CAN TEACHERS PASS THE TEST: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS’ KNOWLEDGE OF, ATTITUDES TOWARD, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INTEREST IN UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

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The period of adolescence is when the differences between undocumented and American born youth may come to light and, therefore, is a time when undocumented students may benefit most from their educators’ guidance and support. This study provides empirical evidence of secondary school teachers’ knowledge, attitudes, and preparation as they relate to immigration policy and undocumented youth. Two hundred seventy-five teachers from 38 states participated in an online survey. Grounded in the Positive Youth Developmental Model and completed during a time when the social climate was less than ideal for immigrants residing in the US, this study illustrated that although the teachers reported receiving little training on undocumented youth, they were generally knowledgeable about immigration policy relevant to these students and had positive attitudes towards them. They also expressed a willingness to be a supportive ally, which has been found to be a developmental asset to vulnerable youth.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................... iv

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1
  Statement of the Problem ........................................................................................................ 5
  Research Questions ............................................................................................................... 7

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ................................................................................................. 8
  Undocumented Youth in the United States ............................................................................ 8
  Navigating Adolescent Development as an Undocumented Student ................................. 10
  The Significance of Teacher Knowledge and Support for Undocumented Youth .................. 15
  The School Environment for the Undocumented Under the Current Administration .......... 17
  Teachers’ knowledge of immigration policy as related to their students .............................. 19
  Teacher training on undocumented immigrant youth .......................................................... 24
  Summary ............................................................................................................................... 27

III. METHODOLOGY ............................................................................................................... 28
  Participants ............................................................................................................................ 28
  Measure ............................................................................................................................... 29
  Procedures ........................................................................................................................... 31
  Data Analysis ....................................................................................................................... 32

IV. RESULTS .......................................................................................................................... 35
  Research Question 1 ............................................................................................................ 35
  Research Question 2 ............................................................................................................ 36
  Research Question 2a .......................................................................................................... 37
  Research Question 2b .......................................................................................................... 37
  Research Question 3 ............................................................................................................ 37
  Research Question 4 ............................................................................................................ 38
  Follow-Up Analyses ............................................................................................................ 39

V. DISCUSSION ...................................................................................................................... 42
  Knowledge ............................................................................................................................ 43
  Attitudes ............................................................................................................................... 45
  Professional Development .................................................................................................... 47
  Limitations ............................................................................................................................ 49
Implications ................................................................................................................................. 49
Future Research ........................................................................................................................ 51
Conclusions ................................................................................................................................. 53

APPENDIX .................................................................................................................................. 55
APPENDIX A. CONSENT FORM AND SECONDARY SCHOOL
TEACHERS’ UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION POLICY ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS SURVEY .................................................................................................................... 56

REFERENCES ................................................................................................................................ 65
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In January 2015, 12.0 million people were estimated to be residing in the United States without the government’s permission (Baker, 2018). These unauthorized individuals may have penetrated the border either legally (e.g., overstaying a government issued visa) or illegally (e.g., crossing the borders without following the proper admittance procedures). In either case, if an individual is not properly authorized to be in the country, they are referred to as undocumented. More than half, almost 55%, of all undocumented individuals hail from Mexico (Baker, 2018). Not all of those who are in the country illegally have purposefully and knowingly broken the law. Although the majority (60%) are adults between the ages of 25 and 44 years, 1 million are children under the age of 18 (Baker, 2018). Many of these children, nicknamed the 1.5 generation (Gonzales, 2010), were brought to the U.S. by their parents at a young age and know of no other home than the United States of America. The Supreme Court Decision Plyler v. Doe allows parents to enroll their children in K-12 institutions without having to show proof of citizenship (American Immigration Council, 2016). Thus, students may spend much of their youth oblivious of their illegal status. Some do not find out about their status until adolescence, a time when many rites of passage are occurring (Gonzales & Chavez, 2012). It is traditionally during this time that youth need government documents to obtain a driver’s license, secure employment, or apply for financial aid to continue their education. When the undocumented youth realize they do not have the necessary “papers” to complete these tasks, it can be a defeating and life changing experience.
Described as “awakening to a nightmare,” Gonzales and Chavez (2012, p. 262) illuminated the loss experienced by undocumented youth upon learning that the effort they put into tasks, such as getting good grades or saving up for a car, were for naught when their parents revealed they were unable to provide them with proper identification documents or proof of residency. Their undocumented status and lack of citizenship documents mean they cannot legally obtain a driver’s license or qualify for the federal financial aid that would allow them to achieve their dream of attending college.

Adolescence is a pivotal time for an individual, and regardless of their legal status, the positive youth development (PYD) approach applies to all adolescents. Hamilton, Hamilton, and Pittman (2004) describe PYD as a set of principles recognizing that individuals, community organizations, and institutions contribute to the growth of young people. The Search Institute has added to the PYD framework by identifying “positive experiences and qualities that influence young people’s development” (Search Institute, 2017a, ¶1), which are known as the Developmental Assets. This asset-based approach posits that, along with internal assets (e.g., resistance skills, integrity, self-esteem), youths’ external assets (e.g., family, school, peers, and neighborhood) are vital to development (Hamilton et al., 2004). This orientation emphasizes the influential role of outside forces such as a youth’s relationships with adults other than their parents and a caring school climate. Research with undocumented students reinforces the significance of these outside influences by illustrating that a supportive relationship with an educator fosters positive outcomes such as drop-out prevention and a safe school
climate for this especially vulnerable population (Dabach, 2015; Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2010; Murillo, 2017).

The current political landscape has undocumented students on edge (Wiggins, 2017). In the most recent presidential election an anti-immigrant campaign was central to the winning party’s platform (Gamboa, DeFrancesco Soto, & Nuno, 2016). More recently, just prior to the 2018 midterm elections Trump released an offensive anti-immigration ad that liberal- and conservative-leaning media outlets pulled from the air (Stelter & Darcy, 2018). Trump’s persistent anti-immigration rants have left even those who felt secure under the previous administration’s policies and programs, such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), questioning their future. Under DACA, undocumented individuals that meet very specific criteria (e.g., born on or after June 16, 1981 and came to the United States before the age of 16) can apply to gain access to traditional rites of passage afforded to their citizen youth counterparts, such as a driver’s license and work permits. In 2016, Trump campaigned that he would end this program, but as of this writing has not acted on his promise. As recently as 2014, the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education issued guidelines to help schools understand their responsibility to educate all children in the United States regardless of citizenship status. This update was necessary to “address some of the misperceptions out there,” and to remind districts about the type of documentation parents can present when enrolling their children in school (U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education, 2014, ¶5). Although a memo from Immigration and Customs Enforcement in 2012 designates school campuses as “sensitive locations” not generally privy to enforcement
activity, such as deportation, raids are taking place near schools (Mitchell, 2017), and educators in these so-called “safe spaces” are feeling free to voice their personal beliefs about the immigration issue (e.g., Cherry, 2017). Since Trump’s election, media outlets have reported teachers from New Mexico, Florida, and Washington state have used their personal Facebook pages to express their anti-immigration/pro-deportation beliefs (Nguyen, 2017), while a teacher in California voiced the opinion during school hours (Yamamoto & Lloyd, 2016). To date, scholarly research demonstrates that the views of the outspoken educators described above are not the norm. Jefferies (2014) posits that generally schools operate under a “circle of silence” on the topic of undocumented youth. Essentially, the circle of silence is the idea that everyone involved—students, teachers, and administration—avoids bringing up the topic of undocumented status (Jefferies, 2014). Jefferies points out a “fear of obtaining information, for fear that this disclosure of important information could at some point be turned against undocumented youth and their families and be used to initiate deportation procedures” (p. 286). Crawford and Weaver (2016) found that teachers view schools as safe spaces and education for all youth as not only a “moral obligation,” but just as much of a right as shelter. Similarly, Murillo’s (2017) research at an institution where one-third of its students were likely undocumented, indicated that the educators wanted to support undocumented students. However, “some faculty felt unprepared to discuss documentation issues and direct students to appropriate resources” (p.104). In instances where undocumented students chose to reveal their status to teachers, the educators maintained the student’s privacy (Murillo, 2017).
Statement of the Problem

Limited research has quantified how much American teachers know about immigration policy, and no published research has examined this within the current tumultuous and divisive political climate. Nor have prior studies determined whether American teachers are aware of how undocumented students are blocked from the typical developmental transitions their American peers are afforded (e.g., driver’s license, ability to work, access to college funding). In today’s volatile social climate, do the teachers who interact with these youths daily understand what being an “illegal” means as it pertains to the students in their classroom and more importantly, do they care? Although government agencies and scholarly researchers agree that teachers need to be made aware of the different challenges their undocumented students may face (Gallo & Link, 2016; Murillo, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2015), it is less clear if this professional development is in fact taking place. Gallo and Link’s (2016) teacher respondents reported that discussions of culture, but not immigration, occurred during professional education and staff in-services and trainings. Teachers’ professional development has been found to be associated with positive student outcomes (Blank & de las Alas, 2009), but what is not known is if teachers want to receive professional development on undocumented students. A few studies have attempted to gauge the effectiveness of a training intervention, such as by humanizing the immigrant, or providing a training workshop to see if it results in increasing teachers’ knowledge and/or changing their beliefs (Buchanan & Hilburn, 2016; Chapman & Hall, 2014; Cruz, 2014). However,
those studies are limited in that they were conducted with K-12 personnel in select school districts confined to North Carolina and Indiana.

Considering the scarcity of the research on teachers’ understanding and attitudes related to undocumented students combined with the current divisive climate surrounding the topic of immigration policy, it is a key time to conduct the present research. The purpose of the study was to explore high school teachers’ level of knowledge and attitudes related to undocumented youth. The present research used social media snowball sampling to obtain a multi-state perspective. Specifically, the study measured secondary school teachers’ general knowledge about illegal immigrant youth and how current policies may affect undocumented students’ school and daily life. It also assessed their attitudes regarding immigration policy and undocumented youth. Because teacher professional development has been found to be correlated with positive student outcomes on other topics (Kunter et al., 2013), the present study examined if secondary school teachers have been provided formal professional development about what it means to be an undocumented student and if they are interested in receiving this professional development. The author has not been able to find any research that quantifies secondary school teachers’ attitudes in regards to receiving professional development related to undocumented youth. This research focused solely on high school educators because their students are in the period of development when the limitations associated with being undocumented begin to emerge. The following questions guided the research.
Research Questions

1. (Knowledge): How much knowledge do teachers have related to immigration policy and undocumented youth?
2. (Attitudes): Are teacher attitudes generally favorable towards policies that support undocumented immigrant youth?
2a. (Attitudes): Do teachers indicate a willingness to be an “ally” to undocumented students needing access to information, a mentor, or just a “safe” space?
2b. (Attitudes): If they found out a student was undocumented, would teachers report the student?
3. (Knowledge): Do teachers report receiving professional development related to immigration policy and undocumented youth?
4. (Attitudes): Do educators in the present study want to receive professional development on immigration policy and undocumented youth?
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature will illuminate the adolescents living “in the shadows” and describe how coming of age and their high school experience is shaped by their legal status. It will describe the positive youth development framework and how teachers fit into the model, specifically highlighting the importance of teachers in an undocumented student’s educational experience. Attention will be given to describing the current political climate and its effect on the school environment. Lastly, this chapter will address the need for empirical research to investigate the attitudes and knowledge that secondary school teachers have about this vulnerable population.

Undocumented Youth in the United States

Contrary to history and popular belief, it is very difficult for unskilled individuals from other countries to pursue the American dream using legal avenues. Of the almost 44 million immigrants living in the United States (Zong, Batalova, & Hallock, 2018), it is estimated that a little more than 12 million are unauthorized (Baker, 2018). An individual who is a foreign-born, non-citizen residing in the United States illegally is considered unauthorized. Those with this status may have crossed the border in a way that circumvented inspection points, or they were granted temporary entrance (i.e., visas) and did not depart when they were supposed to (Baker, 2018; Educators for Fair Consideration, 2012; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2018). For example, an estimated 700,000 people who should have left the United States in 2017 likely overstayed their visa. Close to 90% of those who overstayed are from areas other than

Seventy percent of unauthorized individuals have been in the United States for twenty years or less (Baker, 2018) and are also commonly referred to as undocumented or illegal. According to Zong et al. (2018), the majority of individuals without proper documentation are from Mexico and Central America (71%), followed by Asia (13%) and South America (6%). Immigrants from Europe/Canada/Oceania, Africa, and the Caribbean make up the other 9% of the undocumented population living in the United States.

Children under the age of 18 account for a little over a million, or 9% of those in the country illegally (Baker, 2018). Of those between the ages of 13 and 17, 94% are enrolled in school (Zong et al., 2018). In 2014, approximately 725,000 students represented 1.3% of total school enrollment (Passel & Cohn, 2016). Each year, 65,000 students who have been living in the United States for at least five years graduate high school and face their uncertain future as an undocumented adult now subject to deportation (Educators for Fair Consideration, 2012). These youth may be indistinguishable from their peers with citizenship because of the amount of time they have been in the country (Abrego, 2011). Members of the 1.5 generation, as they are nicknamed, were not born here but were brought over as children and essentially grew up in the United States (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). They may consider themselves to be American, because for some, this is the only home they have known or remember. Additionally, even if the student is a second-generation (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988) U.S.
citizen because they were born in the United States to parents living in the country illegally, it is possible much of their life is affected by current immigration policies. Seven percent of the U.S. child population, or approximately 5.1 million minors, lived with a parent who was unauthorized between 2009 and 2013 (Zong et al., 2018).

Navigating Adolescent Development as an Undocumented Student

For the average teen in the United States legally, adolescence is a time to shed childhood dependence and begin the journey toward adult independence and responsibility. It is usually a time to be celebrated. Individuals are able to increase their mobility and expand their “bubble” by learning how to drive. In addition they begin the process of becoming economically independent by obtaining part-time work and then upon high school graduation, transitioning to full-time work or preparing for a career by attending a technical/vocational school or enrolling in an institution of higher education. Adolescents eagerly anticipate these milestones because they are symbolic of freedom and hope. Undocumented youth are atypical and their lack of citizenship status may prevent them from fully participating in these societal norms.

Undocumented adolescents in most (38) states are unable to take the necessary measures and obtain the documents that allow them to legally drive. Unless they reside in one of twelve states (California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Vermont, or Washington), or the District of Columbia, when an undocumented youth turns sixteen, they are unable to get their driver’s license (Morse & Mendoza, 2015a).
Although individual states may have a higher minimum age for employment, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division (2016), the Fair Labor Standards Act requires youth to be at least 14 years of age to work in the non-agricultural positions associated with young people today (e.g., grocery store clerks, fast-food workers). However, federal employment laws make it difficult for undocumented teens to work. If an individual is in the country illegally by overstaying their visa or crossing over a land boundary without one, which is the case for members of the 1.5 generation, they will not have the proper paperwork to gain employment. Employers are prohibited by law to hire someone without an Employment Authorization Document (EAD), which undocumented immigrants or tourists are not eligible for (Nolo, 2017).

Typically the hurdle to obtaining post-secondary education for undocumented students is a financial one. Filling out the FAFSA to apply for grants or loans to attend college or technical/vocational schools is a common step tackled during senior year for the typical high school student in America. Funding college is often a financial burden that families spend years preparing for, and still come up short. Unlike their peers with citizenship, undocumented students are not eligible to receive federal funds awarded for grants, loans, scholarships, or even money for work-study (U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid Office, 2015), and only five states (California, New Mexico, Minnesota, Texas, and Washington) allow them to apply for tuition assistance using state funds (Morse & Mendoza, 2015b).

Although undocumented students may apply and be accepted into post-secondary institutions, they still face a barrier their peers do not. Thirty of the fifty states or state
university systems do not recognize that unauthorized members of the 1.5 generation may have been in state boundaries for quite some time. These states treat undocumented students as nonresidents and require them to pay out-of-state and sometimes even international student tuition rates (Morse & Mendoza, 2015b). It is clear undocumented adolescents face challenges associated with their developmental stage that other youth do not experience. The next section addresses the Positive Youth Development approach and how teachers are in a pivotal position to foster assets in these youth.

Since its inception all the way through the early 1990s the study of adolescence has viewed individuals in that period of development in a negative way as expressed by terminology used by researchers. G. Stanley Hall saw it as a time of “storm and stress” (p. 4), while Anna Freud discussed the upheavals and Erik Erikson discussed the crisis of the adolescent stage (Lerner, 2005). This deficits approach persisted and the longstanding view of youth by those working in adolescent-related professions, the media, and the general public has been unfavorable and focused on the problems that youth have or cause (Damon, 2004). Attention was given to the problems that arose during adolescence such as alcohol and drug use, difficulties in school, sexual activity, and psychological disturbances (Lerner, 2005). Youth were commonly labeled as “at-risk” or “delinquent” (p. 14) and seen as problems to be fixed (Damon, 2004).

The Positive Youth Development (PYD) model was introduced as an alternative to the prior deficits perspectives. It is an approach of prevention, rather than intervention. It is a set of principles that recognize that individuals as well as community organizations and institutions contribute to the growth of young people. Instead of viewing
adolescence as a time for problems to emerge, positive youth development views adolescents as resources to be developed (Damon, 2004; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003 as cited in Lerner, 2005). This framework is particularly useful for vulnerable populations such as undocumented youth. The PYD movement is guided by the Developmental Systems Theory, which views individuals as a fluid piece in the larger puzzle (Vimont, 2012). That is, a youth’s development can be shaped by their community and social network (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). The Search Institute expanded on PYD by identifying developmental assets, specific components of positive youth development (Benson, Scales, & Syvertsen, 2011). This developmental assets framework strengthens the PYD approach and has become a way to organize programming in schools and communities such as those found at the Y, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, and Girl Scouts (Benson et al., 2011). Benson et al. (2011) described the developmental assets as elements that provide a foundation that molds youth into reliable, healthy, and compassionate adults (Benson et al., 2011). The assets include both internal and external components. Internal assets are the characteristics an individual possesses that indicate a commitment to learning (e.g., achievement motivation, reading for pleasure), positive values (e.g., integrity, restraint), social competencies (e.g., resistance skills, peaceful conflict resolution), and positive identity (e.g., self-esteem, sense of purpose) (Benson et al., 2011). External assets are those environmental or relational components of an individual’s life. They are divided into support (e.g., family support, caring neighborhood), empowerment (e.g., safety, youth as resources), boundaries and expectations (e.g., family boundaries, high expectations), and constructive use of time.
(e.g., youth programs, religious communities) (Benson et al., 2011). The more assets a youth has, the less likely they are to engage in those negative behaviors commonly associated with the adolescent developmental stage: violence, drug or alcohol use, and sexual activity (Search Institute, 2017a).

Because the Search Institute (2017b, 2017c) emphasizes that establishing personal relationships with others is a significant contributor to building an individual’s assets, the student-teacher relationship is recognized as being of great importance. “There are five elements that make relationships powerful in a young person’s life” (Search Institute, 2017d, ¶1): express care, challenge growth, provide support, share power, and expand possibilities. If teachers are knowledgeable about the challenges undocumented youth face due to having first generation immigrant parents, or because of their own status, they are better positioned to engage in the five elements that make their relationship with the students powerful in a positive way. The ultimate goal of PYD is for the individual to possess the “Five Cs” (Hamilton et al, 2004, p. 6) and therefore be identified as thriving. In addition to competence, character, confidence, and contribution, one’s social relations or connections are an indicator of reaching this elevated state (Hamilton et al., 2004). For this reason, teachers are in a pivotal role to foster the developmental assets of their undocumented students. The next section addresses the limited research on teachers’ knowledge and support of their undocumented students.
The Significance of Teacher Knowledge and Support for Undocumented Youth

Openly discussing citizenship status in a classroom setting is not the norm, but when it does occur, students may benefit, particularly when their teachers are supportive and both aware of and knowledgeable about their undocumented status.

Although Dabach (2015) sought to investigate ways in which teachers with knowledge about immigration policy breached “normative silences about undocumented status” in their Civics classrooms, the results also illustrated how doing so may affect students. A case study approach was used to explore how a teacher navigated the 2012 election cycle in her classroom of mixed-status senior government students. The findings demonstrated that when the teacher conveyed her knowledge about immigrants and immigration policy during a letter writing assignment, it opened the door for undocumented students to share their status with her. According to the students, breach allowed undocumented students to feel less alone and realize that she could be a source of support as a “safe” person. In addition, by discussing it in the way she did, she informed those with citizenship status of the obstacles their peers may face, which made the issue less abstract and more human for them. While Dabach’s (2015) results convey the student’s side of disclosure related to their legal status, other research focused on the teachers.

Murillo (2017) reports that having knowledge about a student’s status helps teachers create a supportive and resourceful classroom environment. The ethnographic study of school staff, which included educators, explored why high school students reveal their legal status and how this information is managed and protected once it is disclosed.
to school personnel. One respondent, an English teacher, recognized that his classroom might be a more welcoming environment if teachers initiated and provided opportunities for student disclosure. A science teacher acknowledged the importance of keeping a student’s privacy but believed a student’s disclosure was necessary in order for them to get the support they needed, whether he was directing them to other sources or providing the help himself. A math teacher revealed that when sharing resources with students he tries to be inclusive by making reference to information both undocumented and documented youth need to know.

Consistent with the PYD approach, the literature also illuminates how support sources outside of the family, namely teachers, contribute to the growth of undocumented students. Enriquez (2011) interviewed 52 Latina/o undocumented college students to gather retroactive information about their K-12 educational experiences in the Los Angeles area. Respondents in the study indicated that teachers acted as a confidante, allowing students to discuss their lives beyond the classroom walls. They also encouraged them in academics by challenging them to take higher-level classes and enrolling in higher education. In one instance, Yazmine described how her high school teachers went above and beyond in support of her college aspirations by financially contributing to her university application fees. Sofia explained that encouraging teachers are “a big part in keeping you in school,” while students who choose to drop out do so because they have teachers that “don’t believe in them” (p. 485). This emotional encouragement (i.e., students not wanting to let the teachers down that have been supportive of their situation) pushes undocumented students to not give up on their
Likewise, Green, Rhodes, Hirsch, Suarez-Orozco, and Camic (2008) used data that were collected through the Longitudinal Immigration Student Adaptation (LISA) study and found that support is positively associated with student engagement and “students’ motivation, and effort in school corresponds with current connections with their teachers” (p. 408). The authors posit that having a caring adult in the school may be a protective factor that keeps vulnerable students engaged. Echoing this and confirming the importance of supportive teachers in an undocumented youth’s success is Gonzales’ (2010) research findings. Gonzales explored how students’ social capital was affected by school structure. Students were identified as positively or negatively tracked based on the type of classes they were enrolled in. Students that were taking general classes were considered negatively tracked, while those involved in special programs, honors, or in Advanced Placement classes were labeled as positively tracked. Using ethnographic methods that included life history interviews, Gonzales noted that many students in the negatively tracked group did not feel significant ties to their teachers, which in at least one student’s case led to him dropping out. Feeling no one wanted to help him, he stated, “Teachers didn’t care about me” (p. 480).

**The School Environment for the Undocumented Under the Current Administration**

Immediately following the 2016 presidential election, Andrade (2017) interviewed 18 undocumented students attending a community college in Southern California. He not only wanted to gauge the students’ emotional response to the newly elected head of state, but he also inquired about who they turned to for support as well as what the students thought their teachers could do to better serve them during this difficult
Most students reported feeling fear of the unknown for themselves and their families. Over half (61%) of student respondents indicated they turned to school faculty/staff for support. This sounds promising, but the individuals they sought out were those involved in programs that “specifically assist Latinx and undocumented students” (p. 10). The majority of students (n = 15) reported that their “educators and teachers appeared unfamiliar with undocumented student issues or circumstances” (p. 10). Students also indicated they wished they could turn to their teachers for not only resources (e.g., recommendations for therapists and immigration lawyers), but also support. The author discussed that educators may add to this stressful time by not recognizing how the student’s academic work might be affected (Andrade, 2017) under the current political climate. Andrade also states,

Trump’s presidential victory represents a time of crisis that made students face intensified mental, emotional, and psychological stress, beyond what they already felt as undocumented citizens. Such emotions may perhaps be exacerbated by the fact that students perceived Trump, his election, and supporters as racist. (p. 12)

Although the aforementioned study and quote referenced community college students, it appears that Trump’s victory made some secondary educators more brazen and dismissive of their employer’s training on personal and social media communication. The day after Trump’s victory, a substitute teacher working at a middle school in Los Angeles was recorded telling a sixth grader that the school has students’ families’ addresses and phone numbers in the system and that her parents “got to go” (Yamamoto & Lloyd, 2016, ¶6). He elaborated by stating, “Then they will leave you behind, and you
will be in foster care” (Yamamoto & Lloyd, 2016, ¶6). The district, in a county where 12% of its population is thought to be undocumented (Public Policy Institute of California as cited in Yamamoto & Lloyd, 2016), subsequently fired the individual. Similarly, a teacher at Albuquerque High School made her opinion public when she posted on her personal Facebook page that her English as a Second Language (ESL) class was more peaceful due to absences because of the nationwide protest, “A Day Without Immigrants” (Nguyen, 2017). She also voiced her opinion about immigration policy, stating that schools could better serve American citizen students if students violating the law (by being undocumented) were to be deported (Nguyen, 2017). The protest must have stirred up emotion as this incident did not happen directly following the election, but in March, a significant amount of time afterward. Unfortunately, that same week, another educator made headlines for his unsolicited reaction to a school-wide communication (Cherry, 2017). After receiving an email from a colleague explaining how to deal with students that might be staying home from school because they feared family members could be deported, a secondary teacher in Hawaii not only showed support for the president, but also expressed how he felt about which students have a right to an education. He “replied all” to the email to let the other teachers and staff know that, “IF THEY ARE HERE IN THE US ILLEGALLY, I WON’T TEACH THEM” (All caps used in original source; Cherry, 2017, ¶4).

**Teachers’ knowledge of immigration policy as related to their students.**

Because their parents may not understand all aspects of the educational process, undocumented youth may need guidance from school personnel, including their teachers.
It is important that teachers are knowledgeable about the obstacles the youth face, but it is also necessary to ensure that students know it is safe to share their concerns or ask their questions. Prior qualitative research (Lad & Braganza, 2013) has found staff is lacking in knowledge of various barriers that undocumented students face. Jefferies (2014) suggests that schools do not bring attention to the undocumented youth or the issues they face because they fear the consequences. He states that in part, students are not exposed for fear that the teachers’ personal ideology might compel them to report the undocumented student to government officials. In Texas, one of the top states housing undocumented immigrants (Krogstad, Passel, & Cohn, 2018), teachers report there is no professional development that occurs on the topic of immigration policy and how it affects undocumented students (M. Cone & J. Brooks, personal communication, February 10, 2017).

Gallo and Link (2016) conducted a 5-year ethnographic study that looked at a group of middle school students from Mexican immigrant families living in suburban Pennsylvania. Because the study involved interviewing those educating the children, the researchers were able to glean information from those teachers (n = 7) who were in the unique situation of educating students being affected by immigration practices. The researchers concluded that the teachers fell along a continuum “regarding their desire and success in pushing beyond their comfort zones to create spaces in which they learned from, and built on, students’ immigration experiences” (p. 180). Educators’ placement on the continuum was based on their knowledge of immigration practices and their willingness to engage in these discussions with students. Depending on their response,
teachers were identified as “avoiding”; “acknowledging,” which was in the middle of the continuum; or “entering” the borderlands. Avoiding the borderlands, which meant not bringing up the topic of immigration or policy, was the behavior of 2 of the 7 teachers. They may have feared negative consequences for students and their families and themselves. The authors described those who acknowledged the borderlands, which was the majority of respondents (4 of 7), as willing to bring up the topic but leery; they were scared to overstep boundaries. The teachers in the acknowledgement category were described as being limiting in nurturing personal relationship with students. Only 1 of the 7 teachers interviewed was classified as having entered the borderlands, or addressed the topic even if it was difficult, and learned from and developed “mutual trust” with their students.

Besides illuminating how teachers dealt with the topic of immigration in their classroom on a micro level, Gallo and Link’s (2016) study also revealed how immigration policies and issues surrounding local immigrant families were handled on a bigger scale; there was no formal institutional acknowledgement. Although 5 of the 7 respondents “knew about immigration practices for focal students” (p.186), they were “left out of the conversation by administrators” (p. 188) and relied on other teachers for information. Although immigration policies (e.g., local deportations/ICE raids) were directly affecting the school’s families and the administration knew it, the researchers learned that “… no professional development had been offered to support teachers in how to navigate immigration status and schooling, Plyler [v. Doe] and its implications for talking about undocumented status were not discussed, and teachers were left to their
own devices” (p. 189). *Plyler v. Doe* refers to the 1982 Supreme Court decision that guarantees all students a right to a K-12 education in the public schools of the United States, regardless of their citizenship status (American Immigration Council, 2016). The authors reported the need for more education on current immigration laws as a central theme resulting from the teachers’ interviews. The present research illuminates whether these particular teachers are the exception or the norm.

Jefferies (2014) was able to gain a unique perspective about what educators know when he conducted research on undocumented high school students using participant observation in a high school where all the students were recent (5 years or less) immigrants. In addition to talking with the students that were in the country illegally, he interviewed school personnel and gathered information in a variety of school settings ranging from formal administrator meetings to classrooms. Jefferies’s (2014) aim was to describe not only the experiences of undocumented youth in an educational setting but also how immigration policies created fear of deportation and how that specific fear affects an undocumented student’s educational experience. Ultimately, his findings focused on how “migration status affects the communication between administrators, teachers, and undocumented students” (p. 285). Jefferies’s (2014) research acknowledged that the undocumented students benefit when high school personnel are informed about immigration policy and how undocumented students’ status affects them, but unfortunately this information was not widely communicated in the school. Professional development or a school policy about immigrant youth and their educational rights was not communicated to teachers and other school personnel because
administrators feared that personnel’s ideological beliefs might put the students in danger. Jefferies referred to this as “the Circle of Silence” (p. 279). Essentially, the Circle of Silence is the idea that everyone involved—students, teachers, and administration—avoids bringing up the topic of undocumented status (Jefferies, 2014). Jefferies concluded by positing that without professional development of school personnel, undocumented students are at risk and their future pursuits are in jeopardy due to lack of information. He recommended that, “in the form of either professional development or trainings for school personnel, the history and legal parameters of immigration as it relates to their students need to be addressed” (p. 293).

Murillo’s (2017) ethnographic research with staff and educators at an urban school in California indicated that although they believed knowing students’ legal status would be beneficial, and they generally wanted to support undocumented students, they were not prepared by their institution to discuss issues of documentation or help students find resources. Since there were no protocols in place for how to manage a student’s disclosure, teachers, key people who were part of the students’ everyday routine, were often not briefed when students disclosed their status to other personnel, such as counselors. Murillo (2017) concluded that in order for teachers to be a source of information and support, learning about the needs of undocumented youth in informational sessions or trainings is necessary.

Dabach’s (2015) case study with a high school teacher who did know the limitations her undocumented students faced, acknowledged the lack of professional development. The teacher stated, “We need education about what it means to be
undocumented in this community. People have no idea about what’s happening here” (p. 401). This statement indicates that educators who have undocumented youth in their classroom may lack awareness of what being undocumented entails.

Research has shown that much of what educators do know about undocumented students has come from each other as well as the media, and in some instances, may be incorrect. Gallo and Link (2016) report that some teachers erroneously believe they are legally mandated to report their undocumented students. One of their participants, an elementary teacher, drew comparisons between a family being illegal and other illegal behavior such as child abuse, with both situations mandating reporting, according to the teacher (p. 189). Lad and Braganza (2013) found that although personnel (i.e., administrators, teachers, and support staff such as counselors and tutors) knew a little about the immigrant experience, it was not because they received formal training from their institution. Participants acknowledged that no training was given regarding policies affecting undocumented immigrants or what the population’s learning needs may be. The staff’s understanding reportedly came from random personal interactions or what the media portrayed. In Buchanan and Hilburn’s (2016) research with pre-service teachers, it was confirmed that “mainstream media, including reality television, and political pundits, family, and friends contributed to their knowledge of dominant narratives of immigration” (p. 413).

**Teacher training on undocumented immigrant youth.** The sparse research that has been conducted on professional development related to undocumented students indicates that when professional development or training does occur, it not only increases
educators’ knowledge about the limitations that undocumented students live under, but also their attitude regarding immigration (Chapman & Hall, 2014; Cruz, 2014). Specifically, favorable attitudes regarding immigration and undocumented immigrants increase.

In research conducted with K-12 educators in the state of Indiana, Cruz (2014) explored whether attending a workshop on the topic of immigration and undocumented immigrants would increase knowledge and lead to positive attitudes about the population. Her one-hour workshop used the central and peripheral routes of persuasion by presenting factual information alongside student testimonies. Using pre and post survey results, Cruz found that teachers’ self-reported knowledge about immigration and immigration policy was greater after the workshop and the participants’ attitudes regarding immigration were more positive post-training.

Chapman and Hall (2014) also used the pre/post assessment method when investigating whether a visually based training program improved teachers’ attitudes toward immigrants. The middle school teachers who participated in the in-service training in a North Carolina school district were exposed to still pictures that told the story of an immigrant’s journey. Participants then completed Ommundsen and Larsen’s (1997) Illegal Alien Scale, which assesses attitudes towards illegal immigrants. The results indicated that being exposed to the visual intervention program, Yo Veo, did in fact improve their attitude towards undocumented immigrants (Chapman & Hall, 2014).

Buchanan and Hilburn (2016) used a similar approach but with a different audience. The purpose of their research was to ascertain whether watching a
documentary could influence K-8 *pre-service* teachers’ views on immigration. The intent was to increase knowledge and to challenge any stereotypes of immigrants the participants might hold. The content of the film was meant to show what goes unreported in traditional news stories. The authors found that the visual intervention did indeed shift participants’ personal views of immigration/immigrants, as well as knowledge and interest in the social issue of immigration. After viewing the film, participants reported feeling more favorable attitudes toward immigrants and remorse for previous xenophobic responses. They also reported feeling more knowledgeable about the topic. In addition, it was discovered that the film intervention influenced their perception of current immigration policy in the United States. Before the intervention, participants were considered to be neutral, while their responses after the training indicated that they disapproved of the current US policies.

Although a few researchers have explored whether an intervention in the course of professional development creates agreeable attitudes toward undocumented immigrants, less is known about whether teachers are interested in the training and if they would actually put it to use in the students’ best interest in the classroom. While Buchanan and Hilburn’s (2016) participants self-reported that it was important to understand their students’ experiences and circumstances and to be familiar with current social issues, no research to date has explored whether secondary teachers deem the subject of undocumented immigrants a worthy professional development opportunity.
Summary

The research shows undocumented youth experience adolescence-related challenges beyond those experienced by their peers during normative transitions such as getting a driver’s license, a part-time job, or financing higher education. Consistent with the Positive Youth Development model and the limited research to date, teachers have the potential to be important supports for the undocumented students, particularly in the current climate of political hostility related to illegal immigration. However, not all teachers have an awareness of undocumented students’ status or experiences. Many also do not have knowledge of how immigration policy affects their students. Early research indicates training/professional development related to immigration policy and experiences of undocumented youth may be beneficial. However, additional research is needed to determine the extent to which the training is being offered or even desired by teachers, particularly teachers of high school students in various parts of the country.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the present study was to explore secondary high school teachers’ level of knowledge, attitudes toward, and interest in training related to undocumented youth. It aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. (Knowledge): How much knowledge do teachers have related to immigration policy and undocumented youth?

2. (Attitudes): Are teacher attitudes generally favorable towards policies that support undocumented immigrant youth?

2a. (Attitudes): Do teachers indicate a willingness to be an “ally” to undocumented students needing access to information, a mentor, or just a “safe” space?

2b. (Attitudes): If they found out a student was undocumented, would teachers report the student?

3. (Knowledge): Do teachers report receiving professional development related to immigration policy and undocumented youth?

4. (Attitudes): Do educators in the present study want to receive professional development on immigration policy and undocumented youth?

Participants

The participants included certified secondary school teachers, also known as high school teachers. Overall, 275 participants began the survey. After completing the first two questions (self-reported knowledge about DACA and DREAMers), 47 people chose
not to continue. Therefore, most of the analyses were conducted with the remaining 228 participants. Representing 38 different states, the respondents ranged in age from 21–72 years old. The mean age of the sample was 42.04 years ($SD = 10.82$). Females constituted the majority of the sample (85.7%). Of those who reported their race or ethnicity ($n = 233$), 82% were White, Caucasian, or European descent, while 13.8% identified as Latino or Hispanic. The remaining participants self-identified as Black or African American (2.1%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (1.3%), Asian (0.4%), or other (0.4%). On average, participants had 14.96 ($SD = 8.9$) years of teaching experience with most (96.7%) having experience with upperclassman (juniors and seniors). Over half (52.2%) of the respondents were social studies teachers. The majority (85.7%) of the sample had some graduate school experience or completed a graduate program. Only 4.8% self-identified as conservative or very conservative, while 69% claimed to be liberal or very liberal. The respondents were a well-traveled group, with 52.4% ($n = 107$) self-reporting they had spent time in 5 or more countries. Teachers’ level of exposure to undocumented students was assessed by summing their Yes responses to Section I items 16 through 19 of the survey. Frequencies were calculated and three-fourths (74.1%) of the population self-reported at least some exposure to the undocumented population in their school or school community.

**Measure**

Data were collected in July and August 2018 via an online Qualtrics survey titled Secondary School Teachers’ Understanding of the Impact of Immigration Policy on High School Students. The instrument consisted of four sections of questions meant to assess
the respondents’ knowledge, attitudes, and level of professional development regarding undocumented youth and immigration policy, followed by a background, demographic, and professional profile component (see survey in Appendix).

The first set of questions measured the educators’ knowledge of immigration policy and undocumented youth and consisted of twenty items. Items evaluated respondents’ knowledge of common immigration terms, current policy practices, and the undocumented immigrant presence in their local community. Two of these questions (items 1 and 2) were locked after the respondent submitted their answer to prevent them from later changing their response after reading subsequent questions. This was done so respondents’ knowledge about DACA and DREAMers could be determined without the influence of later questions informing their answers. The later questions, mentioning undocumented students or immigration, could have triggered their memory or influenced the accuracy of their memory. Three questions (items 1, 9, 14) were adapted from the “Educators UndocuKnowledge” quiz found on Unitedwedream.org (2014). The remaining items were based on the review of the literature and information currently pertinent to undocumented youth in U.S. schools.

Section II of the survey, which consisted of nine items, requested information meant to measure the educators’ attitudes towards immigration policy and undocumented youth. For eight items, respondents were asked to indicate their level of support using a Likert scale (1 = strongly oppose to 5 = strongly support) for various scenarios about policy agreement and potential interaction with undocumented youth. The last question of Section II asked whether the educators would be comfortable identifying themselves as
an “ally” to undocumented students needing access to information, a mentor, or just a “safe” space, and why or why not.

The third section of the survey included four Yes/No items that measured the educators’ level of and interest in professional development related to immigration policy and undocumented youth. Respondents who were not interested in professional training, were asked to provide their reason.

The final section was the background and professional profile, which contained 13 items developed to obtain general demographic and professional information about the respondents. Requested information included age, gender, race, ethnicity, years of teaching experience, and subjects and grade level taught. General information on the teacher’s belief system, international travel experience, and area of residence were also requested. Furthermore, the urban/suburban/rural status of the school and the racial and ethnic composition of the student body were also collected.

**Procedures**

Participants were recruited through social media and targeted snowball sampling. The requests for participation and link to the online survey were distributed through several Facebook groups that consisted of teacher members only. The author also used her personal Facebook page and contacts to recruit “friends,” especially those who were teachers, to participate and pass on the survey in an effort to get a more substantial and diversified response. Specifically, the author identified several contacts who were educators and personally requested that they share the survey invitation with any groups, listservs, and/or contacts that included the target population (i.e., certified secondary
school educators in the United States). This targeted snowball sampling technique was employed in hopes of reaching a more nationally representative sample than what currently exists in the sparse research. The author also contacted representatives from groups with access to the target population. Specifically, a request to disseminate the survey amongst members (e.g., via listservs or newsletters) was sent to contacts for the American Psychology Association’s Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools (TOPSS), National Education Association (NEA), and College Board, as well as moderators of blogs that provide resources and content support to high school teachers. In order to improve response rates, incentives were offered in accordance with Kent State University’s IRB guidelines. The principle investigator offered a random drawing for (1) $50 and (4) $25 Amazon gift cards to entice engagement in the survey.

**Data Analysis**

For Section I: Awareness (i.e., knowledge), subscores were calculated. Responses to items 1 through 14 were coded as *Yes* = 1 and *No* = 0. Items 1 and 2 were summed, with higher totals indicating respondents’ higher level of perceived knowledge of DACA and DREAMers. Items 3 through 14 are factual questions. The correct response for items 4, 5, and 7 is yes, while no is the correct answer for the remaining items. The total number of correct responses was summed for each participant. This answered Research Question 1, *How much knowledge do teachers have related to immigration policy and undocumented youth?* In an effort to assess the teachers’ understanding of the varying means by which undocumented immigrants enter the United States, question 15 was open-ended. Specifically, the question was intended to identify
whether the participants could demonstrate an understanding that undocumented status occurs from ways in addition to a physical border crossing. Responses were categorized into general themes. Items 16-19 assessed the exposure and interactions that teachers reported having had with undocumented youth. Again, Yes responses were coded as 1; No and I don’t know responses were both coded as 0. I don’t know responses were grouped together with No responses so the teachers who definitively had exposure to undocumented students could be clearly identified. Responses to items 16–19 were summed; higher scores indicated greater exposure to the undocumented population. Frequencies were calculated on item 20 of Section I in order to determine sources of information about immigration policy and undocumented youth.

In Section II: Beliefs, Research Question 2, *Are teacher attitudes generally favorable towards policies that support undocumented immigrant youth?* is addressed. Items 1, 5, 6, and 7 were reverse coded. Responses to questions 1 through 8 were then summed, with higher scores indicative of greater support for undocumented immigration and undocumented youth. Frequencies were calculated for the responses to item #9. This answered Research Question 2a, *Do teachers indicate a willingness to be an “ally” to undocumented students needing access to information, a mentor, or just a “safe” space?* Research Question 2b, *If they found out a student was undocumented, would teachers report the student?* was evaluated by analyzing question 1 specifically.

Items 1 through 3 for Section III: Professional Development assessed whether the participant’s school offered support and information about undocumented immigration and students. The responses were coded as Yes = 1 and No = 0. Item #3, was the focus
of Research Question 3, which was *Do teachers report receiving professional development related to immigration policy and undocumented youth?* Frequencies were calculated for the last item of Section III to determine the respondents’ interest in receiving professional development on undocumented youth (Research Question 4) and if not, why not. Finally, frequencies and descriptive analyses were calculated on items in Section IV: Background and Professional Profile. Additional analyses explored correlations between subscale scores and variables such as: attitudes and knowledge, and training and attitude.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

Several participants \((n = 47)\) only responded to the first 2 questions (i.e., self-reported understanding of DACA and DREAMers). Therefore, frequencies were calculated to determine their level of perceived knowledge. Out of the survey non-completers, most self-reported an understanding of DACA (78.7%) and DREAMers (82.6%). Completers versus non-completers were compared on self-reported knowledge of DACA and DREAMers by conducting chi-square analyses. The results indicated a significantly greater proportion of those who went on to answer more than the first 2 questions self-reported an understanding of what DACA was compared to non-completers, \(X^2(1, n = 274) = 5.07, p < .05\). However, although nearing significance \((p = .068)\), there was no significant difference in self-reported knowledge of DREAMers between the group that went on to answer all questions and the group that stopped after the first two questions.

Research Question 1

The responses were evaluated to determine how knowledgeable secondary teachers were about immigration policy and undocumented youth. The possible scores on the knowledge/awareness scale (i.e., the sum of items 3-14 in Section 1) ranged from 0 to 12, with higher scores indicating greater knowledge. Participants’ scores ranged from 4 to 12 with a mean of 10.06 (SD = 1.70). Frequencies were calculated and the results indicated 85.1% of the participants knew at least 75% of the material assessed. Forty-seven participants (20.6%) were free from error on all 12 questions for a perfect
score. A follow-up analysis calculating a Pearson’s correlation coefficient was conducted to determine the relationship between respondents’ perceived knowledge of DACA and DREAMers (items 1 and 2 of Section 1) and their actual knowledge about general immigration policy and the challenges facing undocumented youth (the sum of correct responses to items 3 through 14 of Section 1). The results indicated a positive significant association between teachers’ perceived knowledge and actual knowledge ($r = .380, p < .01$). Teachers who believed they knew about DACA and DREAMers scored higher on the knowledge/awareness scale.

To ascertain whether or not respondents were aware that undocumented status could result from entry into the country via legal means and not just the familiar southern border crossing, question 15 of Section I asked, “By what means do the undocumented/illegal enter the United States?” In response to the open-ended question, many participants identified more than one way. While the most common themes centered around the traditional border crossing which also included walking/by foot, and smugglers/coyotes, a large number of respondents recognized that other modes of transportation (i.e., trucks, cars, boats) and entering legally but not leaving were also common.

**Research Question 2**

Descriptive statistics were conducted to answer the second research question: *Are teacher attitudes generally favorable towards policies that support undocumented immigrant youth?* The possible scores on the beliefs/attitudes scale (Section II items 1 through 8) ranged from 8 to 40, with higher scores indicative of greater support for
undocumented immigration and undocumented youth. The participants’ scores ranged from 10 to 40 with a mean attitude score of 34.92 ($SD = 5.83$).

**Research Question 2a**

Frequencies were calculated to determine if teachers were willing to be an “ally” to undocumented students needing access to information, a mentor, or just a “safe” space (Section II item 9). Respondents were forced to choose between two answers, *Yes* or *No*. The majority (90.7%) of the sample expressed they would feel comfortable identifying as an ally, while 20 (9.3%) of the 215 teachers who responded to this question replied *No*. Those that would not be comfortable being an ally identified not knowing how to help (29.7%), not being supportive of undocumented/illegal students (18.5%), and not wanting to get involved with immigration issues (14.8%) as their justification.

**Research Question 2b**

To determine if teachers would report the student if they found out they were undocumented, frequencies were calculated on item 1 of Section II. Participants’ answers could have indicated they strongly support, somewhat support, were neutral, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose. While 5.6% of the participants somewhat or strongly supported reporting a student if they learned they were in the U.S. illegally, the vast majority (89.8%) somewhat or strongly opposed the idea. A small portion (4.7%) of the sample took a neutral position on this question.

**Research Question 3**

The teachers answered *Yes* or *No* to item 3 of Section III to report whether or not they received professional development related to immigration policy and undocumented
youth. Frequencies were calculated and they revealed that only 10.5% of the teachers surveyed had participated in any formal training(s). Therefore, for the considerable majority (89.5%), no formal trainings related to immigration policy or working with undocumented/illegal students were offered at in-services or through other professional opportunities such as brown-bag luncheons or online webinars.

In addition, related to Research Question 3, respondents were asked to report on whether or not district or school administrators communicated any information about undocumented students through means such as newsletters, memos, or email (Section III item 2). While 17.2% confirmed that this practice had occurred in some capacity, the majority, 82.8%, reported that no such district or school official communication took place.

Although it was not likely that professional development or communication on the topic of undocumented students was taking place at the schools, respondents felt their school culture did support undocumented students and their families. Frequencies were calculated on Section III item 1 and 66.8% of the sample confirmed a supportive culture.

**Research Question 4**

The participants’ willingness to receive professional development on immigration policy and undocumented youth was the final research question evaluated. Teachers responded Yes or No depending on their interest in receiving training from their school about undocumented/illegal students. The results, determined by calculating frequencies on item 4 of Section III, indicated that 72.5% of the sample responded favorably to the possibility of the training, while 27.5% were not interested. Forty-seven participants
chose to elaborate on why they were not interested in professional development on the undocumented student population. A little more than a third (36.2%) of this subset believed that training would not be relevant to their school population. Others explained that they did not think it was necessary to treat undocumented students differently (12.8%), while others simply believed there is already too much training (10.6%), and there were more valuable topics on which to receive training (12.8%).

**Follow-Up Analyses**

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, additional analyses beyond those that answered the six research questions were run. Respondents were asked to indicate how they were exposed to information about this population. They identified the media (68.7%) as the main source from which they learned about immigration policy and issues facing undocumented/illegal youth (Section I item 20). Following television news, social media, and other forms of media, respondents cited professional life—colleagues and interactions with students (52%)—in addition to their family and friends (34.2%) as sources of information. When asked in an open-ended question to describe their other sources of information, participants cited personal research, including Google/internet, accessing legislation, and contacting the state department.

A Pearson’s correlation coefficient was calculated to examine associations between knowledge (measured by responses on the knowledge/awareness score) and attitudes (beliefs/attitudes score). Results indicated a statistically significant positive association between participants’ reported knowledge and their attitudes/support related
to immigration policy and undocumented youth ($r = .72, p < .001$). Teachers who were more knowledgeable also appeared more supportive based on their self-reported beliefs.

Further analysis using a t-test showed that the teachers who expressed an interest in professional development/training on the topic of immigration policy and undocumented students had significantly higher scores ($M = 10.36$) on the knowledge scale than the teachers who were not interested in training ($M = 9.7; t(205) = 2.64, p < .01$). Similarly, the teachers who were interested in training also had attitude scores that were more supportive of undocumented students ($M = 36.47$) compared to those teachers who were not interested in professional development on this specific student population ($M = 31.10; t(68.24) = -5.04, p < .001$).

T-tests were calculated to ascertain if prior professional development on immigration policy or working with undocumented students played a role in respondents’ level of knowledge and attitudes related to undocumented students. The findings neared significance ($p = .05$) on knowledge scores. Respondents who had received formal training scored higher ($M = 10.82$), albeit not significantly, on the knowledge scale compared to the teachers who had not received prior training ($M = 10.10$). There also were no statistically significant differences in attitudes of the respondents based on whether that had received prior training or not.

A Pearson correlation showed teachers who scored higher on exposure to undocumented students (Section I items 16 through 19) had significantly more knowledge of immigration policy and undocumented youth, $r = .22, p = .001$. However,
there was not a significant correlation between their level of exposure to this population and their attitudes.

The relationships of respondents’ social/political values and beliefs (Section IV item 7) with their knowledge and attitudes about immigration policy were assessed using a Pearson correlation analysis. Participants who rated themselves as more liberal had significantly higher knowledge scores ($r = .27, p < .001$) and more supportive attitudes towards undocumented youth ($r = .62, p < .001$).
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Previous research has shown that undocumented adolescents are at an especially vulnerable developmental stage (Gonzalez & Chavez, 2012). However, the positive youth development model (Damon, 2004; Lerner, 2005) and related developmental assets framework (Benson et al., 2011) suggest outside influences such as teachers can foster positive outcomes for these students. The sparse research on teachers and their undocumented students has been confined to participants in just a few states and limited in scope (e.g., attitude changes after a workshop on undocumented youth). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to expand on the current literature by assessing secondary teachers’ knowledge and attitudes related to undocumented students through a nationwide survey with a larger, more representative sample of the United States than what is currently available.

Before discussing the findings on teachers’ knowledge and attitudes, it should be mentioned that several respondents chose to only answer the first two questions of the survey, which asked if they had an understanding of DACA and DREAMers. Respondents’ political views may have played a part in this, as the majority of the teachers who completed the survey identified as liberal or very liberal. Since researchers (Doherty, 2018; Gramlich, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2016) have found that conservatives tend to view illegal immigration as a major problem and are less likely to support access to citizenship, it is possible that many who did not complete the survey were more conservative and therefore not interested in completing a survey on a topic
they do not support. Or, perhaps the survey non-completers may not have felt knowledgeable about the topic and therefore chose not to finish the survey. A significantly greater number of survey completers reported an understanding of DACA than non-completers but this difference was not found for the self-reported understanding of DREAMers. This may be because the DACA program received renewed news coverage since Trump had been trying to halt it, while the Dream Act did not receive as much recent attention, and therefore is less known by the general population.

Knowledge

To the author’s awareness, no other research has explicitly quantified the level of knowledge educators have on the topic of immigration policy and how those policies affect the lives of undocumented youth. Previous studies (Buchanan & Hilburn, 2016; Cruz, 2014) have used limited samples to measure knowledge levels pre and post intervention, but a nationwide assessment of secondary teachers’ knowledge has been missing in the literature. Contrary to prior research suggesting teachers are not knowledgeable about the plight of undocumented youth (Jeffries, 2014; Lad & Braganza, 2013), the findings of the present study of teachers from 38 states indicated they were well aware of the current policies and how undocumented youths’ lives are different than those of their peers. This is also contrary to Andrade’s (2017) finding that the majority of students reported their “educators and teachers appeared unfamiliar with undocumented student issues or circumstances” (p. 10).

The teachers’ high level of knowledge could be because over half of them were social studies teachers with advanced degrees, who by the nature of their job may be
inherently curious and studious about keeping up with policy issues. In addition, undocumented immigration was a hot button topic and a major talking point in the 2016 presidential race and the foundation for subsequent first actions of the new commander in chief (e.g., an array of executive orders meant to constrain illegal immigration).

Teachers who expressed familiarity with the concepts of DACA and DREAMers were found to be more knowledgeable about the facts related to policy and undocumented youths’ struggles. The teachers not only perceived they were knowledgeable, they in fact did have a strong understanding of immigration polices as they relate to youth. Undocumented youth would benefit from teachers who recognize what they are experiencing. The Search Institute (2017a) has found having supportive, understanding other adult relationships is associated with increased developmental assets for youth.

Respondents demonstrated awareness that undocumented individuals may have entered the country by means other than a physical southern border crossing. Recent research (Warren, 2019) suggests that many of those who are undocumented arrive legally but overstay their visa. Perhaps because the respondents were well traveled, they were cognizant that one could overstay a visa.

The present study examined sources from which teachers learned about immigration policy and issues facing their undocumented students. Similar to previous studies (e.g., Buchanan & Hilburn, 2016), the respondents cited media and personal and professional interactions as key sources of information. Many of the respondents also indicated they had engaged in personal research on the topic. Personal experience also
likely influenced participants’ knowledge level. Teachers who reported more exposure to the undocumented student population were more knowledgeable about them than those who had less contact with these students.

**Attitudes**

In addition to assessing teachers’ knowledge of current immigration protocol, the present study also evaluated whether or not teacher attitudes were favorable towards policies that support undocumented immigrant youth. The results showed that the attitudes of educators favor policies that would even the playing field between undocumented youth and their peers. This is consistent with a 2018 Quinnipiac University Poll that found only 15% of respondents believed those brought to the U.S. as children should *never* be allowed to apply for citizenship. Most (79%) supported allowing youth brought to the United States as children to remain in the country and eventually apply for citizenship. Similarly, a path to citizenship for undocumented adolescents brought into the country as children was favored by participants in a Pew Research Poll (Tyson, 2018), as well as a population of pre-service teachers (Buchanan & Hilburn, 2016).

Knowledge was found to be positively correlated to attitudes about immigration, meaning the greater the knowledge, the more positive the teachers’ attitudes toward policies supporting undocumented youth. This could potentially lead to teachers’ advocacy for undocumented youth and ultimately political change.

Attitude was additionally explored by whether or not teachers indicated a willingness to be an “ally” to undocumented students needing access to information, a
mentor, or just a “safe” space. Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated a willingness to fill this role. This result is in line with Murillo’s (2017) findings that having knowledge about a student’s status helps teachers create a supportive and resourceful classroom environment. One of the reasons having a teacher ally and mentor is important is because many parents are not able to academically support their children due to varying reasons (e.g., language barrier, lack of formal education themselves, fear, etc.; Lad & Braganza, 2013). The finding of supportive educators in the present study is refreshing and directly contradicts the anti-immigrant sentiments directed at students by school personnel as reported elsewhere (Cherry, 2017; Gonzales, Heredia, & Negron, 2015; Nguyen, 2017; Yamamoto & Lloyd, 2016).

Most of the teachers indicated they would not endanger their students by reporting them to authorities if they found out they were in the country illegally. This might be because they understood undocumented students have a legal right to an education (American Immigration Council, 2016), were knowledgeable of the DACA policy, and/or were generally supportive of this student population. Previous research by Jeffries (2014) found that documentation status was not openly addressed in schools because of the school administrator-respondents’ fear that information might be used against the students. This cautionary behavior perpetuated what Jeffries referred to as the circle of silence around immigration status. The present study’s finding that teachers would not report undocumented students is important in that it might allow school administrators to feel comfortable addressing documentation status and not fear they are endangering students by providing them resources or discussing their struggles with school personnel.
Or, at the very least, the present finding may prompt administration to assess teacher attitudes prior to addressing undocumented student information with them.

**Professional Development**

Although the teachers were knowledgeable about and had favorable attitudes toward undocumented youth, they were not being offered training on the topic, even though the majority said they would like this training. These findings support the literature that indicates there is no formal training in secondary educational institutions to support teachers working with the undocumented population (Dabach, 2015; Gallo & Link, 2016; Jefferies, 2014; Lad & Braganza, 2013; Murillo, 2017). It also supports Jefferies’s (2014) call for more trainings and professional development for school personnel on immigration policy and how it relates to students.

It should be noted that over one-fourth of respondents were not interested in training on undocumented youth. Several indicated they do not need training because they do not feel it is necessary to treat their undocumented students differently. However, the students are different, with different needs and challenges. They are not the typical high school student. They may have spent the majority of their lives in the United States, looking forward to normative adolescent transitions such as getting a job or a license, pursuing a career goal; but they are not like their peers who were born here. They are unable to participate in the American Dream.

Schools that fail to educate their staff on undocumented students are potentially putting the students at a deficit, as it is preventing them from receiving the supports and guidance they may need. Formal professional development and informal communication
about undocumented students could equip teachers with the knowledge and tools necessary to help these youth navigate an adolescent reality and adult future that is much different than their peers’ and perhaps their expectations. Further professional development on undocumented youth is especially important for teachers who are not as knowledgeable and supportive as those who participated in this study. For example, training could lead to dispelling myths and other misinformation such as teachers erroneously believing they have an obligation to report a student if they know of their illegal status (Gallo & Link, 2015; Jefferies, 2014). Ongoing education better positions the teachers to engage in the elements identified by the Search Institute (2017b) that create a powerful relationship with their students (e.g., expressing care, challenging growth, providing support, sharing power, and expanding possibilities).

Buchanan and Hilburn’s (2016) participants self-reported it was important to understand their students’ experiences and circumstances and to be familiar with current social issues. However, the author of this thesis has not been able to find any published research that explicitly quantifies secondary school teachers’ attitudes in regards to receiving professional development related to undocumented youth. Most teachers in the present study expressed a willingness to participate in such activities. This is not a surprising result since the respondents exhibited general support and a positive/pro-immigration attitude. However, this may not be representative of all teachers since participants were highly knowledgeable and supportive of undocumented youth as well as self-described liberal leaning. In addition, respondents appeared to have
an intrinsic interest based on their self-reported individual research on the undocumented population and corresponding policies.

**Limitations**

The primary limitation of this study was the composition of the sample; a highly educated, well-traveled, liberal sample who self-reported they had been part of a social studies department at some point in their career. Although a more nationally representative sample than what has been used in prior research was obtained, the experiences of the general teacher population may not have been captured.

A second limitation to this study is that those who went on to complete the survey may have been more knowledgeable and had favorable attitudes about the topic than those who chose to quit after the first two questions, which inquired about their familiarity with immigration terms. That is, self-selection bias may have played a role. It is possible that the teachers who did not continue after the first two questions would have had different answers than the completers.

Another limitation is that it is possible the attitude score was influenced by social desirability bias. Since educators have the reputation of not being in the field for the money—rather, for their students—their responses may have been influenced by a fear of answering negatively regarding their true beliefs of vulnerable youth. They may have felt obligated to portray their attitude towards undocumented students in a positive manner.

**Implications**

The results of this study suggest that teachers are poised to be a developmental asset in undocumented youths’ lives. They are knowledgeable about immigration policy
and familiar with the challenges the undocumented adolescent faces towards the end of their high school years. Their attitude is one of support and they display a willingness to learn more. Therefore, efforts should be made by school administrators to implement more training opportunities on the challenges undocumented youth face due to their status. Since the teachers were largely supportive, the training might also include ways to put their support into action, such as advocacy. According to the results, students can feel safe turning to their teachers for help, not having to fear being reported if their status is revealed. It is possible that the administrators in Jefferies’s (2014) study were mistaken. That is, it is possible the don’t ask, don’t tell behavior (Jefferies & Dabach, 2014) and “circle of silence” (Jefferies, 2014) in the schools is not necessary. It is possible these assumptions are hurting undocumented youth desperate for guidance on how to navigate their “nightmare” life (Gonzales & Chavez, 2012, p. 262) after having been protected through their primary and secondary education. Although the current research is hopeful, students should not throw all caution to the wind. Instead of students “coming out of the shadows,” supportive teachers could come out of the shadows and loudly advocate on their students’ behalf. Examples could include a butterfly sign on their door to signify they are an ally, a comment that signifies support for ALL students in class, a list of supportive teachers circulated, and an effort to try to bring in families that have been leery of the system. An undocumented teen may be distressed by the next fear mongering and politically-charged rant from politicians using exaggerated stereotypes and untruths about “illegals.” For example, they may be portrayed as entering the country out of deceit instead of a parent’s love, desperation, and for survival, all in
order for the politicians to pander for votes. A word of support and encouragement by a teacher could serve as a powerful buffer for the student who hears such negativity. Research has shown that teachers learn about the undocumented from their colleagues, family, and friends (Buchanan & Hilburn, 2016; Lad & Braganza, 2013). In that vein, it is even more imperative that the teachers who are knowledgeable and supportive are vocal. Teachers in the know need to be outspoken to cast light on their students’ plight; they need to validate the youths’ struggles. If they can talk openly, those who are not familiar with policies and practices related to undocumented students might learn. Knowledge and numbers might make a difference.

Knowing that teachers are open to receiving professional development, the district administration should be encouraged to offer trainings for teachers on this topic. Not all teachers may be open to the training, but at the very least, misinformation should be dispelled. Other trainings and communication could equip teachers with concrete ways on how to assist undocumented students and strategies on how to be supportive in developing an inclusive classroom climate. Incorporating the topic of immigration may help de-stigmatize the undocumented status of students so their peers view them as they do any other classmate.

**Future Research**

The findings of the current study could be used as a basis from which to further explore how the teacher role could be leveraged as an asset in the undocumented youth’s trajectory. The present study found that teachers are interested in professional development on immigration policy and undocumented youth, but what specifically do
they want to know and what should they know? Future research should assess that. In
addition, it would be advantageous to also explore the reasons why some educators may
not want additional knowledge or training. It may have less to do with being
unsupportive of the youth, and more to do with the teachers’ perceived overload of
trainings and workshops.

Although the present study included a sample representing the majority of states,
future research should aim for a more diverse sample. The sample had an
overrepresentation of well-traveled self-described liberal teachers. Ideally, the sample
would contain those who also had limited travel experience as well as those who
identified as conservative and middle-of-the road, in addition to liberal leaning. Care
also should be taken to heavily recruit across all core subjects and electives to obtain a
sample that is not overrepresented by social studies teachers, as the present study was.
Future research should take measures to bolster participation diversity, perhaps by using
a sampling method other than the snowball technique used in the present study. Future
researchers might also want to ensure representation from different areas of the country,
such as border and non-border states, urban and rural areas, and locations with high and
low rates of Latino populations so additional analyses could compare differences across
areas.

Future research should assess knowledge and attitudes of pre-service teachers. If
pre-teacher knowledge is high and their attitude positive, strategies for reaching out to
disenfranchised undocumented students could be discussed. If the pre-service teachers
are not as knowledgeable or receptive to supportive policy as it relates to DREAMers, the
confines of their teacher preparation curriculum might be a good place to discuss bias and best practice.

Further research also needs to include the population of undocumented adolescents. Knowing more about their actual experience in the school environment, which includes their interaction with educators, will help shine a light on the reality of how being undocumented is addressed in their school. The needs of undocumented students also should be assessed. Now that there is evidence that teachers are indeed knowledgeable and willing to offer support to these youth, the best way to meet those needs should be investigated. Furthermore, research that explores school support during elections, threats of DACA removal, and negative media attention could also provide insight on how to best help undocumented youth overcome challenges and meet their potential.

**Conclusions**

This study contributes to the literature in that it is the first known to the author to quantify teachers’ knowledge of how current immigration policy affects the lives of undocumented youth. The present study demonstrated that teachers overall were knowledgeable and supportive of undocumented youth. They generally would not report their students and were willing to be an ally to them, rather than an adversary. Although professional development is not regularly occurring, teachers do signify a willingness to participate in training on this student population. Training would strengthen their ability to foster a key developmental relationship offering care and support and expanding
possibilities; something that is especially crucial during the current political era of uncertainty.

In the recent past undocumented students who chose to enroll in DACA were finally allowed some of the opportunities their peers’ birthright provided them (e.g., a driver’s license, the ability to be employed, and access to college funding aid). Essentially, they had legal permission to be in the country, which allowed them to live a normal life and have hope for their future instead of fearing deportation at age 18. Trump’s September 5, 2017 decision to end DACA in its current form (Duke, 2017), and leave a solution up to Congress, may cause the undocumented students living a “traditional” American life (e.g., working or attending college) to go back into the shadows. Many are scared, but not yet hopeless (Andrade, 2017; Anonymous student, personal communication, September 8, 2017). Now more than ever, it is important that teachers have knowledge of how being undocumented affects the students of the 1.5 generation sitting in their classrooms.
APPENDIX
APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM AND SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS’ UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION POLICY ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS SURVEY
Appendix A

Consent Form and Secondary School Teachers’ Understanding of the Impact of Immigration Policy on High School Students Survey

Title: Secondary School Teachers’ Understanding of the Impact of Immigration Policy on High School Students
PI Name: Maureen Blankemeyer

We are asking you to participate in a research study that involves you completing a survey. We hope to learn about teacher's awareness of the impact of immigration policy on high school students.
Participation typically takes 15 minutes.

Your participation is anonymous. However, you should be aware that this survey is not being run through a secure server, similar to the kind typically used to handle credit card transactions. This means there is a possibility that a third party may view your responses.

The risks of participating in this project are no greater than those encountered in everyday life. You will not benefit directly from this research, but your participation will help us learn more about teachers’ understanding of an atypical population of students.

Participating in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without penalty.

If you are 18 years or older and freely elect to participate, please click the next button below.

In exchange for your participation you will be eligible for compensation through a random drawing of four $25 and one $50 Amazon gift cards. To enter the drawing, you may choose to submit your email address when prompted after completion of the survey. Your email address will not be attached to your responses.

If you have questions about the study you can contact Maureen Blankemeyer at mblankem@kent.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant please contact 330-672-2704.
Section I: Awareness

Instructions: Please respond to the following questions based on your understanding.

Yes  No

1. Do you have an understanding of what DACA is? (lock answer)
   □  □

2. Do you have an understanding of who DREAMers are? (lock)
   □  □

3. Are undocumented/illegal youth and their families usually supported by Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers?
   □  □

4. Do undocumented/illegal students have a legal right to a K-12 education?
   □  □

5. Can teachers offer support to undocumented/illegal students needing access to information, a mentor, or just a “safe” space?
   □  □

6. Are undocumented/illegal youth and their families likely to turn to authorities for security like people with citizenship do?
   □  □

7. Can undocumented/illegal students enroll in college?
   □  □

8. Do all undocumented/illegal youth qualify for DACA status?
   □  □

9. Can undocumented/illegal students apply and qualify for Federal Financial Aid (FAFSA)?
   □  □

10. Does the nickname DREAMers refer to children born in the United States to parents who are undocumented/illegal?
    □  □

11. Can all undocumented/illegal students obtain jobs typical of high school students (i.e., grocery stores, movie theatres, the mall)?
    □  □

12. If you learned one of your students or their family was undocumented and here illegally, would you be required to report them to authorities?
    □  □

13. After receiving DACA status for 4 consecutive years, are the undocumented/illegal youth granted citizenship status?
    □  □

14. Can educators get in trouble from district officials for providing emotional/social support to undocumented/illegal students?
    □  □
15. By what means do the undocumented/illegal enter the United States?

16. Does the community in which you live have a large undocumented/illegal population?
   □ Yes □ No □ I don’t know

17. Do you have undocumented/illegal students in your school?
   □ Yes □ No □ I don’t know

18. Have you ever had undocumented/illegal students in your class?
   □ Yes □ No □ I don’t know

19. Have you ever had a student disclose their legal status to you?
   □ Yes □ No □ I don’t know

20. From what source(s) did you learn about immigration policy and issues facing undocumented/illegal youth? (Please check all that apply):
   □ media (e.g., television news, social media)
   □ personal life (e.g., family, friends)
   □ professional life (e.g., colleagues, interactions with students)
   □ college or college coursework/teacher certification program
   □ other (Please explain): ___________________
   □ none of the above

The correct answers to the undocumented immigration and immigration policy questions #3 - #14 are:
3. No 10. No
4. Yes 11. No
5. Yes 12. No
6. No 13. No
7. Yes 14. No
8. No
9. No
Section II: Beliefs

Instructions: The following questions ask about your views of immigration policy. Please respond using the scale provided.

*To what extent do you support …*

1. Reporting a student if you learned they were in the U.S. illegally

   □ 1 strongly oppose  □ 2 somewhat oppose  □ 3 neutral  □ 4 somewhat support  □ 5 strongly support

2. A pathway to citizenship for undocumented/illegal youth brought to the U.S. by their parents at a young age

   □ 1 strongly oppose  □ 2 somewhat oppose  □ 3 neutral  □ 4 somewhat support  □ 5 strongly support

3. Undocumented/illegal youth brought to the U.S. by their parents at a young age having a legal right to a K-12 education

   □ 1 strongly oppose  □ 2 somewhat oppose  □ 3 neutral  □ 4 somewhat support  □ 5 strongly support

4. The Deferred Action for Childhood arrivals (DACA)

   □ 1 strongly oppose  □ 2 somewhat oppose  □ 3 neutral  □ 4 somewhat support  □ 5 strongly support

5. ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) officials targeting undocumented/illegal populations who are not presenting a danger to their community

   □ 1 strongly oppose  □ 2 somewhat oppose  □ 3 neutral  □ 4 somewhat support  □ 5 strongly support
6. The current administration’s general position on undocumented/illegal youth

□ 1 strongly oppose □ 2 somewhat oppose □ 3 neutral □ 4 somewhat support □ 5 strongly support

7. Undocumented/illegal students paying international student college tuition rates despite graduating from a high school in the United States

□ 1 strongly oppose □ 2 somewhat oppose □ 3 neutral □ 4 somewhat support □ 5 strongly support

8. A student revealing and/or discussing their undocumented/illegal status with you

□ 1 strongly oppose □ 2 somewhat oppose □ 3 neutral □ 4 somewhat support □ 5 strongly support

9. Would you feel comfortable identifying yourself as an “ally” to undocumented/illegal students needing access to information, a mentor, or just a “safe” space?

□ Yes (skip logic) □ No (skip logic)

If yes, why? (Please explain): ______________________

If no, why not? (Please check all that apply):

□ I do not know how to help them
□ I do not want to get involved with immigration issues
□ I do not support undocumented/illegal students
□ I do not get involved with students or student matters beyond the scope of classroom instruction
□ Other (Please explain): ______________________
Section III: Professional Development

Instructions: The following items pertain to professional development you may have received on this atypical student population. Please describe your professional development experience by answering the questions below.

1. Does your school culture support undocumented/illegal students and families?
   □ Yes □ No

2. Have you received any **formal communication** (e.g., emails, memos, newsletters) from your district/school administrators regarding undocumented students?
   □ Yes □ No

3. Have there been any **formal training(s)** offered at in-service(s) or other professional development opportunities (e.g., brown-bag luncheons, online webinars) related to immigration policy or working with undocumented/illegal students?
   □ Yes □ No

4. Are you interested in receiving training from your school about undocumented/illegal students?
   □ Yes □ No (skip logic)

   If you are **not** interested in training about undocumented/illegal students, please identify the reason: ________________________
Section IV: Background and Professional Profile

1. What is your age in years? (Enter the number)

2. What best describes your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Other (Please identify): ____________________

3. What best describes your race and/or ethnicity?
   - American Indian or Alaskan Native
   - Asian (Please specify the country): ____________________
   - Black or African American
   - Latino or Hispanic (Please identify specific country): ____________________
   - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   - White / Caucasian / European descent
   - Other: ____________________

4. In which state do you currently reside? (drop down box for selection)
   City: ____________________

5. In which state did you primarily spend your formative years? (drop down box for selection)
   City: ____________________

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Some Graduate school
   - Completed Graduate school

7. Where do your values and beliefs fall on the continuum below?
   - □ 1 very conservative
   - □ 2 conservative
   - □ 3 neutral
   - □ 4 liberal
   - □ 5 very liberal

8. How many countries outside of the United States have you been to?
   - □ 1
   - □ 4
   - □ 7
   - □ 10+
   - □ 2
   - □ 5
   - □ 8
   - □ 3
   - □ 6
   - □ 9

9. How many years have you been teaching? (Enter the number)
10. What subjects have you taught/what departments have you been a part of? (Please check all that apply):
   - [ ] Business
   - [ ] World Languages
   - [ ] English
   - [ ] Family and Consumer Sciences
   - [ ] Mathematics
   - [ ] Health and Physical Education
   - [ ] Science
   - [ ] Fine Arts
   - [ ] Social Studies
   - [ ] Vocational
   - [ ] Special Education
   - [ ] Other: ____________________

11. Highest grade level taught:   [ ] 9th   [ ] 10th   [ ] 11th   [ ] 12th

12. Which of the following best describes your school’s location?
   - [ ] urban area
   - [ ] suburban area
   - [ ] rural area

13. Which of the following best describes the majority of the student body at your school?
   - [ ] American Indian or Alaskan Native
   - [ ] Asian
   - [ ] Black or African American
   - [ ] Latino or Hispanic
   - [ ] Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   - [ ] White / Caucasian / European descent
   - [ ] Equivalent representation (Please identify): ____________________
REFERENCES


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