

ABSTRACT

THOMPSON, EMEM. Examining Educational Practices, Strategies Related to Academic Achievement of Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID era: An Exploratory Exploratory case study of One Urban Elementary School in North Carolina. (Under the direction of Dr. Lisa Bass).

This research study explored the relationship between post-COVID educational strategies and the academic achievement of marginalized students, focusing on Black and Hispanic populations. The pandemic intensified pre-existing disparities, making it crucial to examine how schools have adapted to address these issues. The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of specific initiatives and contribute to a broader understanding of equity and achievement in the post-pandemic educational environment.

The research occurred at Hillview Elementary, a PK-5 urban school with 360 students, predominantly African American (59.5%) and Hispanic (31.8%). Nearly all students (99%) came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Six educators from Hillview participated in the study, all with significant experience teaching Black and Hispanic students during and after the pandemic. The group included five African American educators and one Asian educator, with 9 to 35 years of teaching experience, representing both male and female perspectives.

Key findings highlighted several strategies that supported academic achievement in the post-COVID context. Small group instruction and intervention programs were common, offering personalized support to students who had fallen behind. Restorative practices emerged as critical in fostering a positive school culture, supporting both academic and emotional well-being. Equity-driven strategies, such as culturally relevant materials and peer mentoring, were emphasized to ensure all students, regardless of background, received necessary support. Technology played a role in overcoming language barriers, though its use varied.

Interactive, hands-on learning strategies also emerged as a theme, although results were mixed. Some students adapted well, while others continued to struggle with engagement. The importance of culturally relevant teaching and community involvement in promoting success was evident, though challenges like economic hardship and limited parental support persisted.

The study also delved into educators' perceptions of the effectiveness of these strategies in helping Black and Hispanic students. Leadership changes led to improved staff morale, but challenges remained, particularly in re-establishing community and socialization after the pandemic. Teachers noted the need for more consistent implementation of strategies, further professional development, and increased community involvement to maintain progress.

Finally, the study addresses policy, practice, and future research implications. Recommendations focus on promoting equitable education and enhancing strategies to boost the academic success of marginalized students in the post-pandemic era. Future research could examine the long-term effects of these strategies, especially in addressing the ongoing challenges faced by Black and Hispanic students in urban schools.

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Examining Educational Practices, Strategies Related to Academic Achievement of Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID era: An Exploratory case study of One Urban Elementary School in North Carolina

by
Emem Thompson

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Lisa Bass,
Committee Chair

Dr. Jenn Ayscue

Dr. Bill Harrison

Dr. Henry Johnson

DEDICATION

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of my family and closest friends. I dedicate this dissertation to every Black and brown child who dares to dream beyond the beliefs and limitations of others. To my wonderful spouse, Tony Thompson, thank you for being my rock and for stepping in as both "mommy and daddy" when I needed to dedicate countless hours to writing. I owe you a debt of gratitude for holding down the fort. Your votes of confidence kept me going when my spirits dipped. Your love, support, and sacrifices did not go unnoticed. To my beautiful children, Kaleo, Kyrie, Zemira, and Kai—thank you for your endless love, understanding, and patience during this journey. You are my inspiration, and I hope this accomplishment reminds you that perseverance and hard work can lead to great things. To my late nephew, I remember a conversation we had right before your passing. In your own way, you pushed me to think beyond my comfort zone, leading me right into leadership. It's now a constant reminder of why I continue to do this work even on my most challenging days as an administrator. To my parents, who instilled the importance of education, you have been my biggest cheerleader and my first example of what hard work and dedication can achieve. I am forever grateful for the foundation you laid for me. So many have cheered me along the way, and I thank you for honoring my dreams. Without your love, prayers and support this dream would have been unbearable. I am grateful and love you all dearly.

BIOGRAPHY

Emem Thompson has been an educator for 15 years. Her educational journey began in the classroom, where she spent four years as a private PreK teacher and six years as a kindergarten teacher. She transitioned to an intervention coach for 1 year before becoming an assistant principal in a local elementary school for the last three years. She received a bachelor's degree in elementary education from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, a master's degree in elementary education from Campbell University, and a master's degree in school administration from North Carolina State University.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-COV-2, emerged in late 2019 and quickly spread globally, leading to unprecedented disruptions in various sectors, including education. As countries implemented stringent public health measures to contain the virus, educational institutions faced immediate challenges in providing equitable and quality education to all students due to widespread school closures, shifts to remote learning, and disruptions to traditional teaching methods. Educational institutions were forced to adapt quickly to the challenges posed by the pandemic, implementing remote and hybrid learning models to ensure continuity of education (UNESCO, 2020). The pandemic's impact was particularly severe for marginalized student populations, who already faced education disparities and barriers even before the outbreak.

Persistent gaps in academic achievement, high dropout rates, and limited access to quality resources and opportunities were evident across many educational systems (Crosby, 2020; Howard et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed these inequities, deepening the existing disparities in academic achievement between marginalized students and their peers (Bell et al., 2021). According to UNESCO (2020), at the height of the pandemic, over 1.6 billion students globally were affected by school closures, accounting for nearly 90% of all learners worldwide. English language learners and students with disabilities experienced difficulties in accessing necessary support services and accommodation in the remote learning environment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Economic hardships and job losses experienced by families during the pandemic added financial stressors, impacting their ability to focus on their studies and potentially leading to increased dropout rates among marginalized students (Crosby, 2020).

The pandemic's socio-emotional toll disproportionately affected marginalized students with increased rates of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress (Howard et al., 2021).

Understanding the relationship between practices, strategies, and academic achievement of marginalized students in the post-COVID era is crucial for developing evidence-based interventions that promote educational equity and encourage marginalized students to thrive academically. By examining this relationship through exploratory case study research, educators and policymakers can identify practical approaches to support marginalized students and bridge the achievement gap created and widened during the pandemic.

Statement of the Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted education systems worldwide, bringing educational disparities to the forefront, especially for marginalized students (UNESCO, 2020). Historically, students from low-income families, racially and ethnically diverse communities, English language learners, and those with disabilities have faced significant challenges in accessing quality education and support (Crosby, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). These barriers, including limited resources and implicit biases, have contributed to lower academic achievement among these groups. With the onset of the pandemic, these difficulties intensified, leading to more pronounced learning gaps, fewer resources, and heightened socioemotional stress (Bell et al., 2021).

Although schools quickly shifted to remote learning, marginalized students were affected, often falling behind due to a lack of access and support. This urgent need to address the growing academic risks for marginalized students prompted the introduction of various policies and strategies to support their academic progress during and after the pandemic. However, the effectiveness of these student equity initiatives in the post-COVID era remains underexplored.

The issue lies in the limited understanding of how specific post-COVID strategies influence marginalized students' academic outcomes. It's crucial to evaluate both the successes and shortcomings of these initiatives to find the best ways to support educational recovery. As schools continue transitioning beyond the pandemic, examining how these new approaches impact academic recovery and empower marginalized students is important. Empowerment here refers to more than just academic success—it includes building critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and the confidence to pursue educational goals despite challenges and systemic barriers.

Additionally, understanding marginalized students' unique challenges and strengths in this post-COVID context will provide key insights into effective strategies for fostering their academic success. In short, this study aims to explore how educational practices and strategies relate to academic outcomes for marginalized students, focusing specifically on Black and Hispanic Latinx populations.

This is important for several reasons. First, it allows educators and policymakers to gauge the effectiveness of current initiatives and create evidence-based approaches tailored to the unique challenges faced by these students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Second, it helps craft more inclusive policies that reflect marginalized students' diverse needs and experiences (Bell et al., 2021; Howard et al., 2021). Finally, addressing this knowledge gap will provide crucial insights for dismantling systemic barriers and guiding interventions that promote equitable opportunities, recovery, and academic success for these historically underserved populations.

Purpose of the Study

This research explores how school-based practices and strategies used after COVID-19 affect the academic achievement and empowerment of marginalized students. The pandemic highlighted and worsened existing educational inequalities, especially for historically

underserved groups. This study will focus on how these efforts make a difference in closing the gaps, particularly for Black and Hispanic students.

Using a mix of data, including academic records and insights from interviews and case studies, this research seeks to offer valuable findings on student equity and academic success. The goal is to provide practical recommendations for educators and policymakers, helping them create fairer educational opportunities in the post-pandemic world. By doing so, the study hopes to contribute to a more inclusive and equitable education system for students who have been historically marginalized.

Research Objectives

1. To identify practices and strategies with the most significant impact on academic outcomes for marginalized students
2. To understand the key barriers that hinder the successful implementation of effective educational strategies for marginalized student groups, focusing on systemic and school-level challenges.
3. To recommend areas for improvement in the current practices and strategies used to support marginalized students aimed at enhancing academic achievement and addressing implementation gaps.
4. To explore the experience and perceptions of educators regarding the effectiveness of post-COVID practices and strategies quality initiatives in addressing the educational needs and promoting the academic success of marginalized students.
5. To provide recommendations to policymakers, educators, and stakeholders for enhancing the impact of practices and strategies in promoting academic achievement for marginalized students in the post-COVID era

By accomplishing these objectives, this dissertation aims to contribute to the knowledge base on student equity and academic achievement, particularly in the context of the post-COVID era. The research findings will inform policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in making evidence-based decisions to address educational disparities and promote equitable opportunities for academic success for marginalized students. Ultimately, the dissertation seeks to advance the understanding and implementation of effective equity-driven practices and strategies that support the academic achievement of these historically marginalized student populations.

Research Questions

To address the problem statement, the following research questions will guide the investigation:

1. What educational practices and strategies have been implemented post-COVID to support academic achievement?
2. How do specific educational practices and strategies implemented at Hillview Elementary support the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID era?
3. How do educators at Hillview Elementary perceive the effectiveness and challenges of the implemented practices and strategies in promoting the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students post-COVID?

Researcher Positionality

Positionality refers to the researcher's social, cultural, and personal background, beliefs, and experiences that may influence the research process and findings. As a researcher examining the relationship between educational practices, strategies, and academic achievement of marginalized students in the post-COVID era, I recognize my own identity, background, and experiences may influence the research process and outcomes. As an individual, I hold certain

beliefs, values, and biases that can shape how I approach research, interpret data, and draw conclusions. Therefore, I must acknowledge my positionality and its potential impact on the study.

First, I acknowledge my vested interest in promoting educational equity and social justice. Witnessing the educational experiences of my late nephew opened my eyes to the prevailing issues in education when it comes to educating marginalized groups. He struggled in an educational system that wrote him off due to his academic and behavioral challenges. All students, regardless of their background or identity, should have equal access to quality education and opportunities for academic success. This belief shapes my motivation to conduct research that can improve educational outcomes for marginalized in the post-COVID era.

Secondly, I recognize that my own experiences might influence how I interpret and approach the research topic. As a child whom Nigerian parents raised in America, I realized early that education seemed different for children who looked like me. Even amongst people who looked like me, there were differences in how I was treated, especially amongst my peers, due to being raised by the traditions and values of my parent's culture. While I strive to maintain objectivity and impartiality in my study, I know that my research background might influence my perspective on equity-related issues. To mitigate this bias, I will remain open to diverse viewpoints and engage with various stakeholders, including marginalized students, educators, administrators, and policymakers.

Moreover, my academic training and expertise in education play a role in shaping my understanding of educational practices, and strategies. My knowledge base equips me with the tools to critically analyze data, identify patterns, and draw conclusions. I will employ rigorous research methods to ensure the validity of my findings. To ensure ethical research conduct, I am

committed to respecting the voices and experiences of marginalized students throughout the research process. I will seek their informed consent, protect their anonymity, and prioritize their well-being. I aim to comprehensively and accurately portray their experiences to inform meaningful policy and practice changes.

I recognize the importance of engaging in reflexive practices to continuously examine how my perspectives may shape the research process. By engaging in ongoing self-reflection, I will be better equipped to navigate potential challenges that may arise during the research process and address any biases that could impact the integrity of the study. I will also seek peer review and input from colleagues to challenge my assumptions and ensure the validity of the research.

Guiding Theory

Social Justice Theory in education is an overarching framework that addresses systemic inequities and promotes fairness, equality, and inclusivity within the educational system (Theoharis, 2007; Sen, 1999; Young, 1990). The theory emphasizes the belief that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, race, gender, or other characteristics, deserve equal access to quality education and opportunities for success (Freire, 1970; Gorski, 2013; Kumashiro, 2000).

At its core, Social Justice Theory in education challenges traditional educational practices that perpetuate disparities and hinder the academic achievement of marginalized student populations (Theoharis, 2007; Young, 1990). It calls for a comprehensive and holistic approach to education, where policies and practices actively seek to dismantle barriers and provide equitable resources to support the learning needs of all students (Sen, 1999).

One of the critical tenets of Social Justice Theory in education is the acknowledgment of diverse students' identities and experiences (Young, 1990). It recognizes that students bring unique cultural backgrounds, languages, and perspectives to the learning environment. As a result, the theory emphasizes culturally responsive teaching practices that validate and affirm students' identities, enabling them to connect with the curriculum more meaningfully and engage in their learning (Au, 2007; Kincheloe, 2004; Ladson-Billing, 1995). Furthermore, Social Justice Theory in education advocates for educational policies that aim to close achievement gaps and create opportunities for success (Theoharis, 2007). It challenges the disproportionate allocation of resources and advocates for increased funding and support for schools serving marginalized communities.

Social justice theory in education also extends beyond the classroom, advocating for inclusive and socially just school environments (Sen, 1999). It emphasizes the importance of addressing discrimination, bias, and prejudices to create safe and affirming spaces for all students (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Kumashiro, 2004; Noguera, 2008). By incorporating Social Justice theory into education, educators and policymakers can work towards creating transformative and empowering educational experiences for all students, regardless of their background or social identity. It is a guiding principle for fostering an equitable and inclusive educational system that prepares students to be critical thinkers, engaged citizens, and agents of positive societal change. Underneath the umbrella of social justice lies the recognition theory. This theory will be discussed further in the literature review and used to inform the analysis of findings within the exploratory case study.

Overview of Method

An exploratory exploratory case study investigating the relationship between practices, strategies, and academic achievement of marginalized students post-COVID combines qualitative and descriptive statistics to offer a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Greene et al., 1989). The approach will enable triangulation of findings, exploration of diverse perspectives, and identification of patterns and correlations within the complex educational context.

The exploratory case study design is the overarching framework that guides the research. It focuses on a specific context or educational setting to deeply examine the relationship between practices and academic outcomes for marginalized students post-COVID. The qualitative phase involves gathering in-depth insights and perspectives from educators and administrators. Data sources will include semi-structured interviews and document analysis. This qualitative study uses descriptive statistics to systematically collect numerical data on academic achievement, school performance, and student outcomes. Data sources will include standardized test scores, survey responses, and demographic data.

The exploratory nature of this case study provides a well-rounded approach to exploring the relationship between educational practices, strategies, and academic achievement of marginalized students post-COVID. By combining qualitative with descriptive statistics, this study can offer valuable insights into the experiences of students and educators and the impact of various educational interventions, leading to evidence-based strategies for promoting equitable academic achievement in the post-COVID education landscape.

Definition of key terms

- Marginalized students - include those from low-income backgrounds, racially and ethnically diverse communities, English language learners, and students with disabilities (Crosby, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). For this study, marginalized students will be identified as Black and Hispanic students within the selected school.
- Equitable Practices- practices encompassing teaching strategies, curriculum design, assessment methods, and student support services that consider the diverse needs and experiences of marginalized students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020)
- Equity-driven strategies aim to target specific barriers marginalized students face and promote academic success. Examples include targeted tutoring, mentoring programs, and culturally responsive teaching approaches (Chen et al., 2020).
- Academic Achievement – Academic achievement refers to students' measurable outcomes and accomplishments in educational settings, typically assessed through various indicators such as grades, standardized test scores, class rankings, and educational attainments (Owens, 2016). Academic achievement is a multi-dimensional concept that reflects a student's overall performance in a learning environment and can be influenced by various factors, including teaching methods, support systems, and external policies.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this exploratory case study is multifold, mainly due to the scarcity of research in this specific context. This study holds implications for educational stakeholders, including policymakers, administrators, educators, researchers, and advocacy groups seeking to

address the educational disparities marginalized students face. Some key areas of significance include addressing educational inequities and post-COVID educational challenges through filling research gaps and guiding inclusive policy and practice.

Addressing Educational Inequities and Post-COVID Educational Challenges

Educational equity is a pressing concern, and this exploratory case study can contribute to advancing efforts to ensure that all students, irrespective of their background, have equal access to quality education and opportunities for academic achievement. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education worldwide, leading to significant learning loss and exacerbating educational disparities (Bell et al., 2021). Understanding how educational practices and strategies can support marginalized students' academic achievement in the post-COVID era is critical for informed decision-making and effective education recovery. This exploratory case study will contribute to understanding how specific educational practices and strategies can be tailored to meet the unique needs of marginalized students, thereby promoting educational equity and narrowing the widening achievement gap.

Filling Research Gaps

The post-COVID educational landscape presents unique challenges, and there is a limited body of research examining the relationship between equity-driven initiatives and the academic achievement of marginalized students, specifically in this context. This exploratory case study will contribute to filling research gaps and provide relevant insights into addressing the educational needs of marginalized students post-pandemic.

Guiding Inclusive Policy and Practice

Policymakers, educators, and stakeholders require evidence-based guidance to develop effective strategies that promote equity, inclusion, and academic success for marginalized

students. This exploratory case study's findings can offer practical recommendations to inform policy and practice decisions that positively impact marginalized student outcomes and prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable student populations. The study can shed light on inclusive practices considering marginalized students' diverse backgrounds, experiences, and strengths. Such practices can create a more supportive and empowering learning environment, enhancing academic achievement and well-being.

By understanding the factors contributing to academic achievement among marginalized students, the research can empower these students to take ownership of their education and succeed academically. Empowerment can foster a sense of agency, self-efficacy, motivation, and resilience in their educational journeys.

Study Overview

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction to the research topic and overviews the study's objectives and significance. This chapter introduces the study's research questions. It delves into the background of educational disparities faced by marginalized students pre-COVID and the impact of the pandemic on their academic achievement. Chapter One lays the foundation for understanding the importance of examining the relationship between educational practices and strategies as it relates to the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID era. Chapter One will conclude by presenting the research questions and the study's theoretical framework.

In Chapter 2, I conduct an in-depth review of relevant literature related to the research topic. It explores existing education disparities among marginalized students, the influence of COVID-19 on academic achievement, and the effectiveness of educational practices and

strategies in supporting marginalized students. The review will establish the current state of knowledge in the field and identify gaps the exploratory case study aims to address.

Chapter 3 will outline the research design, methodology, and data collection procedures used in the exploratory case study. It will provide a detailed explanation of the qualitative and quantitative approaches, including the rationale for selecting each method to gain a deep understanding of marginalized students' experiences in the post-COVID era. The chapter describes the research participants and the purposeful sampling process to ensure the representation of identified marginalized student populations. Ethical considerations, data collection instruments, and data analysis techniques will also be discussed.

Chapter 4 will present the findings from the data analysis conducted in the exploratory case study. The chapter will comprehensively analyze educational practices and strategies implemented in educational institutions. It will explore how these initiatives impact the academic achievement of marginalized students. Quotes and excerpts from interviews with educators and students and document analysis will be used to support the findings. The chapter will organize the findings according to the research questions and key themes identified during the analysis.

The final chapter will offer a comprehensive conclusion summarizing the essential findings and contributions of the exploratory case study. Chapter 5 will reiterate the study's significance and discuss the broader implications for educational equity and student achievement. Recommendations for future research in the field will be proposed, building upon the limitations identified in the study. The dissertation will conclude by highlighting the potential impact of implementing effective equity-driven initiatives to foster academic success and empowerment among marginalized students in the post-COVID era.

In conclusion, Chapter 1 has provided a comprehensive overview of the research context and problem statement, highlighting the critical need to investigate the intricate relationship between educational practices and strategies as it relates to the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students in the post-Covid era. We have established the significance of this study in the context of the unprecedented educational challenges posed by the pandemic. Furthermore, the research questions and objectives have been outlined, setting the stage for thoroughly examining this vital issue in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent decades, marginalized students' educational disparities and inequities have gained significant attention within the educational research community (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Losen et al., 2002). Despite efforts to create a level playing field, disparities in educational achievement persist along racial, socioeconomic, and ethnic lines (Reardon et al., 2016; Rothstein, 2013; Sirin, 2005). The concept of the achievement gap, characterized by differential academic performance between marginalized students and their more advantaged peers, continues to be a concerning phenomenon (Harris, 2016; Lee & Smith, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2020). This gap affects short-term academic outcomes and may cast a long shadow, influencing students' prospects for higher education and future career opportunities. The achievement gap can be exacerbated in times of trauma or distress, as students with fewer educational resources are less able to cope with disruptions caused by such interruptions (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Waldfogel et al., 2010).

The landscape of education faced an unprecedented disruption with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, further exacerbating pre-existing disparities and engendering a new dimension of challenges. This literature review aims to delve into the historical context and complexities of educational disparities, explore the enduring impact of the achievement gap on marginalized students' life trajectories, and elucidate the multifaceted repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational outcomes. In this review, I discuss historical and current disparities, laws enacted to address educational disparities, I further seek to answer the following questions:

1. What educational practices and strategies have been implemented post-COVID to support academic achievement?

2. How do specific educational practices and strategies implemented at Hillview Elementary support the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID era?
3. How do educators at Hillview Elementary perceive the effectiveness and challenges of the implemented practices and strategies in promoting the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students post-COVID?

Historical Context and Current State of Education Disparities for Marginalized Students

Education, often regarded as the great equalizer (Agostinelli et al., 2022), has regrettably borne witness to a long and troubling history of disparities faced by marginalized students in the United States. These disparities, rooted in historical injustices, have far-reaching implications for individual lives and societal progress. The historical context of educational disparities for marginalized students in the United States is deeply rooted in a legacy of racial segregation and discrimination (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Orfield, & Lee, 2005). The origins of educational disparities can be traced back to the earliest days of American history. During the antebellum era, enslaved individuals were systematically denied access to education as a means of maintaining control and subjugation (Anderson, 1988). The abolition of slavery marked a transformative moment, yet educational disparities persisted. In the post-Civil War Reconstruction period, the promise of equal education for Black Americans emerged by establishing Freedmen's Bureau schools (Anderson, 1988; Harrison, 2006). However, the subsequent rise of Jim Crow laws in the late 19th and early 20th centuries ushered in an era of segregation, perpetuating unequal education opportunities for Black students (Orfield & Lee, 2005).

Hispanic and Indigenous populations faced parallel struggles. Native American children were subjected to forced assimilation in government-run boarding schools, where cultural suppression and inadequate education were the norm (Adams, 1995). Similarly, Hispanic students have encountered linguistic and cultural barriers in education, reinforcing disparities (Valencia, 2002). Low-income students, students of color, and English language learners continue to face significant challenges in accessing quality education, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage (Reardon, 2016). Schools in economically disadvantaged communities often have fewer resources, less experienced teachers, and lack advanced courses, contributing to the achievement gap between marginalized students and their more affluent peers (US Department of Education, 2016).

Essential Laws Addressing Educational Disparities: Past and Present

Over the years, legislative efforts have addressed educational disparities and promoted equity in access to quality education. This section delves into significant past and present laws that have played a pivotal role in shaping the education landscape for marginalized Black and Hispanic students.

The landmark Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education* marked a watershed moment in the fight against racial segregation in schools (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)). It declared segregation unconstitutional, but implementation was uneven and met with resistance (Owens, 2007; Russo & Stiefel, 2005). Subsequently, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 played a crucial role in enforcing the integration of schools by prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin (Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-352, 1964). Civil Rights legislation in the 1960s and '70s aimed to rectify these inequities, yet

challenges persisted in the form of tracking systems and unequal resource allocation (Kozol, 1991; Oakes, 2005; Orfield & Lee, 2005).

Efforts to address funding disparities gained momentum with the introduction of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965. This legislation aimed to provide additional funding to schools serving disadvantaged students, attempting to level the playing field (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Nevertheless, adequacy lawsuits emerged in various states, challenging the constitutionality of school funding systems that perpetuated inequities (Baker & Corcoran, 2012; Baker et al., 2022). These lawsuits highlighted the need for fair and sufficient funding to ensure all students have access to quality education.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975, initially passed as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) marked a significant step in addressing disparities for students with disabilities. This legislation mandated a free and appropriate public education for children with disabilities, emphasizing the provision of special education services and individualized education plans to address the unique needs of students in the least restrictive environment (U.S. Department of Education, 2004; Yell & Drasgow, 2017). In 1990, the EAHCA was renamed IDEA to reflect a more inclusive and rights-based approach to educating students with disabilities, signifying a shift toward emphasizing the rights of individuals with disabilities. IDEA (1990) introduced transition planning to prepare students with disabilities for life after school, a provision not present in the original 1975 law. IDEA aimed to address the exclusion of students with disabilities from mainstream educational settings and promote their participation in academic and social activities.

In *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), the Supreme Court ruled that educational programs must provide equal opportunities for students who do not speak English proficiently. This decision led

to the Bilingual Education Act of 1974, which provided federal funding for bilingual and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs (Crawford, 2011). These laws sought to address the language barriers faced by English language learners (ELLs) and promote their academic success through culturally and linguistically responsive education.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) aimed to close the achievement gap by holding schools accountable for the academic progress of all students, with a particular focus on marginalized groups (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 2002). Through standardized testing and the disaggregation of data, NCLB highlighted disparities in student achievement and required interventions to support struggling schools and students. However, critics argue that the focus on high stakes testing led to unintended consequences, such as narrowing curricula and perpetuating teaching to the test (Ravitch, 2016).

Building upon the strengths of NCLB, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) shifted the educational landscape by granting states more flexibility in designing their accountability systems (Every Student Succeeds Act, Pub. L. No. 114-95, 2015). ESSA emphasizes the importance of equity, requiring states to identify and address disparities in access to resources and opportunities among different student subgroups. This shift recognized that a one-size-fits-all approach might not effectively address the nuances of disparities across diverse communities (Manna, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted legislative responses to mitigate the impact of disrupted learning. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and subsequent relief packages allocated funding to support schools' transition to remote learning and address digital divide issues (Chakravarty et al., 2021; Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, Pub. L. No. 116-136, 2020). These efforts recognized the exacerbated educational

disparities during the pandemic. However, ongoing discussions underscore the need for sustained efforts to address the long-standing systemic disparities that the pandemic has highlighted.

The enactment of these laws reflects the ongoing commitment to tackling educational disparities. However, the effectiveness of these measures often hinges on their implementation and enforcement, requiring continuous vigilance and adaptation to evolving challenges.

Regrettably, the historical context of educational disparities is not related to the annals of history.

Despite progress in civil rights and educational policy, present day disparities persist.

Impact of Segregation on Access to Quality Education and Overall Disproportionate

Access to Resources and Opportunities

Segregation de jure and segregation de facto, have had a lasting impact on marginalized students' access to quality education. Schools in racially segregated neighborhoods often face overcrowding, inadequate facilities, and inadequate resources (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Segregated schools in Black or Latinx communities are more likely to have less experienced teachers and fewer advanced academic programs, further exacerbating educational disparities (Reardon, 2016). Marginalized students face disproportionate access to resources and opportunities that are critical for their academic success.

Educational disparities and inequities faced by marginalized students are complex and deeply rooted in historical and systemic factors. The historical context of educational disparities casts a long shadow over the present. The impact of segregation, access to resources, and implicit biases contribute to the achievement gap, which has significant implications for marginalized students' long-term outcomes. Schools serving low-income communities often struggle to provide extracurricular activities, advanced placement courses, and college counseling, limiting students' opportunities to excel academically (US Department of Education, 2016). Disparities in

technology access and digital resources can also hinder marginalized students' learning in an increasingly digital educational landscape (Chen & Cheung, 2020). Multigenerational inequalities have resulted in African Americans coming to terms with a society where unequal treatment persists (Anderson, 2015; Bobo & Charles, 1996).

Analysis of Contributing Factors to Inequality

As we navigate the 21st century, the educational landscape continues to grapple with persistent disparities that disproportionately affect marginalized students. These disparities manifest in various ways including cultural differences and access to resources. Despite efforts to address these inequities, the disparities remain stark and impactful (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

Socioeconomic status: Student from low-income families often face more significant obstacles due to limited access to educational resources, healthcare, and stable housing (Reardon, 2016). Scholars like Coleman (1966) emphasized that socioeconomic background strongly influenced student achievement. This underscored the need to address not only the educational environment but also the socioeconomic conditions that hindered learning.

Cultural Differences: Student skills and behaviors coupled with teacher and school actions and arrangements in what is appropriate and can be achieved amongst marginalized students can cause initial racial gaps to increase over time (Farkas, 2003). Language barriers also play a significant role in exacerbating disparities. English language learners (ELLs) often face challenges in mainstream classrooms due to language proficiency limitations, impeding their ability to fully engage with the curriculum (Hammond, 2015). Inadequate support for ELLs can lead to academic struggles and disengagement from school. Culturally responsive practices that value and integrate students' cultural backgrounds are essential for fostering a positive learning

environment for marginalized students (Garcia & Jensen, 2009; Gandara & Rumberger, 2009; Gay, 2018).

Access to Resources: The historical legacy of discriminatory policies extended to funding disparities. Educational redlining, a practice where schools in marginalized communities received less funding, resulting in inadequate resources and outdated facilities (Baker, 2016; Egalite et al., 2015). Disparities in access to resources, such as textbooks, technology, and qualified teachers, can hinder marginalized students' academic progress (Baker et al., 2022; US Department of Education, 2016). National studies of early childhood have been useful in determining between group differences in behavioral and cognitive development. These studies, amongst others have indicate on average Black and Hispanic children in kindergarten in first grade with lower levels of school readiness than their White and Asian counterparts (Farkas, 2003) In keeping with these low readiness and achievement trends, African American children begin school approximately one year behind Whites, finishing high school approximately four years behind White children. (Farkas, 2003, Fryer & Levitt, 2004).

Recent developments, such as the growing awareness of the school-to-prison pipeline, shed light on the disproportionate disciplinary measures taken against marginalized students, particularly those with disabilities (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Discipline disparities persist, with marginalized students, mainly Black and Hispanic students, experiencing higher rates of disciplinary actions, including suspensions and expulsions (Howard, 2018; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Skiba et al., 2011). This discipline disproportionately often results from implicit biases and contributes to disruptions in learning and the perpetuation of societal disparities.

Achievement gap and its Impact on Long-term Outcomes

The persistent achievement gap remains a significant challenge in the realm of education, particularly for Black and Hispanic students. This section explores the concept of the achievement gap, its manifestations, and its far-reaching consequences on the long-term trajectories of these marginalized students. In considering the impact of educational practices, it is essential to recognize that marginalized groups extend beyond racial and ethnic minorities. Subgroups identified under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act—including students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, multilingual learners (ML), and students with special needs—also experience significant challenges that affect their academic outcomes.

The achievement gap, which gained prominence in the 1960s, refers to the substantial and persistent disparities in academic performance and educational attainment between different racial and ethnic groups, particularly between White students and Black and Hispanic students (Kena et al., 2020; Reardon et al., 2019). Despite efforts to improve educational equity, this gap exists across various educational indicators, including standardized test scores, graduation rates, and college enrollment rates.

The achievement gap is manifested across various stages of the educational journey. For instance, disparities in early literacy and numeracy skills can hinder students' readiness for school, setting the stage for long-term academic challenges (Lee & Burkam, 2003; Magnuson et al., 2007). The gap widens throughout K-12 education, affecting students' access to advanced courses, extracurricular activities, and enrichment opportunities (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Rothstein, 2004).

The rise of standardized testing in the mid-20th century exacerbated disparities. Research by Kozol (1991) revealed how tests entrenched the gap by favoring those with access to test

preparation resources. Standardized assessment, intended to be neutral, inadvertently mirrored societal inequities. Recent studies confirm that Black and Hispanic students consistently perform below their white peers in standardized tests and academic assessments (Fryer & Levitt, 2006; Reardon, 2013). Substantial gaps between marginalized students and their nonmarginalized peers not only affect academic outcomes but also impact students' self-esteem, motivation, and long-term aspirations (Sirin, 2005). The lack of well-trained teachers and lack of access to advanced courses further widened the achievement gap (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Ladson & Billings, 2006). This gap has significant implications for long-term outcomes, such as high school graduation rates, college enrollment, and college completion (Frankenberg et al., 2011), leading to limited access to higher-paying jobs and career advancement, perpetuating cycles of poverty.

High School Graduation Rates and College Enrollment: Marginalized students are more likely to have lower high school graduation rates compared to their marginalized peers, limiting their future opportunities and career prospects (Carter et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2019; Reardon, 2016). Disparities in educational opportunities often result in lower college enrollment rates for marginalized students, reducing access to higher education and potential career advancement (Reardon, 2016). College readiness and attainment rates for Black and Hispanic students are lower compared to their White counterparts. Black and Hispanic students are less likely to graduate from high school within four years (Aud et al., 2012).

College Completion: For marginalized students who enroll in college, the achievement gap can result in lower college completion rates, hindering their ability to access higher-paying jobs and economic mobility (US Department of Education, 2016). A study by Fry (2018) using data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that while college

enrollment rates have increased for all racial/ethnic groups, disparities remain in college completion rates, with Black and Hispanic students facing more significant challenges.

Furthermore, the achievement gap also affects health outcomes. Lower education attainment has been linked to poorer health outcomes later in life, contributing to health disparities between racial and ethnic groups (Braveman et al., 2011; Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2008; Hass, 2006; Williams & Mohammed, 2009). The cumulative effects of limited access to quality education can thus permeate various aspects of individual lives. Black and Hispanic students who face educational disparities are less likely to experience upward mobility and more likely to remain in the same socioeconomic status as their parents, hindering their ability to become informed citizens and active participants in the democratic process (Carnevale & Rose, 2003; Chetty et al., 2014; Heckman & Lafontaine, 2010; Hill et al., 2015; Reardon et al., 2019). This interrupted intergenerational mobility perpetuates cycles of inequality, making it challenging for families to break free from economic hardships.

Addressing these disparities requires targeted interventions that address their root causes, comprehensive policy changes, equitable resource allocation, and culturally responsive practices to ensure that all students have access to quality education and opportunities for academic success. Achieving education equity for Black and Hispanic students is a matter of social justice and a vital step toward creating a more equitable society for all.

Impact of COVID-19 on Educational Outcomes of Black and Hispanic Students

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic caused worldwide disruptions. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about unprecedented challenges to the education system, exacerbating existing educational disparities for Black and Hispanic students. This section explores the

multifaceted effects of the pandemic on these marginalized communities, spanning digital access, learning loss, mental health, and socioemotional well-being.

The pandemic-induced shift to remote learning has posed significant challenges and highlighted the digital divide that disproportionately affects Black and Hispanic students. As schools transitioned to online platforms, students lacking access to reliable internet and necessary devices faced substantial barriers (Chakravarty et al., 2021; McClain, 2020; Simon et al., 2021). The inequities in technology access further compounded existing disparities, hindering these students' ability to engage effectively in virtual classrooms (Bannister et al., 2020; Hobbs et al., 2020; Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). Linguistic and cultural differences created additional hurdles in navigating remote learning platforms (Valencia, 2020). The sudden shift to remote learning disrupted stability, leading to disengagement and reduced motivation (Hamre et al., 2020; OECD, 2020; Riegler-Crumb et al., 2020). Moreover, the closure of schools disrupted the supportive learning environments that many Black and Hispanic students rely on, leading to potential learning loss (Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020).

In-person learning provides students with various support systems, including personalized attention, social interaction, and emotional support. The pandemic highlighted the significance of the teacher-student relationship in effective learning. Black and Hispanic students often rely on schools for essential services such as meals, counseling, and access to healthcare (Haelle, 2020). Extended school closures have raised concerns about significant learning loss, particularly among marginalized students. Efforts to mitigate learning loss during the pandemic face disparities in resource allocation. Research by Reardon et al. (2021) points out that Black and Hispanic students often had limited access to tutoring, personalized instruction, and enrichment activities during remote learning compared to their white counterparts. Black and

Hispanic students, who were already navigating educational disparities, faced a heightened risk of falling behind (Kaffenberger et al., 2021).

The loss of in-person instruction has been linked to reduced academic progress, with Black and Hispanic students experiencing a more pronounced decline (Kuhfeld et al., 2020; United Nations, 2020). Additionally, the reopening of schools was not uniform, with many Black and Hispanic students attending schools with fewer safety measures in place, raising safety concerns (Reardon et al., 2021). The existing achievement gap has likely widened due to the pandemic-related disruptions, further jeopardizing these students' long-term educational outcomes (Reardon et al., 2020).

The pandemic's impact extends beyond academics, affecting the mental health and socioemotional well-being of Black and Hispanic students. Black and Hispanic individuals are more likely to face underlying health conditions and lack access to adequate healthcare (Yancy, 2020). This health vulnerability translated into increased rates of COVID-19 infections and related disruptions, impacting students' and their families' physical and mental well-being (Artiga & Hinton, 2020; Millet et al., 2020; Perry et al., 2021). The stressors associated with remote learning, health concerns, and economic instability disproportionately impact marginalized communities (Cénat et al., 2020; Fitzpatrick et al., 2020; Huang & Zhao, 2020; Romero et al., 2020). These communities have faced longstanding disparities in access to mental health resources (Kataoka et al., 2012).

Additionally, the lack of social interactions and support systems typically provided by schools can contribute to heightened feelings of isolation and anxiety among these students (Loades et al., 2020; Margolin et al., 2021). The students from these marginalized communities who benefited from positive teacher interactions experienced challenges in maintaining those

relationships in virtual settings (Dougherty, 2021; Hobbs et al., 2020). The pandemic-related disruptions, compounded by systemic barriers, can lead to increased stress and anxiety, negatively impacting academic performance and overall well-being.

The pandemic has also highlighted the role of parental involvement in students' educational experiences. However, Black and Hispanic families, often facing socio-economic challenges, may struggle with juggling caregiver responsibilities alongside work and financial constraints (Chakravarty et al., 2021). For Black and Hispanic families who are more likely to hold essential jobs and have limited access to flexible work arrangements, this balancing act becomes even more challenging (Pew Research Center, 2020). Limited parental involvement due to economic pressures can further hinder students' ability to adapt to remote learning and succeed academically.

The enduring impact of COVID-19 on the educational outcomes of Black and Hispanic students is a critical concern. Even as schools have reopened, addressing the learning loss and emotional toll experienced during the pandemic remains challenging (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). The disparities in access to resources and support during remote learning can create a long-term achievement gap, further exacerbating existing disparities (Simon et al., 2021). Addressing the pandemic's impact on educational outcomes for Black and Hispanic students requires a comprehensive approach that addresses digital inequities, offers targeted academic support, prioritizes mental health resources, and provides assistance to families navigating the challenges of remote learning.

Theories Informing Equity

Policymakers and educators use various theories and frameworks to guide their pursuit of educational equity. Two critical theories that play a significant role in shaping educational equity

discourse are Social Justice Theory and Recognition Theory. Each theory provides a unique lens to examine and address issues of fairness, inclusivity, and opportunity within educational systems. This exploration will devolve into these theories, their relevance to educational equity, and the implications for policy and practice.

Social Justice Theory

George Theoharis' social justice leadership framework is about taking tangible, actionable steps to tackle school inequality. He argues that educational leaders must go beyond just identifying issues of inequity—they need to work to dismantle the structures that maintain them actively. According to Theoharis (2007), a vital part of this is making sure that traditionally marginalized groups, such as students of color, those from low-income backgrounds, English language learners, and students with disabilities, are given the resources and opportunities they need to succeed. For him, social justice in education is not just about fairness on paper but about creating an inclusive school culture where every student can achieve their potential. It is about pushing against systemic barriers and fostering environments where diversity is valued and supported.

This theory is especially relevant today as schools grapple with educational equity issues. Theoharis' framework challenges educational leaders to reflect deeply on their practices and biases and consider how policies and procedures may inadvertently reinforce inequities. His approach encourages leaders to make concrete changes, such as revising disciplinary policies that disproportionately affect students of color or ensuring that students with disabilities receive individualized, high-quality support (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). This framework has potential implications for educational policy and practice. It calls for a shift from compliance-based models to those that center student needs and experiences, advocating for policies that promote

inclusivity and equity and pushing for professional development that equips teachers and leaders to engage in this work effectively.

Theoharis' social justice leadership theory also highlights the importance of advocacy. Educators and school leaders, he believes, should be advocates for underrepresented students both within their schools and in broader educational policy discussions. By taking this stance, educational leaders can influence policy decisions directly impacting marginalized students, ensuring that equity remains a central focus in education reform efforts (Theoharis, 2007). This framework offers a powerful reminder that achieving educational equity requires systemic change and individual leaders' commitment to prioritize justice in their schools.

Recognition Theory

Recognition theory, championed by philosopher Axel Honneth (1996), emphasizes recognizing individuals' identities and cultural backgrounds as a fundamental aspect of social justice. Honneth identifies three forms of recognition: love and care, legal recognition, and social esteem. In education, social esteems are particularly relevant, as they relate to recognizing an individual's social identities and contributions. The theory also highlights the harm caused by misrecognition or the denial of social identity and underscores the significance of respecting and valuing students' diverse identities to foster a sense of belonging and inclusion in education (Archer, 2003; Honneth, 1996). Recognizing and affirming student identities can improve self-esteem, motivation, and educational outcomes, especially among marginalized groups (Taylor, 1992). Educational applications of recognition theory involve acknowledging and celebrating students' cultural backgrounds, promoting inclusive curricula, and fostering a sense of belonging. This recognition can enhance students' self-esteem and learning motivation (Fraser, 2001).

Key Studies Emphasizing Policies and Practices that Promote Educational Equity

Numerous studies have examined the impact of educational practices and strategies on the academic outcomes of Black and Hispanic students. Several studies have explored this topic, often using a variety of methodologies and approaches. These studies provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of various initiatives to reduce educational disparities. This section contains an overview discussion of some key studies, their methodologies, common themes, and patterns in their findings:

Darling-Hammond (2004) reviewed existing research on equity-driven policies and practices, including school funding reforms, teacher quality, and curriculum improvements. The study found that well-designed equity-focused policies, such as increased school funding in poor areas, improved teacher training, and culturally relevant curriculum, positively impacted the academic outcomes of Black and Hispanic students (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Similarly, Chetty et al. (2011) emphasized the critical role of teacher quality in shaping long-term student outcomes, using a value-added model to analyze student-level data from New York City schools. Together, these findings underscore the importance of equitable resource allocation and high-quality teaching in improving educational outcomes, particularly for marginalized student groups. The study revealed that having high-quality teachers significantly improved the academic achievements of Black and Hispanic students. The findings underscored the importance of recruiting and retaining effective teachers in schools serving minority populations (Chetty et al., 2011).

Ladson-Billings (1995) employed qualitative methods, including classroom observations and interviews, to explore the impact of culturally responsive teaching practices on Black students' academic outcomes. The study demonstrated that culturally responsive teaching, which

incorporates students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum, positively influenced Black students' academic engagement and achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It emphasized the need for pedagogical approaches that respect students' diverse identities.

Magnuson and Waldfogel (2005) used longitudinal data to examine the effects of early education programs, including Head Start, on the academic readiness of Black and Hispanic children. The research indicated that high-quality early education programs significantly positively impacted the school readiness and subsequent academic outcomes of Black and Hispanic children (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). It highlighted the importance of early interventions in addressing disparities.

Bartlett and Garcia (2020) conducted a longitudinal analysis of the impact of state-level policies on reducing disparities in educational funding. Their research revealed that states implementing equitable funding formulas significantly improved academic outcomes for Black and Hispanic students, including narrowing achievement gaps (Bartlett & Garcia, 2020).

Jackson & Johnson (2018) employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of test score data with qualitative interviews with educators. It examines the impact of school-level policies and practices to reduce the achievement gap for Black and Hispanic students. The study identified several effective strategies: high-quality teacher recruitment, a culturally responsive curriculum, and targeted support programs. These strategies were associated with improved academic outcomes for Black and Hispanic students (Jackson & Johnson, 2018).

Themes from Existing Research

The literature points to the long history of educational disparities that Black and Hispanic students have faced in the U.S. It acknowledges the deep-rooted issues of unequal access to

quality education and resources (Orfield & Lee, 2007). This body of work shows how the legacy of past discrimination, like segregation and unequal opportunities, continues to influence the academic outcomes and experiences of Black and Hispanic students today (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Recent studies highlight digital equity's critical role in education, especially after COVID-19. With a focus on closing the digital gap, initiatives aim to provide technology and internet access to underserved students, helping to maintain academic progress (National Education Association, 2020). Research also explores strategies to counteract learning loss, particularly for marginalized groups, by promoting extended learning time, targeted interventions, and formative assessments (Chetty et al., 2020). Social and emotional well-being is another central theme, with many emphasizing the importance of SEL programs in supporting mental health and engagement, especially for Black and Hispanic students (Durlak et al., 2011). Additionally, partnerships between schools and community organizations have been shown to meet holistic student needs by offering support like tutoring, food services, and mental health resources (Kannenbergh et al., 2020).

In conclusion, these studies use both quantitative data and qualitative insights to explore how equity-focused policies and practices affect academic outcomes. The research repeatedly shows that equitable resource distribution, culturally responsive teaching, and early interventions are essential in boosting the academic success of Black and Hispanic students. These findings examine how such strategies impact these students in the post-COVID era.

Barriers to Implementation of Initiatives and Achieving Desired Equity Outcomes

One major hurdle in achieving educational equity is the unequal distribution of resources across schools. Those serving marginalized communities often lack the necessary funding,

experienced teachers, and access to advanced programs (Reardon, 2011). These gaps can make it hard for schools to implement equity initiatives fully. For example, if a school does not have enough money, it might struggle to offer essential services like tutoring or counseling, which are crucial in closing achievement gaps (Baker et al., 2022).

Another significant challenge comes from implicit biases and discrimination, which can appear in individual actions and institutional policies. These biases often impact decisions on where resources go and can unintentionally reinforce existing disparities (Howard, 2018). Teachers and administrators, without even realizing it, may have biases that influence how they interact with marginalized students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This can lead to different treatment or lower expectations, which can hurt those students' academic performance and school experience.

Resistance to change is also a common obstacle. Teachers, administrators, and parents might hesitate to embrace new equity initiatives, often out of concern about how these changes affect their roles or schools (Cohen-Vogel et al., 2018; Fullan, 2007). When there is not enough support or cooperation from these key players, making real progress toward equity goals becomes much harder.

Policy and legal constraints can make it challenging to implement equity initiatives. Sometimes, even well-meaning policies might unintentionally maintain disparities or limit how flexible schools and districts can be when implementing focused interventions (Orfield & Lee, 2007; Penuel & Gallagher, 2017). Broader political and social issues, like funding gaps and societal inequalities, create systemic hurdles that make educational equity harder to achieve (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006). For example, strict policies around standardized testing can restrict

schools from using alternative assessments that might better reflect the skills of underserved students (Camara & Echternacht, 2000; Linn, 2000).

Another challenge comes from problems with collecting and analyzing data. Without accurate or sufficient data, it becomes difficult to identify disparities and craft effective equity initiatives. Some schools and districts don't have the tools or capacity to gather and analyze critical information, such as student performance and how resources are distributed (Datnow et al., 2013; Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003). This lack of reliable data makes it hard to design targeted interventions and track their progress. It also hinders transparency and accountability, which are crucial in equity efforts.

Tackling these barriers is critical to making real progress toward equitable education. From resource gaps and implicit bias to policy restrictions and data challenges, these issues must be addressed and worked on. This requires changes at multiple levels, including revising policies, offering professional development, cultural competence training, and dealing with implicit bias head-on. Collaboration among stakeholders and a shared vision of equity are essential for achieving meaningful outcomes.

Gaps and Limitations in Current Research

A significant limitation in current studies on equity-driven policies, especially post-COVID, is their reliance on short-term data, which limits our understanding of the long-term impacts on Black and Hispanic students (Chetty et al., 2020). There is also a lack of research that explores how these policies influence students' academic paths and overall educational experiences over time (Patten et al., 2021). Additionally, existing research often treats Black and Hispanic students as a uniform group, failing to consider the intersection of various identities

within these communities (Crenshaw, 1989). This intersectionality and how it impacts students' experiences with equity initiatives is rarely explored.

Much of the existing research also leans heavily on quantitative data like test scores and enrollment figures, which can overlook the rich, qualitative insights that would help us better understand the perspectives and lived experiences of these students and their families (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). There is also a gap in research examining how equity initiatives impact post-secondary education and workforce outcomes for Black and Hispanic students (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011). Furthermore, while many studies link equity initiatives to improved academic achievement, they often fall short of proving causality due to the complex nature of education systems and the many factors at play (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2007). Without long-term studies, it is hard to say whether improvements are sustainable or if disparities resurface over time.

Limitations

When factors like gender, socioeconomic background, or immigration status within Black and Hispanic student populations are overlooked, we miss out on understanding key aspects of how equity initiatives affect academic success. It is important to dive deeper into the long-term effects of these equity-focused policies on things like college enrollment, graduation rates, and career outcomes. Qualitative research can be beneficial here, as it gives us insights into how students experience and engage with these initiatives, which could reveal areas for growth. Also, understanding how well these policies are implemented and whether they are being followed as intended can shed light on obstacles or supports that might influence their success (Patten et al., 2021).

Addressing these gaps is crucial to getting a clearer picture of how equity policies impact the academic progress of Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID era. More studies that track outcomes over time, explore the intersection of various identities, focus on post-secondary results, and dig into qualitative experiences are all essential for improving our understanding moving forward.

Summary

A big takeaway from the research is the importance of digital equity. The pandemic forced schools to shift online quickly, and students who did not have reliable access to technology or the internet, especially marginalized ones, were hit the hardest (Carroll et al., 2021). To keep students engaged, policies that ensure access to devices and the internet in underserved communities have become critical (Chu et al., 2021). There is also much focus on helping students catch up on the learning they missed during the pandemic. Summer programs, tutoring, and other extended learning opportunities have been shown to help close these gaps (Patten et al., 2021). Using data to identify where students are struggling and addressing those needs has also been vital (Chetty et al., 2020).

The pandemic also put a spotlight on students' social and emotional well-being. Many marginalized students face increased stress and mental health issues, and research shows that social and emotional learning (SEL) programs can make a real difference in their mental health and overall ability to learn (Durlak et al., 2011). Culturally responsive SEL practices that honor students' diverse backgrounds effectively support marginalized students (Milner, 2017). Additionally, the role of community partnerships cannot be understated. Collaborating with local organizations to provide resources like food, mental health services, and family support has proven essential in helping marginalized students succeed (Kannenberg et al., 2020). Such

partnerships foster a sense of belonging and connection, positively impacting student motivation and engagement (Turner et al., 2019).

Lastly, the review underscores that equitable policies are critical for closing gaps in educational outcomes. This includes fair funding allocation, teacher recruitment, training, and curriculum design. For instance, when funding is distributed more equitably, we see better outcomes for marginalized students (Baker et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The literature makes clear the complicated and evolving connection between equity-focused policies and the academic performance of Black and Latinx students in the post-COVID era. Looking at historical inequalities and the challenges these students still face, the need for equity-driven efforts in education becomes even more urgent. Research shows that well-designed policies can improve outcomes for Black and Hispanic students. However, they must address the factors that shape their experiences, like race, economic status, and language proficiency.

The pandemic worsened existing disparities, but it also showed the resilience of these students and the importance of equal access to technology and support. Initiatives focusing on resource distribution, culturally responsive teaching, and emotional support have helped offset the pandemic's adverse effects and boosted academic performance.

Achieving equity in education, though, is a continuous process that demands ongoing effort. It is crucial to understand that Black and Hispanic students are not uniform, and policies must reflect the specific needs of different subgroups. Overall, the literature highlights how essential equity-focused approaches are in closing the achievement gap for Black and Hispanic students in this post-COVID world. Staying committed to equity is a moral necessity and a

critical factor in driving broader social and economic progress. Continued research and action will be vital to building a more fair and inclusive education system for all students.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology used for this study, aimed at gaining a thorough understanding of the diverse challenges faced by Black and Hispanic students and the impact of interventions on their academic achievement. The chapter explains the reasoning behind selecting an exploratory, qualitative approach, describing the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. It also highlights using descriptive statistics to complement the qualitative findings, offering a more complete picture of the research focus.

The decision to use an exploratory case study approach is rooted in the complexity of the research questions and the need to deeply explore the lived experiences and contextual factors influencing the educational environment for Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID era. Qualitative research is particularly effective in investigating nuanced topics and producing detailed, context-specific insights (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Given the shifting educational challenges brought on by the pandemic, this approach provides the flexibility to adapt data collection and analysis, ensuring that emerging themes and factors are fully explored (Merriam, 2009).

Methodology and Design

This study used an exploratory case study design, which is ideal for exploring real-world contexts and understanding how practices, strategies, and academic performance interact in specific settings (Yin, 2018). The chosen case study site was an elementary school within a district that has implemented targeted practices to support Black and Hispanic students in response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach allowed for a deep dive into the unique environment where these initiatives are applied, offering insights into how they function within the specific circumstances of the selected school.

An exploratory case study approach enabled a thorough investigation of various elements tied to equity, such as implementation strategies, classroom practices, and their effects on student achievement. This method supports a holistic perspective, aligning with the study's objectives. Qualitative case studies involving interviews are well-suited for gathering rich, detailed data specific to the context. Additionally, qualitative research is flexible and adaptive, making it easier to identify and explore emerging themes and adjust the study.

This study is guided by the following research questions and sub-questions:

1. What educational practices and strategies have been implemented post-COVID to support academic achievement?
2. How do specific educational practices and strategies implemented at Hillview Elementary support the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID era?
3. How do educators at Hillview Elementary perceive the effectiveness and challenges of the implemented practices and strategies in promoting the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students post-COVID?

Population and Sample

Description of Selected Elementary School

The selected elementary school, "Hillview Elementary School," is in a diverse urban community with a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial areas. Hillview Elementary is a part of one of the largest school districts in the state. The district focuses on equity within schools through its Office of Equity. The school serves approximately 400 students in grades PK through fifth. The school has a substantial population of Black and Hispanic students. It offers a

range of academic programs and support services to address the unique needs of its population. The rationale for selecting this site over others is based on several reasons.

Hillview Elementary School serves a racially and ethnically diverse student population, including a significant number of Black and Hispanic students. This diversity aligns with the research focus on equity and the experiences of these student groups. Hillview Elementary School has actively implemented practices and strategies in response to the educational challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. These initiatives make it an ideal site for studying the impact of such efforts. Hillview Elementary School's experiences will likely resonate with other urban elementary schools facing similar equity challenges in the post-COVID era.

Participants

For this study, participants were chosen using both a purposeful and snowball sampling method. Purposeful sampling was used to determine educators who worked at the school during COVID. Snowball sampling worked well for finding individuals with deep, relevant insights in a particular community (Naderifar et al., 2017). The process started by reaching out to educators who met the selection criteria at Hillview Elementary. They recommended other teachers and staff who could contribute valuable perspectives. This method helped gather input from various roles and grade levels, giving a more well-rounded view of the school environment. The number of participants were considered enough when no new themes or ideas were being uncovered, known as reaching data saturation—a critical point where you have captured a complete understanding of the topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants in this qualitative study consisted of educators from the Hillview Elementary. Educators consisted of teachers and administrators who are directly involved in implementing

educational practices, and strategies. These participants were crucial because they significantly influence the educational experiences and outcomes of Black and Hispanic students.

Participants were chosen based on their availability, willingness to participate, and roles within the elementary school. Educators with varied experiences who have worked at the school since 2020 were selected to ensure a range of perspectives. The selection process was transparent and consent-driven, with participants fully informed about the study's purpose, the importance of their role, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Consent forms were provided, and participants could ask questions and voice any concerns before agreeing to participate.

Study Procedures

The initial plan was to conduct the research within a specific district, but the administration did not approve. This hurdle required a shift in approach. To move forward, state report card data was used to identify another school in a different district that met the study's criteria. This data, which breaks down academic performance, demographic information, and equity measures, allowed for a targeted selection of a comparable school that had implemented similar policies and strategies aimed at Black and Hispanic students. Despite the initial setback, this adjustment ensured that the research could still capture relevant and insightful data in alignment with the study's objectives (Yin, 2018).

Once Hillview Elementary was deemed a comparable school, initial contact was established with the school's administration, explaining the research's purpose, objectives, and potential benefits. Once permission was granted, emails were sent to select participants to explain the research purpose, procedures, and the importance of their contributions. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses.

Table 3.1*Alignment of Data Sources to Research Questions*

Research Question	Data Type
What educational practices and strategies have been implemented post-COVID to support academic achievement?	Semi-structured interviews
How do specific educational practices and strategies implemented at Hillview Elementary support the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID era?	Semi-structured interviews Academic School Data
How do educators at Hillview Elementary perceive the effectiveness and challenges of the implemented practices and strategies in promoting the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students post-COVID?	Semi-structured interviews

Two primary data types were used throughout the course of this research:

1. **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with educators to gather rich, narrative data on their experiences and perspectives regarding practices and strategies in post-COVID education. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.
2. **Academic Performance Data:** Quantitative data on academic achievement (e.g., standardized test scores, GPA, attendance records, and demographic information) among Black and Hispanic students, pre- and post-COVID, was collected from school records. Descriptive statistics were used to provide a quantitative overview of academic outcomes.

The data collection table provides an overview of the methods used to gather data for the exploratory case study. It specifies the participants involved, the data sources used, and the purpose of each data collection method.

Table 3.2*Data Collection Table*

Method	Participants	Data Source	Purpose
Semi Structured Interviews	Educators (Administrators/Teachers)	Audio Recordings, Transcriptions	Explore perspectives on equity-driven practices and strategies implemented post-COVID to support marginalized students.
Academic Achievement Data	NC DPI State Reporting System	Standardized Test Scores	Gather quantitative data on academic achievement

This multi-method approach ensures a comprehensive examination of the relationship between practices, strategies, and academic achievement of marginalized students in the post-COVID landscape.

The data collected from semi-structured interviews and document analysis allowed for the construction of rich narratives that explained the various relationships between practices, strategies and academic achievement among Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID era. The qualitative data identified patterns, themes, and causal factors related to the research questions.

Open-ended questions allowed participants to express themselves in their own words, offering rich, detailed insights into their experiences and perspectives (Patton, 2015; Saldana, 2015). These responses provided deeper context to quantitative data, helping to explain the "why" behind specific trends and behaviors (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Additionally, open-ended answers often reveal themes that may not have been anticipated, which can help refine research questions and guide further qualitative exploration (Charmaz, 2014). For a complete list of questions, refer to the Appendix.

Using multiple data collection methods strengthened the validity of the findings by allowing for data triangulation. This approach provides a more complete understanding of the research context. The study offered a balanced view of the research problem by combining qualitative and quantitative data. While qualitative data captured the voices and perceptions of the participants, descriptive statistics provided quantitative patterns that can be compared with qualitative insights.

Relevant academic performance metrics, such as achievement percentiles and school performance grades, were obtained from the NC DPI school reporting online database. Ensuring the data was accurate and complete involved a data-cleaning process to handle any missing values or outliers that could distort the findings (Field, 2018). Once the data was compiled, descriptive statistics were calculated to provide an initial understanding of key aspects, which helped to summarize the data (Pallant, 2020). This academic data was integrated with the broader qualitative findings to offer a comprehensive perspective, where descriptive statistics reinforced qualitative insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The analysis of qualitative data from semi-structured interviews began with an in-depth review of the transcripts. The researcher read the transcripts multiple times to grasp the content thoroughly. In vivo coding, a process that involves using the participants' own words and phrases as codes during the data analysis process was applied, followed by axial and selective coding (Saldana, 2021). Codes were then grouped into broader themes to create a structured coding framework. The analysis process was iterative, using constant comparison to refine themes and adjust the coding framework as new insights emerged.

Research Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, validity refers to how accurately and credibly the findings represent the participants' experiences. Ensuring this validity means that researchers strive to ensure the data and their interpretations genuinely reflect what participants shared (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking was used to enhance the validity of this exploratory case study. Participants who participated in member checking carefully reviewed their transcripts and unanimously confirmed that the content accurately reflected their perspectives and experiences. No participants requested changes or corrections to the transcripts, further validating the authenticity of the data collected. This agreement not only increased the trustworthiness of the research but also reinforced the rigor of the study by allowing participants to verify that their voices were accurately represented (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Yin, 2018). Qualitative research also emphasizes dependability, which is about the consistency and stability of the research process, allowing others to replicate the study and obtain similar results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study maintained dependability by keeping detailed records of all research activities, including coding decisions, memos, and data analysis procedures.

Safeguards Against Researcher Bias

Steps were taken to ensure reflexivity and transparency to minimize researcher bias. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal, documenting personal biases, assumptions, and reflections. This practice allowed for increased self-awareness and helped reduce the potential influence of those biases on the research (Yin, 2018). Regular debriefing sessions with colleagues and advisors provided valuable external perspectives, helping to challenge and validate the findings. Member checking also played a role in safeguarding against bias, ensuring participants' perspectives were faithfully represented. The researcher's positionality, shaped by a

commitment to educational equity and personal background, was acknowledged, and this sense of responsibility contributed to a careful, ethical approach to the study. The focus remained on conducting a rigorous study that would benefit the field of education and support Black and Hispanic students.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant authorities before the study began. Informed consent was sought from all participants, following a clear and detailed process. Initially, participants were contacted via email, during which the researcher introduced the study's purpose and invited their participation. An informed consent form was provided, explaining the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and participants' rights. This ensured that participants were fully informed about the study before agreeing to participate. Participants were also given the opportunity to ask questions or seek clarification before providing written consent. They were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw without consequences. The study followed ethical guidelines for protecting human subjects and safeguarding participants' rights, confidentiality, and well-being throughout the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). These steps ensured that participants understood the study and could provide informed consent freely and voluntarily.

Conclusion and Methodological Overview

In summary, while this qualitative exploratory case study offers valuable insights into the relationship between educational practices, strategies and academic outcomes for Black and Hispanic students post-COVID, it faced transferability, potential bias, and sample size limitations. Understanding these limitations is essential for accurately interpreting the study's findings. The study focused primarily on understanding experiences and patterns rather than

establishing causality, and its findings are not intended to be universally applicable across all Black and Hispanic student populations. Given its cross-sectional nature, the study examined a specific moment without the longitudinal analysis that could track changes over an extended period.

The methodology section of this study provided a detailed outline of the approach used to examine how practices and strategies affect the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID era. A qualitative design was chosen to gain an understanding of the problem. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews and the analysis of achievement data to ensure data triangulation. Triangulating data from multiple sources strengthened the study's validity and reliability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Thematic analysis was used for data interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006), allowing for the exploration of the complex, context-specific issues raised by the research questions. This exploratory case study of Hillview Elementary offered a focused exploration of specific factors and mechanisms, with the strength of the research being its comprehensive, contextually relevant approach and use of triangulation. However, limitations included issues of transferability, potential bias, and constraints related to available resources.

The use of qualitative research methods in this exploratory case study is crucial for exploring the lived experiences of students, families, and educators. This research will fill gaps in existing literature, particularly regarding intersectional identities and qualitative perspectives. The insights gained from this study can inform evidence-based policy decisions to improve educational outcomes for Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID context. Chapter 4 will delve into the data analysis collected through interviews, providing an in-depth look at the

experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors influencing the impact of practices within Hillview Elementary School.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings from an exploratory exploratory case study on the strategies, practices, and academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID educational landscape. This study seeks to uncover the diverse approaches educators and institutions have adopted to support these student groups disproportionately affected by the pandemic's disruptions. By examining these strategies, the study aims to provide insights into the efficacy of various educational practices and identify the factors contributing to academic resilience and achievement among Black and Hispanic students during this period.

This study is critical because there is limited research coming from educator perspectives on effective practices for educating students post-COVID; this research study can set the framework for additional research that examines educator perspectives before developing practices to be implemented on educational campuses. In addition, this research study suggested practices and strategies implemented in schools by educators who live the reality of educating low socioeconomic students during and after the pandemic.

This chapter will include a detailed analysis of the data collected through interviews, providing insights into educators' experiences. The findings will be organized thematically, highlighting key strategies that have emerged as critical in addressing the unique needs of these students. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings, setting the stage for the discussion and recommendations in Chapter 5.

Summary of Methods

This exploratory exploratory case study aimed to address three key research questions:

1. What educational practices and strategies have been implemented post-COVID to support academic achievement?

2. How do specific educational practices and strategies implemented at Hillview Elementary support the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID era?
3. How do educators at Hillview Elementary perceive the effectiveness and challenges of the implemented practices and strategies in promoting the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students post-COVID?

A qualitative research design was employed to answer these questions, focusing on an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perceptions of educators within the school. Descriptive statistics will assist in creating a demographic and academic profile of Hillview Elementary, a pseudonym used to protect the school's identity. Participant profiles will be presented to describe the study participants, including general demographic information and relevant background details. Findings from the study will be organized around the main themes that emerged from the data. The findings presented in this chapter aim to uncover the challenges and successes of practices and strategies implemented to enhance the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students in a Title 1 school setting during the post-COVID era.

Conceptual Framework

The integration of Social Justice Theory and Recognition Theory provided a comprehensive lens through which the research was conducted. Each of these theories contributed uniquely to understanding and addressing the challenges these student populations face in the context of educational inequities intensified by the pandemic.

Social Justice Theory

The Social Justice Theory was pivotal in framing the dissertation's emphasis on equity and fairness in education. This theory stresses the importance of systemic transformation to

guarantee that all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic background, have equal access to quality education and opportunities for success. Within this conceptual framework, Social Justice Theory underscored the need to identify and dismantle structural barriers that disproportionately impacted Black and Hispanic students during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Key focus areas included disparities in access to resources, technology, and support systems, contributing to the widening achievement gap. Furthermore, the theory guided the research examining how schools and educators could adopt strategies and practices that foster more equitable outcomes for these students (Fraser, 1997; Theoharis, 2007).

Recognition Theory

Recognition Theory was integrated into the conceptual framework to address educational equity's social and cultural aspects. This theory focuses on acknowledging and valuing individuals' and marginalized groups' identities, experiences, and cultural backgrounds. Within the context of the dissertation, Recognition Theory helped explore how educational strategies could affirm the cultural identities of Black and Hispanic students, creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. The theory also stressed the importance of culturally responsive teaching and recognizing students' lived experiences as vital for improving academic achievement. By incorporating Recognition Theory, the conceptual framework highlighted the need for educational practices that provide equitable resources and validate and empower Black and Hispanic students throughout their academic journeys (Honneth, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Together, these two theories formed a robust conceptual framework that guided the dissertation's research on the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students post-COVID. Social Justice Theory provided the overarching principle of equity, and Recognition

Theory emphasized the cultural and social validation necessary for academic success. This integrated framework allowed the research to explore and propose practices and strategies that could effectively address the educational disparities Black and Hispanic students faced in the post-pandemic era, ensuring that the study was grounded in a comprehensive understanding of justice and equity in education.

Participant Selection

Participants for the study were selected using snowball sampling, a technique particularly useful for identifying information-rich cases in a specific community. This method initially involved reaching out to a small group of educators at Hillview Elementary, who referred other potential participants. This approach ensured a diverse representation of perspectives from various grade levels and roles within the school. The number of participants was deemed sufficient as it allowed for saturation—at which no new themes or insights emerged from the data, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Data collection involved multiple methods to triangulate the findings. Semi-structured interviews were the primary data sources, supplemented by school report cards to gather descriptive student performance statistics. These report cards provided contextual data on academic achievement trends and helped frame the qualitative findings. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. The transcripts were then subjected to a rigorous data analysis involving line-by-line coding to identify recurring themes and patterns. This thematic analysis allowed for a detailed examination of Hillview Elementary's educational practices and strategies and their perceived effectiveness and challenges.

District's Focus on Equity

The district promotes equity and social justice through the Office of Equity Affairs. The department was created to ensure that all students, regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status, or other factors, receive equitable educational opportunities from pre-K through 12th grade. While the focus is primarily on addressing racial disparities, the office also tackles gaps related to gender, sexual orientation, and disability. They aim to make the district a model for successfully educating students of color. To achieve this, the office works closely with school leaders to analyze key data like graduation rates and enrollment in advanced classes for Black and Hispanic students. They also design professional development on equity, foster partnerships with community organizations, secure grants to support their work, and ensure clear communication with stakeholders. The efforts align with several strategic goals to reduce inequities and improve academic outcomes across the district.

School Profile

Hillview Elementary school is PK-5, nestled in a bustling community, serving 360 students. The student body comprises 54% male and 46% female students. The school racial breakdown comprises 59.5% African American, 31.8% Hispanic, 5.4% Multiracial, and 3% White students. Nearly all students (99%) come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The staff at Hillview Elementary include 89% of licensed teachers and 79.5% possessing three or more years of experience. To provide an understanding of academic performance within the school Tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 highlight academic proficiency disaggregated by year and demographic subgroups. The data presents the overall academic performance and the specific performance of Hispanic, Black, and Two or More Races students and students with disabilities (SWD).

Table 4.1*Percentage of 3rd-5th grade students proficient overall in all subject areas tested*

Year	Overall Composite	Hispanic	Black	Two or More Races	Students with Disabilities (SWD)
2019	42%	49%	36.9%	Not Applicable	7%
2020	State Testing Exemption				
2021	10.5%	9.9%	9.0%	Not Applicable	<5%
2022	31.8%	42.3%	26.1%	35.7%	15.5%
2023	42.2%	51.6%	35.5%	48.1%	15.3%

Note: Data for students identifying as Two or More Races was not applicable in 2019. Due to the state testing exemption in 2020, no data is available for that year.

The impact of the pandemic became starkly evident in 2021, with overall proficiency plummeting to 10.5%. Hispanic students sharply declined to 9.9%, and Black students dropped to 9.0%. The proficiency rate for students with disabilities fell below 5%, while data for students identifying as Two or More Races remained not applicable.

By 2022, the school began to recover, with overall proficiency rising to 31.8%. Hispanic students' proficiency increased to 42.3%, and Black students' rates improved to 26.1%. Data for students identifying as Two or More Races was available for the first time, showing a 35.7% proficiency rate. Students with disabilities also showed progress, with their proficiency rising to 15.5%.

In 2023, the school returned to pre-pandemic levels, with overall proficiency reaching 42.2%. Hispanic students continued to lead with 51.6% proficiency, while Black students' rates increased to 35.5%. Students identifying as Two or More Races improved, achieving 48.1% proficiency. The proficiency rate for students with disabilities slightly decreased to 15.3%.

Table 4.2*Percentage of 3rd-5th grade students proficient in reading*

Year	Overall Composite	Hispanic	Black	Two or More Races	Students with Disabilities (SWD)
2019	36.7%	39.7%	32.4%	Not Applicable	10.5%
2020	State Testing Exemption				
2021	16.4%	14.9%	15.4%	Not Applicable	7.7%
2022	30.7%	34.5%	28%	Not Applicable	20%
2023	31.5%	32.1%	26.7%	58.3%	7.7%

Table 4.3*Percentage of 3rd-5th grade students proficient in math*

Year	Overall Composite	Hispanic	Black	Two or More Races	Students with Disabilities (SWD)
2019	40.5%	54.4%	31.6%	Not Applicable	5.9%
2020	State Testing Exemption				
2021	5.1%	8.1%	<5%	Not Applicable	<5%
2022	30.2%	43.6%	23.2%	Not Applicable	10%
2023	31.5%	32.1%	26.7%	58.3%	7.7%

Both tables 4.2 and 4.3 reveal a significant decline in proficiency following the COVID-19 pandemic, with reading proficiency dropping from 36.7% in 2019 to 16.4% in 2021 and math proficiency plummeting from 40.5% to just 5.1% during the same period. Despite this sharp decline, the school made notable progress in the subsequent years. By 2023, reading proficiency had recovered to 31.5%, while math proficiency also improved to 31.5%. Hispanic students consistently outperformed their peers in both subjects, while students with disabilities continued

to face challenges, particularly in math. The data also highlights a significant improvement in students' performance identifying as Two or More Races by 2023, especially in reading, where they achieved a 58.3% proficiency rate.

Participant Profiles

A total of six educators were selected to participate in the study. The researcher sought to get the perspective of elementary teachers at Hillview Elementary who taught during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. All educators chosen to participate had experiences working with African-American and Hispanic students before, during, and post-COVID. In addition, each educator had several years of experience, ranging from nine to 35 years of experience. The educators in the study were of two different backgrounds, Asian and African American. The study consisted of one Asian participant and five African American participants. The study participants represented both genders: 1 male and five females. The participants' years of experience were also additional information that may have shaped their responses based on their experience working with African American and Hispanic students.

This study analyzes educators' perspectives on educating post-COVID students in African American and Hispanic communities. Thus, to begin the interview, the researcher asked the participants to describe the overall academic performance of African American and Hispanic students before the 2019 pandemic. The participants' experiences and shared knowledge differed from their point of view while providing the researcher with a preliminary understanding of how teachers viewed the academic achievement of their students pre-COVID. The following pseudonyms are given to each participant to protect their identity and respect their privacy.

Aaliyah Brooks is a Black female who has 15 years of experience in education, with 3 of those years working as a teacher. All of Aaliyah's experience has been working on Title One

campuses. Aaliyah states that she was a teacher of record during and post-pandemic. Aaliyah was a first-grade teacher at the time of this study. When asked to describe African American students' academic performance in the 2019-2020 pre-pandemic school year, Aaliyah stated, "Before COVID, my African American students were showing steady improvement in reading, though math remained a challenge. Hispanic students were also progressing, particularly those who received additional language support."

Darius Jackson is a Black male who has teaching experience. Darius disclosed that he was an administrator pre-, during, and post-pandemic. At the time of the study, Darius was an assistant principal. The researcher asked Darius if he could describe the academic achievement of African American and Hispanic students in the year 2019-2020 before school closures. Darius recalled that "we were seeing gradual improvements in academic performance of our African American and Hispanic students. However, there was still a lot of work to be done to close the achievement gap."

Maya Chen has 23 years of teaching experience, 20 of which have served on a Title-One campus. At the time of this study, Maya's current teaching position was kindergarten teacher. Maya is also an Asian female educator. Maya spoke with the researcher and recalled her experiences working with African-American and Hispanic students during the global pandemic when the schools closed and virtual learning occurred. Maya shared that during the 2019-2020 school year before the pandemic, her African American students "were eager to learn, their confidence improved over the school year, and parents were a good support system for most of my students."

Kiana is an African American female who has 19 years of teaching experience. Most of Kiana's educational experience has been working in Title-One schools. Kiana brings eight years

of experience working with students in a public charter school. Kiana agreed to share her experiences working with African American and Hispanic students pre-, during, and post-pandemic. At the time of the study, Kiana was a kindergarten teacher. When asked about the African American and Hispanic students' academic performance in her class during the 2019-2020 school year, Kiana stated, "By the end of the year, my African American students performed on grade level compared to their peers. I even had a few reading above grade level before school closed. My Hispanic students grew, but I had many whose language served as a barrier, preventing them from reaching grade level."

Imani is an African American female educator. She has served in Title-One campuses for nine years, her entire career as an educator. At the time of the study, Imani was a fifth-grade teacher. Imani agreed to discuss her experience working with African American and Hispanic students during the pandemic. Imani started by sharing her students' experiences pre-pandemic. Imani explained that at the start of that particular school year, she had a mix regarding academic achievement. Some students were on or above grade level, while the majority of her African American and Hispanic students came in below grade level.

Jasmine Carter is an African American female educator who has 35-plus years of experience. Jasmine has 15 years of Title One experience and 25-plus years serving in non-Title-1 schools. At the time of the study, Jasmine served as an interventionist at a Title-One campus. She agreed to speak with the researcher about her experience educating African American and Hispanic students. When the researcher asked Jasmine to describe the academic performance of her pre-pandemic students, Jasmine explained, "From my experience, the performance of both African American and Hispanic students was less than that of other ethnicities overall. I noticed

the difference in working with both groups of students was that the disruptive behaviors were more prevalent among my African American students.”

Table 4.4

Summary of Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Position	Years of Experience	Race	Gender
Aaliyah Brooks	1st Grade Teacher	15	Black	Female
Jasmine Carter	Interventionist	35+	Black	Female
Maya Chen	Kindergarten Teacher	23	Asian	Female
Imani Harris	5th Grade Teacher	9	Black	Female
Darius Jackson	Assistant Principal	14	Black	Male
Kiana Williams	Kindergarten Teacher	19	Black	Female

Findings

After interviewing six educators and analyzing the data, common emergent themes arose. Each educator spoke of their own experiences on the following topics: overall school experience and student experiences pre-, during, and post-COVID, effective practices and strategies, equity & inclusivity, academic achievement, and challenges in implementation. Each topic presented common themes. Several themes emerged from the school environment: (a) staff morale, (b) shift in school focus, and (c) equity vs. equality. When discussing the strategies being implemented, commonalities of participant responses focused on (a) intervention & small group, (b) family engagement nights, (c) restorative practices, and (d) student mentorship.

One significant theme emerged: positive change in the school environment and staff morale post-COVID-19. Participants noted that the shift in school leadership was critical in

improving morale. For example, Aaliyah Brooks mentioned, "Our school atmosphere, as far as the administrative staff, is better. Our morale has gotten better." This sentiment was echoed by Jasmine Carter, who observed, "From my observation, the principal does listen to his staff. The morale is better due to his personality and how he engages with staff."

Participants attributed these improvements to a more supportive and inclusive administration fostering community and collaboration among staff and students. The sense of being "wanted" and "valued" contributed significantly to the overall positive atmosphere in the school. This was particularly important following the isolation experienced during remote learning, which created a disconnect among staff, students, and parents.

Before the pandemic, the primary focus was closing the achievement gap in core subjects like math and literacy. Jasmine Carter highlighted students' broad range of needs, from academic support to social services. Despite these challenges, some participants noted that there was steady, albeit limited, progress among African American and Hispanic students before the pandemic. Imani Harris shared that her African American students were "showing steady improvement in reading, though math remained a challenge." Similarly, Hispanic students progressed, particularly those who received additional language support. Darius Jackson echoed this sentiment: "We were seeing gradual improvements in the academic performance of our African American and Hispanic students, particularly in reading." However, he also acknowledged that more work was needed to close the achievement gap.

During the pandemic, the focus shifted dramatically to maintaining student engagement and access to learning. The sudden transition to remote learning created significant barriers, especially for students lacking access to technology or a conducive learning environment. Darius Jackson explained, "During COVID, the challenge shifted to maintaining academic consistency.

Students struggled with access to technology, and the lack of face-to-face interaction made it hard to keep them motivated."

Post-COVID, the focus has transitioned back to closing the gap while keeping student engagement high. Educators also emphasized the importance of re-establishing emotional and social connections with their students. Aaliyah Brooks highlighted the emotional significance of physically interacting with students again: "Being able to hug the babies and love on them." This simple yet profound act reflects the human element of teaching that was deeply missed during the pandemic. Physical presence and connection foster a supportive and nurturing learning environment.

Imani Harris discussed the importance of grace for herself and her students: "Grace... everyone needs grace when it comes to being in those situations... it makes me more reflective on my practices." This sentiment emphasizes the need for empathy and understanding as educators and students navigate the emotional aftermath of the pandemic. The focus on grace also highlights the importance of creating a compassionate and forgiving learning environment where mistakes are seen as opportunities for growth.

Despite the positive changes in school morale post-COVID, several participants highlighted challenges related to socialization and engagement among students and staff. Imani Harris shared that both "kids, even adults, are less socialized," indicating a lingering effect of the isolation experienced during the pandemic. She noted, "Adults are a little bit less collaborative... it's been a transition to get back in the swing of being collaborative and not being so sensitive to feedback." This change in social dynamics reflects a broader challenge in re-establishing the collaborative environment before the pandemic.

The transition to online learning also affected students' foundational skills, particularly in the early grades. Maya Chen shared, "When my students first returned, they didn't know how to form letters... They didn't know how to hold the pencil." This loss of foundational skills, compounded by the lack of in-person instruction and the difficulties of teaching skills like reading over a computer screen, posed significant challenges for educators. Imani Harris also pointed out, "We're having to do a lot of social-emotional learning to get them in a space where they can relax and comfortably receive instruction."

The experiences of Black students in the school concerned several participants. Darius Jackson mentioned that Black students often feel they must "work harder to be seen and heard" and that their cultural experiences are not always adequately represented in the curriculum. This sense of underrepresentation and the need for more excellent cultural responsiveness was a recurring theme. Imani Harris highlighted that many Black students "don't see why school's important" and lack role models that reflect their cultural background and experiences. Aaliyah Brooks also discussed a mixed attitude among students, noting that some feel entitled and believe their parents' opinions should override the teachers'. This dynamic can create tension and challenges in fostering a respectful and effective learning environment.

Language barriers and cultural differences were noted as significant challenges for Hispanic students. Darius Jackson pointed out that many Hispanic students feel their heritage is "not fully appreciated or understood by the broader school community." This lack of cultural understanding can lead to feelings of isolation and a sense that their needs are not being fully met. Kiana Williams emphasized the timidity of Hispanic students, particularly when they are removed from familiar environments for ESL classes. "I think they're more timid because... they don't want to leave their familiar environment, and they're being pulled away from their

classmates." This underscores the need for more culturally responsive practices that honor students' backgrounds and provide support in ways that make them feel included and understood.

A significant theme that emerged was the distinction between equity and equality. Several participants emphasized that equity, rather than equality, should be the guiding principle in education. Imani Harris articulated this perspective well: "Treatment of students, in my opinion, is more equity-based. It should be an equity treatment. It shouldn't be an equal treatment." She argued that because students come from diverse backgrounds with varying needs, an equitable approach that considers individual circumstances is essential for all students to succeed.

Aaliyah shared a similar sentiment as she explained the importance of addressing students' basic needs before expecting them to meet academic expectations: "If a student comes to you and they don't have their basic needs met, they're not ready to do anything that you're putting in front of them." This perspective highlights the need for differentiated support that acknowledges and addresses each student's challenges. Despite recognizing the importance of equity, participants also acknowledged the challenges in implementing it effectively. Darius Jackson noted that while the school strives to treat all students fairly, "there's always more we can do. It's important to continually assess and refine our practices to ensure that we're meeting the needs of all students." This statement underscores the ongoing nature of efforts to promote equity and the need for constant evaluation and improvement of practices.

While there have been positive changes in school morale and a renewed focus on social-emotional learning, significant challenges remain in addressing academic achievement gaps, fostering effective socialization, and ensuring that the experiences of Black and Hispanic students are valued and supported. Understanding the dynamics of the school environment

allows us to better appreciate the context in which post-COVID strategies and practices have been implemented. This context is essential as we examine the approaches that have been most successful in addressing the unique needs of Black and Hispanic students during this period of recovery and adjustment.

Effective Post-COVID Strategies & Practices

As schools transitioned from remote learning to in-person instruction, it became evident that traditional approaches did not address the academic and socio-emotional needs that had emerged during the pandemic. This section of the chapter delves into the strategies and practices that have proven effective in the post-COVID context, focusing on those that have fostered academic achievement and resilience among Black and Hispanic students.

Post-COVID small group instruction emerged as a particularly effective strategy for supporting academic achievement. Jasmine Carter emphasized the effectiveness of small group sessions, stating, "Small group instruction has been particularly effective post-COVID. It allows me to address individual student needs more closely." By focusing on smaller groups, teachers could provide more personalized attention, essential in addressing learning gaps that had widened due to the pandemic. Darius Jackson supported this approach, noting, "By providing more personalized attention, we've been able to address individual learning gaps more effectively." This strategy was particularly beneficial for students who needed extra support, allowing educators to tailor their teaching methods to meet each student's unique needs.

The use of designated intervention times was a common strategy mentioned by several participants. For example, Aaliyah Brooks described the "Tiger Time" intervention program: "Tiger time is in-house, so you have to worry about transportation being a problem... It's school-

wide during the school day." This strategy ensures all students can access necessary interventions without additional logistical challenges.

Maya Chen explained how "Tiger Time," a designated period for targeted interventions, helped lagging students: "We pull kids who are low and we pull them almost every day, sometimes twice within my classroom." This frequent, focused intervention allowed for more immediate feedback and support, helping to address academic deficiencies more effectively. Imani Harris also emphasized the importance of dedicated intervention times, stating, "Having a designated time for intervention, so these people are either coming in, pushing on, or pulling out students, and kind of just focusing on intervention." This focus allows for targeted support tailored to students' specific needs, whether addressing gaps from previous years or reinforcing current grade-level content.

Several participants discussed strategies to increase engagement among Black and Hispanic students, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Aaliyah Brooks emphasized the importance of interactive and hands-on learning: "Gone are the days where it's just sitting still... there's movement, keeping them moving and talking has helped keep them engaged." This approach aligns with the need for more dynamic and interactive teaching strategies to maintain student interest and engagement. Jasmine Carter also highlighted using manipulatives and collaborative learning as effective strategies: "They'll do a whole lesson... then the children are working with the manipulatives... they work with a partner and complete the assignment, and then it's gone over with the whole class." This method promotes active learning and student collaboration, fostering a more engaging and supportive learning environment.

Participants also highlighted using visual aids and technology as effective strategies in the post-COVID era. Imani Harris discussed the benefits of using technology to support language learning: "I've used apps that translate content into students' home languages, which has helped them better understand and engage with the material." This approach facilitated learning for students with limited English proficiency and helped bridge the language barrier in the classroom. Maya Chen described the impact of hands-on activities and tactile learning tools, especially for younger students: "We did a lot of writing... using magnet letters and tactile things like play dough to help students who couldn't form letters initially." These strategies were effective in helping students develop foundational skills, particularly those who struggled with traditional learning methods.

Building strong relationships with students and creating safe spaces for learning were also emphasized as crucial strategies for enhancing engagement among Black and Hispanic students. Darius Jackson noted the importance of fostering a sense of belonging and creating an environment where all students feel valued and supported: "Schools have a crucial role to play in promoting equity... to create an environment where every student feels valued and supported." This underscores the importance of developing trusting relationships with students and creating a school culture that embraces diversity and inclusion.

Imani Harris discussed the need for empathy and understanding in engaging students post-COVID: "I have to be more reflective and honestly empathetic of the way students are, especially post-COVID because they were home... not being engaged by education." This reflection highlights the need for educators to adapt their teaching strategies to better meet the needs of students who have experienced significant disruptions in their education.

Programs that engage students and parents, such as multicultural nights and curriculum-focused events, were highlighted as effective strategies for fostering a supportive learning environment. Jasmine Carter mentioned the positive impact of these events: "They have a curriculum night with staggered presentations for different grade levels... and we had a really good turnout." Kiana Williams shared an example of a successful multicultural day: "Last year, we organized a multicultural day where students and staff shared their heritage through food, music, and stories. It was a huge success because it allowed everyone to feel seen and appreciated for who they are." Such events foster inclusivity and help students from diverse backgrounds feel valued and respected.

Similarly, Maya Chen described the school's efforts during Hispanic Heritage Month: "The school made a concerted effort to include not just cultural events but also academic content that highlighted the contributions of Hispanic Americans." This approach celebrates cultural diversity and integrates it into the curriculum, reinforcing the importance of representation in education.

Beyond cultural events, participants also discussed the importance of recognizing and addressing individual student needs as a form of cultural understanding. Imani Harris shared a poignant example of a student who faced significant challenges at home, noting, "If that means giving them a second to get themselves together, let them do that, and then they can return back to the classroom ready for instruction." Her approach reflects a deep understanding of the student's context and a commitment to providing the support needed for success.

Darius Jackson also emphasized the importance of creating an inclusive environment: "One example of our commitment to cultural understanding is our annual multicultural fair, where students and their families can share their cultural traditions." These initiatives are vital in

fostering a school culture that celebrates diversity and promotes a sense of belonging among all students. The events also provide an opportunity for parents to engage with their children's learning and understand academic expectations.

Several participants discussed the adoption of restorative practices as a strategy for improving student behavior and fostering a positive school culture. Restorative practices focus on relationship-building and understanding the impact of one's actions on others rather than punitive measures. Jasmine Carter highlighted the use of restorative practices in her school: "With restorative practices, it gives the child time to think about what they did and have that conversation in a positive way." This approach encourages students to reflect on their behavior and understand the consequences, promoting a more empathetic and supportive school environment. Maya Chen also noted, "I feel like all staff care deeply for each and every one of these kids, especially kids who need that, who don't get it at home." She emphasized the genuine care and affection shown by teachers, regardless of students' backgrounds, suggesting that at least in some contexts, efforts are made to treat all students equitably.

The integration of equitable practices into daily teaching and school culture was a prevalent theme among participants. Many emphasized the importance of culturally responsive teaching and equity-focused programs. Aaliyah Brooks mentioned a mentorship program targeting boys from different cultural backgrounds: "It actually includes Blacks and Hispanics... they learn things like how to tie neckties and basic etiquette." Similarly, Imani Harris discussed a similar program for girls: "The girl mentorship program at our school has been a game-changer. It's provided a safe space for young girls to build confidence, learn leadership skills, and feel empowered in their academic journey. We've seen significant improvements not only in their academic performance but also in their social interactions and self-esteem." Such programs

support academic success and address social and emotional development, fostering a sense of belonging and self-esteem among students.

Kiana Williams mentioned the success of peer mentoring programs, where older students helped younger ones: "Our peer mentoring – buddy classroom program has not only helped academically but has also strengthened the sense of community and support among students." This program fostered a supportive learning environment and encouraged collaboration and mutual support among students. Darius Jackson emphasized the school's focus on equity in curriculum design and interactions with students and families: "We've implemented several initiatives, such as targeted academic support programs like tutoring and after-school enrichment." These initiatives aim to create an inclusive environment where all students feel valued and supported. Table 4.5 highlights Educators' perspectives on successful strategies and practices for supporting students post-COVID, including interventions, engagement techniques, collaborative learning, relationship-building, and multicultural events.

Table 4.5*Successful Strategies and Practices for Students According to Educators*

Strategies	Sample Quote
Structured Interventions & Small Group Support	“Small group instruction has been particularly effective post-COVID. It allows me to address individual student needs more closely.”
Student & Family Engagement	“Gone are the days where it’s just sitting still... There's movement. Keeping them moving and talking has helped keep them engaged.”
Hands-On and Collaborative Learning	“They'll do a whole lesson... then the children are working with the manipulatives... they work with a partner and complete the assignment, and then it's reviewed with the whole class.”
Building Relationships and Creating Safe Spaces	"I have to be more reflective and honestly empathetic of how students are, especially post-COVID, because they were home... not being engaged by education."
Multicultural & Curriculum Nights	“Last year, we organized a multicultural day where students and staff shared their heritage through food, music, and stories. It was a huge success because it allowed everyone to feel seen and appreciated for who they are.”
Restorative Practices	“Restorative practices give the child time to think about what they did and have that conversation positively.”
Student Mentorship	“The girl mentorship program at our school has been a game-changer. It's provided a safe space for young girls to build confidence, learn leadership skills, and feel empowered in their academic journey.”

Academic Challenges and Barriers to Implementing Support Strategies

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the academic performance of African American and Hispanic students faced several challenges, which the participants highlighted. Aaliyah Brooks described the school's overall performance as below expectations: "Our school grade was not where we wanted it to be." She attributed part of this to the school's administration and staff morale, which she believes negatively impacted students' learning environments and,

subsequently, their performance. Aaliyah pointed out that the administration's high expectations and a lack of appreciation for progress created a challenging environment: "The expectations were so great you could hardly meet the demands... you were never appreciated."

Similarly, Kiana Williams mentioned that the curriculum was not well-suited for the student population, which affected their ability to perform: "The challenges were the curriculum. It was kind of above the kids that we serve." She observed that while there were some successes at the kindergarten level, there was a noticeable decline in performance by the time students reached third grade due to the curriculum not meeting their needs.

Participants identified several challenges and barriers to effectively implementing support strategies, particularly in the post-COVID era. Imani Harris discussed ensuring consistent implementation across the school, highlighting the need for adequate training and support: "If you implement a school-wide practice, everyone's not doing it... You have to make sure not only everyone's on board, but also everyone's knowledgeable about implementing those practices." This underscores the importance of providing ongoing professional development and support for teachers to effectively implement new strategies.

Parental involvement emerged as both a challenge and an opportunity in the responses. Several participants noted a decline in parental engagement following the pandemic, as parents were initially restricted from entering schools and participating in classroom activities. Maya Chen also mentioned, "Before the pandemic, we had a lot of parents come in and out of the school, building a lot of functions within the school. Since the pandemic, I think that has changed." This shift highlights the need for schools to find new ways to engage parents and rebuild the strong sense of community that existed pre-COVID-19. Kiana Williams observed,

"Initially, there was less involvement with parents after we returned to school... Now that we're in the year 2024, I see it coming back where parents are welcome into the classroom."

The participants indicated that parental involvement is gradually improving. However, schools still need to actively foster a home-school partnership to enhance the educational experience for all students. Jasmine Carter emphasized the importance of parental involvement: "I've always told parents... you are your child's best educator... You can't let up." She noted a lack of engagement from some parents and the need for schools to actively encourage and support parental involvement. Kiana Williams highlighted the issue of inconsistent attendance among students, particularly those from underserved communities: "Parents bringing the kids to school on a day-to-day basis... is one of the biggest things post-COVID that I've noticed." This challenge emphasizes the need for schools to address barriers to regular attendance and engage with parents to ensure students are consistently attending school.

Table 4.6 summarizes key challenges in supporting student achievement post-COVID as reported by participants, including issues related to school leadership, curriculum, implementation inconsistencies, and parental involvement.

Table 4.6*Challenges in Implementing Support Strategies According to Educators*

Challenge Type	Summary	Sample Quote
School Leadership	Participants highlighted that high expectations and a lack of recognition from school leadership pre-COVID negatively impacted staff morale and student performance.	“The expectations were so great you couldn't hardly meet the demands... you were never appreciated.”
Curriculum	Before COVID the curriculum was not well-suited to the student population's needs, contributing to a decline in academic performance as students progressed through grades.	“The challenges were the curriculum. It was kind of above the kids that we serve.”
Inconsistencies with Implementation and Lack of Training	Inconsistent implementation of school-wide practices and insufficient staff training were identified as major barriers to effectively supporting students post-COVID.	“If you implement a school-wide practice, everyone's not doing it... You have to make sure not only everyone's on board, but also everyone's knowledgeable about implementing those practices.”
Parental Involvement & Support	Post-COVID, there was a noticeable decline in parental involvement, but schools are working to re-engage parents and emphasize the importance of consistent student attendance.	“Parents bringing the kids to school on a day-to-day basis... is one of the biggest things post-COVID I've noticed.”

Resources and Recommendations to Support Effective Practices

Participants identified several resources and support systems that could enhance the implementation of effective practices. Collaboration among teachers and ongoing staff support were identified as essential components for improving equity and academic achievement. Imani Harris recommended more collaboration between teachers to share effective strategies: "More collaboration between teachers to share strategies that work, and greater emphasis on family engagement." This collaborative approach encourages knowledge sharing and helps teachers

learn from each other's experiences and successes. Many emphasized the need for ongoing professional development focused on equity and inclusion. Jasmine Carter called for more bilingual resources and materials and "professional development on equity and inclusion that should be ongoing, not just a one-time training." This highlights the need for continuous learning and improvement among staff to effectively support diverse student populations.

Maya Chen and Imani Harris stressed the importance of having more support staff trained in culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices. Maya suggested, "We need more counselors and social workers trained in culturally responsive practices," while Imani added, "Having more support staff like counselors who are trained in trauma-informed practices would also be beneficial." These suggestions underscore the need for specialized staff who can provide targeted support to students facing unique challenges.

Many participants highlighted the importance of culturally responsive teaching as a key strategy for improving equity. Jasmine Carter suggested increasing the availability of culturally responsive teaching resources and involving families more in the educational process: "It's also important to continue professional development on equity and inclusion." This recommendation aligns with the need for ongoing training and resources to help teachers effectively support diverse student populations.

Darius Jackson and Kiana Williams echoed the importance of culturally responsive teaching, with Darius recommending that schools "continue to focus on culturally responsive teaching and increase efforts to engage families as partners in education." This emphasis on partnership with families recognizes the critical role that parents and caregivers play in supporting student success and fostering a culturally inclusive school environment.

Access to culturally relevant teaching materials was also highlighted as a critical resource needed to promote equity. Darius Jackson noted the need for "more culturally relevant teaching materials," which can help ensure that all students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and feel a sense of belonging in their educational environment. Providing diverse and inclusive materials is essential for fostering an equitable and supportive learning environment.

Several participants recommended increasing the focus on mental health and social-emotional learning to improve equity and academic achievement for all students. Aaliyah Brooks emphasized the need to "address the whole child, not just their academic needs," suggesting that schools should provide more comprehensive support that includes mental health resources and social-emotional learning initiatives. This approach acknowledges the diverse challenges students face and aims to create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment.

Summary of Themes

This chapter reveals several critical themes in the post-COVID-19 educational environment. One prominent theme is the positive shift in school atmosphere and staff morale, largely attributed to changes in school leadership. Participants highlighted improved morale and a supportive administration as key factors contributing to a more collaborative and inclusive school environment. This shift has been crucial in addressing the emotional and social disconnects caused by remote learning.

The impact of COVID-19 was also a significant theme. Participants noted challenges in re-establishing collaborative environments and addressing gaps in foundational skills due to the transition to remote learning. These challenges underscore the need for effective social-emotional learning and support systems to help students adjust and thrive. Participants pointed out issues of cultural underrepresentation, language barriers, and the need for greater empathy

and understanding in addressing students' unique challenges. The importance of equity, rather than equality, was emphasized as essential for supporting diverse student needs.

The analysis of participant responses reveals several key themes related to the strategies and practices schools have implemented to support academic success and promote equity among students. These themes highlight the importance of structured interventions, restorative practices, culturally responsive teaching, and addressing challenges in implementation and parental engagement. Additionally, the strategies for increasing engagement among Black and Hispanic students emphasize the need for hands-on learning, building relationships, and creating safe, inclusive environments. Darius Jackson highlighted the need for ongoing adaptation and innovation in education: "Flexibility and innovation are key to meeting the needs of our students. We have to be willing to adapt and try new approaches." This statement underscores the importance of being open to change and continuously seeking new ways to improve teaching and learning.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 sought to provide insights into the effectiveness of various practices, with the ultimate goal of informing educational policies and interventions that can better support marginalized student populations in recovering from the pandemic's effects. The inclusion of participant profiles offered a glimpse into the diverse backgrounds, roles, and experiences of the participants, which was essential for understanding how various factors influenced their perspectives on the strategies and practices discussed. The analysis of participant responses reveals varied perceptions of fairness, equity, and cultural understanding in schools. While there are efforts to promote equity and respect for diversity, challenges remain in ensuring consistent and fair treatment for all students. These insights provide valuable guidance for educators and

policymakers as they continue to navigate the challenges of the post-COVID education landscape, highlighting the need for adaptability, empathy, and a commitment to student success.

Key themes such as the need for an equity-focused approach, the importance of cultural understanding, and the requirement for ongoing professional development and resources highlight the areas where schools can continue to improve. By addressing these themes, schools can create more inclusive and supportive environments that meet the needs of all students, regardless of their background or circumstances. Moving forward, it is crucial to address these challenges through targeted interventions, increased cultural responsiveness, and a commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive school community to ensure all students receive the support they need to succeed.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter outlines the study's objectives, reviews key findings, and analyzes the results in the context of the conceptual framework previously introduced. It starts by revisiting the purpose of the research, which sought to explore strategies and practices that supported the academic success of Black and Hispanic students during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. A summary of the key findings is provided, shedding light on critical themes such as the success of targeted instructional methods and the role of socio-emotional support. Following this summary, the discussion delves deeper into the implications of these findings, comparing them with existing research and highlighting the unique contributions this study makes to the field of education. Additionally, this section reflects on the conceptual framework, assessing its effectiveness in explaining the outcomes and considering alternative frameworks that might offer further insights.

The study's limitations are also discussed, acknowledging the constraints that may have shaped the findings and influenced the transferability of the results. Despite these limitations, the research offers valuable implications for policy and practice, proposing ways for educational stakeholders to better support marginalized student populations in a post-pandemic educational landscape. Moreover, the chapter offers recommendations for future research, encouraging continued investigation into the long-term effects of COVID-19 on educational equity and further development of strategies to address the achievement gap. In conclusion, the chapter summarizes the main points and reflects on the broader implications for educators, policymakers, and researchers.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research was to examine educators' perspectives on educational practices and strategies introduced during the post-COVID era and how they influenced the academic success of Black and Hispanic students. As previously noted, the pandemic not only highlighted but also worsened existing educational disparities, particularly for historically underserved groups. This chapter revisits the study's focus on how these educational practices and strategies have addressed the challenges posed by the pandemic, specifically assessing their impact on the academic outcomes of Black and Hispanic students.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1

The first research questions asked: *What educational practices and strategies have been implemented post-COVID to support academic achievement?* The study aimed to investigate the educational practices and strategies implemented post-COVID to support academic achievement, particularly for students from marginalized backgrounds. The researcher focused on identifying which specific approaches were most effective in closing achievement gaps and promoting learning, especially among Black and Hispanic students. By analyzing these methods, the goal was to uncover ways schools could better provide equitable education in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Several key themes emerged from participants' responses when discussing the post-COVID strategies used to improve academic outcomes. These themes shed light on the variety of approaches educators have taken to meet students' needs post-COVID.

One of the most prominent themes was the emphasis on intervention programs and small-group instruction. Four participants spoke about targeted interventions like "Tiger Time" and

small group sessions, which were designed to provide individualized support for students who had fallen behind during the pandemic. These interventions allowed educators to focus on specific learning gaps, and their widespread adoption highlights their perceived success in promoting student progress.

Another important theme centered on the use of restorative practices to improve student behavior and foster a positive school culture. Three participants discussed employing restorative strategies, such as circle time and behavioral interventions like buddy classrooms and calming stations. These approaches were seen as crucial for addressing emotional and social challenges, contributing not only to academic success but also to the overall well-being of the students.

Equity-driven practices also surfaced frequently in the discussions. Four participants emphasized the use of culturally relevant materials and the development of peer mentoring programs aimed at ensuring all students, regardless of their background, received the necessary support. These strategies were designed to create inclusive learning environments where marginalized students, particularly Black and Hispanic students, could thrive academically.

Technology and visual aids emerged as another recurring theme, with two participants highlighting the role of these tools in enhancing learning, especially for students who struggled with traditional teaching methods. Post-COVID, the use of technology became increasingly important in creating more adaptable and accessible learning experiences, catering to the diverse needs of students.

A few participants also mentioned the importance of professional development and additional planning time for teachers. This theme stressed the ongoing need for educators to engage in continuous improvement and collaboration, analyzing data, sharing best practices, and

participating in professional learning communities to refine their instructional methods in the post-pandemic world.

While many participants shared similar themes, there were notable differences in how these strategies were implemented and their perceived effectiveness. For example, while some praised the success of small-group instruction, others pointed to challenges in maintaining consistency with restorative practices or ensuring equity for all students. Additionally, the use of technology varied, with some educators relying heavily on digital tools and others focusing more on hands-on, traditional methods.

Research Question 2

The second research questions, *How do specific educational practices and strategies implemented at Hillview Elementary support the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID era?*, aimed to understand how specific practices and strategies at Hillview Elementary have supported the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID era. The focus was on identifying which approaches were most effective in addressing the unique needs of these students during their recovery from pandemic-related disruptions. Additionally, the study sought to explore the factors that either contributed to or hindered the success of these strategies in promoting educational equity.

A key theme from participants was the importance of interactive, hands-on learning to boost student engagement. Four participants mentioned the use of movement, collaboration, and tactile activities, which helped hold students' attention—something particularly needed in the post-COVID environment where traditional teaching methods were less effective. Strategies like manipulatives and shorter lessons helped keep Black and Hispanic students engaged in learning.

Another theme was the mixed impact of post-COVID strategies on engagement. While some students thrived with personalized learning plans and individualized attention, others continued to struggle, indicating that these approaches weren't universally successful in addressing post-pandemic challenges.

Culturally relevant teaching and community involvement were also highlighted as essential. Three participants noted that incorporating cultural elements, such as multicultural events, made Black and Hispanic students feel seen and valued. These efforts contributed to a more inclusive school environment, fostering reconnection with learning post-COVID.

However, participants acknowledged ongoing challenges, particularly in sustaining engagement for students facing barriers like economic hardships and lack of parental support. Two participants stressed the need for empathy and tailored support to help students overcome these obstacles.

Overall, while interactive learning and cultural relevance were seen as effective, the success of these strategies varied. Some educators observed positive changes, while others noted that not all students benefited equally. Community involvement was also viewed differently, with some considering it vital for success and others focusing more on individualized approaches. The mixed results highlight the complexity of addressing student needs in the post-pandemic landscape.

Research Question 3

Finally, the third research question was: *How do educators at Hillview Elementary perceive the effectiveness and challenges of the implemented practices and strategies in promoting the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students post-COVID?*

The researcher aimed to understand how educators at Hillview Elementary viewed the effectiveness and challenges of post-COVID strategies in supporting Black and Hispanic students. The focus was on gaining insights into what worked, the obstacles faced, and the practical realities of implementing these strategies to promote equity and academic success.

One key theme was the positive shift in staff morale, which several participants linked to new school leadership. The principal's focus on engagement and collaboration boosted teacher morale, enhancing commitment to student success. However, challenges remained in rebuilding a strong sense of community among staff and students.

Another major theme involved struggles with student socialization and engagement. Remote learning created gaps in foundational skills, especially in reading and math, while missing social development made classroom management difficult. Educators spent more time on social-emotional learning and behavioral interventions, which took away from instructional time. This issue was especially challenging for Black and Hispanic students facing additional socio-economic barriers.

Participants also mentioned inconsistent implementation of school-wide practices, noting a need for ongoing professional development to ensure strategies like restorative practices and differentiated instruction were applied effectively. Equity remained a central concern, with educators stressing the importance of addressing both academic and social needs while fostering community partnerships. Parental involvement was seen as essential, but maintaining these efforts post-COVID remained challenging.

Finally, the need for flexibility and adaptability emerged as another theme. Educators had to rethink traditional teaching methods, incorporating new approaches like technology and

reimagining classroom management, to meet students' evolving needs in the post-pandemic environment.

While participants generally agreed on the importance of improved morale, engagement, and flexibility, their views on the success of these efforts varied. Some felt optimistic about the positive shift in school culture and leadership, while others pointed out ongoing challenges and inconsistencies in applying strategies. Opinions on parental involvement also differed, with some noting increased engagement post-COVID, while others struggled with maintaining family support.

In conclusion, educators at Hillview Elementary experienced both successes and obstacles in promoting Black and Hispanic students' achievement post-COVID. Leadership improvements boosted morale, but issues like student socialization, academic consistency, and equitable strategy implementation persisted. The role of community partnerships and the need for flexibility and innovation remain essential to understanding the school's overall approach.

Discussion of Findings

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers have sought to understand the educational practices and strategies implemented to support academic achievement across different contexts (Cahapay, 2020; Siegel et al., 2021). A central focus has been on identifying approaches that have been effective in fostering learning and addressing achievement gaps, particularly among students from marginalized backgrounds.

The first research question explored practices and strategies aimed at supporting academic achievement in the post-COVID period. Participants identified various approaches designed to close achievement gaps, with a strong focus on targeted interventions like small group instruction and programs such as "Tiger Time." These initiatives provided personalized

support for students who had fallen behind, aligning with research advocating for differentiated instruction and individualized attention, particularly for diverse student populations impacted by pandemic-related learning disruptions (Bailey et al., 2021; Breslyn & Green, 2022; Cahapay, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Participants' reports of success with small-group instruction reflected findings from prior studies, which showed that tailored approaches can significantly improve outcomes for low-performing students (Kim & Quinn, 2020; Tomlinson & Moon, 2021).

Restorative practices, focusing on behavior and positive school culture, also emerged as critical. These strategies aimed at relationship-building and addressing underlying issues created a learning environment conducive to academic success (Darling-Hammond, 2023; Lodi et al., 2021). The findings were consistent with research indicating that social-emotional learning and restorative justice methods enhance behavior and engagement (Gregory et al., 2016; Osher et al., 2020). Participants' focus on fostering supportive environments echoed studies emphasizing emotional well-being's role in academic achievement, especially for marginalized students affected by the pandemic (Jagers et al., 2019).

Technology and visual aids appeared as another key strategy, though findings were mixed. Some participants saw notable increases in engagement through digital tools, while others found them less effective. This reflects the mixed results in literature—some studies highlight technology's positive impacts on engagement (Zhao et al., 2021), while others point to access issues that exacerbate inequities (Kaden, 2020). Although some research suggests technology can help bridge achievement gaps (Molnar et al., 2021), participants' experiences with it were varied, indicating that its effectiveness may depend on factors such as teacher familiarity and student access.

A stronger focus on restorative practices and equity-driven strategies than previously documented indicated schools' growing emphasis on holistic student development, including social-emotional health, post-pandemic. This shift underscores the link between emotional well-being and academic performance. However, several participants noted difficulties in consistently implementing restorative and equity-focused initiatives, contrasting with literature that often presents these methods as uniformly effective (Gregory et al., 2016). The varied success across different contexts suggests a need for more research into sustaining consistent and equitable application of these strategies in diverse school environments.

Research question two focused on practices implemented at Hillview Elementary to support Black and Hispanic students. At Hillview Elementary, strategies to support Black and Hispanic students post-COVID focused on interactive and culturally relevant teaching, which participants highlighted as effective in maintaining engagement. The emphasis on hands-on learning, including manipulatives and movement-based activities, aligns with studies that show active learning techniques enhance engagement and comprehension, particularly for students from marginalized backgrounds (Freeman et al., 2014; Hattie, 2017). These strategies helped students stay engaged despite challenges such as shortened attention spans and gaps in foundational skills due to COVID-19.

There was also an emphasis on building an inclusive school environment through events like Hispanic Heritage Month, which helped students feel seen and valued. Culturally relevant pedagogy, reported as a critical strategy, supports previous research demonstrating its effectiveness in promoting student achievement by validating students' cultural identities (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012). Furthermore, the focus on community involvement

mirrors Epstein's (2010) framework for effective school-family-community partnerships that positively impact marginalized students.

However, there was a divergence in how universally effective these practices were perceived. Some participants observed continued challenges sustaining engagement, particularly for students facing external socio-economic barriers, such as parental involvement or economic hardships. While prior literature discusses these barriers, emphasizing individualized attention as not universally effective suggests that these students require even more specific interventions and supports than previously recognized. These findings reflect the broader literature on the post-COVID learning environment, highlighting the complexity of re-engaging students facing systemic barriers (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). The challenges noted by educators also align with research that underscores the importance of addressing academic and non-academic factors in promoting educational equity (Ishimaru et al., 2016).

Research question three explored educators' perceptions of practices and strategies post-COVID. Educators at Hillview Elementary shared optimism about some of the strategies but also pointed to significant challenges. They noted that improved staff morale, largely due to changes in leadership, played a vital role in promoting collaboration and commitment among staff. This aligns with research linking strong school leadership to increased teacher efficacy and student success (Leithwood et al., 2020). The need for flexible, adaptive teaching methods also echoed broader recommendations for innovative approaches in the wake of the pandemic (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). However, educators observed ongoing difficulties with student socialization and engagement, particularly among Black and Hispanic students who faced greater academic disruptions during COVID. These concerns mirrored national trends showing that marginalized students bore the brunt of post-COVID learning loss (Dorn et al., 2021).

Equity issues and the role of community partnerships were discussed, though opinions on their effectiveness varied. Some participants stressed the importance of consistently applying practices like restorative justice and equity-focused initiatives. Inconsistent implementation pointed to a gap between theory and practice, as prior research suggests these initiatives are most effective when consistently applied and backed by professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Gregory et al., 2016). The demand for ongoing professional development and vertical planning matched literature supporting collaborative learning and sustained educator support to improve instructional practices (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018).

Some frustration arose regarding inconsistent family and community involvement. While community engagement is often highlighted as crucial for promoting equity and academic success (Ishimaru et al., 2016), educators found it challenging to rebuild these connections after the pandemic. This mixed experience with parental involvement contrasted with studies showing consistent benefits for marginalized students when families are engaged (Jeynes, 2016). It suggests that while partnerships are important, their impact may vary depending on context and levels of parental involvement, particularly in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas.

An unexpected challenge was the inconsistent application of school-wide practices like restorative justice and equity-driven strategies. Although generally viewed positively in research, their success at Hillview appeared to rely heavily on sustained professional development and collaboration, underscoring the difficulty of translating theory into consistent practice.

The similarities between this study's findings and previous research can be attributed to the shared context of tackling post-COVID educational challenges. Many schools, including Hillview Elementary, implemented strategies like small group instruction and restorative practices to address the widespread disruptions caused by the pandemic. These methods are well-

established in literature as being effective in supporting academic recovery and promoting social-emotional well-being (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

However, differences observed in the use of technology and the consistency of restorative practices may be tied to variations in resources, teacher training, and community support. Schools with greater access to professional development and digital tools likely had more success in adopting tech-driven solutions, while others faced challenges due to limited resources. Similarly, the success of restorative practices depended on sustained training and support, which may not have been available across all settings.

Socioeconomic differences among students and families may also explain discrepancies in community involvement and the effectiveness of strategies. Black and Hispanic students, facing economic hardships and limited parental support, encountered additional barriers that may have impacted the success of certain approaches. In more affluent schools, where resources are more abundant, these factors might not be as prominent, contributing to variations in results.

The challenges brought by COVID-19 have been significant, yet educators have responded with innovative practices to support student achievement, particularly for marginalized communities (Breslyn & Green, 2022; Cahapay, 2020; Daniel, 2020; Lodi et al., 2021). While some participants emphasized the importance of addressing students' social-emotional well-being, the primary focus remained on academic interventions and technology-based learning.

As research on post-COVID educational strategies continues to develop, more analysis is needed to fully grasp the long-term effectiveness of these approaches. Schools must continually evaluate and refine these strategies to ensure equitable, high-quality education for all students.

The alignment between this study's findings and the existing literature on small group instruction, restorative practices, and culturally relevant teaching underscores their importance in supporting marginalized students post-COVID. However, variations in technology use, consistency of restorative practices, and community involvement highlight the influence of contextual factors. Further research is needed to explore how differences in school resources, teacher training, and community demographics affect the implementation and success of post-pandemic educational strategies.

Reflections on Conceptual Framework

The study on educational equity drew from two foundational theories: Social Justice Theory and Recognition Theory. These frameworks were utilized to examine how educational practices can foster fairness, inclusivity, and access to opportunities for marginalized students. Both theories provided essential insights into developing policies and strategies aimed at reducing educational disparities and creating environments where all students can flourish.

Social Justice Theory focuses on addressing systemic inequities by advocating for equal access to quality education, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or other social characteristics (Rawls, 1971; Sen, 1999; Young, 1990). This theory promotes the dismantling of barriers that impede academic success and emphasizes the need for creating inclusive environments where all students can thrive (Freire, 1970; Theoharis, 2008; Gorski, 2013). It calls on school leaders to recognize the diverse identities of students and foster equitable, supportive school cultures.

Recognition Theory, introduced by Axel Honneth (1996), centers on acknowledging and valuing individuals' identities and social contributions. In the educational context, this theory is particularly important for building inclusive environments that affirm students' diverse cultural

backgrounds. The failure to recognize a student's identity can negatively impact their self-esteem and motivation. By affirming these identities, schools can create spaces where students feel respected and valued, which is essential for engagement and academic success, particularly for marginalized groups (Fraser, 2001; Taylor et al., 1994).

In this study, Social Justice Theory provided a framework for understanding how schools, particularly Hillview Elementary, addressed educational challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which further deepened existing inequities. This theory also shaped the development of the interview tools, guiding the creation of questions that explored how educators implemented inclusive practices, used equitable teaching methods, and created opportunities for success. The research questions were designed to uncover the strategies and practices used to promote educational equity, viewed through the lens of social justice. For example, Research Question 1 focused on how post-COVID educational practices addressed academic disparities, while Research Question 2 examined how effective these strategies were in supporting marginalized students, particularly Black and Hispanic students. These questions aligned with Social Justice Theory's core principles, which emphasize equitable access to resources and opportunities (Young, 1990).

Social Justice Theory proved especially valuable in highlighting the need for equitable access to resources and opportunities to address the achievement gaps widened by the pandemic. The study specifically aimed to understand how schools could better support Black and Hispanic students, whose educational setbacks were magnified during COVID-19. This theoretical lens helped pinpoint educational practices that actively worked to reduce systemic inequities. Additionally, the theory's focus on leadership's role in promoting equity aligned with findings

that school leadership was instrumental in fostering a more inclusive and supportive school environment (Theoharis, 2008).

The framework of Social Justice Theory effectively highlighted the need for systemic changes to ensure equitable access to education. It demonstrated how interventions like small group instruction were designed to address learning gaps. Furthermore, incorporating intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) within this framework could provide a deeper understanding of the overlapping identities that shape students' educational experiences, helping schools develop more targeted interventions for students facing multiple disadvantages.

Recognition Theory offered valuable insights into the non-material aspects of educational equity, particularly in understanding how schools acknowledge students' identities. This theory also guided the study's exploration of how schools affirm the identities of Black and Hispanic students. It played a central role in framing Research Question 2, which focused on the educational practices that supported the academic achievement of these students. Recognition Theory shaped interview questions that explored how schools foster a sense of belonging, celebrate cultural diversity, and whether these efforts positively impacted students' engagement and academic outcomes.

The application of Recognition Theory allowed the study to examine the social and emotional dimensions of educational equity, underscoring the importance of creating inclusive school environments where students feel valued and respected. It helped reveal how culturally relevant curricula, peer mentoring programs, and inclusive school events like Hispanic Heritage Month contributed to students' self-esteem, motivation, and overall engagement in learning.

The theory effectively explained the importance of cultural recognition in fostering student belonging and engagement. Its emphasis on social inclusion was particularly relevant in

the post-pandemic context, where students' social-emotional well-being became a central focus of school recovery efforts. The findings supported the theory's assertion that students who feel recognized and valued for their cultural identities are more likely to engage and succeed academically.

However, its application also revealed challenges in practice. While many educators acknowledged the importance of affirming students' identities, the consistency of these efforts varied widely. This suggests that while the theory is conceptually strong, it requires more robust institutional support and teacher training for consistent application across schools. Additionally, while Recognition Theory provided crucial insights into the role of cultural recognition, it did not fully address how systemic barriers, such as poverty and resource access, intersect with issues of identity and inclusion. This gap indicates that Recognition Theory may be more effective when used alongside frameworks that explicitly address structural inequities.

After completing the study, both Social Justice Theory and Recognition Theory emerged as relevant and valuable frameworks for examining educational equity. These theories offer foundational principles crucial for shaping policies that prioritize fairness and inclusivity in schools. While both frameworks were effective in analyzing educational equity, there are potential adjustments that could improve their practical application in future research.

For Social Justice Theory, incorporating a more explicit focus on intersectionality would strengthen its relevance in educational studies. While the theory already addresses broad categories like race, gender, and socioeconomic status, a deeper exploration of how these identities intersect could offer clearer insights into the unique challenges students with multiple marginalized identities face, such as low-income Black or Hispanic students. An intersectional

lens would enable schools to design more targeted interventions to tackle the compounded barriers these students encounter.

Regarding Recognition Theory, while it effectively examined how student identities were acknowledged in classrooms, future research could expand its scope by developing concrete measures of how recognition impacts long-term academic and social outcomes. Building tools to quantify the effects of identity validation on student performance, attendance, and engagement could provide deeper insights. Additionally, more emphasis could be placed on how schools and educators can implement recognition practices consistently at both classroom and institutional levels. This would require greater institutional support and professional development to ensure the principles of recognition are applied uniformly across different educational settings.

Utilizing Social Justice Theory and Recognition Theory in this study provided a strong foundation for exploring educational practices and policies supporting marginalized students. These frameworks offer a thorough approach to understanding educational equity, giving policymakers and educators the theoretical and practical tools necessary for building more inclusive and equitable systems. While both theories proved effective, minor adjustments—such as expanding Social Justice Theory to include classroom-level practices and offering more actionable applications for Recognition Theory—could improve their utility in future research and practice. These refinements would help educators and policymakers better address the complexities of promoting equity and recognition in an increasingly diverse educational landscape.

Limitations

In any research project, limitations often arise due to factors outside the researcher's control, which can influence the study's scope, depth, and transferability. This research

encountered several key limitations that affected various aspects of the study and its overall findings.

One of the main limitations was the initial lack of approval from the intended school district. The original plan was to conduct the study in a district known for its diverse student population and established educational equity initiatives. However, administrative barriers prevented the research from proceeding as planned, necessitating a shift to a different district. This delay impacted the study's timeline and forced the researcher to locate an alternative school.

The urgency to find a new district introduced challenges, as the selected district differed in demographics, resources, and policies from the original plan. These variations may have influenced the transferability of the findings to other urban schools in North Carolina. Additionally, the shortened timeline for establishing relationships with administrators and teachers in the new district may have limited the depth of data collection and understanding of the school's specific context.

Another significant limitation was the reliance on academic data solely from students in grades 3-5, retrieved from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI) public site. This restricted the scope of the academic achievement analysis, as privacy concerns and district regulations prevented access to data from other grade levels. The absence of information from Kindergarten through 2nd grade means the findings don't capture early educational trends, which are often crucial in shaping long-term academic success, especially for marginalized students. The lack of data from younger students limits the transferability of the results to the entire student body and prevents a full exploration of the effectiveness of the strategies across all grades.

The lack of diversity among the participants is another limitation, as the group comprises of five Black teachers and one Asian teacher. This particular makeup might influence the findings differently from how a more diverse or predominantly white group of educators would respond. Teachers' backgrounds and cultural experiences often shape their approaches to education, discipline, and student relationships. For example, Black and Asian teachers may be more attuned to the challenges and experiences faced by students of color, given their own lived experiences, potentially leading to different insights and strategies compared to white teachers.

In contrast, white teachers, especially those with less exposure to diverse student populations, may approach classroom dynamics, cultural sensitivity, and academic interventions from a different perspective. Their responses might place a greater emphasis on certain systemic challenges, or they might approach issues of equity and inclusion with a different lens, possibly highlighting gaps in their own training or experiences. Consequently, while the current participant group offers valuable insights, the lack of broader diversity may limit the scope of perspectives explored in this exploratory case study, particularly when considering how strategies for improving academic outcomes post-COVID might differ across various racial and cultural backgrounds.

Time constraints further limited the study's depth. Given the relatively short research period, it was not possible to observe the long-term effects of the educational strategies on Black and Hispanic students' academic progress. Without longitudinal data, assessing the sustainability of these practices and their lasting impact on student achievement was difficult. Some interventions may have shown early promise but lacked evidence of long-term improvement, or vice versa. Additionally, the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic likely influenced both

the implementation of strategies and student outcomes, making it challenging to separate the pandemic's impact from the practices studied.

The researcher's positionality may have also introduced bias into the study. As an external researcher, there is always a risk of unintentional bias in interpreting findings or interacting with participants. Efforts were made to remain objective, but the researcher's background and experiences may have influenced data collection and interpretation.

Additionally, participants' awareness of being observed by an external researcher could have led them to present their practices more favorably, potentially introducing social desirability bias.

Delimitations

In this study, several delimitations have been applied to maintain a clear focus and ensure manageability within the scope of the research. First, the study is confined to a single urban elementary school within one district in North Carolina, which narrows the geographic context. This choice allows for a more detailed and localized exploration of the strategies and practices impacting Black and Hispanic students' academic achievement in the post-COVID era. While an exploratory case study provides valuable in-depth insights into specific practices and strategies, the unique characteristics of this school—its leadership, community demographics, and available resources—may not reflect those of other urban schools in the region. Additionally, the sample size consists of a limited number of educators, which, while small, facilitates in-depth qualitative insights and a more personalized understanding of the experiences within this particular setting. However, these parameters also mean the findings may not be broadly generalizable to other schools, districts, or larger populations, as the unique circumstances and demographic makeup of the selected school play a significant role in shaping the results.

This study faced several limitations and delimitations, including the lack of district approval, reliance on academic data from grades 3-5, time constraints, and the focus on a single school during the post-pandemic period. While these factors restricted the scope and transferability of the findings, they also pointed to important areas for future research. Despite these challenges, the findings contribute valuable insights into educational equity in urban elementary schools and lay the groundwork for future studies. A broader, longitudinal study involving multiple schools and grade levels, with a focus on long-term outcomes, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how to support the academic success of Black and Hispanic students in urban settings.

Implications for Policy

The findings from this study suggest several key policy implications aimed at supporting the academic success of Black and Hispanic students in the post-COVID era. Drawing from participant responses, these implications focus on equitable distribution of resources, professional development for educators, and the promotion of culturally responsive teaching practices.

Policies that prioritize directing resources to schools with large populations of marginalized students, such as Title I funding in the U.S., should be strengthened and expanded. This would help ensure schools can implement and sustain effective interventions like the "Tiger Time" program, which provided personalized learning opportunities for students who had fallen behind. Continued support and funding for remedial programs and additional support staff will be essential in closing achievement gaps.

The study's findings underscored the critical role of professional development in enabling educators to effectively use strategies like small group instruction, restorative practices,

and culturally relevant teaching. Policies should encourage ongoing professional development that equips educators to apply these methods consistently. Establishing professional learning communities (PLCs) as a policy requirement could foster continuous learning and collaboration among teachers, helping them better address the diverse academic and social-emotional needs of marginalized students.

Integrating culturally relevant materials and equity-driven teaching strategies was a prominent theme in the study. Policies should ensure the inclusion of culturally responsive curricula that reflect the diverse backgrounds of student populations, particularly Black and Hispanic students. Such curricula not only enhance academic engagement but also foster a stronger sense of belonging. Additionally, policies should support regular reviews of curricular content to maintain relevance and inclusivity, ensuring diverse cultural perspectives are continually reflected.

Policies should promote the development of partnerships between schools, families, and community organizations to create more inclusive learning environments enhancing the educational outcomes for Black and Hispanic students. When looking at the academic success of marginalized students, it's essential to consider both the factors that schools can control and those that come from outside the school environment. Within schools, elements such as the quality of teaching and the resources available can greatly influence student achievement. Research shows that having skilled teachers and well-equipped classrooms is crucial for creating a supportive learning atmosphere where all students can excel (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Effective teaching has a particularly strong impact on students from underserved backgrounds (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2014).

External factors like parental involvement and community support also play a vital role in shaping a student's educational experience. When parents actively engage in their children's education, it often leads to better academic performance, increased motivation, and improved behavior (Jeynes, 2012). Communities that collaborate with schools—by offering resources, programs, and advocacy—can help create a more supportive environment for students. Strong partnerships among schools, families, and communities can significantly narrow gaps in support and resources, making education fairer for everyone involved (Epstein, 2011).

Schools should strive to improve the quality of their teaching and available resources while fostering positive relationships with families and the community to promote greater success for all students. This could involve creating positions such as school-community liaisons to strengthen connections between educators, parents, and local organizations. Furthermore, policies that allocate resources for parent education programs would help bridge the gap between home and school, particularly for families dealing with socioeconomic hardships.

These policy recommendations, informed by the study's findings, highlight the importance of supporting marginalized student populations through targeted resource allocation, professional growth for educators, culturally inclusive curricula, and stronger family and community partnerships.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this study offer practical insights for educational practice, emphasizing strategies that can be adopted at the school and classroom levels to enhance support for Black and Hispanic students.

The success of small group instruction, as demonstrated by interventions like "Tiger Time," indicates that schools should prioritize these approaches to address learning gaps.

Teachers need ongoing training and support to effectively deliver small group instruction, ensuring personalized attention for each student. Regular assessments should be conducted to monitor student progress and make data-driven adjustments to instruction as needed.

Restorative practices, such as circle time and behavioral interventions, were found to positively influence school culture and address students' emotional and social challenges. Expanding these practices across schools is recommended, with an emphasis on developing students' social-emotional skills. Additional teacher training in conflict resolution, peer mediation, and creating safe spaces like calming stations should be encouraged. Evaluating the consistency of these practices across grade levels will help maintain uniformity in their application.

The positive impact of culturally relevant teaching on Black and Hispanic students' sense of belonging suggests schools should embed these strategies into everyday instruction. Teachers should be trained to incorporate diverse perspectives and materials into their lessons, offering students opportunities to explore their cultural identities through class projects and school events. Culturally responsive pedagogy can foster inclusive and affirming classroom environments that engage all students.

Professional development emerged as a critical component in addressing post-COVID learning challenges. Schools should regularly provide training sessions focused on instructional strategies, including technology integration, interactive learning, and support for students facing additional barriers like economic hardships. Establishing professional learning communities (PLCs) would enable teachers to share best practices, analyze student data, and collaborate on effective lesson planning.

Family and community involvement are essential in maintaining student engagement, particularly for Black and Hispanic students. Schools should host events celebrating cultural diversity and create opportunities for parents to engage actively in their children's education. Establishing clear communication channels between schools and families will ensure parents are informed and can participate in the learning process.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study aimed to identify effective strategies for supporting the academic success of Black and Hispanic students post-COVID. It highlighted the need for further research into specific groups within these populations, such as students in advanced, average, below-level, or special education programs. Expanding the scope to focus on these subgroups would provide a more nuanced understanding of how different students within these racial categories are impacted by educational interventions.

Additionally, this research examined educator experiences during a specific time frame, with participants reflecting on the pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic periods. Future studies could investigate the long-term academic outcomes of Black and Hispanic students over a longer period. Tracking students from elementary school during the pandemic through high school would offer deeper insights into the pandemic's lasting impact on academic achievement.

Another area for future research includes exploring the socio-emotional effects of COVID-19 on students from different racial backgrounds. Understanding the post-pandemic emotional and social challenges that students face can inform strategies to support their overall well-being.

Lastly, the pandemic exposed disparities in access to educational technology, particularly in developing countries and underserved regions. Future research should examine how schools in

these areas responded to the unique challenges of COVID-19, addressing gaps in remote learning capabilities (Breslyn & Green, 2022).

Conclusion

This research explored the relationship between post-COVID educational strategies and the academic achievement of marginalized students, with a focus on Black and Hispanic populations. The pandemic intensified pre-existing disparities, making it crucial to examine how schools have adapted to address these issues. The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of specific initiatives and contribute to a broader understanding of equity and achievement in the post-pandemic educational environment.

The research took place at Hillview Elementary, a PK-5 urban school with 360 students, predominantly African American (59.5%) and Hispanic (31.8%). Nearly all students (99%) came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Six educators from Hillview participated in the study, all with significant experience teaching Black and Hispanic students during and after the pandemic. The group included five African American educators and one Asian educator, with 9 to 35 years of teaching experience, representing both male and female perspectives.

Key findings highlighted several strategies that supported academic achievement in the post-COVID context. Small group instruction and intervention programs were common, offering personalized support to students who had fallen behind. Restorative practices emerged as critical in fostering a positive school culture, supporting both academic and emotional well-being. Equity-driven strategies, such as culturally relevant materials and peer mentoring, were emphasized to ensure all students, regardless of background, received necessary support. Technology played a role in overcoming language barriers, though its use varied.

Interactive, hands-on learning strategies also emerged as a theme, although results were mixed. Some students adapted well, while others continued to struggle with engagement. The importance of culturally relevant teaching and community involvement in promoting success was evident, though challenges like economic hardship and limited parental support persisted.

The study also delved into educators' perceptions of the effectiveness of these strategies in helping Black and Hispanic students. Leadership changes led to improved staff morale, but challenges remained, particularly in re-establishing community and socialization after the pandemic. Teachers noted the need for more consistent implementation of strategies, further professional development, and increased community involvement to maintain progress.

This final chapter outlines the implications for policy, practice, and future research. Recommendations focus on promoting equitable education and enhancing strategies to boost the academic success of marginalized students in the post-pandemic era. Future research could examine the long-term effects of these strategies, especially in addressing the ongoing challenges faced by Black and Hispanic students in urban schools.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Introductory Email Correspondence for Educators

Subject: Invitation to Participate in a Exploratory case study Exploring Impact on Educational Strategies for Black and Hispanic Students Post-COVID.

Dear Fellow Educators,

I hope this email finds you well. I am reaching out to invite you to take part in an important research initiative focused on the educational landscape post-COVID and its impact on the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students.

As educators, your firsthand experiences and insights are invaluable to my exploratory case study, which aims to examine the diverse strategies and practices that have influenced the educational journey of Black students during and after the pandemic.

This exploratory case study aims to explore the diverse experiences and challenges faced by students within our educational system, specifically concerning strategies implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Your participation in this research will provide essential perspectives and contribute significantly to our understanding of the challenges and successes in this realm.

Key Details

Purpose: Exploring the impact of practices and strategies on the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students post-COVID.

Participation: Voluntary and highly confidential, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive education landscape.

Attached to this email you will find:

1. Informed Consent Information Sheet: This document provides general information about the study, outlines the parameters of participation and emphasizes your rights and the confidentiality of your responses. A link is located at the bottom of the document to complete.

Please take the time to review the attached materials and complete the consent form via the link provided within above document or by typing <https://forms.gle/bv9ZoHfrFhuUDgjk9> to opt in or out of the study.

Your expertise and perspective will play a crucial role in advancing our understanding of these critical educational matters. I hope you will consider joining us on this endeavor.

Should you have any queries or require further information, please feel free to contact me or my chair, Dr. Lisa Bass at lrbass@ncsu.edu.

We are eager to embark on this journey together and greatly appreciate your consideration.

Warm regards,
Emem Thompson
Researcher
North Carolina State University
ethomps5@ncsu.edu
(919) 631-8687

Appendix B: Educator Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form for Participation in Research

Title of Study: Exploring Educational Practices and Strategies Related to the Academic Achievement of Black and Hispanic Students post-COVID: An Exploratory Case Study of One Urban Elementary School in North Carolina

Principal Investigator(s): Emem Thompson, ethomps5@ncsu.edu, (919) 631-8687

NC State Faculty Point of Contact: Dr. Lisa Bass, lrbass@ncsu.edu, (984) 888-3294

Funding Source: None

You are invited to take part in a research study. Here are some important things to know:

- Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can choose not to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate and change your mind, you can stop participating at any time without penalty.
- You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies may pose risks to those who participate. However, this research study does not pose any risks to you as a participant.
- You may want to participate in this research because it allows you to share your insights, contributing to a better understanding and potentially improving outcomes for Black and Hispanic students. You may not want to participate in this research if you have time constraints that would limit your availability.
- If you have questions about your participation in this research at any time, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above or the NC State IRB office via email at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu or via phone at 1-919-515-8754

Please read the rest of this consent form for more specific details of this research. If you do not understand something, please ask the researcher for clarification or more information.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to explore the impact of equitable practices, strategies and the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students post-COVID. The study will explore experiences and perceptions of educators regarding the effectiveness of practices and strategies created to address educational needs and promote student success.

How many people will be in the study?

There will be approximately 10-12 participants in this study.

Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?

In order to be a participant in this study, you must agree to be in the study and be an employee at the school from at least 2020. You cannot participate in this study if you do not meet the previously stated inclusion criteria.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a One on One Interview.

The total amount of time that you will be participating in this study is 1- 1.5 hrs.

Recording in research

Participants will be audio and video recorded during the research activities. If you do not want this information collected, you cannot participate in this research. We would like to use these recordings for transcription only. We will keep these recordings until transcriptions have been verified.

Benefits to participating in this research

There are no direct benefits to your participation in the research. The indirect benefits are contributing to research aimed at improving educational policies and practices and influencing positive change in the educational system.

Risks to participating in this research

There is minimal risk associated with your participation in this research.

Researcher obligations

Due to my professional role as a public service educator along with district and state reporting requirements, I have an obligation to report child neglect and abuse, sexual discrimination and harassment of students). This means that if I observe instances of, or you tell me about an incident where a child has been abused or sexually discriminated against, I am obligated to report that. The risks associated with reporting this information include further investigation by state entities.

What data will be collected about me and are there risks associated with that?

The data that are collected about you include your role, how many years of experience you have. These data are not connected to your name or other information that could easily identify you. There are minimal risks to you as a result of collecting this information. All risks will be mitigated through implementing data protections in accordance with NC State data protection standards.

How will my identity and the data about me be stored and protected?

After all data is collected, the researchers will go through the data and remove all direct and indirect identifiers from the dataset and create a coded list that connects your real identity to the dataset.

This list will be stored separately from the data. After the study is over, we will permanently delete the master list . It is unlikely your identity could be deduced from your responses in the dataset without the master list. We will go through your responses and the transcripts and do our best to remove or replace any information that can identify you directly. Examples of the information we will remove are your name, which will be replaced with an alternative identifier

not linked to you as a participant. After we do this, it is unlikely your identity could be deduced from your responses.

Who can access my data and how will my data be shared and used in the future?

Your data will not be used or shared for future research studies. We will delete your data after 3 years.

How will the data about me be reported to the public and are there risks associated with that?

We may quote you or share specific responses from you in our publications and presentations but we will not include your name or any other information that could easily identify you. As a result, there are minimal risks to you as a result of how we report the data.

Right to withdraw your participation

Your participation is voluntary. Even if you agree initially, consent is an ongoing process. You can stop participating at any time for any reason. To do so, you can close their internet browser, tell the researcher implementing the intervention you would like to discontinue your participation in the study. You can also contact the student researcher, Emem Thompson, at ethomps5@ncsu.edu and (919) 631-8687. Or you can contact the faculty advisor for this research, Dr. Lisa Bass, at lrbass@ncsu.edu.

If you withdraw, we will stop any procedures or data collection that may be happening. We will also delete any data that's already been collected from you whenever possible. We will not be able to delete your data if we cannot identify which responses are yours or if the data has already been published.

Compensation

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, You can also contact the student researcher, Emem Thompson, at ethomps5@ncsu.edu and (919) 631-8687. Or you can contact the faculty advisor for this research, Dr. Lisa Bass, at lrbass@ncsu.edu.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the NC State IRB (Institutional Review Board) office. An IRB office helps participants if they have any issues regarding research activities. You can contact the NC State University IRB office at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8754, or [fill out a confidential form online](https://research.ncsu.edu/administration/participant-concern-and-complaint-form/) at <https://research.ncsu.edu/administration/participant-concern-and-complaint-form/>

Consent to participate

Please use the following link to disclose your participation in study -
<https://forms.gle/bv9ZoHfrFhuUDgk9>

Appendix C: Educator Interview Questions

School Experience

1. Can you share your overall feelings about how your school environment has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic started? What have been the positive aspects, and what have been the challenges?
2. What was your school's biggest challenge with academic achievement before Covid? During Covid?
3. What do you think it is like being a Black student in your school? (What are the attitudes of students - what are they telling you or what are you hearing them say)
4. What do you think it is like being a Hispanic student in your school? (What are the attitudes of students - what are they telling you or what are you hearing them say)

Equity Strategies -

5. What are things (practices and strategies) your school has done for students to help with academic success and achievement for all students?
6. Are there any other practices implemented by the school to address the unique challenges faced by Black and Hispanic students? If so, what have been the outcomes or impacts?
7. In your opinion, to what extent are equitable practices integrated into your daily work and interactions with students? Can you provide specific examples of equity focused practices you or your colleagues have implemented recently?
8. What challenges or barriers, if any, do you perceive in implementing practices effectively? How have these challenges evolved or changed in the post-COVID era?
9. How do you perceive the level of student engagement among Black and Hispanic students at the school post-COVID? What are some specific strategies or interventions that are used within the school, aimed at increasing the engagement and support of Black and Hispanic students post-COVID?
10. In your opinion, what role should schools play in promoting equity and providing additional support to students, especially those from historically underserved communities?

Equity and Inclusivity

11. In your opinion, do you think that all students in your school are treated fairly and equally? What factors contribute to this perception, and are there areas where improvements could be made?
12. What are some resources or support systems you believe would enhance the ability to implement equity driven practices effectively?

Academic Achievement

13. Please describe the overall academic performance of African American students you taught before the COVID-19 pandemic? Can you describe the overall academic performance of Hispanic students you taught before the COVID-19 pandemic ?

14. When children returned to face to face instruction, did you observe gaps in their academic knowledge and skills? Were African-American students impacted more or about the same as other students? Why? Is there a specific time or student you think about?
15. In your experience, how has the academic achievement of Black and Hispanic students been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and related changes in teaching and learning?
16. What practices or strategies have you found effective in supporting student's academic achievement during this post-COVID era? Share a story or specific example?
17. What recommendations do you have for improving equity and academic achievement for all students, with a particular focus on Black and Hispanic students, in the school?

Suggestions and Additional Comments

18. What has been your most memorable post-COVID experience as an educator?
19. If Covid 19 has taught me nothing else, it has taught me.....
20. Upon students returning to face to face learning, did you feel supported by the administration? In what ways did they help you? How have teachers, administrators and support staff approached their work due to COVID-19?
21. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as a staff member and how they relate to our research focus?