

May 2023

## Afterschool Programs: Participation and Belonging in Latinx Students

John Corbolotti  
*Dominican University of California*

<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2023.EDU.03>

IRB Number: 11076

**Survey: Let us know how this paper benefits you.**

---

### Recommended Citation

Corbolotti, John, "Afterschool Programs: Participation and Belonging in Latinx Students" (2023). *Master of Science in Education | Master's Theses*. 66.  
<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2023.EDU.03>

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Liberal Arts and Education | Graduate Student Scholarship at Dominican Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Science in Education | Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Dominican Scholar. For more information, please contact [michael.pujals@dominican.edu](mailto:michael.pujals@dominican.edu).



This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the program chair, has been presented to and accepted by the Department of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education.

John Corbolotti  
Candidate

Jennifer Lucko, PhD  
Program Chair

Katherine Lewis, PhD  
First Reader

Rebecca Birch, EdD  
Second Reader

**Afterschool Programs: Participation and Belonging in Latinx Students**

By

John Corbolotti

A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

2023

Copyright John Corbolotti 2023 All Rights Reserved

## Abstract

It is important for students to feel like they belong and that the offering of afterschool programs welcomes them. Afterschool programs develop confidence, engagement, and belonging for students (Fuller et al., 2013). Unfortunately, afterschool sports and extracurricular participation is diminishing and by even greater numbers for students from minority groups (Borden et al., 2006). The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how educators and school communities might increase and promote participation in extracurricular activities, specifically for Latinx students, by hearing from underrepresented Latinx students about their experiences in afterschool programs. There is limited research regarding how mentors and peers with different backgrounds than Latinx students might affect students' participation in extracurricular activities. Findings from this project show that Latinx students have strong intrinsic motivation and confidence to participate in an afterschool program; however many of their classmates need more support to participate. Findings indicate that other Latinx students at the school are discouraged from joining afterschool programs when they see little representation of themselves within the program. Finally, students participating in an afterschool program at the end of the season did not feel like they had less belonging within the group despite having a different ethnicity as the majority group. Creating programs to promote extracurricular participation at the lower grade levels can lead to greater confidence and passion among young students who may then join programs at the middle school level.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to extend my appreciation to my professor, Katie Lewis for all of her support, guidance, and mentorship over the course of the year. You've been instrumental in guiding me through this challenging year. In addition, I'd like to thank my second reader, professor Rebecca Birch for all her help throughout this writing process. I would also like to thank my parents for their support during my academic journey. I am immensely grateful for your dedication and sacrifices you continue to make. Finally I'd like to thank the students involved in my research who so generously gave up their time and who so thoughtfully answered questions.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Statement of Purpose .....	1
Overview of Research Design .....	2
Significance of the Study .....	3
Research Implications .....	4
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	6
Extracurricular Activities Promote Positive Student Outcomes and Behavior .....	7
Role of the Mentor .....	12
Mentors Promote a Sense of Belonging .....	13
Latinx Families: Considerations for Extracurricular Participation .....	17
Chapter 3: Methods .....	23
Research Questions .....	23
Description and Rationale for Research Approach .....	24
Research Design .....	25
Methods .....	26
Data Analysis .....	27
Validity .....	29
Chapter 4: Findings .....	31
Confidence in Themselves as a Reason to Participate in Afterschool Programs .....	32
Barriers to Participation .....	35
Belonging and Motivation at School .....	37
Chapter 5: Discussion .....	44
Implications for the Literature .....	45

Implications for Policy and Practice .....	48
Limitations of the Study.....	50
Directions for Future Research .....	51
Conclusion .....	51
References.....	53
Appendix A- Student Semi Structured Interview Questions .....	59
Appendix B - IRB Approval .....	61



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The danger of middle school students spending more time alone is a growing concern. Studies show that students who are left to their own devices are more likely to become involved in risky behavior (Kahn, 2019). Afterschool programs can be an invaluable resource for children and teenagers. They provide a safe place for young people to explore, learn, and grow and can have lasting impacts on their lives. Low income students often face uphill battles in participation in afterschool programs compared to their higher income peers. Children from low-income families are three times less likely to participate in afterschool programs (Anderson, 2019). Some lower income students may feel isolated and overwhelmed, making it difficult to take advantage of the opportunities that afterschool programs can provide. This poses a critical challenge for educators who must find ways to make afterschool programs approachable and engaging for these students in order to ensure they have the same opportunities for development. Schools and organizations have to build strong support networks and relationships for young people and their families in order to grow a culture of afterschool program participation amongst a diverse group of students.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore how Latinx students navigate afterschool participation at their school, where they are the majority group during school hours but become the minority group during afterschool hours. Existing research has focused on the barriers faced by underrepresented groups in afterschool participation, primarily related to concrete factors such as financial support, but there has been limited discussion about the social dynamics at play. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of mentors with similar backgrounds to students in improving motivation and sense of belonging. This study aimed to understand how

underrepresented students perceive themselves within afterschool programs and whether having different backgrounds from their peers and mentors affects participation and overall sense of belonging. The demographics of the school site provide a unique perspective on how participation manifests at school. While previous research has primarily focused on quantitative participation statistics and qualitative justifications for the importance of afterschool programs, this study seeks to capture students' narratives and their perspectives on Latinx participation at the school and how they perceive their fit within the larger school structures. By gaining insights into students' thoughts on afterschool participation and the factors influencing their decisions to join, we can better support students who are interested in being part of an afterschool program.

### **Overview of Research Design**

This research was conducted at a middle school in Northern California which serves a student body of 1,100 students that is predominantly Latinx (75%). Of the five students that were invited to participate, four participated in individual interviews. Of the 1,100 students 749 qualify for free or reduced lunch. 401 students are considered English Language Learners; 814 are Latino while 251 students are white. I serve as the Athletic Director and Physical Education teacher at the school site and am heavily involved with our afterschool activities at the site. The four students selected were Latinx students who were participating or had participated in an afterschool activity. I taught two of the students and helped coach one more. All four students attended the same middle school. Many of our mentors and fellow peers of Latinx students do not share a similar background or ethnicity from those involved in an afterschool activity. With some of the students, I am involved with them through not only teaching but setting up sports and observing practices periodically throughout the year. I clearly have a personal investment in this research since I am directly connected to our afterschool programs and our teachers that help

run it, and to students that participate. Students' responses may be impacted due to my involvement at the school and my investment that I have in our afterschool programs. I chose a qualitative, phenomenological interview study in order to better understand the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of students involved in an afterschool program, their attitudes towards mentors, and feelings of belonging.

This qualitative project sought to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the reasons students participate in afterschool activities? Do race, ethnicity, and backgrounds of students' peers and mentors affect the decision to participate in afterschool activities? (2) How do afterschool programs foster a sense of belonging for students that participate in them? (3) How do mentors and peers with different backgrounds than participating students create a sense of belonging for students in afterschool programs?

### **Significance of the Study**

Several rich themes emerged from interviews with student participants. One notable theme was the perceived influence of peers' demographics on participation in afterschool programs. Interviewees mentioned that the race and backgrounds of mentors and peers played a role in their decision to join an activity, but once they were involved in afterschool programs, the race and backgrounds of their peers did not affect their sense of belonging. Interviewees also emphasized the high level of self-confidence and individual autonomy they had in choosing to join an afterschool program, without feeling pressured by family or friends.

Another important factor was the lack of exposure to afterschool activities during their elementary school years (K-5), which affected some interviewees' perceptions of their own competencies and influenced their decision to participate. Many felt that not being "good

enough” might affect their sense of belonging, and some believed that their peers would hesitate to join an activity if they were new to it and unsure of their competencies.

However, students also highlighted the positive impact of afterschool programs in facilitating the formation of new friendships and creating a sense of community. The race and backgrounds of peers did not affect the Latinx students' sense of belonging, as they found common ground in their shared interests. The background of mentors also did not impact their sense of belonging; instead, students appreciated mentors who held them to high standards. Being involved in an afterschool activity not only strengthened connections with classmates but also fostered pride and excitement in representing their school.

### **Research Implications**

The implications of these findings for classroom teaching are evident in the appreciation students have for mentors and coaches who possess high standards and effective leadership qualities. Through interviews, students expressed the importance of confidence when joining afterschool programs. Reflective practice among teachers of such programs is recommended as this practice could benefit them in effectively utilizing leadership skills and fostering a sense of belonging among all students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds, as observed in this study.

Also, these findings could inform changes in educational policy related to funding afterschool programs for elementary students. The study highlighted that lack of experience (i.e., not participating in afterschool programs during elementary school), could be a reason for hesitation among middle school students to join such programs. In fact, none of the middle school students in the study had participated in any afterschool programs or extracurricular activities, including summer camps and enrichment programs at the K-5 level. This reality

underscores how many middle school students may not be prepared or have the necessary tools, skills, and/or confidence for success in afterschool activities at the middle school level.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

It is important for students to feel like they belong and that the offering of afterschool programs welcomes them. Afterschool programs develop confidence, engagement, and belonging for students (Fuller et al., 2013). Unfortunately, afterschool sports and extracurricular participation is diminishing and by even greater numbers for students from minority groups (Borden et al., 2006). Interest and enjoyment of activities with classmates is important for many students as these activities provide opportunities for increased social development and can lead to positive attitudes about themselves and their competencies (Riciputi, 2016). In many underserved communities, including schools serving primarily students of color, students may not be provided with adequate support to engage in these afterschool activities that promote student growth (Fuller, Percy, Bruening & Cotrufo, 2013). The data suggests that white students participate the most in extracurricular activities while Latinx students participate the least (Borden et al., 2006).

This literature review is categorized into multiple sections that surround the topic of who participates in extracurricular activities and the overall importance of activities in general. This first section of the review will provide an overview of the important benefits associated with participating in afterschool activities. The positive youth development framework will guide the first section of the review. The second portion of the review discusses the importance of mentors and how the environments they create can have positive or negative effects. Finally, the third section of the literature review will examine Latinx participation within afterschool programs with a highlight on some of the barriers and possible discrimination in participation.

## **Extracurricular Activities Promote Positive Student Outcomes and Behavior**

There are several existing frameworks that address the importance of extracurricular activities and the benefits for students. The extracurricular activities or afterschool activities in the middle school setting that I am referring to are sports, clubs, and the performing arts. There are a few key frameworks that arose in my research that highlight why afterschool activities are valuable for student success. The positive youth development (PYD) is a framework that helps promote “health, happiness, and competence of adolescents in a way to becoming productive and satisfied adults” (Linver, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009, p. 354). Often this is done through skill acquisition which is also helpful and can be translated into other domains like home and school (Weiss, 2008). Ultimately PYD promotes empowerment and has beneficial impacts towards cognitive, social, and psychosocial development (Ersing, 2009). Another theoretical framework is Astin’s theory of development which states that the more time a student engages in extracurricular activities, the more learning, personal, and social development takes place (Astin, 1998). When students are involved in afterschool activities, they are, in general, spending more time than their peers being productive.

Plenty of research explores the connections between afterschool activities, particularly physical activity, and whether this leads to positive academic results for students. The World Health Organization defines physical activity as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure. In one extensive research study, researchers set up a neural map network and studied academic achievement in adolescents (Pellicer-Chenoll et al., 2015). Over this four-year study, researchers found a connection between physical exertion and academic performance. For students who initially had low performance profiles and who engaged in little physical activity, when increasing their physical output, researchers observed

more positive behaviors as well as increased academic success analyzed through grade point average (Pellicer-Chenoll et al., 2015). Finally, this study revealed that the students with the highest levels of energy expenditure per neural maps had better academic performance compared to those with less energy expenditure (Pellicer-Chenoll et al., 2015). Another systematic review of the literature found moderate to strong connections between afterschool physical activity and improved academic performance (Donnelly, Hillman, Castelli, Etnier, Lee, Tomporowski, Lambourne, & Szabo-Reed, 2016).

Contemporary educational organizations believe that increased physical activity can promote mental acuity and resilience strategies that will help students face challenges they will engage in throughout their lives. Over the course of the study conducted by Donnelly and colleagues (2016), the research team found that there were some mixed findings and associations. Physical activity, in general, had positive effects on cognition but physical education in particular had more of a neutral effect (Donnelly et al., 2016). This meta research has some interesting implications that may even stress further the importance of afterschool physical activity since the research shows that afterschool movement has greater impact for students. There are many factors to consider as to why this may be the case which will be touched on later in this review.

Although academic performance is an important aspect and possible benefit associated with afterschool activities, there are other benefits to afterschool activities in other domains where important social and emotional developments can take place. There are positive social and psychological outcomes that can be attributed to extracurricular activities. In one study, researchers investigated the effectiveness of afterschool programs in an urban environment,



focusing on Black and Latinx students (Fuller, Percy, Bruening, & Cotrufo, 2013). After a series of interviews with students and teachers, researchers tracked some key findings. Within the program, they found that many of the boys had increased confidence about themselves and had a stronger formation of their self concept. Some students even experienced better hope about themselves and their future. Through deductively coded interview data, researchers found that the program also helped students stay out of trouble and provided experiences that led to positive personal development (Fuller, Percy, Bruening, & Cotrufo, 2013).

Not only does youth development take place through sports but one study analyzed a Debate League in the Chicago Public Schools (Anderson & Mezuk, 2015). Positive youth development examines how developmental factors like social and emotional competence, bonding, and resilience can impact students beyond a purely academic stance (Catalano et al., 2004). Speech and debate is an academic activity where students research, study, and practice arguing over a certain topic. Those students in the Chicago Public Schools that participated in the debate club reported greater social and school engagement than non - debaters (Anderson & Mezuk, 2015). Debate participation was related to greater community involvement in adulthood and researchers found that there were long - lasting social benefits to communities, independent of the positive impact on student academic performance. Finally, the findings from this research were consistent with some prior research on afterschool programs showing that the academic connections are mixed and strong academic connections can not be made (Anderson & Mezuk, 2015).

Another study from Denault and Poulin (2009), stresses the importance of participating in organized afterschool activities during adolescence. The aim of this particular study was to draw connections between participation in organized activities and show how these participation

practices were related to youth outcomes in later adolescence (Denault & Poulin, 2009). The study suggested that a high level of early-to-mid adolescence participation is particularly important when it comes to later outcomes (Denault & Poulin, 2009). For those working with young people, this could suggest putting extra effort into promoting activity participation during the transition to middle school. Participation in organized activities might play a role in adolescent development; high levels of participation in early-to-mid-adolescence—a period characterized by multiple changes in youth's lives—may be especially significant for youth's successful development in late adolescence (Denault & Poulin, 2009). This research is consistent with the fact that it is imperative to have options for students to participate in afterschool programs and make sure these programs are targeting students that need it the most.

Finally, one study analyzed over 63 sources on afterschool programs and considered whether the framework for PYD in afterschool programs is beneficial for students (Holt et al., 2017). One method of measuring the PYD is through the 5 Cs. Whereby the Cs refer to character (respect for societal and cultural norms), caring (a sense of empathy and sympathy), competence (social, academic, cognitive, and vocational skills), confidence (self-efficacy and global self-regard), and connection (positive exchanges between peers, family, school, and community (Holt et al., 2017). It is noted that the 5 Cs of PYD was developed first through sports but can now be extended to leadership activities, performing arts, and vocational sports. The most frequently reported positive outcome among the meta analysis study was positive self perceptions; one participant said, "I'm more confident because I realized I could accomplish things" (Holt, et al., 2017, p. 61). This idea of a positive self perception is consistently associated with afterschool activities and the PYD program. Even though academic success was weakly related, students saw improvement within communication skills and an improvement in creating

connections and friendships with others. Overall, the strongest or most impactful PYD programs placed an emphasis on life skills, like the importance and value of simply learning a skill and seeing yourself improve (Holt, et al., 2017). The emphasis on life skills is related to and responsive to the kind of climate the mentor sets up, which will be addressed in section two of this literature review.

Finally, afterschool programs can help develop growth mindsets that can improve student outcomes for students. A growth mindset, proposed by Stanford professor Carol Dweck (2008) in her book *Mindset*, describes people who believe that their success depends on time and effort. In afterschool programs, students can see their relationship with the time spent learning a new skill and the relationship with said improvement in the skill. Generally, afterschool programs provide an opportunity for students to develop their skills in a controlled environment.

According to Chen, Sun, Zhu, and Chen (2014), students are more likely to be motivated to learn based on their expectations about whether they will be successful. Afterschool activities can provide students with environments where they can succeed at learning new skills. When programs nurture competence for their students, those feelings can be externalized to other settings, like the classroom (Chen et al., 2014). Afterschool programs that provide controlled experiences that help students have a positive view about themselves are beneficial for their development (Chen et al., 2014).

After reviewing some qualitative analysis on youth development programs, one researcher suggests there is not a strong relationship between academic success and afterschool activity participation (Whitley, 2019). Some qualitative research had an over-reliance on deductive/confirmatory analyses, and an over-reliance on participant perspectives, without triangulation with other agents in the intervention (Whitley, 2019).

Considering alternative views, Riciputi's (2016) research on afterschool sports programs suggested that some youth development programs can foster the wrong behaviors like lower moral reasoning and the endorsement of aggressive behaviors. These behaviors can be promoted when mentors stress winning and losing instead of task and caring climates. It is vital to have mentors that set a culture that is positive for students.

### **Role of the Mentor**

Afterschool programs do not exist within a vacuum, and youth development programs do not offer value without a mentor and leaders running the afterschool activities. Mentors and leaders are those that organize and facilitate an extracurricular activity and set up a culture where students can thrive. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory views child development as a complex set of relationships from the child and their environment in addition to the large environment as a whole (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). An effective mentor factors into this theory of child development where the mentor can have either positive or negative effects on a student's experience.

The mentor plays an integral role in developing engagement and participation within afterschool programs (Fuller et al., 2013). Mentors that develop safe and positive climates are able to have the most impact on students' growth. The mentor refers to the leader, those that run a specific afterschool activity, where they have direct impact on which students participate in the program and how students respond to the program.

According to a meta study researching leaders' roles in developing climate, researchers found that mentors play a key role in the effectiveness of an afterschool program (Whitley, Massey, Camiré, Boutet, & Borbee, 2019). Why is an effective afterschool program important? Several studies explain that there is a decline of extracurricular participation and overall more

sedentary lifestyles; as a result, programs that include physical activities also have a stronger emphasis on principles of inclusion and participation (Hallal, Andersen, Bull, Guthold, Haskell, & Ekelund, 2012; Petitpas, Cornelius, Raalte, & Jones, 2005;). It is leaders who create these climates focused on inclusion and participation. In fact, climate and leader relationships are key indicators as to whether students participate in a program the following year (Whitley, Massey, Camiré, Boutet, & Borbee, 2019). In addition, overall leader support is related to stronger indicators of ongoing engagement from participants and higher identification of self worth (Whitley et al., 2019). In another study, researchers studying an urban afterschool program analyzed leaders who were caring and supportive; they found that these physical activity programs showed improved climate and fostered a sense of belonging for students (Breuning, Dover, & Clark, 2009).

### **Mentors Promote a Sense of Belonging**

Through mentor support and leadership, belonging and connectedness can be promoted through extracurricular activities. Middle school students tend to demonstrate a greater attraction to and affiliation with peers, a strong need to belong, and the need to feel connected to school (Allen, Slaten, Arslan, et al., 2021). Substantial research has indicated that the student–teacher relationship provides a powerful avenue for schools concerned with increasing perceptions of school belonging among their students (Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie, & Waters, 2018). According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2019), one in three students around the world do not feel a sense of belonging to their school and these numbers are continuing to rise. There are various ways to define school belonging and I will use the definition presented by Goodenow and Grady (1993) which states that belonging is “the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school

social environment” (p. 62). Zimmer-Gembeck et al. (2006) suggest that school belonging is connected to the way students feel about their mentors and peers. When students feel that they have good relationships with their teachers and peers, they gain a sense of belonging, which results in greater engagement (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2006).

Belonging is a critical goal of sports afterschool activities because it fosters continued participation (Martin, Byrd, Garn, McCaughtry, Kulik & Centeio, 2016). Based on the qualitative studies reviewed for this project, successful leaders are those that “create task-oriented motivation climates focusing on personal mastery, promote cooperation, and who facilitate the inclusion of every participant, regardless of skill level” (Martin et al., 2016, p. 4). However, leaders who develop an ego-oriented motivational climate rewarding superior abilities, and create discipline for certain failures, ultimately marginalize their students and hurt confidence (Newton et al., 2007). Overall, in some afterschool programs, students who experienced strong task and caring climates and minimal ego climates expressed a stronger feeling of belonging within the program (Martin et al., 2016).

In another study, Cox and Williams (2008) researched the role of teacher support on student motivation. Teachers impact student behavior and can create meaningful connections with their students by demonstrating emotional support or involvement which consists of “caring, friendliness, understanding, dedication, and dependability” (Cox & Williams, 2008, p. 224 ). In addition, research from Gagne, Ryan, and Bargmann (2003) showed that adolescent gymnasts who experienced more support from their coach not only felt more socially related but also more competent and self determined in their motivation. These two studies purport that the individual relationships between mentor and mentee may be a bigger indicator of belonging and relatedness than feelings of competence or autonomy (Gagne et al., 2013). Not only does the

relationship between mentor and mentee play a significant role in positive student development but student to student relationships play an important role. In afterschool programs where students have positive relationships with their peers, there is a greater motivation to participate within the program (Chen et al., 2020).

Many studies have analyzed the role of mentors in creating positive relationships. Breunig, Dover, and Clark (2009) evaluated the value of female youth development in an urban afterschool program. One of the unique aspects to this study, as compared to other studies, was that mentors/coaches and mentees/females were linked in that they shared similar experiences or backgrounds. Many of the coaches had similar experiences and upbringings with youth counterparts, which led to stronger relationships. The study emphasized the importance of belonging and how mentors helped foster that sense of connection since students looked up to them as role models (Bruening et al., 2009). When one parent was asked why their daughter continued to come back to the afterschool program, she said her daughter really liked spending time with the leaders (Bruening, Dover, & Clark, 2009). This study concluded that leaders have an impact when it comes to engagement in afterschool programs along with continued student participation in the following years.

In another study looking at urban boys in afterschool programs, students had similar connections to mentors with similar backgrounds; researchers stated that these connections are important and recommended culturally relevant teaching methods in these programs (Anderson & Mezuk, 2013). In one of a few studies of its kind, Fashola (2003) found that the presence, or lack thereof, of available African American male role models as program staff influenced afterschool program participation. Some youth development programs are not culturally relevant and according to some research, sports can be a popular choice in attracting males to

participation (Fuller, et al., 2013). According to the research, there is a further need to consider race/ethnicity and gender as a mediating factor for developmental outcomes (Fuller et al., 2013). This consideration is directly linked to students seeing themselves represented by their mentors or leaders. For example, some youth may hold an expectation that mentors who are more similar to them are more likely to relate to them. It is also important to consider that mentors who are better suited to serve the needs of the youth may be more open to forming connections than those with different backgrounds (Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby & Muller, 2011). In a study based on high school students and their teachers, students who were matched with mentors of their own gender or race said it was important to them; this was especially true for women of color (Blake-Beard et al., 2011). Students who had a mentor of their own gender or race reported receiving more help; however, matching mentors and mentees by race or gender did not affect outcomes (Blake-Beard et al., 2011). Riciputi (2019) investigated staff leaders and youth in a PYD program and found that strong staff relationships with the youth promoted engagement and those staff leaders with similar backgrounds can further enhance student engagement levels.

While mentors with similar backgrounds play an important role in feelings of belonging and increased participation, relationship duration also plays a key role in fostering belonging and can lead to increased student participation and sense of belonging. According to Bruening, Dover, and Clark (2009), students and their mentors developed stronger connections with each additional contact and those with longer relationships generally saw increased improvement in engagement. Another study suggested developing mentor relationships over an extended period of time, because previous research has found relationships of a year or more in duration produce greater positive outcomes (Rhodes, et al., 2002).



Considering alternative views, one study suggests that the role of mentor and mentee relationships built on similar backgrounds is overblown and does not have links to positive outcomes for students. Bearman et al. (2007) suggest perhaps what determines the outcomes of any mentoring relationship is not the “match between the protege and the mentor, either in terms of demographic characteristics or in terms of attitudes, but rather the match between what the protege needs and what the mentor can provide” (p. 638). Sometimes, a protege may wish “to obtain certain types of instrumental or psychosocial help, and when a mentor can provide the help, great outcomes follow; no matter what the gender, race, or attitudes of the mentor and no matter how well or poorly they match the gender, race, and attitudes of the protege” (Bearman et al., 2007, p. 638).

### **Latinx Families: Considerations for Extracurricular Participation**

A recent report from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that children tend to have higher levels of school engagement when involved in one or more activities, like sports, lessons, or clubs. Unfortunately, there is an activity gap when it comes to participation in afterschool activities. Lower socioeconomic youth are less likely to participate than their higher socioeconomic peers (Wimer et al., 2006). For example participation by youth 12-17 years old was 72% in the highest income quintile while only 43% for the lowest quintile (Wimer et al., 2006). Dearing and fellow authors (2009) found that greater family income was associated with higher participation, and that neighborhood income level partially mediates this relationship between income and participation rates. Evidence from Putnam (2015) suggests that the gaps are either at worst increasing or remaining the same. In addition, from 2003-2011, the participation of higher-income youth steadily increased while low income youth stayed the same (Moore et al., 2014). Although disadvantaged youth are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities

they often experience greater benefits, depending on the risk status and activity type (Heath, 2022). Families' monetary resources were related to the participation in that organized activities require spending from families. Participants in one study felt the cost of an activity could prohibit participation (Ream & Rumberger, 2008).

Income is a factor affecting participation in afterschool programs. Discrimination and prejudice in a society (institutional discrimination), which can create segregated neighborhoods and influence youth's feeling of inclusion, may also affect participation in such programs (Simpkins, et al., 2013). Adolescents' perception of and experiences with discrimination, broadly and within an organized activity, may impede their participation in such activities. Latinx families and/or immigrant families are groups that may experience institutional and systemic discrimination within and outside schools.

Few studies specifically examine immigrant extracurricular participation, and those that do primarily focus on Latino immigrants (Heath, 2022). Immigrant youth may be more likely to participate when they are enrolled in racially diverse schools (Okamoto, Herda, & Hartzog, 2013). Yet, in general, immigrant youth are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities when compared to non immigrant youth (Okamoto, Herda, & Hartzog, 2013). Scholars have noted that non-white youth who reside in white, middle class neighborhoods may have more resources in their surroundings. Yet actual and perceived discrimination could limit non-white adolescents' access and utilization of the resources within those middle class neighborhoods, such as organized activities. In one study regarding Latinx participation in organized activities, it was important for researchers to test how adolescents perceive being marginalized in organized activities and whether that affects future participation (Simpkins, Delgado, Price, Quach, & Starbuck, 2013). Results revealed that white students had a significantly greater level of

involvement whereas Latinx students had significantly less involvement. These results are discussed in terms of creating accessible and attractive extracurricular activity opportunities for diverse students (Heath, 2022). Considering race and ethnicity, findings from this study suggest that Latinx youth participate at the lowest rates compared to white and Black youth. 65% of white youth participate in organized activity, then 58% for Black youth and 43% for Latinx youth (Heath, 2022). When studying participation in afterschool programs, it is worth noting participation levels among diverse groups of students and asking questions about whether specific groups, including Latinx and immigrant families, feel welcomed to participate and feel a sense of belonging within such programs.

There are many mechanisms at play as to why diverse families participate in afterschool programs. Families with a lower socioeconomic status may participate in fewer extracurricular activities as they may not have enough money to spend on these activities. In some cases, adolescents may need to take on adult responsibilities at home (Burton, 2007). In addition, families may simply reside in neighborhoods where resources are limited or they are not aware of the programs that they have access to (Burton, 2007). Most support for families with lower socioeconomic status focuses on income but does not necessarily take into account the nature of parents' occupations. Families with lower socioeconomic status may experience jobs with longer hours, nontraditional shifts, and demands that can limit time and energy devoted to their children's obligation, for example (Yoshikawa, 2011). Multiple studies suggest that schools increase opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities by improving recreational facilities, transportation to sporting events, and general awareness of local sports programs (Hopkins, Kanny, & Watson, 2022).

Parental support is also a driving factor for children to take advantage of existing opportunities to participate in such programs (Atkins, 2013). Parental support regarding extracurricular participation may also be related to a family's cultural values. For example, one study showed how family practices were related to participants' preferences for particular activities (Simkins et al., 2013).

Adolescents from immigrant families represent the fastest rising ethnic groups in California (Grieco et al., 2012). Some immigrant families cite a lack of familiarity with the American school system which might contribute to the extracurricular participation disparity (Kirk et al. 2011). In one study concerning participation among Latinx students, researchers found that generational status was not a consistent predictor of extracurricular participation. Whether you were a first, second, or third generation immigrant did not increase or decrease your chances of participating in extracurricular activities (Camacho & Fulgini, 2014). It is helpful to consider why some immigrant families may not participate in or feel a sense of belonging in afterschool programs.

Overall, Latinx youth ranked personal development and confidence as their reasons for participation in extracurricular and youth development programs (Peguero, 2010). Participating in extracurricular activities was an opportunity for personal gain where they could reach their goals, grow their self esteem, and develop their confidence (Borden et al., 2006). In looking at trends within the Latinx community as to who participates in extracurricular activities, a few trends emerged from Peguero's (2010) analysis of Latinx tenth grade students. First generation Latinx immigrants were least likely to participate in all of the school-based extracurricular activities (Peguero, 2010).

This review of relevant literature lays out the importance of youth participation in afterschool activities. These outcomes may not always have strong correlation with academic success but there are various other positive outcomes (Donnelly et al., 2016). These outcomes include increased confidence, belonging, and more developed peer relationships. These positive outcomes are not developed simply through participating in an extracurricular activity but by supportive mentors who create environments that allow for students to develop (Bruening, Dover, & Clark, 2009). Although, it is debated as to whether it is the participation in extracurricular activities that promotes positive outcomes or if it is simply a byproduct of more motivated students joining extracurricular activities (Whitely et al., 2019). The overall trends in afterschool activities participation reveals that students with lower socioeconomic status, on average, participate less than those with higher socioeconomic status (Heath, 2022). Additionally, Latinx students participate less than white students due to various prohibitive factors and possible cultural and family beliefs (Peguero, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to examine how educators and school communities might increase and promote participation in extracurricular activities, specifically for Latinx students. In addition, this study asks, “how might mentors ensure their students feel an increased sense of belonging (which fosters further participation)?”

While there are numerous studies on the importance of mentors and mentees having similar backgrounds and experiences in order to foster participation and belonging, there is limited research regarding mentors and mentees with different backgrounds and how this may affect participation and engagement in extracurricular activities. There is little research examining the contrast of having a diverse school population yet less diversity among mentors and peers involved in extracurricular activities. This study explores the social

dynamics within extracurricular activities at one school site serving a diverse population of students and considers how these dynamics impact students' sense of belonging in these afterschool programs.

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

There have been multiple studies on how afterschool youth development programs develop the 5 Cs within students: caring, connection, competence, confidence, and character (Holt et al., 2017). There is also extensive literature on whether participating in afterschool activities positively affects academic success and performance (Pellicer-Chenoll et al., 2015). Finally, there is research connecting the importance of having mentors and mentees with similar backgrounds to improve participation and belonging in afterschool programs (Allen et al., 2021). However, there is little research concerning mentors and mentees with different backgrounds and how that might influence participation and belonging. Some studies used surveys to understand families' decisions and beliefs about afterschool programs but this research project is concerned with student voices surrounding participation and belonging within afterschool programs. In particular, the project is concerned with Latinx students' voices and how they fit in with the overall school and extracurricular (or afterschool program) landscape. In this qualitative study, these student voices were viewed as the direct authority and primary source on the subject of belonging and participation with extracurricular programs.

#### **Research Questions**

This study focused on student responses to a series of questions presented in individual interviews as well as focus group sessions. To this end, interview questions were formed based on the following central questions:

1. Do race, ethnicity, and backgrounds of students' peers, and mentors affect the decision to participate in afterschool activities?
2. Do afterschool programs foster a greater sense of belonging for students that participate in them?

3. How do mentors and peers with different backgrounds than participating students create a sense of belonging for all students in afterschool programs?

### **Description and Rationale for Research Approach**

In researching participation, engagement, and belonging in afterschool activities for a Latinx population, I am using a constructivist approach to guide my research. I am curious to learn how our students make meaning out of their experiences and how their beliefs about themselves and their past experiences affect their participation in afterschool activities. Creswell states that, in the constructivist worldview, individuals make meaning out of their experiences and develop feelings towards things and objects (Creswell, 2014). I sought to dive into how my students view co-curricular activities and whether they feel like they belong within them and if they feel welcome to participate. Students will have unique insights into the situation where they can draw from the past to explain their participation in extracurricular activities. There are many driving forces that are at play in examining how students develop a sense of belonging through afterschool activities, and according to Crotty (1998), the basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. Through open-ended questions, I explored how students form communities and how they fit in with their afterschool program.

Every student responds differently to their environments and has their own thoughts on their level of belonging during afterschool activities. Through phenomenological interviewing, students constructed their own meaning of their experiences within these activities. This research was conducted qualitatively and given my connection to the school site, I am intertwined with the community at the focus of this study. I used a constructivist worldview where I believe that “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Cresswell &



Creswell, 2018, p. 46). The constructivist worldview relates to my research because I focused on the context of my students and their interactions. In my time as a student at the school site, thirteen years ago, and now as a teacher employed by the school, I have continued to see some of the same trends in afterschool participation. Participation is mostly dominated by our white students and there is a lack of diversity when compared to our overall school population. In many cases we hear about overarching trends about this gap but in some cases we do not hear from the students as to why they decided to participate and why so many of their classmates are not involved. I recognize my own experience growing up being pushed by my parents and thinking about my participation as the norm. However, for others this participation may have taken a great risk and it may not be the comfortable thing to do.

## **Research Design**

### ***Research Site and Entry into the Field***

This research was conducted at a middle school in Northern California which will be referred to as Magnolia Middle School. This site was purposefully selected because I have been a physical education teacher and athletic director at the school for the last two years. Thus, I had pre-existing relationships with some of the students involved in the research. Of the five students that were invited to participate, four decided to participate in the individual interviews. This school serves over 1,100 students where 749 students qualify for free or reduced lunch. While 401 students are considered English Language Learners; 814 are Latino while 251 students are white.

### ***Participants and Sampling Procedure***

Students at Magnolia Middle School were selected for the study. This school is particularly informative for my case study because the student body is made up of predominantly

white and Latinx students. In addition, I serve as a teacher and athletic director at the school where I oversee activities. The school sees disparities in who participates in certain extracurriculars and participation trends in general. Many of our coaches do not share a similar background or ethnicity to their students which may affect participation. Students that were interviewed are Latino/a/x and range in age from 12-15. The informed consent process included a statement about how participation in this study does not affect a student's grade.

As Athletic Director and teacher/coach at the school site, I have relationships with the students. Therefore, most recruiting occurred either face-to-face or via email. At the beginning of the school site's winter sports and club season, I reached out in person to students, shared the purpose and details of the study, and determined if there were any volunteers who wanted to participate in my research project. I shared an introduction letter, reviewed the informed consent letters and process, and distributed interview questions to those interested in participating in the study. I reached out to interested volunteers to obtain informed consent and scheduled 45-60 minute individual interviews with four students. I then followed up with the four students at the end of the season.

## **Methods**

Prior to the focused interview questions, the four student participants' parents provided verbal consent then written proxy consent. The students provided written assent. They saw a brief description of the study and purpose. Prior to the focused interview questions, I distributed pre-interview questions to have students begin to think about their participation in extracurricular activities (see Appendix A). I split up the qualitative interviews with students into two different dates, one at the middle of the extracurricular season and a final interview at the end of the season. Interviews were audio recorded by using an iPhone. After audio was recorded, I

transcribed the interview verbatim using a Google document. The purpose of an interview during the middle of the season was to focus on questions regarding my first two research questions: *What experiences have led students to participate in afterschool activities? And Do the ethnicities and backgrounds of students' peers and mentors affect participation in these activities?* The interview questions achieved this goal by having students reconstruct their life experiences as to what led them to this decision to participate in afterschool activities.

The final interview was based on the research question, *Do extracurricular or afterschool activities foster greater belonging for students that participate in them? How do mentors and peers with different backgrounds factor into that sense of belonging?* The final interview questions were centered around whether students felt a greater sense of belonging upon the conclusion of the afterschool activities and whether their mentors and peers contributed to this sense of belonging. Belonging is an abstract concept so I provided students with examples and definitions of what belonging means so that they can grasp it at a middle school level.

### **Data Analysis**

I collected data through qualitative open-ended interviews with students. I recorded each interview on a smartphone. After each interview, I immediately wrote an analytic memo sharing my thoughts and key insights. Analytic memos can be used to help develop and further ideas (Maxwell, 2013). When recording analytic memos with students, I also noted body language, emotions, and overall attitudes about the afterschool programs. Within these interviews, there were similarities between what feelings and viewpoints the students had towards the afterschool programs offered.

I categorized codes into broad categories of positive and negative viewpoints. In addition, student interviews, I immediately coded the interviews into categories of outreach to

students and effective teaching strategies to increase engagement. In an effort to not misrepresent the interviews solely through coding, I implemented connecting strategies by using narrative summaries and concept maps. Narrative summaries “seek to preserve the context and the story of the relationship” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 114). Concepts maps were used in order to better synthesize my understanding of what participants said and helped me pull out key ideas. It was important to identify main ideas from participants. Through analytic memos after interviews and analyzing important quotes, I developed narrative summaries to help understand participants’ stories.

Overall, I used three strategies for data analysis: analytic memos, categorizing strategies, and connecting strategies. When conducting memos from and student interviews, I categorized answers to look at different responses. In addition, I used narrative summaries to hold the context of their stories within afterschool sports.

Before I began interviewing, I created a list of words and phrases that I expected to hear during my interview to help with the coding. These potential code words included: motivation, friendships, confidence, fitting in, failing, capable, and positivity. These expected codes work as a mini hypothesis as to what people may feel when engaging in afterschool activity. Although some answers may vary and may not use the same exact words as listed, I made sure to ask follow up questions in order to be able to frame participants’ answers within a specific category if it is not initially connected. During interviews, I made sure to write down important words or phrases that stuck out to me in order to categorize them later. After my interviews were recorded, I went through the transcript and open coded by finding common overarching categories. This first part of coding is collapsing the data into broad themes (Creswell, 2018).

Later, I reviewed coding in an effort to implement focused coding where I reviewed the initial categories and from there found sub themes related to the topic.

### **Validity**

I am the Athletic Director and P.E. teacher at the school where I interviewed students. I teach a portion of the students that I interviewed. With some of the students, I am involved with them through not only teaching but setting up sports and observing practices periodically throughout the year. I clearly have a personal investment in this research since I am directly connected to our afterschool programs and our teachers that help run it, and to students that participate. Students' responses may be impacted due to my involvement at the school.

Reactivity is important to consider given my involvement with the school. It is also important to consider my bias as I want to have our afterschool programs have fulfilling and deep impacts for our students (Maxwell, 2013) In order to have research that is clear and valid, I applied a few strategies.

After conducting interviews, I made sure to member check these interviews to make sure I interpreted interviewees' experiences and perspectives accurately. Member checking helps validity by confirming certain themes and answers with interviewees in order to ensure they feel like their responses are accurate (Cresswell, 2018). Some of my relationships with my interviewees are years long so I am able to foster relationships where they feel comfortable and can be honest with me. In addition, I am always around the students and will frequently observe them in their setting in order to develop more credibility. My experience with the afterschool programs and my consistent interaction with my participants will help develop better relationships and more context to my results.

My aim was to have rich data with two interviews with students lasting at least 30 minutes in order to find patterns and themes within the responses. I transcribed the data verbatim in order to preserve the authenticity of the interviewees.

## Chapter 4: Findings

This qualitative project sought to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the reasons students participate in afterschool activities? Do race, ethnicity, and backgrounds of students' peers and mentors affect the decision to participate in afterschool activities? (2) How do afterschool programs foster a sense of belonging for students that participate in them? (3) How do mentors and peers with different backgrounds than participating students create a sense of belonging for students in afterschool programs? After analyzing data, three themes emerged. Students who entered into afterschool programs projected autonomy over their choices and had a passion and curiosity to join. When talking about their decision and experience to join an afterschool program, many student participants cited certain barriers in prior years that made it difficult for them to join an afterschool program. After joining a program, students felt a stronger connection to their school and classmates. Although the students participating in this study were underrepresented in these programs, the differences of their mentors and peers did not affect their sense of belonging; however, they discussed how this difference could potentially affect their peers' motivation to join. Through these themes, the students involved provided a snapshot of their decision making process involved in joining an afterschool program and shared their experience in these programs as an underrepresented student.

Participants from this study were all from Magnolia Middle School, which serves a predominantly Latinx population (73% of the student body). These four participants were selected because they were Latinx students participating in afterschool programs that had predominantly white participation. Chris plays the trombone for the marching band and is the only student from his elementary school that participates in middle school band. Alex, a transfer student, is the only Latinx student on the basketball team. Joselin participates in a variety of

afterschool activities and was just finishing her first season in cross country. Finally, Anthony had his first experience in organized sports playing flag football for the 8th grade team.

My research on afterschool programs revealed four key themes. First, students' confidence in themselves was found to be a significant motivator for participation. Second, barriers to participation were identified as challenges that students may face in accessing these programs. Third, belonging and motivation at school were closely linked to afterschool program participation. Lastly, the backgrounds of students and mentors/coaches did not significantly affect students' sense of belonging and participation in these programs.

### **Confidence in Themselves as a Reason to Participate in Afterschool Programs**

Students selected for interviews were Latinx students that were underrepresented in afterschool programs. They participated in various extracurricular activities and I was curious to learn why they participated and what might separate them from classmates who are not in afterschool programs and whether having a different background from their peers may discourage them from participating.

I was expecting to hear different reasons from students as to why they decided to participate and although the students that I interviewed provided some different reasons, there were many similarities. One commonality was that all students cited confidence within themselves as a reason to participate in afterschool programs. They projected individual autonomy for 7th /8th graders and courage to try something new. In many of our conversations, the student participants discussed having particular reasons to join an afterschool program, whether that was because they were curious to try a new opportunity or they thought they might pursue a passion. In Alex's case, he was new to the school and when he enrolled, the basketball team started the following week. He explained,



I've always had the confidence to try new things. When I was younger I had gotten into hip hop dancing and I liked to dance in front of people. I had always liked playing basketball with my friends so I said why not join the basketball team.

In our interview, he continued to tell me that he is not shy and does not like to say "no" to things.

He admitted that he might be overly confident amongst peers and he is always trying to join a group and do something new. Chris shared a similar sentiment, that he is always confident and willing to try new things even if classmates are shy- "I chose an instrument even though most of my friends wouldn't do something like that. I don't think people would expect me to do that."

Chris is the only student from his elementary school that makes up 1/5th of the school that plays in the marching band. He brought up how cool it would be to perform with others and in front of others and actually learn and be able to show off that he can "actually play a song now." He shared his belief that you need to be confident to join a new group even if you are not sure you will fit in.

When asked where their confidence comes from, students said they had it at a young age and that they were always taking on different challenges. Alex, who was initially intimidated by participating in flag football, played the following year in 8th grade. He said that although he had no experience aside from playing in P.E. class, his skill and confidence in himself was all it took for him to join the team. He realized that he was pretty good in class and when his P.E. teacher suggested he join the team, he decided to play. He said there are a lot of kids that do not have the confidence to play and despite being athletic, had trouble deciding to join. Confidence was the driving factor for these students when it came to "making the jump" into participating in an afterschool program.

Joselin revealed that there was an element of peer pressure to not join an afterschool program; for example, if their friends are not joining, students may feel they should not join the program. She said that

if you decide to join a group that not a lot of others are in, some people can make fun of you for wanting to do something like cross country because people might not think it's cool. People will always talk but that doesn't matter because if there's something that you want to do there is no reason that you shouldn't go do it because then you would not have that experience.

Chris shared something similar when he stated that his friends

can sometimes give me a hard time but we do that a lot with each other. They will mess around with me and call me a band kid. You've gotta be ok with that and be confident enough to keep pushing through and not care what others will say.

I asked participants whether or not their parents were a source of their confidence and whether or not they pushed them to participate in these programs. Joselin said that her parents were happy that she was participating, but were not aware of the activities she was deciding to join until she needed a ride to be picked up. They were happy she was participating but it was no big deal either way. For Alex, who plays on the basketball team, his parents suggested he join something at school since he was a new student and that it would be a good way for him to meet new friends; however, they did not tell him what specifically to join so he decided to give basketball a shot.

In some of these afterschool programs, the participants are predominantly white while the school student body is predominantly Latinx (75 percent of the student population). One interview question focused on the lack of representation of Latinx students and how this might affect feelings of confidence and/or a decision to join the program. Many participants stated they were aware of the lack of diversity but it was not on the top of their mind as a deterrent to joining a program. Anthony stated that it is "always hard to join a new group no matter who the group of people are." And Joselin said that "all it takes is really one good friend to push you into joining."

All four participants mentioned that joining a new program was a good opportunity to meet new people and make new friends. Participants explained that different ethnicities of people leading the programs were not a deterrent for them but could be a possible deterrent for their classmates. All four participants were dismissive of the fact that the lack of diversity would hurt their confidence, but suggested that some students and classmates would think of these programs as a “white thing” and not for them. Joselin and Anthony said that many students are not confident to join and when they do not see some of their peer group in the program, they will only be more discouraged from joining. Many students are concerned about “looking cool,” Joselin noted. Joselin continued to repeat that it is important to not think about what others are doing or what others will say.

It was clear that all student participants had self confidence. Most participants were new to the activities and meeting new students for the first time; this helped them feel encouraged to join. Despite some of their obstacles, these students were willing to join because they had confidence in themselves to try something new and different without prior experience or parents pushing them to join.

### **Barriers to Participation**

A clear theme from participant interviews was a lack of opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities throughout their development in school. All participants shared a commonality in that the first time they participated in an organized program was in middle school. Participants commented how this lack of opportunities earlier in school minimizes a person’s confidence level. Alex said that “many kids on the team have been playing together for a long time. They are pretty advanced and that was intimidating for me. This was my very first time playing and it was in 8th grade.” Alex also shared that he was familiar with basketball, as he

ran the scoreboard and made money for that experience. He spoke about the first time playing in an organized 8th grade team as, aside from this year, playing was never really an option for him. He was unable to articulate why this was the case, except for stating that “it just never happened.”

Anthony also reacted to questions about opportunities to play and the possible barriers of being in an afterschool program. He reluctantly spoke about money “being tight” and that he was not able to play on organized teams even though he really likes sport. His body language seemed to show that he was embarrassed (e.g., slumped over, hiding face). He spoke about wanting to participate in sports activities but just never having the chance. He then flipped the conversation to a more positive outlook saying how much fun he had playing on the 8th-grade team and how he could not wait for high school football.

Joselin said that she likes playing games but does not participate in any kind of summer camps and she would have to play and run on her own. She said, “It can be kind of intimidating when some kids have been doing the same activity for a long time.”

Many participants spoke of the intimidation they may feel when other students have been in an activity for a much longer period of time than them. Outside of Chris, who has been playing trombone for some time, this was the first time participants were engaged in the afterschool activity. Participants even stated middle school was the first time they had the chance to participate in an afterschool program. Participating for the first time was intimidating for these students and when asked if it was more intimidating than being an underrepresented student, they all said “yes.” Many students' insecurities seemed fueled by how competent they felt, not who their mentors and peers were; they just wanted to be good at what they were doing. What made

it challenging to decide to participate was the feeling that you might not perform as well as your peers.

### **Belonging and Motivation at School**

When talking to students to see if afterschool programs made them feel a greater sense of belonging, I first offered a definition of belonging from Goodenow and Grady (1993)-the feeling that you are more respected, accepted, and included within your school environment. All participants shared that they felt more belonging when participating in an afterschool program. All participants experienced enjoyment when representing the school during events. As Alex put it,

sometimes it can be a little boring going to school every day but when you have a basketball game you get excited. It's really cool to go to another school's gym and wear your team's colors. The next day at school is a lot of fun because you get to talk to your friends about the game and my spirit can be higher.

Anthony, who did not participate in the afterschool program in 7th grade but joined one in 8th grade, compared both years,

I don't feel like 7th grade was a bad year because I liked going to school but being in flag football gave a little extra energy for the school day. This was my first year on a team and it was great to get closer to a group of friends and get to represent our school.

Whether it was the marching band or an afterschool sports program, all student participants liked the fact that they were representing their school during events.

Although participants were not bringing it up explicitly, they were talking about moments in which they felt "seen." In a performance or competition, students have an opportunity to go to different school sites and settings; this was important for them. They are participating with their friends, wearing school colors, and are taking part in a shared experience.

Participants also shared their feelings of acceptance and increased connection to classmates when they were participating in afterschool programs. They talked about having the

chance to meet a new group of friends. For all participants involved in this study, the people they were joining a group with were different from the people in their normal social circles. When asking if this change was a negative or positive experience, all participants said that it was a good thing that they were meeting a different group of people and that they made friends they would not normally have made in the first place. Chris said that

it is kind of weird that if it weren't for the band I wouldn't get to know people outside of my normal friend group and now I see people in a different setting. I definitely feel accepted by a larger group of people.

Joselin said that when her classmates are "pushing each other to run every day we become closer friends and that helps me be more accepted." Alex also added that "for the most part everyone is really supportive on the team and it can be a good thing when people are cheering for you and wanting you to do well when I'm on the court."

A few students suggested that there is a strong feeling of inclusivity within each activity because all of the students chose to join the activity so they have a shared interest. However, sometimes the shared interest does not create inclusivity; Arturo pointed out that

Sometimes there can be kids who are overly intense and can ruin the fun of playing. Man we are just out here trying to have fun and sometimes people can be too competitive and too hard on people which won't make it fun."

Participants said that everyone in the program is connected by having an interest and this allows for friendships to blossom. One common theme from all participants was that they were making a new group of friends that they would not normally meet if they just went to school. Two student participants spoke about social dynamics that can develop at school. Cliques can be formed at school based on previous elementary schools people went to which can be tough to break when at middle school. Yet, as one participant explained, "when you are in afterschool activities those cliques can be more easily broken because you are already making a new group by joining the group."

When asking whether or not they felt like being in an afterschool program may have improved their motivation in school, participants shared some interesting responses suggesting there are benefits. Chris, who enjoys the trombone, said that playing in the marching band has helped him with school. He explained that the instructor “holds me to a high standard and can be strict so I have to come prepared. It’s just making me a more focused student and making sure that I’m on it.” Chris also pointed out that “when I’m home I really like practicing the trombone and that already puts me in a school work mindset. If I’m practicing the trombone I might as well start my school work next to stay on track.”

Joselin takes some of the strategies and discipline that she learns from running and connects them to school-

Running can be really hard and you have to keep pushing yourself to get better. That is the only way you can improve. Even when you want to quit you kind of have to keep going. Running shows me that even when I’m doing school work I have to keep pushing and not get discouraged when things are hard. I just have to keep making an effort and it will get better just like improving my running time.

Other participants shared that their afterschool program would keep them accountable for doing their homework. The school policy is that no student can have an F and must maintain over a 2.0 grade average in order to continue participating in these programs. Alex, who admitted that he was not always the best student, said that he really did not want to “mess up” and put not playing into jeopardy, so he made sure to get all of his homework in and not take any chances. He learned-“it wasn’t too hard for me to get my work done and can keep this up. Basketball kind of showed me that.”

### **Different Backgrounds for Students and Mentors/Coaches Did Not Affect Belonging and Participation**

Latinx students were acutely aware that Latinx students were underrepresented in afterschool programs and that their mentors and coaches did not share a similar background.

However, many of the participants said this lack of a shared background was “not a big deal” for them; the participants also did not feel that mentors and peers with similar backgrounds would improve their belonging and connection. Many studies suggest that students are more motivated and feel a greater sense of belonging when they have mentors that look like them and share a similar background to them. Of note is that participants chose to participate in these afterschool programs regardless of the different backgrounds of their peers and mentors. Interestingly, these participants suggested that the different backgrounds of coaches, mentors, and peers may have hindered some of their classmates from taking the risk to join a new group and participate. As Joselin said, “some people need a close friend to push them in the direction to join.”

A few student participants mentioned that joining the group brought a feeling of “oh this isn’t what I’m used to,” meaning they were navigating in a different group of people than they were more accustomed to during school hours. A few participants said they felt “a little weird” for the first few practice sessions but then the experience started to feel normal. When asked if it felt like they had to make an adjustment to the new group, one participant stated that “no it’s just kind of in the back of your head and then it’s not at all.” Another participant said “yeah I can see that my ethnicity and background isn’t the same as my peers but I have no issue making new friends and I’m just extremely social.”

All participants stated that the lack of diversity can “turn off” other students from joining. Joselin pointed out that students do not really have much confidence now and they need to feel really comfortable to join and not having the support from people and not knowing people can hurt their chances of joining. Chris spoke about his nickname from some of his friends as the “band kid,” further explaining that they “are kind of saying you aren’t supposed to be doing that



because of who you are so other kids may not be confident to join because they don't want to be seen as different.”

What many of the participants were saying is that their classmates who are Latinx do not feel like those activities are for them when they see the lack of diversity and representation. The participants I interviewed were confident, took a risk, and had different reasons for joining. Yet when asking about why their classmates might not join, they thought the demographics of who participated may persuade them that they should not join because they will be judged as an “outsider.”

When asked how their mentors created belonging and connection, all participants said that the background of their mentors did not affect their ability to create a sense of belonging. Joselin said that it would be “unfair to judge the mentor and leader before seeing what kind of person they are and how they coach.” Alex said that was something he never really thought about- if the mentor had a similar background. He thought that it could be exciting and make me want to learn more if someone is “in my shoes.” Chris and Anthony stated that they never really considered whether similar backgrounds were important to them and that they “wanted a good coach.”

Most participants said they want a mentor that “knows what they are doing.” When describing how their coaches and mentors created belonging within the group, three participants spoke about mentors finding a balance. The balance was between “being hard on them and having high standards” while also showing them that they cared. The common idea of being hard and having high expectations was something all the participants wanted from mentors. While the participants wanted mentors that would set high expectations they also noted that they could not

be hard on them “all the time.” Anthony spoke about how his coach “just got it” and “that balance between being fun and hard is difficult to explain; they just know how to do it.”

## **Conclusion**

Existing literature expresses the importance of various kinds of afterschool programs and how they can bring about added benefits to students' experience in school. However much of the research is done at a macro level, but this research sought to learn from individuals in an unique school environment. Although participants' ethnicity was represented by the majority of the student body, they were underrepresented in their selected afterschool programs. This study aimed to ask students about their experiences in these programs, especially considering how underrepresentation may affect their overall experience in afterschool programs.

The first research question asked, *What are the reasons students participate in afterschool activities? Do race, ethnicity, and backgrounds of students' peers, and mentors affect the decision to participate in afterschool activities?* The study showed that students attributed their reasons to join a program as confidence in themselves to try something new. They acknowledged that some of their classmates may have had more experience but that they were confident in themselves to try something new. Although they were aware of having different backgrounds than their classmates, the student participants reported that this difference did not affect their decision to participate; however, participants acknowledged social dynamics at school that can play a factor (e.g., being viewed as an “outsider”).

The second research question asked, *How do afterschool programs foster a greater sense of belonging for students that participate in them?* All participants enjoyed feeling a stronger connection to the school community when they could represent the school when off-site. In addition, participants reported they felt a stronger connection to the campus community because

they had the chance to meet new people they would not normally meet in their “normal” social circles.

The third research question asked, *How do mentors and peers with different backgrounds than participating students create a sense of belonging for all students in afterschool programs?*

Participants said that having mentors and peers of different backgrounds did not reduce their sense of belonging. They wanted mentors who brought expertise and high standards but were also willing to have fun. However, participants said their peers at school may be discouraged from joining if their backgrounds are underrepresented and that they need the confidence to give it a chance; everyone who joins, for example, has a common interest in the activity.

The findings of this study show that student participants are aware of the lack of diversity among their peers, mentors, and coaches but report that this is not a pressing issue when considering whether to participate in an afterschool program. The students involved in this study reported their autonomy and self confidence as factors for overcoming pressure and barriers to joining a program. Participants attributed feeling part of the group to their confidence in themselves to join. When taking part in the afterschool program, participants felt included and had a good experience. They were able to make new friends and had mentors that exhibited good leadership qualities. All participants said they were looking for mentors who had high standards and an expertise in what they were teaching or coaching. Of note is that student participants continued to make comments that they thought their Latinx peers could be discouraged from participating if they were underrepresented and also did not have experience with the activity. The participants in this study explained that not having experience could make someone feel less confident and it takes confidence to join a new group.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

My research aimed to understand the attitudes and feelings of Latinx students about their participation in afterschool programs. My study examined the social dynamics, connections to mentors and peers, and the overall importance of these programs for the development of youth. Through conducting interviews with students about their experiences in afterschool programs, I was able to identify the students' feelings and attitudes about being an underrepresented participant in the program. My study also explored how mentors build relationships with students and ways to improve participation among the Latinx student population.

One prevailing theme that emerged from my research was that students felt a stronger motivation and a better connection to school when engaging in afterschool programs. The study found that students felt a greater sense of belonging, especially with their peers, which improved their self-confidence and helped to develop a stronger connection to the school. Additionally, the literature review consistently demonstrated that students who participated in afterschool programs felt better equipped to take on the challenges of school. This was consistent with my research where students that participate in afterschool programs develop a growth mindset and a willingness to take on challenges with all of their practice. Overall, the students' attitudes towards themselves and their relationships with classmates improved significantly in the research.

Another significant similarity between the literature review and my research project is the importance of mentors building strong connections with students. A supportive mentor plays a crucial role in helping students develop greater self-confidence, forge connections with peers, and feel a sense of belonging within the school community. Research has shown that leader support is linked to stronger ongoing engagement from participants and a greater sense of self-

worth (Whitley et al., 2019). Effective mentorship involves consistent practices over an extended period, competence in coaching, and a genuine concern for students' well-being. Ultimately, such support is essential for students to succeed academically and thrive in their personal and professional lives.

During the interviews, students cited various barriers that inhibited their participation in afterschool programs, which aligns with existing research on the topic. Some of the barriers mentioned included a lack of encouragement from parents to participate, and financial constraints that prevented families from paying for organized activities (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). Several students expressed reluctance to participate in afterschool or extracurricular activities due to financial limitations. Additionally, students highlighted the importance of parental support for extracurricular participation, which may be influenced by cultural values. In particular, many students reported a lack of guidance from their parents on what activities they should or should not participate in, which differed from their white peers, who tended to receive more explicit instructions from their parents. Overall, these findings suggest that a lack of resources and guidance can create barriers to afterschool program participation, particularly among underrepresented communities.

### **Implications for the Literature**

The literature suggests that afterschool programs are important for the positive development of adolescents, and that mentors can play a critical role in enhancing the benefits of these programs. However, the literature also highlights some of the systemic barriers that Latinx students face when participating in afterschool programs. Despite this, limited research exists on how the backgrounds of mentors and participants in afterschool programs impact Latinx students' sense of belonging. For instance, it is unclear whether Latinx students are discouraged

from joining or if their connection to the group diminishes when they are in the minority. This study aimed to address this gap in the literature by directly hearing from Latinx students who participated in afterschool programs, rather than relying solely on overarching statistics. By doing so, this research aimed to shed light on the experiences of Latinx students in afterschool programs and identify potential areas for improvement in creating more inclusive and welcoming environments for all students.

Despite their underrepresented status within their afterschool program group, many students did not believe that their ethnicity or the ethnicity of their peers and mentors had any significant impact on their sense of belonging. They expressed confidence and a willingness to join a new group, and many formed close friendships and connections with others. However, some students did acknowledge feeling a sense of "weirdness" early on, although they did not view this as a major obstacle to fitting in. Over time, they were able to overcome any initial feelings of not fitting in through their willingness to join a new group and their confidence in doing so. As they shared a common interest in the afterschool program, they found it easy to fit in with their peers after just a few weeks. While these findings may have been influenced by the fact that the students were only in eighth grade, they nevertheless provide insight into how students perceive and overcome potential barriers to belonging in afterschool programs.

Several students reported that many of their Latinx classmates were discouraged from joining afterschool programs, often asking where the other Latinx students were and expressing a desire to participate if there were more representation. Many of these students were harboring a feeling that if they did not see themselves within the program they felt that whatever activity they had interest in ultimately was not for them. However, since only students who had joined afterschool programs were interviewed, they may have had a greater degree of confidence in

overcoming any initial feelings of not fitting in. They consistently spoke about their willingness to join despite being in the minority, and once they did join, the ethnicity of their peers became less important to them.

When asked about their feelings regarding the ethnicity of their mentors and its impact on their sense of belonging, all students expressed that they did not care about the ethnic backgrounds of their mentors once within an activity. They stated that having a mentor of the same ethnicity would not lead to greater connection and belonging within the afterschool programs. In fact, some students even deemed it unfair to evaluate mentors based on their ethnicities. What mattered most to them was having mentors who cared about their learning and were proficient in their teaching or leadership roles. Two students wished to evaluate their mentors based on how well they taught and the connections they were able to establish with them.

The common themes that emerged regarding the characteristics students desired in their mentors were the ability to have fun and connect with students while maintaining high expectations and standards for them. They spoke of the need for a delicate balance between enjoyment and skill development in afterschool activities. Furthermore, students expressed a hunger to improve their competencies when participating in afterschool programs.

The students who participated in afterschool activities identified their lack of competencies in the program as the main obstacle to feeling like they belonged. They reported feeling least connected to the program when they lacked confidence in their skills. This feeling of inadequacy led them to feel like they did not fit in, whether they were playing an instrument or participating in a game of flag football. This, in turn, negatively impacted their sense of connection and belonging.

Overall, interviewees said that having different backgrounds and ethnicities of their peers likely influenced the participation of many of their Latinx friends but once taking part in an afterschool program the backgrounds and ethnicities were seemingly not as important. This runs contrary towards some of the literature that states having mentors as the same background is important for students.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

These findings point to implications for classroom teaching in that students appreciated mentors and coaches with high standards and good leadership qualities. In interviews with students, they continued to express how important it was that they had high levels of confidence in order to join afterschool programs. Teachers in the classroom spend many hours with their students and can be highly influential in helping kids increase their confidence. By noting specific interests of students they can provide students the requisite confidence in order for them to join an afterschool program. Students interviewed did not have family members pushing them to join so teachers can help fill that void and can influence more participation especially for students underrepresented in these activities.

Teachers of afterschool programs could benefit from reflective practice about how they use effective leadership skills and create a sense of belonging for all students in these spaces, especially underrepresented students like those involved in this study. This reflective practice can include how mentors are holding their students to a high standard and what kind of expectations they set for their group of students. Finally, teachers can evaluate how they can keep the balance of holding a high standard for their students while finding the time to build relationships and connect with students. This feeds into the idea that mentors need to build



healthy connections so students feel comfortable in these spaces (Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie, & Waters, 2018).

These findings could inform educational policy changes related to funding afterschool programs for both elementary and middle school students. Participants in this study stated that one reason students may hesitate to join afterschool programs in middle school is that they have little experience; in other words, they did not participate in afterschool programs in elementary school. All middle school students involved did not participate in any afterschool programs or extracurricular activities including summer camps and various other enrichment programs. The reality is without being immersed into these afterschool programs several students at the middle school level have been deprived of those opportunities for development. By the time the opportunities present themselves at middle school, many students are not comfortable with joining because they have not built up the competence and skill for whatever the activity may be.

There is a void of extracurricular activities at the k-5 level that would set students up for success at the middle school level. There are limited and likely no organized sports teams at the k-5 level that are school affiliated, meaning many of the programs are "pay to play," which ultimately furthers the gaps of those that have the means to pay for extracurricular activities and those who do not. If more schools could provide afterschool programs, it would help de-emphasize the "play to play" model. In addition it would be worthwhile to look into grants for summer school activities and partner with summer camp programs to reach out to underserved communities and provide families without the full means to participate with scholarships or partial scholarships. The reality is many students come into middle school and feel that they are not ready or equipped to participate because they are not good enough since they have not been exposed to extracurricular activities either in the summer or in school years past.

There needs to be a concerted effort to provide students with extracurricular opportunities at younger ages because so many kids can be left behind at a young age. The growing landscape of parents spending hundreds to thousands of dollars on extracurricular activities only lengthens the gap between students of different socioeconomic backgrounds so there needs to be a concerted effort for low cost extra curricular activities.

Finally these findings provide insights that could increase educational equity for students who are underrepresented in afterschool programs. In order to address underrepresentation, educators must first understand why students join and name some of the benefits of joining. The findings from this project showed that students felt confident, included, and made new friends in their afterschool programs. Perhaps students who are underrepresented in these programs would have increased interest in joining if they heard more about the positive benefits.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations of this study. First, all of the students were from the same school site, so relationships to afterschool programs may be different at other school sites. The issue of lack of diversity may not be indicative at other school sites. A second limitation is the possible response bias from participants. My relationship with students as the athletic director as well as teacher may have influenced responses from students. When asking about the possible benefit of being enrolled in afterschool programs it may have been hard for students not to tout the benefits. In addition, when discussing whether mentors with different backgrounds as students affected belonging, me being white may have also impacted their responses. Finally, interviewing four students may not encapsulate the true feelings Latinx students have towards afterschool programs. Although this small group of participants provided common insights, this

might not be the overall feelings and sentiments Latinx students have towards afterschool programs at their school site.

### **Directions for Future Research**

A survey of Latinx students would be useful for understanding some of the concrete challenges students and families face in participating in afterschool programs. This would help alleviate some of the pain points in afterschool participation and learn what specifically schools can do to help their underserved students. What kind of pathways can k-5 schools setup in order to promote more engagement and more representation in middle school extracurriculars? Are there pipelines at the moment where k-5 schools work with middle schools that promote a culture of afterschool participation? Finally, students often spoke about competence and skill as either supports or deterrents for afterschool participation. It is recommended that future studies focus on how much of an impact the competence and skill has on participation.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the disparities in afterschool program participation among Latinx students compared to their white peers. By listening to the voices of Latinx students and understanding their experiences, I learned that their low participation rates are not solely due to disinterest, but rather a lack of confidence in their own abilities and seeing peers like them represented. This suggests a need for targeted interventions that focus on building self-esteem and providing support to increase Latinx student participation in afterschool programs. My findings also highlight the crucial role of mentors in fostering student engagement and enjoyment in these activities. To address the participation gap, it is recommended that afterschool programs start at a younger age to provide students with the opportunities to develop competence and confidence in their abilities, which may lead to higher participation rates at the

middle school level. Overall, this study underscores the importance of afterschool programs in developing belonging and highlights the issues surrounding student participation and engagement.

## References

- Astin, A. W. (1999). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 518–529.
- Allen, K., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2016). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 30(1), 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9389-8>
- Anderson, S. & Mezuk, B. (2015). Positive youth development and participation in an urban debate league: Results from Chicago public schools, 1997-2007. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 84(3), 362. <https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.84.3.0362>
- Allen, K. A., Slaten, C. D., Arslan, G., Roffey, S., Craig, H., & Vella-Brodrick, D. A. (2021). School belonging: The importance of student and teacher relationships. *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education*, 525–550. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64537-3\\_21](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64537-3_21)
- Bearman, S., Blake-Beard, S., Hunt, L., & Crosby, F. J. (2007). New directions in mentoring. In T. D. Allen & L. T. Eby (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of mentoring: A multiple perspectives approach* (pp. 275 – 295). New York: Blackwell.
- Blake-Beard, S., Bayne, M. L., Crosby, F. J., & Muller, C. B. (2011). Matching by race and gender in mentoring relationships: Keeping our eyes on the prize. *Journal of Social Issues*, 67(3), 622–643. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2011.01717.x>
- Borden, L. M., Perkins, D. F., Villarruel, F. A., Carleton-Hug, A., Stone, M. R., & Keith, J. G. (2006). Challenges and opportunities to latino youth development. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 28(2), 187–208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986306286711>

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). Ecological systems theory (1992). In U. Bronfenbrenner (Ed.), *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development* (pp. 106–173). Sage Publications Ltd.
- Bruening, J. E., Dover, K. M., & Clark, B. S. (2009). Preadolescent female development through sport and physical activity: A case study of an urban after-school program. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 80(1), 87–101.  
<https://doi.org/10.5641/027013609x13087704027751>
- Camacho, D. E. & Fuligni, A. J. (2014). Extracurricular participation among adolescents from immigrant families. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 44(6), 1251–1262.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-014-0105-z>
- Catalano, R. F., & Hawkins, J. D. (1996). The social development model. In Hawkins, J. D., Farrington, D.P., & Blumstein, A. (Eds.), *Delinquency and Crime* (pp. 149-197). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Chen, S., Sun, H., Zhu, X., & Chen, A. (2014). Relationship between motivation and learning in physical education and after-school physical activity. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 85(4), 468–477. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2014.961054>
- Chen, R., Wang, L., Wang, B., & Zhou, Y. (2020). Motivational climate, need satisfaction, self-determined motivation, and physical activity of students in secondary school physical education in China. *BMC Public Health*, 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-09750-x>
- Cox, A. & Williams, L. (2008). The roles of perceived teacher support, motivational climate, and psychological need satisfaction in students' physical education motivation. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 30(2), 222–239. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsep.30.2.222>

- Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc
- Denault, A. S. & Poulin, F. (2009). Intensity and breadth of participation in organized activities during the adolescent years: Multiple associations with youth outcomes. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 38(9), 1199–1213.
- Donnelly, J. E., Hillman, C. H., Castelli, D., Etnier, J. L., Lee, S., Tomporowski, P., Lambourne, K., & Szabo-Reed, A. N. (2016). Physical activity, fitness, cognitive function, and academic achievement in children. *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, 48(6), 1197–1222. <https://doi.org/10.1249/mss.0000000000000901>
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
- Ersing, R. L. (2009). Building the capacity of youths through community cultural arts: A positive youth development perspective. *Best Practices in Mental Health: An International Journal*, 5(1), 26–43.
- Fuller, R. D., Percy, V. E., Bruening, J. E., & Cotrufo, R. J. (2013). Positive youth development: Minority male participation in a sport-based afterschool program in an urban environment. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 84(4), 469–482. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2013.839025>
- Gagne, M. (2003). Autonomy support and need satisfaction in the motivation and well-being of gymnasts. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 15(4), 372–390. <https://doi.org/10.1080/714044203>
- Goodenow, C., & Grady, K. E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 62(1), 60–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.1993.9943831>

- Grieco, E. M., Acosta, Y. D., de la Cruz, G. P., Gambino, C., Gryn, T., Larsen, L. J., Trevelyan, E. N. & Walters, N. P. (2012). The foreign-born population in the United States: *American Community Survey Reports*.
- Hallal, P.C., Andersen, L. B., Bull. F. C., Guthold R., Haskell W., & Ekelund, U. (2012). Global physical activity levels: Surveillance progress, pitfalls, and prospects. *Lancet Physical Activity Series Working Group*.380, (9838),247-57.
- Heath, R. D., Anderson, C., Turner, A. C., & Payne, C. M. (2018). Extracurricular activities and disadvantaged youth: A complicated—but promising—story. *Urban Education*, 57(8), 1415–1449. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085918805797>
- Holt, N. L., Neely, K. C., Slater, L. G., Camiré, M., Côté, J., Fraser-Thomas, J., ... & Tamminen, K. A. (2017). A grounded theory of positive youth development through sport based on results from a qualitative meta-study. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 10(1), 1-49.
- Kahn, N. (2019). Promoting positive adolescent health behaviors and outcomes. *National Academies Press*. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25552>
- Maxwell, J. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Martin, J.J., Byrd, B., Garn, A. *et al.* (2016). Predicting social responsibility and belonging in urban after-school physical activity programs with underserved children. *The Urban Review* 48, 403–418. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-016-0360-2>
- Newton, M., Watson, D., Gano-Overway, L., Fry, M., Kim, M., & Magyar, M. (2007). The role of a caring-based intervention in a physical activity setting. *The Urban Review*, 39, 281–299.



- Pantzer, J. R. (2016). *Middle school intramural sports participation: Psychosocial outcomes based on gender, grade, and ethnicity differences* (Publication No. 10112467) [Masters Dissertation, North Carolina Central University]. Available from ProQuest Central Student.
- Peguero, A. A. (2010). A profile of Latino school-based extracurricular activity involvement. *Journal of Latinos and Education, 9*(1), 60–71.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15348430903253076>
- Pellicer-Chenoll, M., Garcia-Masso, X., Morales, J., Serra-Ano, P., Solana-Tramunt, M., Gonzalez, L.-M., & Toca-Herrera, J.L. (2015). Physical activity, physical fitness and academic achievement in adolescents: A self-organizing maps approach. *Health Education Research, 30*(3), 436–448. <https://doi.org/10.1093/her/cyv016>
- Petitpas, A. J., Cornelius, A. E., Van Raalte, J. L., & Jones, T. (2005). A framework for planning youth sport programs that foster psychosocial development. *Sport psychologist, 19*(1).
- Riciputi, S. C. (2016). *Relationship quality, engagement, hope, self-worth, and health-risk behaviors in a physical activity-based positive youth development program* (Publication No. 10182205) [Masters Dissertation, Purdue University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing
- Rhodes, J., Grossman, J., & Roffinan, J. (2002). The rhetoric and reality of youth mentoring. *New Directions for Youth Development, 93*, 9-21.
- Simpkins, S. D., Delgado, M. Y., Price, C. D., Quach, A., & Starbuck, E. (2013). Socioeconomic status, ethnicity, culture, and immigration: Examining the potential mechanisms underlying Mexican-origin adolescents' organized activity participation. *Developmental Psychology, 49*(4), 706–721. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028399>

Weiss, M. R. (2008). 2007 C. H. McCloy Lecture. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 79(4), 434–449. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2008.10599510>

Whitley, M. A., Massey, W. V., Camiré, M., Boutet, M., & Borbee, A. (2019). Sport-based youth development interventions in the United States: A systematic review. *BMC Public Health*, 19(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-6387-z>

Zimmer, M., Chipuer, H., Hanisch, M., Creed, P., & McGregor, L. (2006). Relationships at school and stage-environment fit as resources for adolescent engagement and achievement. *Journal of Adolescence*, 29, 911–933.

## **Appendix A- Student Semi Structured Interview Questions**

Thank you for taking the time to come to this interview today. I am doing research to understand more about afterschool programs and your relationship with them. My hope is that this understanding can be used to create stronger afterschool programs that support all students

**Questions:**

1. Why did you decide to participate in this activity?
2. How were you influenced... individual, family, or friends
3. How are you enjoying participating in those activities
4. Does participating improve your feeling in mood, like your mindset/positivity feelings about yourself
5. Do you see a difference between who attends school and which participates in your afterschool activities
6. Does this affect your sense of belonging and connectivity
7. What are your feelings about being the majority race during school but then becoming the minority in afterschool programs
8. Do you notice that? Would it affect your sense of belonging if there was more of a diverse background of students
9. Did you even notice that before signing up and trying out for this program? Do you think that others with the same race feel discouraged in participating because they feel like they are an outsider
10. Do you notice the background and ethnicities of your coaches and classmates in the afterschool program?
11. Does that make it more difficult to connect with the program and does it hinder your sense of belonging?
12. Why do you think you are against the grain and are an outlier
13. What could the school do to foster greater sense of belonging? Does adding more latinx contribute to that?
14. Do you have any barriers in participating rides, money etc

## **Appendix B - IRB Approval**

DOMINICAN  
UNIVERSITY  
of CALIFORNIA

Jan 30, 2023

John Corbolotti  
50 Acacia  
Ave.  
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear John,

On behalf of the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants, I am pleased to approve your proposal entitled *Co-curriculars: Promoting participation and belonging in underrepresented students* (IRBPHP Initial IRB Application #[11076]).

In your final report or paper please indicate that your project was approved by the IRBPHP and indicate the identification number.

I wish you well in your very interesting research effort.

Sincerely,

Michaela George, Ph.D.  
Chair, IRBPHP  
Cc: Katie Lewis

