncc.edu)
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Walter Hart (whhart@uncc.edu)

You may request a copy of these rights and compliance guidelines. If you are 18 years of age or older, and understand the information provided and freely consent to participate in the study, you may sign below and return to the researcher.

Consent to Participate

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will receive a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

_____

Name (PRINT) Date

_____

Signature Date

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

This survey is designed to collect demographic information pertaining to current North Carolina based, PK-12 school administrators who identify as Latinx/a/o and/or Hispanic and are eligible and participate within this study. Data collected from this survey will be used for dissertation research purposes only.

1. How many years have you served as a PK–12 public education school administrator in North Carolina?
    a. 0 - 4 years
    b. 5 - 9 years
    c. 10 - 14 years
    d. 15 - 19 years
    e. 20+ years
    f. Choose not to disclose

2. Indicate your highest level of education achieved:
    a. Bachelor's Degree
    b. Graduate Teaching Certificate
    c. Master's Degree
    d. Doctorate Degree
    e. Choose not to disclose

3. Indicate your age range:

a. 20–24

b. 25–29

c. 30–34

d. 35–39

e. 40–44

f. 45–49

g. 50–54

h. 55–59

i. 60–64

j. 65+

k. Choose not to disclose

4. Do you consider yourself to be a Latinx individual?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Other

d. Choose not to disclose

5. With which of the following Latinx origins do you most closely identify?

a. Mexican

b. Puerto Rican

c. Cuban

d. Other

e. Choose not to disclose

6. Which of the following most accurately describes the gender with which you identify?
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Other:
    d. Choose not to disclose

7. Please indicate the highest level of education achieved by your parent(s) **or** legal guardian(s):

Mother	Father	Legal Guardian
A. HS Diploma	A. HS Diploma	A. HS Diploma
B. Associate's Degree	B. Associate's Degree	B. Associate's Degree
C. Bachelor's Degree	C. Bachelor's Degree	C. Bachelor's Degree
D. Master's Degree	D. Master's Degree	D. Master's Degree
E. Doctorate Degree	E. Doctorate Degree	E. Doctorate Degree
F. Choose not to disclose	F. Choose not to disclose	F. Choose not to disclose

8. How do you identify:
    a. Single
    b. Married
    c. Divorced
    d. Widow/widower

e. Other

f. Choose not to disclose

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Racial/Ethnic Background

With which racial/ethnic group do you identify?

Professional Background

What is your current professional role and how long have you served in that role?

Please describe other professional roles you have held.

Personal Schooling Experiences

Describe your PK-12 schooling experiences when you were a student.

Did those experiences contribute to your decision to become an educator, and if so, how?

Professional Supports and Barriers: Advancement into Formal Leadership Roles

What do you believe were the significant factors that supported your advancement into a formal school leadership role?

a. Describe the people who supported you?
b. Describe any programs or experiences that were helpful with your advancement?

Describe any barriers that you faced in your professional advancement into school leadership?

a. Describe any people who inhibited your advancement.
b. Describe any programs or experiences that served as obstacles to your advancement.

Did your racial/ethnic identity impact your advancement into school administration, and if so, how?

Professional Supports and Barriers: Current Leadership Role

Challenges

Describe the biggest challenges you face in your current role?

Describe the support systems or individuals that help you to address these challenges (e.g. board of education, trusted colleagues, community groups, personal relationships, etc.).

Describe any barriers you have to overcome in order to address these challenges (e.g., board of education, trusted colleagues, community groups, personal relationships, etc.).

Successes

What are the biggest successes you have experienced or are experiencing in your current role?

Describe the supports contributed to these successes.

Describe the barriers you had to overcome in order to have these successes.

The Intersection of Race, Ethnicity, and the Current Professional Role

Describe how your racial/ethnic identity intersects with your current role.

How do you think other school administrators in North Carolina experience the intersection of race, ethnicity, and their professional roles?