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## **Creating Grace and Space: The Foundation on Which Progressive Educators Build a Sense of Belonging and Safety for Marginalized Gender and Sexual Diverse High School Students**

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Lisa M. Ortiz

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Concordia University–Portland  
College of Education  
Doctorate of Education Program

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Creating Grace and Space:  
The Foundation on Which Progressive Educators Build  
a Sense of Belonging and Safety for Marginalized  
Gender and Sexual Diverse High School Students

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Concordia University–Portland  
College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the College of Education  
in partial satisfaction of the requirements for a degree of  
Doctorate of Education in  
Transformational Leadership

Angela Owusu-Ansah, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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## **Abstract**

This descriptive case study focused on a single high school community which is intentional in its efforts to craft a school culture, fostering belonging and safety in students who are Gender and Sexual Diverse (GSD). The researcher examined the perspectives of classroom-based and non-classroom-based educators, as they strove to articulate how they address the needs of this student-population without negatively impacting academic and other school priorities, and how they incorporate understandings regarding this population into their practice. Through a multi-phase process including interviews, observations, focus group, and document analysis, the researcher explored how seven educator-participants navigate changing demographics both personally and professionally and identified aspects of the school culture associated with positive interactions and outcomes for the GSD population. This study revealed a well-articulated school culture in which educators independently engage in reflective practice in their planning, while teaching, and post-instruction individually and with peers. Participants place value on providing the grace and space to include both high academic standards and a strong culture which includes decency and trust, a focus on democracy and equity, commitment to the entire school, value of teacher-as-coach, and personalization for all members of the community. These values are the school's cultural foundation and built on The Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) and the CES 10 Common Principles. From the data, four themes within the over-arching theme of Creating Grace and Space were identified: Crafting Culture with Intentionality, Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, Facilitating and Managing Change, and Exercising Agency and Accountability.

*Keywords:* gender and sexual diverse (GSD), belonging, safety, grace and space, high school, Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), school culture

## **Dedication**

For all those who strive to provide each another the grace and space to thrive.

“Together, there is nothing we cannot accomplish” (Sanders, 2015).

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I am filled with gratitude for every person who helped me reach this point. Each of you brought wisdom, experience, generosity, humor—all the threads, beautiful, rough, and fine which wove together to create a living tapestry depicting this beautiful journey. Thank you.

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Thank you to my dissertation committee: Dr. Owusu-Ansah, as well as my reader, Dr. Anne Grey, and my content specialist, Dr. Joshua Moon Johnson. Your guidance and faith helped me preserve and deliver a study and a story I believe to be both worthy and worthwhile.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The educators' role in developing school culture, specifically safety and belonging, and its effect on all students, especially those from marginalized populations, have been topics of interest throughout the researcher's life and career. The researcher has always had a keen sensitivity to injustice; has been an advocate and ally for those who are marginalized or disenfranchised; and has spent considerable time, energy, and other resources fighting for social justice causes. In doing so, the researcher came to understand their own gender and sexual identity. With that dawning awareness, they became involved in the queer community and, as a teacher, was naturally drawn to working with queer youth and the causes that impact them.

One of the most impactful experiences for the researcher was helping to edit a zine called *Out Word* which was written by The Queer Players, an adolescent and young-adult writing group their girlfriend facilitated. In reading the pain, the power, the abuse, the defiance in their words as these young people described their truth; the reality of their lives, the researcher came to know these young people's struggles and to experience how their path had been different from that of the researcher as the process the researcher was navigating in their mid-20s, these youth were navigating as teenagers living under their parent's roof or on the streets, attending public schools or dropping out, and learning the ways of life and love with so few visible and positive examples in popular culture and the news, and no level of acceptance from either the church or the state. The researcher became interested in what other teachers were experiencing and what they were doing to support marginalized gender and sexual diverse students in schools.

For this study, the term "gender and sexual diverse" (GSD) is used to describe students who are marginalized within the spectra of gender and sexual identity. In the literature, this population is referenced by various configurations of the initial letters for lesbian, gay,

bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, pansexual, asexual, intersex, and two-spirit (LGBTQQPAI2S); Queer; Queer-spectrum; Trans-spectrum; Gender-Queer; among others. GSD, in this context is being used to describe those who are marginalized along these continua.

This study sought to examine the perceptions and practices of high school teachers as they navigate societal changes and serve to educate, nurture, and honor all their students, including those who are members of the focus GSD population. The specific factors of educators' perspectives and practices regarding belonging and safety are the lenses through which school culture and its impact on these GSD students were examined via an interpretivist perspective.

As a scholar researching this topic and a professional with a variety of teaching experiences in over 20 schools—public, private, and charter—in three western states, the researcher has learned the significant influence teachers, administrators, school policies and procedures, written and unwritten rules have as they combine to affect and create a school's culture. Research supports that students who feel safe and a sense of belonging in school are students who want to stay in school and be successful to the point of achieving graduation (Goodenow, 1993; Gray, 2012; Osterman, 2000). With the emphasis on graduation rates as a marker of school success, fostering a school culture which facilitates safety and belonging is key in achieving state and national goals in education. The need for school safety and sense of belonging in school supports the researcher's experience as a student, a special education paraprofessional, an early childhood special education teacher, a founding member of a charter school, a general education K–2 teacher, a substitute teacher, a resource teacher, and an autism specialist serving multiple schools or school districts at one time. School culture, as dictated or influenced by teachers' and administrators' perceptions and behaviors has a marked impact on

students who are marginalized, especially those who are GSD as they may have no representations of themselves or resources available to them.

### **Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

Students, especially from disenfranchised populations such as those who are GSD are striving for a sense of belonging and safety in their learning environments. School communities, at all levels, bear responsibility for ensuring a sense of belonging and safety for all their students. Progressive school communities, such as those who practice the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES, 2016) are primed to provide the support all students require and deserve. To be successful, these school communities need not only effective leadership committed to these principles but also a strong commitment from the teachers, who must implement the principles with authenticity.

Educators, including administrators and teachers, have an important role to play in a school community that is being intentional in fostering a culture of belonging and safety for their students. School communities, such as Bayview High School (a pseudonym), which are committed to the progressive schools' Coalition of Essential School's philosophy, strive to have all their students, including those who are GSD, succeed academically, socially, and emotionally and further expect all educators to support them in doing so.

Building such a school culture requires leadership with a vision and supporting values in addition to teachers who are in alignment and are willing to be led as well as serve in a leadership capacity themselves. To truly foster such a culture, teachers must be willing to critically look at their own practices; to be self-reflective practitioners in determining how their perceptions, attitudes, and understandings affect their preparation and practice in teaching their diverse student populations.

The cultural shifts within society represent the macrocosm of the changes taking place within public schools. As Parker Palmer relates, “Whatever is inside us continually flows outward to help form, or deform, the world—and whatever is outside us continually flows inward to help form, or deform, our lives” (2004, p. 47). So it is with school systems as a reflection of society at large. Response to these challenges in the form of systemic change takes place when the combined pressure from within and without reach a critical point. We are currently at such a point culturally and within the public schools.

One such challenge faced by schools in the United States is changing demographics within their student and familial populations (NCES, 2016; Pagan, 2016; Superville, 2014). Influxes of populations of people can often be predicted—given trends in population growth, conscious attention to world affairs, and America’s foundational identity as a nation of immigrants, irrespective of current political rhetoric (SPLC, 2016b). These externally-driven demographic changes often occur at the beginning of a school year and present school systems with the challenge of how best to plan to meet the needs of the “newcomers” (Pagan, 2016; Superville, 2014).

Though demographic discussion in this country often refers to race, ethnicity, socio-economics, and binary gender differentiations (M/F), within this context there is an emerging population of newcomers representing an internal demographic change within schools. This shift occurs when one or more members of the existing student population experience change in demographic due to dawning awareness about and acceptance of their gender and/or sexuality (Diaz, Kosciw, & Greytak, 2010; Dunlap, 2016; Greytek, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; SPLC, 2016a).

GSD students represent a unique layer of complexity within the existing middle and high school dynamic in which students undergo developmental and hormonal changes as they mature

into young adulthood. This is typically a challenging period for all students and their multiple microsystems. As such, high schools and middle schools are finding themselves emerging into places where GSD students must reintroduce themselves to those with whom they have already established relationships—their teachers, administrators, other students, and the wider school-community.

The process of *coming out* refers at its most basic level, to disclosing first to oneself and then to others about one's gender identity, sexual orientation, or both. The general broadening of societal cultural norms and attitudes provides the context which emboldens many of today's students to begin the coming out process at an earlier age than prior generations (Dunlap, 2016; Robertson, 2014; Williams, 2010). These processes and their impact on systems and individuals have, over time, transferred from college and other adult institutions to local high schools and middle schools across the country (Dunlap, 2016; Robertson, 2014).

Since the expansion of public education laws in the 1970s, the de facto motto of public schools in the United States has been, "We take all comers!" Because attendance in school is compulsory, students have very little control over where they spend much of their lives. Their schools are determined predominantly by where their caregivers have chosen to live, with income, mobility, and school policy serving as additional influences.

Public schools, likewise, have no control over who comes to their doors. These two factors combine in such a way as to necessitate an elaborate mix of planfulness, flexibility, and responsiveness on the part of schools, to remain effective places of learning for all its students. Consequently, high schools today need to consider ways to prepare for and shape school culture for the internally-driven changes in the demographics of its GSD students, to retain the ability to promote the success of all its students.

There are many factors which define student “success.” Academic achievement (including GPA, test scores, placement in competitions, among others) is time-honored, but one metric which has recently begun to be asserted as an equally-valid measure of merit is *belonging*.

Belonging describes the sense that one is an integral member of a group and has “psychological membership in the school or classroom,” (Wehlage, 1989, p. 10 as cited in Goodenow, 1993, p. 10) or “perceptions of fitting in or social attachment,” (Gray, 2012, p. 3).

Research shows (Anderman, 2003; Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997; Goodenow, 1993; Osterman, 2000; Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005; McMahon et al., 2009; Tillery, 2009; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010; Payne & Smith, 2012; Jennings, 2015) that students with a high sense of belonging feel accepted, respected, included, and supported. In addition, according to Gray (2012), they “generally have greater motivation, better grades, and greater psychological well-being” (p. 2). These benefits are not exclusive to GSD students, but across populations (Meyer, Taylor, and Peter, 2015; Poteat, Sinclair, DiGiovanni, Koenig, & Russell, 2013; Sandowski, 2016; Szalacha, 2003; Toomy & Russell, 2013). It is clearly important that middle and high schools attend to fostering both belonging and safety as a prevalent aspect of their school culture.

Culture is variously defined in the literature however; the definition offered in the Glossary of Education Reform (The Great Schools Partnership, 2013) is the most comprehensive and was used for the purposes of this study:

(S)chool culture refers to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions, but the term also encompasses more concrete issues such as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, or the degree to which a

school embraces and celebrates racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity . . . (resulting) from both conscious and unconscious perspectives, values, interactions, and practices, and it is heavily shaped by a school's particular institutional history. Students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other staff members all contribute to their school's culture, as do other influences such as the community in which the school is located, the policies that govern how it operates, or the principles upon which the school was founded.

Teacher attitude toward and perception of diversity, in all its permutations, has been found to be among the most influential factors in determining their behavior toward students and others within the school context (Bailey, 1996; Barber & Krane, 2007; Cavanagh & Waugh, 2004; Certo, Cauley, & Chafin, 2003; Dewey, 1933; Fisher, Frey, and Pumpian, 2012; Fredman et al., 2015; Gay, 2013; Hogan, 2013; Horn & Romeo, 2010; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Meyer, Taylor, & Peter, 2015; Rands, 2009; Roby, 2011; Schwartz & Wynne, 1985; Ullman, 2014; Wagner, 2014; Weinberg, 2009). To be most effective, teachers need a balanced environment where they can challenge themselves to grow out of their preconceptions, reflect on their practice, and actively pursue their own development about the societal changes occurring both inside and outside of the school environment, particularly as it applies to their treatment and perception of their GSD student population.

The human needs for safety and belonging are well established in academic cannon. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, first described in 1954 and elaborated on in his later works, delineates six levels of human need or motivations, each successive, building upon satisfaction



of lower needs in order to access higher order need fulfillment. Situated near the base of these needs are those of Safety and Belonging (and Love). According to Maslow's theory, cognitive concerns or the "pursuit of knowledge," which is the narrowest definition of the "business of school," are not accessible until the Self-Actualization phase which is built upon the more basic human needs, Physiological, Safety, Belonging and Love, and Esteem. Thus, assuming students' Physiological needs are met at home or perhaps in part via school supports such as free and reduced lunch programs and student health centers, it is clearly important that middle and high schools consciously foster both Safety and Belonging as prevalent aspects of their school culture to support student growth toward Self-Actualization and academic learning.

Safety is often defined in terms of freedom from physical harm, but that is a focus on inputs—incidents of violence, types of acts, and so forth. The purpose of this study is outputs—the results of actions and practices which either foster or hinder students' feelings of safety. Social and emotional safety, represented in feelings of belonging or the lack thereof, are the overarching outcomes of these environmental factors. With a focus is educators' practices and perceptions, the researcher is focused on subtleties such as language, curricular choices, and problem solving as evidence of fostering a safe environment in which students are free from all types of harm—verbal harassment, ostracization, physical abuse, silencing and marginalization, to name a few and are free to express themselves and develop to their fullest potential within educational institutions. Once Safety is satisfied, Belonging can come to the fore.

For students who emerge in school as marginalized GSD after being known as non-marginalized GSD, their original mold of belonging may need to be reshaped. In coming out, a student may find themselves, in the position of having to re-introduce themselves, justify, or recreate a space of belonging based on their newly-realized identity. Former places of belonging

may be no longer accessible to them and other, new, and unknown places may be made evident. As belonging is part of a reciprocal system; the system must recognize that a student belongs for the sense of belongingness to be complete and for the student to feel safely a member of that system. In this way, a binary system (belonging or not belonging) is reinforced however, if schools are mindfully creating spaces for belonging, then rather than being obstacles of power and oppression, they can facilitate inclusion and a civility which fosters belonging and safety for all students and community members.

Additionally, a high school or middle school culture that incorporates a niche for GSD students could reflect Foucault's (1978) theory on sexuality; that there is no such thing as "sexuality," as such, rather it and the concept of sexual categories are a social construction influenced by our times and current understandings which evolve and change and are therefore not fixed in definition. Sexuality is a topic of discussion or an object of knowledge versus an actual thing, *Scientia sexualis*, according to Foucault. The social construction of sexuality ties to Foucault's theory of power, as those who name the thing, have the power over it. As an illustration, during the 20th century, sex became a topic surrounded by shame and secrecy via the machinations of power—namely that of an intersection between the church, politics, and medicine. According to Foucault, sexuality is a tool for the distribution of power and a mechanism for social control. If this assertion is conceded, then schools—as manifestations of institutional power—can either fuel the loss in students' sense of belonging and decrease in safety in the school community or they can foster enhancement of belonging and safety for GSD and other marginalized populations.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Teachers, administrators, and other educators and personnel have the power to either heighten or diminish students' sense of belonging and safety in schools and impact the school community of GSD students. How then do educators (teachers, the administrator, and the counselor) at the focus school intentionally set about crafting such a school culture? And how do they perceive their contribution to creating space for GSD students such that the educators foster a sense of belonging and safety in this specific population of students within the wider context of increasing a sense of belonging and safety for all students? The research emphasis concerns the experiences and contributions of different adult participants within the learning community: administrator, counselor, and teachers.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The researcher contends that the ways in which the adults in the school community construct and define belonging clearly affects the design and delivery of instruction and ultimately affects the messages that students receive about their gender identity, familial value, sexuality, and self-concept as well as whether they belong and are valued as members of the school community. If the adults of a school community come to consensus about how to expand and foster creating space, with specific regard to GSD populations, this may lead to greater levels of feelings of belonging and safety.

## Research Questions

The following is the primary question which guided this research: How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations? The study sought to answer the following subquestions:

1. How does a public high school community with high academic standards, intent on carefully shaping its school culture, expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging of all its diverse students, in particular its marginalized GSD students, without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives?
2. How do educators in this high school relate to and incorporate new and developing understanding of their marginalized GSD students as students create a space for themselves within the existing school culture?

Creswell (2012) describes qualitative research as allowing one to use an inductive process to allow for the emergence of relevance through the data. It is through accumulation of data; multiple, rich data sources; and thorough analysis that meaning is developed. This process and the use of a case study method allowed the researcher to study this school in a real-world context (Yin, 2014); something which the subject matter requires. The school as a whole, though conscious in its focus on belonging and safety, particularly with regard to GSD populations, is relatively new to these concepts and is therefore a work in progress. Via a case study methodology and an interpretivist perspective, the researcher was able to use multiple lenses to explore and build meaning with the subjects as related to their process.

## **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

By addressing the research questions and providing insights, the practice of both teachers and administrators can benefit. As particular elements are identified and evaluated, gaps in service delivery can be addressed and achievements celebrated and refined. Regarding policy, in this era of high stakes testing, highlighting the importance of school culture and belonging at an academically successful school may provide a model for other schools. Specifically regarding GSD students, identifying educators' intention and perspective is the first step to determining which aspects of a purposefully-designed school culture are beneficial. This information adds to the current understanding of how to provide relevant resources to this marginalized population. As related to theory, by relating multiple theoretical influences and seminal thought on this topic, the researcher hopes the results of this study adds to the existing body of knowledge. To assist in the possible improvement of other school programs, this study intends to look at the mechanisms and progress of one school community which has been intentional in its efforts to build a space in the school environment in which GSD students feel a sense of belonging and safety. The research incorporated interviews with the administrator, counselor, and teachers as well as a focus group and observations of teachers in their classrooms and review of relevant documents.

## **Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study the key terms have been defined as follows:

**Gender and Sexual Diverse (GSD).** This term describes people who are marginalized within the spectrums of gender and sexual identity. This population is referred to in the literature as various configurations of the initial letters for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, pansexual, asexual, intersex, and two-spirit (LGBTQQPAI2S);

Queer; Queer-spectrum; Trans-spectrum; Gender-Queer; among others. GSD, in this context is being used to describe those who are marginalized along these continua.

**Sense of belonging.** This term describes the belief that one is an integral member of a group. It is related to feeling accepted, respected, included, and supported which has been found to increase motivation, improve grades, and contribute to greater psychological well-being (Anderman, 2003; Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997; Goodenow, 1993; Osterman, 2000; Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005; McMahon, Parnes, Keys, & Viola, 2008; Tillery, 2009; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010; Payne & Smith, 2012; Jennings, 2015).

**School culture.** According to in the Glossary of Education Reform (The Great Schools Partnership, 2013) *school culture*:

refers to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions, but the term also encompasses more concrete issues such as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, or the degree to which a school embraces and celebrates racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity . . . (resulting) from both conscious and unconscious perspectives, values, interactions, and practices, and it is heavily shaped by a school's particular institutional history. Students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other staff members all contribute to their school's culture, as do other influences such as the community in which the school is located, the policies that govern how it operates, or the principles upon which the school was founded.

**School community.** This term refers to all stakeholders: district and site administration, teachers, support staff, students, families, and members of the wider school community.

**Safety.** This term refers to outputs—the results of actions and practices which either foster or hinder students’ feelings of safety. Social and emotional safety, represented in feelings of belonging or the lack thereof, are the overarching outcomes of the environmental factors under investigation. Because the focus is on educators’ practices and perceptions, the researcher is focused on subtleties such as language, curricular choices, and problem solving as evidence of fostering a safe environment in which students are free from all types of harm—verbal harassment, ostracization, physical abuse, silencing and marginalization, to name a few—and are free to express themselves and develop to their fullest potential within educational institutions.

**Space.** This term denotes a physical area but most relevant to this study, it is a metaphorical “space” related to open and affirming attitudes, atmosphere, policies, and practices.

**Heteronormativity.** This term refers to the tendency to consider heterosexuality to be normal, while positioning marginalized GSD identities as deviant.

**Cisnormativity.** This term refers to the tendency to consider gender expression and identity as normal only if it matches the chromosomal or gender-designation at birth. This positions marginalized GSD identities as deviant.

**Teacher practices.** This term includes all the choices teachers make during planning, implementation, and post-reflection regarding curriculum and classroom environment as well as their language usage, classroom management style, and attitude toward students and societal events and expectations.

### **Assumptions, Delimitation, and Limitations**

**Assumptions.** The primary assumption is that the participants in this study would respond both truthfully and forthrightly when sharing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences

and that the lessons observed in the classroom are reflective of a typical lesson and typical student interactions.

**Limitations.** The researcher acknowledges the following limitations and delimitations of the research design. Limitations concern external situations out of the control of the researcher, while delimitations concern internal situations, or boundary choices, which the researcher has intentionally set to reasonably restrict the extent of the study. There are two limitations to this study: time and the relationship of the researcher to the school.

Time is the primary limitation within this study. As the focus of this descriptive case study is a traditionally-scheduled school, the maximum research period is September through June with many times uncondusive to study (testing, vacations, campus events, etc.). In addition, the participants' time must be respected; therefore, all aspects requiring participant cooperation needed to be conducted at their convenience regarding time and location. Given these time constraints, it is essential to schedule interviews and observations as early as possible within the timeline to leave time for make-up sessions and adjustments to the schedule.

The second limitation is the relationship of the researcher to the school. As a parent of a child attending the focus school and a member of the GSD community, some participants may feel anxious about sharing their true perceptions or vulnerabilities with the researcher. Would the participants fully disclose with the researcher or simply say what they feel is "correct?"

Methods and procedures to address these limitations are discussed in Chapter Three, Methodology.

**Delimitations.** This study is delimited to a small, suburban school district in the Pacific Northwest in which members from one of the two district schools—the high school—



participated. It is further delimited to six participants, two from the administration and four from the faculty. These are necessary to address the limitations of time.

## **Summary**

As an educator, the researcher's personal and professional experiences have shaped the lenses through which the work of teachers—and indeed the world—is viewed. Likewise, the educators at Bayview High School—their practices, their perceptions, and their awareness and understanding of social and cultural phenomena—are shaped by their experiences. This study sought to examine the perceptions and practices of high school teachers as they navigate societal changes and serve to educate, nurture, and honor all their students, specifically those who are GSD. The researcher has identified the specific factors of belonging and safety as the lenses through which school culture and its impact on GSD students were examined via an interpretivist perspective.

Chapter 1 has served to introduce the topic and the motivation behind the research as well as identified terminology. Chapter 2 presents a review and synthesis of research as it relates to the topic as well as a review of methodology and a critique of previous literature. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology and design, participant description and selection, instrument design, data collection, analysis processes, and credibility and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 provides the data analysis and results. Chapter 5 summarizes the results and relates them to the literature as well as implications and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Students, especially from disenfranchised populations such as those who are marginalized gender and sexual diverse (GSD), are striving for a sense of belonging and safety in their learning environments. School communities, at all levels, bear responsibility for ensuring a sense of belonging and safety for all their students. Progressive school communities, such as those who practice the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES, n.d.) are primed to provide the support all students require and deserve. To be successful, these school communities need effective leadership committed to these principles but also a strong commitment from the teachers, who must implement the principles with authenticity.

Educators, including administrators and teachers, have an important role to play in a school community that is being intentional in fostering a culture of belonging and safety for their students. Progressive school communities, such as those which follow the Coalition of Essential Schools' philosophy, strive to have all students, including those who are GSD, succeed academically, socially, and emotionally and further, expect all educators to support them in doing so.

Building such a school culture requires leadership with a vision and supporting values in addition to teachers who are in alignment and are willing to be led as well as serve in a leadership capacity themselves. To truly foster such a culture, teachers must be willing to critically look at their own practices; to be self-reflective practitioners in determining how their perceptions, attitudes, and understandings affect their preparation and practice in teaching their diverse student populations.

## **Organization**

In this chapter current literature is presented demonstrating the rationale supporting the need for the study. The conceptual framework describes the foundation of the study and is organized by key concepts under the review of the research and methodological literature, followed by a section addressing methodological issues. Next, a synthesis and critique of existing literature relate current and seminal research on the topics pertaining to this study is provided and finally, the chapter summary offers a review of key concepts.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study identifies the attributes of teacher perceptions and teacher practices within the context of belonging and safety as they relate to Bayview High School community's efforts to provide space for their gender and sexual diverse (GSD) population of students. Teacher perceptions and practices are the foci of study with insights from the administrative team providing additional context specifically regarding vision and the incorporation of the Coalition of Essential Schools Principles as well as the school district's progressive nondiscrimination policy.

The following literature review investigates the current perspectives associated with gender and sexual diversity, teachers' practices in addressing the unique needs of GSD students, teachers' perceptions, belonging, and safety as they relate to instruction and school culture.

## **Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

The cultural shifts within society represent the macrocosm of the changes taking place within public schools. According to Durkheim, (as cited in Singer & Pezone, 2003), education "can be reformed only if society itself is reformed. . . . (Education) is only the image and reflection of society. It imitates and reproduces the latter . . . it does not create it," (pp. 372–

373). Schools hold space to educate society's children. They are created as agents of the dominant society and are social constructs which reflect the current societal norms (Foucault, 1978). Paulo Freire (1968/1970) advocated for the poor and oppressed to take control over their lives and to address injustice and inequality through education to shape their future. Similarly, Parker Palmer (2011) posits, "Whatever is inside us continually flows outward to help form, or deform, the world—and whatever is outside us continually flows inward to help form, or deform, our lives" (p. 47). So it is with school systems as a reflection of society at large. Response to these challenges in the form of systemic change takes place when the combined pressure from within and without reach a critical point. Society is currently at such a point culturally and within the public schools, as is demonstrated below.

Schools function in many ways as both businesses and ecosystems. When one views systems through the four frames as described by Bolman and Deal (2013), the Symbolic Frame, is most relevant to this topic. Although the other three frames, Human Resources, Structural, and Political each play a part as they relate to the needs of the people within an organization, the goals and policies of the organization, and the power structure and management of the organization respectively; the Symbolic Frame deals with meaning and the mythos of the organization which are of particular import when discussing culture. The Symbolic Frame encompasses those elements which foster belief, hope, and attachment to an organization; in other words, those elements of culture which foster belonging.

Sergiovanni (2000) describes school culture in terms of Lifeworlds and Systemsworlds. The Systemsworld includes, "management designs and protocols, strategic and tactical actions, policies and procedures, and efficiency and accountability assurances" whereas the Lifeworlds comprise "leaders and their purposes, followers and their needs, and the unique traditions,

rituals, and norms that define a school's culture" (p. ix). In this way, Systemsworlds align well with Bolman and Deal's (2013) Structural and Political Frames, and Lifeworlds align with the Symbolic Frame, with elements from Human Resources in both. Sergiovanni asserts that the Lifeworld must be the generative force of the Systemsworld or else the culture and character of a school erodes.

### **Coalition of Essential Schools**

The Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) is a framework for progressive small schools. The CES is a network of districts, schools, and individual educators who share common principles and practices and serve as a professional learning community to support and promote innovative and effective teaching and learning in small schools.

According to their website (About, n.d., para. 4),

CES practice is exemplified by small, personalized learning communities where teachers and students know each other well in a climate of trust, decency, and high expectations for all. Modeling democratic practices with a strong commitment to equity, Essential schools work to create academic success for every student by sharing decision-making with all those affected by the school and explicitly confronting all forms of inequity.

Among the 10 Principles CES promotes, those most relevant to this study are:

1. Personalization, which refers to individualizing teaching and learning, and specifies that goals apply to all students. Though the means of achievement or expression of achievement varies, "school practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of students" (Common Principles, n.d., para. 4)

2. A tone of decency and trust, described in terms of a tone which “explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation, of trust, and of decency (fairness, generosity, and tolerance)” (Common Principles, n.d., para. 7)

3. Democracy and Equity which is described in the following way,

The school should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies. It should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school. The school should honor diversity and build on the strength of its communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity. (Common Principles, n.d., para. 10)

To be faithful to these principles and meet the needs of their students, teachers must not only define the changing demographics of their students more broadly, but also be willing to critically look at their own practices; to be self-reflective practitioners in determining how their perceptions, attitudes, and understandings affect their preparation and practice in teaching their diverse student populations.

### **Changing Demographics**

One of the many ongoing challenges faced by schools in the United States is changing demographics within their student and familial populations (NCES, 2016; Pagan, 2016; Superville, 2014). Influxes of populations of people can often be predicted—given trends in population growth, conscious attention to world affairs, and America’s foundational identity as a nation of immigrants, irrespective of current rhetoric (SPLC, 2016b). These externally-driven demographic changes often occur at the beginning of a school year and present school systems with the challenge of how best to plan to meet the needs of the “newcomers” (Pagan, 2016; Superville, 2014).

Though demographic discussions in this country often refer to racial, ethnic groups, socio-economic, and binary gender differentiations (M/F), within this context, there is an emerging population of newcomers, representing an internal demographic change within schools. This shift occurs when a portion of the existing student population experience change in demographic due to dawning awareness about and acceptance of their gender and/or sexuality (Diaz, Kosciw, & Greytak, 2010; Dunlap, 2016; Greytek, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; SLPC, 2016a).

For this study, the term “gender and sexual diverse” (GSD) is used to describe students who are marginalized within the spectrums of gender and sexual identity. This population is often referred to in the literature by various configurations of the initial letters for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, pansexual, asexual, intersex, and two-spirit (LGBTQQPAI2S); Queer; Queer-spectrum; Trans-spectrum; Gender-Queer; among others. GSD, in this context is being used to describe those who are marginalized along these continua.

GSD students represent a unique layer of complexity within the existing middle and high school dynamic in which students undergo developmental and hormonal changes as they mature into young adulthood. This is typically a challenging period for all students and their multiple microsystems. As such, high schools and middle schools are finding themselves emerging into places where GSD students must reintroduce themselves to those with whom they have already established relationships—their teachers, administrators, other students, and the wider school-community.

This process has an impact on everyone within the community. Though clearly necessary and most impactful for the person who is emerging as marginalized GSD, the process of change is one experienced by all, including educators whose job it is to support all their students but who must also engage in a process of self-reflection and transformation themselves—as

individuals and as professionals. Maxine Greene (1993), in writing about democratic classrooms, advocates listening to students as a means for empowerment and to decrease the marginalization many experience. She posits that all processes are in a constant state of evolution, including teaching practices, attitudes, and beliefs. The process of that evolution takes many forms and each individual educator must navigate their particular pathway, sometimes at the same time as they are ushering their students—both marginalized GSD and non-marginalized GSD—along their particular journeys.

### **Dealing with Change**

The process of change, whether societal, organizational, or individual, is a well-studied field. The researchers previously cited variously address change as it relates to each of these areas. Most specifically, regarding educators' perspectives, it is important to fully investigate the processes of individual change in addition to change as it relates to school systems.

Individual change is closely linked to reflection and, in the field of education, the theory is borne out in the research (Dewey, 1933; Foucault, 1978; Freire, 1968/1970; Greene, 1993; Mezirow, 1994; Schön, 1983; Schön, 1987). Reflective practice, according to Schön (1987), is described as knowing-on-action (before and after) and knowing-in-action (during). Practitioners filter their experiences through their own *appreciative systems*—values, knowledge, theories, and practices. Dewey (1933) addressed reflection as a response to a problem or a feeling of unease. He described the conditions for reflection as open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility which are incorporated, holistically, into a practitioner's way of being. Open-mindedness addresses a teacher's practice of continual reflection about why they are doing what they are doing. It is an active practice of listening, seeking multiple perspectives, and being open to the possibility of being wrong and needing to change course. Whole-



heartedness reflects a commitment to learning and the process of change. Bearing responsibility means that consequences (personal, academic, and socio-political) are an integral aspect of consideration in the reflective process. See Figure 1 below.



*Figure 1.* Reflective Practice (based on Dewey, 1933 and Schön, 1987; created by Sandy Krebs, 2018).

As instruction is taking place, immediately after, and over time, the practitioner reflects on their work as well as their cognitive and metacognitive processes, their actions and inactions. It is through that process, which often involves discomfort or dissonance, professional growth is achieved. According to Mezirow (1994) the act of examining one's assumptions, patterns of interaction, and the premise under which actions are taken defines meaningful learning. Far beyond mere remembering, reflective practice is the act of consciously analyzing not just actions and cause and effect, but emotions, reactions, insights, and interactions. It is a discipline, requiring practice to become a habit of mind and be engaged in reflexively. Reflection is not about judgement as much as it is about thoughtful processing regarding not just the What and

How of teaching, but also the Why and determining meaning not only of the content but also of the practicing art of *teaching* and what it means to be a teacher.

There are many barriers to overcome when facing change. Some are attitudinal, and some are behavioral. Research shows that attitudes inform instruction and a teacher's treatment of their students (Bailey, 1996; Barber & Krane, 2007; Cavanagh & Waugh, 2004; Certo et al., 2003; Dewey, 1933; Fredman, Schultz, & Hoffman, 2015; Horn and Romeo, 2010; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Meyer, Taylor, & Peter, 2015; Rands, 2009; Roby, 2011; Schwartz & Wynne, 1985; Ullman, 2014; Wagner, 2014; Weinberg, 2009) as well as the importance of teachers' attitudes on students' sense of belonging (Anderman, 2003; Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997; Goodenow, 1993; Osterman, 2000; Wigfield & Wagner, 2005; McMahon et al., 2009; Tillery, 2009; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010; Payne & Smith, 2012; Jennings, 2015). Much, of course, is subconscious and that fact highlights the need for self-reflection. Until one analyzes one's own practice, biases and assumptions go unchecked. Once uncovered, the individual practitioner can exercise the choice to address the need for, and process of, changing.

There are many theories of behavioral change. From Tuckman's (1965) Storming, Forming, Norming, Performing, to Bandura's (1977 and 1986) integrative theoretical framework addressing self-efficacy which acknowledges that "cognitive processes mediate change but that cognitive events are induced and altered most readily by experience of mastery arising from effective performance" (p. 191), to Daniel Pink's (2009) "purpose motive," including challenge, mastery, and making a contribution; to the transtheoretical change theory (Prochaska, et al. 1998) addressing the non-linear stages of change as Precontemplation, Contemplation,

Preparation, Action, Maintenance, Termination. What they all have in common is change is a process. While there are instances of a thunderclap reckoning which brings about a rapid transformation, there is still a process between the epiphany and integration of new behaviors.

### **Coming Out**

The process of *coming out* refers, at its most basic level, to disclosing first to oneself and then to others about one's gender identity, sexual orientation, or both. The general broadening of societal cultural norms and attitudes provides the context which emboldens many of today's students to begin the coming out process at an earlier age than prior generations (Dunlap, 2016; Robertson, 2014; Williams, 2010).

The Stonewall Organization's study (as cited by Williams, 2010), which polled 1,500 individuals who identified as gay or lesbian, indicated the average age people began the coming out process had dropped dramatically with each generation. The coming out process for Baby Boomers over age 60 began at an average age of 37, Gen Xers in their 30s began at age 25, and the average age for Millennials (ages 18-24 at the time of the poll) was 17 years old. One recent survey by the American Friends of Tel Aviv University (2011), found the average age in the United States had dropped to 16.

Dunlap's 2016 study reinforced with the Stonewall organization's findings. Dunlap (2016) analyzed the coming out process identifying nine milestones and found that from start to finish, the process had shortened from 12.1 years for the oldest women to 5.2 years in the youngest and the data for males showed an even greater acceleration from 22.4 years to 6.8 years. These processes and their impact on systems and individuals have thus transferred from college and other adult institutions to local high schools and middle schools across the country. According to Dunlap (2016), while this can be viewed as a positive development, it creates a

perverse problem for young people who are coming out. Traditionally, supportive resources for same-sex attracted youth have been targeted at young adults rather than teens (under 18). If fewer supports are available for struggling adolescents than for struggling young adults, today's thirteen-year-old may be struggling with the same issues as yesterday's twenty-year-old, but with fewer resources and a less solid sense of self.

### **The Mandate for Public Education**

Since the expansion of public education laws in the 1970s, the de facto motto of public schools in the United States has been, "We take all comers!" Because attendance in school is compulsory, students have very little control over where they spend much of their lives. Their schools are determined predominantly by where their caregivers have chosen to live, with income, mobility, and school policy serving as additional influences.

Public schools, likewise, have no control over who comes to their doors. These two factors combine in such a way as to necessitate an elaborate mix of planfulness, flexibility, and responsiveness on the part of schools, in order to remain effective places of learning for all its students. Consequently, high schools today need to consider ways to prepare for and shape school culture for the internally-driven changes in the demographics of its GSD students, to retain the ability to promote the success of all its students.

### **Student Success and Belonging**

There are many factors which define student "success." Academic achievement (GPA, test scores, placement in competitions, college acceptance rate and locations, among others) is time-honored but one metric which has recently begun to be asserted as an equally-valid measure of merit is *belonging*.

Belonging describes the sense that one is an integral member of a group and has “psychological membership in the school or classroom,” (Wehlage, 1989, p. 10 as cited in Goodenow, 1993, p. 10) or “perceptions of fitting in or social attachment,” (Gray, 2012, p. 3). Research shows (Anderman, 2003; Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997; Goodenow, 1993; Osterman, 2000; Wigfield, Lutz, & Wagner, 2005; McMahon, Parnes, Keys, & Viola, 2009; Tillery, 2009; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010; Payne & Smith, 2012; Jennings, 2015) that students with a high sense of belonging feel accepted, respected, included, and supported. In addition, according to Gray (2012), they “generally have greater motivation, better grades, and greater psychological well-being” (p. 2). These benefits are not exclusive to GSD students, but across populations (Toomy & Russell, 2012; Meyer, Taylor, and Peter, 2015; Poteat, Sinclair, DiGiovanni, Koenig, & Russell, 2013; Sandowski, 2016; Szalacha, 2003). It is clearly important that middle and high schools attend to fostering both belonging and safety as a prevalent aspect of their school culture.

### **School Culture**

Culture is variously defined in the literature as, “the set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the ‘persona’ of the school” (Peterson, 2002); “An underground flow of feelings and folkways [wending] its way within schools in the form of vision and values, beliefs and assumptions, rituals and ceremonies, history and stories, and physical symbols” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, pp. 7–8, as cited in Fisher, Frey, & Pumpian 2012); “the superglue that bonds an organization, unites people, and helps an enterprise to accomplish desired ends” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 252); and the “soil versus the plants” (Payne & Smith, (2012). The definition offered in the Glossary of Education

Reform (The Great Schools Partnership, 2013), though not the most poetic, is the most comprehensive and is used for the purposes of this study:

[S]chool culture refers to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions, but the term also encompasses more concrete issues such as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, or the degree to which a school embraces and celebrates racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity . . . (resulting) from both conscious and unconscious perspectives, values, interactions, and practices, and it is heavily shaped by a school's particular institutional history. Students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other staff members all contribute to their school's culture, as do other influences such as the community in which the school is located, the policies that govern how it operates, or the principles upon which the school was founded.

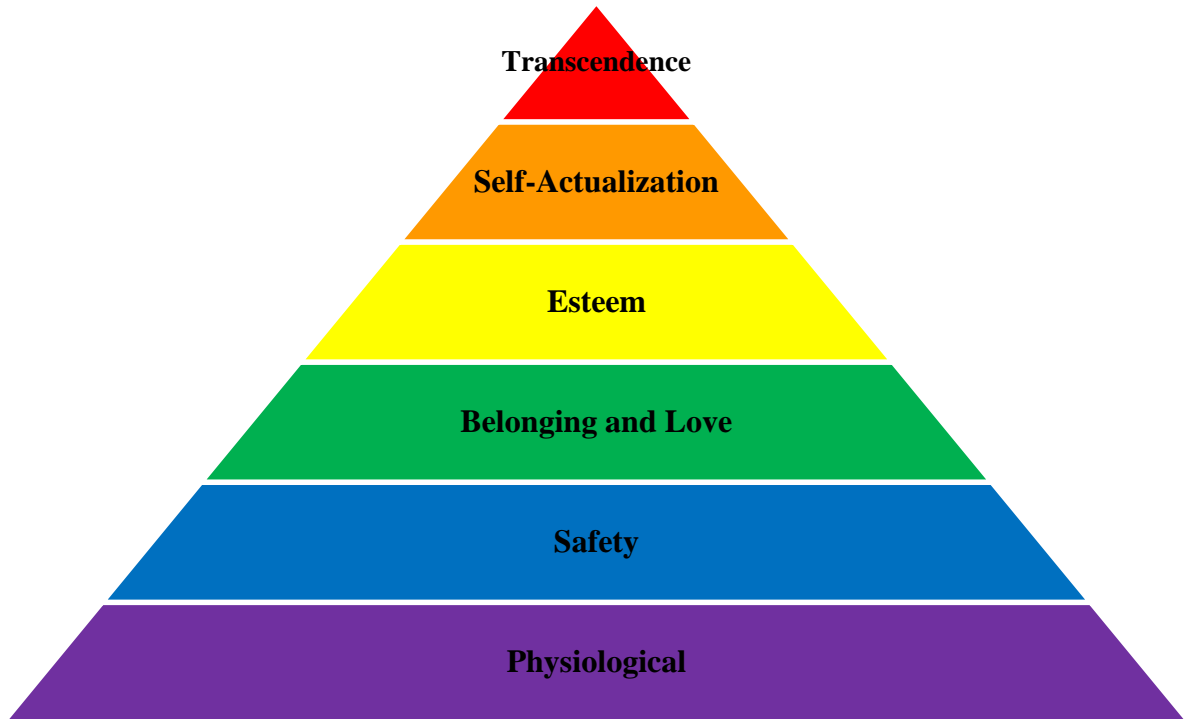
### **Teacher Perceptions and Practices**

Teacher attitude toward and perception of diversity, in all its permutations, has been found to be among the most influential factors in determining their behavior toward students and others within the school context (Bailey, 1996; Barber & Krane, 2007; Cavanagh & Waugh, 2004; Certo et al., 2003; Dewey, 1933; Fredman, Schultz, & Hoffman, 2015; Horn and Romeo, 2010; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Meyer, Taylor, & Peter, 2015; Rands, 2009; Roby, 2011; Schwartz & Wynne, 1985; Ullman, 2014; Wagner, 2014; Weinberg, 2009). According to Geneva Gay (2013) there are consistent research findings demonstrating “teachers’ instructional behaviors are strongly influenced by their attitudes and

beliefs” (p. 56) regarding student diversity. Hogan (2013) posits that personal ignorance of the affect one’s attitude has on students and the classroom results in a narrowing of the scope of inquiry and inspection in the learning environment. Therefore, one of the most essential elements needed for teachers to develop their understanding and practices, is an environment and administration which is not merely “tolerant” but safe; one in which mistakes are seen as part of the learning process and trust is mutual to the point that grace—belief that the other is doing their best, is open to influence, and assuming best intentions—is the norm. To be most effective, teachers need a balanced environment where they can challenge themselves to grow out of their preconceptions, reflect on their practice, and actively pursue their own development regarding the societal changes occurring both inside and outside of the school environment, particularly as it applies to their treatment and perception of their GSD student population.

### **The Need for Safety and Belonging**

The human needs for safety and belonging are well established in academic cannon. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, first described in 1954 and elaborated on in his later works, delineates six levels of human need or motivations, each successive, building upon satisfaction of lower needs in order to access higher order need fulfillment (see Figure 2).



*Figure 2.* Maslow's Six-Level Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow 1954).

Situated near the base of these needs are those of Safety and Belonging (and Love). According to Maslow's theory, cognitive concerns, or the pursuit of knowledge, which is the narrowest definition of the "business of school," are not accessible until the Self-Actualization phase which is built upon the more basic human needs, Physiological, Safety, Belonging and Love, and Esteem. Thus, assuming students' Physiological needs of food, water, air, warmth, and sleep are met at home or perhaps in part via school supports such as free and reduced lunch programs and student health centers, it is clearly important that middle and high schools consciously foster both Safety and Belonging as prevalent aspects of their school culture to support student growth toward Self-Actualization and academic learning.

Countless studies have supported Maslow's hierarchy and determined these foundational needs as prerequisite for academic learning. Culture itself is based on fulfillment these foundational needs. According to Lieberman, Yalom, and Miles (1973 as cited in Shechtman,



1997), the climate (a term often used interchangeably with culture) of a group is determined by the extent to which an individual's needs are being met by the group, the results of which have an impact on the group or culture as well. They identified five areas of need: "(a) a sense of belonging (the need to know that one is part of the group and shares both power and responsibility), (b) acknowledgement by others (the sense of being liked and recognized for both one's strengths and uniqueness), (c) freedom of self-expression (the need to express an opinion, provide feedback, and be free of destructive criticism), (d) opportunities for self-disclosure (the need to express emotions, be honest and authentic), and (e) open communication (the need to resolve inevitable group conflicts in empathetic and rational processes, free of labeling and stereotyping" (p. 100).

Safety is often defined in terms of freedom from physical harm, but definition is a focus on inputs—incidents of violence, types of acts; that which is done to a person to cause them to feel unsafe. The purpose of this study is outputs—the results of actions and practices which either foster or hinder students' feelings of safety. Social and emotional safety, represented in feelings of belonging or the lack thereof, are the overarching outcomes of these environmental factors. Because the focus is on educators' practices and perceptions, the researcher is focused on subtleties such as language, curricular choices, and problem solving as evidence of fostering a safe environment in which students are free from all types of harm—verbal harassment, ostracization, physical abuse, silencing, and marginalization, to name a few—and are free to express themselves and develop to their fullest potential within educational institutions.

In addition to the existing federal and state legislation prohibiting discrimination according to sexual orientation (among other protected classes) one unique aspect of Bayview

School District is its nondiscrimination policy, which is among the most progressive in the state, defining “sexual orientation” as including actual *and perceived* sexual orientation and gender identity, specifying, “regardless of whether the individual’s gender identity, appearance, expression or behaviors differs from that traditionally associated with the individual’s sex at birth.” This is a notable distinction. By enumerating in this way, the intent of their policies is made clearer and more enforceable. In addressing bullying, Sandowski (2016), states that such enumeration of policies “underscores those students who research shows are most likely to be bullied and harassed and least likely to be protected under non-enumerated anti-bullying laws and policies” (p. 6). In addition, enumeration “provides teachers and school personnel with the tools they need to implement ...policies. When they can point to enumerated language... they feel more comfortable enforcing the policies” (Sandowski, 2016, p. 6).

Research has shown that students who are GSD experience greater degrees of harassment and bullying than their non-GSD counterparts. According to the researchers of the biennial National School Climate Survey, commissioned by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), since the study’s inception in 1999 the overall percentage of GSD-identified students who report experiencing homophobic remarks as well as verbal and physical harassment and physical assault has decreased and there is an increase in access to supports and services as well as policies which specify protection of both gender and sexual diverse populations (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016). There are, however other trends within this longitudinal study which are less positive. Looking at Figure 3, which depicts the last three biennial reports, (2011, 2013, 2015), every area had a decrease in frequency in the percentage of GSD students who report acts of bias in school from 2011 to 2013 and then there was a sharp increase reports of sexuality-biased remark and several other areas

from 2013 to 2015. In that same time-period, the percentage of students identifying harassment due to gender expression including policies and procedures which privilege heteronormativity and cisnormativity have increased.

Most relevant to this study, the third and fourth data sets below indicate the percentage of students reporting teachers making negative remarks related to sexuality and, most markedly, gender have increased to rates commensurate with or exceeding rates in 2011 and 2013.

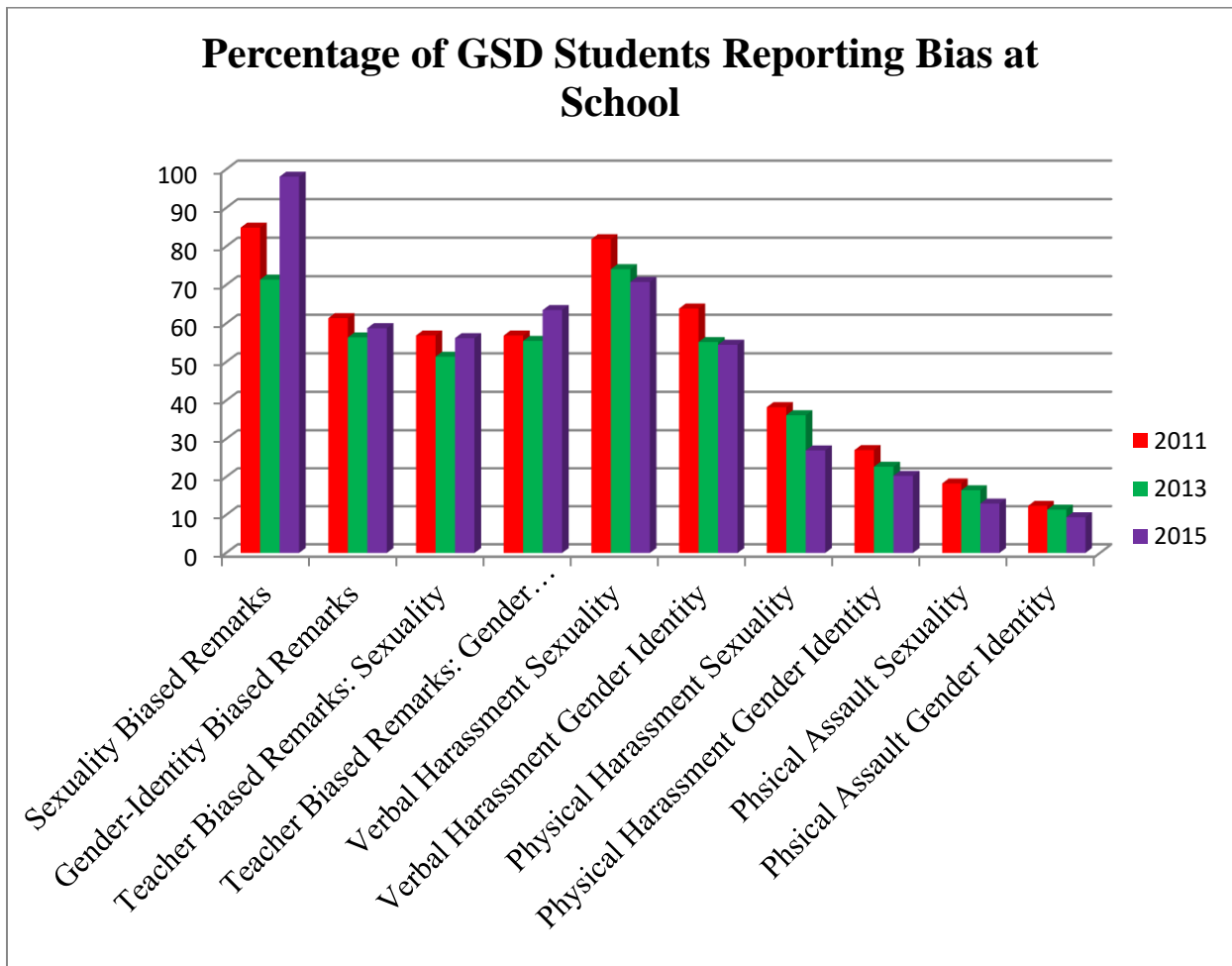


Figure 3. Percentage of GSD students reporting bias in school. (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014).

As previously documented, teachers' attitudes are primary influences in their treatment of students and teachers' treatment of students is one of the key factors impacting safety, but also the students' sense of belonging.

Figure 4 depicts the last two reporting years (2013 and 2015) and the percentage of GSD students who have experienced bias at school. These students report higher instances of absenteeism, avoidance gendered situations, avoidance of participation in school-related activities, as well as incidences of discipline and subjection to biased mandates and treatment based on sexuality and gender expression—all of which are identified as factors which inhibit belonging and a feeling of safety.

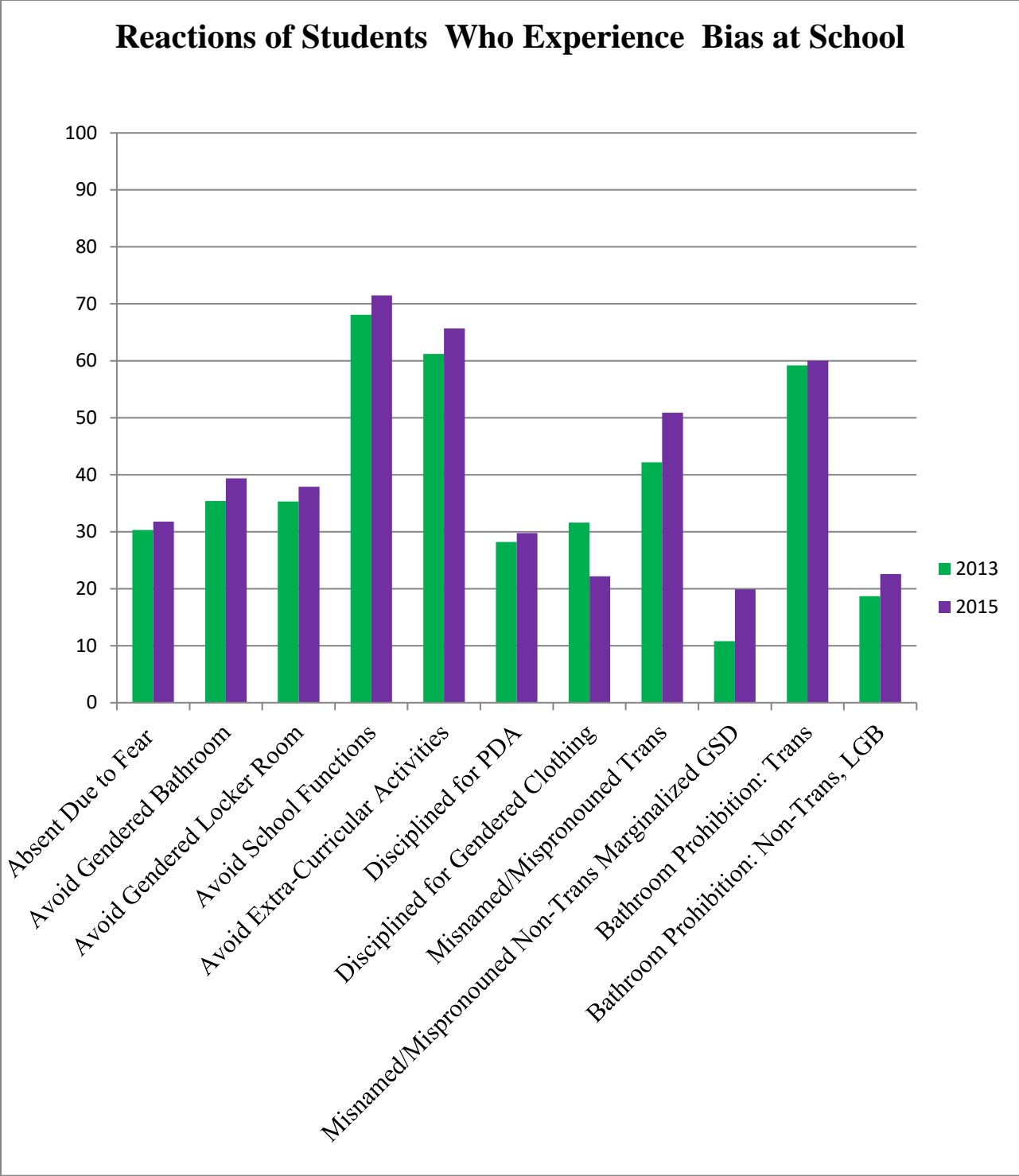


Figure 4. Reactions of GSD students who experience bias at school (by percentage) (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014).

Clearly instances of such acts against any student, including those who are GSD, is of concern to members of progressive and self-aware and self-reflective institutions of learning such as Bayview High School.

### **Belonging Within a Complex System**

For students who newly emerge in school as marginalized GSD, their original mold of belonging may need to be reshaped. In coming out, a student may find themselves, in the position of having to re-introduce themselves, justify, or recreate a space of belonging based on their newly-realized identity. Former places of belonging may be no longer accessible to them and other, new, and unknown places may be made evident. As belonging is part of a reciprocal system; the system must recognize that a student belongs, for the sense of belongingness to be complete and for the student to feel safely a member of that system. In this way, a binary system (belonging or not belonging) is reinforced. However, if schools are mindfully creating spaces for belonging, then rather than being obstacles of power and oppression, they can facilitate inclusion and a civility which fosters belonging and safety for all students and community members.

A high school or middle school culture that incorporates a niche for GSD students could reflect Foucault's (1978) theory on sexuality; that there is no such thing as "sexuality," as such, that it and the concept of sexual categories are a social construction influenced by the times and current understandings which evolves and changes and are therefore not fixed in definition. Sexuality is a topic of discussion or an object of knowledge versus an actual thing, *scientia sexualis*, according to Foucault. The social construction of sexuality ties to Foucault's theory of power, as those who name the thing, have the power over it. As an illustration, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sex became a topic surrounded by shame and secrecy via the machinations of

power—namely that of an intersection between the church, politics, and medicine. According to Foucault, sexuality is a tool for the distribution of power and a mechanism for social control. If conceded, then schools—as manifestations of institutional power— can either fuel the loss in students’ sense of belonging and decrease in safety in the school community or they can foster enhancement of belonging and safety for GSD and other marginalized populations.

### **Methodological Issues**

Individual case studies and qualitative research in general, though not generalizable, provide a rich and dense description of singular systems, be they a people, an organization, or an individual. From this richness and depth of focus, we can glean patterns from which understandings, elaborations, and new theories can emerge.

### **Synthesis and Critique of Literature**

While other studies have lain the foundation for this work, investigating school culture, belonging, gender and sexual diversity, teacher perceptions, and other specific aspects, none have addressed the research question and subquestions posed herein. This study hopes to incorporate all these foundational elements in analyzing how teachers foster a sense of belonging and safety for their marginalized gender and sexual diverse student populations, specifically within an established public high school community.

### **Chapter 2 Summary**

This chapter examined the specific attributes within the conceptual framework of the study; culture, belonging, and safety, as well as teacher practice and school policy (relevant CES principles and nondiscrimination policy) addressing the central research question: How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations? The literature

review supports both a foundation for exploration and the need for additional investigation to add to the body of literature concerning these important concepts and most specifically their positioning about addressing the unique needs of marginalized GSD students. During this study, the following subquestions are also addressed:

1. How does a public high school community with high academic standards, intent on carefully shaping its school culture, expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging of all its diverse students, in particular its marginalized GSD students, without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives?
2. How do educators in this high school relate to and incorporate new and developing understanding of their marginalized GSD students as these students create a space for themselves within the existing school culture?



### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter addresses the following areas: Background to the Study, Research Questions and Subquestions, Purpose and Design of the Study, Research Population and Sample Method, Instrumentation, Data Collection, Identification of Attributes, Data Analysis Procedures, Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design, Validation, Expected Findings, Ethical Issues in this Study, and a Summary of Chapter 3.

#### **Background to the Study**

Students, especially from disenfranchised or marginalized populations such as those who are marginalized Gender and Sexual Diverse (GSD) are striving for a sense of belonging and safety in their learning environments. School communities, at all levels, bear responsibility for ensuring a sense of belonging and safety for all their students. Progressive school communities, such as those who practice the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools, are primed to provide the support all students require and deserve. To be successful, these school communities need not only effective leadership committed to these principles, but also a strong commitment from the teachers who must implement the principles with authenticity.

Educators, including administrators and teachers, have an important role to play in a school community that is being intentional in fostering a culture of belonging and safety for their students. School communities, such as Bayview High School, which are committed to the progressive schools' Coalition of Essential School's philosophy, strive to have all their students, including those who are GSD, succeed academically, socially, and emotionally and further expect all educators to support them in doing so.

Building such a school culture requires leadership with vision and values and teachers who align with those values and are willing to be led as well as serve in a leadership capacity

themselves. To truly foster such a culture, teachers must be willing to critically look at their own practices; to be self-reflective practitioners in determining how their perceptions, attitudes, and understandings affect their preparation and practice in teaching their diverse student populations.

### **Research Questions and Subquestions**

The following primary question guided this research:

How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations? The study sought to answer the following subquestions:

1. How does a public high school community with high academic standards, intent on carefully shaping its school culture, expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging of all its diverse students, in particular its marginalized GSD students, without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives?
2. How do educators in this high school relate to and incorporate new and developing understanding of their marginalized GSD students as these students create a space for themselves within the existing school culture?

### **Purpose and Design of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to determine how educators, both teachers and administrators, intentionally set about crafting a school culture that creates space for gender and sexual diversity such that they foster a sense of belonging in this specific population of students within the wider context of increasing a sense of belonging for all students. The research emphasis concerned the experiences and contributions of different adult participants within the learning community: the administrator, counselor, faculty advisor for the Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA, formerly Gay Straight Alliance), and other teachers.

Research related to the focus of this study, how educators craft their school culture with intentionality to foster belonging and safety in their GSD student populations, though limited, was found in both qualitative and quantitative study formats. In both, researchers sought to determine factors associated with school success, the hypothesis being that when students feel a valuable part of their learning environment, their academic performance and overall well-being is enhanced.

Qualitative and quantitative studies have added to the body of knowledge concerning school culture, belonging, and safety. Studies have found teacher attitudes and practices affect student outcomes (Bailey, 1996; Barber & Krane, 2007; Cavanagh & Waugh, 2004; Certo et al., 2003; Dewey, 1933; Fredman, Schultz, & Hoffman, 2015; Horn and Romeo, 2010; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Meyer, Taylor, & Peter, 2015; Rands, 2009; Roby, 2011; Schwartz & Wynne, 1985; Ullman, 2014; Wagner, 2014; Weinberg, 2009) and play a pivotal role in creating the culture of the school (Bayko, 2005; Bolman & Deal, 2013; CES, 1984; Sergiovanni, 2000), fostering belonging and safety (Anderman, 2003; Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997; Goodenow, 1993; Jennings, 2015; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010; McMahon, Parnes, Keys, & Viola, 2008; Osterman, 2000; Payne & Smith, 2012; Tillery, 2009; Wigfield & Wagner, 2005), and addressing the specific needs of marginalized populations in general and the GSD population in particular (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009; Barber & Krane, 2007; Barnes, 2009).

The qualitative research design of descriptive case study, examined via an interpretivist perspective, was used to understand the perceptions, practices, and processes pursued by the

administration and teachers of one highly regarded, academically successful, small, suburban school district in the Pacific Northwest as they co-create their school culture and critique their practices to meet the needs of their diverse student population. A descriptive case study, utilizing an interpretivist approach, allowed the researcher to study this school in a real-world context and investigate in-depth how participants interfaced with the research question as well as why—their motives and intentions (Yin, 2014). According to Orlikowski and Baroudi, (1991), interpretive studies assume “people create and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. Interpretive researchers thus attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings participants assign to them . . . within cultural and contextual situations” (p. 5).

This design was the best match for the questions under investigation because the participants were the experts of their own practice and therefore best to answer the question of how and why they engaged in those practices. Through interview, observation, and focus group discussion, practices and attitudes which affect the culture of belonging and safety for GSD students emerged. A case study with multiple and varied opportunities to collect data allowed the researcher to dig deep into the perceptions of each participant.

### **Research Population and Sampling Methods**

The targeted population for this study was the educators of a public high school located in a predominately White, middle to upper income neighborhood. The school is referred to as Bayview High School, a pseudonym. Bayview School District consists of two schools: one a grade school (K–8) and the other a high school. According to school statistics, there were 18 adult educators as defined by the study criteria. Of those, 100% of the target population was ethnically White; 57% identified as Cis-Female, 43% identified as Cis-Male, and no adult

educators identified as Non-Gender Binary; 88% had a Master's Degree or higher; and the average teaching experience was 20 years with a range of 5–30 years. At the time of the study, no adult educators identified as a member of a marginalized GSD, 14% had participated in a specialized training related to marginalized GSD populations, and 100% had participated in staff development on the topic at a site or district level. In comparison, with the most demographically similar high schools in the greater metropolitan area, the target population's gender identity and educational statistics were commensurate. The average teaching experience at Bayview High was higher and racial diversity somewhat lower, though the latter was in greater alignment with Bayview's student population than comparison schools align with their student population. Statistics could not be found regarding marginalized GSD status and specific marginalized GSD training for comparison schools. The research sample represents 100% of Bayview High School's administration and 31% of teaching staff, for a total of 39% of the classroom-based and non-classroom-based educators as defined by this study.

This school site and community was chosen using purposeful sampling based on their public efforts to be intentional in crafting their school culture and ease of access. Purposeful sampling of this case to study (and of the specific participants) was the best sampling method because of both the commonness of the environment—a public high school—and the uniqueness of this school—size, intentionality, and availability (Creswell, 2012).

This single case study concerns what was happening in one school and was investigated through the perspectives of two groupings of participants: non-classroom-based educators (principal, school counselor) and classroom-based educators (teachers, including the GSA faculty advisor). The Bayview School District community, and particularly that of Bayview High School, had taken specific actions to address school culture such as adopting the Coalition

of Essential Schools' philosophy and crafting a very specific nondiscrimination policy. As such, this investigation included data regarding both the vision and implementation of these policies from the perspectives of both classroom-based educators (teachers) and non-classroom-based educators (principal and counselor), specifically in how they related to fostering belonging and safety for GSD students.

Of final consideration was the purposeful sampling of participants. According to Patton (2002), qualitative research often employs the use of purposeful sampling to select information-rich resources. The principal, counselor, and faculty advisor for the Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) were presumed to be three of the richest resources for information in the school and were asked to refer other classroom-based educators to the study based on their depth of knowledge and experience with GSD students. The rationale for this design decision was the administrative team had a wider field of view—whole school versus classroom or department and the GSA faculty advisor was presumed to be a teacher with significant understanding and investment in the needs of GSD students. Ideally, parity across broad disciplines (STEM and humanities) would have been achieved in garnering participants for this study; however, it was most important, given the topic, that participants with the deepest and most relevant information were prioritized for participation. Table 1 describes the educational staff, as defined by this study.

Table 1

*Classroom-Based Educator Demographic Information*

Number Assignment	Years as a Classroom-Based Educator	Years at Bayview High	Highest Degree	Humanities or STEM
*1*	17	15	MA	Humanities
2	22	10	MFA	Humanities
*3*	8	3	MA	Humanities
4	nr	thirteen	nr	Humanities
*5*	26	6	MA	Humanities
6	30	18	MA	Humanities
7	5	3	MA	Humanities
*8*	20	18	MA	Humanities
9	10	4	MA	Humanities
10	nr	ten	nr	STEM
11	nr	seventeen	nr	STEM
12	28	11	MA	STEM
*13*	28	21	BA+128	STEM
14	27	20	MA	STEM
15	15	4	MA	STEM
16	20	15	MA	STEM

*Note.* \*\*#\* denotes study participant and “nr” = no response to requests for information

For the purposes of this study, “educators” included only the principal and school counselor and those teachers who were the teacher-of-record for graded, content areas within the school. Educators not housed on campus, paraprofessionals (regardless of licensure), and support staff (clerical, custodial, librarian, tech support, district-level administration and staff) were not included in the pool of possible participants, even though they are considered part of the educational staff and some have instructional duties. Within the entire target population of teachers, self-identified females represented 50% of the classroom-based educators and 50% of the high school administration with no one identifying as non-gender binary.

Regarding assigned curricular area, 56% of classroom-based educators taught within the humanities with the remaining 44% teaching STEM subjects. It should be noted that several STEM teachers either co-taught cross-curricularly or taught electives which fall under the humanities domain. At the time of this study, Bayview High teachers had an average of 20 years classroom experience (range: 5–30) and had worked at Bayview High for an average of 11 years (including third-party estimates noted in Table 1; range: 3–21 years).

The first category of participants for this study was the principal, the guidance counselor, and the faculty advisor for the Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA), a student club on campus. As this is a very small school and given the depth and breadth of these individuals in their respective roles, all three were pre-selected to participate. Conversations with these individuals resulted in the identification of a second set of participants: classroom-based educators, via purposeful sampling. In this way, resource-rich sources were approached for participation. Resource rich participants were those who identified GSD students' needs as important and relevant to their teaching and were self-reflective in their practices as it relates to working with this population. Information about the study was presented and a request for participation was made. Informed consent was obtained from educators who agreed to participate in the study.

### **Instrumentation**

The instruments used for this study consisted of researcher-generated interview questions and observation forms (see Appendix A and B respectively). The researcher sought to explore the process by which teachers prepare for and reflect on their practices with specific regard to GSD students. Sample interview questions included: What are the elements of Bayview High School community's culture, which foster a sense of belonging for all its students, specifically its GSD students? How does an affluent high school community with high academic standards,



expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging of all its diverse students, in particular its GSD students, without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives?

All interview questions were aligned with the research questions and subquestions (see Appendix D). The foci of the classroom observations were how the participants used GSD-supportive language, content, and behavior as well as identifying examples of anti-heteronormativity/cisnormativity, and problem-solving strategies employed.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection occurred from April 2017 through June 2017. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A) of the administrator, counselor, the GSA faculty advisor, and four other teachers; formal classroom observations (see Appendix B) of four of the five participating teachers to note specific instances of GSD-supportive language, content, and behavior as well as anti-heteronormativity/cisnormativity and problem solving; teacher observation debriefs; and focus group discussion with classroom-based teachers (see Appendix C). In addition, school and district documents were reviewed.

In all interview and observation situations, researcher-designed interview protocols were used. With permission (confirmed verbally on the recording), interviews were recorded using a stationary device. Notes were also taken regarding non-verbal cues and other environmental factors in addition to notes pertaining to the researcher's state and ongoing perspective to guard against reflexivity (Yin, 2014). The recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher and used to inform research notes. Post-transcription, interviewees were given the opportunity to participate in member checking (Creswell, 2013) to verify accuracy of the transcription and researcher notes and to ensure the validity of information shared.

After obtaining clearance from the University and District Institutional Review Boards, equivalent permission from the school district, and site permission from the principal, semi-structured, audio-taped interviews were conducted at a time that was convenient for each participant's schedule and took place on site. The interviews were confidential and private involving only the participant and researcher. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher.

**Phase 1: Semi-structured interviews.** A semi-structured interview format allowed for flexibility in the interview process (Yin, 2014). Semi-structured interview format allowed for participants to offer a broader scope and greater depth in their responses. Given the content, it was important to allow participants some scope regarding what they choose to share. One hour-long, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with each participant took place in May and early June 2017, beginning with the three pre-selected participants to garner their input regarding the three additional participants for study. Seven demographic questions, followed by 17–19 topical questions guided the interview process.

**Phase 2: Classroom observations.** Classroom observations took place in May and early June 2017. For each teacher participant one 70-minute classroom observation was conducted, according to the teacher's schedule availability. During observations, information was gathered regarding inclusion of GSD-respective curriculum, evidence of anti-heteronormativity/cisnormativity within teacher's practices, and instances of teacher usage of language and behavior which promoted belonging and safety for GSD students. Instances of problem-solving regarding situations related to these topics were also be noted. Of specific interest was how the vision of the administration was translated to the classroom-based educators and how they in turn implemented that vision within the classroom; how pedagogy and the values expressed by the school's philosophy aligned with implementation.

Debriefing meetings with each participant were held within 36 hours of the observation to assist in accessing reflective insight from the teachers on their perspective regarding belonging and safety in context of GSD students, particularly as it related to school culture and the Coalition of Essential Schools 10 Principles and the district's nondiscrimination policy.

**Phase 3: Focus group.** All classroom-based participants were part of a 90-minute focus group. The focus group discussion took place in June and was conducted in a semi-structured format, primarily using questions from the individual interviews as launching points for group discussion. The rationale for using a focus group format after the interviews and observations was to allow for participants to further reflect on their practices and participate in discussion with their colleagues relevant to the issues raised in this study. It is believed that this format generated even greater depth and breadth of understanding for the researcher while also allowing teaching colleagues to interact with each other and the topic in a constructive manner.

**Document Analysis.** District and school-based documents relevant to the study were reviewed and coded with data from interviews, observations, and focus group.

### **Identification of Attributes**

To maintain focus within the descriptive case study, it was necessary to identify specific attributes. The conceptual framework for this study identifies attributes of school culture, belonging, and safety, as well as teacher practice and school policy (relevant CES principles and nondiscrimination policy). In the following table (Table 2) each attribute was reviewed and operationalized.

Table 2

*Operationalized Research Attributes*

Variable	Sources	Indicators
Practices which foster Belonging	Interview, Observation, Focus Group, Documents	Inclusion of GSD topics and content in curriculum, celebrations of diversity, GSA, open-participation in all school-related events and sports, locker room policies
Practices which foster Safety	Interview, Observation, Focus Group, Documents	GSA, visible markers for spaces, how physical violence and bullying (ostracization, silencing marginalization, teasing, name-calling, mocking, threats, humiliation) are addressed, gender-neutral bathrooms
Anti-Heteronormativity and Cisnormativity	Interview, Observation, Focus Group, Documents	General and gender-neutral pronoun usage (such as “they” or “ze”), GSD-supportive language (e.g., partner, not asking gendered questions or using gender-assumptive language, etc.), ungendered dress code and fair enforcement
School Policies: Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) and Nondiscrimination Policy		
Personalization (CES)	Interview, Observation, Focus Group, Documents	Using student-specific names and pronouns, demonstrating appropriate knowledge about a student’s life
Decency and Trust (CES)	Interview, Observation, Focus Group, Documents	Management of the classroom such that conversation and learning about GSD-related topics is part of the norm, use of appropriate pronouns and names, consent
Democracy and Equity (CES)	Interview, Observation, Focus Group, Documents	Deliberate and purposefully addressing instances of inequity, participation of all constituencies in decision-making
Nondiscrimination	Interview, Observation, Focus Group, Documents	Knowledge of and adherence to district policy, use of policy in classroom discussions

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Each participant was offered the opportunity to review audio recorded transcription data for member checking (Creswell, 2012), for accuracy of both content and intent. The data was coded, per Saldana (2016) in two steps. The first step used provisional or open coding based on the research question and subquestions as well as targeted indicators (culture,

belonging, safety, teacher practice, and school policy). The second coding was based on patterns which emerge during the first process. These emergent or axial codes reveal themselves through repeated readings and serve to illuminate relationships between categories and to uncover new categories as they emerged from the data. Multiple sources of data (interviews, observations, and focus group) as well as data concerning the researcher's thoughts, insights, and speculations were coded as it was collected. By engaging in concurrent analysis, using Atlas.ti software (2016), the researcher was able to track codes, trends, and themes as they emerged. In qualitative research, data analysis and collection occur simultaneously, rather than in a linear fashion. Through multiple readings and review of the data, patterns emerged. It was through this cyclic analysis that connections and meaning were made (Yin, 2014).

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design**

The researcher acknowledged the following limitations and delimitations of the research design. Limitations concern external situations out of the control of the researcher, while delimitations concern internal situations, or boundary choices, which the researcher has intentionally set to reasonably restrict the extent of the study. There were two limitations to this study: time and the relationship of the researcher to the school.

Time was the primary limitation within this study. As the focus of this case study was a traditionally-scheduled school, the maximum research period was September through June with many times uncondusive to study (testing, vacations, campus events, etc.). In addition, the participants' time had to be respected; therefore, all aspects requiring participant cooperation needed to be conducted at their convenience regarding time and location. Given these time constraints, it was essential to schedule interviews and observations as early as possible within the timeline to leave time for make-up sessions and adjustments to the schedule.

The second limitation was the relationship of the researcher to the school. As a parent of a child attending the focus school and a member of the GSD community, there was concern that some participants may feel anxious about sharing their true perceptions or vulnerabilities with the researcher. Would the participants fully disclose with the researcher or simply say what they feel is “correct?” The following was submitted to address this limitation.

First, a level of familiarity and trust had been established by the researcher within the school community. The researcher had been part of the school community for the previous 18 months and had participated in many social and official school activities including serving on the Site Council and conducting surveys and focus groups at the principal’s request. Second, the researcher, her child’s other parent, and their partner (all cis/female) were well-known as a GSD family, so the school’s, and therefore teachers’, comfort levels should have been alleviated to some degree by that familiarity. Third, efforts were made to schedule observations during classes in which the researcher’s child is not a member of the class. This concern was further addressed via triangulation using observations as well as the focus-group in addition to one-on-one interviews.

This study was delimited to a small, suburban high school in the Pacific Northwest. It was further delimited to six participants, two from the administration and four from the teaching staff. These were necessary to address the limitations of time.

## **Validation**

**Credibility.** To enhance trustworthiness as well as internal validity, the researcher employed the following methods within this case study, as recommended by such seminal researchers as Creswell (2012) and Yin (2014): observation debriefing, member checking, researcher reflection, and peer debriefing.

One on one debriefing between the researcher and each of the classroom-based educators took place within 36 hours of classroom observations. In this way participants could reflect on their own practices and inform the research via self-reflection. Following each interview, the researcher transcribed all notes and participants were offered the opportunity to complete member-checking. Member checking (Creswell, 2012) was scheduled at the participant's convenience. Member checking is useful to ensure that both the content and the intent of the interview were documented. Throughout the observations and interviews, the researcher engaged in active reflection, taking notes regarding their state of mind and general well-being as well as thoughts concerning the subject and subject matter to minimize bias and increase accuracy of both observation and analysis (see Appendix L). By identifying and acknowledging bias, the researcher had a mechanism for controlling its influence. Peer debriefing was utilized throughout the process to enhance validity and ensure credibility (Yin, 2014). According to Creswell (2012), peer debriefing offers the opportunity for "an external check of the research process" (p. 251).

**Dependability.** Dependability was strengthened in this case study via prolonged engagement, triangulation, rich and thick description, and by addressing reflexivity (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014).

Interviews, observations, debriefs, member checking, and focus group activities took place over a period of two months. Such varied and sustained interactions and engagement in the subject environment increased dependability. The data gathered via all means and from both non-classroom-based educators (principal and counselor) and classroom-based educators (GSA faculty advisor/math teacher and four other teachers) provided triangulation of data and therefore increased dependability as well as credibility of the findings. The researcher provided rich and

thick description of the teachers in their classrooms and of the school at large, which further enhanced dependability by augmenting triangulation and providing context for the findings. And finally, identification of and reflection on researcher biases and assumptions and use of interview and observational protocols were used to address the issue of reflexivity (Creswell, 2012; Wolcott, 2010). Left unchecked, reflexivity, whereby the researcher is positioned as a factor within the study, can affect the study and therefore influence the outcomes or interpretations of the study. By disclosing biases and assumptions, determinations can be made by the reader concerning interpretation of the data and findings.

### **Expected Findings**

For this case study the researcher expected to discover that each category of participants—classroom-based and non-classroom-based educators—perceived belonging and safety for all students, including those within the GSD population, to be paramount and identify both ways that the current school culture supports these ideals and ways to improve. It was expected that key areas of strength and growth would be identified as well as areas which could improve with greater focus. With teacher practice as a focus of this study, involving participants in interviews and focus group discussions, as well as observations and debriefs, it was intended that self-reflection and analysis could occur and practices improved for the benefit of the GSD population. In addition, it was expected teachers would perceive a need for more than “just” safety to foster belonging and enhance student achievement. The researcher expected to find evidence of teacher practices that foster anti-heteronormativity and anti-cisnormativity, including integration of language, behavior, and curricular and instructional choices which are inclusive of GSD individuals and their experience.



## **Ethical Issues in the Study**

**Conflict of interest assessment.** There were no conflicts of interest as the researcher was not employed by and did not have a supervisory role of any of the participants nor of the participating school.

**Researcher's position.** The researcher was approaching this topic from a point of personal, professional, and scholarly interest.

The topic of school culture is one about which the researcher's interest and appreciation is intense. In addition, as a member of the GSD community and with other family members—some of whom are school-age and therefore subject to the effects of school culture—who are also members of this community, this topic is personal.

Professionally, these topics: school culture, belonging, and safety have been recurring throughout the researcher's career. They first identified its relevance as a teenager in ninth grade, so believe this is a topic about which they have a calling. This belief was reinforced in each of the researcher's professional placements, from Charter School Founding Member to Resource Teacher in a public school to Administrative Assistant in a private school.

As a scholar, the researcher felt compelled to investigate these topics and engage in the analysis, believing that school culture matters and greatly influences the experiences—positive and negative—students have in school. They believe adults in schools, whether administration, teachers, or support staff, have great influence over those environments and that schools are a microcosm of the larger society and are therefore influenced by it.

For all these reasons, this research is important to the researcher. Maintaining validity, credibility, and dependability are paramount throughout the process as they believe this research could have a meaningful impact and add to the body of knowledge.

**Ethical issues in the study.** Maintenance of ethical practices must be maintained for the protection of all those involved in research, most notably, the participants. To assure that the research is carried out in an ethical manner, the researcher completed the following:

1. Obtained CU-IRB approval
2. Ensured informed consent and easy withdrawal of participants from the study
3. Ensured privacy of participants and security of the data. Only the researcher has access
4. The researcher will destroy all data after 3 years

### **Summary**

In this chapter the researcher explained why a descriptive case study would be used to investigate the focus and subquestions related to GSD populations at Bayview High School and introduced the study along with research questions and subquestions. The purpose and design of the study and information pertaining to the research population and sample method as well as instrumentation and data collection were described, as well as the attributes of belonging, safety, teacher practice, and school policy—each of which helped create a data set with both breadth and depth. The researcher has described the data analysis procedures as well as the limitations and delimitations of the research design and addressed validation in terms of credibility and dependability. Finally, after describing expected findings, ethical issues in this study were addressed.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

This chapter serves to provide details related to the data compiled through the course of this study. Interviews, observations, focus group, and document analysis are presented in relation to the research question and subquestions. Codes, categories, and themes are described as well as the analysis process.

This single descriptive case study examined, via an interpretivist perspective, the perceptions and practices of high school educators as they navigated societal changes and served to educate, nurture, and honor all their students, including those who are members of the focus marginalized gender and sexual diverse (GSD) population. The purpose of the study was to determine how educators, both teachers and administrators, intentionally set about crafting a school culture that creates space for gender and sexual diversity such that they foster a sense of belonging in this specific population of students within the wider context of increasing a sense of belonging for all students. The research emphasis concerns the experiences and contributions of different adult participants within the learning community: the administrator, counselor, faculty advisor for the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), and other teachers.

The following is the primary question guiding this research, “How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations?” In addition to the primary question, the study sought to answer the following subquestions:

1. How does a public high school community with high academic standards, intent on carefully shaping its school culture, expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging of all its diverse students, in particular its marginalized GSD students, without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives?

2. How do educators in this high school relate to and incorporate new and developing understanding of their marginalized GSD students as these students create a space for themselves within the existing school culture?

This chapter details the results related to the research question and subquestions by describing the data analysis related to codes within each of the four themes identified: Crafting Culture with Intentionality, Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, Facilitating and Managing Change, and Exercising Agency and Accountability. Findings of the study are described in addition to a description of the methodological approach, the researcher's role in data collection and analysis, and personal and professional influence effects regarding the data are described. Through thorough analysis of the data, a picture of this school and its culture emerged and are described in this chapter as well as in Chapter 5.

### **Description of Sample**

The setting for this single descriptive case study is Bayview High School, a pseudonym. Bayview Public School District began as a K–8 school over 100 years ago and is adjacent to a major urban school district in the Pacific Northwest. The district currently consists of two schools, one K–8 and the other high school. Bayview High School, operational for just over two decades, was founded as the result of changing legislative funding models. The targeted research population for this study is the educators of this single public high school located in a predominately White, upper-middle to upper-income neighborhood. The Bayview School District community, and particularly that of Bayview High School, has taken specific actions to address the formulation and maintenance of school culture such as adopting the Coalition of Essential Schools' philosophy and crafting a very specific nondiscrimination policy. As such, this investigation includes data regarding both the vision and implementation of these policies

from the perspectives of both classroom-based educators (teachers) and non-classroom-based educators (principal and counselor), specifically in how they relate to fostering belonging and safety for GSD students. For the purposes of this study, “educators” include only the principal and school counselor and those teachers who are the teacher-of-record for graded, content areas within the school. Educators not housed on campus, paraprofessionals (regardless of licensure), and support staff (clerical, custodial, librarian, tech support, district-level administration and staff) are not included in the pool of participants, even though they are considered part of the educational staff and some have instructional duties.

According to district demographic information, the high school employs 18 adult educators (as defined by the study criteria) divided equally according to binary gender, with 44% teaching in STEM and 56% teaching in humanities. One hundred percent of the possible sample population is ethnically White. Classroom teachers have, on average, 20 years of classroom experience and 11 years at Bayview High.

Table 3

*Participant Educator Demographic Information*

Participant Pseudonym	Classroom-Based Educator?	Years in Education / Degree	Years at Bayview High	Humanities or STEM	Hours GSD-Specific Training
Casey	No	33/Ed.D.	8	n/a	< 4
Kelly	No	37/MS	10	n/a	< 4
Jordan	Yes	17/MA	15	Humanities	< 3
Taylor	Yes	20/MA	18	Humanities	< 3
Jesse	Yes	8/MA	3	Humanities	< 3
Jace	Yes	26/MA	6	Humanities	< 6
Chris	Yes	28/BA+128	21	STEM	> 10

According to Table 3 (above), of the seven participants, 80% taught humanities (percentage of classroom-based educators), 88% had a Master’s Degree or higher; 24 years was

their average experience in the classroom (range of 8–37 years) which was higher than average for Bayview High; and the average number of years they had been at Bayview High was 12 which was slightly higher than average for this particular school. At the time of this study, 14% had participated in a specialized training related to marginalized GSD populations, 100% had participated in at least two hours of intentional staff development on the topic at a site-level, and 71% indicated they engaged in independent reading or study related to the topic, and all reported significant incidental “training” via conversations with knowledgeable and experienced colleagues. One participant reported extensive training, attending at least ten trainings of one or more days each. In addition, though not included on the table, 57% identify as Cis-Female, 43% identify as Cis-Male, and no participants identify as marginalized GSD or Non-Gender Binary.

In comparison with the most demographically similar high schools in the greater metropolitan area, the target population’s gender and educational statistics were commensurate. The average years of teaching experience was higher and racial diversity lower, though more commensurate with student population than that of the adjacent district (Bayview High’s student population is 89% White). Statistics could not be found regarding marginalized GSD status and specific marginalized GSD training for comparison schools. The research sample represented 100% of Bayview High School’s administration and 31% of teaching staff, for a total of 39% of the classroom-based and non-classroom-based educators as defined by this study.

When the three preselected participants (principal, counselor, and GSA advisor) were contacted and agreed to participate in the study, each was asked to provide the names of several teachers from which the total study sample could be achieved. Ultimately, the researcher received a total of ten referrals, two of whom were outside the bounds of the sample (secretary and librarian) and two of whom were referred by more than one person. Each of the six-

remaining classroom-based teachers was contacted, resulting in four affirmative responses, one declination, and one non-response (given two attempts). Given the option of four additional participants (as opposed to the originally intended three), the researcher decided to increase the sample size to include all affirmative respondents rather than eliminate a willing participant. The seventh participant provided a cushion in case of dropout and a fifth classroom-based teacher for the third phase of investigation, the focus group.

All five classroom-based teachers consented to observations, however, given the timing of the study and the particular focus of instruction within the classroom of one humanities teacher, it was decided that they would not be observed. The remaining four teachers were observed for one class period and offered the opportunity to debrief afterward.

All interviews were concluded prior to the scheduled focus group. Classroom-based teachers were polled and, given a threshold of one, they chose not to include administrative staff in the focus group discussion. Providing them choice in making this determination encouraged trust, allowed them to speak more freely, and provided additional validity as there would be no impetus to speak in an overly positive or negative manner to impress a third-party.

All seven respondents were given the opportunity to participate in member checking. Member checking provided an opportunity for participants to review their responses, provide verification and clarification if needed. It also availed them to the opportunity to omit any portions of the interview which they felt was not representative of their thoughts and feelings regarding this topic. Member checking provided an additional opportunity for participants to be actively involved in the research process and is intended to garner trust between researchers and participants. Table 4 depicts response rates for each phase of the study.

Table 4

*Response Rates for Educators in Each Phase of Investigation and Member Checking*

	Interview		Observation		Focus Group		Member Checking	
	NCB	CB	NCB	CB	NCB	CB	NCB	CB
Participants Contacted	2	7	0	5	0	5	2	5
Participants Confirmed	2	5	0	4	0	5	1	5
Positive Response Rate	100%	71%	n/a	80%	n/a	100	50%	80%

*Note.* NCB = Non-Classroom-Based, CB = Classroom-Based

### **Research Methodology and Analysis**

The purpose of this study was to describe teachers' perspectives regarding fostering belonging and safety in their students who identify as marginalized gender and sexual diverse. Research related to the focus of this study, how educators intentionally craft their school culture to foster belonging and safety in their GSD student populations, though limited, can be found in both qualitative and quantitative study formats. In both, researchers sought to determine factors associated with school success, making the hypothesis when students feel a valuable part of their learning environment, academic performance and overall well-being are enhanced. In this study, teachers' perspectives were investigated through an interpretivist approach.

**Case study.** The qualitative research design of a single descriptive case study was used to understand the perceptions, practices, and processes pursued by the administration and teachers of one highly regarded, academically successful, small, suburban school district in the Pacific Northwest as they navigated societal changes and served to educate, nurture, and honor all their students, including those who are members of the focus marginalized gender and sexual



diverse (GSD) population. As classroom teachers and administrators co-created their school culture and critiqued their practices regarding meeting the needs of their diverse student population, the specific factors of educators' perspectives and practices related to belonging and safety were the lenses through which school culture was examined via an interpretivist approach.

This model and approach allowed the researcher to study the school in a real-world context and investigate in depth how participants interfaced with the research question as well as why—their motives and intentions (Yin, 2014). According to Orlikowski and Baroudi, (1991), interpretive studies assume “people create and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. Interpretive researchers thus attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings participants assign to them . . . within cultural and contextual situations” (p. 5). This design was the best match for the questions under investigation because the participants were the experts of their own practices and therefore best to answer the question of how and why they engaged in those practices. Through interview and observation, practices which enhanced the culture of belonging and safety for GSD students emerged. A case study examined via an interpretivist perspective, with multiple and varied opportunities to collect data allowed the researcher to dig deep into the perceptions of each participant.

**Purposeful sampling.** This school site was chosen using purposeful sampling due to the school community's public efforts to be intentional in crafting their school culture and ease of access. Purposeful sampling of this case to study (and of the specific participants) was the best sampling method because of both the commonness of the environment—a public high school—and the uniqueness of this school—size, intentionality, and availability (Creswell, 2012).

Regarding the purposeful sampling of participants, qualitative research often employs the use of purposeful sampling to select information-rich resources (Patton, 2002). The principal, counselor, and faculty advisor for the Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) were presumed to be three of the richest resources for information in the school and were asked to refer other classroom-based educators to the study based on their depth of knowledge and experience with GSD students. As managers of the school environment, the administrative team had a wider field of view—whole school versus classroom or department. The GSA faculty advisor was presumed to be a teacher with significant understanding and investment in the needs of GSD students.

Of the nine subjects approached, seven confirmed including 100% of non-classroom-based educators (administrators) and 71% of classroom-based-educators, as defined by this study. All confirmed participants participated in the interview process. Of the five classroom-based-educators, four participated in observations, including debrief (see Table 4, previous). When offered the opportunity to complete member checking, six participants responded with four completing the process. In an ideal situation, parity across broad disciplines would have been achieved in garnering participants for this study; however, it was most important, given the topic, that participants with the deepest and most relevant information were prioritized for participation.

This single descriptive case study was about what was happening in one school as investigated through the perspectives of two groupings of participants: non-classroom-based educators (principal, school counselor) and classroom-based educators (teachers, including the GSA faculty advisor). The Bayview School District, and particularly Bayview High School community, had taken specific actions to address school culture such as adopting the

Coalition of Essential Schools' philosophy and crafting a very specific nondiscrimination policy. As such, this investigation included gathering data regarding both the vision and implementation of these policies from the perspectives of both classroom-based educators and non-classroom-based educators, specifically in how they related to fostering belonging and safety for GSD students.

**Instrumentation.** The instruments used for this study consisted of researcher-generated interview and focus group questions and observation protocols (see Appendix A, C, and B respectively). The researcher sought to explore the process by which teachers prepared for and reflected on their practices with specific regard to GSD students. Sample interview questions included: What elements of the school's culture – policies and procedures – foster a sense of belonging for all its students, specifically its GSD students? How do you support them in your role? This school community is consciously focusing on culture. It's also consciously focused on high academic achievement. How do you balance those two things and how does focusing intention on diversity, inclusion, and the needs of this particular population interplay with these other goals? All interview questions were aligned with the research questions and subquestions (see Appendix D). The foci of the classroom observations concerned how the participant's used GSD-supportive language, content, and behavior and identifying examples of anti-heteronormativity, anti-cisnormativity, and problem-solving strategies.

**Data collection.** After obtaining clearance from the University and District Institutional Review Boards, equivalent permission from the school district superintendent, and site permission from the principal, data collection occurred from April 2017 through early June 2017. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A) of the administrator, counselor, and the GSA faculty advisor and four other teachers; formal classroom observations

(see Appendix B) of four of the five participating classroom-based to note specific instances of GSD-supportive language, content, and behavior as well as anti-heteronormativity and anti-cisnormativity and problem solving with teacher observation debriefs; and a focus group discussion involving all five classroom-based educators (see Appendix C). In addition, school and district documents were reviewed and analyzed for content related to the research question and subquestions (see Appendices E, F, G, H, I, and J). Data specifics related to each of the three phases of this study and Document Analysis are discussed in data phases.

**Data analysis procedures.** A transcription of audio recorded data from their individual interview was offered each participant for member checking (Creswell, 2012), for accuracy of both content and intent. No major changes or clarifications resulted from this process. The data including interviews, focus group, observation notes, and documents was coded multiple times. Engaging in concurrent analysis, using Atlas.ti software (2016), the researcher tracked codes, trends, and themes as they emerged. In qualitative research, data analysis and collection occur simultaneously, rather than in a linear fashion. Through multiple readings and review of the data, patterns emerged. It is through this cyclic analysis by the researcher that connections and meaning were made (Yin, 2014).

The first step in data analysis was to identify provisional codes based on the research question and subquestions as well as targeted indicators. The seven initial attributes from the proposal phase of this study were translated into provisional codes; however, in conducting the interviews it was clear that some of the original choices were not manifesting or were too broad and others emerged as relevant, therefore, the provisional codes were expanded to 14 prior to analysis. As codes emerged through two coding rounds, the total number identified was 37. In a third round, eight codes were merged for a final code count of 29. Twenty-five of these 29 codes

were organized into four themes (Figure 5, p. 91): Crafting Culture with Intentionality, Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, Facilitating and Managing Change, Exercising Agency and Accountability. These four themes provide a picture of the cultural landscape of Bayview High School.

### **Summary of Findings**

The data collected through all four phases of this study, proved an outline of the school culture as a whole and as it relates to the GSD student population. With the addition of each of the four themes, greater detail and depth were added and a clearer picture emerged. This section defines the four emergent themes to facilitate discussion of the data phases.

**Four themes.** To begin summarizing the findings of this study, the four themes, Crafting Culture with Intentionality, Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, Facilitating and Managing Change, and Exercising Agency and Accountability are described, followed by the Data Phases and Presentation of Data, and Results. In this and subsequent sections, relevant quotes from participants are shared.

It should be noted, that the researcher chose to assign gender-neutral pseudonyms and omit gender markers, using the singular forms of “they” instead. When quotes were altered to account for this change, the pronoun or pseudonym appears in brackets. At times other changes, such as verb agreement, needed to be adjusted as well.

***Crafting culture with intentionality.*** Crafting Culture with Intentionality supports all foundational aspects of the school environment. The philosophy of the Coalition of Essential Schools with its emphasis on the 10 Principles is the foundation for Bayview School District and especially Bayview High School which was conceived under the CES model. All policies and procedures, both implicit and explicit, are built upon such principles as Personalization,

Commitment to the Entire School, a Tone of Decency and Trust, Democracy and Equity, and Teacher as Coach.

***Contributing to the whole with integrity.*** Contributing to the Whole with Integrity supports the strengths and needs of every component with an eye toward the CES Principles of Commitment to the Entire School and Democracy and Equity. Within the school, everyone—administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, and the wider community—plays at least one part. In a complex system, a breakdown in any one area can cause the entire system to fail. Consciously doing one’s part and attending to the entire system’s functioning is an integral aspect of Contributing to the Whole with Integrity.

***Facilitating and managing change.*** Though not particularly attached to any one CES principle, Facilitating and Managing Change bears a part of the load of all the other themes, as without a capacity to change, growth cannot occur. It falls to each member of the culture to process and manage the changes taking place around them and facilitate such transformation in others. Teachers and administrators must support each other and their students in navigating new ways of being, thinking, and acting. Engaging in reflection—planfully, in the moment, and in retrospect are aspects of managing change.

***Exercising agency and accountability.*** The underpinnings of Exercising Agency and Accountability lie in Bayview High’s small school size and the CES Principle of a Tone of Decency and Trust with its emphasis on unanxious expectations, fairness, generosity, and tolerance. While most typically invoked when speaking about students, the philosophy of unanxious expectations is also applied via Personalization, to educators at all levels.

## **Presentation of Data**

This section presents the data collected as well as a review of procedures and outcomes for each phase of the study including Phase 1: Interviews, Phase 2: Observations, Phase 3: Focus Group, and Document Analysis.

**Data phases.** In this section, each phase of data collection are reviewed and described with coding and analysis provided. To begin, Table 5 depicts the code prevalence within each theme. For each of the four identified themes, primary (X) and secondary (\*) codes were aligned to facilitate interpretation of the data. There are between 13 and 17 primary codes associated with each theme. Four unique codes (italicized) related to specific problem areas rather than as positive aspects of the school culture and therefore did not fit under any theme. Of the remaining 25 codes, three were represented across all four themes, 10 across three themes, seven across two themes, and five represented in just one theme. Fifteen are most closely related to Crafting Culture with Intentionality, 16 with Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, 17 with Facilitating and Managing Change, and 13 with Exercising Agency and Accountability.

Table 5

*Codes within Each Theme*

Codes	Crafting Culture with Intentionality	Contributing to the Whole with Integrity	Facilitating and Managing Change	Exercising Agency and Accountability
Accountability	X	X	*	X
Administration	X	X	X	X
Belonging	*	X	*	*
Change	*	*	X	*
Collaboration	X	X	X	*
Connection	X	X	X	X
Democracy and Equity	X	*	*	X
Empathy	*	*	X	*
GSD Awareness	X	*	X	*
Implementation of Vision	*	X	*	*
Institutional Memory	*	*	X	*
Intentional Creation of Culture	X	X	X	*
Intentionality – Pre-Reflection	X	X	X	*
<i>Newbies Vs. Veterans</i>	*	*	*	*
Personalization – School/Teacher	X	X	X	*
Personalization – Teachers/Student	X	X	X	*
<i>Pie</i>	*	*	*	*
<i>Play the Game</i>	*	*	*	*
Problem Solving	*	*	X	X
<i>Problems</i>	*	*	*	*
Reflection In-Action	X	*	X	X
Reflection On-Action	X	*	X	X
Safety	X	X	*	*
Size	X	*	*	X
Student Agency	*	X	X	X
Teacher Agency	*	X	X	X
Teacher Coach	*	X	*	X
Teaching Practice	*	X	*	X
Tone of Decency and Trust	X	X	X	X

*Note.* X indicates primary factor, \* indicates secondary factor



*Phase 1: Interviews.* Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the convenience of each participant and took place at the school site. With verbal permission, interviews were recorded using a stationary device. Notes were taken regarding non-verbal cues and other environmental factors in addition to notes pertaining to the researcher's state and ongoing perspective to guard against reflexivity (Yin, 2014). The recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher and used to inform research notes. Post-transcription, interviewees were given the opportunity to participate in member checking (Creswell, 2012) to verify accuracy of the transcription and researcher notes and to ensure the validity of information shared. Five participants responded to the request to participate in member checking, two opting to review paper copies of their transcript, two opting for electronic copies, and one declining to review. No significant alterations were made to the content of interviews based on member checking.

A semi-structured interview format allowed for flexibility in the interview process (Yin, 2014) and provided an opportunity for participants to offer a broader scope and greater depth in their responses. Given the content, it was important to allow participants some scope regarding what they choose to share. One hour-long, semi-structured, one-on-one interview was scheduled with each participant, taking place in May and early June 2017, beginning with the three pre-selected participants to garner their input regarding the additional resource-rich participants for study. Resource-rich participants were defined as those who have identified GSD students' needs as important and relevant to their teaching and who were self-reflective in their practices as it relates to working with this population. Based on that criteria and willingness of participants, four additional classroom-based teachers were added as research participants.

Seven demographic questions, followed by 17–19 topical questions were crafted to guide the interview process. In practice, however, interviews were much more organic than discrete

questions allowed, due to participants answering multiple questions and concepts in each of their responses. The questions for the interview and focus group as well as the targeted topics for observation and elements sought in the document analysis were designed to align with the research question and subquestions and with identified attributes previously articulated. Information from all sources contributed to the researcher's understanding. This section describes how each of the phases of the research design attempted to answer the study questions.

Table 6 summarizes the relationship between research questions and subquestion and the four themes with the final interview and focus group questions. In the proposal phase of this study, interview and focus group questions were aligned with the research questions and subquestions (see Appendix J) and realigned as the themes emerged during the data collection and coding process.

Of the 17 original questions, 16 were addressed: three in their original form, four incorporated into other questions, and eight reworded with similar content. One question (#11) was omitted as less relevant. In addition, three unique questions related to a) a conceptualization of school culture, b) a problem-solving scenario, and c) staff collaboration were added to the interviews. Finally, one question was added to the focus group to address the comfort level differential regarding CES between veteran teachers and teachers more recently added to the faculty at Bayview High. See Appendix K for question evolution.

Table 6

*Alignment of Research Question, Research Subquestions, and Themes with Final Interview/Focus Group Questions*

Interview Questions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
<b>Research Questions</b>															
Q: How do educators ...foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations?	X	X	X	*	X	*	X	X	*	X	X	X	X	*	X
SQ1: How does a public high school community . . . expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging . . . without adversely affecting . . . other school initiatives?	*	*	X	*	*	X	X	*	*	X	X	*	*	*	X
SQ2: How do educators . . . relate to and incorporate new and developing understanding ...?	X	X	*	X	X	*	X	X	X	X	*	X	X	X	X
<b>Themes</b>															
Crafting Culture with Intentionality	X	X	X	*	X	X	X	X	*	X	X	X	X	*	X
Contributing to the Whole with Integrity	X	X	X	X	X	*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Exercising Agency and Accountability	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Facilitating and Managing Change	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

*Note.* X indicates primary focus, \* secondary focus

Interviews lasted an average of 84 minutes, with a range of 52 minutes to 141 minutes. One participant required two sessions to complete the interview process. Without their second interview, the average length of interviews was 75 minutes with a range of 52 to 98 minutes. All subjects were candid and forthcoming during their interviews. All were thoughtful in their responses and seemed genuinely committed to providing thorough and accurate information from their individual perspective. As stated previously, the semi-structured interview process had an organic quality and adjustments were made based on a variety of factors, with each participant. In reviewing reflexive journal entries, the researcher noted different responses to each participant. Though never “uncomfortable,” there were definitely different levels of comfortability, as well as comments regarding pre-assumptions about each participant’s knowledge related to the topics under investigation. Of interest, the researcher noted how they patterned their own communication style after that of each participant—talking more with those who were more talkative and less with those who were more reserved, adjusting their communication register to match the formality-level of the participant, negotiating wait time, etc. In addition, the researcher documented participants’ mannerisms, speech patterns, and non-verbal cues particularly around verbal hesitation, repetitive phrasing, repeating the questions, and other verbal and non-verbal affects. Noting these items helped guard against reflexivity (see Appendix L) and potential bias and informed the coding process. Table 7 represents code frequencies during the Interview phase with all participants.

Table 7

*Interviews: Code Frequency for All Participants*

Code	Groundedness (Frequency)	Code	Groundedness (Frequency)
<b>Accountability</b>	328	Personalization – Teacher/Student	229
Administration	184	Pie	58
Belonging	60	Play the Game	32
Change	226	Problem Solving	183
Collaboration	117	Problems	76
Connection	212	Reflection In-Action	59
Democracy and Equity	235	Reflection On-Action	206
Empathy	144	Safety	54
GSD Awareness	199	Size	38
<b>Implementation of Vision</b>	357	Student Agency	139
Institutional Memory	80	Teacher Agency	207
<b>Intentional Creation of Culture</b>	376	Teacher Coach	184
<b>Intentionality – Pre- Reflection</b>	246	Teaching Practice	154
Newbies Vs. Veterans	10	<b>Tone of Decency and Trust</b>	277
Personalization – School/Teachers	83		

*Note.* Total responses: 4753 across 29 codes, Average 164, Median 154

The five highest frequencies (246–376) representing the most-prevalent codes generated through the interview process, were Intentional Creation of Culture, Implementation of Vision, Accountability, Tone of Decency and Trust, and Intentionality—Pre-Reflection (bold).

Of the five codes identified, four are most closely related to Crafting Culture with Intentionality, five with Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, three with Facilitating and Managing Change, and two with Exercising Agency and Accountability as depicted in Table 8.

Table 8

*Interviews: Codes within Each Theme*

Codes	Crafting Culture with Intentionality	Contributing to the Whole with Integrity	Facilitating and Managing Change	Exercising Agency and Accountability
Accountability	X	X	*	X
Implementation of Vision	*	X	*	*
Intentional Creation of Culture	X	X	X	*
Intentionality – Pre-Reflection	X	X	X	*
Tone of Decency and Trust	X	X	X	X

*Note.* X indicates primary factor, \* indicates secondary factor

In Table 9, each participant's quote count is tabulated by code. Across all participants, three codes were among the most frequently applied: Intentional Creation of Culture, Implementation of Vision, and Accountability. Interviewee word counts are provided to demonstrate the density of rich source material participants provided. Though quotes varied in length from just a few words to whole paragraphs and therefore are not comparative, it may be a useful reference. Based on 4,753 quotes, quote density ranged from 6% to 12% with an average of 9%. Participant word count ranged from 3,773 to 18,572 for a total of 50,857 and an average of 7,265.

Table 9

*Interviews: Individual Code Frequency by Participant*

Codes	Casey	Kelly	Jordan	Taylor	Jesse	Jace	Chris	Total
Accountability	71	41	74	33	25	33	51	328
Administration	71	32	21	24	7	16	13	184
Belonging	11	12	2	6	4	8	17	60
Change	41	32	52	26	13	27	35	226
Collaboration	14	17	24	14	7	16	25	117
Connection	18	25	47	25	20	34	43	212
Democracy and Equity	37	27	49	29	21	22	50	235
Empathy	16	20	43	14	9	8	34	144
GSD Awareness	36	19	53	23	14	13	41	199
Implementation of Vision	61	41	81	47	29	47	51	357
Institutional Memory	2	13	15	19	4	16	11	80
Intentional Creation of Culture	64	49	79	47	28	52	57	376
Intentionality – Pre- Reflection	44	22	63	32	9	27	49	246
Newbies Vs. Veterans	0	0	1	0	5	3	1	10
Personalization – School/Teacher	14	12	8	12	6	14	17	83
Personalization – Teachers/Student	28	26	55	26	17	36	41	229
Pie	20	5	25	4	1	2	1	58
Play the Game	8	6	10	2	0	6	0	32
Problem Solving	41	21	41	19	9	16	36	183
Problems	9	6	37	6	5	11	2	76
Reflection In-Action	7	4	19	3	8	6	12	59
Reflection On-Action	22	30	58	31	13	30	22	206
Safety	12	12	6	9	1	2	12	54
Size	4	1	9	3	0	18	3	38
Student Agency	11	18	31	14	11	23	31	139
Teacher Agency	14	23	53	32	18	25	42	207
Teacher Coach	9	21	43	21	20	25	45	184
Teaching Practice	12	15	35	27	23	21	21	154
Tone of Decency and Trust	35	28	71	39	21	34	49	277
TOTAL	732	578	1105	587	348	591	812	4753
Interviewee Word Count	6318	7306	18572	4751	3773	9521	10137	50857



*Phase 2: Observations.* Classroom observations took place in May and early June 2017. For each of the four consenting teacher participants, one 70-minute classroom observation and debrief was conducted, according to the teacher’s schedule availability. During observations, information was gathered regarding: inclusion of GSD-respective curriculum, evidence of anti-heteronormativity/cisnormativity within teacher’s practices, instances of teacher usage of language and behavior which promote belonging and safety for GSD students, and instances of problem-solving situations related to these topics. Of specific interest was how the vision of the administration was translated to the classroom-based educators and how they in turn implemented that vision within the classroom; how pedagogy and the values expressed by the school’s philosophy aligned with implementation.

Observations were conducted during a single 70-minute class period with four out of five of the participating classroom-based educators, three from humanities and one from STEM; though the latter observation took place during a humanities elective they were teaching. Each educator was observed in their typical classroom. Most classrooms at Bayview High are conjoined with two small rooms in between. Two of the observation classrooms were located on the lower level of the two-level school and two on the main level. Classroom arrangements were similar in all four rooms with options to sit in various-sized small groupings (four to eight); two classrooms offered individual seating options as well. Two classrooms were oriented toward a central instructional area and two were oriented with two or more instructional focal points. Two educators placed their desks near the front of the room—near instruction—and two at the back of the room; none of the teachers spent more than a couple of minutes at their desks during observations and all were observed to engage in “management by walking around.” During observations there were no major issues to be resolved.

The purpose of these observations was expansive and previously described under Data Collection. Given a single observation, the task proved far greater than the time allotted. The researcher concluded several full days with each participating teacher would be necessary to satisfy the list of inquiries, but the timing of the study with relation to final exams and the end of the school year prohibited lengthening the observation time (to be discussed in Chapter 5).

Debriefing meetings with each participant were typically held immediately following the observation and assisted in accessing reflective insight from participating teachers. Findings from the 280 minutes of classroom observation are included in data results and in Table 10 (below) which represents code frequencies during Observations with all participants.

Table 10

*Observations: Code Frequency for All Participants*

Code	Groundedness (Frequency)	Code	Groundedness (Frequency)
Accountability	2	Personalization – Teacher/Student	4
Administration	0	Pie	0
Belonging	4	Play the Game	0
Change	0	Problem Solving	1
Collaboration	3	Problems	4
<b>Connection</b>	9	Reflection In-Action	3
<b>Democracy and Equity</b>	5	Reflection On-Action	1
Empathy	4	Safety	2
GSD Awareness	4	Size	1
<b>Implementation of Vision</b>	8	<b>Student Agency</b>	6
Institutional Memory	0	Teacher Agency	0
<b>Intentional Creation of Culture</b>	9	<b>Teacher Coach</b>	5
Intentionality – Pre-Reflection	0	<b>Teaching Practice</b>	5
Newbies Vs. Veterans	0	<b>Tone of Decency and Trust</b>	9
Personalization – School/Teachers	0		

*Note.* Total responses: 89, Average: 3, Median 3

The five highest frequencies (4–9) representing the most-prevalent codes generated through the observation process, were Connection, Intentional Creation of Culture, Tone of Decency and Trust, Implementation of Vision, Student Agency, Democracy and Equity, Teacher Coach, Teaching Practice, Belonging, Empathy, GSD Awareness, Personalization—Teacher to Students, and Problems (bold).

Of the 13 codes identified, six are most closely related to Crafting Culture with Intentionality, nine codes with Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, seven with Facilitating and Managing Change, and six with Exercising Agency and Accountability, as depicted in Table 11 (below).

Table 11

*Observations: Codes within Each Theme*

Codes	Crafting Culture with Intentionality	Contributing to the Whole with Integrity	Facilitating and Managing Change	Exercising Agency and Accountability
Belonging	*	X	*	*
Connection	X	X	X	X
Democracy and Equity	X	*	*	X
Empathy	*	*	X	*
GSD Awareness	X	*	X	*
Implementation of Vision	*	X	*	*
Intentional Creation of Culture	X	X	X	*
Personalization – Teachers/Student	X	X	X	*
Problems	*	*	*	*
Student Agency	*	X	X	X
Teacher Coach	*	X	*	X
Teaching Practice	*	X	*	X
Tone of Decency and Trust	X	X	X	X

*Note.* X indicates primary factor, \* indicates secondary factor

In Table 12, each coded item during observations is tabulated by participant. Across all participants, four codes were the most frequently applied across all four participants: Connection, Implementation of Vision, Intentional Creation of Culture, and of Decency and Trust. Belonging was also applied across all four participants but at a much lower frequency.

Table 12

*Observations: Individual Code Frequency by Participant*

Codes	Jordan	Taylor	Jesse	Chris	TOTAL
Accountability	0	1	0	1	2
Administration	0	0	0	0	0
Belonging	1	1	1	1	4
Change	1	0	0	0	0
Collaboration	0	1	1	1	3
Connection	2	2	4	1	9
Democracy and Equity	1	0	3	1	5
Empathy	1	0	2	1	4
GSD Awareness	0	0	2	2	4
Implementation of Vision	1	2	4	1	8
Institutional Memory	0	0	0	0	0
Intentional Creation of Culture	2	2	4	1	9
Intentionality – Pre-Reflection	0	0	0	0	0
Newbies Vs. Veterans	0	0	0	0	0
Personalization – School/Teacher	0	0	0	0	0
Personalization – Teachers/Student	2	2	0	0	4
Pie	0	0	1	0	0
Play the Game	0	0	0	0	0
Problem Solving	1	0	0	0	1
Problems	2	0	2	0	4
Reflection In-Action	1	2	0	0	3
Reflection On-Action	1	0	0	0	1
Safety	1	2	0	0	2
Size	1	0	0	0	1
Student Agency	1	0	3	2	6
Teacher Agency	0	0	0	0	0
Teacher Coach	1	0	2	0	5
Teaching Practice	1	0	2	0	5
Tone of Decency and Trust	1	2	3	3	9
Total	22	17	34	16	89

***Phase 3: Focus group.*** All classroom-based participants were invited to be a part of a 90-minute focus group. The focus group discussion took place in early June and was conducted in a semi-structured format, using questions and responses from the individual interviews as launching points for group discussion. Conducting a focus group as the final data collection point allowed for participants to further reflect on their practices and participate in topical discussions with their colleagues. It is believed that this format generated even greater depth and breadth of understanding of the topic for the researcher while also allowing teaching colleagues to interact with each other and the topic in a constructive manner. Teachers were given the opportunity to consent to allowing administrative staff to participate in the focus group discussion, but given a threshold of one, they chose not to do so. Providing them choice in making this determination encouraged trust and allowed them to speak more freely.

All five classroom-based educators participated in the focus group. The discussion was scheduled for, and lasted exactly 90 minutes; however, it began about 15 minutes later than anticipated, and consequently one participant had to leave prior to its completion. Participants appeared to be very comfortable talking together on the topics presented. Two participants were somewhat less talkative than their counterparts; however, the researcher was mindful to include them into the conversation, inviting them at each turn to share their experience and thoughts. Participants had a very easy rapport and appeared to genuinely like one another, demonstrating interest in and knowledge of each other's lives, joking, teasing, and respectfully disagreeing and correcting one another on occasion. Though not coded, the terms "laughter" and "clamor" (indicating multiple, animated voices) appeared frequently in the focus group transcript.

During the focus group discussion, a topic which was touched upon in several individual interviews was revealed with even greater clarity to be an issue. All classroom-based educators

agreed a difference in comfort level and fluency with the language and practices associated with the Coalition of Essential Schools 10 Principles exists between those among them who the researcher calls “newbies” and their “veteran” counterparts. Within the group of five participating in the focus group, three had been working at Bayview High School for 15 or more years and two had been there less than seven. Within those two groupings there was a delineation in comfort level and training received related to the school’s foundation as a Coalition of Essential Schools member. This is further discussed in Chapter 5. Table 13 (below) represents code frequencies during the Focus Group with all participants.

Table 13

*Focus Group: Code Frequency for All Participants*

Code	Groundedness (Frequency)	Code	Groundedness (Frequency)
<b>Accountability</b>	85	Personalization – Teacher/Student	41
Administration	52	Pie	3
Belonging	10	Play the Game	1
Change	47	Problem Solving	42
Collaboration	62	Problems	49
Connection	33	Reflection In-Action	24
Democracy and Equity	60	<b>Reflection On-Action</b>	80
Empathy	36	Safety	8
GSD Awareness	32	Size	17
<b>Implementation of Vision</b>	94	Student Agency	18
Institutional Memory	29	Teacher Agency	69
<b>Intentional Creation of Culture</b>	96	Teacher Coach	31
Intentionality – Pre- Reflection	51	<b>Teaching Practice</b>	83
Newbies Vs. Veterans	27	<b>Tone of Decency and Trust</b>	76
Personalization – School/Teachers	43		

*Note.* Total responses: 1300, Average: 45, Median 42

The five highest frequencies (80–96) representing the most-prevalent codes generated through the focus group process, were Intentional Creation of Culture, Implementation of Vision, Accountability, Tone of Decency and Trust, Teaching Practice, and Reflection On-Action (bold).

Of the five codes identified, three are most closely related to Crafting Culture with Intentionality, four with Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, two with Facilitating and Managing Change, and three with Exercising Agency and Accountability as depicted in Table 14 (below).

Table 14

*Focus Group: Codes within Each Theme*

Codes	Crafting Culture with Intentionality	Contributing to the Whole with Integrity	Facilitating and Managing Change	Exercising Agency and Accountability
Accountability	X	X	*	X
Implementation of Vision	*	X	*	*
Intentional Creation of Culture	X	X	X	*
Reflection On-Action	X	*	X	X
Teaching Practice	*	X	*	X

*Note.* X indicates primary factor, \* indicates secondary factor

**Document analysis.** Relevant district and site-based documents related to the research questions, and subquestions, including the Coalition of Essential Schools 10 Principles as well as district policies for Nondiscrimination, Equal Employment Opportunity, Equal Educational Opportunity, Freedom of Expression, Bayview High Description of Habits of Mind (see Appendices E, F, G, H, I, and J respectively) were reviewed and coded with the other data.

Table 15 represents code frequencies in Documents.



Table 15

*Document Analysis: Code Frequency for All Documents*

Code	Groundedness (Frequency)	Code	Groundedness (Frequency)
<b>Accountability</b>	11	<b>Personalization – Teacher/Student</b>	11
<b>Administration</b>	13	Pie	0
Belonging	0	Play the Game	0
Change	1	Problem Solving	0
Collaboration	3	Problems	0
Connection	8	Reflection In-Action	0
<b>Democracy and Equity</b>	13	Reflection On-Action	0
Empathy	1	Safety	1
GSD Awareness	7	Size	1
<b>Implementation of Vision</b>	18	Student Agency	8
Institutional Memory	1	<b>Teacher Agency</b>	9
<b>Intentional Creation of Culture</b>	18	Teacher Coach	7
<b>Intentionality – Pre- Reflection</b>	12	<b>Teaching Practice</b>	9
Newbies Vs. Veterans	0	<b>Tone of Decency and Trust</b>	13
<b>Personalization – School/Teachers</b>	12		

*Note.* Total responses: 177, Average: 6, Median 7

The five highest frequencies (9–18) representing the most-prevalent codes generated through the document analysis process, were Implementation of Vision, Intentional Creation of School Culture, Administration, Tone of Decency and Trust, Intentionality—Pre-Reflection, Personalization—School to Teachers, Accountability, Personalization—Teachers to Students, Teacher Agency, and Teacher Practice (bold).

Of the 11 codes identified, eight are most closely related to Crafting Culture with Intentionality, 10 with Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, seven with Facilitating and Managing Change, and six with Exercising Agency and Accountability as depicted in Table 16.

Table 16

*Document Analysis: Codes within Each Theme*

Codes	Crafting Culture with Intentionality	Contributing to the Whole with Integrity	Facilitating and Managing Change	Exercising Agency and Accountability
Accountability	X	X	*	X
Administration	X	X	X	X
Democracy and Equity	X	*	*	X
Implementation of Vision	*	X	*	*
Intentional Creation of Culture	X	X	X	*
Intentionality – Pre-Reflection	X	X	X	*
Personalization – School/Teacher	X	X	X	*
Personalization – Teachers/Student	X	X	X	*
Teacher Agency	*	X	X	X
Teaching Practice	*	X	*	X
Tone of Decency and Trust	X	X	X	X

*Note.* X indicates primary factor, \* indicates secondary factor

In Table 17, each coded item is tabulated by document. Across all documents, three codes were the most frequently applied across all five documents: Democracy and Equity, Implementation of Vision, and Intentionality—Pre-Reflection. Other high frequency codes found in four of the five documents include Accountability, Administration, Personalization—Teachers/Student, and Tone of Decency and Trust.

Table 17

*Document Analysis: Individual Code Frequency by Document*

Codes	Non- discrimination	Equal Ed Opportunity	Equal Emp Opportunity	Freedom of Expression	CES 10 Common Principles	Total
Accountability	3	2	1	1	4	11
Administration	3	2	2	2	4	13
Belonging	0	0	0	0	0	0
Change	1	0	0	0	0	1
Collaboration	0	0	0	0	3	3
Connection	0	0	0	0	8	8
Democracy and Equity	3	2	2	1	5	13
Empathy	0	0	0	0	1	1
GSD Awareness	1	1	2	2	1	7
Implementation of Vision	3	3	2	2	8	18
Institutional Memory	0	0	0	0	1	1
Intentional Creation of Culture	3	3	2	2	1	18
Intentionality – Pre- Reflection	2	2	1	1	6	12
Newbies Vs. Veterans	0	0	0	0	0	0
Personalization – School/ Teacher	1	0	3	0	8	12
Personalization – Teachers/Student	2	2	0	1	6	11
Pie	0	0	0	0	0	0
Play the Game	0	0	0	0	0	0
Problem Solving	0	0	0	0	0	0
Problems	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reflection In-Action	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reflection On-Action	0	0	0	0	0	0
Safety	0	0	0	0	0	1
Size	0	0	0	0	1	1
Student Agency	1	1	0	2	4	8
Teacher Agency	1	0	2	0	6	9
Teacher Coach	0	0	0	0	7	7
Teaching Practice	0	0	0	0	9	9
Tone of Decency and Trust	3	2	2	2	4	13
Total	27	20	19	16	87	177

**Summary of data phases.** The prior sections related data pertaining to each of the four phases of this study: Interview, Observation, Focus Group, and Document Analysis. When addressing all four phases of this study, 18 of the 29 codes were identified as most frequently applied. Of those 18, 11 are most closely related to Crafting Culture with Intentionality, 14 with Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, 12 with Facilitating and Managing Change, and 10 with Exercising Agency and Accountability. More important than number in this case however is the degree of representation of each theme across the phases. As depicted in Table 18 (below), Contributing to the Whole with Integrity has the greatest representation (133), both in total and across all four phases. The next greatest representation (101) is Crafting Culture with Intentionality which ranked second in Interviews and Document Analysis and tied for second (with Exercising Agency and Accountability) in the other two phases. Facilitating and Managing Change was third in representation (86) and Exercising Agency and Accountability was fourth (79).

Table 18

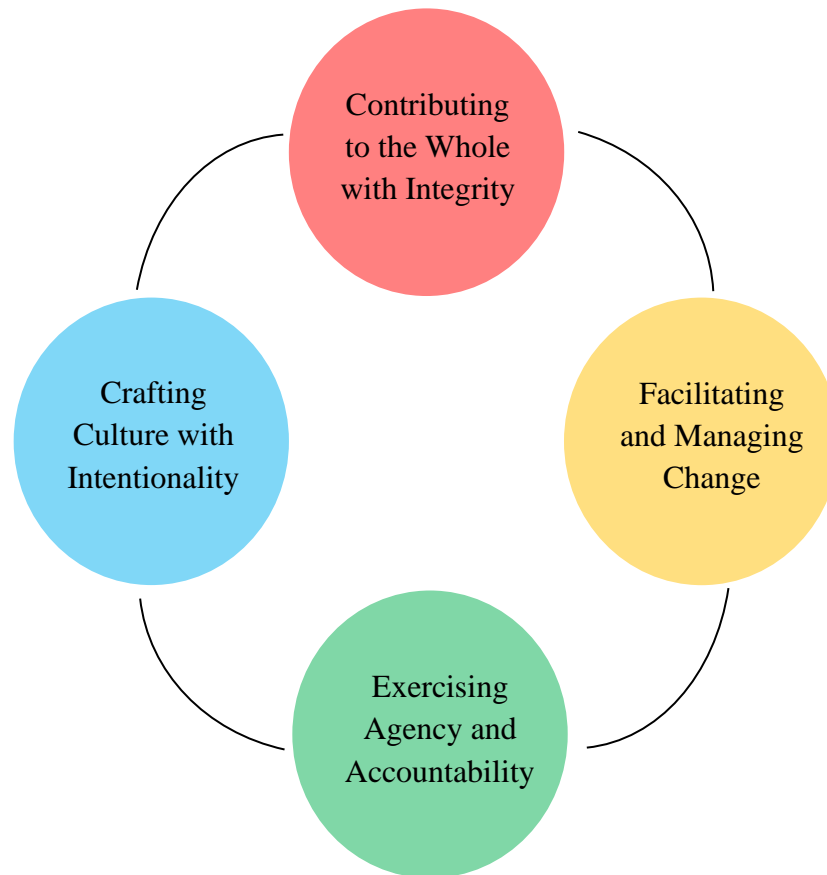
*Theme Representation in Each Phase*

Phases	Crafting Culture With Intentionality	Contributing to the Whole With Integrity	Facilitating and Managing Change	Exercising Agency and Accountability
Interviews	.29	.36	.21	.14
Observations	.21	.32	.25	.21
Focus Group	.25	.33	.17	.25
Document Analysis	.26	.32	.23	.19
Total	101	133	86	79

*Note.* Total indicates combined representation across phases.

## Results

Each of the four themes related to this study were identified in the coding process. In this section, the themes are presented and supported by relevant quotes from interview and focus group discussions to illustrate their relationship. Figure 5 (below) illustrates the four themes.



*Figure 5.* The Four Themes

**Crafting culture with intentionality.** From the foundational philosophy of CES to documents which guide district and school policy to the everyday practices and experiences in the halls and classrooms, Bayview High School focuses intentionally on providing an environment which fosters belonging and safety for all their students. They have a strong sense of identity. Here Jordan shares their understanding of Bayview High’s school culture:

[W]e know who we are and that is how we have come to this place now where we are able to have an environment that is a holding environment for kids. So, it's not exclusionary. It is not pretending to be inclusive. It doesn't matter if they are Black, White, gay, straight—no one cares. You're a kid. You're a person. You're here to get an education.

Part of knowing who they are and what the school stands for pertains to both the leadership and foundational principles in CES. Cultural goals generated from the Principal's Council of students and the Site Council (a mix of students, parents, faculty, staff, and administration) identify key areas on which to focus in crafting the culture at Bayview High. Here Jace describes this year's focus:

[W]hat we've done this year and just being really clear about what we want to emphasize (empathy) and how we're going to do that has been very helpful. (Empathy) . . . and resilience and persistence. Those are really fundamental qualities that we want to inculcate all of our kids and all of us as a staff too.

Presented clearly throughout the interactive elements of this study, educators shared a desire for all their students to feel comfortable and welcome in their classrooms and the wider school setting, as illustrated by Jesse's comment:

[A]s a teacher . . . you always want every student, regardless of any category they happen to fall in, to be comfortable enough in their own skin to be able to walk into the doors of the school and the doors of your room and be an active participant.

District policies, among them the Nondiscrimination Policy, explicitly include gender and sexual diversity, going farther by specifying, "'Sexual orientation' means an individual's actual or perceived heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, or gender identity, regardless of whether

the individual's gender identity, appearance, expression, or behavior differs from that traditionally associated with the individual's sex at birth." This signifies an evolution in the typical listing of protected classes and is relevant to a comment made by Chris, expressing frustration regarding assumptions about gender presentation and the conflation of gender and sexuality:

When people say to me, "Oh, I always knew he was," that rubs me the wrong way because that's really making assumptions about someone's gender expression. And I want to give people the freedom to express themselves however they want to regardless of how they identify.

Honoring each person's humanity and individuality was described by multiple participants as central to the school's philosophy. As Jace shared, "Honoring individuality . . . is a pillar of this school. I feel as if this community specifically has so many opportunities for students to not only know each other well but to have their teachers know them well." In addition, maintaining focus on learning was an ideal about which every participant spoke and is related to Teacher as Coach, a common code and one of the CES 10 Principles (Student-as-Learner, Teacher-as-Coach). In referring specifically to students, some participants emphasized the Student-as-Learner aspect, subordinating identity somewhat to the mission of academic achievement. Jordan shared, "[I]f it's a kid that's transitioning, they still have to learn. That's the purpose of them being here and my relationship to them is as their teacher. . . . And that's what's most important to me."

Within and in addition to such sentiments, every participant acknowledged that in the face of intense emotional, personal, and social changes, where a sense of belonging and safety are in question, academic learning recedes as a priority. Kelly shared the following:

If somebody is not feeling safe, that's generating emotional stuff that impacts their learning. . . . I'm tasked to solve learning problems but solving learning problems with someone who's not feeling safe leads right to those feelings of not feeling safe. Then you have to ask, 'Why do you not feel safe?' So, the conversation naturally expands whenever you start with learning. . . . You always have to start with where the kid is.

While expressing value for individuals, educators commented explicitly or implicitly that gender and sexual diversity was one of many elements, or "slices of the pie," related to both an individual and the school culture. It was not subordinated to others, neither was it elevated. This sentiment was reflected to greater or lesser degree in the comments of all participants including Jace who shared, "I see that as another form of individuality, but I don't see kids recognizing it as anything that needs special attention because (they) . . . are people and they deserve to be treated just like anybody else."

Recognition of the tremendous diversity in terms of learning style and individual needs was also widely expressed. Jordan acknowledged some of the issues faced by their students, such as relationship troubles and mental health concerns, empathizing students "... have all of this stuff going on . . . and we're like 'And you need to do your work. . . . And focus.' And then not only that but they have the distractions of the phone, the computer. . . . Everything's a distraction." Here Casey shares a similar sentiment, from their administrator perspective:

There are just so many layers of needs . . . there's crippling anxiety, there's panic attacks, there's eating disorders, there's drug addictions, there's electronics addictions, there's gender identity issues, there's love triangles. . . . I'm working in a school with 250 totally different (needs). . . . That's my kids. So, when you want to talk about a teeny sliver of them when I have 54 teeny slivers, it's hard for me. It's not that I don't care about every



sliver. It's hard for me to focus on just one sliver. . . . I have to pay attention to everybody.

The circumstance regarding legislative funding changes leading to the founding of Bayview High and its original focus, as what several participants referred to as a “rehab school,” are both unique. Here Kelly shares some of the relevant history which provides context in understanding the school's dual cultural/academic focus:

For a lot of reasons there's been a progression from less policy/more spontaneity, to lots of policy, to just stay out of trouble and less spontaneity. And partly that's about staffing because the school had four teachers . . . at first. And what's done by four people at the district office was done at by one person for years and years and so we're not going to dot every i under those circumstances. It is a little bit about the personality of the principals . . . and every new principal is like, “What? We're doing that? That's not the way it was where I was before.” And so, the policy is written because they feel we need to tighten up the ship here. Which is probably . . . it's true. Probably the most magical time was when the faculty were younger and there were fewer of them and there was that spontaneous potential and the school didn't even have a building and so it just became a merry band. . . . And—in the first half of our history—there was a bigger number of people who needed a therapeutic community. And so, it's like “Let's send them to Bayview because it's smaller and they'll get the love and attention that they need. . . . When I first arrived . . . half the school had no intention of going to college really or they went just to save face but dropped out by Christmas because they just were not having the focus and the executive functioning skills that they needed at that time.

Its unique origin story, their focus on CES, and specifically the “un-anxious expectations” aspect of the principle, A Tone of Decency and Trust, are incorporated into the fabric of the school’s culture. The meaning and significance of “un-anxious expectations” was shared by participants in every interview. This foundational belief sets the stage for the atmosphere of Bayview High not only regarding academic performance, but also social, behavioral, and other metrics. Jesse shared his interpretation, “The biggest thing is this idea of ‘un-anxious expectations.’ What I really take from that is creating a comfortable environment for kids to take risks; a lot of times that risk-taking is academic, sometimes it’s social, sometimes it’s inner-personal.”

Though highly regarded and respected throughout the region as a school with excellent academic offerings and outcomes, during interviews and in the focus group, addressing the needs of the whole student represented a much larger element in educators’ responses and discussions. Here is how Jace described it:

I’ll go back to honoring individual differences and then sort of this collaborative process that we . . . can have here with smaller classes and because the kids know each other well and because we can kind of count on them just to be able to function in groups effectively. I feel like even kids who . . . where academics are not necessarily their strength—like maybe it’s robotics maybe it’s drama, maybe it’s language, maybe it’s math—but . . . there’s the area of weakness. . . . I often think that our focus on being academic can be really intimidating to kids . . . for whom (academics) doesn’t come as easily.

Several of those interviewed shared examples or ideas about integrating academics with cultural goals directed toward positive outcomes for the marginalized GSD population. While

there is a unit in the health course which specifically addresses gender and sexuality and the topic comes up during several issues-based courses in humanities such as global issues and a course on the media, and at times in advisory, most comments from educators pertained to incidental teaching. For Jesse, several opportunities for “teachable moments” have occurred when students self-advocated regarding proper pronoun or name usage. They shared about a particular student, “(I) have a student who is like, “I prefer the pronoun he.” I remember catching kids, in passing, self-correcting and correcting others, “Oh, no-no—he. He.” “Oh gosh. What’s wrong with me?” Then I’m going, “Well, that’s good.” They also shared about a discussion regarding bathroom laws:

North Carolina. So that came up and one of my students who’s using a different pronoun—he did a really good job explaining the situation as to why being forced to use bathroom of biological birth seems wrong to a person in his position. And . . . this is about the same time I was hearing kids self-correct. Nobody discussed the right or wrong . . . there wasn’t like that standard, “Well, why is this even a court case? If you’re a boy, you go to the boy’s bathroom. If you’re a girl, you go to the girl’s bathroom.” And that didn’t turn into the discussion. It was really more of you know, what are gonna be the repercussions for North Carolina? What are, what happens in this court case is—because at that time there were only eight Justices on the court and it could’ve ended in a tie. And we we’re talking about what happens and I’m like “Hey, that’s kind of cool.” I mean they’re looking at it as a current event not that one facet of it but sort of the big picture.

Some teachers, such as Taylor who teaches French, shared experiences with students which caused them to rethink their lesson plans:

And it's changed the way I give my lessons. When we talked about he and she and masculine and feminine objects and masculine and feminine people . . . You have "ells" which is an all-girls group and then you stick in one guy. You can have 5000 girls over here and all the sudden it becomes "ils." I used to call students up to do the visuals. You know like you have all of these girls over here and you have all these boys over here and now I have to think of a different way to do it because that just doesn't, that doesn't work as well any more.

Here, Chris describes how GSD awareness and inclusion can be interwoven throughout coursework:

If you say, "Fitting it in where it's appropriate," that sounds like it's a hardship or something as opposed to saying, "Every time that I bring up gender and it's assumed that it's a binary in the text book, I need to bring up that it's not. . . . Teachers have a lot of opportunities to give those cues to students; whether it's on a math worksheet or in a social science class or language class. There's lots of opportunities for people not to make assumptions that are heteronormative . . . like using parent or saying the doctor and not assuming any gender with that . . . So even though people are like, "Oh, but my classroom's about—I don't know—about auto mechanics, . . . still you still have a lot of opportunity to be able to use gender-neutral pronouns or to . . . have your examples . . . be something that's acknowledging the gender diversity and diversity of sexuality as well.

Taylor shared a strategy which they admire and have a desire to employ, "I think [Chris] starts their classes by saying, 'Hi my name is [Chris] and the pronouns that I use are . . .'. And so [they do] that and I think I should do that—and I never do that."

**Contributing to the whole with integrity.** People are the heart of any institution or organization. Contributing to the Whole relates specifically to the broader school climate which is inclusive of not only the educators who are the specific population related to this study but also students, parents, staff, and the wider community and culture which surround Bayview High.

Rather than focusing solely on the parts, participants often first described a holistic view and approach to teaching and then shared discrete or individualized aspects. As Kelly shared, “If you’re trying to optimize people’s learning . . . you’re rarely able to not also address them as a whole person.” This is in alignment with their value of the CES Principles of Commitment to the Entire School and Personalization. Personalization is an important part of addressing “the whole” when each part of that whole is seen as unique and important. It is the commitment to the entire school and to personalization which creates the atmosphere of trust, built on autonomy, freedom, and creativity. This trust underpins the school culture and creates a synergy affecting the whole.

The personalization employed at Bayview High aims in all directions. The district personalizes teaching and learning for all communities—students, educators, parents—at each of its two schools and within the district personnel, as their nondiscrimination, hiring, and other policies protect adults and families as well as students. Most district policy documents include a section concerning equal opportunity and treatment as well as assignment of a compliance officer and commitment to investigate allegations of noncompliance. For example:

Equal employment opportunity and treatment shall be practiced by the district regardless of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, age,

veterans' status, genetic information, and disability if the employee, with or without reasonable accommodation, is able to perform the essential functions of the position. Similar wording is specified in the written policies addressing Equal Educational Opportunity, Freedom of Expression, and Nondiscrimination.

At the school level, although firmly rooted in the CES Principle of Personalization which states, "the use of students' and teachers' time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff," (CES, 1984) families and students are both considered and consulted in policy and practice. Students and parents have a role in site governance: students through the Principal's Council, parents through participation in the parent group, and both groups via the Site Council and accessing teachers and administrators directly. In addition, the school administration provides considerable personalization and professional respect to teachers who can in turn provide greater input and mutual respect to parents as illustrated in this comment from Jace:

I would be 100% supported in doing whatever it was that I wanted to do and . . . that's what's so cool about working here. I don't have to go through a school board policy to teach a book. I get to do whatever I want. But I'm also not going to take advantage of that. And I'm going to ask other people their opinions and if it's something that's potentially scandalous, I'm going to send a note home and I'm going to say this is what we're doing and this is what the books about.

As Jace's quote alludes, the regard expressed by teachers for the administration at Bayview High was considerable. While acknowledging "things to improve" (primarily a return to a greater and more intentional focus on CES and a desire to be more proactive), each participant honored their administrators in their interviews and in the focus group discussions

with their peers. The most succinctly-summarized sentiments illustrative of their regard referred to them as “kind of the glue,” and “the foundation of it all.” Several comments focused specifically on the influence of Bayview High’s principal. Jordan described them, as “more like the nerve center. How [they] manage the building has a direct effect on all of us” and acknowledged that “in a school this small, the principal’s personality is pervasive.” Jesse shared:

I think [the principal’s] got a good vibe and you can tell it. Like just walking through the [lunch] room, you look over and ‘Oh wait. [Their] room’s dark today.’ But, actually, I probably knew that just by wandering around because [they’re] present. I mean [they] wander everywhere and engage in a way that’s not confrontational. And I think that makes [them] approachable.”

Even in their role as supervisor, regard was given for not only their administrative skills, but their humanity, Jordan shared, “[They have] a way of saying “No” that’s easy to hear and you can work with it. It’s not like you have to ask permission . . . I mean you do but not in such a top-down sort of way.” Jace added, “Like for teacher appreciation [they’re] just really focused - not just during the week but all year. [They’re] just very appreciative.” These statements speak to the importance of relationships, good leadership, and democratic practices in which all members feel they have a voice and can exercise agency while expecting accountability from themselves and their peers and administrators as they contribute to the whole.

The school’s scholastic offerings, including honors courses, an advanced diploma, and concurrent college credit are testaments to its commitment to academics. Outcome data are the evidence that what they are doing academically, works. In addition, especially considering its size, Bayview High offers significant numbers of electives, including technology, art, and music, as well as options in core content areas. In alignment with the CES Principles of Demonstration

of Mastery and Goals Apply to All Students, school personnel also provide significant support services to address diverse learning styles and needs and have official or unofficial learning plans for approximately one-fourth of their student body, according to the administration. In addition to special education services and 504 plans, the school provides study skills courses and works with outside service providers to support student needs. While many of these supports are not required, they are provided because doing so also fits with the CES Principles of Democracy and Equity and Personalization and is the right thing to do—it's the "Bayview Way."

In conjunction with its academic focus, considerable energy and resources are provided to foster students in terms of their non-academic development, incorporate all aspects of learning, and teach the Bayview Way. These are all in alignment with cultural goals, such as fostering a sense of belonging and safety for all students, including those who are marginalized GSD. This development assumes many forms both within and outside the school building and conventional school experiences. In addition to mixers and community service opportunities during the summer, every year freshman and students new to Bayview High School attend a week-long retreat, described by Kelly in this way:

The rule about [the retreat] is there is no particular educational content ... There's nothing that's obviously instruction. So, it's all based on experience and the experiences have to be a little bit weird. . . . of course, there are underlying agendas and one of the underlying agendas is that you're going to accept whoever you are or whatever comes up with interest rather than judgment.

One of several broad-based ways in which the focus on culture manifests at Bayview High is through a weekly advisory class, a multi-age grouping of students who remain with the same teacher/advisor over the course of their high school career. Though in years prior, each



teacher determined how best to run their group, advisory has recently become more student-driven, however, as Kelly shares, “there’s more of an agenda . . . time for scheduling . . . to arrange for field studies . . . for senior ex projects. . . . There is, throughout the year, a number of opportunities for real choice.” Here Chris describes some of the benefits:

Having a 4-year advisor that a student is with that knows them outside of an academic setting, . . . that can help foster a different relationship there. And it’s cross-grade so that then helps make some connections that aren’t just nines with nines, but that allow people to make connections across grades. . . . They have connections even with their classmates that aren’t forced or predicated by where they were placed in Spanish.

Each year, the school offers field study options in the spring. They are not mandatory, and some families choose to tour colleges, pursue apprenticeships, or take extended vacation during that time. Some field studies are away camps and others are based in town as day-camps. Here Casey relates the decision-making process with its basis in respecting students’ emotional safety:

[The] photography field studies got approved because a lot of kids don’t feel comfortable leaving to spend the night away from home. . . . When I make decisions, I look at students’ emotional safety. Are students going to be supported with their passions and hopes and dreams—helping them to be a whole person?

There are many other ways in which Bayview High makes efforts to contribute to the whole and foster a sense of belonging and safety for all their students, including those who are marginalized GSD:

- Bathrooms—students can use the bathroom and locker room which corresponds with their gender identity

- Clubs—forming a club is one way in which students demonstrate agency and are provided avenues to pursue their passions
- Sports—the school offers a wide variety of no-cut sports and sports club opportunities as well as scholarships
- Inclusivity rules—the school has strict policies barring exclusivity and other gang-like or cliquish behaviors
- Extra-curricular activities—all extra-curricular activities are open to all genders
- Dress-code—the school dress code is non-gendered
- Dances—the school does not have limitations (beyond typical permissions) about who students bring as their date nor do they mandate what clothing they choose to wear
- Prom—Bayview High hosts an all-grades prom that does not discriminate

Though multiple stories were shared that related to marginalized GSD students and the specific ways in which their needs are addressed and incorporated into the school community’s sense of belonging and safety, one from Casey stands out:

I had a student that came as a freshman this fall and their request was, “I’m requesting that I can use the boy’s restroom.” And I said “OK.” I don’t know that that would have been that simple in another organization because my next step was OK, I don’t feel I need to get any justification or whatever. This is just what the kid told me that they need, and their parent was there, though their parent was disagreeing with the student and me. Then my next step was at the next school board work session, I said, “OK guys . . . we’re running this. We’re gonna see what the fallout is or what’s gonna happen because this is our first trial.” I haven’t heard a word from anybody. . . . I did have myself prepared for . . . if there were conflicts . . . Who knows where they would come from, so I wasn’t

making a problem before it happened, but I did play it out in my head. I would support the student; I would stand behind the student to the superintendent. I would stand behind the student to the school board. I had a state policy letter dissected to have as my ammunition . . . for when I needed to have those conversations to stand behind my student.

One of the most prevalent codes which emerged through the interview process was “Collaboration,” which was used to indicate intra-teacher or teacher to administrator cooperation and involvement. A parallel code, “Connection,” denoted intra-student and student to teacher cooperation and involvement. Collaboration was of great interest to the researcher in part due to the tremendous amount of collegiality witnessed in all environments, both when speaking about each other and to each other. The educators who participated in this study demonstrate a care for one another; they have a sense of comradery and facilitate and support each other personally and professionally in terms of interests and areas of growth. As Jace describes, “We are a community and we do support each other. And the bottom line is we should (all) know what we’re (each) doing not just in the classroom in terms of curriculum but how we’re growing as individuals.”

Most demonstrative of this phenomenon was their behavior when the five classroom-based educators were brought together for the focus group. Though not a code, one of the most common descriptors in a word analysis performed after transcription was “laughter.” The prevalence of laughter when these educators were given time together was remarkable. They knew about each other’s lives, what they were teaching, and their habits and had an easy way of interacting. As one of many possible examples, during an exchange where Jace was relating how they appreciated receiving feedback from the principal, they shared, “I don’t know about

you guys but [the principal has] been in my room probably six times this year. (Silence) Yeah. Just hanging out. Doing observations . . . (Looks around). That's not the case with some people? (Silence, heads shaking) Ok. [They've] been in my . . ." at which point Chris interjected that the principal had "popped in a few times." There was silence for a moment and then Jesse, contributed, "You're in trouble!" which caused a great deal of clamor with all teachers speaking at once. Jace responded, "No. Not that I . . . No . . . I don't think that I'm in trouble . . ." which made everyone laugh even more. Jace completed this exchange saying, "But in another school, I would have made that assumption" and Jesse and others concurred.

Perhaps due to this positive rapport, educators were able to talk about even challenging topics with little defensiveness. One such topic was the variability of training level and comfort with CES depending on years of experience at the school. This issue was touched upon in several individual interviews and was revealed with even greater clarity during the focus group discussion. All classroom-based educators agreed there is a difference in comfort level and fluency with the language and practices associated with the Coalition of Essential Schools 10 Principles between those among them who the researcher calls "newbies" and their "veteran" counterparts and that this difference was based on the variability in direct focus on CES as a philosophy.

Between the focus group's five participants, three had been working at Bayview High School for 15 or more years and two had been there less than seven. Within those two groupings there was a clear delineation in comfort level and training received related to the school's foundation as a Coalition of Essential School member. This difference is highlighted by member of the newbie group, Jesse, "I sort of feel like I'm playing catch-up and everybody (else) knows what we're talking about. . . . I always feel like I missed the first week of class." Jace shared a

similar sentiment, “I just feel woefully ill-prepared to be talking about it. . . . Since I’ve arrived I’ve always felt like . . .we really should all be trained outside the context of this school where everything’s just kind of nuanced.”

Interestingly, in terms of years at Bayview High, the current principal and counselor fall between these two groupings. Here Chris relates to Jace’s comment and shares their understanding of the principal’s experience with CES training:

[They] went to Fall Forum and . . . (felt) really disappointed because they didn’t have a good CES 101 section which is like what you’re talking about. That doesn’t really exist and that hasn’t really ever existed. . . . You talk to all these people at all these Progressive schools across the country and . . . you would kind of get this general sense from seeing all of these examples of it. So, I think that was something that was problematic with it, but the idea was that it’s not prescriptive, so we can’t tell you the way to do it because there isn’t one way to do it.

Though members of the veteran group demonstrated a comfortability and ease with CES, longevity has also given them the opportunity to witness adherence to CES evolve and come in and out of focus dependent upon administrative experience and attitudes. Jordan’s comments represent their sentiments well:

I do remember when I first started working here; that there was a huge focus on CES . . . . It was talked about a lot. It was it was pretty central in all those meetings. And the meetings were . . . teacher driven. Everyone had equal voice . . . every voice was heard, and everybody had fair say.

Chris concurred and added the element of school growth to the discussion:

We've got intuitional memory here . . . seeing the culture change as we grew from having 35 students to having 250+, there's definitely changes that are because of the size but there's also changes that are about to what extent you have CES practice inform your teaching, inform the way you build the school.

The turnover in administration—both at the district and on-site—has a tremendous effect on the school culture. Participant comments previously cited regarding the centrality of the current principal are evidence of this. Administrative turnover was a commonly cited influencing factor regarding the fluctuating levels of CES focus over the years.

The current principal has been at Bayview High for eight years. In the 13 years preceding their arrival, the school had three other principals as well as two interim principals. With each new principal and, likewise with the shift in district superintendents, came considerable changes and challenges for teachers; some administrators were fully-supportive of CES and others had other priorities which conflicted with CES; still others were verbally supportive but laissez-faire and didn't contribute actively to building that culture. With each of these administrative changes, the focus and adherence to CES waxed and waned based on who filled the highest levels at the district and on site. Here Chris shares:

There's [sic] two factors. One is growth and the other is institutional memory and turnover of administration. If you don't have people who understand things and who have built whatever the culture is within the school . . . it's hard to have someone come in and have language be the only thing that communicates to them these ideas, because . . . the culture isn't just an experience of language. So, you can't just read the document and know what it means. . . . We've had . . . four principals along the way . . . the staff is (not)

immune to this . . . but there's definitely been administrative talk the talk but can't walk the walk.

**Facilitating and managing change.** Although not a significant change for Bayview High School since its inception was based in the Coalition of Essential Schools, and its high academic standing was developed over time layered atop the CES philosophy, in the decades since the school was opened, the national focus on “standards,” high stakes testing, and the Common Core represent elements of change which require some level of facilitation and management on the part of every public school. As academic and testing mandates from the state and federal levels are passed, public schools such as Bayview High are forced to adapt and accommodate them, regardless of the impact they have on existing programs and other school values. Some of these changes potentially have a direct impact on marginalized GSD students and families. Here Casey shares one example:

Today I just wrote new things that the federal administration has done that affect education and one of them is they rescinded Obama-era transgender bathroom/locker room (protections). This is (my) note to me that I need to be cognizant that this is an issue that the kids are hearing. . . . So, I need to get the word out that nothing's changed here. Nothing's changed here. . . . This is my house. We still make our own decisions—as long as we're not breaking the law.

One of the other means by which the principal can address both academic and cultural focus needs of their staff and facilitate growth and change is via funding. Casey explained:

I support the teachers when they are seeking conferences, workshops, or information regarding the things that affect our marginalized populations. . . . I have a vision of this and for this place of an inclusive environment and so if people do make requests that

don't quite fit into that—if it's not college-prep world or inclusiveness—then it's probably not going to get approved.

Regarding how to balance academics with cultural needs, Casey further shared:

That's easy. (To address) the academic goals you support kids in a certain way, so they progress or not. . . . High school is all about social emotional—no matter who you are, no matter how bright you are, no matter how easy the academic part is. The other parts you have to learn about to be college ready? How do you navigate bureaucracy? How do you make a request like, “I want to use the boy's bathroom”? Who do you talk to? How do you verbalize it in a way that you're going to be heard? What research do you have to have with you? How do you navigate social media? And so, to be “College Prep” is 10% academics and the rest: self-advocacy, managing bureaucracy, talking to your teachers.

When specifically asked about the role of students who are GSD at Bayview High, Kelly shared this story:

They're pioneers . . . I remember very clearly the first verbal, open gay students that I encountered. It was like, “Oh this is different,” and then very quickly it wasn't different. Here were people being willing to share that openly and train the environment. And immediately because they were environments that did have the best of intentions, everybody sort of snapped into attention and said, “Well everybody, these people have to be treated fairly. So, what does that mean?” And so, the folks that are here now who are transitioning genders are in a similar situation I think; which in a way is a privileged position because you do have an identity that is unique and gets attention. At the same



time, you're kind of responsible for training everybody in their pronouns. And what does that mean? So that question, "What does that mean?" for them, becomes pretty central.

Teachers' ability to reflect greatly impacts their capacity to change, to grow and develop both their skills and their understanding. At Bayview High School, though all teachers prescribe reflection opportunities for their students, reflective practice is not mandated for educators. Jace shared,

The culture that I have observed since I've been here is that the teachers want to have those opportunities, not just to talk about what could have been done better but also to celebrate the success of students and how far they've come.

Each practitioner discussed their own processes from grinding through until scheduled breaks, to daily formal or informal practices and incidental reflection while engaged in other activities, to being in a near constant state of reflection; a commonality however was processing with their peers. Here Taylor speaks to the benefits of proximity and shared subject matter:

I reflect a lot with [Jordan] because [they're] right next door and we teach the same subject. And so, we do a lot of "Okay I did this in my class and this works really well." You know, we can share ideas like that. Or "This really flopped. Oh, my gosh! What should I do? I hate it." Or just listen to somebody vent and then say, "Oh you know what you can do next time ...". And so that works really well. And I think that . . . in our staff meetings there are times built in where we're sharing our goals . . . directed reflection.

Though not always easy, the benefit of peer reflection makes the effort worthwhile as Chris shares:

You have to make some kind of effort and it's not always built in into our schedules. Sometimes we do have some opportunities and those can kick off some really great

things. We can have a staff meeting where we have . . . 5 minutes to connect . . . and then afterwards it's like, "Oh, wow! We are on the same wavelength about that! So, I want to touch base with that person about that." But it almost feels like virtually anybody in the building, if I have a chance to get to chat with them, then something really fantastic can come of that. And there's all kinds of wisdom.

Whether regarding course content, particular students, or specific successes and challenges, each of the participants—particularly the classroom-based educators—identified a group of fellow-educators with whom they process. Interestingly, this reflected in their community, their general assertion that each student had at least one teacher to whom they could turn if needed. Taylor shares:

I think we act as good listeners for each other. So, if somebody is having an issue or is needing resources or having questions about certain student and something that they might be struggling with, I think almost everybody in the building has a handful of people that could go to to just run ideas past and to talk them through it. I have five or six people that I would go to to talk about issues.

As another example which reflects both the comradery previously described and a level of professional intimacy regarding reflection, Jesse and Jace who had co-taught a course the semester before with a third teacher, bantered regarding Jesse's reflective practice during the focus group:

Jesse: I don't think I have a consistent way to reflect. I mean I talk to people. I used to wander up and talk to [the former secretary]. [The new secretary] doesn't understand it when I come up there and just start talking. [Laughter]

Jace: [They] will. [They'll] warm up to it. [Laughter]

Jesse. But you know, I mean I bounce things off of just about everybody. And I think that's a good thing . . . You know I bounce things off of [Jace].

Jace: You're trying to tease but that's not how you think. That's not how you process either. You are a bit of an enigma in that way. You're more like a language teacher.

Jesse. Yeah. I mean I write things down. I try to explain. I try to explain things to my [partner] who goes, "Why do you do this?" [Laughter]

Jace: Teaching or reflecting? . . . Or talking? [Laughter] You don't do that to me when I when I reflect! [Laughter] We don't always talk about school. We talk about kids.

Jesse: Yeah, I don't think I have like one specific way.

Jace: You run.

Jesse: Yeah. I come up with ideas in the middle of that.

Jace: That's something I do too.

Jesse: That's a stress relief and an opportunity to . . . yeah, I guess I do that. But right now, my knee hurts. So, I haven't been able to run for 3 days so I'm antsy. [Laughter] But yeah no I don't feel like I lack for it but still when I write myself notes . . . My planning book is in pencil because you change things all the time and when I have something, and I want to remember it, I write it in in pen, so it stands out like "Don't ever do this again!" [Laughter] . . . And then also just yeah go on a run, talk to the boss, talk to people who have you know that perspective. All good things.

Each of the educators interviewed demonstrated an ability to be self-reflective and even critical and interrogate themselves for biases. Here Jesse shares a particularly challenging situation related to students who are GSD, demonstrating both agency and accountability to themselves and to their students and also modeling how to manage change:

Students will tell me early-on in the year “You know, like regardless of what my biological data might be on my whatever, I prefer X, Y, or Z.” And I’m like “Okay. I will do my best.” But I’m ingrained in some ways and . . . I told one student “It’s like this is really kind of eye-opening for me because I consider myself very open-minded person who doesn’t have a bias in any way on this and you pointed out that I’ve made this mistake several times. And I catch myself but I’m still making them. So, does that speak to a bias that I have that I was not as aware of or why am I finding this harder to get ahold of? . . . But you know I think in some ways it’s good that kids see that I clearly think it’s important because I correct myself and I make a clear effort in public and I see it in their classmates and their peers.

A final area addressed regarding change harkens back to CES as a philosophy. Taylor specifically addresses a change in attitude on the part of the students. As mentioned previously, Bayview High did not always enjoy its current status as a high achieving, college-prep school. In the transition from “rehab school” to “renowned,” through the varied combinations of district and on-site administrators, as the school doubled in size nearly three-times-over in both students and faculty, and as the focus on CES waxed and waned, the culture of the school has changed. Though newbies may not have the institutional memory which allows them to see the changes, veteran, Taylor shares their perspective:

I’m not saying that that’s what we want to go back to necessarily but when you have a population that’s primarily focused on achievement, achievement, achievement, achievement, achievement, and some of them don’t even know why they really want to achieve it, they’re just feeling competitive. Yeah, we lose some of the specialness.

Being able to slow down and just say, “Let’s just sit with this and let’s take this time to figure out who we are and who this person is.

Chris reflected on changes at the school and the demise of CES as a national organization:

I see us swinging back towards it a little bit in the last year or two. I think there’s an opportunity. I don’t care if it’s not a thing because it never was centralized anyway. In my mind. It was all about a community and about a conversation and not a central authority.

**Exercising agency and accountability.** In a school of this size with only 18 educators and under 30 adult personnel of any classification, holding oneself accountable and being accountable to each other is essential. There are many roles to be filled and nowhere to hide if one does not follow through on tasks they have volunteered for or been assigned. The same is true for students.

A common belief held by participants is that the size, intentionality, and focus of the school provide support mechanisms in terms of their relationships and sense of safety. Taylor shared, “most kids here have at least one adult in the building they feel they can come to if they’ve got a problem or see something going on. Having those relationships with kids helps create a better sense of safety.” In addition, the small school size and intentionality on the part of educators was credited by Chris, “A lot of people in a lot of small ways try and identify students. They see students who might not be connecting and so they try and find ways to make sure those students feel included at some level.”

Regarding accountability, small school size has a parallel effect on students; on one hand, as Kelly shares,

If a kid is from a . . . school where they've had a tight community, they know what that's like. They expect that or that's their experience. But if the kid's come from a junior high that's had 800 kids in it, then they haven't had experience with that personalization and they haven't experienced that accountability and lack of anonymity that you get when you are in a small community.

On the other hand, there are increased levels of autonomy which accompany the decreased level of anonymity. That phenomenon is described by Jordan:

Here we have so much freedom. We can actually give [students] a lesson and then say, "Okay. We're going to take this information and we're going to apply it. We're going to do this project." We can let them walk around the building. Oh my gosh, I can't even imagine doing that in a school of, like even in the high school I went to. My god, there were 3000 of us! We weren't allowed to leave the room . . . it was like lock-step.

School size, though challenging in some respects, provides professional opportunities professionally for teachers to wear many hats: instructionally, in support roles, and as leaders in their teaching and learning community. According to Chris:

One of the biggest things for me is the freedom that the principal gives us to be able to do our work in the best way we know how. [The principal] does a great job of that. . . . That impacts our ability to live in our skin and our ability to just be ourselves and be comfortable. When we're stressed out that's going to impact the kids' experience too.

Size also is the incubator for innovation in terms of course offerings and opportunities for collaboration on the part of educators which, in turn, provides a modeling opportunity for students. Jesse shared:

Earlier this year [Jace] and [another teacher] and I just went “Hey let’s do a project all together!” . . . [T]he kids saw their teachers working together, and it didn’t work perfectly, but they saw us going, “Well, we’re gonna make this work because it’s a good thing and it’s important and we learn how to work with each other and guess what? So will you.”

Though administrative roles share some similarities with classroom-based educators, there are unique aspects as well such as serving as liaison to the school board and superintendent. Casey shared that they represent the needs of their GSD students “by making sure my superintendent and school board are educated with the most current laws and I tip them off that we’re going to implement new practices; that we’re going to support ALL the marginalized people in our building.”

Educators fill many niches and support one another in myriad ways, demonstrating both accountability in being able to fulfill those needs for one another and agency not only in stepping up to serve others but also in asking for help. Specific to the topic of GSD, teachers spoke of the role the GSA facilitator plays in terms of staff development and GSD awareness. Here Jesse describes one aspect:

[They work] with the GSA Club and [they are] very passionate about it. . . . [They are], in a lot of ways, our voice for that. It’s like if there’s something that needs to be made aware of, [they’re] going to be the one making you aware of it. Even if even if it slips by us, it’s not going to slip by [them].

Taylor spoke of their service as well. “[They’re] great about finding people to come and cover [their] classes so [they] can come be in our classes. And now we have three Health classes going on at once, it’s going to be quite an ordeal.” They further specified, “I’m always happy that [they

come] because I always feel like I'm going to be stumbling over my words and I'm not going to say exactly the right thing." This anxiety about "getting it wrong" and experiences of misgendering or dead-naming a student were expressed by most others as well. Jesse shares:

It's not like I can sit there and practice: Ok, this kid—like flashcards— "He." "She." "She." But I think every time I get better at it. So, when I would screw up . . . I mean I feel like it got less frequent until there was a break and then you come back, and you forget, and you print off the old role sheet which has the wrong name on it. And you're ingrained, years of "This name equals X" and you're talking fast, and you go and you screw up and in your brain you're like "God dang it. I did it. And now the kid feels bad and people are . . ." ARG!

Jess further shared their frustration, "I mean you just have to be aware of it. And the way you're aware of it is just being in the moment and knowing who your kids are, which it's tiring sometimes." Jordan related a similar experience:

I was calling on a student who was formerly known by a female name and had changed their name, but it wasn't officially changed, and it wasn't changed in our computer. It was the first day of the class and I had no idea and I was like, "Well, I guess she's absent." And I'm counting and I'm like "Wait a minute . . . Oh my God!" I just quickly had to put two and two together. And that was really embarrassing for me because I thought I just totally hurt someone, and I didn't even know. How could I ever have known? You know? And it was just this ARG! The child was very gracious about it, thank goodness, but I was just (exasperated sigh). And so that has only happened once thank God.



This accountability also lends a “family” feel to the school and, given the parameters of this study, to the quality of the staff relationships. Jace shared:

There’s such a spirit of camaraderie and there is a spirit of cooperation. And yeah, not like always. I mean, of course we’re going to disagree with each other. But it’s a different environment than I think exists in other schools and other school districts. And for that I feel so grateful to work here. . . . We are a community and we do support each other.

The sense of agency in that statement was commonly expressed. Educators believe there is a uniqueness at Bayview High and choose to not only work there, but often have their children attend district schools. In addition, they held a common belief that students who attend Bayview High have a choice whether to be there or attend elsewhere based on district rules and the lottery system which allows students from outside the district to attend. Part of that choice is full engagement and respect for differences, not only in the student population but with their fellow educators. Here Chris shares their experience gaining buy-in regarding school-wide initiatives:

It can be hard to get traction on school-wide things, but also what happens in the room is authentic in the sense that people take from it and use that concept and apply it in a way that makes sense for themselves. . . . It’s just really inspiring to see people connecting to stuff in their own way and bringing things that we talk about together in some way that . . . I wouldn’t have made that happen in my classroom.

In prior examples, the researcher shared teacher insights regarding the school’s small size necessitating agency and accountability as well as teachers’ need and opportunity to play multiple roles. Related to these needs, the question arose of how to incorporate new and developing understanding about marginalized gender and sexual diverse students and their needs.

Among the ways addressed, the school provides staff development, funds attendance to workshops, and supports the GSA and other student-based initiatives. In addition, the GSA facilitator, who is universally regarded as a resource, offers incidental teaching and mini-workshops concerning aspects of GSD community including student needs.

Each of these provisions for faculty and staff is a representation of the school's commitment to develop its members understanding of marginalized GSD students and community. While there had been considerable focus on this topic, most participants shared the sentiment "There still can be improvements." A lack of automaticity regarding teaching practices related to students who are GSD and frequency of errors or fear of making errors was a common refrain among educators. Jordan shared several times about a student who confided in them they felt "disoriented" by perceived mismatches between gender presentation and gender identity:

[They] said "It's disorienting to me when someone I look at is clearly a girl saying she wants to be a guy." And I said "Well, yeah that's a good word to use for it. It is. I think it's challenging. But imagine what it would be like to be inside of their body. Like how hard must that be for that person?"

Casey shared a similar coaching opportunity regarding a staff member questioning whether they "had to" use student-chosen pronouns:

I said, "No, it's not the law that you use particular pronouns, but I want you to put it in a context of this is a person you love and you care about so . . . instead of [them] calling you Mrs. or Mr., would you like them to just randomly pick what it was when you've chosen that that's the title you want to be?" So, it's only about that. It's about respect . . . This is about learning how to support all of our students in a public organization and focus on their basic civil rights.

This tension between agency on all parts and accountability was a central theme when discussing gender, specifically transitioning and pronouns. During the individual interviews, one question presented a scenario wherein Student A had been misgendered by Student B and they have a verbal altercation. In addition to these two students, there were bystander-students, and the teacher wearing both a professional “hat” and a hat where they are a human being with individual feelings and attitudes. I asked them how they reconcile both the situation and their roles. Responses ranged from pragmatic to empathetic. Here is Kelly’s response:

Well it’s a decision—institutionally and personally. The teacher’s responsibilities to the transgendered person . . . who wants the pronouns to be a certain way is to make it possible for them to learn algebra. . . . That’s universally accepted which means you can’t have them harassed. If harassment is a bunch of people using the wrong pronouns, then that’s a question. . . . If it’s clearly something that is distracting for everybody, then it has to be dealt with; otherwise the algebra won’t happen. And the algebra is the primary responsibility. Whether you add on, “We need to train everyone in proper pronouns” is a question that each teacher probably is invited to figure out themselves.

Chris shared how for the first time, on the day of their interview they had witnessed one student misgendering another. Although the student apologized after being corrected by the misgendered peer, it was cause for considerable reflection Chris’s part:

(And I thought) “Do I need to follow up? I think I do need to follow up. How much do I need to follow up? What’s the way to navigate this?” So, I followed up with the person who had misgendered the other person and was like, “Was that intentional? Or accidental? Or what was that about?” . . . I want to follow up with the person who was misgendered as well and see if that’s something that’s happened frequently to them. I

mean I'm sure it's happened frequently to them, but frequently with the same person is what I'm curious about.

Here Jordan shares their experience and how much more complex the situation can be depending on the students involved:

So, here's the trick . . . you got this kid who is ADD, ADHD, autistic, what-have-you shooting their mouths off—no idea, and no control. And the kid who's sensitive . . . (single clap—like a clash). It's dangerous . . . I try to make sure that they are doing their work, they're focused on the work of the class so we don't get these divergent conversations where it ends up potentially dangerous or hurtful. (A) kid the other day made a comment and . . . it wasn't directed at anyone and then I was like “Whoa. You need to just dial that back. Let's talk about this.” . . . I could tell [they were] kind of like. “I have never heard this before. What are you talking about? This is really weird. What do you mean I can't say stuff like that?” But I said, “It's a public school so everybody's here and sometimes even if we have a personal opinion about something, sometimes just kind of keep it under wraps. It's the kind thing to do. You know you can have your opinions but sometimes you just have to kind of dial it back.”

One sentiment expressed strongly by several participants is the need to demonstrate accountability and be more planful or proactive in addressing procedures and teacher training related to awareness about GSD student, family, and community concerns. Particular procedures and paperwork—having more than just a M/F drop down menu, ensuring that all paperwork says “Guardian” versus “Mother” and “Father,” designating gender-neutral bathrooms, among others—were suggested in conjunction with teacher training. Chris shared:

I think we're in a reactive space and we try to do our best to meet student's needs individually when they come in, but a proactive situation would be so much more welcoming. If on our forms, when you sign in . . . if there were more options . . . Having that be something more inclusive sends a message. . . . It sends a message not only of welcome to the students who don't identify as male or female, but it also sends a message to everybody else that there isn't just the binary and we are welcoming and inclusive and thoughtful about all students.

Comments addressed the need for being more proactive about CES training as well.

Kelly shared, "Regardless of the community you build, you have to figure out how to bring [new people] into the community and how to help them understand there's an opportunity for this to be different than their experience of education before." Taylor reminisced about prior efforts to broaden understanding and buy-in to the philosophy by inculcating the students in CES principles in a more proactive manner. "We used to do a really good job at being a CES school and . . . communicating to the students what that meant." Chris concurred about the benefit of prior programs designed around what it means to be a Bayview student, "Part of that is about how do we treat each other? And there could be some really good training there. Cuz it feels like . . . when the tone is set in 9th grade . . . then things can really change." Chris shared further, regarding the value of students being more directly taught about CES stating, "What really helped with grounding that part was kids putting the CES principles in their own words . . . and understanding what it was . . . and then they were just more aware consumers when they were in the classroom."

## **Chapter 4 Summary**

This chapter provided an analysis of the data collected via interviews, observations, focus group, and document analysis as they related to the four themes which emerged during this study regarding educators' perspectives regarding how they intentionally craft school culture to foster a sense of belonging and safety for GSD students. As a single site-based case study, an interpretivist perspective using the experiences of the educators was the lens through which a picture of the school culture could be viewed. The emergent themes: Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, Facilitating and Managing Change, Exercising Agency and Accountability, and Crafting Culture with Intentionality were borne out from this data. The most prevalent codes were described for each phase of the study using participant quotes and anecdotal data.

While this chapter introduced each of the four themes, Chapter 5 describes them more fully and use the four themes to present a holistic view of Bayview High School from an organizational and culture perspective and attempt to draw conclusions and inferences from the research findings in answering the study.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

This chapter serves to provide analysis and interpretations related to the data compiled through the course of this study. The results are summarized, discussed, and related to the literature. Limitations are reviewed, and implications and recommendations shared. While Chapter 4 introduced each of the themes identified in this study, Chapter 5 uses the four themes to present a holistic view of Bayview High from an organizational and culture perspective and attempt to draw conclusions and inferences from the research findings to inform implications and recommendations based on this current research.

### **Summary of the Results**

This single descriptive case study examined the perceptions and practices of high school educators as they navigated societal changes and served to educate, nurture, and honor all their students, including those who are members of the marginalized gender and sexual diverse (GSD) population, via an interpretivist perspective. The purpose of the study is to determine how educators, both teachers and administrators, intentionally set about crafting a school culture that creates space for gender and sexual diversity such that they foster a sense of belonging in this specific population of students within the wider context of increasing a sense of belonging for all students. The research emphasis concerns the experiences and contributions of different adult participants within the learning community: the administrator, counselor, faculty advisor for the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), and four additional teachers.

The following was the primary question guiding this research, “How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations?” In addition to the primary question, the study sought to answer the following subquestions:

1. How does a public high school community with high academic standards, intent on carefully shaping its school culture, expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging of all its diverse students, in particular its marginalized GSD students, without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives?
2. How do educators in this high school relate to and incorporate new and developing understanding of their marginalized GSD students as these students create a space for themselves within the existing school culture?

As related to these questions, seven educators (five classroom-based and two non-classroom-based) were interviewed, each of the classroom-based educators participated in a focus group discussion and four of the five were observed for one class period; in addition, district and school documents relevant to these questions were analyzed. The data from all four phases of the study was transcribed, coded using Atlas ti software (2016), and analyzed. The resulting 29 codes lead to the development of four themes, Crafting Culture with Intentionality, Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, Facilitating and Managing Change, and Exercising Agency and Accountability.

Analyzing the data gathered from multiple participants through four phases of data collection, informs and benefits the practices of both teachers and administrators. The salient elements identified and evaluated reveal potential gaps in service delivery which now can be addressed. In this era of high stakes testing, highlighting the importance of school culture and belonging at an academically successful school has policy implications and can provide a model for other schools. Specifically regarding GSD students, identifying educators' intention and perspective is the first step to determining which aspects of a purposefully-designed school



culture are beneficial. This information adds to the current understanding of how to provide relevant resources to this marginalized population.

By relating multiple theoretical influences and seminal thought on this topic, the results of this study add to the existing body of knowledge. To assist in the possible improvement of other school programs, this study investigated the mechanisms and progress of one school community which has been intentional in its efforts to create and nurture space in the school environment to foster GSD students' sense of belonging and safety.

### **Discussion of the Results**

The themes which emerged through this study create a picture of the cultural landscape of Bayview High School. The Greater Schools Initiative (2013) defines culture as the “beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions . . . policies that govern how it operates, or the principles upon which the school was founded.” Through the coding process, four themes emerged based on the 29 codes identified. These themes, as previously introduced in Chapter 4, are further described in the following sections as an introduction to the key concept and central theme running throughout this study: Creating Grace and Space.

**The case for school culture.** Bayview High School was founded on the 10 Principles of The Coalition of Essential Schools: Learning to Use One's Mind Well; Less is More: Depth Over Coverage; Goals Apply to All Students; Personalization; Student-As-Worker, Teacher-As-Coach; Demonstration of Mastery; Tone of Decency and Trust; Commitment to the Entire School; Resources Dedicated to Teaching and Learning; and Democracy and Equity. This foundation, as well as its unique origin story, small size, and institutional memory have contributed to Bayview High developing and sustaining an intentionally-created school culture.

That culture, applied and cultivated across school populations of students, teachers, administrators, families, and community members is comprised of different elements which are bound together into a cohesive whole, enriched by its parts.

In this study the researcher has identified four elements or themes: Crafting Culture with Intentionality, Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, Facilitating and Managing Change, and Exercising Agency and Accountability. Students who identify as marginalized Gender and Sexual Diverse are the population of concern in this study, however, how their belonging and safety needs are met at Bayview High School was investigated through educators' perspectives. This requirement: to utilize a third-party from whom the data could be gleaned, meant participants reported about their own actions and intentions separate from outcomes for the population for whom they were acting. One result of this limitation was a constant balancing act on the part of the participants between describing the needs of the specific GSD student population and that of the school as a whole.

Throughout the interview and focus group processes the researcher experienced both frustration and a curiosity regarding the lack of specificity related to the target population in participant's responses to "how" teachers foster a sense of safety and belonging in GSD students. Frustration because it seemed that regardless of the number of times the topic was broached or the manner, participating educators tended to provide more global responses, generalized to the entire school community. This was manifest in multiple ways, but particularly in instances coded as "Pie," meaning the needs of the marginalized GSD population was one slice of the pie; one of myriad concerns for teachers and administrators.

This phenomenon was also met with curiosity based on the researcher's assumptions regarding how a progressive school would function and three specific observations about the focus school:

1. Bayview High is a progressive school with a professed focus on its culture
2. the sentiment was universally expressed
3. unlike situations, outside of this study, regarding race where respondents refer to “not seeing color” or being “color-blind,” the sentiments expressed—both in word and tone—did not feel like either an erasure of difference nor an attempt to evade addressing the need or avoid a challenging topic, based on triangulation of data. In each interview and during the focus group discussion, participants thoroughly acknowledged the uniqueness of the marginalized GSD population, however, rather than being a concern which was added-on or a separate consideration, the specific needs of the GSD population were addressed as a matter of course. Rather than needing a committee dedicated to ensuring gender and sexual diversity is respected in school practices and policies, the principles of Personalization, Tone of Decency and Trust, Commitment to the Entire School, and Democracy and Equity ensured that GSD students' needs were embedded.

“Pie” emerged as a concept from the onset of the study with Casey's interview describing the host of considerations, challenges, identities, and issues experienced within the student population at Bayview High School. Specifically, they shared,

We're in an adolescent organization and there's a load of issues going on all the time and they're all identity issues . . . (Focusing on one piece of the pie) is hard for me. Not to say that if this one sliver would voice what they needed more that I wouldn't be

responsive, but I don't . . . even know who they are. There's a couple of students I know who they are. There's the student who asked to use the boy's restroom; I know who they are. There's the student who usually dresses a certain way and has same-sex romances; I know who they are.

Casey further shared,

Another reason I don't know who they are because the GSA is such an active club! It has one of the biggest attended events (The Day of Silence) in our whole school year after year. And so, if you go that event in some schools you might say, "Oh these are all those kids," but in our school, it's the whole school. Like we have 90% of our school that attends.

The four themes revealed create a picture of Bayview High's cultural landscape. In the Acknowledgement section of this work, the researcher described a tapestry with threads "beautiful, rough, and fine" as a metaphor for their life journey. It seems fitting, therefore, to come full circle and utilize it here as well.

**Four themes; the weft of Bayview's cultural landscape.** In this study, the four themes are elements within a landscape depicted in the tapestry. These landscape elements include aspects of everyday life—crops growing, artists creating, houses being built, families playing, animals cavorting, people working—everyone doing their part on behalf of and within the community. As one looks deeply, GSD students and their attendant needs are acknowledged elements of that landscape as well. The question arises, what is it that serves to hold together this complex structure? To answer, I begin by elaborating on the description of the four themes from Chapter 4.

***Crafting culture with intentionality.*** In the landscape, Crafting Culture with Intentionality is the layout of the town—streets, homes, and neighborhoods; where the business centers and rural areas are located; and locations for the hubs of the town: schools, city government, parks, community centers. Crafting Culture with Intentionality supports all foundational aspects of the school environment. The philosophy of the Coalition of Essential Schools with its emphasis on the 10 Principles is the foundation for Bayview School District and especially Bayview High School which was conceived under the CES model. All policies and procedures, both implicit and explicit, are built upon such principles as Personalization, Teacher as Coach, a Tone of Decency and Trust Commitment to the Entire School, and Democracy and Equity.

As with any culture, the values and norms which establish and distinguish it must be communicated and shared with the wider community—passed down through the generations, if you will. Personnel, from school-based staff, faculty, and administrators to district-based staff and administrators, exhibit buy-in to the philosophy and transmit the culture throughout the district. This intentional adherence to CES principles gives the school a grounding, support, and rationale for the grace-filled space being created. This commitment allows the community to not only sustain the school culture, but also to build and grow, providing a framework for exercising judgement about which new elements to incorporate into the established cultural landscape, which elements to modify, and which to reject.

***Contributing to the whole with integrity.*** Within the cultural landscape, Contributing to the Whole with Integrity is represented in the bright blue skies, pristine waterways, and verdant fields and gardens. Contributing to the Whole with Integrity supports the strengths and needs of every component with an eye toward the CES Principles of Commitment to the Entire School

and Democracy and Equity. To build a school culture which holds a space for and values diversity and the needs of all learners, there must be a conscious commitment—both to these values and to protect and develop each member, especially those most vulnerable. To function fully, everyone plays at least one part—administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, and the wider community. In a complex system, a breakdown in any one area can cause the entire system to fail. Consciously doing one’s part and attending to the entire system’s functioning is an integral aspect of Contributing to the Whole with Integrity and fostering a grace-filled space.

At the core of any culture is its people. At Bayview High School, the educators, students, and parents each inhabit specific communities which interact with and inform each other and the school culture. In this study, these different communities are reflected through the educators’ lenses; their anecdotes and understandings, their perceptions, attitudes, and interpretations inform the picture of the wider school culture.

A thorough analysis of “the whole” includes focus on each essential component. Therefore, the CES Principle of Personalization—school-for-teacher and teacher-for-student—comes into play along with the principle of Commitment to the Entire School. Though it may seem counter-intuitive to discuss personalization when addressing “the whole,” a commitment to the entire school and this personalization—and the autonomy, freedom, and creativity which they engender—contribute to the general atmosphere of trust which underpins the school culture and creates a synergy which affects the whole.

***Facilitating and managing change.*** The clocktower at the center of the town plaza is the aspect of the cultural landscape represented in Facilitating and Managing Change. Though not particularly attached to any one CES principle, without a capacity to change, growth cannot occur. In a way, Facilitating and Managing Change is a thread woven throughout all the other

themes. Whether addressing policy changes regarding academic requirements or wider societal evolutions or internal attitudinal adjustments or exercising the discipline of being a self-reflective practitioner and professional, being able to facilitate and manage change are keys to continuing to grow and thrive. It falls to each member of the culture to process and manage the changes taking place around them and facilitate such transformation in others. Teachers and administrators must support each other and their students in navigating new ways of being, thinking, and acting.

The ability to engage in reflection—to reflect in a planful way about decisions to be made as well as in retrospect and in the moment—is a vital aspect of managing changes faced as a community. To do so successfully, community members must not only trust in the rationale for the change and the process, but in each other and in their leadership to facilitate and manage change in a grace-filled space.

***Exercising agency and accountability.*** Exercising Agency and Accountability is represented in the landscape by the people depicted going about their daily business and interacting with one another. The underpinnings of Exercising Agency and Accountability lie in Bayview High’s small school size and the CES Principle of a Tone of Decency and Trust with its emphasis on unanxious expectations, fairness, generosity, and tolerance. While most typically invoked when speaking about students, the philosophy of Unanxious Expectations is also applied via Personalization, to educators at all levels.

In Bayview School District, the administrators are both trusted and expected to help implement and craft policies and procedures which support the school culture and development through all metrics. They are given and assume great responsibility and hold themselves and each other accountable. Classroom teachers are expected and trusted to teach their content with

excellence and help implement and inform policies and procedures. At the same time, they are given not just freedom, but administrative support to develop new coursework and expand existing courses, to voice their concerns, and function autonomously within the system while holding themselves, each other, and the administration accountable. Students likewise are afforded a great deal of independence and opportunity within the school culture. Being part of such a small school community, opportunities for accountability to their peers as well as their teachers are many. Students bear that responsibility as well as the freedom to create niches for themselves, their interests, and pursuits within the school. The degree of trust required within such a system is a prerequisite of the grace needed to sustain such relationships.

**Creating Grace and Space.** Viewing this study metaphorically, the four themes: Crafting Culture with Intentionality, Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, Facilitating and Managing Change, and Exercising Agency and Accountability are the weft of the Bayview's cultural tapestry. Each is made up of individual threads—beautiful, rough, and fine—the 29 codes used to transform more than 64,000 words into manageable pieces to analyze in search of answers to the research question and subquestions posed at the onset of this study. Each theme presents an element of the tapestry, but what is it that holds the weft of this tapestry in place? What serves as the warp, providing structure and integrating the elements into a cohesive picture depicting the entire landscape? The answer? Creating Grace and Space.

Creating Grace and Space is the overarching theme which emerged from this research. Rather than a particular curriculum or set of overlaid rules or procedures, Grace and Space is a state of being within the culture and environment being created; it is the atmosphere. It is about relationship and trust. As healthy relationships are cultivated in school environments—if a community and intention is created which is holding enough and provides enough belonging,



safety, freedom, personalization, and authenticity where members can assume and trust best intention—then a space has been created in which trust is paramount and grace can be given and received. A grace-filled space is one in which people can make mistakes—mistakes are expected and accepted, learned from and corrected—and thus handled with grace. Grace is an offering. When mistakes are made, or someone is hurt, those inhabiting a grace-filled space feel safe enough to offer correction and the person who made the error can receive that critique, in the spirit intended, knowing they are not being attacked and therefore have no need to be defensive but instead can correct their actions or make amends. This complex cultural state of being acts as warp, binding the wefts of the four themes, completing the tapestry depicting the cultural landscape of Bayview High.

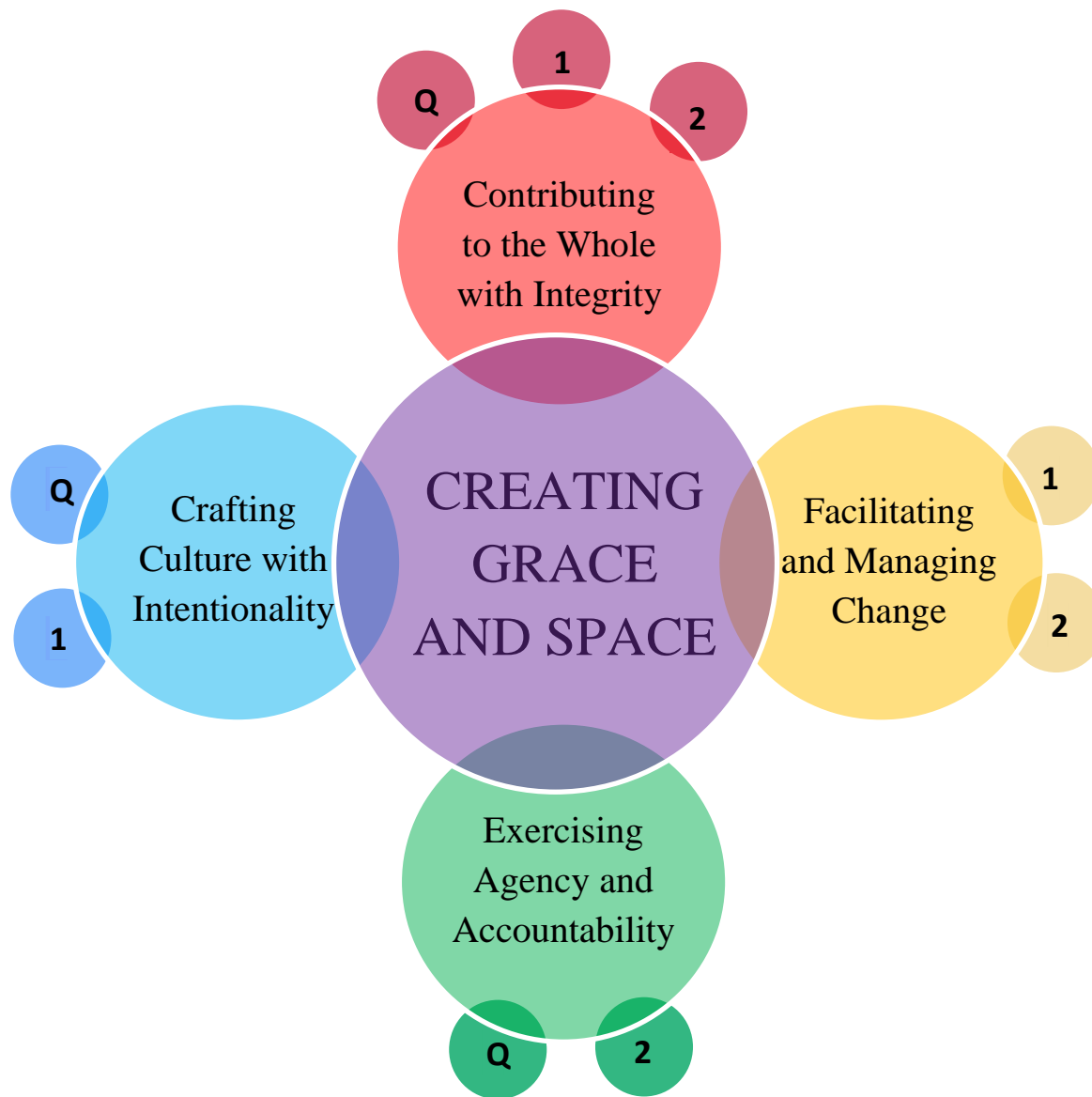


Figure 6. Creating Grace and Space; A Thematic Model

**Research Question**

**Q:** How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations?

**Subquestions**

**1:** How does a public high school community with high academic standards, intent on carefully shaping its school culture, expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging of all its diverse students, in particular its marginalized GSD students, without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives?

**2:** How do educators in this high school relate to and incorporate new and developing understanding of their marginalized GSD students as they create a space for themselves within the existing school culture?

**Research question and subquestions.** Each of the questions related to this study were analyzed through the lens of the four sub-themes identified in the coding process. In this section, each question is answered and related to three of the four themes as identified in Figure 6 (previous page). Each is supported via artifacts and processes identified through observation and with relevant quotes from participants, offered during individual interviews and the focus group.

**Research question.** *How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations?* The themes associated with the primary research question are Crafting Culture with Intentionality, Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, and Exercising Agency and Accountability. Educators at the focus school foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations by creating grace and space within the school culture. From adoption and maintenance of CES principles and a student-led Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) to a strong sense of accountability and regard for each other as well as their students, the space created at Bayview High School is one which facilitates the trust needed to provide grace.

*Crafting culture with intentionality.* From the foundational philosophy of CES to documents which guide district and school policy to the everyday practices and experiences in the halls and classrooms, Bayview High School has a strong sense of identity and focuses intentionally on providing an environment which fosters belonging and safety for all their students.

Part of knowing who they are and what the school stands for pertains to both the school's leadership and foundational principles in CES. Cultural goals generated from the Principal's Council of students and the Site Council, a mix of students, parents, faculty, staff, and administration, identify key areas on which to focus in crafting the culture at Bayview High.

District policies, among them the Nondiscrimination Policy, explicitly include gender and sexual diversity, going farther by specifying, “‘Sexual orientation’ means an individual’s actual or perceived heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, or gender identity, regardless of whether the individual’s gender identity, appearance, expression, or behavior differs from that traditionally associated with the individual’s sex at birth.” This signifies an evolution in the typical listing of protected classes. In addition, it serves to address assumptions about gender presentation and the conflation of gender and sexuality.

Honoring each person’s humanity and individuality was described by multiple participants as a pillar of the school’s philosophy. In addition, maintaining focus on learning was an ideal about which every participant spoke and is related to Teacher as Coach, a common code and one of the CES 10 Principles (Student-as-Learner, Teacher-as-Coach). In referring specifically to students, some participants emphasized the Student-as-Learner aspect, subordinating identity somewhat to the mission of academic achievement. However, within and in addition to such sentiments, every participant acknowledged that in the face of intense emotional, personal, and social changes, where a sense of belonging and safety are in question, academic learning recedes as a priority.

While expressing value for individuals, educators commented explicitly or implicitly that gender and sexual diversity was one of many elements, or “slices of the pie,” related to both an individual and the school culture. It was not subordinated to others, neither was it elevated. This sentiment was reflected to greater or lesser degree in the comments of all participants.

Presented clearly throughout the interactive elements of this study, educators shared a desire for all their students to feel comfortable and welcome in their classrooms and the wider school setting. Specifically, Jesse shared, “There’s so many things that you can be . . .

blindsided by in this world. And being who you are really shouldn't be one of them.”

Recognition of the tremendous diversity in terms of learning style and individual needs was also widely expressed.

*Contributing to the whole with integrity.* People are the heart of any institution or organization. How individuals and groups of individuals are treated informs the whole which is the culture. At BHS, one element which demonstrates this integrity and commitment is the non-gendered dress code. Contributing to the Whole relates specifically to the broader school climate which is inclusive of not only the educators who are the specific population related to this study but also students, parents, staff, and the wider community and culture which surround Bayview High.

Rather than focusing solely on the parts, participants often first described a holistic view and approach to teaching and then shared discrete or individualized aspects. This is in alignment with their value of the CES Principles of Commitment to the Entire School and Personalization. Personalization is an important part of addressing “the whole” when each part of that whole is seen as unique and important. It is the commitment to the entire school and to personalization which creates the atmosphere of trust, built on autonomy, freedom, and creativity. This trust is authentic and underpins the school culture and creates a synergy which affects the whole. Here Chris shares their thoughts regarding individual teacher’s efforts to address change, each in their own way:

It can be hard to get traction on school-wide things. But . . . . what happens in the room is authentic in the sense that people take from it and use that . . . . concept and apply it in a way that makes sense for themselves. So, there’s definitely been teachers who do something in a way that I wouldn’t do, . . . . They do it in a way that matches

with what makes sense for them. It's really cool to see people—if you thought from some ideological spectrum or a political spectrum that you'd say, "Oh I wouldn't expect that person to do thus-and-such" and yet they do it and they do it in a way that they bring it in their classroom. And to me that's way more authentic than them doing some sort of cookie-cutter, "This is how we do inclusion" curriculum.

The personalization employed at Bayview High aims in all directions. The district personalizes teaching and learning for all communities—students, educators, parents—at each of its two schools and within the district personnel, as their nondiscrimination, hiring, and other policies protect adults and families as well as students. Most district policy documents include a section concerning equal opportunity and treatment as well as assignment of a compliance officer and commitment to investigate allegations of noncompliance. Similar wording is specified in the written policies addressing Equal Educational Opportunity, Freedom of Expression, and Nondiscrimination.

At the school level, although firmly rooted in the CES Principle of Personalization which specifies the teachers and principal as the decision-makers regarding teaching practices, families and students are both considered and consulted in policy and practice. Students and parents have a role in site governance: students through the Principal's Council, parents through participation in the parent group, and both groups via the Site Council and accessing teachers and administrators directly. In addition, the school administration provides considerable personalization and professional respect to teachers who can in turn provide greater input and mutual respect to parents and students.

High regard was expressed by teachers for the administration at Bayview High. While acknowledging being in a constant state of improvement, each participant honored their

administrators in their interviews and in the focus group discussions with their peers. Several comments focused specifically on the influence of the principal at Bayview High. Even in their role as supervisor, regard was given for not only their administrative skills, but their humanity. These sentiments speak to the importance of relationships, good leadership, and democratic practices in which all members feel they have a voice and can exercise agency while expecting accountability from themselves and their peers and administrators as they contribute to the whole.

*Exercising agency and accountability.* In a school of this size with only 18 educators and under 30 adult personnel of any classification, holding oneself accountable and being accountable to each other is essential. There are many roles to be filled and nowhere to hide if one does not follow through on tasks they have volunteered for or been assigned. The same is true for students.

A common belief held by participants is that the size, intentionality, and focus of the school provide support mechanisms in terms of their relationships and sense of safety. In addition, the small school size and intentionality on the part of educators was credited. One positive aspect of small size is flexibility. Casey describe the benefit in this way,

We don't have to go through the bureaucracy . . . (A larger district) would not be able to just make a change because someone is saying "This is what's best for our kids." They have to go through stakeholder feedback and meetings. So, we have the luxury at Bayview to be able to just go, "Oh. This is best for our kids," and turn on a dime.

School size, though challenging in some respects, provides professional opportunities for teachers, to wear many hats: instructionally, in support roles, and as leaders in their teaching and learning community. Size also is also credited as an incubator for innovation in terms of course

offerings and opportunities for collaboration on the part of educators which, in turn, provides a modeling opportunity for students.

Educators fill many niches and support one another in myriad ways, demonstrating both accountability in being able to fulfill those needs for one another and agency not only in stepping up to serve others but also in asking for help. Specific to the topic of GSD, teachers spoke of the role the GSA facilitator plays in terms of staff development and GSD awareness. This accountability also lends a “family” feel to the school and, given the parameters of this study, to the quality of the staff relationships.

Teacher’s sense of agency was commonly expressed. Educators believe there is a uniqueness at Bayview High and choose to not only work there, but often have their children attend district schools. Jordan shares the importance of choice in relationship to belonging:

I think that the kids probably feel that way too. And if they know that the teachers want to be there, I think that that probably gives them a sense of security. And especially in high school where they really need that. They need to know they’re in a safe place. And when you’re in a small school, the ripples of anything are felt by all. I think that’s important for them to know that at the very least, the staff is cohesive and together and supporting each other.

Teachers also shared a common belief that students who attend Bayview High have a choice whether to be there or attend elsewhere based on district rules and the lottery system which allows students from outside the district to attend. Part of that choice is full engagement and respect for differences, not only in the student population but with their fellow educators.

***Research subquestion 1.*** *How does a public high school community with high academic standards, intent on carefully shaping its school culture, expand its academic focus to include*



*sense of belonging of all its diverse students, in particular its marginalized GSD students, without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives?* The themes associated with Research Subquestion 1 are Crafting Culture with Intentionality, Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, and Facilitating and Managing Change. Educators at the focus school include sense of belonging without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives in part because school culture has been a focus of school since its inception and within CES is a core value of the school. It is not an added benefit nor is it something which is expendable, but integral. In addition, educators are intentional in preserving and enhancing their school culture. School culture—including belonging—is a priority and one of the primary contributors to creating grace and space at Bayview High School.

*Crafting culture with intentionality.* The circumstance regarding legislative funding changes leading to the founding of Bayview High and its original focus, as what several participants referred to as a “rehab school,” are both unique. Its origin story, their focus on CES, and specifically the Unanxious Expectations aspect of the principle, A Tone of Decency and Trust, are woven into the fabric of the school’s culture. The meaning and significance of Unanxious Expectations was shared by participants in every interview. Here Taylor shares their understanding,

The philosophy behind it is one of creating an environment where kids are challenged but that safety piece is really key on all of the different principles. . . . Unanxious expectation really has to do with academics but it also is keeping kids safe and making them feel . . . safe to be who they are.

This foundational belief sets the stage for the atmosphere of Bayview High regarding not only academic performance, but also social, behavioral, and other metrics.

Though highly regarded and respected throughout the region as a school with excellent academic offerings and outcomes, during interviews and in the focus group, addressing the needs of the whole student represented a much larger element in educators' responses and discussions. Several of those interviewed shared examples or ideas about integrating academics with cultural goals directed toward positive outcomes for the marginalized GSD population. While there is a unit in the health course which specifically addresses gender and sexuality and the topic comes up during several issues-based courses in humanities such as global issues and a course on the media, and at times in advisory, most comments from educators pertained to incidental teaching. Some teacher shared experiences with students which caused them to rethink their lesson plans. Here Chris offers one example,

To have queer representation in the materials . . . and not assume a binary or not assume heteronormative, . . . it's really hard to catch yourself. You catch yourself saying "her husband" and . . . I go, "Oops" and the next time I say it, I say "partner" . . . or "spouse" or something that's not gender-specific . . . Then you're modeling for students and you're having that student in the classroom say, "There's someone up there's who's thinking about this stuff and who isn't assuming. Who isn't erasing me. Who isn't saying I don't exist.

*Contributing to the whole with integrity.* The school's scholastic offerings, including honors courses, an advanced diploma, and concurrent college credit are testaments to its commitment to academics. Graduation rates, college acceptance rates and locations, test scores, and other outcome data are the evidence that what Bayview High School is doing academically, works. In addition, especially considering its size, Bayview offers, and prioritizes through their

funding choices, significant numbers of electives, including technology, art, and music, as well as options in core content areas.

In alignment with the CES Principles of Demonstration of Mastery and Goals Apply to All Students, school personnel also provide significant support services to address diverse learning styles and needs and have official or unofficial learning plans for approximately one-fourth of their student body, according to the administration. In addition to special education services and 504 plans, the school provides study skills courses and works with outside service providers to support student needs. While many of these supports are not required, they are provided because doing so also fits with the CES Principles of Democracy and Equity and Personalization and is the right thing to do—it's the "Bayview Way."

In conjunction with its academic focus, considerable energy and resources are provided to foster development of students in other areas, incorporating all aspects of learning and teaching the Bayview Way. These are all in alignment with cultural goals, such as fostering a sense of belonging and safety for all students, including those who are marginalized GSD. This development assumes many forms both within and outside the school building and conventional school experiences.

In addition to mixers and community service opportunities during the summer, Bayview has many opportunities throughout the year which foster a sense of belonging and safety and focuses on developing the culture of the school. There are three specific programs which are integral to building the culture of Bayview High:

- Retreat—Every year, freshman and students new to Bayview High School attend a week-long retreat which focuses, through activities, on acceptance both of themselves and others

- Advisory—Bayview High’s course schedule has a dedicated advisory period each week. Advisory is a multi-age grouping of students who remain with the same teacher/advisor over the course of their high school career.
- Field Studies—Each year, the school offers field study options in the spring. They are not mandatory, and some families choose to tour colleges, pursue apprenticeships, or take extended vacation during that time. Some field studies are away camps and others are based in town as day camps.

In addition to these special features, there are many other ways in which Bayview High makes efforts to contribute to the whole and foster a sense of belonging and safety for all their students, including those who are marginalized GSD. Policies and practices include: use of bathrooms and locker rooms associated with one’s gender, the ability to form clubs, no-cut sports and availability of scholarships, inclusivity rules, non-gendered extra-curricular activities, a non-gendered dress code, and all-ages dances (including prom) which do not discriminate regarding the gender of one’s date nor chosen attire.

*Facilitating and managing change.* Although not a significant change for Bayview High School since its inception was based in the Coalition of Essential Schools, and its high academic standing was developed over time layered atop the CES philosophy, in the decades since the school was opened, the national focus on “standards,” high stakes testing, and the Common Core represent elements of change which require some level of facilitation and management on the part of every public school. More so than the academic changes themselves, however, the increased demands placed on a limited school day complicates finding time to focus on school culture. According to Casey,

(To address) the academic goals you support kids in a certain way so they progress or not . . . High school is all about social emotional—no matter who you are, no matter how bright you are, no matter how easy the academic part is. The other parts you have to learn about to be college ready? How do you navigate bureaucracy? How do you make a request like, “I want to use the boy’s bathroom”? Who do you talk to? How do you verbalize it in a way that you’re going to be heard? What research do you have to have with you? How do you navigate social media? And so, to be “College Prep” is 10% academics and the rest: self-advocacy, managing bureaucracy, talking to your teachers. As mandates from the state and federal levels are passed, public schools such as Bayview High are forced to adapt and accommodate them, regardless of the impact they have on existing programs and other school values. Some of these changes potentially have a direct impact on marginalized GSD students and families.

**Research subquestion 2.** *How do educators in this high school relate to and incorporate new and developing understanding of their marginalized GSD students as students create a space for themselves within the existing school culture?* The themes associated with Research Subquestion 2 are Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, Exercising Agency and Accountability, and Facilitating and Managing Change. Educators at the focus school use reflection in a variety of ways, specific to each individual. A common practice, however, was to engage with their peers. Educators were found to engage in reflective practice in their planning, while teaching, and post-instruction. Their reflections informed future decisions regarding curriculum as well as interactions between students. In addition, the culture of the school fosters collaboration and the small school size necessitates both interaction and interdependence. This

quality of relationship between educators is built upon a trusting—grace-filled—relationship which is borne out of the school culture.

*Contributing to the whole with integrity.* In analyzing the previous question and sub-question, “the whole” was explored more broadly. The nature of this question focuses on the educators themselves and the faculty and staff community.

One of the most prevalent codes which emerged through the interview process was “Collaboration,” used to indicate intra-teacher or teacher to administrator cooperation and involvement. Collaboration was of great interest to the researcher in part due to the tremendous amount of collegiality witnessed in all environments, both when speaking about each other and to each other. In addition, the strength of those relationships seemed to be key to creating and sustaining grace and space. The educators who participated in this study demonstrate a care for one another; they have a sense of comradery and facilitate and support each other personally and professionally in terms of interests and areas of growth.

Most demonstrative of this phenomenon was their behavior when the five classroom-based educators were brought together for the focus group. Though not a code, one of the most common descriptors in a word analysis performed after transcription was “laughter.” The prevalence of laughter when these educators were given time together was remarkable. They knew about each other’s lives, what they were teaching, and their habits and had an easy way of interacting.

Perhaps due to this positive rapport, educators were able to talk about even challenging topics with little defensiveness. One such topic was the variability of training level and comfort with CES depending on years of experience at the school. This issue was touched upon in several individual interviews and was revealed with even greater clarity during the focus group

discussion. All classroom-based educators agreed there is a difference in comfort level and fluency with the language and practices associated with the Coalition of Essential Schools 10 Principles between those among them who the researcher calls “newbies” and their “veteran” counterparts and that this difference was based on the variability in direct focus on CES as a philosophy.

Between the focus group’s five participants, three had been working at Bayview High School for 15 or more years and two had been there less than seven. Within those two groupings there was a clear delineation in comfort level and training received related to the school’s foundation as a Coalition of Essential School member. Interestingly, in terms of years at Bayview High, the current principal and counselor fall between these two groupings.

Though members of the veteran group demonstrated a comfortability and ease with CES, longevity has also given them the opportunity to witness adherence to CES evolve and come in and out of focus dependent upon administrative experience and attitudes.

The turnover in administration—both at the district and on-site—has a tremendous effect on the school culture. Participant comments regarding the centrality of the current principal are evidence of this. Administrative turnover was a commonly cited influencing factor regarding the fluctuating levels of CES focus over the years.

The current principal has been at Bayview High for eight years. In the 13 years preceding their arrival, the school had three other principals as well as two interim principals. With each new principal and likewise with the shift in district superintendents, came considerable changes and challenges for teachers; some administrators were fully-supportive of CES and others had other priorities which conflicted with CES; still others were verbally supportive but laissez-faire and didn’t contribute actively to building that culture. With each of

these administrative changes, the focus and adherence to CES waxed and waned based on who filled the highest levels at the district and on site.

*Facilitating and managing change.* Although not a significant change for Bayview High School since its inception was based in the Coalition of Essential Schools, and its high academic standing was developed over time layered atop the CES philosophy, in the decades since the school was opened, the national focus on “standards,” high stakes testing, and the Common Core represent elements of change which require some level of facilitation and management on the part of every public school. As academic and testing mandates from the state and federal levels are passed, public schools such as Bayview High are forced to adapt and accommodate them, regardless of the impact they have on existing programs and other school values. The administrative and classroom staff at Bayview are cognizant of the effects on their students and are diligent in their efforts to mitigate stress and harm.

With the recent election, civil rights advancements for GSD citizens have come under attack. These too have an effect on schools regarding facilities, access, and nondiscrimination policies. Bayview High School, works to ensure its student population and community feel safe and supported. Knowing who they are and what they stand for and their firm grounding in CES Principles such as Democracy and Equity, Tone of Decency and Trust, Commitment to the Entire School are echoed in Casey’s statement, “This is my house,” in explanation of their commitment to protect Bayview’s GSD population against regressive federal legislation.

Teachers’ ability to reflect greatly impacts their capacity to change, to grow and develop both their skills and their understanding. At Bayview High School, though all teachers prescribe reflection opportunities for their students, reflective practice is not mandated for educators. Each practitioner discussed their own processes from grinding through until scheduled breaks, to daily



formal or informal practices and incidental reflection while engaged in other activities, to being in a near constant state of reflection; a commonality however was processing with their peers.

Though not always easy, the benefit of peer reflection makes the effort worthwhile. Whether regarding course content, individual students, or specific successes and challenges, each of the classroom-based educators—identified a group of fellow-educators with whom they process. The non-classroom-based educators, due to the difference of their position primarily relied on each other or outside peers for peer to peer reflection. Interestingly, this reflected in their community, their general assertion that each student had at least one teacher to whom they could turn if needed.

Each of the educators interviewed an ability to be self-reflective and even critical and interrogate themselves for biases. Here Jordan shares,

It's supportive and also professional because my profession is to teach and to be there for the kids. It's not about me. It's not about my personal belief. . . . I would still have an obligation to my students to be respectful of their needs and them as people. And if I could not abide by that, then I think I'm in the wrong profession.

A final area addressed regarding change harkens back to CES as a philosophy, but specifically addresses a change in attitude on the part of the students. As mentioned previously, Bayview High did not always enjoy its current status as a high achieving, college-prep school. In the transition from “rehab school” to “renowned,” through the varied combinations of district and on-site administrators, as the school population grew to 10 times its original size in both students and faculty, and as the focus on CES waxed and waned, the culture of the school has changed. Though newbies may not have the institutional memory which allows them to see the changes, veterans do and while some changes were welcomed, the relatively frequent changes in

administration, both at the district and site levels and the waxing and waning of focus on CES principles was a source of concern. Taylor opined, “I think we try to always come back to the Coalition, the 10 Common Principles. I wish we could go back to when we were really focused on that.” Chris shared they perceived the school’s philosophical pendulum swinging back toward CES in the past year. The minimal training for CES was a related concern for newbies, as disclosed by Jace:

I think we need to do some more trainings . . . A lot of the people that have been on staff longer have more working knowledge and then if you joined later, you’ve got a bit. And it’s mentioned regularly but I think there was a really big focus on it 10 years ago maybe. And if you weren’t here ten years ago there’s less of an understanding less of an emphasis on it.

*Exercising agency and accountability.* In response to other questions investigated in this study, the researcher has shared results regarding the school’s small size necessitating agency and accountability as well as teachers’ need and opportunity to play multiple roles. Related to the question of incorporating new and developing understanding about marginalized gender and sexual diverse students and their needs, the school provides staff development, funds attendance to workshops, and supports the GSA and other student-based initiatives. In addition, the GSA facilitator, who is universally regarded as a resource, offers incidental teaching and mini-workshops concerning aspects of GSD community including student needs.

Each of these provisions for faculty and staff is a representation of the school community’s commitment to develop its members understanding of marginalized GSD students and community. While there has been considerable focus on this topic, most participants shared the sentiment “There still can be improvements,” specifically, as shared by Taylor, regarding the

need for greater ease and automaticity in meeting the needs of GSD students, “It’s like CPR you know you know it, but you need to always be talking about it and thinking about it and so that way when you’re in the classroom, it’s just (snap snap snap) automatic.” This lack of automaticity and frequency of errors or fear of making errors was a common refrain among educators.

This tension between agency on all parts and accountability was a central theme when discussing gender, specifically transitioning and pronouns. Through a combination of reflective practice, professional development, on-the-job-training, basic human decency, and a desire to treat others civilly, teachers grapple daily to improve their practice in serving students who are GSD.

During the individual interviews, one question presented a scenario wherein Student A had been misgendered by Student B and they have a verbal altercation. In addition to these two students, there were bystander-students, and the teacher wearing both a professional “hat” and a hat where they are a human being with individual feelings and attitudes. I asked them how they reconcile both the situation and their roles. Responses ranged from pragmatic to empathetic and all addressed the need (a) for professionalism, (b) to address the victim’s needs, (c) to educate. Here Chris shares their response:

So how do I navigate all that intersectionality and dealing with all of that? I try – on my best days – to (be tactful). That you have a responsibility certainly to the person who was misgendered, but also to the person who was doing the misgendering. (It’s about) educating – and not about judging – but about saying “Your actions were hurtful. Maybe whether they were intentional or not – were hurtful and so let’s talk about that.” But not

to demonize the person . . . It's not about shame. . . . It's about the behavior and not about the person.

A sentiment expressed strongly by several participants was the need to demonstrate accountability and be more planful or proactive in addressing procedures and teacher training related to awareness about GSD student, family, and community concerns. Here Jesse describes their process and understanding:

I think it's just being open with everyone around you and being aware of that . . . nobody's ever perfect right off the bat. And part of that is, "I made the mistake today, but you're going to make it tomorrow or next week, or a year from now, or every day from now until next year. And you know, if you're doing it honestly, then that's not an issue. If you're doing it intentionally then that's an issue . . . so being able to go, "Hey. My bad. This is what I meant . . . and I'm sorry."

Particular procedures and paperwork—having more than just a M/F drop down menu, ensuring that all paperwork says "Guardian" versus "Mother" and "Father," installing gender-neutral bathrooms, among others—were suggested in conjunction with teacher training. Chris shared,

We could we could be more thoughtful about that. And be more proactive about building Community for gender-nonconforming kids . . . We could do to be more proactive and . . . send a message from day one or before day one - when their kids are filling out their forms (they would think) "Oh hey this is a place that cares about . . . me or that cares about people who aren't cis or aren't straight" and that that sends a positive message of inclusion for everybody.

Comments addressed the need for being more proactive about sustaining their CES roots as well. All three veteran members of the classroom-educators reminisced about prior efforts to

broaden understanding and buy-in to the philosophy by inculcating the students in CES principles in a more proactive manner.

### **Discussion of Results Related to Literature**

This research study sought to identify the attributes of teacher perceptions and teacher practices within the context of belonging and safety as they relate to Bayview High School community's efforts to provide space for their gender and sexual diverse (GSD) population of students. Teacher perceptions and practices were the lenses through which this study analyzed data to answer the research question and subquestions. This section relates results from this study to the research literature. The researcher identified four themes: Crafting Culture with Intentionality, Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, Facilitating and Managing Change, and Exercising Agency and Accountability which are encompassed in the overarching theme, Creating Grace and Space.

The cultural shifts within society represent the macrocosm of the changes taking place within public schools. As Parker Palmer (2011) posits, "Whatever is inside us continually flows outward to help form, or deform, the world—and whatever is outside us continually flows inward to help form, or deform, our lives" (p. 47). So it is with school systems as a reflection of society at large. Response to these challenges in the form of systemic change takes place when the combined pressure from within and without reach a critical point. We are currently at such a point culturally and within the public schools.

Sergiovanni (2000) describes school culture in terms of Lifeworlds and Systemsworlds. The Systemsworld includes, "management designs and protocols, strategic and tactical actions, policies and procedures, and efficiency and accountability assurances" whereas the Lifeworlds comprise "leaders and their purposes, followers and their needs, and the unique traditions,

rituals, and norms that define a school's culture" (p. ix). In this way, Systemsworlds align well with Bolman and Deal's (2013) Structural and Political Frames, and Lifeworlds align with the Symbolic Frame, with elements from Human Resources in both. Bolman and Deal's (2013) Symbolic Frame encompasses those elements which foster belief, hope, and attachment to an organization; in other words, those elements of culture which foster belonging. Sergiovanni asserts that the Lifeworld needs to be the generative force of the Systemsworld or else the culture and character of a school erodes.

The four themes and Creating Grace and Space reinforce the ideas in both works cited above. Like the interlocking sides of a frame or the interconnected worlds as described by Sergiovanni, the elements of the cultural tapestry uncovered at Bayview High are inextricably bound and are the foundation on which the needs of any population or the requirements of any mandate could be met.

**Coalition of Essential Schools.** CES provides a framework to support and promote innovative and effective teaching and learning in progressive small schools.

Among the 10 Principles CES promotes, three were initially identified as most relevant to this study. After interviews and analysis, that list was expanded to five. They are:

1. Personalization, which refers to individualizing teaching and learning, and specifies that goals apply to all students. Though the means of achievement or expression of achievement varies, "school practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of students," (Common Principles, n.d., para. 4).
2. (Student-as-Worker) Teacher-as-Coach emphasizes coaching students how to learn and distinguishes CES schools from others in which teachers are used as "deliverer of instructional services," (Common Principles, n.d., para. 5).

3. A Tone of Decency and Trust, described in terms of a tone which “explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation, of trust, and of decency (fairness, generosity, and tolerance),” (Common Principles, n.d., para.7).

4. Commitment to the Entire School manifests in staff bearing multiple responsibilities in service to the entire school. It requires that the principal and teachers should “perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline),” (Common Principles, n.d., para. 8).

5. Democracy and Equity which is described in the following way,

The school should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies. It should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school. The school should honor diversity and build on the strength of its communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity (Common Principles, n.d., para. 10).

**Changing demographics.** To be faithful to these Principles and meet the needs of their students, teachers must not only define the changing demographics of their students more broadly, but also be willing to critically look at their own practices; to be self-reflective practitioners in determining how their perceptions, attitudes, and understandings affect their preparation and practice in teaching their diverse student populations. The intrinsically-driven demographic changes represented by students coming out as GSD present unique challenges, however in a culture of grace and space, they are woven in as part of the tapestry and dealt with in course. This process of change requires educators, whose job it is to support all their students, engage in a process of self-reflection and transformation themselves—as individuals and as professionals.

For students who newly emerge in school as marginalized GSD, their original mold of belonging may need to be reshaped. In coming out, a student may find themselves, in the position of having to re-introduce themselves, justify, or recreate a space of belonging based on their newly-realized identity. Former places of belonging may be no longer accessible to them and other, new, and unknown places may be made evident. As belonging is part of a reciprocal system; the system must recognize that a student belongs for the sense of belongingness to be complete and for the student to feel safely a member of that system. In this way, a binary system (belonging or not belonging) is reinforced however, if schools are mindfully creating spaces of belonging, then rather than being obstacles of power and oppression, they can facilitate inclusion and a civility which fosters belonging and safety for all students and community members. Bayview is such a mindful space. Though steeped in the history and architecture associated with traditional schools, educators work intentionally to foster a culture of belonging and safety in their school environment and combat the traditional mindsets and mores which are prevalent in school environments and often toxic, especially to marginalized populations.

**Dealing with change.** The process of change, whether societal, organizational, or individual, is a well-studied field. Most specifically, regarding educators' perspectives, it is important to fully investigate the processes of individual change in addition to change as it relates to school systems.

Individual change is closely linked to reflection and, in the field of education, the theory of its benefits and place in best practice is borne out in the research. Reflective practice, according to Schön (1987), is described as knowing-on-action (before and after) and knowing-in-action (during). Practitioners filter their experiences through their own *appreciative systems*—values, knowledge, theories, and practices. Dewey (1933) addressed reflection as a response to a



problem or a feeling of unease. He described the conditions for reflection as open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, and responsibility which are incorporated, holistically, into a practitioner's way of being. Open-mindedness addresses a teacher's practice of continual reflection about why they are doing what they are doing. It is an active practice of listening, seeking multiple perspectives, and being open to the possibility of being wrong and needing to change course. Whole-heartedness reflects a commitment to learning and the process of change. Bearing responsibility means that consequences (personal, academic, and socio-political) are an integral aspect of consideration in the reflective process.

As instruction is taking place, immediately after, and over time, the practitioner reflects on their work as well as their cognitive and metacognitive processes, their actions and inactions. It is through that process, which often involves discomfort or dissonance, professional growth is achieved. According to Mezirow (1994) the act of examining one's assumptions, patterns of interaction, and the premise under which actions are taken defines meaningful learning. Far beyond mere remembering, reflective practice is the act of consciously analyzing not just actions and cause and effect, but emotions, reactions, insights, and interactions. It is a discipline, requiring practice to become a habit of mind and be engaged in reflexively. Reflection is not about judgement as much as it is about thoughtful processing regarding not just the What and How of teaching, but also the Why and determining meaning not only of the content but also of the practicing art of *teaching* and what it means to be a teacher.

Educators at Bayview High School are an excellent demonstration of the three systems of reflection and change described above. Intentionality—Pre-Reflection, Reflection In-Action, and Reflection On-Action, a slight variance on Schön, were three codes utilized in this research, most directly in response to Research Subquestion 2. That feeling of “unease,” described by

Dewey, is apropos most directly in the way teachers are grappling with gender, pronouns, and anti-heteronormativity/cisnormativity in general. They are still storming and forming—but with open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, and responsibility. These three attributes as well, fit in with the four identified themes of this study. Different participants had different degrees of experience with the GSD community and different levels of knowledge but each, in their own way is still working to make habits of these new expectations and none appeared to be on a path of resistance.

**Coming out.** The process of *coming out* refers, at its most basic level, to disclosing first to oneself and then to others about one's gender identity, sexual orientation, or both. The general broadening of societal cultural norms and attitudes provides the context which emboldens many of today's students to begin the coming out process at an earlier age than prior generations (Dunlap, 2016; Robertson, 2014; Williams, 2010).

The Stonewall Organization's study (as cited by Williams, 2010), which polled 1,500 individuals who identified as gay or lesbian, indicated the average age people began the coming out process had dropped dramatically with each generation from Baby Boomers (age 60) to Millennials (ages 18-24 at the time of the poll) was 17 years old.

Dunlap's 2016 study reinforced with the Stonewall organization's findings. Dunlap (2016) analyzed the coming out process identifying nine milestones and found that from start to finish, the process had shortened from 12.1 years for the oldest women to 5.2 years in the youngest and the data for males showed an even greater acceleration from 22.4 years to 6.8 years. These processes and their impact on systems and individuals have thus transferred from college and other adult institutions to local high schools and middle schools across the country. Dunlap observed that due to this shift, today's thirteen-year-old may be struggling with the same

issues as yesterday's twenty-year-old, but with fewer resources and a less solid sense of self. High schools are at the epicenter of these societal and generational changes.

**The mandate for public education.** Since the expansion of public education laws in the 1970s, the de facto motto of public schools in the United States has been, "We take all comers!" Because attendance in school is compulsory, students have very little control over where they spend much of their lives. Their schools are determined predominantly by where their caregivers have chosen to live, with income, mobility, and school policy serving as additional influences.

Public schools, likewise, have no control over who comes to their doors. These two factors combine in such a way as to necessitate an elaborate mix of planfulness, flexibility, and responsiveness on the part of schools, to remain effective places of learning for all its students. Consequently, high schools today need to consider ways to prepare for and shape school culture for the internally-driven changes in the demographics of its GSD students, to retain the ability to promote the success of all its students.

Bayview is keenly aware of its role as a public school. Both classroom-based educators and non-classroom-based educators reflected on the important societal role they play and the need to honor every student's human rights within the complexity of being a public institution under tremendous scrutiny with minimal time and marginal funding. Here Casey describes their view of individual difference and their process for training teachers:

I think that I'm supporting them at the pace that they're able to palate the support and the learning. We're all in different places. We all have different experiences. We all have different value and moral background and decisions and choices and fortunately for me, my work isn't too difficult as I believe that I'm working with a pretty democratic group

of people who believe in people-first and are willing to be strong in their own values but know we are in a public setting.

Of the challenges, they shared:

I do know there's times when some of the speakers I'm having come teach us is sometimes not easy for people and I can see that physically for them and I also can tell with the kinds of questions they asked me afterwards, but no one is challenging the need to have civil rights. . . . We had a transgender woman and a gay man speaking to us who were very open about who they were and why they were speaking to us. . . . When I introduced the speakers I said, "These are the speakers. They're giving us information that's required for us to be good at our job in the public sector. This is not about your morals at all. This is not a time for you to argue your morals and values about the information we're seeking—we're listening to today. This is a learn how to support all of our students in a public organization and focus on their basic civil rights. So that's the lens that's I expect you to be listening through today." And people were really open and asked great questions and follow up questions after the presenters.

**Student success and belonging.** There are many factors which define student "success." Academic achievement (GPA, test scores, placement in competitions, college acceptance rate and locations, among others) is time-honored but one metric which has recently begun to be asserted as an equally-valid measure of merit is *belonging*.

Belonging describes the sense that one is an integral member of a group and has "psychological membership in the school or classroom," (Wehlage, 1989, p. 10 as cited in Goodenow, 1993, p. 10) or "perceptions of fitting in or social attachment," (Gray, 2012, p. 3). Research shows that students with a high sense of belonging feel accepted, respected, included, and

supported. In addition, according to Gray (2012), they “generally have greater motivation, better grades, and greater psychological well-being” (p. 2). These benefits are not exclusive to GSD students, but across populations.

It is clearly important that middle and high schools attend to fostering both belonging and safety as a prevalent aspect of their school culture. A research meta-analysis related to belonging conducted by Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie, and Waters (2018) included 51 research studies ( $N = 67,378$ ) between 1993 and 2013. These researchers found that the greatest factor impacting student’s sense of belonging was teacher support citing, “Students who believe that they have positive relationships with their teachers and that their teachers are caring, empathic and fair and help resolve personal problems, are more likely to feel a greater sense of belonging” (p. 25). Additional factors fostering belonging included positive personal characteristics (e.g., optimism, self-esteem, conscientiousness); parent and peer support; and emotional stability were also strongly related to school belonging.

Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, and Greytak (2013) found four types of GSD-related supports to not only have a positive effect on the school experience and sense of belonging for GSD students, but also mitigate negative effects of victimization: GSAs, supportive school staff, inclusive curricula, and comprehensive antibullying/harassment policies. The strongest positive influence found in this study concurred with Allen, et al (2018): supportive adults. Further, students who reported having greater numbers of supportive educators reported higher GPAs and less missed school. Bayview High meets all four of these criteria: GSA, supportive staff, inclusive curricula, and comprehensive protective policies.

**Teacher perceptions and practices.** Teacher attitude toward and perception of diversity, in all its permutations, has been found to be among the most influential factors in

determining their behavior toward students and others within the school context. According to Geneva Gay (2013) there are consistent research findings demonstrating “teachers’ instructional behaviors are strongly influenced by their attitudes and beliefs” (p. 56) regarding student diversity. Hogan (2013) posits that personal ignorance of the affect one’s attitude has on students and the classroom results in a narrowing of the scope of inquiry and inspection in the learning environment. Therefore, one of the most essential elements needed for teachers to develop their understanding and practices, is an environment and administration which is not merely “tolerant” but safe; one in which mistakes are seen as part of the learning process and trust is mutual to the point that grace—belief that the other is doing their best, is open to influence, and assuming best intentions—is the norm.

To be most effective, teachers need a balanced environment where they can challenge themselves to grow out of their preconceptions, reflect on their practice, and actively pursue their own development regarding the societal changes occurring both inside and outside of the school environment, particularly as it applies to their treatment and perception of their GSD student population. Jesse’s comment illustrates this point:

If a student—forget student—if a person is not comfortable in the situation they’re not going to put themselves out there, which is bad. So, my biggest takeaway from the CES Principles is that idea of Unanxious Expectations that that leads to creating a safe environment where a kid can present something that may be two-thirds of the class will go “Ugh! Great.” And I’m going, “Let’s figure out where this comes from.” . . . At the very least it turns into a talking point and it contributed something to class and the kid feels comfortable enough to continue to present things.

**The need for safety and belonging.** The human needs for safety and belonging are well established in academic cannon. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, first described in 1954 and elaborated on in his later works, delineates six levels of human need or motivations, each successive, building upon satisfaction of lower needs in order to access higher order need fulfillment. Situated near the base of the hierarchy, are Safety and Belonging (and Love). According to Maslow's theory, cognitive concerns, or the pursuit of knowledge, which is the narrowest definition of the "business of school," are not accessible until the Self-Actualization phase which is built upon the more basic human needs, Physiological, Safety, Belonging and Love, and Esteem. Thus, assuming students' Physiological needs of food, water, air, warmth, and sleep are met at home or perhaps in part via school supports such as free and reduced lunch programs and student health centers, it is clearly important that middle and high schools consciously foster both Safety and Belonging as prevalent aspects of their school culture to support student growth toward Self-Actualization and academic learning.

Countless studies have supported Maslow's hierarchy and determined these foundational needs as prerequisite for academic learning. Culture itself is based on fulfillment these foundational needs. According to Lieberman, Yalom, and Miles (1973 as cited in Shechtman, 1997), the climate (often a term interchanged with culture) of a group is determined by the extent to which an individual's needs are being met by the group, the results of which have an impact on the group or culture as well. They identified five areas of need: "(a) a sense of belonging (the need to know that one is part of the group and shares both power and responsibility), (b) acknowledgement by others (the sense of being liked and recognized for both one's strengths and uniqueness), (c) freedom of self-expression (the need to express an opinion, provide feedback, and be free of destructive criticism), (d) opportunities for self-disclosure (the need to express

emotions, be honest and authentic), and (e) open communication (the need to resolve inevitable group conflicts in empathetic and rational processes, free of labeling and stereotyping” (p. 100).

Safety is often defined in terms of freedom from physical harm, but that is a focus on inputs—incidents of violence, types of acts, etc. The purpose of this study is outputs—the results of actions and practices which either foster or hinder students’ feelings of safety. Social and emotional safety, represented in feelings of belonging or the lack thereof, are the overarching outcomes of these environmental factors. Because the focus is on educators and their practices and perceptions, the researcher is focused on subtleties such as language, curricular choices, and problem solving as evidence of fostering a safe environment in which students are free from all types of harm—verbal harassment, ostracization, physical abuse, silencing and marginalization, to name a few—and are free to express themselves and develop to their fullest potential within educational institutions.

In addition to the existing federal and state legislation prohibiting discrimination according to sexual orientation, among other protected classes, one unique aspect of Bayview School District, is its nondiscrimination policy which is among the most progressive in the state, defining “sexual orientation” as including actual *and perceived* sexual orientation and gender identity, specifying, “regardless of whether the individual’s gender identity, appearance, expression or behaviors differs from that traditionally associated with the individual’s sex at birth.” This is a notable distinction. By enumerating in this way, the intent of their policies is made clearer and more enforceable. In addressing bullying, Sandowski (2016), states that such enumeration of policies “underscores those students who research shows are most likely to be bullied and harassed and least likely to be protected under non-enumerated anti-bullying laws and policies” (p. 6). In addition, enumeration “provides teachers and school personnel with the



tools they need to implement . . . policies. When they can point to enumerated language, . . . they feel more comfortable enforcing the policies” (Sandowski, 2016, p. 6).

Research has shown that students who are GSD experience greater degrees of harassment and bullying than their non-GSD counterparts. According to the researchers of the biennial National School Climate Survey, commissioned by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), since the study’s inception in 1999 the overall percentage of GSD-identified students who report experiencing homophobic remarks as well as verbal and physical harassment and physical assault has decreased and there is an increase in access to supports and services as well as policies which specify protection of both gender and sexual diverse populations (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016). There are, however other trends within this longitudinal study which are less positive. In analyzing the last three biennial reports, (2011, 2013, 2015), every area had a decrease in frequency in the percentage of GSD students who report acts of bias in school from 2011 to 2013 and then there was a sharp increase reports of sexuality-biased remark and several other areas from 2013 to 2015. In that same time-period, the percentage of students identifying harassment due to gender expression including policies and procedures which privilege heteronormativity and cisnormativity have increased. Most relevant to this study, the data indicate the percentage of students reporting teachers making negative remarks related to sexuality and, most markedly, gender have increased to rates commensurate with or exceeding rates in 2011 and 2013. As previously documented, teachers’ attitudes are primary influences in their treatment of students and teachers’ treatment of students is one of the key factors impacting safety, but also the students’ sense of belonging.

These students reported (2013 and 2015) higher instances of absenteeism, avoidance gendered situations, avoidance of participation in school-related activities, as well as incidences

of discipline and subjection to biased mandates and treatment based on sexuality and gender expression—all of which are identified as factors which inhibit belonging and a feeling of safety.

Results of this current study support existing literature concerning the importance of belonging and safety within school environments.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation to this study, as predicted, was time. Given the school schedule, with testing, assemblies, Field Studies, Spring Break, senior projects, prom, graduation, and other priorities, beginning this research in the Spring term was not ideal. Fall has similar issues, so beginning in January is thought to have been preferable.

The purpose of the classroom observations, as described in Chapter 3 was expansive. Given a single observation, the task proved far greater than the time allotted. The researcher concluded several full days with each participating teacher would be necessary to satisfy the list of inquiries, but the timing of the study with relation all the timing limitations previously described prohibited lengthening the observation time.

### **Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

The results of this study support existing literature regarding the value of school culture. In relationship to practice and policy, the importance of belonging and safety as matrices of student success; and the benefits of including such programs and policies as GSA, supportive staff, inclusive curricula, and comprehensive protective policies has been demonstrated to be of value in this case study. In response to the research question and subquestions, the effect of the grace and space offered within a culture built upon the Coalition of Essential Schools serves to bind the values of the school as described by the four themes: Crafting Culture with Intentionality, Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, Facilitating and Managing Change, and

Exercising Agency and Accountability. Educators at all levels are focused on meeting GSD students' needs and other cultural and belonging goals while maintaining academic excellence. These goals are not seen as hierarchical, but complimentary and therefore addressed with parity. Through self-reflection, reflection in- and on-action, careful planning, post-reflection, peer reflection, and simple practice, participant-educators work to hone their craft which is not merely defined by their discipline but also the cultural values of the whole school.

As public education is becoming ever-more focused on high stakes testing, Bayview High School's concentration on addressing the needs of its GSD population and student population in general, is note-worthy. Although this single descriptive case study is not generalizable, some of the lessons learned may inform practice and perhaps policy in other schools. Other schools could benefit from these educators' experience. Although unique, given its small size, relative affluence, and focused philosophy (CES), lessons can be gleaned from these educators' and this school community's example.

Paramount is the emphasis on Culture. Individual participants all described the importance of having a cohesive philosophy—a shared language. Through the years, the centrality of CES and the 10 Principles has ebbed and flowed, it is the undercurrent at Bayview High, in part fostered by the institutional memory represented by veteran teachers. The parity between academics and culture, as evidenced by the Site Council, Principal's Council, school-wide goals for cultural development and focus, programs, funding priorities, and staff interest, ensures that culture is neither viewed nor treated as a secondary concern. It is not subordinated. This seems to be an essential understanding gleaned from this study. One cannot overlay, as Chris described, "some sort of cookie-cutter, 'This is how we do inclusion' curriculum," atop a

toxic culture. This is true whether dealing with racism, sexism, xenophobia, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, homophobia, or any other hate- or ignorance-based biases.

Self-reflection, on the part of individual educators and as a collective, is another element which may inform practice. Though not formalized, participants all engaged in considerable and varied forms of reflection which informed their practice. Peer reflection and a general collegiality and mutual respect and enjoyment of each other led to a trusting atmosphere or space which fosters belonging, safety, and the opportunity to offer grace.

While one clearly cannot mandate cultural change, one of the key factors in this school community's evolution in terms of GSD students appears to be communication. They engage each other and students in the topic rather than obfuscating or avoiding. As they have created a grace-filled space, built upon Crafting Culture with Intentionality, Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, Facilitating and Managing Change, and Exercising Agency and Accountability, they are able to grapple individually and collectively with challenging topics and can make mistakes without irreparably damaging relationships or the wider culture. Mistakes are expected and accepted, learned from and corrected—and thus handled with grace.

At the core, educators do understand that as a public institution, they are required to respect human rights, but this “requirement” does not appear to be why they are committed. It may be that this is part of the “Bayview Way,” described previously in relationship to student inculcation to CES Principles. How one treats people and functions within the school culture is part of the Bayview Way. The Bayview Way, CES, creating grace and space, . . . these are all ways of describing “culture.”

## Recommendations for Further Research

This single descriptive case study provides opportunity for others to conduct similar research in similar and dissimilar environments; both of which would inform this work and the body of knowledge. Other possibilities for further research include:

- A study which addresses outcomes—how do GSD students perceive educator’s efforts? Do educator’s perceptions and intentions align with students’ perceptions and outcomes?
- A study focused on classroom observations which address problem-solving, language, and anti-heteronormativity/cisnormativity
- A parallel study at the K–8 school in the subject district
- A study cross-referencing populations: administrators, teachers, parents, and students
- A longitudinal study, following both teachers and students for a four-year cohort addressing change over time regarding teacher and student attitudes regarding GSD practices and policies
- A multi-case study to determine the presence of the four elements defined by Allen (GSA, supportive staff, inclusive curricula, and comprehensive protective policies) and assess GSD wellness
- A study which measures the effects of implementing CES as a method of creating cultural change (varied school baselines, from failing to successful via various matrices)
- A study based on the attributes detailed by St. Armand, Gerard, and Smith (2017): positive emotions, positive relations, energy, and willingness to be meaningfully involved in a group, and harmonization.

## Conclusion

*Whatever is inside us continually flows outward to help form, or deform, the world—and whatever is outside us continually flows inward to help form, or deform, our lives.*

Palmer, 2011, p. 47

This study began with an intense interest in school culture, borne out of a lifetime of experiences, both good and bad, which seemed to hinge on the cultural richness and veracity, or lack thereof, of various educational institutions experienced by the researcher. That interest, and a keen curiosity formulated into three questions. Simply:

How do educators foster a sense of belonging and safety in their GSD students?

How do they do so without adversely affecting academic and other school priorities?

How do they incorporate new and developing understandings about this population?

Given my experiences, I believed answering these questions via a well-functioning school which was successful by traditional matrices and intentional in its focus on developing, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture, as rich and dynamic as its academic focus may shed light on these concerns. The results of this research support that belief and add to the body of knowledge on these important topics. My study of Bayview High School results affirmed the following:

Bayview High School is a complex weaving of ideas, ideals, people, personalities, commitment, and a fierce hope for and foundation in the future. Bayview High appears firmly rooted in culture, strong in institutional memory, and staffed with dedicated and self-reflective professionals. The model positively impacts sense of belonging and safety of GSD students, by targeting all students; maintains high accountability in academic standards; and provides for growth in developing and understanding of the GSD student.

Students who are gender and sexual diverse are striving for a sense of belonging and safety. These basic human needs are in fact, primary drivers for all people. As Maslow's seminal work illustrates, safety and belonging are second and third only to a person's most basic physiological needs. Just as food, shelter, air, sleep, and water are prerequisites; safety and belonging are requirements which must be met before higher level thinking and ways of being (esteem, self-actualization, transcendence) and learning can occur.

Teachers and administrators have a key role to play in meeting these needs as demonstrated in the literature which highlights the centrality of the student/teacher relationship in terms of adolescent student success and more specifically in positive outcomes for GSD students who, through marginalization and discrimination, have higher likelihoods of risky and self-harming behaviors than do their non-GSD peers. Rates of all high-risk behaviors from truancy, run-away, and drinking to self-harm and suicide are higher among GSD students. Conversely, Gray (2012) found that students with a high sense of belonging feel accepted, respected, included, and supported, and have greater psychological well-being. Further, these benefits are not exclusive to GSD students, but across populations. A research meta-analysis related to belonging conducted by Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie, and Waters (2018) found that the greatest factor impacting student's sense of belonging was teacher support and that students with greater numbers of supportive educators reported higher GPAs and less missed school. Interestingly, strong student/teacher relationships have also been found to mitigate the effects of victimization (Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, and Greytak, 2013). Allen, et al identified four criteria as most supportive of GSD belonging: A Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) club, supportive staff, inclusive curricula, and comprehensive protective policies. Bayview High School meets all four of these criteria as described in the prior sections.

Research by Cavanagh & Waugh (2014); Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer (2012); Ullman (2014); among others, shows that teacher attitudes inform instruction. Their attitudes also impact students' sense of belonging (Goodenow, 1993; Osterman, 2000; Jennings, 2015; among others), and affect their instructional behaviors (Gay, 2013) even to the point of decreasing the breadth and depth of instruction (Hogan, 2013). Therefore, one of the most essential elements needed for teachers to develop their understanding and practices, is exactly that which students need: an environment and administration which is not merely "tolerant" but safe; one in which mistakes are seen as part of the learning process and trust is mutual to the point that grace—belief that the other is doing their best, is open to influence, and assuming best intentions—is the norm. To be most effective, teachers (and students) need a balanced environment where they can challenge themselves to grow out of their preconceptions, reflect on their practice, and actively pursue their own development regarding the societal changes occurring both inside and outside of the school environment, particularly as it applies to their treatment and perception of their GSD student population.

Individual change is closely linked to reflection and, in the field of education, the theory of its benefits and place in best practice is borne out in the research. Educators at Bayview High School are an excellent demonstration of the three systems of reflection and change described by Schön (1987), Dewey (1933), and Mezirow (1994). Intentionality—Pre-Reflection, Reflection In-Action, and Reflection On-Action, a slight variance on Schön, were three codes utilized in this research, most directly in response to Research Subquestion 2. The feeling of "unease," described by Dewey, is apropos most directly in the way teachers are grappling with gender, pronouns, and anti-heteronormativity/cisnormativity in general. Reflection is not about judgement as much as it is about thoughtful processing regarding not just the What and How of



teaching, but also the Why and determining meaning not only of the content but also of the practicing art of *teaching* and what it means to be a teacher (Mezirow, 1994). On this topic, Bayview educators are still storming and forming—but with open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility. These three attributes fit within the four identified themes of this study. Different participants had different degrees of experience with the GSD community and different levels of knowledge but each, in their own way is still working to make habits of these new expectations and none appeared to be on a path of resistance.

Statistically, people who are GSD are coming out earlier with each generation (Dunlap, 2016; Robertson, 2014; Williams, 2010). While their dawning awareness about and acceptance of their gender and sexuality at younger ages is a welcome alternative to the turmoil and trauma many from older generations experienced, these students present a unique challenge to the system in that the need for supports has expanded from college and other adult institutions to local high schools and middle schools across the country (Diaz, Kosciw, & Greytak, 2010; Dunlap, 2016; Greytek, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; SLPC, 2016a). Dunlap (2016) observed that due to this shift, today's thirteen-year-old may be struggling with the same issues as yesterday's twenty-year-old, but with fewer resources and a less solid sense of self. High schools are at the epicenter of these societal and generational changes.

A healthy, vibrant school culture is the heart of this conversation. In the tapestry, it is the bright sunlight permeating all corners of the landscape. Conversely, a toxic school culture, such as those illuminated by the two most recent National School Climate Surveys (GLSEN, 2013/2015), cannot sustain any initiative to foster belonging and safety. These schools showed an increase in acts of bias—by teachers against GSD students—over a two-year period. Students also reported higher instances of absenteeism, avoidance gendered situations, avoidance of

participation in school-related activities, as well as incidences of discipline and subjection to biased mandates and treatment based on sexuality and gender expression—all of which are identified as factors, which inhibit belonging and a feeling of safety.

For all these reasons, and more as shared below, simply laying even the most promising, research-based curriculum atop a toxic culture will not bring about a broader cultural shift nor foster a sense of belonging and safety in students or anyone else subjected to its toxicity. Culture is every aspect of a school from its beliefs to its written and unwritten rules to how it functions and its physical space and values as well as its history and its inhabitants and the space it inhabits in the world. The historical and cultural framework atop which all of Bayview's practices and values are laid, is based on The Coalition of Essential Schools (CES, 1984) 10 Common Principles. At minimum, the five focused most closely on in this study: Personalization, (Student-as-Worker) Teacher-as-Coach, A Tone of Decency and Trust, Commitment to the Entire School, and Democracy and Equity, ought to be considered by other high schools.

The ecosystem that is high school and specifically school culture is aptly described by both Bolman and Deal (2013) and Sergiovanni (2000). Sergiovanni's Lifeworlds reflects the cultural aspects of school whereas the Systemsworlds relates to the business aspects of running an organization. Systemsworlds align well with Bolman and Deal's (2013) Structural and Political Frames, and Lifeworlds align with the Symbolic Frame, with elements from Human Resources in both. Bolman and Deal's (2013) Symbolic Frame encompasses those elements, which foster belief, hope, and attachment to an organization; in other words, those elements of culture which foster belonging. Sergiovanni asserts that the Lifeworld needs to be the generative force of the Systemsworld or else the culture and character of a school erodes. Bayview High

School is thriving as it recognizes the value of its Lifeworld, allowing it to be the generative force of the school's culture.

By creating a strong school foundation coupled with policies and practices which are non-discriminatory and affirming and maintaining a sense of accountability and professional and personal regard for each other as well as students, educators create a school culture which allows all members, GSD and non-GSD, to experience a sense of belonging and safety. The school culture is founded on personalization, commitment to the entire school, and establishing a tone of decency and trust within a democratic and equitable environment.

Educators at the focus school balance a sense of belonging and academic goals without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives because school culture has been a focus since its inception. In conjunction with their foundation in CES, that balance is the core value of the school. It is not an added benefit nor is it something which is expendable, but integral. In addition, educators are intentional in preserving and enhancing their school culture. School culture—including belonging—is a priority.

Educators at the focus school use reflection in a variety of ways, specific to each individual. A common practice, however, was to engage with their peers. Educators were found to engage in reflective practice in their planning, while teaching, and post-instruction. Their reflections informed future decisions regarding curriculum as well as interactions with and between students. In addition, the culture of the school fosters collaboration and the small school size necessitates both interaction and interdependence. This quality of relationship between educators is built upon a trust which is borne out of the school culture.

The four themes—Crafting Culture with Intentionality, Contributing to the Whole with Integrity, Facilitating and Managing Change, and Exercising Agency and Accountability—and

the over-arching theme, Creating Grace and Space, foster a sense of belonging for all students, including those who are marginalized GSD, while maintaining academic standards, and allow for growth in developing and understanding of GSD students and their needs. The themes found central to the Bayview High School's model form the interlocking sides of a frame, the interconnected worlds as described by Sergiovanni, the grace and space for all members of the community to thrive.

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## Appendix A: Proposal Phase – Educators’ Interview Protocol

Interviewee(s) Name and Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Focus Question: How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations?

Introductory Protocol: Prior to the interview, provide a handout which includes:

1. The focus question
2. Definitions for gender and sexual diverse (GSD), heteronormative, cisnormative, belonging, safety
3. The three relevant principles from the Coalition of Essential Schools
4. The district nondiscrimination policy

(Script in italics) *To facilitate my note-taking, I would like to audiotape our conversations today.*

*For your information, only I will be privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after*

*they are transcribed. You must sign a consent form devised to meet our human subject*

*requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held*

*confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel*

*uncomfortable, and (3) I do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreeing to*

*participate.*

*I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. For classroom-based educators,*

*this is one of three interactions planned for us (focus group session, interview, and observation).*

*Non-classroom-based educators will have one interview as part of the research and may be*

*asked to participate in the focus group. During this time, I have a few questions that I would like*



*to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.*

### Introduction

*You have volunteered to speak with me today and I believe you have a great deal to share about the focus of my study and I am very grateful.*

*Let's begin with getting to know each other. My name is Lisa Ortiz. I have worked in the education field since 1989 and am a doctoral candidate at Concordia University. My areas of interest include special education, educational culture, social justice, equity, and organizational change. I am motivated to participate in this study because I believe the role culture plays in securing a sense of belonging and safety in schools is important and that teachers, administrators, and counselors are instrumental in establishing and maintain such a culture. I look forward to working with you during this interview and follow-up activities.*

### \*Possible Background for building rapport:

1. How long have you been
  - a. in the field of education?
  - b. in your present position?
  - c. at this institution?
2. In a sentence or two, tell me what motivates you to teach at Bayview High School?
3. What is your highest degree and primary field of study?
4. Briefly describe your role as it relates to student learning and well-being.
5. Tell me about the courses you teach and hope to teach in the near future
6. What motivates you to participate in this study?

*The main question for this session is: How do educators in a public high school community which*

*crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized gender and sexual diverse (GSD) student populations?*

The following is a bank of questions I chose from during the interview:

1. How is the culture here affected by being a part of the Coalition of Essential Schools?
2. How would you describe the cultural changes, if any, that have occurred here in the past 4-5 years (or if working less than 4-5 years: since you began here)?
3. How do you, as a teacher, communicate the school's vision and mission on diversity to support all its students and its school community?
4. What is your experience working with students who are GSD?
5. What are the elements of the school's culture, which foster a sense of belonging for all its students, specifically its GSD students?
6. How does an affluent high school with high academic standards, expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging of all its diverse students, in particular its GSD students, without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives?
7. How do school policies and practices that shape the school's culture into a highly inclusive school, influence your identity formation as a teacher?
8. How do you incorporate content or practices which are specifically beneficial to creating belonging and/or a sense of safety for GSD students?
9. In what ways can you, in your role, address heteronormativity – the practice of approaching topics and conversations from a heterosexual perspective as the norm – in your classrooms and the wider school?
10. In what ways can you, in your role, address cisnormativity – the practice of approaching topics and conversations from the perspective that gender assigned at birth is the norm – in

your classrooms and the wider school?

11. In your role, how do you support a newly-self-identified GSD student make sense of the change in the context of their relationships in the school and regarding school culture?
12. In what ways does the broadening of inclusion to encompass gender and sexual diversity affect your professional experiences?
13. If a student has come out to you as GSD, what does that personal disclosure and knowledge represent for you as an educator?
14. In what ways has addressing GSD students' needs affected school culture?
15. What resources are available to help you implement a GSD-inclusive curriculum?
16. What additional resources would benefit you in implementing GSD-inclusive curriculum?
17. (Principal/Counselor) In your role, given newly self-identified GSD young adults (or adolescent), how do you support teachers and the school with make sense of the change in the context of the school and school culture?

Conclusion:

*Is there any other information you would like me to have?*

*Do you have any questions?*

*What would you like to say to conclude our session?*

*Thank you for your participation in this session. I look forward to the observation and follow-up interview and discussion. As a reminder, you have the option to withdraw from this study at any time without any repercussions.*

**Appendix B: Observation Form**

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Course/Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Debrief: \_\_\_\_\_

Focus: How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations?

Lesson Introduction	Lesson Body	Lesson Conclusion	Notes
Specific Examples of Language – Belonging, Safety, and Anti-Heteronormativity/Cisnormativity			

## Appendix C: Proposal Phase – Educators’ Focus Group Protocol

Participants: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Focus Question: How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their GSD student populations?

Introductory Protocol: Focus question written on the board (Script in italics below)

*To facilitate my note-taking, I would like to audiotape our conversations today. For your information, only I will be privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. You must sign a consent form devised to meet our human subject requirements.*

*Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) I do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.*

*I have planned this focus group to last no longer than 90 minutes. This is the final of three interactions planned for us (focus group session, interview, and observation). During this time, I have a few questions that I would like to cover. I am primarily interested in facilitating a conversation between you as colleagues on this particular topic.*

### Introduction

*You have volunteered to speak with participate today in this focus group and I believe you have a great deal to share about this topic and I am very grateful for your participation.*

*As you know, my name is Lisa Ortiz and I am a doctoral candidate at Concordia University. My areas of interest include special education, educational culture, social justice, equity, and organizational change. I am motivated to participate in this study because I believe the role culture plays in schools is important and that teachers, administrators, and counselors are instrumental in affecting change.*

Rapport Building:

1. What are your thoughts on this process so far –interview, observation, this focus-group.
2. Briefly describe your role as it relates to student learning and well-being.
3. What motivates you to participate in this study?

*The main question for this session is: How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized gender and sexual diverse (GSD) student populations?*

The following is a bank of questions I chose from during the interview:

1. How would you describe the school culture here in the past 4-5 years?
2. How do the teachers communicate the school's vision and mission on diversity to support all its students and its school community?
3. What are the elements of the school's culture, which foster a sense of belonging for all its students, specifically its GSD students?
4. How does an affluent high school with high academic standards, expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging of all its diverse students, in particular its GSD students, without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives?
5. How do school policies and practices that shape the school's culture into a highly inclusive school, influence teacher identity formation?
6. How do you incorporate content or practices which are specifically beneficial to creating belonging and/or a sense of safety for GSD students?
7. In what ways can you, in your role, address heteronormativity – the practice of approaching topics and conversations from a heterosexual perspective as the norm – in your classrooms and the wider school?

8. In what ways can you, in your role, address cisnormativity – the practice of approaching topics and conversations from the perspective that gender assigned at birth is the norm – in your classrooms and the wider school?
9. If, in the process of teaching, you have experienced a situation where a student has come out as GSD, what processes are involved for you as a teacher regarding re-introducing and/or integrating that student?
10. In what ways does the broadening of inclusion to encompass gender and sexual diversity affect your professional experiences?
11. If a student has come out to you as GSD, what does that personal disclosure and knowledge represent for you as an educator?
12. In what ways has addressing GSD students' needs affected school culture?
13. In your role, how do you support a student who is newly-self-identified as GSD, make sense of the change in the context of the school and school culture?
14. What additional resources would be of benefit implementing a GSD-inclusive curriculum?
15. In your role, given newly self-identified GSD young adults (or adolescent), how do you support other teachers and the school with make sense of the change in the context of the school and school culture?

Probes:

1. Are there any comments from your colleagues that particularly intrigued you?
2. What do you think about what your colleague had to say?

Conclusion: *Do you have any questions? What would you like to say to conclude our session*

**Appendix D: Alignment of Research Question and Research Subquestions with Proposal Phase Interview/Focus Group**

**Questions**

(Related to Appendices A and C)

<b>Question Numbers</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Research Questions</b>																	
Q: How do educators ...foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations?	*	*	X	X	X	*	*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
SQ1: How does a public high school community ... expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging ... without adversely affecting ... other school initiatives?	X	*	*	X	*	X	*	X	*	*	*	*	*	X	X	X	*
SQ2: How do educators ... relate to and incorporate new and developing understanding ...?	X	X	X	X	X	*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	*	X	X	X

*Note. X indicates primary factor, \* indicates secondary factor*



## **Appendix E: Coalition of Essential Schools 10 Principles**

### **Learning to use one's mind well:**

The school should focus on helping young people learn to use their minds well. Schools should not be “comprehensive” if such a claim is made at the expense of the school’s central intellectual purpose.

### **Less is more: depth over coverage:**

The school’s goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program’s design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that the students need, rather than by “subjects” as conventionally defined. The aphorism “less is more” should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort to merely cover content.

### **Goals apply to all students:**

The school’s goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of students.

### **Personalization:**

Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than 80 students in the high school and middle school and no more than 20 in the elementary school. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students’ and teachers’ time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.

### **Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach:**

The governing practical metaphor of the school should be “student-as-worker,” rather than the more familiar metaphor of “teacher as deliverer of instructional services.” Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.

### **Demonstration of mastery:**

Teaching and learning should be documented and assessed with tools based on student performance of real tasks. Students not yet at appropriate levels of competence should be provided intensive support and resources to assist them quickly to meet standards. Multiple forms of evidence, ranging from ongoing observation of the learner to completion of specific projects, should be used to better understand the learner’s strengths and needs, and to plan for

further assistance. Students should have opportunities to exhibit their expertise before family and community. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation: an “Exhibition.” As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school’s program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of “credits earned” by “time spent” in class.

**A tone of decency and trust:**

The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation, of trust, and of decency (fairness, generosity, and tolerance). Incentives appropriate to the school’s particular students and teachers should be emphasized. Families should be key collaborators and vital members of the school community.

**Commitment to the entire school:**

The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline). Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and demonstrate a sense of commitment to the entire school.

**Resources dedicated to teaching and learning:**

Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include student loads that promote personalization, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff, and an ultimate per-pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10 percent. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided to students in many schools.

**Democracy and equity:**

The school should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies. It should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school. The school should honor diversity and build on the strength of its communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity.

## Appendix F: District Nondiscrimination Policy

The district prohibits discrimination and harassment on any basis protected by law, including but not limited to, an individual's perceived or actual race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation<sup>1</sup>, national or ethnic origin, marital status, age, mental or physical disability or perceived disability, pregnancy, familial status, economic status, veterans' status, or because of the perceived or actual race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, marital status, age, mental or physical disability or perceived disability, pregnancy, familial status, economic status, veterans' status of any other persons with whom the individual associates.

The district prohibits discrimination and harassment, including but not limited to, in employment, assignment and promotion of personnel; in educational opportunities and services offered students; in student assignment to schools and classes; in student discipline; in location and use of facilities; in educational offerings and materials; and in accommodating the public at public meetings.

The Board encourages staff to improve human relations within the schools, to respect all individuals and to establish channels through which citizens can communicate their concerns to the administration and the Board.

The superintendent shall appoint and make known the individuals to contact on issues concerning the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title VI, Title VII, Title IX and other civil rights or discrimination issues<sup>2</sup>. The district will publish complaint procedures providing for prompt and equitable resolution of complaints from students, employees and the public.

The district prohibits retaliation and discrimination against an individual who has opposed any discrimination act or practice; because that person has filed a charge; testified, assisted or participated in an investigation, proceeding or hearing; and further prohibits anyone from coercing, intimidating, threatening or interfering with an individual for exercising any rights guaranteed under state and federal law.

END OF POLICY

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<sup>1</sup>"Sexual orientation" means an individual's actual or perceived heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality or gender identity, regardless of whether the individual's gender identity, appearance, expression or behavior differs from that traditionally associated with the individual's sex at birth.

<sup>2</sup>Districts are reminded that the district is required to notify students and employees of the name, office address and telephone number of the employee or employees appointed.

## **Appendix G: District Equal Employment Opportunity Policy**

Equal employment opportunity and treatment shall be practiced by the district regardless of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation<sup>1</sup>, national origin, marital status, age, veterans' status<sup>2</sup>, genetic information and disability if the employee, with or without reasonable accommodation, is able to perform the essential functions of the position.

The superintendent will appoint an employee to serve as the officer in charge of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The superintendent will also designate a Title IX coordinator to comply with the requirements of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. The Title IX coordinator will investigate complaints communicated to the district alleging noncompliance with Title IX. The name, address and telephone number of the Title IX coordinator will be provided to all students and employees.

The superintendent will develop other specific recruiting, interviewing and evaluation procedures as are necessary to implement this policy.

END OF POLICY

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## Appendix H: District Equal Educational Opportunity Policy

Every student of the district will be given equal educational opportunities regardless of age, color, disability, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation or any other basis protected by applicable laws.

Further, no student will be excluded from participating in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity conducted by the district. The district will treat its students without discrimination on the basis of sex as this pertains to course offerings, athletics, counseling, employment assistance and extracurricular activities.

The superintendent will designate at least one employee to coordinate its efforts to comply with and carry out its responsibilities under Title IX. The Title IX coordinator will investigate complaints communicated to the district alleging noncompliance with Title IX. The name, address and telephone number will be provided to all students and employees.

The Board will adopt and the district will publish grievance procedures providing for prompt and equitable resolution of student and employee complaints under Title IX.

END OF POLICY

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## **Appendix I: District Freedom of Expression Policy**

Students have a general right to freedom of expression within the school system. The district requires, however, that students exercise their rights fairly, responsibly and in a manner not disruptive to other individuals or to the educational process.

### **Freedom of Student Inquiry and Expression**

Generally, students and student organizations are free to examine and discuss questions of interest to them and to express opinions publicly and privately within the school system, provided such examination and expression is fair and responsible and is not disruptive to other individuals or to the educational process. Students may support causes by orderly means which do not disrupt other individuals or the operation of the school.

In the classroom, students are free to examine views offered in any course of study, provided such examination is expressed in a responsible manner.

### **Freedom of Association**

Students are free to organize associations to promote their common interests. Student organizations should be open to all students. Membership criteria may not exclude students on the basis of creed, national origin, race, sex or sexual orientation. Each student organization must have a faculty advisor who shall supervise the organization. All student organizations must submit to the school a statement of purpose, criteria for membership, rules and procedures and a current list of officers. School administrators may establish reasonable rules and regulations governing the activity of student organizations.

### **Publications**

On occasion, materials such as leaflets, newsletters, cartoons and other items including displays and productions are prepared, produced and/or distributed by students as part of the educational process and free expression in an academic community. Materials may be subject to administrative review, restricted or prohibited, however, pursuant to legitimate educational concerns. Such concerns include:

1. The material is or may be defamatory;
2. The material is inappropriate based on the age, grade level and/or maturity of the audience;
3. The material is poorly written, inadequately researched, biased or prejudiced;
4. Whether there is an opportunity for a named individual or named individuals to make a response;



5. Whether specific individuals may be identified even though the material does not use or give names;
6. The material is or may be otherwise generally disruptive to the school environment. Such disruption may occur, for example, if the material uses, advocates or condones the use of profane language or advocates or condones the commission of unlawful acts; and
7. Students, parents and members of the public might reasonably perceive the materials to bear the sanction or approval of the district.

END OF POLICY

## Appendix J: Bayview High Description of Habits of Mind

We lean on the benchmarks of the Coalition of Essential Schools as we continue to improve our school culture and practices, including the Habits of Mind. Habits of Mind, Heart and Work are ways to articulate the type of thinking and emotional dispositions that help students develop their social-emotional intelligence and succeed in school and life.

As explained by expert Arthur L. Costa, **“Educational outcomes in traditional settings focus on how many answers a student knows. When we teach for the Habits of Mind, we are interested also in how students behave when they *don’t* know an answer.”**

He asks: **What behaviors indicate an efficient, effective thinker? What do human beings do when they behave intelligently?** Vast research suggests that effective thinkers and peak performers have identifiable characteristics, referred to as the Habits of Mind, which can be taught, cultivated, observed, and assessed. We want students to learn how to develop a critical stance with their work: inquiring, editing, thinking flexibly, and learning from another person’s perspective.

The Habits of Mind are performed in response to questions and problems, the answers to which are not immediately known. Each Habit of Mind is a pattern of intellectual behaviors that leads to productive actions. In essence, a composite of many skills, attitudes, cues, past experiences, and proclivities that help determine how best to react to a particular situation with which one is faced.

To learn more about developing the Habits of Mind and a Growth Mindset, consider reading “Mindset” by Carol Dweck and “Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind” by Arthur L. Costa and Benna Kallick.



**Appendix K: Question Progression—Proposed and Final Interview Questions**

Proposal Question	Final Question
1. How is the culture here affected by being a part of the Coalition of Essential Schools?	1. How does being part of the Coalition of Essential Schools and following those philosophies and principles, impact your practice, the school in general, and specifically is there particular relevance to this community the GSD Community?
2. How would you describe the cultural changes, if any, that have occurred here in the past 4-5 years (or if working less than 4-5 years: since you began here)?	2. How do staff culture, school culture, and student culture interact at this school?
3. How do you, as a teacher, communicate the school’s vision and mission of diversity to support all its students and its school community?	3. How do you, as a teacher, communicate the school’s vision and mission on diversity to support all its students and its school community?
4. What is your experience working with students who are GSD?	4. What is your experience working with students who are GSD?
5. What are the elements of the school’s culture, which foster a sense of belonging for all its students, specifically its GSD students?	5. What elements of the school’s culture – policies and procedures – foster a sense of belonging for all its students, specifically its GSD students? How do you support them in your role?
6. How does an affluent high school with high academic standards, expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging of all its diverse students, in particular its GSD students, without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives?	6. This school is conscious in its focus on culture. It’s also conscious in its focus on high academic achievement. How do you balance those two things and how does focusing intention on diversity, inclusion, and the needs of this particular population interplay with these other goals?
7. How do school policies and practices that shape the school’s culture into a highly inclusive school, influence your identity formation as a teacher?	(Incorporated into 5)
8. How do you incorporate content or practices which are specifically beneficial to creating belonging and/or a sense of safety for GSD students?	7. How do you incorporate content or practices which are specifically beneficial to creating belonging and/or a sense of safety for GSD students?
(Cont.)	

Proposal Question	Final Question
9. In what ways can you, in your role, address heteronormativity – the practice of approaching topics and conversations from a heterosexual perspective as the norm – in your classrooms and the wider school?	8. In what ways do you address inequity – heteronormativity and cisnormativity, specifically – in your classrooms and the wider school?
10. In what ways can you, in your role, address cisnormativity – the practice of approaching topics and conversations from the perspective that gender assigned at birth is the norm – in your classrooms and the wider school?	(Incorporated into 8)
11. In your role, how do you support a newly-self-identified GSD student make sense of the change in the context of their relationships in the school and regarding school culture?	(Omitted)
12. In what ways does the broadening of inclusion to encompass gender and sexual diversity affect your professional experiences?	(Incorporated into 9)
13. If a student has come out to you as GSD, what does that personal disclosure and knowledge represent for you as an educator?	9. As the culture broadens to include gender and sexual diversity, what is your experience with GSD students either coming out to you or otherwise sharing their experience? How do these changes affect you?
14. In what ways has addressing GSD students’ needs affected school culture?	10. In what ways have addressing GSD students’ needs and their presence affected school culture?
15. What resources are available to help you implement a GSD-inclusive curriculum?	11. Do you feel you have the administrative support and resources you need to be able to create a GSD-inclusive curriculum and address the needs of all your diverse students? What additional resources would be of benefit?
16. What additional resources would benefit you in implementing GSD-inclusive curric?	(Incorporated into 11)
17. (Principal/Counselor) In your role, given newly self-identified GSD young adults (or adolescent), how do you support teachers and the school with make sense of the change in the context of the school and school culture?	12. (Principal/Counselor) How would you describe your role as it relates to GSD students and families? How do you support teachers as they serve the needs of this student population?
	13. SCENARIO: Thinking about grace and space, how does that concept resonate with you in terms of the space you’re creating in your classroom and in this school?
(Cont.)	

Proposal Question	Final Question
	14. (To veteran educators: There has been some turn over in principals since you've been at this school.) What influence does the principal have on school culture?
	15. How does staff support one another? What do you see as your role within the staff?
	<p><b>FOCUS GROUP ONLY:</b></p> <p>Regarding CES, what has your experience been in terms of how long each of you has been teaching at HHS? How have your experiences differed?</p>

**Appendix L: Researcher Notes—Sample**

GSA (GSA) → *brave space*

Name - *promising*

Referrals

The following is a bank of questions I will choose from during the interview:

**ANTI**

**Policies and practices which foster Belonging - (CES: Personalization)**

1. What are the elements of the school's culture, which foster a sense of belonging for all its students, specifically its GSD students? *how, Retreat*
2. How do you incorporate content or practices which are specifically beneficial to creating belonging for GSD students? (R)
3. How would you characterize this school's philosophy and practices toward student belonging?

**Policies and practices which foster Safety - (CES: Decency and Trust)**

1. How do you incorporate content or practices which are specifically beneficial to creating a sense of safety for GSD students? (R)
2. How would you characterize this school's philosophy and practices toward student safety?
3. How does consent inform school culture?

**Policies and practices which support Anti-Heteronormativity and Anti-Cisnormativity (Anti-Discrimination) (CES: Democracy and Equity)**

1. What role does the district's Anti-Discrimination policy play in the formation and maintenance of school culture?
2. How do you deal with instances of inequity (in your classroom and) in the school at large?
3. In what ways can you, in your role, address heteronormativity – the practice of approaching topics and conversations from a heterosexual perspective as the norm – in your classrooms and the wider school? (R)
4. In what ways can you, in your role, address cisnormativity – the practice of approaching topics and conversations from the perspective that gender assigned at birth is the norm – in your classrooms and the wider school? (R)

**Reflection and Intentionality: Teaching On-Action and Teaching In-Action**

1. What role does reflective practice serve in your planning and teaching practice? (How

*Ally*  
*have intersectionality for person each person & class*

*Letter - provide goals*

*Policy*

*Reflection*

*Note. Interview form (page 1) for participant. Square on the right side with stars and happy faces indicate level of knowledge related to the topic (1-5) and researcher's disposition/comfort level (emotion and 1-3)*

**Appendix M: Final Code Progression**

<b>Provisional Codes</b>	<b>2nd Round Codes (3rd Round Omissions)</b>	<b>Categories</b>
Democracy and Equity	Democracy and Equity	<b>Grace and Space</b>
		<b>School Foundations</b>
	(Inclusion)	<b>X</b>
Belonging	Belonging	<b>Grace and Space</b>
		<b>GSD Belonging and Safety</b>
Safety	Safety	<b>Grace and Space</b>
		<b>GSD Belonging and Safety</b>
Teaching practice	Teaching practice	<b>Teacher Role</b>
	Teacher Coach	<b>School Foundations</b>
		<b>Teacher Role</b>
	Implementation of Vision	<b>Administrator Role</b>
		<b>Agency</b>
		<b>School Foundations</b>
		<b>Teacher Role</b>
Tone of Decency and Trust	Tone of Decency and Trust	<b>Administrator Role</b>
		<b>Grace and Space</b>
		<b>School Foundations</b>
		<b>Teacher Role</b>
	(Respect)	<b>X</b>
	Empathy	<b>Grace and Space</b>
		<b>(Cont.)</b>

<b>Provisional Codes</b>	<b>2nd Round Codes (3rd Round Omissions)</b>	<b>Categories</b>
Reflection	Reflection In-Action	<b>Administrator Role</b>
		<b>Processing Change</b>
		<b>Reflection</b>
		<b>Teacher Role</b>
	Reflection On-Action	<b>Administrator Role</b>
		<b>Processing Change</b>
		<b>Reflection</b>
		<b>Teacher Role</b>
	Intentionality – Pre-Reflection	<b>Administrator Role</b>
		<b>Agency</b>
		<b>Processing Change</b>
		<b>Reflection</b>
		<b>Teacher Role</b>
Anti-Cisnormativity	Anti-Cisnormativity	<b>GSD Belonging and Safety</b>
Anti-Heteronormativity	Anti-Heteronormativity	<b>GSD Belonging and Safety</b>
Problem Solving	Problem Solving	<b>Administrator Role</b>
		<b>Processing Change</b>
	Change	<b>GSD Belonging and Safety</b>
		<b>Processing Change</b>
Language	Language	<b>GSD Belonging and Safety</b>
		<b>Grace and Space</b>
		<b>Processing Change</b>
	Size	<b>School Foundations</b>
<b>(Cont.)</b>		

<b>Provisional Codes</b>	<b>2nd Round Codes (3rd Round Omissions)</b>	<b>Categories</b>
Personalization	Personalization – School for Teachers	<b>Administrator Role</b>
		<b>School Foundations</b>
		<b>Teacher Role</b>
	Personalization – Teachers for Students	<b>Administrator Role</b>
		<b>School Foundations</b>
		<b>Student Role</b>
<b>Teacher Role</b>		
Grace and Space	Grace and Space	<b>Grace and Space</b>
Intentionality	Intentional Creation of School Culture	<b>School Foundations</b>
	Institutional Memory	<b>School Foundations</b>
	Accountability	<b>Administrator Role</b>
	Teacher Agency	<b>Agency</b>
		<b>Grace and Space</b>
		<b>Teacher Role</b>
	Student Agency	<b>Agency</b>
		<b>Grace and Space</b>
		<b>GSD Belonging and Safety</b>
		<b>Student Role</b>
<b>(Cont.)</b>		

<b>Provisional Codes</b>	<b>2nd Round Codes (3rd Round Omissions)</b>	<b>Categories</b>
Connection	Collaboration - Teacher to Teacher	<b>Administrator Role</b>
		<b>Agency</b>
		<b>Grace and Space</b>
		<b>Teacher Role</b>
	Connection - Student to Student and Student to Teacher	<b>Administrator Role</b>
		<b>Agency</b>
		<b>Grace and Space</b>
		<b>GSD Belonging and Safety</b>
		<b>Student Role</b>
		<b>Teacher Role</b>
	“Pie”	<b>Agency</b>
		<b>GSD Belonging and Safety</b>
		(“We’re All the Same”)
	(Examples)	<b>X</b>
	Institutional Memory	<b>Administrator Role</b>
		<b>Processing Change</b>
		<b>School Foundations</b>
		<b>Teacher Role</b>
	Newbies vs. Veterans	<b>Administrator Role</b>
		<b>Processing Change</b>
	Administration	<b>Administrator Role</b>
	(CES Philosophy)	<b>X</b>
	“Play the Game”	<b>Agency</b>
		<b>Student Role</b>



## Appendix N: Code and Term Descriptions

Accountability	Taking ownership of one’s actions and words. Bearing responsibility. Consistency with CES principles. An effect of being a small school. Responsible to one’s colleagues/peers.
Administration	Related to policies and procedures, referencing administrative staff or tasks
Agency	Using one’s voice. Exercising independent thought. Being able to function autonomously within a system.
Anti-Cisnormativity	Fighting against the tendency to consider gender expression & identity as normal only if it matches the chromosomal or gender-designation at birth. This positions marginalized GSD identities as deviant.
Anti-Heteronormativity	Fighting against the tendency to consider heterosexuality to be normal, while positioning marginalized GSD identities as deviant
Belonging	Belief that one is an integral member of a group. Related to feeling accepted, respected, included, & supported/
Change	Organizational, societal, structural, educator development.
Collaboration	Actions and practices which foster cooperation within staff: PLC, critical friends, co-teaching, etc.
Connection	Actions & practices selected to foster connection between students/classes/grades/whole school & between students & teachers/staff
Democracy & Equity	Non-discriminatory & inclusive modeling of democratic practices. Deliberately and explicitly challenge inequity, honoring diversity
GSD Awareness	Encompassing Anti-Cisnormativity and Anti-Heteronormativity, as well as GSD specific aspects of Language, policies, and procedures particular to marginalized GSD.
Implementation of Vision	Educators implementing the school/district vision
Institutional Memory	History of the school – people with experience over time can provide context for policies, procedures, etc.
(Cont.)	

Intentional Creation of Culture	Policies, procedures & practices which are in place institutionally to foster safety & belonging in all members of the school community, ensure equity, and perpetuate a positive atmosphere.
Intentionality – Pre-Reflection	Reflection prior to instruction/creating policies. Considers prior experience. Thoughtful consideration of possibilities.
Language	Using inclusive language regarding gender & sexuality, pronouns, chosen-name. Also the language of CES.
Personalization - School for Teachers	Consideration for the individual needs, strengths, personalities, & lives of teachers. Allowing for flexibility, creativity, and agency.
Personalization- Teachers for Students	Consideration for the individual needs, strengths, personalities, & lives of students. Allowing for flexibility, creativity, and agency.
Pie	GSD needs in the context of the varied needs of others in the school.
Problem Solving	Methods of dealing with “problems” or situations as they arise. Planful or in the moment.
Reflection In-Action	Reflecting as teaching/coaching/policy-making is taking place. Involves problem solving and in-the-moment judgment and
Reflection On-Action	Reflecting after teaching/coaching/policy-making has taken place. Evaluating outcomes. Often leads to the next cycle of pre-reflection.
Safety	Outputs: language, curricular choices, & problem solving where students are free from harm—including ostracization, silencing, & marginalization & are free to express themselves & develop to their fullest potential within our educational institutions.
Teacher as Coach	Student as worker/learner. Modeling, serving as an ally, support role.
Teacher Practice	Which fosters a sense of belonging & safety
Tone of Decency & Trust	Explicit and self-conscious focus on setting environment of unanxious expectations, fairness, generosity, tolerance

**Appendix O: Data Alignment With Research Questions, and Emergent Themes**

<b>Initial Attributes and Preliminary Codes from All Sources</b>	<b>Related Research Questions</b>	<b>Emergent Themes</b>
<b>Intentionally Crafted School Culture</b>	Q: How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations?	Crafting Culture with Intentionality Contributing to the Whole with Integrity Exercising Agency and Accountability
<b>Practices which Foster Belonging</b>	Q: How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations?	Crafting Culture with Intentionality Contributing to the Whole with Integrity Exercising Agency and Accountability
<b>Practices which Foster Safety</b>	Q: How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations?	Crafting Culture with Intentionality Contributing to the Whole with Integrity Exercising Agency and Accountability
<b>Anti-Heteronormativity and Cisnormativity</b> (Marginalized GSD) Educator’s relationship/attitude	SQ2: How do educators in this high school relate to and incorporate new and developing understanding of their marginalized GSD students as these students create a space for themselves within the existing school culture?	Contributing to the Whole with Integrity Facilitating and Managing Change Exercising Agency and Accountability
(Cont.)		

<p><b>High Academic Standards versus Sense of Belonging</b> Balance of high academic standards with civic, cultural, and community standards, practices, values</p>	<p>SQ1: How does a public high school community with high academic standards, intent on carefully shaping its school culture, expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging of all its diverse students, in particular its marginalized GSD students, without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives?</p>	<p>Crafting Culture with Intentionality Facilitating and Managing Change Exercising Agency and Accountability</p>
<p><b>Educator Attitudes</b> Reflection – personal and professional regarding GSD</p>	<p>SQ2: How do educators in this high school relate to and incorporate new and developing understanding of their marginalized GSD students as they create a space for themselves within the existing school culture?</p>	<p>Contributing to the Whole with Integrity Facilitating and Managing Change Exercising Agency and Accountability</p>
<p><b>Personalization (CES)</b></p>	<p>Q: How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations? SQ1: How does a public high school community with high academic standards, intent on carefully shaping its school culture, expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging of all its diverse students, in particular its marginalized GSD students, without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives?</p>	<p>Crafting Culture with Intentionality Exercising Agency and Accountability</p>
<p>(Cont.)</p>		

<b>Decency and Trust (CES)</b>	<p>Q: How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations?</p> <p>SQ1: How does a public high school community with high academic standards, intent on carefully shaping its school culture, expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging of all its diverse students, in particular its marginalized GSD students, without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives?</p>	<p>Crafting Culture with Intentionality Contributing to the Whole with Integrity Exercising Agency and Accountability</p>
<b>Democracy and Equity (CES)</b>	<p>Q: How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations?</p> <p>SQ1: How does a public high school community with high academic standards, intent on carefully shaping its school culture, expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging of all its diverse students, in particular its marginalized GSD students, without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives?</p>	<p>Crafting Culture with Intentionality Contributing to the Whole with Integrity Exercising Agency and Accountability</p>
<b>Nondiscrimination</b>	<p>Q: How do educators in a public high school community which crafts its school culture with intentionality foster belonging and safety in their marginalized GSD student populations?</p> <p>SQ1: How does a public high school community with high academic standards, intent on carefully shaping its school culture, expand its academic focus to include sense of belonging of all its diverse students, in particular its marginalized GSD students, without adversely affecting academic performance and other school initiatives?</p>	<p>Crafting Culture with Intentionality Contributing to the Whole with Integrity Exercising Agency and Accountability</p>

## Appendix P: Consent Form

**Research Study Title:** Fostering Belonging and Safety of Gender and Sexuality Diverse High School Students: The Progressive Educators' Perspective  
**Principal Investigator:** Lisa Ortiz  
**Research Institution:** Concordia University, Portland  
**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Angela Owusu-Ansah

### **Purpose and What You Will be Doing:**

The purpose of this case study is to investigate teachers', administrators', and counselors' (educators') perceptions of your school's adoption and implementation of progressive school principles, especially with respect to gender and sexuality diverse (GSD) students. I am interested in observing how you are crafting a school culture that creates space for gender and sexuality diversity. Specifically, I am looking at the ways a sense of belonging and safety is fostered in this specific population, within the wider context of increasing a sense of belonging and safety for all students. We expect 6 adult volunteers (1 administrator, 1 counselor, the faculty advisor for the Gay Straight Alliance [GSA] and 3 other classroom-based educators). No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on April 18, 2016 and end enrollment on April 30, 2017. To be in the study, you must be employed by Riverdale School District as a classroom teacher, administrator, or school counselor. You will participate in one hour-long one-on-one interview, (classroom-based educators only) one full-class (up to 70 minute) observations, one 90-minute focus group, and follow up debrief sessions and member checking (transcriptions) with the principal investigator. Given your responses, you may be asked to provide information via additional interviews or participation in a focus group discussion. Participation should take approximately four hours of your time.

### **Risks:**

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, I will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. All information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside the investigator's office. When I or any of other investigators look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. We will only use a secret code to analyze the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after I conclude this study.

### **Benefits:**

Information you provide will help determine aspects of a purposefully designed school culture which are most beneficial to understanding how to provide relevant resources to this marginalized population. To assist in the possible improvement of other school programs, this study intends to look at the mechanisms and progress of this school because it has been intentional in its efforts to build a space within the school environment in which gender and sexuality diverse (GSD) students feel a sense of belonging and safety. As particular elements are identified and evaluated, gaps in service delivery can be addressed and achievements celebrated and refined. Regarding policy, in this era of high stakes testing, highlighting the importance of school culture and belonging at an academically successful school may provide a model for other schools. You could benefit from participating in this study by investigating, via interview and focus group discussions, areas of strength and need within your teaching practice with regard to this particular subject area; identifying colleagues with whom you can collaborate and from whom you can learn regarding this topic and/or methods.

**Confidentiality:**

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but I acknowledge that the questions I am asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, I will stop asking you questions.

**Contact Information:**

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Lisa Ortiz, at [email redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

**Your Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Name Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature Date



Investigator: Lisa Ortiz; email: [redacted]  
c/o: Professor Angela Owusu-Ansah  
Concordia University – Portland  
2811 NE Holman Street  
Portland, Oregon 97221

**Appendix Q: Ancillary Data—Scenario**

**The Scenario**

The tension between agency on all participants and accountability was a central theme when discussing gender, specifically transitioning and pronouns. During the first semi-structured interview, the Scenario emerged; it was added to the bank of questions and asked of each participant. In conjunction with analyzing the data under the four sub-themes to Creating Grace and Space, the addition of the Scenario question presented an opportunity to specifically look at educator responses and produce a sub-analysis of just that aspect of the study. Though scenarios were coded as part of the greater study, the researcher decided to also code the scenarios separately. Responses ranged from pragmatic to empathetic and all addressed the need a) for professionalism, b) to address the victim's needs, c) to educate. Table 19 reflects this additional coding.

**Scenario.** Student A has been misgendered by Student B and they have a verbal altercation. In addition to these two students, there are bystander-students, and you as the teacher wearing your professional “hat” as well as your regular-human-being hat with your individual feelings and attitudes. How do you reconcile both the situation and your roles?

**Summary.** Of the seven most frequent codes (range 4-7 in bold, see Table 19), the following were represented in each category: 29% occurred under Reflection (Teacher On-Action), 16% under Challenge (Pronouns and Confusion), and 55% occurred under Problem Solving (Coaching, Part of Learning, one-on-one, and Acknowledging Feelings). Across all categories, Confusion, Teacher On-Action, Coaching, and Providing Language were the most prevalent codes.



Table 19

*Scenario: Code Frequency for All Participants*

Code	Groundedness (Frequency)	Code	Groundedness (Frequency)
<i>Challenge</i>		<i>Problem Solving</i>	
<b>Confusion</b>	7	<b>1:1</b>	5
Moral Certainty	1	<b>Acknowledging Feelings</b>	5
Name Changes	1	Being an Ally	2
One of Many Identity Issues	1	Between Students	3
Potential Volatility	2	<b>Coaching</b>	7
<b>Pronouns</b>	5	Core Issue	1
Pronouns and Grammar	2	Behavior - No Judgement	3
Second to Teaching Content	1	Group	2
Special Cases (Special Needs)	2	How to Disagree	3
Teacher Error	1	<b>Part of Learning</b>	6
<i>Reflection</i>		Seek Support	1
Teacher In-Action	4	Student Self-Advocacy	3
<b>Teacher On-Action</b>	7		

*Note.* Total responses: 75 across 24 codes under 3 themes, Average 3.13

Under Challenge, Confusion represented 30% of the total codes in that category of 10 codes. Chris gave an example in which they were debriefing with a student after a situation of misgendering. “They actually said, ‘I don’t know’ which is really interesting. Like – you don’t know if it was intentional? Or you don’t know if you were confused? It just seemed like they were pretty confused about the whole situation.” Jace shared a similar sentiment expressed by a younger student, “They would always ask me, ‘Well, I don’t understand why it’s they/them/theirs. I don’t understand why it can’t just be he or she because it doesn’t make sense because there’s only one of that person.’”

Comments related specifically to Teacher On-Action, in Reflection, represented 64% of the total codes in that category of two codes. Chris shared how, on the day of the interview they had, for the first-time witnessed one student misgendering another. Although the student was corrected by their peer and they apologized, it was cause for considerable reflection Chris’s part:

(And I thought) “Do I need to follow up? I think I do need to follow up. How much do I need to follow up? What’s the way to navigate this?” So, I followed up with the person who had misgendered the other person and was like, “Was that intentional? Or accidental? Or what was that about?” . . . I want to follow up with the person who was misgendered as well and see if that’s something that’s happened frequently to them. I mean I’m sure it’s happened frequently to them, but frequently with the same person is what I’m curious about.

Under Problem Solving, Coaching represented 18% of the total codes in that category of 12 codes. Chris provided one of several examples demonstrating Coaching:

So how do I navigate all that intersectionality and dealing with all of that? I try—on my best days—to (be tactful). You have a responsibility certainly to the person who was misgendered, but also to the person who was doing the misgendering. (It’s about) educating—not about judging. (It’s) about saying “Your actions . . . whether they were intentional or not—were hurtful and so let’s talk about that.” But not to demonize the person. . . . It’s not about shame. . . . It’s about the behavior and not about the person.

Part of Learning was also prevalent under Problem Solving. Jesse relayed the learning opportunity for the whole class presented by the scenario,

It’s a class. You’re supposed to learn from it. So, I mean even when you might have a disagreement, . . . there’s still a reason someone came to that disagreement . . . [T]his would be a good opportunity to say, “Well let’s look at that.” “Why in that situation was that not the right thing to say?” . . . “How did that offend?” “Why . . . did that cause a problem for our classroom culture?”

Comments related to the Challenge, Pronouns, were generated primarily when participants shared specific stories about students who changed pronouns. This code had a great deal of

crossover with Confusion. Jace shared the following about one student who was adept at self-advocating:

One of the students that uses a gender-neutral pronoun. Sh . . . they one day became very upset when other students in the class didn't acknowledge they, them, and theirs and sometimes that would be a heated situation. Or maybe I would misspeak . . . And I found that in cases where they were concerned . . . if they didn't bring it up to me afterward, I felt compelled to say something afterwards because they are their own best advocate.

The final two most prevalent codes are one-on-one and Acknowledging Feelings under Problem Solving.

The importance of meeting students where they are and providing a safe environment to problem solve were well-illustrated by Jordan as they related a story which about a student with special needs who made a passing comment which was offensive and seemed confused that they should not voice their opinion.

I didn't do it in front of everyone either because I didn't want to embarrass [them] . . . I said, "It's a public school so everybody's here and sometimes even if we have a personal opinion about something, sometimes just kind of keep it under wraps. Just you know, it's the kind thing to do. You know you can have your opinions but sometimes you just have to kind of dial it back."

Coded under Acknowledging Feelings, Jace empathized with a particularly self-confident and mature student who consistently corrects their peers in instances of misgendering or dead-naming, "but that still . . . made me feel uncomfortable that they had to feel that way or that they had to jump to their own defense or try to take the responsibility . . . on of educating every single person in the room."

Jordan shares their experience and how complex the situation can be depending on the students involved:

I have had students that have said things in class because ...you've got this kid who is . . . shooting their mouths off - no idea, and no control. And the kid who sensitive . . . (single clap – indicating a clash). It's dangerous. And you cannot—and it's not expected of us—to be able to control . . . what comes out of their mouth . . . you just can't. What you can do is you can create an environment in which they're busy enough that they're not going to be distracted . . . So, I try to make sure that they are doing their work, they're focused on their work of the class so we don't get these divergent conversations where it ends up potentially dangerous or hurtful. But does it happen? Oh yes it does.

**Appendix R:**

**Warp and Weft—A Metaphor for Creating Grace and Space and the Four Themes**

WEFT –  
Crafting  
Culture with  
Intentionality

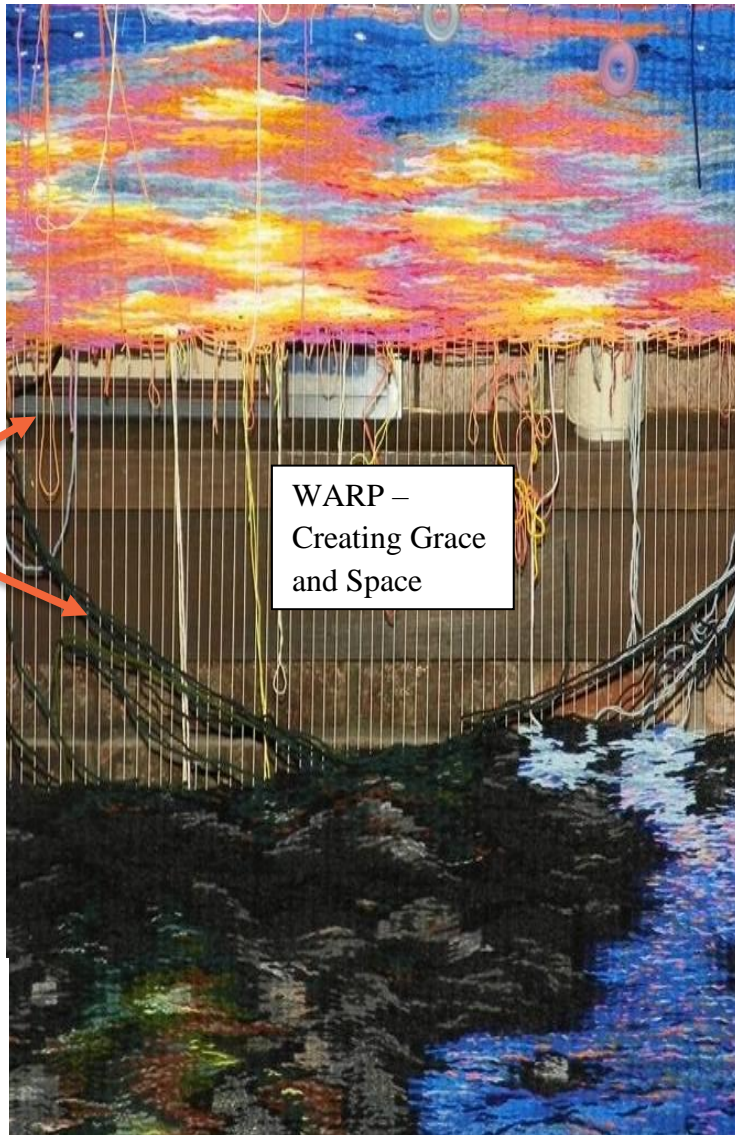
WEFT –  
Contributing to  
the Whole with  
Integrity

Codes

WARP –  
Creating Grace  
and Space

WEFT –  
Exercising  
Agency and  
Accountability

WEFT –  
Facilitating and  
Managing  
Change



## **Appendix S: Statement of Original Work**

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### ***What does “fraudulent” mean?***

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### ***What is “unauthorized” assistance?***

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

## Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

Digital Signature: *Lisa M. Ortiz*

Name: Lisa M. Ortiz

Date: March 25, 2018