

ACTUALIZING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION:  
A SCHOOL, A MISSION, A PRACTICE

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ACTUALIZING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION:  
A SCHOOL, A MISSION, A PRACTICE

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### ACTUALIZING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION:

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The need for organizations to address diversity, equity, and inclusion can be related to a myriad of issues. From internal organizational affairs to matters found in recent current events, and the fragile racial climate across the United States, organizations are looking for substantive ways to solve their diversity problems. Diversity statements peaked in popularity after the Summer of 2019. Efforts to devise a diversity statement were noble, however, if the words in the statement misrepresented the lived experiences of stakeholders, adjustments need to be made. This study focuses on educators as they identify features of their diversity, equity, and inclusion development. The findings reveal how leaders can understand and support educators to initiate shifts and fully actualize a diversity mission.

Dedicated to all the Black Women who make Waves (in White Spaces) with Style and  
Grace.

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## CHAPTER ONE: PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

W.E.B. DuBois (1903) wrote, “Education must not simply teach work, it must teach life.” This statement applies to both social and educational aptitude. While some believe racism is on the decline in the United States, many others see otherwise. Criminal incidents, due to a bias towards a victim’s race, ethnicity, or ancestry, have risen for three consecutive years; more than 55% of the year’s most recent hate crimes were committed by known White offenders (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2021). Bias expresses conscious and subconscious thoughts, ideas, or beliefs that discriminate against or sympathize with characteristics or traits (Lipsky, 2010). Most recently, in the overwhelming response to the death of George Floyd, institutions began discussions around equity disparities internally and within their surrounding communities. Many of these institutions are realizing how their organizations play a critical role in impacting the diverse cultural identities they serve, not only in their institutions but more broadly (Johnson, 2020). Knee-jerk responses to these diversity crises have included acts from posting on social media outlets and standing in solidarity to creating a diversity task force. Companies are intentionally working to market their visible attempts at solving diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) problems within their organizations (Duarte, 2020).

Learning institutions have also responded to innumerable internal intolerance, race-based conflict, and societal violence (Barnum & Belsha, 2020). Bower’s Hollow School (pseudonym) (BHS) created a strategic plan in response to its brewing diversity concerns. It began with tasking its diversity committee to create an improved diversity statement that embodied the ideals of a learning environment in which all who attended

and worked at BHS would have a sense of belonging. The reimagined diversity statement centered BHS as a place where differences are celebrated, and teachers are committed to creating an inclusive and welcoming learning community. Although posters of the new diversity statement were affixed to a wall in each classroom and common area, their positions were not enough to stop or reduce the number of student incident reports that detail occasions in which students have felt targeted by peers or faculty members due to their racial or ethnic identity. The students of color specifically stated they continued experiencing daily and weekly race and ethnicity-based aggression from their White BHS peers and teachers, even after the new diversity statement appeared and DE&I meetings convened.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Challenges with diversity can be attributed to a variety of reasons. One way they surface is when schools proclaim allegiance to DE&I yet fail to act on ensuring the commitment is fulfilled. Schools may embrace the idea of having diverse stakeholders, but they can also avoid making the effort to understand the needs of all perspectives. These struggles will remain as long as leaders talk about diversity without making organizational changes that affect their most vulnerable or historically marginalized stakeholders (Thomas & Whitburn, 2019). While it requires a great intention to communicate authentic, rather than reactionary and superficial DE&I avowals, working to make DE&I values a part of the school culture, is essential to delivering on hoped transformation (Bourke & Dillon, 2018). Responsible DE&I engagement means educators take the necessary steps to provide abundant and just learning spaces. Learning for Justice (2021) described DE&I educators as those who “work in partnership with

communities to dismantle White supremacy, strengthen intersectional movements and advance the human rights of all people” (p. 1). Misappropriated diversity statements sit at the foundation of institutions that promote DE&I and fail to address related issues when they arise in their community and classroom. Educators have a responsibility to effectively address DE&I issues in their classrooms and this can be achieved through supportive leaders and culturally competent instructional practices. When teachers choose otherwise, they open space to perpetuate racism and oppression while suffocating the reach of students of color (Kendi, 2019).

### **Problem of Practice**

Living and working today has pushed individuals to learn how to interact within diverse community spaces. Education is also evolving, and teachers are being pushed to utilize curricula and facilitate learning that includes diversity-related topics in their classrooms. What was once a personal decision, because even talking about race in the classroom can be emotional, uncomfortable, and frustrating, is now considered a professional expectation (Burris, 2020).

Recently, educators are being held accountable and often required to deliver instruction about topics of culture and diversity, even reluctantly. Delivering curricula reflective of untold stories and nondominant histories is a new and difficult prospect for many educators to grasp and embrace. Teachers are made privy to student experiences that violate DE&I efforts and student safety and some are aware that “saying nothing sends a message of indifference and complicity, and that is harmful” (Burris, 2020, p. 1); however, they still feel unprepared to appropriately respond when DE&I issues arise.

To align with the BHS mission and advance DE&I teaching and learning initiatives, BHS leaders encourage teachers to engage in culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching is indicative of educators who have explicit knowledge about cultural characteristics and the contributions of different ethnicities (Gay, 2002, p. 107). Educators utilize academic curricula that distinguish the values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns that are unique to diverse backgrounds (Gay, 2002, p. 106). Culturally responsive teachers encapsulate classroom learning experiences through a lived, individually meaningful, thorough, interesting, and appealing teaching and learning lens (Gay, 2002, p. 106).

BHS school leaders provide multicultural resources, student activities, and classroom lessons to help teachers better engage DE&I practices. Such consumable and premade *multicultural* activities lack authentic culturally responsive teaching practices that transcend consciousness of, regard for, and general appreciation of racial and ethnic differences because diversity is on a gradient, “members of the same group can still have different values [and] express similar values in various ways” (Gay, 2002, p. 107). According to Hammond (2014), culturally responsive teaching does not come from redoing lesson plans in every subject, however, it is a mindset; a way of thinking, that fosters flexibility within teaching. Access to resources and a few DE&I-focused professional learning opportunities is insufficient as teachers seem to struggle to engage in culturally responsive teaching. Developing a quality DE&I understanding at BHS that is culturally responsive, is imperative so that BHS instructional and non-instructional faculty can identify and counter inequity that especially impacts students and faculty of color). Doing so is two-fold, as it authentically upholds the BHS diversity statement and

positions all community members (especially those of color) to learn and work in an environment that values diverse identities and cultures.

### **Justification of the Problem**

Diversity statements are often created in response to social, political, or financial crises. In the United States, after the Spring of 2020, many institutions sought to create diversity statements to appear empathetic towards the experiences of people of color. To showcase its position on equity and inclusion, BHS, like many other institutions, revamped or created diversity statements. A diversity statement is often a shared organizational “exercise in making implicit intentions and values explicit” that includes elements of social justice, diversity, equality, equity, and inclusion (Fuentes, 2021, p.6). These diversity statements frequently tout abundant promises of fairness and belonging for all but often fail to do so. They suggest hope, liberty, and the value of differences while idealizing the actual organizational culture and climate that perpetuates bias and institutional conflict (Carnes, Fine, & Sheridan, 2019).

One core belief of the BHS diversity statement asserts students find strength in diversity and commit to learning from each other. A second suggests BHS creates an inclusive community that cultivates cultural competence. The BHS mission asserts it is a school that prepares students for future success as global leaders because BHS values differences. This mission statement uses language suggestive of an organization that creates inclusive learning environments where all students are ready to achieve their potential, savor life, and meet the challenges of the world. To uphold the diversity statement, BHS holds affinity group meetings. According to Blitz and Kohl (2012), the term affinity group is used to describe commonalities among individuals based on their

race, gender, profession, or special interests; it provides a space in which the members can explore issues of shared identity and social experience (p. 480). Affinity groups are structured to affirm the emotional and intellectual responses of being a part of a distinct subset of BHS with the goal of its participants developing connections with peers within the BHS learning community.

During the spring semester of the 2020 and 2021 school years, two affinity group meetings were held on campus. The meeting invitation was extended to middle school students in grades five through eight who self-identify as students of color. A student of color is a student who identifies as Black or African American, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, and, or multiple races. More than 40 BHS students attended. Throughout the meeting, the students were asked to share their perspectives on life at BHS. Many students believe BHS curricula and classroom assignments are insensitive to their identity. Black or African American students reported being called racial epithets and slurs by their peers. The students of color stated each has had monthly, weekly, and, or daily instances in which they were mistreated, discriminated against, and or ridiculed (jokes, comments, pranks, etc.) because of their ethnic and racial identity, by their peers. One student of Asian descent stated, "My first-time experiencing racism was at BHS."

The BHS student experiences sit in direct contrast to the school's 'reimagined' diversity statement. Such accounts directly violate the BHS diversity statement and contradict the school's designation as an inclusive learning community. When the students' lived experiences fail to reflect the institution's mission, there is the misalignment and simultaneous complicity in perpetuating racism while injuring student

outcomes. The incongruence between statements and experiences indicates reasoning this study needs to be done.

## **Deficiencies**

An aspirational BHS diversity statement coupled with harmful accounts from BHS students highlights deficiencies among faculty within the campus, and around DE&I practices, teaching, and learning at BHS. As biases (unfair judgment of others), discrimination (individual and institutional denial of justice and fairness), and hate crimes increase among American elementary, middle, and high schools, researchers found these incidents are not discussed in schools because doing so can be unsettling, uncomfortable, and can lead to political divide (Cabral, Gordon, & Leighninger, 2018).

It is challenging for educators to even begin the conversation about diversity because often what educators know about the DE&I is “based on superficial or distorted information conveyed through popular culture, mass media, and critics” (Gay, 2002, p.107). Some BHS educators teach in their classrooms, without the necessary tools and resources so they can fulfill their responsibility to critically respond and implement culturally competent instructional practices at BHS. BHS educators have not learned “how to convert [their teaching standards] into culturally responsive curriculum designs and instructional strategies (Gay, 2002, p. 108). For a variety of unique reasons connected to White normativity, power and privilege, discomfort, unfamiliarity, and unawareness, wholly altering experiences related to diversity have been challenging. Students continue to attend BHS while equity and inclusion are not fully actualized.

Some tools and resources have been created to help individuals address DE&I issues. *Courageous Conversations about Race* is promoted as a field guide to help



achieve equity in schools (Singleton, 2014). *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People* is another familiar resource that suggested all people carry biases based on race, gender, age, and nationality and if these biases are recognized, individuals may act or treat others more fairly (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016). These two works represent examples of how DE&I gaps and supports have been addressed in the literature; although helpful, the works' descriptions come from a macro level. Large-scale descriptors miss tangible measures that specifically address the needs of the BHS learning community. The deficiencies call for BHS leaders to support educators to expand curriculum, teaching, and learning. Developing relevant and engaging classroom teaching experiences that are reflective of current social, political, emotional, and world issues, and responsive to the needs of learning experiences with racially and ethnically diverse perspectives ensures the BHS diversity statement is no longer misaligned with the student experience and school culture.

### **Audience**

American schools were built in a system that grants inherent power and privilege to Whiteness; understanding these factors can play a critical role in recognizing the internal school biases and traditions that negatively impact students. Over seventy percent of BHS faculty members self-identify as White. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2020 annual report, 52% of today's schools come from a diverse racial or ethnic background, but about 80% of the school educator workforce is White. This is important considering recent racial tension, socially and politically. The social tension surrounding race played a role in BHS faculty being encouraged to start their cultural competence journey. Intending to adjust to the cultural shifts across

America, BHS's road began with foundational support and aid. What BHS faculty initially perceived as a personal decision (DE&I and cultural competence work), was now deemed an expectation, from BHS leadership. BHS faculty are held responsible for and frequently required to deliver instruction about topics of culture and diversity.

Some BHS faculty feel uncomfortable and ill-prepared and school staff and administrators experience challenges regarding DE&I issues at BHS. The feelings of discomfort and being uninformed can resort in stakeholders utilizing curriculum, and instructional practices and carrying out school traditions devoid of DE&I principles. The results do not recognize curriculum designs and academic practices that strengthen cultural competence (Gay, 2002). BHS faculty and leaders play a key role in influencing future students to be tolerant and inclusive. If BHS community members hold identities, express beliefs, and initiate organizational actions that violate the BHS diversity statement, they thwart their opportunity to support DE&I principles. BHS stakeholders need support in understanding how to recognize and respond to inequity, so their classrooms and the community begin to authentically represent the BHS diversity statement.

### **Overview of Framework and Research Questions**

This research used a conceptual framework and model for assessing cultural competence based on the work of Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Isaacs (1989). Understanding the six cultural proficiency indicators coupled with the guiding principles of cultural proficiency (Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, Terrell, and Lindsey, 2019) gave a practical assessment of BHS faculty and their cultural competency. It was used as a tool to assess the BHS faculty and their teaching and learning practices to recognize if their

classrooms are places that honor differences. Knowing the guiding principles was critical to ensuring they were prepared to address the needs of the BHS community. Cross et al. (1989) utilized six descriptors in the cultural competence continuum. Beginning with culturally destructive and progressing to culturally proficient, the continuum categorizes habits and practices that can be connected to each position on the continuum. As BHS faculty identify the principles along the cultural competence continuum they most associate with, the indicators provide BHS faculty with a sense of areas they may be developing tolerance and acceptance of diverse identities and perspectives. This allows BHS faculty to begin observing their cultural competence awareness so that the BHS educator's beliefs surrounding DE&I can be reflected in theory and practice.

There are six competency indicators and corresponding descriptions, which provide some examples of incidents that have been observed or reported at BHS. The Cultural Competence Continuum begins with, Cultural Destructiveness (1) this is signified by, for example, members of White supremacist groups or colleagues targeting teachers of color. Stage two is, Cultural Incapacity (2) a person here might use language like "Liberal tears," make demeaning and insensitive comments towards students or colleagues or suggest "I didn't say the N-word, it was just a part of the song." The third stage is Cultural Blindness (3). Individuals here suggest "All Lives Matter," could say "We don't have *those* kinds of students here," or express "We have a lot of highly educated teachers of color." Fourth is Cultural Pre-competence (4). Examples of this include posting a "we stand in solidarity" blog, reacting to recent news and creating a new diversity statement, or visitors characterizing the school as welcoming. Cultural Competence (5), is indicative of educators, including "untold stories" within teaching

curricula, a celebration of differences, or working with and learning from students and teachers of diverse identities and backgrounds. Cultural Proficiency (6), is grounded in creating an inclusive environment (spaces purposefully created with differences in mind), having people of color in leadership who initiate organizational change, or using an anti-bias and anti-racist curriculum across all grade levels.

### **Three Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency**

According to Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, Terrell, and Lindsey (2019), a guiding principle of cultural competency is, “Culture is a predominant force; one cannot not have culture” (p. 8.2). Culture lies at the very foundation of every living thing. It surfaces when a mother wakes from an evening nap to check on her child who has not returned home from their after-school activity. Culture is present when a first-generation high school senior is accepted to each of their top college picks. It is alive the moment someone struggles to complete an application printed in English. Dismissing the notion that culture is always present or minimizing culture only to be attributed to the color of someone’s skin, dilutes the reality of culture being a perpetual force that never goes away.

Culture encompasses a myriad of descriptors that each hold individual nuance. Lindsey et al. (2019) described culture as complex because it includes knowledge, views, art, rules, principles, customs, and any other abilities and routines a member of society holds. It is “everything you believe and everything you do that enables you to identify with people who are like you and that distinguishes you from people who differ from you” (p. 29). Culture, most commonly groups people based on their geographic, lingual, historical, or physical attributes. These commonalities are then juxtaposed with the

dominant culture which sets others apart and highlights differences. Paris and Alim (2014) suggested dominant American culture and programmatic academic achievement are rooted in middle-class White norms, cemented by centuries of oppression and marginalization. Their analyses furthermore identified the use of these notions to assess the educational experiences of students from diverse backgrounds as a fallacy (p. 86). Interrupting the standard where Whiteness and wealth adjacent culture is dominant, and those who sit closest to its boundaries hold the most access to power and privilege, is key. Disrupting this paradigm is an arduous and necessary shift. Developing the skills to recognize one's own cultural identity and simultaneously valuing the makeup of those who differ is the first step towards building awareness and redefining culture to not just be different, but representative of inclusivity and diversity.

Lindsey et al. (2019) stated "Diversity within cultures is vast and significant" (p. 82). Understanding culture in such an immense way can be challenging because it requires a significant degree of distinction. Often, people are most comfortable when the people and things around them are not different. and. We routinely categorize, classify, compare, and contrast people to ensure they are where they *should* be. The system has affixed boxes in which those who are a part of the dominant culture easily fit. McIntosh (1988) explained White privilege, "I could think of myself as belonging in major ways and of making social systems work for me. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms" (p. 4). This mindset is problematic because it encapsulates singular traits and regards individuals from a unidimensional view while perpetuating the idea that whiteness is most valuable. Systems that highlight absolute identifiers miss the nuances of individuality. Their presence

solidifies the need for systemic disruption to recognize intersectionality. Hankivsky (2014) explained, “Intersectionality rejects the idea that human lives can be reduced into separate categories such as gender, race, and class” (p. 255). This means various qualities contribute to human identity and human experiences. Acknowledging these variables and compounding them to include individual needs, provides a platform to appreciate the greatness of diversity within cultures.

Lindsey et al. (2019) specified, “The school system must incorporate cultural knowledge into practice and policymaking” (p.82). Reynolds (2018) noted inclusive leaders play a key role in assisting stakeholders in their pursuit of cultural competence. They “bring awareness and clarity to problem areas, they practice courageous accountability to help resolve those problems, they empower others, and they foster innovative collaboration to unlock the unique contributions of each person in a group” (p. 3). Teachers who lack cultural competence can miss this opportunity with students and open space to deliver instruction and demonstrate behavior that perpetuates bias, and racism based on others’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Matias, 2013). Unaware teachers hinder student learning experiences because learning is not facilitated through a multiple-perspective or authentic approach. Silverman (2010) found that when cultural competency-based professional development is a priority for teachers, it affects their sense of effectiveness, accountability, and support for differences. This does not happen immediately but is paved over time as teachers engage in “a lifelong process of increasing self-awareness, developing social skills and behaviors around diversity, and gaining the ability to advocate for others” (Guzman, 2016, p. 1). Teachers who are equipped to build resources that increase their cultural competence, prepare themselves

and their students to cultivate inclusive learning environments. The school becomes a place where all stakeholders access and participate in ongoing professional development that addresses anti-bias language and facilitates diverse curricula and pedagogy to address real-world issues of injustice and inequity, so all feel like they belong.

Learning institutions exercise practices that impact student outcomes. Its actions can prepare or hamper the educators' capacity to provide spaces and experiences that enable students and staff to effectively engage concepts related to diversity and to provide an equitable school culture and climate. All should be able to work together as educators promote and value differences. Building cultural competence among educators ensures positive social-emotional well-being and increased academic outcomes. Faculty members are better equipped to access equitable resources and deliver appropriate strategies so that all have a sense of belonging.

### **Introduction to the Research Questions**

The research questions for this study were designed to bring forward indicators of BHS educator practices and how their cultural competency impacts the BHS community. In addition, it sought to discover ways BHS leadership can support educators with DE&I and in their ability to build equity-oriented classrooms across the BHS campus. The research design provided conceptual and practical implications for affecting BHS school culture so that the BHS diversity statement was more reflective of the daily experiences of students. Examining three guiding principles of cultural proficiency and analyzing culturally proficient indicators sets this research study to observe the individual practices and experiences of educators and to discover how these determinants impact students and classrooms. The primary question considered was: *What are the strengths, opportunities,*

*and barriers to BHS achieving its commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion? Two ancillary research questions included: What are BHS faculty' experiences and practices related to diversity, equity, and inclusion? And what is helping or hindering BHS faculty's ability to fully actualize the BHS diversity statement?*

This research study explored Whiteness (Yancy, 2021), traits related to the Cultural Competency Continuum (Cross, et al., 2019), and guiding principles of cultural competency (Lindsey, et al., 2019). These perspectives were expounded on through thematic analysis, a survey, and semi-structured interviews. The outcomes distinguished the aspirations of grand mission statements from the lived realities of the school culture and climate. Learning institutions with educators who avoid DE&I issues in their classroom open space to perpetuate White supremacy and inflict educational malpractice on the students of color they serve.

### **Limitations**

This action research study paired qualitative and quantitative data collected through a survey, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis. There are limitations within the research. One, participation in the study was limited to current educators at BHS and lacks generalizability. The educators at the school are predominately White and BHS is a private school, solely funded by donations and tuition payments. Many of the teachers have spent their careers at BHS and showcase a personal attachment to the organization and its history. Two, there is a measure of resistance BHS faculty may feel to participate in the research. BHS faculty may be reluctant to participate if they feel they could receive consequences because of any personal bias or prejudice deduced from the surveys or semi-structured interviews. Three, there is a great likelihood of social



desirability ideas. Social desirability refers to the tendency for participants to give the socially desirable response as opposed to choosing the response that accurately reflects their true feelings or position on an issue (Grimm, 2010). In this case, BHS faculty may choose responses that portray them and their teaching practices as culturally competent, although they, and or their practices may be culturally destructive. And four, research on cultural competency and DE&I is consistently evolving. As a result, this research is not all-encompassing and is unable to address every factor and consideration necessary to impact educator practices and school culture and climate.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Whiteness is dominant in America. It gives fundamental power and privilege to those who hold and value it. Yancy (2018) emphasized Whiteness is “implicated in a complex web of racist power relationships... [filled with] heteronomous webs of White practices [that] are linked both as a beneficiary and as co-contributor to such practices” (p. 75). For some, Whiteness is systemic, immoral, and should be corrected. Others see Whiteness, as a traditional way of life that people should talk about less often. The findings of this research identified three contributing factors that support inequitable organizational culture. First, organizations are structured to value Whiteness over diversity. Next, organizational leaders have not built cultural awareness and competence skills for the organization or its employees. Last, organizational leaders miss the opportunity to build culturally competent stakeholders by responding too quickly and without a comprehensive plan to address DE&I issues.

## **Racial Identity and Attitudes**

Helms (2017) defined Whiteness as “the overt and subliminal socialization processes and practices, power structures, laws, privileges, and life experiences that favor the White racial group over all others” (p. 718). It is considerably entangled with racism, which has continued to surface and permeate within American society (Helms, 1990, p. 207) When Whiteness is ignored or disregarded it lessens the individual’s ability to develop positive ideas of Whiteness. It begins to create individuals who are unaware of the definitive privileges and traits of Whiteness. Racism exists in three faculties (individual, institutional, and cultural) which situate non-White people as inferior and subordinate to those who are White (Helms, 1990). Organizational leaders must recognize the individual, institutional, and cultural bias towards Whiteness to develop stakeholders with a “healthy White identity,” create structures that foster equity, and promote a climate in which differences are valued. Leaders must also support their White stakeholders so they can move away from their racial bias. These actions will increase the capacity to connect with people from diverse backgrounds and counter the “pervasive socialization towards racism” (Helms, 1990, p. 211).

Edwards (2017) stated that while considerations of institutional racism, White privilege, and microaggressions are growing, their impact is still debated among U.S. citizens. 1999’s “Stephen Lawrence Inquiry” set a precedent for defining institutional racism as, “the collective failure of organizations” to provide appropriate and professional service to people from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds (Cluny, Cook, and Stone, 1999 p. 49). It surfaces through procedures, outlooks, and actions and matures into “discrimination through prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and

stereotyping” (Cluny, Cook, and Stone, 1999 p. 49). White privilege is the set of social and economic advantages that White people have, by virtue of their race, in a culture characterized by racial inequality (Jewel, 2020). Microaggressions are daily (overt and covert), deliberate or unintended, comments, ideas, behaviors, or suggestions that communicate bias toward historically marginalized groups (Limbong, 2020). Racism and its derivatives have polarized many communities, organizations, and spaces. There are divisions among the people because of differing beliefs, experiences, and definitions of racism.

Brookfield (2019) questioned if racial identity connects to culture, and not biology “Why focus on any form of racial markers? Doesn’t this constant harping on race create unnecessary divisions and stop us all from getting along?” (Brookfield, 2019, p. 52). Race can feel controversial and borderline pervasive for some people; but as Lawrence and Tatum (1998) noted, this is because race and racism are infused within every social institution. Whiteness is woven into systems and is synonymous with power, structural inequality, cultural blindness, intentional exclusion, and brutality toward humans (Brookfield, 2019). It created “White normativity” which situated Whiteness as the measure of what is moral, right, and acceptable in society (Brookfield, 2019, p.54).

### **Cultural Awareness and Competence within Organizations**

Some individuals argue issues involving “prejudice, racism, sexism, heterosexism, gender bias, and ethnocentrism would go away if we would just stop talking about them” (Edwards, 2017, p. 5). They hold sentiments that the problem is not structural discrimination and -isms but rather society’s preoccupation with injustice and intolerance. The existence and residual trauma from enslavement forced relocation,

assimilation, sterilization, and aversive therapies illustrate the unethical and intentional efforts individuals have made for ideas of Whiteness to remain superior (Edwards, 2017). Actions and attitudes as such oppress and marginalize people of color and satiate those with superior ideals of Whiteness to find racism and discriminatory ideation admissible. For this study, marginalized describes relegated groups or communities who have been denied full access to cultural, social, political, and economic arenas (Reierson and Littlefield, 2012).

Quinn and Stewart (2019) explained the racial makeup of schools continues to diversify as some school student populations have become the majority. While classrooms become more representative of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, the teachers serving these students remain predominantly White. Consequently, the racial attitude of educators can vastly differ from the outlooks of those they serve. Racial attitudes include acceptable views, stigma, associations, and beliefs about race (Quinn & Stewart, 2019, p.2). They encompass prejudiced thoughts people have towards different racial groups. Quinn and Stewart (2019) expounded that “incongruent racial attitudes across racial lines between educators and students can affect student and teacher relationships and classroom conversations about race and racism” (Quinn & Stewart, 2019, p. 7). As a result, leaders must be innovative to raise awareness around problematic attitudes and beliefs that propel Whiteness and harm students, including White students (Quinn & Stewart, 2019, p. 25).

DeCuir-Gunby, Allen, and Boone (2020) recollected a story about a high school social studies teacher hosting a White nationalist podcast. During the podcast, the teacher announced people of color were inferior. The host encouraged listeners and teachers to

infuse more White nationalist beliefs into their schools so that perceptions of societal racism can be minimized. They studied 159 predominately White pre-service teachers and examined their relationship with color-blind racial attitudes, emotion regulation, and psychological inflexibility with stigmatizing thoughts about race. The podcast host presented another example of how “racial ideology, emotions, and racial beliefs [cannot be separated from] professional contexts” (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020, p. 1). While the host resigned from teaching, before being removed by district officials, this exemplifies how race ideology and actions matter. The way individuals think about race impacts their ability to appropriately respond with empathy and consideration of others. DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2020) found a relationship between color-blind ideology and psychological inflexibility. This understanding is imperative to realizing how Whiteness can impact the way individuals interact with each other, inside and outside of their workplace.

Miller and Harris (2018) described how often educators who work with students of color deem their classrooms progressive. The teachers work in environments with students from diverse backgrounds and are unable to discern how Whiteness manifests in their classroom routines, in their curriculum and instruction, and their school’s culture and climate. This oblivion is continuously evidenced by the years of research in which theorists maintain education is an oppressive tool that has been used to teach students of color that their culture is subservient to Whiteness (Woodson, 1933; Freire, 1970; Hooks, 2001; Kohli, 2008). Whiteness idealism permeates the school systems and school leaders have done little to tackle the residual effects of racism. As the decades pass, achievement gaps widen, dropout rates increase, disproportionate referrals for discipline infractions multiply and special education services increase for students of color (Miller & Harris,

2018, p. 1). Overall, experiences for students with diverse backgrounds, especially students who are Black or African American or below the poverty line, show a large disinterest and disengagement in school matters (Miller & Harris, 2018, p. 1).

### **Recognizing and Addressing DE&I Issues**

Borsheim-Black (2018) reasoned a leader's ideas of Whiteness can subvert their ability to recognize racism and address it. An anecdotal account recalled a teacher attempting to provide a contemporary context for the existence of racism by showing their class a picture. The photo showcased a cartoon with monkey-like police officers pointing shotguns toward a clever rabbit whose fingers cause the bullets to backfire on the officers. The teacher initiated a class discussion:

Teacher: What do you see happening?

Student: I'm pretty sure they're in blackface because of the gunpowder. You know, like you can draw anything now and people will find a way to think that it's racist.

Teacher: Absolutely. You could look at this and argue that it's not racist because they're the ones who look like idiots. You could take it either way.

Such exchanges have transpired in many spaces and suggest a belief that racism is subjective. Proposing racism is a symptom of individuals being "overly sensitive or too politically correct" (Borsheim-Black, 2017, p. 229). This experience is twofold. One, it showcases instructional unawareness. The teacher was unable to recognize the historical implications of the picture. An image depicting violence, unlawful behavior, animalistic traits, and boisterous gestures plays into many of the stereotypical discriminatory traits that have been associated with Black people and Black culture for years. The teacher also

missed the opportunity to facilitate authentic discourse with the students. When leaders are aware and can recognize the historical implications of the activities or materials they share with their followers, they can build a directive force, by influencing how members comprehend current events and proposed responses (Salter, 2021, p. 29). This incident and response signify an internal conflict that perpetuates racial distortion. The teacher's perceptions of race hindered their instructional capacity and "undermined [the] attempt to teach about racism." The original goal of utilizing classrooms as effective places to procure "productive antiracist pedagogies" was derailed (Borsheim-Black, 2017, p. 229).

Discussions, situations, and environments where diversity is criticized can trigger "defensive emotions of fear, anger, and guilt" (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020, p. 3). The conversations can balloon and manifest through quarreling, evading, and silence among members of the organization. Defending Whiteness becomes a futile attempt to "reinstate White racial equilibrium and protect standards of Whiteness" (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020, p. 3). Leaders can often be unaware of such interactions and the harmful effects color-blind perceptions and discriminatory actions have on people of color. The experiences render emotional irregularities that stigmatize the individual's thoughts about race (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020, p. 9-10).

Schools attempt to address race-based issues within the campus' school culture and climate by implementing multicultural professional development and education (Miller & Harris, 2018, p.1). This minimal and often reactionary effort falls short as it takes ill-advised action and employs an unsuccessful bat at a Situational Leadership Approach. Hershey and Blanchard (1969) developed this widely utilized leadership approach. The Situational Leadership Approach explains that leaders are not cemented to

a particular performance level indicator, because leadership is action-based and surfaces in situations (Northouse, 2019, p. 95). A situation might require the leader to be more directive or more supportive. When this happens, the actions of the leader are determined by the circumstances, as opposed to being predetermined because of their individual and personal traits.

Instead of addressing race-related concerns and issues of diversity and inclusion from a reactionary and situational approach, organizations might consider focusing on opportunities leaders can foster to increase community inclusion. Research indicates a substantial link between DE&I progress and leadership involvement (Bardhan and Gower, 2020). According to Balta (2015), if organizations are going to fully actualize diversity missions, top leaders need to create spaces where all members of the community are respected and accepted. Van Camp (2012) noted although it may be hard to evaluate, leaders who engage in DE&I initiatives are helpful to themselves and the organization.

Whiteness, cultural incompetence, and prejudiced acts can infiltrate the culture and climate of learning communities. Since Whiteness is tethered to systemic racism and oppression, if faculty begin to account for immortalizing Whiteness, the repair might ignite a new paradigm for their learning environments. Many transformational educators agree, that as Bennet (2019) noted, “trust” is essential to creating connections when groups are divided. This process begins by establishing relational trust. Relational trust is created when collaborators mutually reciprocate respect, fulfill responsibilities, care for one another, show integrity, and are accountable (Bennet, 2019, p. 4). Over time, through open dialogue and discussion, “the fostering of relational trust [through] difficult



conversations can lead to better racial awareness” inside White normative and White dominant spaces. (Bennet, 2019, p. 9).

### **Action Research Design and Methods**

This schoolwide action research study explored factors in BHS school culture, including mission alignment, educator teaching practices, and cultural competence. These ideas also incorporated equity-oriented classroom indicators. It is important to note that this study was not meant to predict a cause-and-effect relationship between Whiteness ideology and cultural competency, rather it documented BHS educator practice and informed BHS leadership. It was intended that these elements (documentation of BHS educator practices and information for BHS leadership) be used as tools to impact the student experience and promote the values of the BHS diversity statement. Analyzing cultural proficiency and its indicators and guiding principles set this research to observe the individual practices and experiences of BHS faculty and reviewed its impact on students, classrooms, and school culture. The primary question considered in this schoolwide action research was:

- What are the strengths, opportunities, and barriers to BHS achieving its commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Two ancillary research questions were:

- What are BHS faculty's experiences and practices related to diversity, equity, and inclusion?
- What is helping or hindering BHS faculty’s ability to fully actualize the BHS diversity statement?

This study used a qualitative approach to record, analyze, and understand the instructional outlooks of BHS non-instructional and instructional faculty members. A qualitative research approach was chosen so the needs of the BHS community could be supported through documented academic literature. Qualitative research commonly focuses on the voices of those engaging in the research (called participants) which allows for a more in-depth understanding of their experiences, in comparison to quantitative research—which regards participants as subjects (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This feature of qualitative research supported BHS stakeholders to engage in the research personally and professionally.

According to Hesse-Biber (2017), this qualitative research design explored the ethnographic implications of BHS faculty who have been urged to facilitate DE&I teaching and learning practices in the classroom. Using an ethnographic framework captured language, behavior, and belief indicators that paint a portrait of how some think or feel about race at BHS (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The research sought to identify the resources BHS faculty presently hold. How these factors connected to ideas of Whiteness and the school climate the educators work in provided a baseline for determining if and how BHS faculty are upholding the BHS mission. Utilizing a schoolwide action research approach, the conceptual framework and model that assessed the BHS educators' cultural competence was based on Cross et al. (1989) system of care. This schoolwide action research involved data derived from survey results and semi-structured interviews which addressed alignment to the BHS diversity statement. Utilizing a qualitative approach with quantitative features to collect data including a survey and semi-structured interviews, this study engaged a critical examination of educators, their

backgrounds, their habits, their instructional practices, and their cultural reflections on school. It gathered quantitative data from surveys and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. This study did not implement a mixed methodology approach. However, it applied a qualitative methodology with a quantitative component. The survey was solely used to provide information on the educators' stance on equity and diversity concerning their experiences with students and their specific perspectives of campus DE&I. Semi-structured interviews was conducted to gain a better understanding of educator teaching practices and how/if they recognize equitable methodologies within their classrooms and among their students.

### **Site and Population Selection**

Situated at the suburban edge of the Arrowhead and the Yellowstone Mountains, the Bowers Hollow School (pseudonym BHS), is one of twenty private schools in the valley. Private schools are tuition-based institutions funded by tuition payments, charitable contributions, and organization donations as opposed to government-funded ones. BHS is a non-sectarian, non-profit school offering students in preschool through eighth grade a tuition-based education. It is home to approximately 700—students (550), faculty (100), and staff (50) members. Over seventy percent of BHS faculty members self-identify as White. The approximately 100 faculty members that have direct interactions with BHS students from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade made up this research's convenient sampling of research participants. To gain access to these stakeholders, I partnered with the school's leadership administration team. Using a short video recording, the BHS faculty members were informed of the purpose of the project, and they were allowed to freely participate in the research.

## **Researcher Role & Positionality**

Although I was born and raised in an urban community where nearly a quarter of high school seniors would not graduate, being college and career ready was an enduring goal. One of my most proud accomplishments came from earning acceptance into higher education. This feat was pivotal because I knew the opportunity would open doors to make a difference in others' lives. After nine years as a classroom teacher and two degrees later, I quickly realized my reach for change, within a school year, was only impacting 30-40 students at a time, and I wanted to do more. I noticed students consistently experiencing academic, cultural, and social struggles and found teachers were not equipped with the necessary skill sets to address their students' expansive needs. This realization was further compounded when I observed teachers turning to school leaders, who too lacked the competencies to support.

Private schools, like BHS, operate on accrued funds from individuals and organizations. They self-determined the school philosophy, mission, financials, and board of trustees' proprietorship to create a fully functioning business—complete with its members, culture, and traditions. As a previous faculty member of BHS for three years, hearing accounts of race-based mistreatment from my students and colleagues was distressing. This coupled with some exclusionary practices of administrators and teachers made BHS feel more. Reported and purported, culturally unaware instructional practices and daily situations that devalued the identity and culture of people of color (and those who looked like me), were a challenging, first-hand affair. The lingering harm to people with diverse backgrounds, and specifically the hurt that was felt as a black woman within a predominantly white private school, resulted in recognizing tangible signs of

misalignment with a bold *diversity* mission. Personal experiences and shared accounts provided significant motivation for the researcher to assist BHS with its diversity efforts. I did not want other Black, Indigenous, or People of Color across the United States, who work in or attend a predominately white private school, to have their identities disgraced. I languished with the thought of another student realizing and later reporting their first encounter with racism was at their school. I wanted to support BHS with its diversity goals, so I partnered with the faculty and school leaders to begin the research process and listened to voices within the BHS community as they shared their experiences and perspectives surrounding DE&I at BHS. I recognized it has taken over two decades for BHS to become the notable learning institution it is today, so I and my research solely aimed to act as another step on their road towards becoming a school that authentically reflects DE&I values.

The researcher's epistemology connects to a critical outlook. This approach considers systems and humanity (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). According to Bell (1980, 2004) even when race is denied, race is an ever-present factor in society. Freire (1970) described major conditions of humanity, and particularly in education, these factors are grounded in race, class, and economic sustainability. Western judicial systems were built on frameworks in which universal principles about the human capacity to rationalize are applied across all situations, and create a context for today's rules of law, fairness, justice, and absolutes. It "serves as a foundation for legal practice" (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016, p. 12). This ideology is inherent to education systems that base success on a student's ability to fit into a set norm and follow the rules. This study brings forth a significant concern when students and professionals disrupt norms, break traditions, and

join predominately White spaces. These ideas beget critical research thought, “How can people thrive in a system created to favor some above others?”

Considering if educators address or ignore topics of diversity with students of color reveals bias. This bias may cause individuals to immediately think educators purposefully ignore topics of race because they do not value the history and experiences of their students who are not white. This idea can be somewhat presumptive because it situates the “people of color’s experiences” in one space as demonstrative of the experiences of all, regardless of their culture, identity, nationality, class, or race (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 27). Discounting race is a preemptive habit of educators who sustain Whiteness idealism in their practices and these conventions contribute to the experiences surrounding race in the classroom (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 92). Understanding that all educators hold individual lenses requires a critical methodology to authentically capture the participants’ ideas of BHS culture and climate surrounding DE&I.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion sit at the foundation of the researcher’s investigation of the BHS educator experience at focus. Bell and Freire’s ideas have greatly contributed to the researcher’s approach to the current study as they are rooted in individual and interpersonal social justice advocacy. To discover accurate meaning, understanding, and increased probability of change; a concurrent consideration of the distinct qualities of people, a reflection of definitive societal aspects, and a thorough consideration of the judiciary elements at play, all need to be examined (Slater, Fain, & Rosatto, 2002). Predominantly white private schools like BHS must exercise the effort to discover and acknowledge the experiences of all community members, especially those with diverse cultural and racial backgrounds to recognize the strengths, opportunities, and

barriers in realizing their mission and vision, to have statements shift from aspiration to actual practice.

### **Data Collection Method**

Data provides valuable information often leading to an understanding of phenomena (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). BHS faculty members completed a survey to determine the trends among the educator population. The questionnaire provided a means for participants to self-report their experiences and descriptions of their understanding of equity-oriented practices in their classroom (see Appendix E). The survey was adapted from the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Incorporated Equity Audit (Greenburch & Shaffer, 2021). The MAEC equity audit tracks key indicators of an equitable classroom and aids in recognizing inequity within multiple target areas. The audit was used to uncover strengths, opportunities, and barriers to living up to the aspirations and commitments of the BHS mission statement.

The MAEC equity audit applied the student funds of knowledge approach and identified outside resources to define diverse tools, strategies, and methods educators should engage in their classrooms. The instrument addresses various instructional strategies that can be implemented to better meet the individual learning needs and backgrounds of students. The assessment uses a Likert-type quality response to assess faculty in 9 equity-oriented areas using a “yes, no or needs improvement” protocol. It addresses instructional practices the educator uses in the classroom.

### ***Schoolwide Action Research Survey***

Convenient sampling was used to gain participants. I first shared the study with BHS’s leadership administration team members. I created a short research introductory

video via email, and it was viewed during a scheduled professional learning time. At the video's close, the researcher shared a Google survey link to gauge the general interest and faculty members. A BHS leadership team member emailed BHS faculty members with a link to the video and an invitation to participate. The invitation to participate described the proposed schoolwide action research study, stated the research would take place, and requested the free participation of BHS faculty if desired. After the survey, an interest list was generated, and the researcher offered a ten to fifteen-minute general meeting via Zoom to participants to explain the procedures and expectations of completing the survey and conducting the study. Building rapport casually, yet intentionally, reassured BHS faculty that their perspectives and responses would be used ethically. This effort began with the researcher describing the study and the connection the researcher has with the work and with acknowledging any reservations and limitations participants may have. The researcher's main sentiment encouraged BHS faculty to be as honest as possible.

The BHS faculty (adult participants) freely consented to participate by completing a research participation consent form. This was done before participants were able to begin the schoolwide action research survey. This introductory process was specific to ensuring coercion was not used to force BHS educators to participate in the proposed study. BHS participants were not compensated for their time. When BHS faculty felt ready to participate, the survey window opened for 30 consecutive days. A survey opening email was sent, followed by intermittent survey completion reminders. All participants were contacted via email once the survey was live; and again, when the



survey was completed after three days, seven days, twelve days, sixteen days, twenty days, twenty-four days, thirty days, or until the survey's closure.

The last question of the survey asked BHS faculty if they wanted to take part in a second portion of the schoolwide action research study, by engaging in a one-on-one semi-structured interview. If the participant elected to do so, they disclosed their best contact information and were contacted within a week of initial survey completion. This study intended to collect at least five to seven interview participants from the convenient sample of BHS faculty who expounded on their experiences via one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

### ***Schoolwide Action Research Semi-Structured Interviews***

Based on the survey results, at least five to seven BHS faculty members who expressed interest in being interviewed participated in separate thirty to sixty-minute semi-structured interviews using a personal video conference meeting room through Zoom. I used an interview protocol with the BHS faculty members to engage in semi-structured interviews (see Appendix F). The formal interaction began with reminders of the purpose of the research study, the research questions, consent to participate, and permission to record and transcribe the interview. The one-on-one semi-structured interviews collected data using appropriate open-ended questions. At the start of the interview, I confirmed their responses were secure. I reiterated the questioning would follow a sequence that includes the interview p their identity, anecdotes of classroom experiences, their beliefs, instances when DE&I has had an impact in their classroom, and impressions of BHS's culture and climate concerning equity. Participants were free to ask clarifying questions and encouraged to elaborate on responses to elicit more

information from the interview participant when they had difficulty explaining ideas. At the end of the process, the remaining minutes were used for the interview participant to ask or share any lingering questions and reflections.

The primary method of collecting interview data throughout the study came from recordings conducted in the researcher's video conferencing Zoom room with the option to have the camera off and the participants' names removed, to preserve anonymity. When participants were uncomfortable with this recording method only notetaking was used. Outline method note-taking captured key ideas for the researcher and assisted in curating follow-up questions after the participant responded. The BHS educators' personal and identifiable information was excluded, and or redacted at the end of the interview process. The participant's information was de-identified from the outset of data collection and removed from electronic and paper storage receptacles. For added security, any notes and data were maintained and moved to a locked file cabinet in room 119A of the YES Prep North Forest Secondary campus located at 6602 Winfield Road, Houston, TX 77050. Only the proposed study investigators accessed the file cabinet.

### ***Data Collection Timeline***

Each participant was surveyed once, then after expressing interest, at least five to seven BHS faculty were interviewed a minimum of two times (initial survey, and follow-up one-on-one semi-structured interview) unless they are lost through attrition. The following timeline outlines the data collection steps that were undertaken during the Fall semester of 2022 and the Spring semester of 2023:

1. Mid-September—Initial contact, consent, and survey window open
2. Late September—Survey data collected.

3. Early October—The survey window closes, and one-on-one interviews scheduled.
4. Mid-October—One-on-one interviews conducted.
5. Mid-November—Schoolwide survey and one-on-one interview data reviewed.
6. December—Recommendations drafted.

After data was collected from the survey and semi-structured one-on-one interviews, the data was analyzed and transcribed to identify unique factors, themes, and common trends among the survey and interviews. Following transcription and analysis, the researcher interpreted and discussed the results. Finally, recommendations for BHS faculty and leadership and future research were made.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

The qualitative data analysis of the schoolwide action research was completed based on Cross et al. (1989) conceptual framework of cultural competence. Cross et al. (1989) is rooted in the knowledge, attitude, and skill individuals hold, that contribute to the achievement of cultural competence which includes movement across the continuum. The cultural competence analysis was grounded in assessing and interpreting the data to establish factors that influenced BHS faculty's teaching and learning practices and contributed to their cultural competence. The determination depended on the extent to which DE&I and equity-oriented ideas formed a core theme in the data. It is possible that the collected data may be misaligned with the Cross et al. (1989) framework (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). As Creswell and Guetterman (2019) explained, qualitative research is challenging because oftentimes the data can transform and take shape in ways that differ from the discussed literature--in which case the reference should be abandoned.

## **Quantitative Analysis and Interpretation of Surveys**

A quantitative analysis of the schoolwide action research survey was based on descriptors from the MAEC equity audit. Accessing the Qualtrics Core XM (Experience Management) platform, a survey instrument aligned to the cultural competency continuum (Cross et al., 1989) and the MAEC equity audit (Greenburch & Shaffer, 2021) was created. During analysis, the researcher used straight addition scoring and reverse scoring to report a plausible competency rating based on the BHS faculty's responses for each of the six categories of cultural competence in conjunction with the MAEC equity-audit descriptions. Categories varied from one BHS educator to the next and may change over time, regardless of the perceived consistency of participants' attitudes toward DE&I.

The next analysis phase looked at the schoolwide action research survey outcomes. The results contained information for at least 25 BHS faculty and delivered descriptive statistical analysis of BHS educator instructional practices and individual cultural competence. Using SPSS (version 26) software, frequency statistics were examined for the percentage of BHS faculty who depicted teaching and learning practices, and the perceived cultural competency level of BHS faculty.

## **Qualitative Analysis and Interpretation of Interviews**

An analysis of the semi-structured one-on-one interviews was conducted to find at least five to seven categories among the interviews to determine patterns in the interviews and to form a major idea within the data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This provided details about the interviews and was used to analyze further. After analyzing the interviews for ordinary, unexpected, hard-to-classify, major, and minor themes, the emerging themes underwent a multiple-perspective analysis (Creswell & Guetterman,

2019). A multiple perspectives analysis means that the researcher will provide, “several viewpoints from different individuals and sources of data as evidence for a theme” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 251). This reinforces the importance of conveying the complexity of experiences in qualitative research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

### **Trustworthiness**

To uphold the soundness of the research, three specifications have been distinguished. One, the researcher identifies the type of survey used in the study. Second, the data collection methods are anonymous, avoiding coercive measures, and the participant interviews provide uninfluenced personal accounts (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 161). Finally, this research set out to understand how the racial identity and racial attitudes of educators collide with the climate and culture at a school and impact their ability to address inequity. It is expected to inform others of the perspectives and potential support educators might need to recognize inequity effectively and appropriately. The study data was stored on a password-equipped flash drive and will only be connected to a personal computer when internet access is not accessible to protect the identity of participants.

### **Credibility**

To establish confidence in the findings, participants engage in informal discussions, before a formal interview. The informal discussions provide space to preview the interview questions and establish rapport, so the interview participants feel safe to share their identity, attitudes, and their thoughts on the school’s climate and culture. It helps their guard to be weakened and reservations eased. After the formal semi-structured interviews, each interview participant was given a copy of the interview

recording and the interview transcript. Examples and specific quotes that contributed to the research report were shared, along with the researcher's interpretation of the quote. This routine supported appropriate member checking without overwhelming participants with review material. Participants confirmed the accuracy of their words in comparison to the findings, implications, and conclusions the researcher presented.

### **Transferability**

This research postulates an organizational problem of practice at BHS, but the accounts do not represent the beliefs or practices of all educators who must address DE&I in their classrooms. The findings, however, can be reflective of the experiences of educators who promote ideas of Whiteness in their practices and those who teach within predominantly White spaces since White teachers make up most of the United States teaching workforce. This research is also replicable across other similar predominately White, private, tuition-based Kindergarten through eighth-grade learning institutions in the United States, as it illuminates some common issues that present themselves within this education sector. Miller and Katz (2007) explained the realities organizations encounter to become transformative. Since advances in technology continue, avenues to communicate increase, and communities are diversifying, organizational systems also need to be restructured to appropriately meet evolving needs. Hiring people of color to work in the organization is a rudimentary first step. Large numbers of employees from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds within the space mark a box and change will only come when the organization evolves (Miller & Katz, 2007). An organization's survival is indicative of leadership that guides the organization toward inclusivity (Miller & Katz, 2007). Educators have a role in creating a community in which all members are

valued. It is important to understand how Whiteness shows up within learning communities and recognize how its existence impacts educators. ' This understanding is necessary to address DE&I so that school diversity missions are not contradictory. Allowing leadership teams to become aware of their role in mediating systemic oppression within classrooms creates a democratic school environment (Thomas & Whitburn, 2019).

### **Confirmability**

Being a Black educator in a school of predominantly White educators closely connects me to the problem of practice. As a result of the findings, a delicate consideration of the participants and my research questions needed to be present. There was a simultaneous necessity for a distinct separation from the researcher's beliefs and the interview participants' accounts to diminish the researcher's partiality towards the problem and their professional relationship with White colleagues. An audit trail of the research allows others to process my work and substantiate the results.

### **Dependability**

Merriam and Grenier (2019) noted dependability is reached when the research is conducted, and the findings can be replicated (p. 27). Since this research questions cultural competence and teaching and learning practices, and the personal perception of school culture and climate, it is important to note dependability could be questioned. Because human behavior is unfixed and human experiences are unique to the person's lens, the findings of this research cannot be ethically stated without acknowledging the singular expressions that do not denote the thoughts, attitudes, or beliefs of all educators. Replications of this qualitative research will not yield the same results, but readers can

concur that the implications of the data make sense, and the data is consistent and reliable (p. 28).



## CHAPTER TWO: RESULTS OF RESEARCH

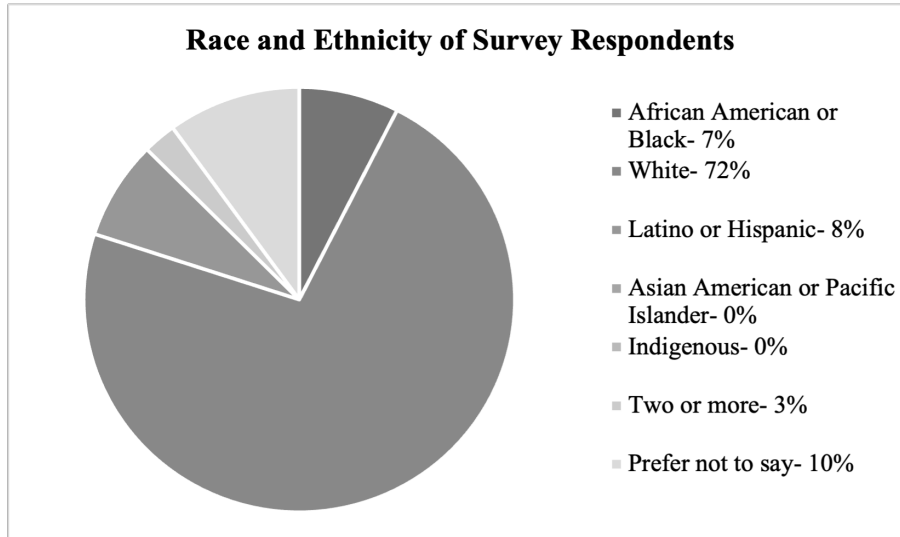
This action research aimed to understand the strengths, opportunities, and barriers to achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion commitments in a predominately white private school. The social and educational challenges BHS faculty and students encountered surrounding DE&I left lasting marks. The observations and instances of discrimination and inequity indicated misalignment between an ambitious BHS diversity statement and the lived experiences of BHS community members. I leveraged Greenburch & Shaffer's (2021) equity audit and Dumlao (2018) guide to engaging community partners, so the BHS faculty were willing to communicate collaboratively, and with minimized, or at least lowered defenses. The equity-oriented open-ended questions and the collaborative communication principles supported a questionnaire and interviews where BHS faculty members articulated their personal DE&I experiences at BHS, to help BHS understand factors that helped or hindered the actualization of the BHS diversity statement.

Based on historical and recent diversity challenges in the BHS community, this research attempted to provide evidence-based recommendations for the BHS leadership team so that they and the BHS faculty could actualize diversity, equity, and inclusion commitments. Overall, the goal was to better understand the strengths, opportunities, and barriers to living out the BHS diversity statement. Using a schoolwide action research survey and one-on-one semi-structured interviews, I gained applicable insight into the perspectives of BHS faculty members in which I evaluated relevant outlooks, rationales, and experiences surrounding DE&I at BHS.

## **Participants**

The total BHS faculty count was 103 members, who were contacted to participate in the study. This study included a total of 51 initial school-wide responses and 40 surveys completed. 11 survey participants voluntarily decided to end their participation. The majority ethnic, or racial background of the 40 survey participants was White (see Figure 1). The primary job roles of the participants included 25 instructional faculty (i.e., lead teacher or learning support) and 15 non-instructional faculty (i.e., school administrator or after-care staff). Eight BHS faculty provided their contact information after the schoolwide survey and volunteered to participate in a one-on-one semi-structured interview. The eight who elected to participate were contacted via email to arrange a one-on-one interview based on their availability. Over the course of six weeks, six semi-structured interviews were successfully conducted with BHS faculty members. One interview participant withdrew their participation, and one party was lost due to attrition. Pseudonyms (see Table 1) were used to protect the identity of the six BHS one-on-one interview participants.

**Figure 1.** Race and ethnicity demographic of schoolwide action research survey respondents.



**Table 1.** Interview participants including pseudonym and role.

Pseudonym	Role
Jack	Non-instructional
Jill	Instructional
Jan	Non-instructional
Joe	Instructional
Dan	Non-instructional
Bob	Non-instructional

### Qualitative Data Collection

Approval to conduct this schoolwide action research study was granted by the University of Dayton institutional review board (IRB) (see Appendix A) and by the BHS Head of School (see Appendix B). The data was collected from BHS instructional and non-instructional faculty members who were current employees of the school and had firsthand interactions with BHS students, faculty, and instructional curriculum. In

collaboration with a member of the school's lead administration team, I created and shared a short video invitation, cordially inviting BHS faculty members to participate in my action research study (see Appendix C). The email, which included a video, an invitation to participate, and an anonymous Qualtrics Core XM (Experience Management) survey link, was first sent to a BHS Administrator (see Appendix D). After additional review by BHS administrators, the schoolwide action research attachments and links were blind copied to 103 BHS faculty members. Of the 103 BHS faculty member population, 40 individuals completed the action research schoolwide survey. Of the 40 participants, eight individuals elected to further participate in one-on-one interviews; six interviews were conveniently scheduled according to the participant's availability and voluntarily conducted. The six one-on-one interview participants corresponded to schedule their meeting date and time; the interview was held via Zoom video conferencing, and participants were provided a copy of the interview protocol. To preserve anonymity: the interviews were scheduled once per day, the participants used a uniquely linked and password-protected Zoom video conference room, and the participants' names were removed with the option to have audio only. The interviews lasted 30-45 minutes and did not exceed the agreed 60-minute commitment. At the start of each interview, I stated their responses were secured and explained the interview questions discussing identity, beliefs, and experiences surrounding DE&I—personally and professionally (at BHS). Participants asked clarifying questions and after the exchange, they gave final reflections and were reminded of the study's privacy and participation safeguards.

## **Credibility**

To establish confidence in the participants' conclusion, the data collected from the survey and the information shared during the interviews were considered within the full context of the participants' original intention. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained research must accurately represent the participants' actual expressions. Using data triangulation, I debriefed with participants, so they could review their recordings. Participants had a chance to question, add or amend their commentary. We collaborated on a summary of their expressions so that key factors, themes, and common trends were aligned with their true position in the research. Each participant confirmed the findings reflected their personal experience at BHS. The findings were not predetermined but resulted from an analytical thematic review process without bias.

## **Confirmability**

To protect the study, careful consideration of my bias, research measures, and connection to the participants was made. I specifically stated my position in the research and previous professional relationships with participants (as a former faculty member at BHS) to create the necessary separation from the researcher's perspective and the participants' accounts. I needed to name these variables as they impact the researcher's epistemology and philosophy concerning the problem at BHS. I conducted the study and presented the results that represented the sole insights of BHS faculty members, and the research methods can be followed and replicated in other predominantly White private schools. The themes from the study were not predetermined but emerged from the insights of the participants using inductive analysis.

## **Dependability**

Merriam and Grenier (2019) noted research dependability increases when the findings of the research are determined and if the study is successfully replicated across other settings with similar contexts. This schoolwide study researched BHS faculty's experiences and questioned how those experiences impact DE&I. Dependability could be questioned because each educator's experience was unique. The findings of this research were ethically stated by acknowledging the singular expressions of the participants do not represent the ideas of all educators. Replications of this qualitative research may not yield mirrored results, but readers and other interested school leaders could agree the findings are consistent and reliable (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). An audit of the research established a detailed methodology, clear evidence, and results, a thorough action plan and implementation strategy, and comprehensive data. I was transparent with my positionality which supported bias reduction and allowed others to recreate the research with reduced bias.

## **Limitations**

Limitations did exist within this schoolwide action research. The MAEC equity audit was a practical tool to suggest classroom and educator indicators of inequity (Greenburch & Shaffer, 2021). Applied in conjunction with the Cross et al. (1989) cultural competence continuum system, the schoolwide action research was useful to discover possible strengths, opportunities, and barriers to actualizing the BHS diversity mission. The instrument was in some ways abstract and convoluted as it targeted numerous areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion. It focused on several aspects and examples of diversity, equity, and inclusion, but it was not an all-encompassing list. In

addition, if utilized incorrectly, the MAEC equity audit and the cultural competency continuum could be unintentionally manipulated as a pseudo-grade book. Applying the MAEC equity audit and the cultural competency continuum in this manner would inadvertently *grade* educators and classrooms on their classroom practices. Spaces and practices could be solely judged resulting in a pass-or-fail mindset. After principles of the cultural competency continuum and the MAEC equity audit were employed in a BHS classroom, there would likely be two results. Solution one, BHS *passed*, the DE&I issues at BHS have been solved, or they no longer exist. Then there is solution two, BHS *failed*, and the community is full of racism.

The audit and competency continuum lack clear next steps following its delivery. Dwyer and Smith (2020) would agree such a black-and-white retort of organizational findings from the audit's questioning halts progress and deviates from the original aims of the MAEC equity audit and cultural competence continuum system. Using this research in isolation, or with the intention to judge classrooms could increase the identification of inequity in a space and provide no clear concept of what the organization should do to address the problem. Since these limits exist, the research should not be emulated as a reporting card or judgment instrument. It should, however, be a flexible means to building cultural awareness within school traditions, while adjusting educator practices, to jumpstart ongoing DE&I work. The MAEC equity audit and the Cross et al. (1989) cultural competence continuum system were individual pieces in a puzzle; critical parts to be adapted, reviewed, and recalibrated at multiple points of the research and beyond to authentically achieve DE&I commitments.

## **Findings**

The schoolwide action research survey included results from 40 BHS participants. The subsequent semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted among 6 BHS non-instructional and instructional faculty members. The survey was distributed using Qualtrics Core XM (Experience Management) software. The interviews were recorded using Zoom video conferencing and transcribed within a password-protected file on my laptop device.

The surveys and the one-on-one interviews supported the assessment and interpretation of how teaching and learning practices have contributed to cultural competence. From diverse viewpoints within the BHS organization, I was able to identify shared trends and unique themes among the data. These ideas are discussed under the following headings: Schoolwide Survey Developments and Insights and Reflections from Interviews. Because these themes emerged as a direct result of the use of The MAEC equity audit and the Cross et al. (1989) cultural competence continuum system, the action research process was validated in the study. The themes were not predetermined. They developed from an inductive analysis in which the themes organically emerged from the perspectives of the participants.

### **Schoolwide Survey Results**

The schoolwide action research survey findings used a qualitative data analysis based on Cross et al. (1989) conceptual framework of cultural competence. The analysis identified an accumulation of indicators (cultural knowledge, understanding, and skills) that move individuals across a cultural continuum. Considering the notion that qualitative research is challenging because data can shift and differs from the discussed literature, I



monitored my positionality and research process to protect the data and the literature that supported it (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Using the collective input of 40 BHS faculty members, I gathered key takeaways from the data in this schoolwide action research to understand the strengths, opportunities, and barriers to BHS succeeding in its DE&I commitments.

Blair-Loy, Wharton, and Goodstein (2011) reported mission statements are a pervasive feature of all businesses in the United States. Like other American organizations, that have a mission statement, 100% of survey participants (40/40) reported BHS has a clear mission and vision statement regarding DE&I. 88% of survey participants (35/40) agreed BHS regularly publishes the DE&I policies and mission statement to staff, students, and families. In addition, 90% of BHS faculty (36/40) agreed BHS constantly monitors DE&I considerations for implementation and makes programmatic modifications when necessary. 88 % of the survey participants (35/40) agreed all BHS faculty were involved in and supported the implementation of schoolwide DE&I strategies and initiatives. However, 42% of the participants (17/40) believed all stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, staff, families, students, and community members were not involved in the development of the DE&I mission statement. As evidenced by the survey data, most BHS participants needed to identify the existence of the BHS DE&I statement, and they were aware of DE&I policies, considerations, implementations, and program modifications at BHS. This baseline acknowledgment was necessary because according to Blair-Loy, Wharton, and Goodstein (2011) for years, mission statements have been studied to examine their contents and

purpose; studies have shown links between statement contents and certain [organizational] performances.

BHS has created a structural framework within the learning community that BHS faculty members are cognizant of, and most are in support of the school's DE&I mission. With faculty awareness in place, 70% of the participants (28/40) verified students reported concerns related to DE&I at BHS. 69% of participants (27/40) stated they have discussed DE&I concerns with their colleagues. In addition, 30% of the participants (11/37) verified families reported DE&I concerns. Following the accounts, 43% of the participants (17/40) reported they did not have a clear understanding of the effective responses or the appropriate measures to take when individuals report or share concerns related to DE&I.

According to the results, BHS is an environment where 88% of the participants (35/40) agreed that all staff members model values of equity, fairness, and inclusion when they are at school. The survey data summarized in Table 2 shows the choice count of participants and their perception of DE&I culture at BHS. The participants' reflections on and professional scope to engage DE&I efforts spanned from strongly disagree, to strongly agree. After being surveyed, 23% of participants (9/40) disagreed that they felt comfortable sharing their DE&I barriers and challenges with others.

**Table 2.** Participant reflections regarding DE&I perceptions.

<i>Participant Choice Count Table</i>				
Query	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I intentionally find opportunities to address and improve my personal DE&I journey	0	0	17	22
I intentionally find opportunities to address and improve my professional DE&I educational journey	0	2	13	13
I feel comfortable sharing my DE&I barriers and challenges with others	3	6	14	17
I empathize with others' thoughts, feelings, and concerns regarding DE&I at the school	0	0	9	31
Critical DE&I issues that impact the school community are addressed with a sense of urgency and timeliness	0	2	13	23

Most participants indicated they received and participated in professional learning to recognize strategies for countering discrimination and bias BHS. 100% of the participants believed the professional learning was delivered to them in ways that model perspectives that directly improve their DE&I competence. 96% of participants (36/38) believed the BHS-provided professional learning adequately built DE&I competence to gain skills that could be implemented professionally and personally. Thus, 100% of participants agreed they would benefit from training in developing strategies when encountering DE&I issues at BHS.

## **Insights from Interviews**

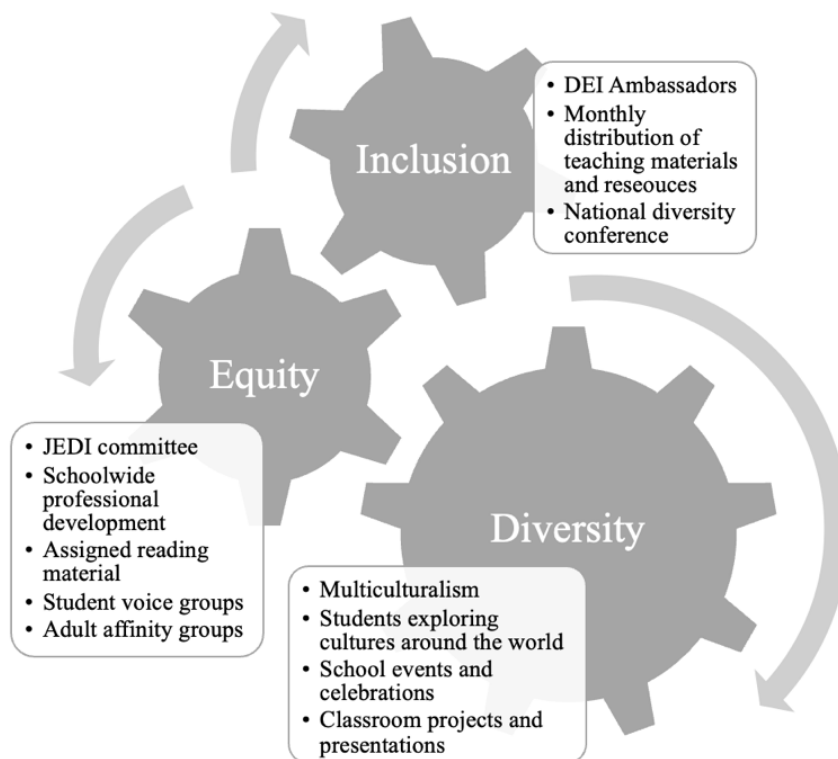
An analysis of the six semi-structured one-on-one interviews was conducted. The analysis and transcription procedure focused on comprehensive views and themes, and the distinct experiences of six interview participants. The analysis process showcased ordinary, unexpected, hard-to-classify, major, and minor themes; the emerging themes underwent a multiple-perspective analysis to validate the participants' intricate experiences (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). These details worked to understand the educators' experiences and practices related to DE&I and provided particulars into grasping what is helping or hindering BHS faculty's ability to fully actualize the BHS diversity statement.

### ***Changing Over Time***

Significant insights of the research came from participants stressing that the BHS community has encountered challenges surrounding DE&I, but they also acknowledge improvements the community has reached thus far (see Figure 2). Faculty who have been employed at BHS for several years openly stated DE&I has been a journey throughout the years for the BHS community. They noted the road towards becoming the private school where DE&I flourished, beginning during a past school year's multicultural curriculum initiative. Many years ago, BHS school leaders mandated, teachers, create one curriculum unit per grade level, in which the teachers and students studied different countries across the world. Teachers helped students create projects that highlighted the foods, dance, dress, and sports unique to a country outside the United States. In addition to classroom projects, there were annual school celebrations commemorating national events like Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Black History Month.

By the 2019-2021 school years, BHS multiculturalism efforts evolved, and a BHS JEDI (justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion) committee was formed. This group included select faculty and staff members who worked to intentionally create a more inclusive BHS community. The group's main function acted as a support network to inform BHS faculty of their own culturally responsive outlooks. The group promoted using anti-bias language and creating a curriculum and pedagogy reflective of diverse experiences and perspectives. As of June 2021, the JEDI committee was dismantled. According to the participants, instead of creating a BHS Director of Diversity position, the 2021-2022 school year would mark the appointment of five faculty members who were named BHS Diversity Ambassadors. Officially titled the DE&I Ambassador, this new role garnered an additional \$5,000 annual stipend and served as a conduit between the Board-level team and a campus committee. They work with school leadership teams to bring an anti-bias, anti-racist lens to decision-making conversations. In addition, ambassadors provide instructional support, student support, advice, resources, and thought-provoking conversation to aid in the DE&I growth journey.

**Figure 2.** Shifts surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion at BHS.



### ***Individual Interview Reflections***

**Jack's experience.** Jack is a non-instructional faculty member and works closely with BHS administrative personnel. He partners with students and staff members to create a climate of care at BHS. Spending several years working in private schools, Jack has seen diversity engagement across coasts, and in rural, suburban, and metropolitan settings. At BHS, Jack found DE&I to be a constant focal point. From his role's inception, Jack saw BHS place a lot of focus on identifying and diagnosing internal issues surrounding DE&I. In his role, Jack has pondered, "How is it that BHS is not making assumptions [about DE&I], but rather data-driven decisions?". Over time, faculty members have begun to see DE&I, not as a choice but as part of BHS DNA.

Jack shared a recent DE&I concern involving two White-male students. He recalled one student who taught a peer to use the n-word because “[they] should know this word.” Jack expressed that after the incident was investigated, neither student seemed to know the gravity of their actions, but the incident spoke to the condition of the BHS parent population surrounding DE&I. He stated that BHS students “are learning words either from peers or parents.” With the support of a DE&I Ambassador, the students were removed from the BHS community for a day and participated in a restorative consequence process. Although BHS’s response to the n-word situation was swift and isolated, Jack retorted, “I don’t know if that’s enough.”

Jack believes the strongest barrier to accomplishing DE&I efforts comes from the parent side. He encourages families to accept a school where students have faculty that look like them, resemble them and can share their experiences. Jack shared that a significant amount of time is given to “debating” with families about BHS’s effort to create a school where students can be their authentic selves. He stated that to support BHS’s strides to be diverse, equitable, and inclusive, DE&I classroom lessons, “core to BHS curriculum and part of the BHS responsibility, to educate middle school students in age-appropriate ways” were created. To pacify families who were against these topics, parents were given the lesson plans ahead of time and were allowed to “keep [their] child home that day.” According to Jack, this was an example of how BHS may not be leaning hard enough into those conversations and is giving them (parents) an out to not engage with a core part of DE&I programming at BHS.

Jack stated there is a tangible fear of parent push-back. Fearing the ramifications or consequences of engaging in DE&I work poses a perceived reputational and financial

threat to BHS. BHS is part of a connected wealthy community, and negative perceptions of the school's actions could have damaging impacts on enrollment, tuition, fundraising, and other financial metrics. Losing one student from a family with social capital, and then retelling their version of events to other community members, presents BHS with social and market hazards. Jack believes this risk could also become a political stance, where the pragmatic or moral reasoning behind a family leaving BHS is subsequently reduced to BHS becoming too liberal. Jack asserted that these concerns lend themselves to unknown consequences that BHS will need to be stronger to overcome.

**Jill's experience.** Jill is an instructional faculty member. She spent most of her career teaching elementary and middle school students a variety of disciplines. Jill noted BHS was the first school that mentioned and focused on DE&I, in comparison to other schools that primarily concentrated on rigor, differentiation, and other academic areas. Through committees and student displays, Jill acknowledged BHS has provided teachers with opportunities to inform themselves about DE&I. She stated teachers have had the choice to engage in DE&I work "at will;" if the teacher decided to opt-out, that was okay. Jill explained in the past, the climate surrounding teachers and DE&I was open and nonjudgmental. Teachers were encouraged to, "find out and learn together." BHS leaders welcomed everyone to engage DE&I through an exploratory approach which helped colleagues who were just beginning their DE&I work.

At present, Jill has observed a shift in the manner DE&I is carried out. She noted DE&I being used from a deficit perspective as BHS leaders are focused on what "teachers are not doing." This has caused Jill to feel disconnected from DE&I goals and uncomfortable when posited to address DE&I with colleagues and students. For Jill,



DE&I initiatives have brought fewer opportunities where she can “be proud of [her] affinity and identities, whatever they may be” as Jill has felt DE&I being weaponized. Her experience asserted the climate surrounding DE&I is one where teachers and students suffer the consequences at any moment someone “[goes] against our diversity statement.” For example, Jill stated the number of initiatives BHS teachers are accountable for, DE&I has become a directive that is either “pushed aside” or used as a disciplinary course of action. She recalled a disagreement between two students. While Jill helped students come to a solution, she indicated misalignment in her professional judgment, how the details of the incident were framed to the parents, and how BHS administrators expected her to respond as the classroom teacher.

Jill expressed a desire to create more authentic opportunities to learn and develop her DE&I lens. She suggested having an action-oriented approach where groups of instructional and non-instructional faculty can collaborate on executing exemplary DE&I lessons and learning experiences with each other for their students. Discovering strategies to engage with students utilizing a variety of action-oriented indicators (low-tech, high-tech, immediate change, long-term change) would more authentically support DE&I in the classroom. This focuses on what teachers can do as opposed to highlighting DE&I deficits.

**Jan’s experience.** Jan is a non-instructional faculty member. Most of her career was spent in schools supporting elementary and middle school-aged students. Working at other schools, Jan noted DE&I was “not taken seriously,” and was typically “thrown into the school as a checkbox,” or an interesting fact to share. Once working at BHS, she remembered DE&I started as a checklist, progressed to being clearly defined in a

diversity statement, and later blossomed to represent a celebration of her identity. Over the years, Jan felt BHS leaders made accommodations to make her voice heard in all her job roles. She stated DE&I is a “major area we focus on, grow in, and develop. It is intertwined into every single layer of our school.” Jan stated historically, BHS had not employed people of color in leadership roles and since that change is now here, it is critical to protect faculty members who are not White.

She acknowledged changes have been made, however, according to Jan, families and colleagues still demonstrate race-based microaggressions which counter BHS’s DE&I mission to ensure all people feel a sense of belonging on the campus. Jan’s main hurdle surrounding DE&I goals comes from parents “who are not on board.” She recalled instances when parents said, “[they] couldn’t even send [their] kid to a school like this because all BHS talks about is DE&I.” Parents believed BHS was “just pushing [DE&I] initiatives” and these stakeholders are “not ready” for DE&I. Recognizing tensions from her fellow community members, Jan expressed a lot of work continues to be needed as BHS refines its school culture and identity. According to Jan, although it took BHS a while to reach this point and there has been improvement, BHS must make it clear that it believes in DE&I and that this is the direction it is going.

Jan’s secondary barrier shined a light on an internal issue. She stated BHS is aware of blatant racism displays and sees the wrong with big issues such as “the n-word.” However, she suggested it seems harder for BHS to “comprehend the smaller things that can still be viewed as mistreatment” because of someone’s race or identity. Jan remembered, initially hesitating to address DE&I issues because they “were not well received.” She remembered many instances where she negotiated acting on DE&I

concerns with students and teachers; moments where she failed to act due to feeling it was not her position to do so.

Jan prioritizes advocating for the people of color at BHS. She encourages others to be vulnerable to speak up and pushes BHS leadership to recognize and “hear the hurts” that have been caused. She proposed there needs to be a plan in place to protect students and faculty members of color to make sure they are taken care of. BHS seeing inequity and injustice within the learning community and “stopping” to let stakeholders of color be heard, begins the momentum for creating a school where classmates and colleagues respect and value one another and their differences.

**Joe’s experience.** Joe is an instructional faculty member. He taught in elementary and middle private schools for many years. Joe credits his family and friends with propelling his aspiration to strengthen his understanding and thoughts surrounding diversity. Joe’s journey in DE&I has been long and he expressed that some people probably “have been hurt along the way.” He remembered a situation where racial inequity played a role in harming a former colleague, and although Joe has learned how to better recognize privilege and power differences, he regretted “never having a chance to apologize” for past harm.

As a result of his personal DE&I development, Joe has been fully invested in BHS’s DE&I work. He said he was “on board almost right away and tries to do [his] best to help the progress along.” Joe acknowledged the headway BHS has made thus far but shared that those injuries connected to DE&I incompetency “still go on, daily... and we’re not always aware.” Joe believed BHS is trying and many faculty members have partnered together to keep pushing the DE&I lens forward. This effort has been seen

through curriculum and practice, but there seems to be a “block” in whole-school advancement. Joe likened BHS’s DE&I momentum to taking “two steps forward and maybe one or two steps back.” According to Joe, this opposition frustrates faculty members who are in alignment with the DE&I vision.

Thinking back on a hindrance to achieving the DE&I vision at BHS, Joe recalled an incident where a student used the n-word in class. In the past, Joe noted he would have “downplayed and ignored” hearing the n-word in class, hoping that the students would forget about it and move on. When he heard the word this time, Joe recognized the hurt minor aggressions caused and decided to directly address the DE&I issue. Joe brought his students together to dissect the incident. He fairly discussed with students, structured a historical lesson for the students, and emailed parents about the situation. Joe wanted the students to learn and grow from the matter so they could understand why it “was not okay to use that word.” Following the discussion, lesson, and communication, Joe received two varying responses from school administrators. One individual affirmed he “handled this greatly,” while the other suggested, “Maybe you went too far with this.” Joe supposed the divergent responses was attributed to the popularity of the student and family within the BHS community. According to Joe, the student who used the n-word “was someone of very much privilege” and situations involving students with privilege should be handled delicately. Joe felt in this instance, the BHS administrators were under pressure from families. The concept of going “too far” while addressing a DE&I issue in the classroom contradicted the DE&I work BHS was trying to accomplish. Regardless of the rationale, however, Joe found it his duty to ensure he did not “band-aid the problem” but rather create a specific space for students to recognize wrong and grow.

Joe expressed a large contributor to DE&I gaps is due to training deficiencies. He noted BHS faculty members see issues that need to be addressed, but there is not a “clear goal in mind of where we want to end up as a school.” An explicit expectation of curriculum standards, clear examples of student outputs, and consistent support with instructional practices related to DE&I are essential to creating a school that exemplifies DE&I. Without training and support, Joe stated BHS faculty will remain “lost.” He noted seeing and hearing of fellow faculty who do not know how to move forward or where to move forward because of insubstantial DE&I training and foresight.

**Dan’s experience.** Dan is a non-instructional faculty member. He supported schools across public urban and private suburban secondary settings. Dan’s DE&I journey began with a role outside BHS that provided basic training surrounding diversity community, and activism. Later at BHS, Dan witnessed the DE&I proceedings from its inception which included curriculum considerations and creating a diversity statement. Dan noted DE&I at BHS has “grown progressively and rapidly.” He shared a variety of initiatives and points where DE&I work sprouts within affinity groups, being active in the community, student voice groups, agenda items during grade-level meetings, department meetings, curriculum mapping, outside consulting, webinars, and readings. Aside from these efforts, Dan noted with DE&I there are “always things to learn and the learning never stops.”

Thinking about the climate surrounding DE&I at BHS, Dan stated it is “an area we’ve grown in, and there’s also areas of improvement.” He defined a section of the BHS community who are doing the professional and personal DE&I work and another group that is not. He stated the group “that is not doing the work” often questions the value of

DE&I and lacks buy-in to the diversity mission. A mindset in which DE&I is meaningless or unnecessary affects the systems and practices BHS is trying to put in place for students and creates an unsafe and exclusionary environment.

Dan highlighted ideas that impact DE&I goals. According to Dan, the safe and inclusive spaces at BHS are “compromised when there is work that adults still need to do.” He described stakeholders who oppose DE&I efforts and showcase their position to students through conscious and unconscious behaviors. Faculty have lacked advocacy and allyship, and parents have declared, “They don’t believe in [DE&I].” Dan recollected a recent email where a family expressed concern about a book their child elected to read. The book was about a Black male lawyer who spent his career helping people of color and poor people in America who have been wrongly punished by the U.S. criminal justice system (Stevenson, 2019). The family doubted the validity of the text and questioned if it was appropriate to be read at BHS. Dan stated conversations of this nature continue to happen and signify an educational opportunity for families, faculty, and students. When approaching reluctant stakeholders, Dan prioritizes regular and one-on-one conversations. He proposed these avenues help tremendously in creating a space to communicate, biases surface, and solutions are not always found, but the healthy conversation supports the individual while also ensuring the students’ experience remains first.

**Bob’s experience.** Bob is a non-instructional faculty member. He spent decades in many different educational seats, from teacher to leader. Professional and personal endeavors center around helping to ensure equity within education increases. Bob grew up in a middle-class family and did not discover cultural diversity until college. At that

point, his understanding of diversity focused on festivals and celebrations and did not recognize systemic racism and systematic inequality. Over the years, Bob worked with more diverse communities and different people, he became a better listener to understand what other people were experiencing in life, particularly the experiences of students of color.

At BHS, regardless of your identity or background, Bob focuses on making sure that everyone (students, teachers, and families) feels seen, valued, and loved. He described BHS as being a place that is becoming more open and receptive to conversations about race and identity. This was evidenced by monthly affinity group meetings and social outings, quarterly DE&I professional development, and about one-third of the faculty members are people of color. As BHS became more diverse, there have been more instances of race and identity-based (intended, and or unintended) “collisions” among stakeholders. He considered it might feel hard to be in a changing organization because the compounding dynamics bring conflict and conversations that are necessary and hard.

For Bob, addressing DE&I issues were not uncommon. He discussed that for his colleagues of color, most conflicts were related to race. Bob learned to see a situation from the person of color’s lived experience to understand the intricate dynamics and triggers race can surface. In the past, when race was the issue, he would find ways to downplay it or explain the “race” factor away. Bob would reason there was another rational explanation for why a conflict happened, that had “nothing to do with your skin color.” Bob flipped his thinking and found conflict is greatest when it is connected to a

person's identity. Changing this perspective helped me recognize if race was a factor or if there was a misunderstanding about values, beliefs, or priorities.

Bob explained many elements have contributed to the shifts in DE&I at BHS. Weighing factors like stakeholders and community circumstances, he attributed the changes to establishing a people and culture group, a parent pipeline, and teachers who "are bought in." The people and culture groups were selected and charged with primarily driving DE&I activities. They support professional development, affinity groups, and student voice groups, and are responsible for making a lot of [DE&I] decisions. Bob also mentioned a group of parents on the outside (notably BHS's families of color) "who are asking us to do more for their kids." These families expressed BHS is the school they and their children want to be connected to, but BHS needs "to do more." Bob noted this charge is specifically adding to BHS's sense of urgency. The faculty members who are bought-in, in represent a diverse group of teachers and staff. Bob stated they are working collectively to lead DE&I work within their spheres of influence, inside and outside of the BHS walls. Within these spheres, he recalled a faculty member who encouraged their colleagues to explicitly include culturally aware literature within thematic units. This insight, from within the sphere, pushed other teachers to go further in their instruction than they have historically. Through community alignment and support, Bob asserted these leadership streams push BHS to apply pressure and drive DE&I work forward.

### ***Perceptions from Research Engagement***

Common perceptions among the interview participants focused on three primary areas. The first perception surrounded community barriers that according to participants, are hindering BHS's DE&I strides. Some hindrances reportedly stem from professional



training, DE&I competence, and stakeholder mindsets. The second perception recognized shifts around DE&I and described personal and professional DE&I work felt like a report card. Diversity was a task to be completed and once it was achieved, further action was not necessary. If diversity expectations were not met, then that signified the faculty member was not bought in, and further implied, BHS was not a place one should continue working. Finally, key BHS supports that have or could promote DE&I development connected to meeting groups with diverse membership (faculty, students, and stakeholders with diverse identities) culturally responsive curriculum structures, and safe spaces to engage in conversation.

**Community barriers.** The one-on-one interview participants discussed BHS initiatives and actions they believed impede DE&I within the learning community. Participants encouraged BHS to sit with the Board and craft policies to protect employees and families of color. According to participants, BHS does not have clear procedures, policies, or response protocols in place that protect people of color. This highlighted the “bigger issues” people of color encounter in the community, questioned “What are we doing to take care of the victims?” and suggested initiating “zero tolerance” for identity-based discrimination at school. They believed this approach will help BHS quickly become a diverse, equitable, and inclusive school, and could also increase families of color retention.

Participants reported difficulties understanding the instructional expectations for teachers when presenting or addressing DE&I matters. They have felt worried about curriculum material connected to DE&I coming up because faculty found themselves teaching hard and soft DE&I skills. When certain DE&I topics arise, participants

suggested pre-reading material, delivering mini-DE&I lessons during the unit, and conducting read-alouds to frontload vocabulary and backload key themes. This could facilitate a meaningful engagement framework for students interacting with challenging DE&I topics. Soft DE&I skills could be better supported by creating and defining the competencies of BHS students. Discovering the values BHS wants students to hold and demonstrate could directly connect to core DE&I competencies, set up to specifically reinforce DE&I maturation among students. Participants proposed if BHS had an instructional practice lens and focused on teaching particular competencies in every class of every grade, teachers could holistically assess students based on teaching and learning markers connected to implicit and explicit diversity standards. Participants requested critical training to effectively develop hard and soft DE&I skills with students; this believably helps create transparency between home and BHS while minimizing potential criticisms or mixed messages from families and school leadership as participants recalled the appropriateness of their DE&I classroom engagement has been questioned.

Interview participants collectively conveyed the reality that organizational structures and systems within the BHS community play a considerable role in the school's DE&I progress. The participants reported that the school's broader context, including families and a Board of Trustees, contributed to the school's approach to DE&I. The prescribed approach to DE&I does not always align with the faculty's expectations. They express that more coordination and collaboration between BHS stakeholders will allow them to engage DE&I work meaningfully and intentionally. This approach would enable those BHS stakeholders with the most decision-making power to help improve DE&I efforts and support faculty as they work directly with students.

Participants explained BHS's Board and families play critical roles in their DE&I change process.

The Board, whose members include parents, business owners, and trustees, oversees BHS affairs to safeguard the organization's current and future well-being. It and families were described as persuasive stakeholders in BHS's curricular and extra-curricular DE&I pathways. As a result, participants reported oftentimes faculty have ideas for programmatic and organizational DE&I choices, and they are motivated to develop DE&I initiatives, but because of their perception of coordination and collaboration opportunities with colleagues, families, and school leaders, participants feel they are unable to act on their DE&I aims. Being mindful of all BHS constituents and clearly communicating DE&I goals and priorities is an important consideration for BHS because it is a tuition-driven institution. When stakeholders are misaligned with DE&I endeavors, they may choose to leave the school, which impacts enrollment and public perception. BHS must exercise courage to engage in challenging DE&I work with all community members so that it is not unduly influenced by external factors.

Interview participants were conflicted about strict DE&I policy and expectations. Faculty members self-described their total investment in BHS's diversity mission, but they too understand the fine boundary BHS must consider. BHS relies on families, business partnerships, donations, and tuition streams to fund all campus operations. BHS is just as much a school as it is a business. Although there are unavoidable variables where circumstances and individuals violate the DE&I statement, a participant stated, "Sometimes the business overtakes the DE&I and I'm not sure why." Ultimately, BHS is a private institution and families are paying customers. BHS has been careful in its

approach because DE&I has ramifications on enrollment and other financial metrics, “we err on the side of fear instead of courage and that’s the paradigm shift that we need to start making.”

**Community climate.** The one-on-one interview participants shared their perspectives on BHS’s DE&I climate. It was apparent DE&I ideas are present. Through various means, DE&I is discussed and identified, however, the identification of DE&I pillars has not altered the BHS school experience. It has created DE&I fear. According to participants, from school branding to school planning, assemblies, meetings, and agendas, DE&I is often top-of-mind. Non-instructional and instructional faculty members have DE&I markers interwoven into their job roles and responsibilities and work evaluation structures. DE&I expectations are blunt and explicitly non-negotiable. According to non-instructional participants, BHS utilizes a top-down approach to DE&I initiatives, and responses to DE&I issues are often addressed from a deficit mindset. BHS faculty members believe if the diversity mission is violated, regardless of intention, punitive measures are taken against students and adults. When DE&I missteps and injuries materialize, the occurrence is attributed to not being “mission-fit” (the archetype; an individual who embodies and encapsulates desired positive beliefs and values of DE&I) and BHS community members assert the DE&I violator is not bought in. The “buy-in or bought-out” idea has created a school environment where students, families, and employees are expected to know and represent all the values and characteristics within the BHS diversity mission; however, some members are worried about the opportunity to learn, and grow culturally competent has been overshadowed by BHS’s drive quickly to be diverse and inclusive. The urgency has detracted from the DE&I

journey of being a personal and professional process and minimized DE&I to an unattainable “mission-fit” status.

**Community motivations.** The one-on-one interview participants discussed BHS initiatives and actions they believed propel DE&I within the learning community. At its most basic form, participants recognize BHS actively listens to concerns surrounding DE&I and want to make changes. The school encourages faculty members to attend an annual nationwide identity-based seminar and participate in affinity groups. These opportunities support faculty, especially those with diverse identities, to increase their sense of belonging. Recently, eight out of ten faculty of color attended a conference for people of color. Student voice groups and affinity groups for all stakeholders were a clear bright spot that supported the DE&I mission at BHS. These safe spaces are intentionally created, and individuals actively engage as participants, facilitators, members, and allies to support diversity from a variety of scopes. Some forums focus on race, nationality, gender, sexuality, religion, neurodiversity, mental health, families, personal connections, and professional associations. Support adapts to and spans the unique needs of students and teachers.

The DE&I Ambassadors were consistently identified. The five BHS faculty members work to “activate” the BHS community in their DE&I journey and “level up” in their growth. If other BHS faculty are unsure how to address topics, perspectives, or current events or if the faculty wants to explore resources to support DE&I understanding, BHS faculty have access to DE&I Ambassadors. The overall perception of DE&I Ambassadors was split. Some participants agreed the DE&I Ambassadors were critical to providing advice, resources, and thought-provoking conversation for the

learning community. Others reported that while well-intentioned, the DE&I Ambassadors have not fully embodied their roles' responsibilities to address DE&I at BHS. One participant expressed, the onus and accountability can no longer be on the students or a few, "it's on all the faculty to create an environment where all belong."

### **Summary of Findings**

The data generated from the research and one-on-one semi-structured interviews reflect the perspectives of BHS stakeholders and the lived experiences of six instructional and non-instructional faculty members. Each participant was a current instructional or non-instructional faculty member at BHS during the 2022-2023 school year, and the collected data reflects the ideas of participants during this timeframe. The engagement with the BHS community included asynchronous and synchronous virtual touchpoints. The insights that emerged from the data collection included factors within the community that slow BHS's DE&I work. It also addressed considerations the participants believed could propel DE&I efforts and the climate surrounding DE&I at BHS. The trends from the schoolwide survey and participants' accounts unveiled possibilities for future action to fully actualize BHS's diversity and inclusion statement. The participants' views generated themes that were not predetermined but rather developed from an inductive analysis devoid of influence from the researcher's positionality.

Overall, the ability to infiltrate and entirely alter BHS culture to be 100% reflective of its diversity statement is not a simple feat. The qualitative research identified strengths, opportunities, and barriers to BHS achieving its commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The secondary focus captured educators' experiences and practices related to diversity, equity, and inclusion and concentrated on determining what could be

helping or hindering BHS faculty in their DE&I strides. By amplifying the participants' ideas and viewpoints, it is hoped that the findings can lead to future action planning with the BHS community to transform the experiences of community members with diverse identities so that BHS is a school that fully embodies its diversity statement for every student, in every space, and on every day.

### **Action Plan**

Creating a school where students learn what it means to be engaged and contributing global citizens and themselves taking the responsibility of being agents of positive change is a significant mission for BHS stakeholders. This endeavor is considered imperative for BHS to manifest the principles and values found in the BHS diversity statement. If BHS employs faculty members who engage in culturally responsive practices ineffectively, the threshold for tolerance and acceptance of diverse identities and perspectives shrinks within the community. Great implications to recognize factors that promote or impede school and classroom experiences that value diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds involve key BHS stakeholders. Developing a plan to intentionally engage these members can support providing a clearer path forward for the BHS community as they work to actualize the BHS diversity statement.

The BHS DE&I Development Plan is a proposed plan that seeks to strengthen BHS's DE&I practices and support their needs so that the learning environments and community more intentionally affirm and value diversity. The action plan would specifically facilitate DE&I Sessions with BHS faculty so that stakeholders have a space to develop guidance strategies and to support the interpersonal, cultural, and instructional needs of all educators. Silverman (2010) noted professional development that prioritizes

DE&I growth supports teacher effectiveness, so the BHS DE&I Development Plan process should allow for consistent daily check-ins/reflection points and biweekly meetings. These regular check-ins could be facilitated by external and internal, trained, and experienced DE&I leaders and practitioners and non-instructional and instructional stakeholders at BHS. With the intentional consideration of the unique needs of the BHS community, DE&I Development Plan sessions should also be thoughtful so that educators, staff, and faculty members can build a stronger capacity to recognize DE&I issues within their sphere of influence and respond appropriately.

To act on the individual needs of the BHS community, the plan considers the interpersonal, social-emotional, cultural, and practical dynamics of participants using an engagement framework that follows a plan, do, study, act model. The process will focus on personal outlooks and professional practices to help faculty to begin to really represent the BHS diversity statement. Stressing BHS values and core beliefs, and initiatives to incorporate innovative and culturally competent professional learning experiences, the following goal was created with two ancillary foci to support:

BHS faculty will increase self and social awareness of DE&I so that BHS faculty create an inclusive and welcoming learning community, where all community members learn in diverse environments and from equity-oriented resources.

- By the end of the 2022-2023 school year, BHS faculty will gain personal strategies to recognize DE&I issues within their interpersonal relationships and respond using culturally responsive approaches as measured by data collection observation from the participant and the responsive DE&I plan facilitator.



- By the end of the 2022-2023 school year, BHS educators will gain instructional strategies to recognize DE&I issues with their students and respond using culturally responsive approaches as measured by data collection observation from the participant and the responsive DE&I plan facilitator.

External and internal, trained, and experienced DE&I leaders and practitioners should facilitate ongoing DE&I support. Likened to the Responsive Classroom (2020) model, the BHS DE&I Development sessions could provide opportunities for educators to learn about, understand, reflect, and practice culturally responsive approaches in a low-stakes space. This idea benefits interview participants who expressed wanting more and consistent opportunities to learn and grow in their DE&I involvement. This approach would utilize four actionable features of a responsive classroom to help the BHS community progress in cultural competence.

The four methodologies of a responsive classroom would be commissioned to help BHS faculty structure learning spaces to be empathetic to the social and cultural needs of all students. With ongoing support and deliberate preparation, the BHS community can become an environment that showcases the pillars of a responsive space. The first pillar of the Responsive Classroom (2020) is Interactive Modeling. Interactive modeling explicitly teaches rules, procedures (i.e., how to manage time and facilitate discussions), and interpersonal skills. Next, the space can allow for Agile Language, which is the intentional application of vocabulary to help students access essential academic, social, and emotional skills that are needed in various social contexts. Third, the space can promote Logical Consequences, which are non-punitive outcomes for unexpected or uninformed acts that allow students to set boundaries for others, hold them

accountable, and address a situation in a dignified manner. Finally, the space can provide Interactive Learning Structures, which are deliberate activities that encourage participants to interact with DE&I concepts through active and social pathways (Responsive Classroom, 2020).

The proposed action plan seeks to provide a starting point for BHS to reignite the momentum needed to create a school culture of empathy and appreciation for DE&I in all learning spaces. Using the suggested methodologies and structures can support the BHS faculty in their ability to gain personal and professional culturally competent skills and tools. Over time, the faculty's capacity to confidently engage DE&I issues increases. The suggestions offer fundamental ways to adapt BHS's learning environments so that experiences surrounding DE&I improve.

### CHAPTER THREE: DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION PLAN

The BHS stakeholders undoubtedly believe in their DE&I mission and strive to create learning environments that value the diverse identities of students, families, and faculty. Intentional and restorative-oriented engagement will be essential to BHS faculty developing mindsets and practices that authentically represent the diversity statement. This will be critical to the action planning engagement since members of the BHS community report instances and experiences that contradict the principles and values found in the BHS diversity statement. Building the capacity to engage in culturally responsive practices will help the BHS community as it increases the personal and professional effectiveness of faculty educators' DE&I considerations (Silverman, 2020).

Therefore, the details of the action plan seek to help and encourage the BHS community to purposefully engage in culturally responsive work so that faculty are better equipped with the skills and resources needed to appropriately address DE&I issues. The proposed plan is not an all-encompassing DE&I guide but rather aims to mark another step in BHS's already growing efforts in DE&I engagement. The plan recognizes developing cultural competence is a journey of self-awareness, social skill building, and advocacy that can last a lifetime (Guzman, 2016). Continuing the voyage is fundamental to BHS truly living out its diversity statement.

#### **Cultivating a Mindset for Change**

The baseline toward full actualization of the goals outlined in the action plan rests on time, consideration, and stakeholder investment. This will push the BHS community to step outside of traditional organizational change timelines. An adjustment period should be expected so that stakeholders can ignite and sustain change as they collaborate

and initiate a BHS DE&I Development Plan. Based on Maynard and Weinstein (2020) and with a growth mindset engaged, it is recommended that the BHS community exercise a restorative approach to addressing DE&I development. This can begin with Maynard and Weinstein (2020)'s, seven strategies for engagement and communication about DE&I. The strategies include communicating, repairing, and cultivating empathy with all the BHS community members. The following seven measures, from Maynard and Weinstein (2020), support the BHS community to begin actionable strides toward actualizing its diversity mission.

1. Let's talk- communicate to resolve conflict.
2. Circle up- gather and address an issue immediately.
3. Repair the harm- be responsible and accountable for actions.
4. Throw out the rules- create clear agreements and expectations.
5. Growth mindset and mindfulness- boost cultural confidence and build self-awareness.
6. Cultivate empathy- build the capacity to listen, understand and communicate.
7. Build restorative support- solidify interventions and principles to track and respond to data.

**One-on-One Coaching and Engagement.** The action plan promotes engaging BHS stakeholders in the DE&I development process across all teams from Early Childhood Center, Lower School, Middle School, leadership, and administrative teams. The faculty each can play a critical role in one-on-one and small group coaching sessions with the DE&I development facilitator. A key facet of the plan emphasizes one-on-one coaching to establish effective communication between each of the members and the facilitator. This action paves the way for future communication and begins with the application of mindful listening between BHS faculty. Mindful listening between the facilitator and the BHS community will broaden the opportunity to develop participatory engagement structures. Over time, this will cultivate incremental and relational trust

between the facilitator and the community, which helps to gain strides toward decreasing DE&I apprehension for the BHS faculty so that they all shift the BHS learning environments to represent the BHS diversity mission more authentically (Dumlao, 2018).

**Supportive Communication.** The action plan will also facilitate supportive communication. This concept is important because addressing DE&I is challenging. It questions the status quo to no longer perpetuate discriminatory and exclusionary customs, so building trust through intentionally supportive measures is important. The BHS DE&I development action plan suggested considerations of supportive communication indicators. According to Dumlao (2018), supportive communication practices can build trust and well-being among BHS stakeholders by creating a positive communication climate. Faculty learn to recognize verbal and nonverbal expressions and experiences. This promotes focus on working together to solve problems, and the DE&I development participants can recognize one another. As BHS faculty engage in emotional, esteem, and informational support, the process offers a mutual exchange of understanding while decreasing defensive comportments (Dumlao, 2018).

A key consideration of the recommended action plan recognizes BHS is an environment in which governing bodies (parents and the board of directors) sit as the main proprietors of decision-making. According to interview participants, BHS leaders often utilize traditional engagement styles. They reported administrators have high expectations for their DE&I instructional practices, but they have not been provided useful tools to address DE&I with their students and families. Because of these unique features within the BHS community, it will be important to increase opportunities for supportive communication throughout the BHS DE&I development process between the

school, faculty, and families. Sincere efforts to be transparent and empathetic to the needs of one another will be critical to ensuring stakeholders feel seen and stay invested in the change process.

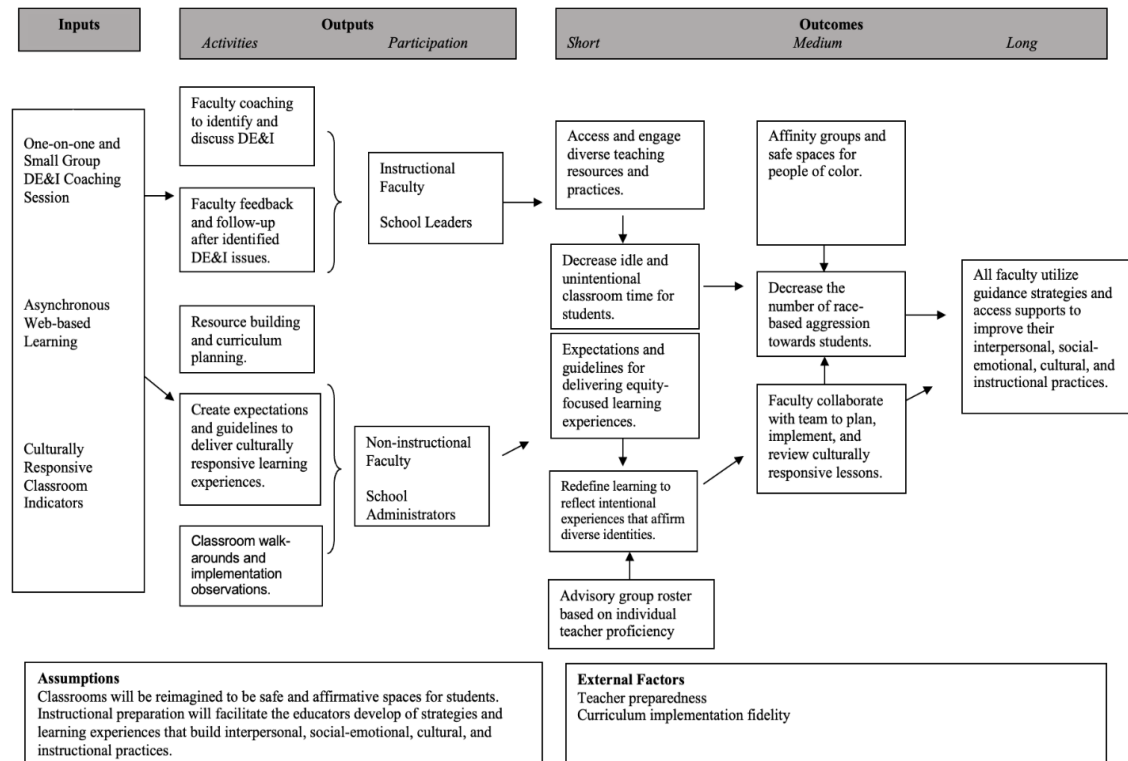
**Participatory Spaces.** The action plan suggests BHS prioritize creating participatory spaces within the community. These spaces will be central to the BHS community and the DE&I development plan, because according to Parker (2020), participatory spaces foster understanding and collaboration, above isolation, and contention against one another so that conflict is minimized. Parker (2020) cautioned organizations to prepare for participation conflict that surfaces from ranking differences that obstruct the strategic use of power, knowledge, and resources. The BHS faculty will need to work on building self and social DE&I awareness., Doing so norms participatory spaces to utilize, “radical listening for creating free spaces” throughout the DE&I development plan process (Parker, 2020, p. 60).

Essential to the engagement, coaching, communication, and participation throughout the DE&I development process should be deliberate listening. Deliberate listening will help inform the BHS stakeholders of their individual outlooks, misunderstandings, discomforts, and perspectives. It is recommended that the change process utilizes acute discourse structures to support BHS faculty to increase participation aptitude. This DE&I action plan endeavor urges the BHS community to discuss unique strengths, embrace mutual learning, build risk-taking and vulnerability faculty, and dialogue and share in their cultural competency successes and shortfalls (Parker, 2020).

## Action Plan Logic Model

Logic models create a graphic representation of relationships within a plan and the corresponding outcomes (Giancola, 2021). The display shows three key elements of the action plan and the anticipated result (see Figure 3). The three elements of the action plan included one-on-one and small group DE&I coaching sessions, asynchronous web-based learning, and culturally responsive classroom indicators. These aspects are founded on essential outputs and guided by BHS stakeholders. The intended long-term outcome of the logic model situates BHS faculty to utilize guidance strategies and access supports to improve their interpersonal, social-emotional, cultural, and academic practices. This process aids in fulfilling BHS's diversity mission through actionable and authentic measures.

**Figure 3.** The BHS logic model for the action plan.



The Logic Model for the recommended BHS DE&I Development plan suggests grouping stakeholders based on common workplace faculty. Across a six-day rotating cycle, the DE&I development process allows BHS faculty to check in or reflect for 15 minutes (asynchronously or synchronously), with their external or internal, trained, and experienced DE&I leader or practitioner for at least five times per cycle. Once per cycle, there can be a 60-minute live session. There can be facilitated activities for faculty to participate in. Since the interview participants consistently communicated wanting support with their DE&I development, the DE&I leader should facilitate direct instruction on specific DE&I approaches, supply topics for small group discussions, and engage in team-building activities. The foundation of the BHS DE&I development training is rooted in faculty increasing their self and social awareness of DE&I so that the BHS community is inclusive and welcoming of diverse identities and cultures.

According to the Responsive Classroom (2020) model, BHS can create a responsive community that reflects its diversity mission when it facilitates and engages six key indicators:

1. ***DE&I Meeting***—An anticipated, regular, and systematized meeting (arrival welcome, announcements, acknowledgments, and activity) using distinct purposes that offer a framework for building important connections and developing respectful and trusting relationships that meet the participants' individual needs.
2. ***Investing Participants in Expectations***—A DE&I leader-facilitated process involving setting SMART goals and connecting the goals to expectations, behaviors, and actions to develop culturally responsive habits and mindsets.



3. ***Brain Breaks***—Short whole-class lessons that allow participants to get moving, to motivate, and to increase focus, learning, and connection.
4. ***Active Teaching***—A method for delivering curricula in which the DE&I leader explains, illustrates, and demonstrates standards so that learning objectives are reached. The three phases of active teaching are Teach and Model, Participant Collaboration, and Facilitate Reflection.
5. ***Participant Practice***—A guided teaching process where participants explore and practice the DE&I standards and culturally component proficiencies presented during a lesson. Participant Practice allows the DE&I leader to formatively assess participant thinking before participants practice independently.
6. ***Small Group Learning***—A structured way for participants to collaborate with peers on learning tasks and projects.

The outlined logic model and responsive indicators aimed to so support BHS while engaging an actual plan. The plan should not be seen as a one-step solution to BHS's diversity improvement goals. It should however be seen as a flexible to initiated to support BHS in creating clear goals and outcomes for engaging DE&I work with faculty. With precise effort, this proposed participative engagement can propel the environmental and cultural dynamics surrounding DE&I at BHS to tilt "toward the least powerful when there are threats" to the BHS diversity mission and the community's equity values (Parker, 2020, p. 60).

## **Analysis of Future Implementation**

The action plan for this study was not conducted, therefore, the analysis of future implementation is theoretical. Carrying out critical DE&I measures will support BHS in actualizing its diversity statement. School leaders and educators are aware of the current need to address DE&I within their organizations. Sparks (2020) noted most school employees across the United States are white, and stakeholders of color reported a “lack of diversity in staffing and curriculum, as well as inequitable school procedures and practices” (p. 1).

Considering future implementation, this research is relevant to other organizations and associations that provide resources and direction for cultivating equity and diversity nationally. The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC), the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), and Learning for Justice. NAIS is a nonprofit membership association that serves more than 1,800 schools and associations of schools in the United States and abroad. It accounts for more than 1,500 independent private K-12 schools in the United States. MAEC envisions a day when all students have equitable opportunities to learn and achieve at elevated levels. It believes when educators increase their awareness and understanding of the factors that create and propel inequity, they will become better prepared to construct positive learning environments so that students are successful. Learning for Justice is a branch of the Southern Poverty Law Center, partnering with communities to demolish white supremacy, increase intersectional movements and advance human rights. It focuses on providing resources to improve

Culture and Climate, Curriculum and Instruction, Leadership, and Family and Community Engagement among educators, students, caregivers, and communities.

Using journals, publications, and outlets to disseminate my findings promoted ongoing research. One valuable journal, *To Improve the Academy* (TIA) is a tributary peer-reviewed publication of the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (POD Network). It concentrates on faculty, student, instructional, professional, and organizational development. A useful outlet, through NAIS, is the People of Color Conference which is the flagship of the association's pledge to equity and justice in teaching, learning, and sustainability for independent schools. This conference sets private school educators and school leaders to establish the actions needed to reverse civil, human, democracy, and identity-based threats and discrimination. TIA and NAIS' People of Color Conference are two avenues that offer and endorse relevant considerations for addressing and actualizing diversity, equity, and inclusion in schools.

BHS faculty recognize students from diverse backgrounds and acknowledge that they have experienced microaggressions and mistreatment based on their ethnic and racial identity. For many educators, Eddy and Hogan (2014) noted teacher instructional practices come from traditional delivery methods such as lectures (which racially disadvantages students), and past experiences emulated from their teachers and backgrounds. Teaching in classrooms where so many DE&I considerations arise, implores BHS faculty to effectively respond to matters and support students; however, research shows educators are not receiving guidance and are thus unequipped to create inclusive learning environments (Dwyer & Smith, 2020).

Research suggests there are distinct DE&I elements that can have a “significant impact on the campus community” (Booker & Campbell-Whatley, 2016, p. 3). Considering the necessary urgency to address DE&I and past historical practices across organizations, organizational change at BHS will be most fruitful by utilizing key factors. First, engagement must be framed in the DE&I mission that supports the BHS to fully actualize the diversity statement, is aimed to improve student experiences, and participation is voluntary. Next, the change process will be cognizant of Grant and Sleeter (2011), which recognized on how power, opportunity, access, and discrimination, affect environments and experiences; and will include markers for agency and social action as a medium for change. Finally, as Sparks (2020) noted the organizational change will explicitly foster and teach concrete and targeted interventions to directly counter specific DE&I gaps and biases (relevant to the BHS community). This practice can reduce the frequency of negative DE&I-related events in a school setting and increase the number of positive DE&I demonstrations (Dwyer & Smith, 2020). As evidenced by the research, future implementation of the action plan should focus on faculty-centered structures and intentional school-based practices that create long-term change and short-term solutions. With these elements combined, the research and action plan hope to render attainable objectives, goals, and outcomes so that BHS fully represents its DE&I mission.

### **Recommended Evaluation**

The recommended evaluation of the action plan framework draws on sociologist and evaluator, Michael Quinn Patton, who developed the utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) approach. This hands-on approach is grounded in the intervention being

effectively utilized by stakeholders (Giancola, 2021). It requires the researcher to work closely with the community stakeholders, because, in the end, those individuals will be responsible for carrying out the goals and outcomes of the intervention. UFE presumes the evaluator is an acting facilitator, working in concert with stakeholders, to determine what the users will need at the end of the research (Giancola, 2021). Prioritizing the thoughts and beliefs of those who will be affected by the results of the evaluation is a quintessential concentration of UFE. When applied intentionally the UFE approach can support BHS to access and assess the effectiveness of the action plan.

### **Organizational Change and Leadership**

According to Booker and Campbell-Whatley (2016) a sizable number of school faculty “feel ill-prepared to address some multicultural concepts such as power, dominance, access, and privilege;” and because of these fears, school leaders have “answered the call by providing professional development opportunities to assist” DE&I initiatives (p. 1). The Harvard Business Review studied 30 years of diversity initiatives and found that required DE&I training did not improve diversity or behavior, especially when the mandate was in response to a negative social or organizational event (Legault, Gutsell & Inzlicht, 2011).

Predominately White organizations often respond quickly to internal DE&I concerns. This band-aid approach to solving problems is inauthentic to actual DE&I work. Leaders who react swiftly to situations without information, intention, and meaningful action can be characterized as having situational or transactional leadership. The quick and temporary responses to organizational issues surrounding DE&I sustain environments where actual progress and change are not lasting. The community’s ideas

of Whiteness are superior, and it is unlikely to realize or accept Whiteness as an aspect of identity that is “socially meaningful and personally salient” (Lawrence & Tatum, 1998, p. 1).

A different perspective of DE&I is necessary to create and sustain meaningful change within organizations. This shift requires an evocation of Transformational Leadership. Transformational Leadership holds a stark contrast to situational and transactional leadership models. This approach holds a great emphasis on the charisma and affective elements that are synonymous with effective leadership (Northouse, 2019, p. 197). Transformational leaders can engage their peers in such a way that the individual's motivations, morality, and level of servitude increase (Northouse, 2019, p. 202). Leadership can mobilize others for a greater good or purpose. This greater good can be personal or to the organization, itself which allows the leader and the member to reap benefits. The notion of greater purpose is a quintessential characteristic of a transformational educator. An educator willing to do the work sets them apart. Educators recognizing Whiteness as a social concept denoting authority and advantage means being willing to “ultimately internalize a realistically positive view of Whiteness which is not based on assumed superiority” (Lawrence & Tatum, 1998, p. 1). Such a realization can be a catalyst for tangible mindset shifts among stakeholders who are encouraged to also begin their identity journey (Lawrence & Tatum, 1998, p. 10). When educators can stop universalizing ideas of Whiteness as the norm for all, they can develop a school culture that is effectively racially and culturally constructed (Brookfield, 2019, p. 52).

## **Conclusion**

BHS and school leaders and educators across the United States are aware of the current need to address DE&I within their organizations. The method in which schools have begun to identify and address DE&I issues surrounding student experiences, staffing, curriculum, school policies, and practices has manifested in a variety of ways. Some organizations have understood DE&I issues as a harsh current reality, a component of an equity audit, or a foundational finding, but at BHS, it has been a motivation for change (Sparks, 2020). Clear data from school policies, student anecdotes, and teacher accounts provide abundant reasoning to respond to DE&I issues at BHS. A plan to begin the work starts with intentional DE&I training.

DE&I training is necessary, but decades-long reviews have found such plans to be unsuccessful (Hudson, 2020). This is largely due to diversity training initiatives that span an afternoon. Research suggests one-time DE&I training is ineffective because they focus on benefits that momentarily impact (Sparks, 2020). These brief efforts concentrate on vocabulary retention and pinpointing common response techniques to avoid stereotyping, which minimally develops the participants' awareness of implicit biases (Forscher, Lai, Ebersole, Herman, Devine & Nosek 2019).

Ongoing DE&I support to maintain short-term awareness and procure long-term transformation is essential for BHS faculty to begin actualizing their diversity statement. It can increase their ability to gather useful teaching tools and to create learning climates that recognize the “intellectual, social, emotional, and physical environments in which our students learn,” is affected by many factors, including the strides of the instructor (Dwyer & Smith, 2020; Ambrose et al., 2010). Dwyer and Smith (2020) asserted rather

than singular workshops, consistent faculty development endeavors are more effective toward long-term institutional change. For BHS learning environments to reflect the BHS diversity statement, strategic opportunities must be crafted to boost educator consciousness, mindsets, and abilities to act on classroom realities and encourage DE&I importance.



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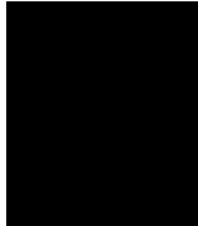
## APPENDIX A

### University of Dayton IRB Approval

What Changed
Danita Nelson updated this service request on Fri 5/20/22 11:32 AM Eastern Daylight Time.
Comments: Changed Status from <b>New</b> to <b>Approved</b> .
EXEMPT (d)(2); Approved Mon 5/16/22 5:10 PM Eastern Daylight Time
RESEARCHER: Kelisha Everage
PROJECT TITLE: Actualizing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A School, a Mission, a Practice
The Institutional Review Board has reviewed the subject proposal and has found this research protocol is exempt from continuing IRB oversight as described in 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2). * Therefore, you have approval to proceed with the study.

## APPENDIX B

### Written Approval from the Organization



Dr. Davin Carr-Chellman  
Associate Professor of Education  
University of Dayton  
[dcarrchellman1@udayton.edu](mailto:dcarrchellman1@udayton.edu)

February 21, 2022

Dear Dr. Carr-Chellman,

As the Head of School for the [REDACTED] School [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I'm writing today to authorize Kelisha Everage to conduct her doctoral research at our school. We agree to participate in her data collection, including faculty and staff interviews and a survey, both designed to learn more about our diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. I've spoken with Kelisha directly about maintaining confidentiality, as a former employee and a researcher, to the extent possible. We look forward to the findings from this study and will support her efforts pending IRB approval.

Should you have any questions about our partnership with Kelisha and the University of Dayton to conduct this study, I can be reached at ([REDACTED]) or by email at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,



Head of School

## Invitation to Participate

## APPENDIX D

### Introduction Video and Survey Link

Kelisha's Research Invitation Video and Survey Link



**Kelisha Everage** <everagek1@u Dayton.edu>

Mon, Aug 1, 2022, 10:12 PM ☆ ↶ ⋮

Hello,

Please see below for the resources necessary to begin my research!

1. Topic: Kelisha Everage's Invitation to Participate in the Research

Meeting Recording:

<https://zoom.us/rec/share/B4KGHhncG01NHA7d3iwh6VoWodlWnrQg3hLNko-zsmXUZ4NiNDFGLjrxBDQ-e90.xqoabIDTJ6jJWPHj>

2. Anonymous Survey Link

[https://u Dayton.iad1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_0CG3dFSplPQAcjs](https://u Dayton.iad1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0CG3dFSplPQAcjs)

Let me know if you have any questions or if there are any issues with the links.

Smiles,

Kelisha

## APPENDIX E

### Action Research Survey

#### Demographics:

- Please specify your ethnicity.  
African American or Black, White, Latino or Hispanic, Asian American or Pacific Islander, Indigenous, or Two or more, Prefer not to say
- What is your age range?  
18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56+ years
- Choose the position that best describes your primary role at the School.  
Instructional (i.e., teacher of record or teacher's assistant), Non-Instructional (i.e., school administrator or maintenance staff)
- How many years have you been at the School? (round to the nearest whole year)  
1 year, 2-4 years, 5-7 years, 8-10 years, 11 years plus
- How many years have you been in your current role (this will not include grade level changes; round to the nearest whole year)?  
year, 2-4 years, 5-7 years, 8-10 years, 11 years plus

#### School Policies:

- Does the School have a clear mission statement regarding DE&I?  
True/False
- All stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, staff, families, students, and community members participated in the development of the DE&I mission statement.  
True/False
- The School regularly publishes the DE&I policies and mission statement to staff, students, and families.  
True/False
- The School consistently monitors DE&I considerations for implementation and makes programmatic modifications when necessary.  
True/False
- The School has a specific policy regarding educational discrimination, inequity, and exclusionary practices.  
True/False

#### School Climate

- All School staff members are involved in and support the implementation of schoolwide DE&I strategies and initiatives.  
Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree
- I have observed or have been informed of DE&I issues at the School.  
True/False
- Students have reported concerns related to DE&I at the School.  
True/False
- I have a clear understanding of effective responses and the appropriate measures I should take when students report incidents related to DE&I.

- Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree
- Families have reported concerns related to DE&I at the School to me directly.  
True/False
  - I have a clear understanding of effective responses and the appropriate measures I should take when families report concerns about DE&I.  
Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree
  - Colleagues have discussed concerns related to DE&I at the School.  
True/False
  - I have a clear understanding of effective responses and the appropriate measures I should take when my colleagues share concerns about DE&I.  
Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree
  - Critical DE&I issues that impact the School community are addressed with a sense of urgency and timeliness.  
Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree

### **School Culture**

- All staff members model values of equity, fairness, and inclusion when they are at the School.  
Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree
- I intentionally find opportunities to address and improve my personal DE&I journey.  
Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree
- I intentionally find opportunities to address and improve my professional DE&I educational journey.  
Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree
- I feel comfortable sharing my DE&I barriers and challenges with others.  
Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree
- I empathize with others' thoughts, feelings, and concerns regarding DE&I  
Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree

### **Professional Learning**

- I have received and participated in professional learning to recognize strategies for countering discrimination and bias.  
Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree
- Professional learning is delivered in ways that model perspectives that are relevant to directly improving DE&I competence.  
Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree
- School-provided professional learning adequately builds DE&I competence to gain skills to be implemented professionally and personally.  
Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree
- School-provided professional learning has resulted in my increased professional and personal DE&I competence.  
Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree
- I would benefit from training in developing alternative strategies to achieve excellence when encountering DE&I issues at the School.  
Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree

## APPENDIX F

### Interview Protocol

Could you tell me a bit about yourself, your background, and your role at BHS?

This study is focused on understanding policies and practices related to diversity, equity, and inclusion at BHS. Individual community members' prior experiences and learning are an important part of the overall picture.

Could you share with me some of your journeys so far in learning about diversity, equity, and inclusion both in general and as an educator?

I'm especially interested in your experiences at BHS. What are your thoughts and experiences about the climate for diversity, equity, and inclusion at BHS?

I'm wondering if you could walk me through a recent experience you had working with DE&I issues in your classroom/role.

- a. How did events unfold?
- b. How did you decide on how you used your professional judgment and teaching and learning practices to navigate the situation?

Can you share about a time you had or tried to address a DE&I issue with your colleagues or your students?

- a. What happened?
- b. If you have not, describe a time you wish you had.

What stopped you from engaging or participating fully in the situation, or in a dialogue in order to address the issue?

Can you describe what has specifically been done (or not done) to support teachers in addressing DEI in their classrooms?

- a. For your personal growth, what more should the school be doing?
- b. As a \_\_\_\_\_ (interviewee's role) what more can/should the school be doing?

Now that you know more about the study, is there anything else you want to make sure I understand?